Islamic Art from Southeast Asia: Prominent or Periphery? Case study of pair of doors for royal compound (*Lawon kori*) dated from the sixteenth century from the Art Gallery of South Australia Asian Art Collection.

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Abstract

The central subject of this dissertation is the *Pair of doors, lawon kori*, dated circa 1560, from the collection of Asian Art at The Gallery of South Australia. The *Lawon kori* was made in Lampung, a South Sumatra society that embraced Islam in the sixteenth century and so it could be regarded as an example of Islamic art of Southeast Asia. This object was selected for research in order to examine the development of early Islamic art in the region and its relationship to the wider world of Islamic aesthetics.

Islamic art is complex and diverse. It is directly related to the interpretation of Islam as its aesthetic expression. Until now most of the definitive research on Islamic art has focused on the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. Nevertheless, the thesis proposes, through a general analysis of the academic literature, that Islamic art is not confined to any one specific geographical territory or cultural group. Islamic art has been created wherever there are Muslim communities around the world; and, in the process, it has inevitably hybridized with pre-existing indigenous traditions and beliefs.

Writers commonly associate the art and culture of Southeast Asia with indigenous ancestral, Hindu and Buddhist spiritual practices, but the appearance of Islam in the archipelago from the thirteenth century challenges this presupposition. Islam contributed to the rich diversity of regional art and is unique in the complexities of its design elements and symbolic language, as exemplified by the *Lawon kori*. Southeast Asian

Islamic art differs from Islamic art originating in other parts of the Muslim world. Pre-existing worldviews and aesthetics, such as originated from Malay traditions, became interwoven with the creation of artworks so as to become a crucial aspect of its identity.

The second part of the thesis is an analysis of the *Lawon kori* that may be described as among the most important sculptural objects of early Islamic art to survive from Southeast Asia. The visual language of the *Lawon kori* demonstrably emerges from its anonymous maker's understanding of Islamic belief, which had become interwoven with the local aesthetic traditions of the Lampung community. The work of art is a testament to the diversity of expression that existed within the unity of Islamic art as it developed in Southeast Asia.

Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to a copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, to be available for loan and photocopying.

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Introduction

Bismillah hir'rahman nir'rahim (In the name of Allah the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful)

Much has been published about Islamic art in general but in comparison, little has been written about Islamic art from Southeast Asia. A number of factors may be suggested for this lack of acknowledgement of the rich traditions of the region, so this thesis seeks to present evidence that establishes the importance of Southeast Asian Islamic art. Islamic art is a complex field that does not fit into a simplistic classification or generalized criteria. The essence of Islamic art is universal but, nevertheless, different Muslim societies and historical periods have created unique local styles. Indeed, even in some contexts, Islamic art has been made by non-Muslims for the use of Muslims or, alternatively, non-Muslim communities. For reasons such as these, the nature of Islamic art continues to be debated but, whatever the theoretical premise of the discussions, the importance of Islam itself as the source of inspiration ought not be forgotten.

Islam and Islamic art in Southeast Asia has often been 'confined' within the complex discourse of history because of the presence of other diverse religions with their own cultural expression. The transition from indigenous beliefs, Hindu and Buddhist religions to Islam, over the past seven centuries, has profoundly influenced aesthetic practices in the archipelago. The assimilation and appropriation of other forms of art, during this process of transition, created a unique Islamic style based upon earlier aesthetics.

Lawon kori (figure 1) has been chosen for this discussion to demonstrate the special qualities of Islamic art from Southeast Asia. The decorative elements appearing on this object epitomize the significant differences found in Islamic art produced in Southeast Asia compared to the rest of the Muslim world. The source of the motifs, and their use by the maker, are derived from an Islamic understanding of *tauhid* (the oneness and uniqueness of Allah), yet nevertheless were fabricated within a context of the local Malay worldview. The *Lawon kori*, presents an opportunity to explore the different ways that Southeast Asian Muslim artists have exploited patterns and designs in architectural woodcarving. The doors, with their rich decorative ornament blending vegetal and geometric themes, convey intrinsic meanings relating to the cosmology of local people as well as the aesthetic values of sixteenth century international Muslim culture.

In Chapter One of this dissertation, the writer presents ideas and definitions of Islamic art from the perspectives of a selection of scholars. The purpose is to create a framework within which to understand the nature of Islamic art, although past-varied theoretical approaches have arrived at differing conclusions in efforts to reach a definition of Islamic art. The survey examines the underlying factors, such as historical fashions and scholarly prejudices, which have influenced the interpretation of Islamic art. Islam, and its interpretation as a religion, has been a key force determining the development of its art practice. Nevertheless, other spiritual and cultural values that existed parallel to Islamic teaching have added elements towards the formation of its art. In the process, Islamic art has also sought to cater for 'secular' circumstances, outside the

mosque or other religious context. This survey demonstrates that Islamic art is a truly diverse and complex field and one not easily bound by simplistic criteria.

From the perspectives of Islamic, Western and contemporary discourses, surveyed in Chapter One, it is apparent that many philosophical arguments about Islamic art have been founded on widely differing premises. Often the interpretation of Islamic art has been dependent on circumstances specifically suitable only to individual Islamic societies. But another view suggests that, whatever the diversity of philosophical ideas or definitions, the intention must always be to suggest that Islamic art is an integral aspect of religious belief in the unity of Islam itself.

Chapter Two focuses discussion of Islamic art within the Southeast Asian region in order to understand its characteristics. The survey examines separately Western and local perspectives, as a means to present diverse views on the subject. Due to the lack of extensive information about Islamic art in Southeast Asia, and the region's unique identity, much of the research for this chapter references socio-cultural points of view. The heritage of religion, tradition and culture played a vital role in forming perceptions around aesthetic practices among local societies. Subsequently this heritage also shaped the art of Muslim people in Southeast Asia and is an important element that needs to be recognized to create a contextual understanding for the analysis of *Lawon kori*.

Chapter Three commences with a selective survey of the history and forms of wooden doors that were made in the wider Islamic world from the ninth to sixteenth century. This reveals the stylistic trends that evolved before the period in which the *Lawon kori* were created and becomes the basis for the subsequent selective survey of the tradition of wooden doors in Malay archipelago from the same period of the ninth to nineteenth century. Based on surviving evidence, the characteristics of wooden doors created in the archipelago may be categorized into three distinct types in order to better understanding their historical development and introduce a visual analysis of the *Lawon kori*.

The discussion of the *Lawon kori* commences with a historical overview including the socio-political and cultural background of Lampung where they were made, their purpose and known provenance. A close reading of the motifs carved on *Lawon kori* assists in explaining their origins, why particular motifs were selected as ornament and their possible symbolic meanings. Islamic and related Malay cosmological symbolism is demonstrated to be an important key to appreciating the decoration of the *Lawon kori*. The analysis, based on the overall design of the *Lawon kori*, divides each door into three sections in order to identify the varying naturalistic and geometrical themes. This establishes connections with imagery used elsewhere in wood carving and other art media around the Malay archipelago, and assists in leading towards a contextual interpretation of the *Lawon kori*.

In conclusion the dissertation proposes the *Lawon kori* emerged from a flourishing and vibrant local Islamic cultural tradition in Lampung. Their decoration displays motifs that were also used in Islamic art from other places and periods. This indicates that the artist was influenced directly, or indirectly, by art styles in neighboring coastal port centers, such as Sumatra and Java, which were part of the international world of Islamic commerce and culture during that time.

Methodology

When Robert Irwin described Islamic art as 'a net with a lot of holes tied together with a string', it describes the challenge in finding the best approach to appreciating *Lawon kori* [1]. There has only been one previous study published discussing this object, which is the short essay *Islamic Heirlooms from South Sumatra* by James Bennett[2]. That study relies on describing the historical stylistic context as a key to 'reading' the doors. The present writer seeks to extend this approach by placing the *Lawon kori* in the context of Islamic belief and aesthetics as a method to further appreciate this object.

The only early description of the Islamic society where the *Lawon kori* was made in Tulang Bawang, Lampung, South Sumatra, is the writing by British naturalist Henry

[1] Irwin, R., *Islamic art*, Laurance King Publishing, London, 1997, p. 35.
[2] Bennett, J. '*Islamic Heirlooms from South Sumatra : Art Gallery of South Australia*', TAASA Review : The Journal of The Asian Arts Society of Australia. Volume 16 No 1, March 2007.

Forbes who traveled there during the late nineteenth century (1878 – 1873)[3]. Consequently, a background understanding of woodcarving art as it developed in neighboring Sumatra and Java over the long period from the ninth to nineteenth century is important because it documents the aesthetic transformation that occurred with the arrival of Islam. After the great kingdom of Majapahit weakened in the fourteenth to fifteenth century, new Islamized port cities came into existence in *pesisir* (coastal) Sumatra, Java and the Malay peninsular. These included Pasai and Aceh, Tuban, Gresik Demak, Cirebon, Banten and Melaka[4]. Cultural exchange between the ports promoted flourishing artistic traditions, especially in the decorative arts such as woodcarving, as well as through trade with other Islamicised regions in the Malay archipelago. *Lawon kori* cannot be seen separated from its historical environment, which included this vibrant social history and accompanying art practices[5].

Zakaria Ali in his book *Seni dan Seniman: esei-esei seni halus* (*Art and Artist: fine art essays*), proposes six principles as the basis for defining Malay visual aesthetics: that which is fine, useful, unity, contains contrasting elements (*berlawanan*), meaningful and symbolic[6]. He also proposes that form fulfills a vital role in appreciating the beauty

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[3] Forbes, H.O., *A Naturalist Wondering in the Eastern Archipelago*, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1885-1989.

[4] Lombard, D., 'Early Islamic cities and commercial life', Miksic, J., (et. al.), Indonesian Heritage series, *Volume 1: Ancient History*, Archipelago Press, 1999, p. 131.

[5] D'Alleva, A., *Methods and Theories of Art History*, Laurance King Publishing, London, 2005, p. 53.

[6] Ali, Z., *Seni dan Seniman: esei-esei seni halus*, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1989, pp. 206 – 209.

and meaning of Malay art objects[7]. On the basis of this supposition, his style of formal methodological approach maybe is most useful in examining the physical decoration of the doors. A contextual reading of the doors, such as locating the *Lawon kori*'s place in the history of decorated door making in the Southeast Asian archipelago, provides other more relevant information where Ali's formalistic approach may simply offer a 'pure and direct engagement with the work of art itself'[8].

The motifs and imagery of *Lawon kori* was not merely made as decoration. It was not carved 'only for beauty's sake'. The patterns on the *Lawon kori* derive from a world-view that Lampung Islamic people believed enabled them to engage with certain profound cosmological principles. A study of the *Lawon kori*'s iconography is thus useful because it helps 'retrieve the symbolic and allegorical meanings contained in the work of art'[9]. At the same time an iconographical analysis of the meaning of a historical art work, like *Lawon kori*, also extensively relies on second-hand information, whose accuracy may at time be untested, derived from various sources documented in available historical and contemporary texts[10].

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[7] Ibid. pp. 212 – 213.
[8] D'Alleva, A., op. cit. p. 17.
[9] Ibid. p. 23.
[10] Adam, L.S., *The methodologies of art*, Westview Press, Colorado, 1996, pp. 36 – 37.

Dates, terminology and visual material

The writer uses the Gregorian calendar, and not the Muslim *hijrah* reckoning, when referring to dates, such as the 'ninth century' or 'sixteenth century'.

Arabic, Malay and Javanese terms are accompanied by English translation provided by the writer. There is no consistency or single convention in the transliteration of Arabic, Malay or Javanese words and names. Generally Arabic, Malay or Javanese words in this paper follows each author's usage and are reproduced without diacritical marks.

The term 'Malay' in this paper follows contemporary usage in Malaysia and is derived from the common cultural definition that Malays are a person or group, who are Muslim and ethnically originated from the west and central region of the Southeast Asian archipelago. In this context the term 'Malay' also includes Javanese, Bugis, Banjar or any other different racial groups who share similar traditions as a standard generic term commonly used in Malay scholarship.

Malay Archipelago generally refers to the geographical area, which is approximately the same as modern day of Southern Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore and Southern Philippines. A world map showing the population of Muslim around the world is included (figure 2). Two other maps, showing the spread of

Islam in Southeast Asia (figure 3) and a map showing places or areas in Southeast Asia which is mentioned in this thesis is also included (figure 4).

Figure 1, circa 1560, *Pair of Doors, lawon kori*, Lampung, South Sumatra, Indonesia, wood, 280 x 88 cm. Collection of Art Gallery of South Australia

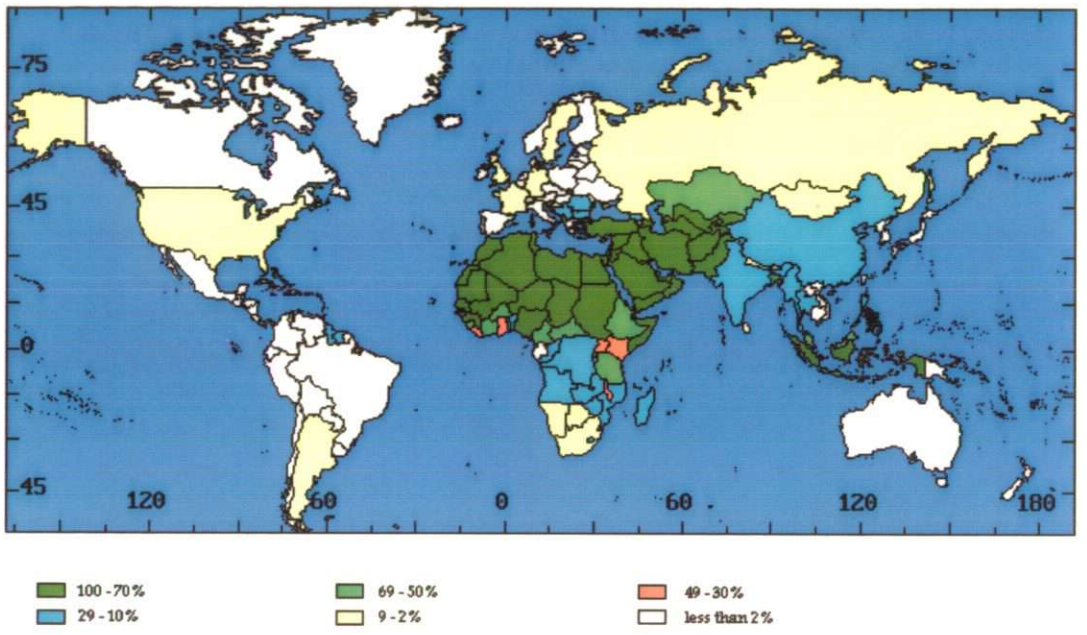

Figure 2, Islamic population around the world (1998). Source: IslamicWeb.com

Figure 3, Spread of Islam in Southeast Asia. Source: www.hawaii.com

Figure 4, Southeast Asian map - indicate places and areas which been talking in the thesis

Chapter 1 The idea and definition of Islamic art

Islamic perspectives

Al Qur'an, which is the foundation of Islam and primary source of guidance in Islamic life, does not discuss the visual arts as a fundamental aspect of life. However, in Al Qur'an, chapter (*surah) Ash-Shu'ra* (26) verses 224-227, there is a verse that addresses the situation of a poet whose identity may be seen as an analogous to the visual artist:

> As for the poets, the erring ones follow them. See you not that they speak about every subject (praising people – right or wrong) in their poetry?. And that they say what they do not do. Except those who believe (in the Oneness of Allah) and do righteous deeds, and remember Allah much and vindicate themselves after they have been wronged (by replying back in poetry) to the unjust poetry (which the pagan poets utter against the Muslims)[11].

This revelation conveys concerns regarding the role, criteria and the challenge of being a poet in the context of faith as a Muslim. To talk about the aesthetics of visual art, like poetry, in Islam is not solely to speak about making or viewing beautiful or useful objects. The main objective for each Muslim, in every aspect of his/her life, is to serve Allah, as stated in Al Qur'an (51:56): "And I (Allah) created not the jinn and mankind

[11] Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *Interpretation of the Meaning of The Noble Qur'an*, Darussalam, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 1996. p. 683.

except that they should worship Me (alone)"[12]. From a believer's perspective, this religious premise is the fundamental basis for discussing art in the context of Islam.

A further key concept in Islam is the categorization of knowledge (*ilmu*) under two main headings, namely *fardhu 'ain* and *fardhu kifayah*. Knowledge in *fardhu 'ain* generally is knowledge dealing with Allah. Knowledge concerning human interest generally included in *fardhu kifayah* and some examples of this knowledge are philosophy, science and medicine. Art is categorized under the latter *fardhu kifayah*. In Islam, knowledge must be sought with modesty and humility, and with the aim of promoting beauty and dignity, freedom and justice[13]. It is compulsory for all Muslims to follow the rules of *syari'ah* (Islamic law) in order that every activity in life to be considered as *ibadah* (Muslim act of worship). In the context of Islamic art an artist or maker must understand the *nawaitu* (intention), as well as to be concerned with the creative process, choice of materials and the resulting appearance of the product, in order to be considered as an *ibadah*.

In the European Middle Ages (from ninth to thirteenth century), art and craft were generally called *fann* in Arabic. As stated by Robert Irwin, *fann* does not correspond precisely to the concept of art, design or craft in western culture, but it is the nearest term or word to suggest the meaning of art[14]. Different levels of skill were implied in the

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[12] Ibid., p. 947.
[13] Sardar, Z. and Abbas Malik, Z. *Introducing Islam*, Allen & Unwin Pty. Ltd., NSW, 2002, p. 58.
[14] Irwin, R. *Islamic Art in Context*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1997, p. 12.

existence of the art/craft apprenticeship system. In sixteenth century Samarqand, the head maker (artist or craft person) was called *ustaz* or *mu'alim* while the apprentice was known as *muta'alim*. After the head maker was satisfied that the apprentice had mastered his craft, he then presented him with an *ijaza* (certificate of competence)[15]. In classical Arabic, the word *sani* (pl. *sunna*) was also used to indicate a man who works creatively with his hands[16]. This term describes an architect, artist, craft worker and artisan who use their hands to produce objects of visual excellence. A painter or illustrator could be called as *musawwir* in Arabic, but it may also refer to an artisan or architect[17]. The *musawwir* needed to possess the ability to manipulate form (*sura*). The term *al-funun al-mustazrafa* specifically means the 'fine arts' but was only invented in the nineteenth century[18].

Unlike the western hierarchy of 'high' and 'low' art, Islam never categorized art, design and craft activities into such a dichotomy. Architecture, painting, sculpture, woodwork, metalwork, glassmaking, ceramics, textile and carpets weaving, were all categorized as equal in significance[19]. Before the mid nineteenth century, art and craft were never separated in Islam but shared the same notional framework of production and consumption. In his famous study titled *Muqaddimah* (Prolegomena), Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) the late fourteenth century Islamic philosopher and historian from Northern

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[15] Ibid., p. 134.
[16] Ali, W. *What is Islamic Art?* (second edition), Royal Society of Fine Art: Amman, Jordan, 1998, p. 20.
[17] Leaman, O., *Islamic Aesthetics: An Introduction*, University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana, 2004, p. 78.
[18] Ibid., p. 12.
[19] Irwin, R. op. cit. p. 133., Patricia L. Baker. *Islam and the Religious Arts*, Continuum: London, New York, 2004, pp. 16-18.

Africa, defined craft by using the dichotomy of rural and urban categories[20]. The mainly rural crafts of smithing and weaving were differentiated from the more luxurious crafts of glass-making, gold and coppersmithing, the tailoring of garments, silk-weaving and book-binding, practiced in urban society. However Islamic calligraphy held a separate and uniquely elevated position in Islamic arts[21]. Calligraphy is perceived as particularly important because of its central role in the copying of Al Qur'an[22]. Consequently, calligraphers enjoyed a much higher status than the artist, architect or craft maker[23].

The writings of Ibn Khaldun, are a useful historical reference in order to clarify the cultural significance of art in Islam. He observed that the activity of making craft (art) was important because it distinguishes humanity from the animal kingdom; "the crafts ...(are) the result of man's ability to think, through which he is distinguished from the animals"[24]. Visual pleasure and harmony in creating form could be achieved if the maker (artist or craftsman) treats the medium as a servant not as a master[25]. For him, the condition of society and its government was reflected in the art making process and its subsequent consumption. If society were well governed, civilized and stable, this would be reflected in the production of art and craft categorized as both aesthetically successful

[20] Patricia L. Baker, op. cit. pp. 17.
[21] Irwin, R. op. cit., pp. 133, 167 and 177.
[22] Patricia L. Baker, op. cit., pp. 52-53.
[23] Ibid., p. 177.
[24] Quoted from Rosenthal. F. (trans.), The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History, Vol. 2, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967, p. 347, in Patricia L. Baker, op. cit., p. 36.
[25] Ibid., p. 16.

and commercially viable[26]. According to this viewpoint, the role of the maker, object and society was fully integrated when the object proclaimed the supremacy of Islam and the wealth of its patrons[27]. Objects, as diverse as textiles and coins, or monuments, such as mosques and palaces, could thus be said to symbolize a society's cultural, ideological and technological achievements[28].

Nevertheless, there is no evidence that the term 'Islamic' was ever used by Muslim artists or patrons to describe an art object before comparatively recent times. It was only in the last quarter of the twentieth century, when 'Islamic art' was first intensively analyzed, that Muslim artists and scholars produced specific studies regarding Islamic art. One reason for the lack of investigation is because art is not discussed in the Al Qur'an and *hadith* (sayings or the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad) that are the two main sources of *syari'ah* (Islamic law or 'the path to be followed'). For that reason, scholars perceived art as less important as an activity in developing the *ummah* (universal community of Muslim). Another reason is the strict rules that appear in some of the *hadith*, especially in the Sunni tradition, against making sculptural objects, such as idols, or the imitation of a sentient being on a two-dimensional surface. It is reported that the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) was against such activities and warned that the maker would be consigned to Hell if he/she were unable to breathe life into

[26] Ibid., p 34.
[27] Ibid., p. 83.
[28] Ibid., pp. 202-204.

his/her creation on the Day of Reckoning (*kiamat*)[29]. In other words, damnation awaited anyone who attempted to imitate or usurp Divine Creation[30]. In another *hadith*, Abu Huraira reported the Prophet Muhammad (MPBUH) said: "Angels do not enter a house in which there are portraits and pictures"[31]. These two *hadith* are classified as *hassan* and *sahih*, meaning they are regarded as the most reliable, being the first of the four grades of *hadith*, namely *sahih* (authentic), *hassan* (good), *muwaththaq* (dependable – also termed *qawi* 'strong'), *da'if* (weak)[32]. Another famous *hadith* used regularly in recent times to justify the interrelation of art, beauty and Islam, was narrated by Imam Muslim: "Verily Allah is most beautiful and he loves beauty"[33].

Significantly, major scholars never discussed the aesthetics of beauty merely for its own sake, although beauty was discussed in doctrinal commentaries concerning Allah and His attributes in relation to His creation[34]. The Islamic philosopher Ibnu al-Farabi (d. 950) in his book *Al Madina Al Fadila* (The Virtuous City) asserts beauty in all things was primarily ontological; the more any being attains final perfection, the more beautiful it is[35]. Proceeding from that statement, he concluded that Allah is the most beautiful of beings:

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[29] Ibid., p. 37.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Saeed, A., *Islamic Thought An Introduction*, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, London and New York, 2006, p. 86.
[32] Ibid., p. 86.
[33] Mohd. Yatim, O., *Islamic Arts*, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka: Kuala Lumpur, 1995, p. 7.
[34] Deborah L. Black, 8 March 2007 < http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/H020>
[35] Ibid.

> Allah's beauty surpasses all other beauty because it is essential not accidental; the source of Allah is his own substance as defined by his self-contemplation, whereas created beauty is derived from accidental and corporeal qualities that are not one with their own substances[36].

It was the famous religious thinker al-Ghazzali (1059-1111) who suggested a connection between beauty and aesthetics when he observed the inner beauty/spirituality of the maker was manifested in the finished object, and recognized by others of a like mind: "The beautiful painting of a painter or the building of an architect reveals the inner beauty of these men"[37]. In his book *Kimia Al-Saadat* (The Alchemy of Happiness) written around 1106, al Ghazzali said that man loves the perfection found in beautiful things because he wants to become perfect himself. Artistic beauty is thus not understood as merely external and but conceived as a reflection of an inner state[38]. Furthermore, he noted:

> There is a difference between him who loves the painted picture on the wall on account of beauty of its outer form and him who loves the Prophet on account of his inner form[39].

There had been several previous Islamic scholars who examined the formal characteristics that were important factors towards establishing beauty as perfection. A ninth century essayist from Basra, al-Jahiz (d. 869), emphasized the importance of certain

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Mantran, R., 1962, 'Istanbul dans la seconde moitie du XVII siecle...' Paris: Maisonneuve, as being quoted by Patricia L. Baker, op. cit. p. 15.

[38] Irwin, R., op. cit. p. 53.

[39] Ibid.

qualities, such as appearance, when searching for perfect balance in a form. He observed that balance could relate to the human body, architecture, rugs, embroidery, clothes or even canals; by balance we mean evenness in design and composition[40]. In the eleventh century, the famous mathematician and optical theorist, Ibn al-Haytham (d. 1039), discussed color as a source of beauty. He added that solidity, size, separateness and motion all potentially contribute to the beauty of an object[41]. The thirteenth century physician Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi, also examined the sense of beauty in harmony and proportion[42]. He was among the first Muslim scholars to place sculpture in a historical context by referring to the pre-Islamic period.

The fundamental premise behind the idea of Islamic art is the belief in submission to Allah. From the perspective of the Sufi tradition, which was so significant in bringing Islam to Southeast Asia in the first centuries of the second millennium, the maker, the medium and the process are relatively unimportant[43]. The most important is the maker's path of devotion to god, by using the platform of creativity. Ardalan states: "He (the maker) participates in the creative processes of nature...and by doing so participates in the divine art"[44].

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[40] Ibid., p. 176.
[41] Ibid., p. 177.
[42] Ibid., p. 176.
[43] Ibid., p. 13.
[44] Ardalan, Nader., *et al. The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1973, p. 10.

If, in the creative process, the maker follows *syari'ah*, which is Islamic law as based upon the Revelation laid out in Al Qur'an and *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad (MPBUH). Then at the same time he is making an act of *ibadah* (act of worship). This is considered essential in Islam, and in its art, because Al Qur'an (45:18) declares:

> Then We have put you (O Muhammad) on a (plain) way of (our) commandment [like the one which We commanded Our Messengers before you (i.e. legal ways and laws of the Islamic Monotheism)]. So follow you that (Islamic Monotheism and its laws), and follow not the desires of those who know not[45].

Western perspectives

European societies started to have especially close contact with the Middle East during the time Rome united Western Europe[46]. During the subsequent era of the crusades, following the fall of the Roman Empire and the so-called 'dark ages', European travelers commenced to bring art objects back from Islamic lands and gave them new meanings in their home context[47]. Etienne de Blois, a French commander during the First Crusade, brought a fine Samite saddlecloth, woven in Iran, back to France[48]. The saddlecloth later was converted to a shroud cloth used to wrap the bones of de Blois when

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[45] Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, op. cit., pp. 903-904.
[46] Carroll, A., *East and West The Meeting of Asian and European Art*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 1985, p. 39.
[47] Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, *The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the study of an unwieldy field*, The Art Bulletin, Vol. 85, No 1. (March 2003), p. 153.
[48] Ibid.

he was reburied in 1134[49]. Another example of the re-contextualization of an art object, created by a Muslim artist, occurred following the sack of Cordoba (now in Spain) in 1010. Catalan mercenaries looted an exquisite ivory box made in 1004-1005 for the Andalusian warlord Abd al-Malik ibn al-Mansur and later used it to store the relics of the virgin sisters, Nunilona and Alodia, at the Benedictine monastery in Pyrenees (France)[50]. During the Renaissance era the interaction of western people with the Middle East became more intense as a result of the growing spice trade and Europe's wealth. Even in the late fifteenth century, the famous Italian artist, Gentile Bellini visited Istanbul, capital of the Ottoman empire, in order to understand and record its foreign culture[51]. The recent exhibition and publication "Venice and The Islamic World 828-1797" reveals the extent that Islamic material culture permeated European society, especially in the media of carpets, textile and metalwork[52]. But it was only in the eighteenth century, with the development of the notion of public collections, that 'objects' were re-redefined for the context of a museum environment.

A western secular conception of Islam and its culture became clearly articulated during the modern era of European colonialization commencing in the middle of the nineteenth century. This was at a time when the Ottoman and Mughal empires were

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., pp. 153-154.

[51] Carroll, A. loc. cit.

[52] Carboni, S. (Ed.), *Venice and The Islamic World 828-1797*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and Yale University Press, New Heaven and London, 2007.

becoming both politically and culturally weak[53]. In the middle to late nineteenth century, European scholars categorized art objects from Islamic land under restrictive geographical or ethnic terms in order to reach an understanding of distinct regional styles[54]. As a result the word 'Arabs', 'Turkish', 'Egyptian', 'Moorish' or 'Persian' were used to identify art objects from northern Africa, the Middle East and the northern Indian sub-continent. Islamic art was also often labeled generically as 'Saracenic art'[55]. Among the first modern scholars to intensely study Islamic art was Max van Berchem (1863-1921). In 1889 he developed the idea of 'Arabic Archeology' (*l'archeologie arabe*). For van Berchem, this meant the study of historical 'monuments', being the architecture, painting, decorative arts, inscriptions, coins, seals, or manuscripts made in lands where Arabic was spoken[56]. Van Berchem understood these 'monuments' not just as isolated examples of art but historical documents that could reveal key elements in the history of Islamic lands[57]. Van Berchem's most important publication in the field was the *Materriaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum* (MICA).

In the early twentieth century, European, and later American scholars constructed Islamic art as a specific field of study located within the wider history of world art[58]. The term 'Islamic', 'Muslim' or 'Mohammedan' became a popular label at a time when many

[53] Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, op. cit., p. 153.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Particia L. Baker, op. cit, p.12.
[56] For more information read Sheila S. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1998, Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.

western scholars started to look back to a golden age of Islamic culture in the eighth and ninth century. Thus, the first use of these terms could be considered a little simplistic in the context of the intellectual language of the modern world[59]. It was as recently as the 1950s that the term Islamic art became frequently used in aesthetic discourse although it contains a definite religious connotation[60]. In subsequent decades the word 'Islamic' entered the common vocabulary and today continues to be widely used when discussing any aesthetic practices and cultural activities related to Islam.

The development of collections of objects from Islamic lands became widespread in the early of twentieth century when European intellectuals, in the area of antiquities, art history, archeology and orientalism, started to see Islamic art as a new field of inquiry[61]. Among the early serious attempts to collect and study those Islamic objects from the Middle East (Arabs, Persian and Turkish), was the collection of Pierre Louis Jean Casimir (1771-1839)[62]. Casimis was a French politician and patron for the famous French artists, Ingres and Delacroix. He hired French Orientalist J.T. Reinaud to do scholarly research on his collection. The result was a famous catalogue *Monumens arabes, persans et turcs, du cabinet de M. le duc de Blacas et d'autres cabinets* (Paris, 1928) which could be said to be one of the earliest comprehensive studies of Islamic decorative arts[63]. Another important researcher was Ernst Hertzfeld (1879-1948), a

[59] Particia L. Baker, loc. cit.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, loc. cit.
[62] Ibid., p. 154.
[63] Ibid.

German architect and historian. Among his major contributions to Islamic art was the excavation of the remains of the Abbasid capital in Samarra, which had been the center for Islamic civilization in the ninth century[64]. Hertzfeld's publication about the excavation became a major source for later scholars' endeavors to understand Islamic art.

The term Islamic art does not describe one specific style or period, neither is it restricted to any particular country, region or race. Furthermore, most of the objects initially studied by European scholars were not always considered as fine art in the western cultural context. This situation created a complex taxonomical challenge for the categorization of objects encompassed by the term 'Islamic art'. An early example of this dilemma was the Mshatta façade in Kaiser-Friedrich Museum in Berlin in 1910. Ernst Herzfeld challenged the classification of Façade of Mshatta by Kaiser-Friedrich Museum under the 'late antiquity' period. On the contrary, he suggested that the facade was a clear example of the 'early period' of Islamic art[65]. From 1910 onwards, there were many new research publications produced, as well as public collections established, in order to understand Islamic art[66]. Consequently, more scholars started to investigate the visual characteristics of Islamic art. The art historian Alois Riegl, commenced to investigate Islamic ornament and the origin of arabesque, and perceived Islamic art as standing at a

[64] Ibid.

[65] To understand more read Herzfeld essay ' The genesis of Islamic art and the Mshatta problem' in Jonathan M. Bloom (ed.), Early Islamic Art and Architecture The formation of Islamic classic world, Aldershot: Ashgate, Variorum, 2002, Ibid p. 155.

[66] For example by E. J. Brill, *First Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1913-1936, ed. M. Th. Houtsma et. al., Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987, Ibid.

point equivalent to midway between ancient and medieval European art history[67]. The staging of public exhibitions provided another way for researchers to understand and analyze Islamic art. Among the early important exhibitions were the famous 'Islamic art exhibition' held in Munich in 1910, and the 'London Exhibition of Persian Art', held in Burlington House, London, in 1930's.

Western (mostly European) scholars, before the last quarter of the twentieth century, tended to consider Islamic art in the context of its visual characteristics, and sought to classify objects under certain periods of time, such as dynasties, geographical locations or 'high' and 'low' styles. These scholars were influenced by early twentieth century notions of 'formal aesthetics', promoted by art critic's Roger Fry (1866-1934) and art historian's Henri Focillon (1881-1943), which avoided acknowledging spiritual belief and doctrine as a fundamental aspect of some traditions of artistic expression. No early western scholarship sought to understand Islamic art within the context of Islamic spirituality or relate it to key Islamic concepts such as *syari'ah, tauhid, ibadah* or *tasawwuf* (the esoteric path of Islam). An exception is a small group of scholars, led by Titus Burckhardt (1908-1984) and Alexandro Papadopoulo (1917-1996) in the last quarter of twentieth century who published significant research on Islamic art. Burckhardt's important *Art of Islam, Language and Meaning* and his essay "The Spirit of Islamic Art", specifically aimed at understanding and defining Islamic art within the

[67] To understand more read Riegl, A., *Problems of Style: Foundation for a History of Ornament*, (trans. Evelyn Kain), Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. Ibid.

context of Islam and was informed by his own Sufi beliefs[68]. Papadopoulo's book, *Islam and Islamic Art* could also be categorized in the same spirit[69].

International contemporary perspectives from the beginning of the last quarter of twentieth century until now

Professor Ismail al-Faruqi (1921-1986) is a renowned scholar of Islamic studies and one of the most eminent authorities to write on Islamic civilization, especially in connection to the visual arts. Faruqi's basis for discussing Islamic art is *tauhid* (the belief in oneness and uniqueness of Allah):

> The essence of Islam, as well as of its civilization, is *tauhid*, the affirmation that Allah is indeed Allah and that none else is so...(the) truth of *tauhid*, which consists of the transcendence and unity of God, has equally been the first principle of every aspect of Islamic civilization[70].

Thus he defines Islamic art as the aesthetic expression of *tauhid* – an art that seeks to express beautifully the concept of Divine Unity[71]. The goal of Islamic art is to follow *syari'ah* (defined by Al Qur'an and *hadith*) to produce a 'total' form of art. Such art would inevitably be expression of *ibadah*, according to the understanding of Ismail al

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[68] Burckhardt, T., *Art of Islam, Language and Meaning*, London: World of Islam Festival Publication, 1976 and Burckhardt, T., "The Spirit of Islamic Art", *Islamic Quarterly* 1, 1954: pp. 212- 218.

[69] Papadopoulo, A., *Islam and Islamic Art*, New York: Abrams, 1976.

[70] al Faruqi, I., 'Figurative representation and drama : their prohibition and transfiguration in Islamic Art', *Islamic Art Common Principles, Forms and Themes*, Research Centre for Islamic History Art and Culture, Dar Al Fikir : Damascus, 1989, p. 261.

[71] Esa, S. 'Introduction', *Art and Spirituality*, National Art Gallery: Kuala Lumpur, 1995, p. 9.

Faruqi, who declared: "All Islamic art has recoursed to, and used, the highly emotive words of Al Qur'an and *hadith*"[72].

Another leading scholar is Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b. 1933). Nasr defined Islamic art as 'ennobling matter'[73]. He regarded art as a form of 'spiritual alchemy' (*tazikah Al-Nafs*)[74]. Nasr stressed the importance of understanding Islamic spirituality in order to either produce or appreciate Islamic art. According to Nasr, the two main sources of Islamic spirituality were Al Qur'an, in its inner reality and sacramental meaning, and the second were the very substance of the soul of the Prophet Muhammad (MPBUH), including his *sunnah* and *hadith*. These later are the exemplary practices, customs and tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (MPBUH), recorded in *hadith* and used as the model for Muslim behavior and customs[75]. Nasr believes that the origin of Islamic art must be sought in the inner reality (*haqa'iq*) of Al Qur'an and the spiritual reality of the Prophetic Substance from which flows the 'Muhammadan grace' (*al-barakat al-muhammadiyyah*)[76]. The interrelation of Islamic spirituality and Islamic art is so intense for Nasr that he concluded there was no Islamic art without Islamic spirituality[77]. The art of Islam is Islamic art not only because Muslims created it but also because it issues forth from the Islamic revelation, as does the Divine Law (*syariat*) and the Way (*thariq'ath*)[78].

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[72] al Faruqi, I. *Islam and Art*, Studia Islamica, No. 37, 1973, p. 81.
[73] Esa, S. op. cit. p. 10.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Nasr, S. H. *Islamic Art and Spiritualliy*, Golgonooza Press, 1987, p. 7.
[76] Ibid., p. 6.
[77] Ibid., p. 7.
[78] Ibid.

Another important point for this scholar is that Islamic art is based upon knowledge, which itself is spiritual in nature. Traditional masters of Islamic art refer to this knowledge as *hikmah* (wisdom)[79]. For Nasr, Islamic art contains the presence of both spiritual and intellectual elements because it inseparably follows the genuine path of Islam[80].

Titus Burckhardt, the artist, scholar and connoisseur of Islamic art and civilization who has been previously mentioned, generally identified Islamic art, whether religious or non-religious in theme, as the 'arts of Muslim people'[81]. Burckhardt implies, in this generalized statement, that Islamic art was different from other religion-based art forms. The reason is Islam never separates life into separate religious and secular profane spheres, because Al Qur'an defines both spiritual and social laws[82]. Al Qur'an and *sunnah* regulates not only culture, and a society's common laws, but also the fundamental recurrent actions of everyday life, even including the way to greet, to wash and to eat[83]. Furthermore he said:

> This means that Islam represents a total order, which involves all the planes of human existence, the body as well the soul, and which decides naturally the place which art occupies and the role it will play in the spiritual and physical equilibrium of the *Dar al-Islam* (literally House of Islam). It is by conforming to a certain hierarchy of values that the arts are integrated in Islam, and that they become Islamic art, whatever the

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[79] Ibid., p. 8.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Burckhardt, T. 'Introduction to Islamic Art', *The Arts of Islam*, The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976, p. 31.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.

source of their diverse elements may be[84].

Burckhardt added that the ignorance of the true hierarchy of values in Islam was the basis for much misunderstanding among outside observers of Islamic art and even some of its own artist practitioners.

Professor Oleg Grabar, an Islamic art historian from Harvard University and one of the most important scholars today, defines Islamic art as:

> The art made by artists or artisans whose religion was Islam, for patrons who lived in predominantly Muslim lands, or for purposes that are restricted or peculiar to a Muslim population or a Muslim setting[85].

Abdullah Saeed, a Sultan of Oman Professor of Arab and Islamic studies at the University of Melbourne and commentator on contemporary Islam, said that Islamic art could be defined as art that is produced as part of the cultural and religious traditions of Muslims[86]. Wijdan Ali is an important contemporary art theorist in Islamic art from Jordan who regularly write about Islamic art in twentieth century, has offered a straightforward definition of Islamic art as:

> The sum of artistic manifestation created under Muslim patronage, by both Muslim and Non-Muslim artists and artisan who adhere to Islamic aesthetics, for the usage and enjoyment of Muslims[87].

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[84] Ibid.

[85] Grabar, O. 'Islamic Art' in Turner, J. (Et. all.), *The Dictionary of Art*, London: Macmillian, 1996, Vol 16, p. 94ff.

[86] Saeed, A. op. cit. p. 85.

[87] Ali, W. op. cit. p. 8.

This definition is particularly relevant for understanding the nature of Islamic art in Southeast Asia with its rich multiculturalism and community, which have a history of ethnic and spiritual diversity.

For Tim Stanley, a senior curator of the Middle Eastern collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum (London), there are several ways to understand and perceive Islamic art, which are equally valid, because each emphasizes different features of an enormous body of material[88]. For Stanley, some definitions concentrate more on the religious aspects of the art, giving pride to a special form of art that directly relates to religion namely mosque architecture or calligraphy[89]. In one essay Stanley views Islamic art as a product of culture, in which Islam plays a dominant role in forming 'objects'[90]. Stanley seeks to project a broad view of Islamic art as 'products' or 'objects' created by certain cultural forces (politics, economy etc.)[91]. In other words, Stanley proposes a 'social context' approach to investigate the nature of Islamic art. He recognizes Islamic art evolved through a gradual process that involved influences from other civilizations, namely Sasanian (now in Iraq, Iran and western central Asia) and Byzantine (now in Egypt and Syria)[92]. Furthermore Stanley proposed that Islamic art had formed from the merging of these two major traditions, together with the innovatory addition of new

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[88] Stanley, T. 'What is Islamic Art?', *Palace and Mosque Islamic Art from the Middle East*, V & A Publication, London, 2004, p. 17.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid., p. 18.

elements[93]. Later, because of the continuing influence of Sassanian and Byzantium art, merging with Islamic art, it is sometimes difficult to tell whether if the item was made under the authority of Muslim rule or just by an individual artist who happened to be Muslim [94]. Islamic art is a complex area to study because of the history of influences from other cultures during the period of its genesis, as well as the issues that arise due to its direct relation to religion. It is relevant, in the context of the *Lawon kori*, to note that Stanley's conclusions about the early development of Middle Eastern Islamic art suggest direct similarities to circumstances in Southeast Asia. Islamic art in the Malay archipelago developed in an environment heavily influenced by indigenous, Hindu and Buddhist cultures as well as the presence of immigrant societies which introduced their own art traditions, such as the *nanhai* Chinese communities.

M. B. Piotrovsky a Professor in art, archeology and history of Arabia at the St. Petersburg State University, agrees that the roots of Islamic art could be found in the earlier artistic traditions of Syria, Iraq and Iran[95]. Nevertheless, he acknowledge that the Arabs, who later conquered these territories in the name of Islam, added important elements of the arts from their own heritage[96]. Piotrovsky added:

> ...the culture of the new Islamic world soon came to differ radically from preceding cultures and from those of the

[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Piotrovsky, M. B., 'Islamic Art: an Introduction', *Heaven on Earth Art from Islamic Lands*, Prestel: Munich, Berlin, London, New York, 2004, p. 17.
[96] Ibid.

> surrounding area...the visual unity of Islamic art should have been established in so short a time must be due to the spirit of Islam itself, the aesthetic principles and concepts that are to be found in the pages of its Holy Scripture, Al Qur'an[97].

For Piotrovsky, the tendency to luxury, combined with an extreme use of abstraction, in Islamic art created confusion for an outsider[98]. The first, reflecting the fabulous wealth of Islamic rulers, is an art that celebrates earthly majesty; the second reflects the mystery of the divine majesty of Allah[99].

By using a historical approach, Piotrovsky, like Stanley, suggested that this situation formed a key part of the evolution of Islamic art, where the ruler performed a vital role in promoting the essence of Islam in an appropriate visual language[100]. As Linda Komaroff, curator of Islamic art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, suggests Islamic art reflects the complexity of its civilization[101]. It was not necessarily created for the service of Islam because the varied art styles can also include secular objects produced, whatever the artist's or the patron's religious affiliation, in societies under Islamic rule or influence. Nevertheless, Komaroff asserts, Islamic art is unified in style and purpose.

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[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Komaroff, L., *Islamic Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1998, p. 2.

Chapter 2 Islam and art in Southeast Asia

Perspectives on Islamic art in Southeast Asia

It is very rare to find publications devoted to discussion of Islamic art in Southeast Asia. This is a result of the early conception that Islam didn't really create a genuine art tradition in Southeast Asia. In general, scholars have always related historical art in the Southeast Asia archipelago to the glorious era of Hindu and Buddhist cultures from the eighth to the thirteenth century[102]. A common perception has been that Islamic art arrived later and built on the decline of previous art forms inspired by indigenous beliefs, Hinduism and Buddhism[103]. Furthermore Islamic art has been perceived as more directly related to the art of Middle Eastern people.

In this chapter the writer examines studies that discuss the idea of Islamic art in Southeast Asia and then, in examining the *Lawon kori*, subsequently seeks to construct an understanding of Islamic art as it developed in Southeast Asia. Many ideas discussed here were referenced in research that examines Islamic and Malay culture in a sociological context. This is due to the fact that not many research publications are specifically devoted to the topic of Islamic Art in Southeast Asia.

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[102] Kossak, S.M. and Watts, E.W., *The Art of South and Southeast Asia: Resource for Educators*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2001.
[103] Ibid.

Western perspectives

In recent scholarship, the researcher Patricia L. Baker has been a pre-eminent scholar who has discussed Islamic art in Southeast Asia. She notes that Islam is a universal religion, with the Islamic world stretching from West Africa to China and Southeast Asia, but actually it is very diverse in its cultural expressions[104]. In the case of Southeast Asian Islamic art, Barker proposes that the majority of western scholars in art history and anthropology still subscribe and follow the 'standard' academic view promoted in 1950's that Islamization of the region was a gradual process, beginning in the thirteenth century and limited to the trading coastal ports until the late eighteenth century[105]. Contrary to this, Baker argues that modern research of Southeast Asian history reveals contact with Islam commenced as early as the late seventh century and, by the seventeenth century, archipelago court life, except in Hindu Bali, was largely governed by Islamic laws[106]. As one specific example, Baker notes that the batik making tradition of Java and South Sumatra is still generally perceived as Asian, not as 'Islamic', because few designs display an obvious visual relationship with textiles of the Middle East (figure 5)[107]. Furthermore, Baker states that many Western scholars perceived Islam in the region as a 'block' preventing, or even annihilating, the rich heritage of diverse cultural expressions and practices[108].

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[104] Baker, P.L., op. cit, p.9.
[105] Ibid., p. 10.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid., p. 9., Baker, L. P., *Islamic Textiles*, London: British Museum Press, 1995, p. 9.
[108] Ibid., p.10.

In support for her claims, she lists previous views on Islamic art of Southeast Asia. The influential Dutch colonial scholar and academic Snouck-Hurgronje (1857-1936), which is quoted by Baker, in his book *The Acehness* declared:

> ...the foreign civilization which has exercised the most lasting influence on the Acehness (people of the north Sumatra Indonesia), namely that of Islam, is but little favorable to the awakening or development of the artistic sense[109].

She also cites academician Kenneth Perry Landon, who viewed the presence of Islam in Southeast Asia as 'a veneer over the indigenous culture', while van Leur regarded it as "a flaking glaze on the massive body of indigenous civilization"[110]. By contrast Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity are accepted as rich and 'enabling' artistic inspiration, even though it is acknowledge that they too are 'imported' religious philosophies and cultures[111]. Landon asserted that Islam did attack the manufactures of images and art objects of a religious nature and, as a consequence, brought to a sudden halt to the budding genius of Indonesian sculptors and architects[112]. In a more radically extreme statement the same author proposed that Islam produced no art and no structure to

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[109] Ibid. Snouck Hurgronje, Christian., *The Acehness*, (trans. A.W.S. O' Sullivan). Vol. 2, Brill: Leiden. 1906.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Landon, K. P., *Southeast Asia: Crossroad of Religion*, The University of Chicago Press, 1949, p. 136 – 137.

compare with the ninth century Buddhist temple of Borobudur[113]. In his finishing line he said that artistically it (Islam) was sterile[114].

The precedent for these perceptions was first established by the famous early nineteenth century British colonial administrator and founder of Singapore, Stanford Raffles. Raffles was a respected pioneer scholar of Southeast Asian studies, author of the ground breaking and voluminous *The History of Java* (publish in 1819), and apparently fluent in Malay. He pronounced that Islam was the religion, above all others, most likely to enslave the minds and bodies of mankind. It is, for him, essentially a 'robber-religion' and responsible for the decline of civilization in the Malay nations (figure 6)[115]. Raffles, whose great interest was the heritage of early Hindu-Buddhist cultures, stated that the establishment of 'mohametan institutions' had discouraged any effort in building the great religious monuments that was a distinctive pursuit of pre-Islamic Javanese and Sumatran societies[116]. He added that most of those ancient monuments, known as *candi*, had subsequently been deliberately demolished and replaced by graves and new 'mohametan temples' that were insignificant when compared to earlier architectural achievements[117].

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[113] Ibid., p. 137.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Al Junied, S.M. Khairuddin., *Raffles and Religion: A Study of Sir Thomas Stanford Raffles Discourse on Religions amongst Malays*, The Other Press, Kuala Lumpur, 2004, p. 20.
[116] Ibid., p. 32.
[117] Ibid.

It would be over 150 years later before another writer began to closely examine the Islamic art of Southeast Asia. Mubin Sheppard (1905-1994) was an expatriate civil servant and connoisseur of Malay art, and lived almost of his entire life in Malaysia. During this time he produced his study of Malay arts titled *Taman Indera Kayangan* (Royal Pleasure Ground) (first published in 1972). The book doesn't mention Islam as a major factor in the development of Malay arts. Sheppard seems to be more interested in explaining the roots, history and culture of the Malay arts in the context of a 'Malay milieu'. In his introductory essay, Sheppard attempts to trace back the legacy or ancestor of the Malays to the three geographical spheres of Southeast Asia, India and Southern China. Based on the assumption these are the roots of Malay arts and culture, he links their identity specifically to Hindu/Buddhist civilization and culture[118]. His writing discusses the history of 'objects', as expressions of Malay art, with a complete absence of any contextual readings. In the chapter on Malay decorative woodcarving, Sheppard alludes to Islamic sources of inspiration only in the most obvious examples, which are the decorative use of Arabic inscriptions quoting Al Qur'an (figure 7)[119]. There is no mention of the Islamic influence apparent in the abstraction of natural forms in woodcarving motifs, such as *ukiran timbul* ('relief carving'), *bunga semantong* ('thundery weather flower') or *bunga tampok manggis* ('mangosteen flower') (figure 8)[120]. It is also the same with his examination of Malay textile traditions. Neither is there reference to the Islamic interpretation of meanings found in the many textile patterns of indigenous *songket*

[118] Sheppard, M., *Taman Indera Kayangan*, Oxford University Press, 1972, pp. 2-15.
[119] Ibid., pp. 40-41.
[120] Ibid., pp. 32-33.

(literally the 'digging under' process) and batik that was introduced into peninsular Malaysia from Indonesia in more recent historical times (figure 9)[121].

A similar disregard for the Islamic aesthetic context of Indonesian, and in particular, Lampung, textiles occur in major studies, such as Holmgren and Spertus (1989)[122]. While acknowledging that Islam changed the identity of Lampung society, the authors' only reference to the arrival of the new religion, conjoins it with Dutch colonization, and so implies that its influence on local art traditions was negative:

> Little is known about the early Lampung culture...the gradual penetration of Islam commencing in the sixteenth century changed Lampung's cultural direction. After 1825, Dutch interference further sapped Lampung's vitality[123].

Nearly sixteen years later, the Art Gallery of South Australia, proposed a comprehensive view of Islamic art and civilization in Southeast Asia in the ground-breaking exhibition *Crescent Moon: Islamic art and civilization in Southeast Asia*. The curator, James Bennett sought to look at the cultural presence of Islam in Southeast Asia, through a thematic perspective based on the artistic and historical evidence documented in objects drawn from twenty-four Southeast Asian and Australian collections. The exhibition aimed to explore aesthetic interface between Islam, as a universal religion, and local worldviews and spirituality. In the catalogue publication that accompanied the

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[121] Ibid., pp. 120-123.
[122] Holmgren, R.J. and Spertus, A.E. *Early Indonesian Textiles from Three Island Cultures*, 1989, The Metropolitan Museum of Art & Harry N. Abrams, Inc. New York, p. 72.
[123] Ibid.

survey, Bennett proposes the long scholarly neglect of Southeast Asian art has its roots in nineteenth century European policies that sought to 'westernize' the indigenous rulers through promoting secularism[124]. European colonial powers systematically dis-empowered Islam as a major cultural force because it was the elite class who previously had supplied major patronage for those traditional arts that were inherently Islamic in content[125]. Bennett further suggests that early European scholars, such as Snouck Hurgronje, Richard Winstedt (1878-1966) or, even more recently, Clifford Geertz (1926-2006) worked from a secularist academic context which ill-equipped them to understand the subtle dialogue between art and spirituality in the Islamic world of Southeast Asia[126]. As a result, these western observers failed to see Islam as the prime cultural force in the archipelago from the period of the thirteenth century until the present.

One of the major points that Bennett proposes, as a key to appreciating Islamic art, is the necessity to understand the ambivalent relationship between the two major facets of Islam: the normative legalistic and the mystical aspects[127]. This lack of recognition has been a factor in much previous misinterpretation of Islam and its artistic expression. The *Crescent Moon: Islamic Art & Civilization in Southeast Asia* exhibition curator notes that much of Islamic art was produced for non-religious use, such as in the

[124] Bennett, J., *Crescent Moon: Islamic Art & Civilization in Southeast Asia*, The Art Gallery of South Australia, 2005, p. 248.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid., p. 250.

court or domestic environment[128]. This contradicts the tendency of scholars to reference theological criteria when analyzing art objects and so reinforces the common assumption that Islamic art is purely religious. This concurs with the views of Baker's previously cited[129]. Bennett warns that scholars must carefully understand the historical contexts in which objects were made before assuming if they constitute Islamic art or not[130]. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge the multicultural nature of the societies that contributed to the region's rich aesthetic heritage through the diversity of traditions, ethnicities and geographical environments (figure 10)[131].

Bennett acknowledges that the Malay people were the most important group responsible for the creation of an Islamic heritage in Southeast Asia, but agrees it is a difficult question to clearly define Malay identity[132]. As Anthony Reid has argued in his article *Understanding Melayu (Malay) as a source of diverse modern identities*, notions of Malay identity have constantly altered with social change[133]. Furthermore, other ethnic groups, like the Bugis, Javanese and Makassans, as well as minority people such as the Abung of Lampung where the Art Gallery's *Lawon kori* were made, have also contributed to the rich heritage of Islam in the region.

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[128] Ibid., p. 254.
[129] Baker, P.L., op. cit, pp. 13-14.
[130] Bennett, J., *Crescent Moon*, p. 254.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid., pp. 254-255.
[133] Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 32., No. 3., 2001, pp. 295-313.

Local perspectives

Commencing in the 1980's, Muslim scholars in Southeast Asia endeavored to construct theories for understanding the relationship of Islamic art in Southeast Asia to traditional arts found amongst the multi-ethnic communities of the archipelago. The work of these scholars is particularly significant because they speak from the viewpoint of participants 'within' Malay Islamic culture and not as foreign 'outside' observers.

One of the first was Professor Othman Mohd. Yatim (b. 1949) and he could be considered a pioneer as the first Malay Muslim scholar to investigate the nature and form of Islamic art in Malay civilization. In his investigations into the arrival of Islam in Southeast Asia, Yatim proposed that international trade, traveling Sufi masters and the sultanate *pesisir* (coastal) courts played significant roles in encouraging widespread acceptance of the new religion[134]. In his study of the epigraphy of Malay tombstones *Batu Aceh: Early Islamic gravestones in Peninsular Malaysia*[135] he documented the extent to which decorative style merges introducing south Asian and indigenous elements. He also noted the important role of the introduction of the Arabic script, and its subsequent adaptation into Jawi script for writing the Malay language, in the region's art history (figure 11)[136]. Jawi became a key vehicle of communication in the articulation

[134] Yatim, M.O., *Islamic Arts*, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1995, p. 2.
[135] Yatim, M.O., *Batu Aceh: Early Islamic Gravestones in Peninsular Malaysia*, Persatuan Muzium Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 1988.
[136] Yatim, M.O., *Islamic Arts*, p. 14.

of the archipelago's worldview, and identity, which would become so important in the development of its unique styles of artistic expression[137].

Yatim, in his research into the aesthetics of early Southeast Asian Islamic art, was also the first scholar to introduce a sophisticated analysis of space. 'Space' here refers to the creation of specific spatial relationships, within the structure of designs, which are based on the maker's intimate observation of the environment and express his/her belief in the creations of Allah (figure 12)[138]. For Yatim, the Muslim artist must accept the Oneness of Allah (*tauhid*) and so use the format of each design to intelligently portray a harmonious arrangement of space, thereby enabling the viewer to enjoy its beauty[139]. Thus Yatim sees the expression of *tauhid* in traditional Malay art as a definitive trait of Malay Islamic art. In doing so he cites repetitive decorative patterns, such as typical fauna and floral motifs utilized by local Islamic artists, whose symbols relate directly to the local environment[140]. A specific example is the motif called *itik pulang petang* ('ducks returning home in the evening') found in woodcarving, tombstone ornament and textiles (figure 13 and 13a)[141].

In year 2000, Raja Fuziah Raja Tun Uda and Abdul Rahman Al Ahmadi wrote the definitive essay *Malay arts and crafts: Islamic Inspiration in Creativity*. This innovative

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[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid., p. 46.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid., pp. 52-55.
[141] Ibid.

study explores the spectrum of Malay art and craft in terms of its influence by Islam. Both researchers suggest, from the perspective of Muslim belief and in nearly the same tones as Yatim, that the Malay civilization, following the advent of Islam, underwent a major shift from a mythological/animistic worldview to being more rational and philosophical[142].

This rational and philosophical worldview refers to the evolution of aesthetic traditions in the Malay world and the specific principles that guided the activities of artists and craftsmen[143]. Its core consciousness is *tauhid* and all Muslim artists ought be fully aware of this principle in their practice [144]. The writers concluded:

> ...this means that the personality of the craftsman is de-emphasized in order to draw the mind of the viewer to the notion of Divine transcendence. For the craftsman, he craft the total submission applying his creative energy and knowledge to the utmost in pursuit of excellence. And, at the end of the process, he leaves no signature, no name to exalt his creation : For to him this is an act of devotion[145].

It is clear both researchers formulated the notion of Malay Islamic art within the context of *tauhid*. Islamic mysticism, of which *tauhid* is the fundamental aspect of belief, was brought to the archipelago by Sufi *ulama'* (religious scholars) who participated in Malay court life and who were often also active as traders in the archipelago. Sufi cosmology

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[142] Raja Tun Uda, R.F. and Al Ahmadi, 'Malay arts and crafts: Islamic Inspiration in Creativity', in Osman, M.T. (et. al.), *Islamic Civilization in the Malay World*, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and The Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture, 2000, p. 285.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.

became deeply embodied in the various traditional Malay arts and influenced calligraphy, palace architecture, decorative woodcarving, silver metal ware and even kite making (figure 14)[146]. Islam emphasizes the dual relationship of 'vertical' (man to God) and 'horizontal' (man to man). The latter relationship encompasses all activities in society, such as making art. Thus, through the impact of Islam, Malay arts became spiritually enriching and socially integrated, as well as psychologically ennobling in its intent[147].

Emeritus Professor Mohd. Taib Osman (b. 1934) from University of Malaya, a well-known scholar in Malay studies, initiated a different theoretical angle when he proposed a socio-cultural approach to studying Islamic art of the region. Osman's Sunni perspectives prompted him to suggest that any Malay ignorance of the 'true teaching' of Islam, as often claimed by earlier scholars, might be due to circumstances of distance from the teaching centers of Islam's heartland[148]. For Osman, Malay Islamic art profoundly differed from Shi'ite Persian (Iran) and north Indian art because it never naturalistically depicted humans and animals in art[149]. Malay Muslim artists instead found pleasure in portraying nature in stylised forms like *pucuk rebung* ('bamboo shoots') and *awan larat* (literally 'meandering clouds' but often representing, flowers and tendrils) (figure 15 and 16)[150]. It is untrue to declare that the coming of Islam blunted the creativity of people just because of its strict rules against the realistic depiction of living

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[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Osman, M. T., 'Introduction' in Osman, M.T. (et. al.), op. cit. p. xxxiv.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.

forms or anything offensive to the moral sense of men and women (i.e. erotic imagery)[151]. The stylization of Javanese shadow puppets (*wayang kulit*) is an example of a refined artistic sensibility expressed in the depiction of a figure while avoiding overt realism (figure 17). Osman rejected the notion suggested by earlier western scholars and orientalists that Islam had been a 'block' to the creativity of local people. The Malay arts continued to flourish and give rise to new forms of expression, beautifully crafted to meet people's religious aspirations, such as the *khat* (calligraphy), the weaving of pandanus leaves into prayer mats or the carving of the Qur'anic verses on the pulpit where the *imam* delivers his sermon (figure 18)[152]. His approach slightly differs from the writing of Yatim, Raja Tun Uda and Al Ahmadi. From Osman's socio-cultural perspective, the reader can understand how external social factors may give rise to a different understanding of Islam, but its basic beliefs and practices, are the same as revealed in the artworks he discusses.

University Technology MARA Associate Professor Dzul Haimi Md. Zain, a researcher on Islamic art, perceives Islamic art in Southeast Asia in relation to its local customs. Unlike Raja Tun Uda, Al Ahmadi and Osman, Zain defines a more intrinsic inter-relationship between Islam and indigenous traditional custom, known as *adat*, in Southeast Asian art. He proposes that a combination of *tauhid* and Malay *adat* has created a 'true pillar' of Muslim art. Zain agrees with Raja Tun Uda and Al Ahmadi's proposition that Islam spread by trade in Southeast Asia and changed the local cultural

[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.

landscape[153]. Muslim missionaries, who were also engaged in commerce, from Middle East, India and China were responsible for this transformation around the thirteenth century onwards[154]. It is important to recognize this theory in order to understand the unique styles of Islamic art that developed in Southeast Asia. The coming of the new religion from three such different geographical areas meant Islam became quite complex in the forms it subsequently assumed. This is typically apparent in an art object like the *Lion* from Sendang Duwur Mosque (circa 1561), which was made contemporary to the *Lawon kori* from the Art Gallery of South Australia. The animal displays Chinese and Indian stylistic characteristics but was carved to decorate a Javanese Muslim tomb (figure 19). There is no single attributable source to the formation of Islamic cultural or artistic practices in the archipelago.

Zain observed how a variety of motifs from nature and abstract forms were used extensively in illuminating Al Qur'an manuscripts although the contents, which is the divine message revealed to the Prophet Mohammed (MPBUH), are immutable. He stresses the local differences in Southeast Asia where manuscripts use less gold color and a more local flavor has been added to emphasize moderation and simplicity in appearance (figure 20)[155]. In the case of Southeast Asian textiles, like batik, *songket* or *kain limar*, the scholar suggests Islamic teaching plays a major role determining the calligraphic,

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[153] Md. Zain. D.H., 'Art of Nusantara: The Southeast frontier of Islam', in *The Message and The Monsoon : Islamic Art of Southeast Asia* , Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, 2005, p. 16.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid., p. 19.

geometric and floral patterns of designs (figure 16)[156]. Zain seeks to highlight how local taste has created the characteristic image of Southeast Asia Islamic art differing from Islamic art produced in other geographical areas.

Although Zain is prepared to acknowledge the influence of local cultural diversity, expressed in Malay *adat*, he reminds the reader that beginning with the proclamation of faith, known as the *syahadah*, which is 'The is no God but Allah and the Prophet Muhammad is His Messenger', Muslims display their commitment to Islam in all aspects of their daily lives (figure 21)[157]. This is encapsulated in the *pepatah Melayu* (traditional Malay saying):

> *Adat bersendikan syarak, syarak berpaksikan Kitabu'llah* [158]
>
> (Tradition relies upon Islamic law, Islamic law hinges on Al Qur'an).

This traditional Malay saying conveys how all art and associated activities, said to be *adat* or 'tradition', of the Malays, must strictly follow the teaching of Islam stated in Al Qur'an and *hadith*. *Adat* must follow the *syari'ah* (Islamic law) in order to create art that could be called *ibadah* (muslim acts of worship) and not *bida'ah* (any heretical innovation). An essential point suggested by Zain is that the declaration of *syahadah* is not just about a proclamation but must be witnessed in the character and life of each

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[156] Ibid., p. 22.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid.

Muslim person. Art created with this full understanding by a Muslim may be said to be Islamic art.

Associate Professor Zakaria Ali (b. 1946) from Universiti Sains Malaysia, a well-known art historian and scholar, is among the most important figures in his field, due to his major publication *Islamic Art in Southeast Asia 800. A.D. – 1570 A.D.*[159]. Unlike previous researchers or scholars so far discussed, Ali attempts to formulate a dependable working definition of Islamic art in Southeast Asia[160]. His book maps the geographical centers of Islamic culture, from around the ninth century onwards, and documents outstanding examples of historical art found at each location. Ali proposes Islamic art was initially made at the instigation of patrons who became the rulers of sultanates, which arose in trading ports dominated by Muslims, along the coastlines of Southeast Asia[161]. Ali suggests port kingdoms, like Champa, Patani, Terengganu, Pasai, Sulu and Brunei, subsequently prospered to become the major centers of artistic patronage (figure 22)[162]. Objects such as coins, textiles, weapons and architecture were created as 'art' to communicate signs and emblems that were significant for their representation of economic and political prestige. This symbolic language, founded on the religious affiliation of these societies, was intended to portray the power of its owner, the ruler

[159] The research was actually a PhD thesis, which he completed at Harvard University in 1992. The research was later published as a book in 1994.
[160] Ali. Z., *Islamic Art in Southeast Asia 800. A.D. – 1570 A.D.*, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1994. p. xxv.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid., p. xxvi

(figure 23)[163]. The contextual interrelation between aesthetic, religious and worldly concerns that Ali proposes as a 'social reading' of Islamic art in Southeast Asia, ensures a holistic understanding of its development. He notes the ongoing 'localization' of various art forms, drawn from the Hindu and Buddhist traditions implanted earlier in the region, was a task that the artist undertook in order to fulfill the requirements of patrons living in the new religious climate of Islam[164].

In the conclusion chapter of his study *Islamic Art in Southeast Asia*, Ali proposes the theory that the Malay concept of self changed following the fall of Malacca (Melaka) to the Portuguese in 1511 (figure 24). The Portuguese invasion and conquest of their lands markedly altered local traditional concepts of city, country and religion as well as trade and warfare[165]. The Malay identity began to evolve, from a concept of self that was based on locality, being the *kampung* (village), to the concept of self as based on religious affiliation, which was Muslim[166]. This assertion of Malay identity as Islamic – to become a Muslim was said to *masuk Melayu* ('become Malay') – began to take shape after the fall of Melaka and in order to meet the Portuguese challenge[167]. Thus a new notion of Malay and Islamic art emerged at a time of changing self-identity and when Islam became the central pillar of Malay culture and civilization. In simple words, according to Ali, to speak about Malay art also means to speak about Islamic art.

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[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid., pp. 414-415.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid.

Over the last two or more decades, as international interest in the Islamic art of Southeast Asia has begun to grow, it is apparent how there has been increasing debate amongst Malay and foreign scholars about the nature of its development in the region. One of the major challenges, in discussing the *Lawon kori*, is to find historical information to assist our appreciation of the object in the context of the different theories proposed by the writers mentioned in this chapter. Earlier scholars shared a common assumption that the art, that Islamic people created, was less important and impressive art than the previous Hindu-Buddhist traditions, so little primary source material was collected in the field before the advent of the modern era. Nevertheless, as recent scholars cited here have demonstrated, it is erroneous to assume local Muslim people were less orthodox or less creative because there is less information available about them. The artists of the Malay world were open to the appropriation and interpretation of a wide range of styles, as well as the use of local symbolism derived from *adat*, which they interwove into the creation of Islamic art. The various explanations offered by scholars, such as Baker, Yatim and Ali, and others, for understanding the aesthetic importance of this art in Southeast Asia reveals the context in which the *Lawon kori* may be visually analyzed and better appreciated.

Figure 5, early 20th century, *Batik with parang rosak motif*, Yogyakarta, Central Java, cotton, natural dyes, hand-drawn batik. Collection of National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

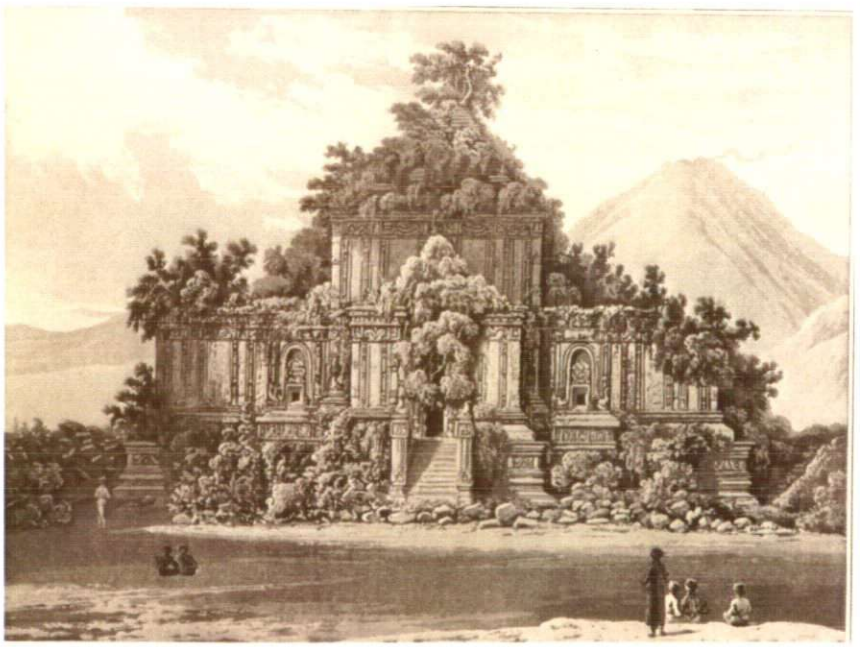

Figure 6, early 19th century, *The large temple at Prambanan* (Java), prints. Source: The History of Java (Vol. 1) by Thomas Stanford Raffles

Figure 7, 19th century, *Calligraphic woodcarving*, believe to be part of Tengku Nik Palace decoration, Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia. Source: Mubin Sheppard

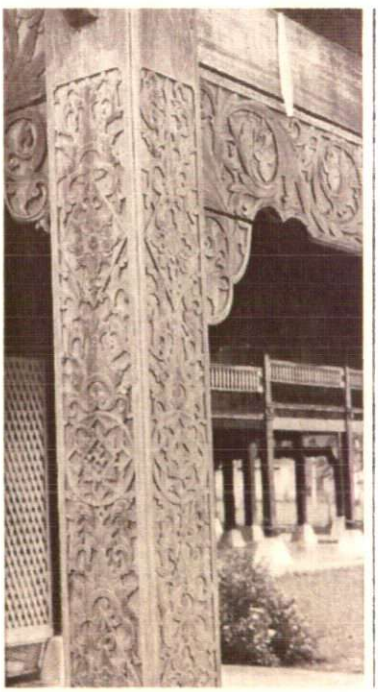

Figure 8, 1908, *Variety of Malay woodcarving motif and design*, Sri Menanti Palace, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. Source: Mubin Sheppard

Figure 9, 1970s, *Kelantan batik design*, Kelantan, Malaysia. Source: Mubin Sheppard

Figure 10, 17th century, *Bayan Mosque*, Lombok, Indonesia. Source: James Bennett

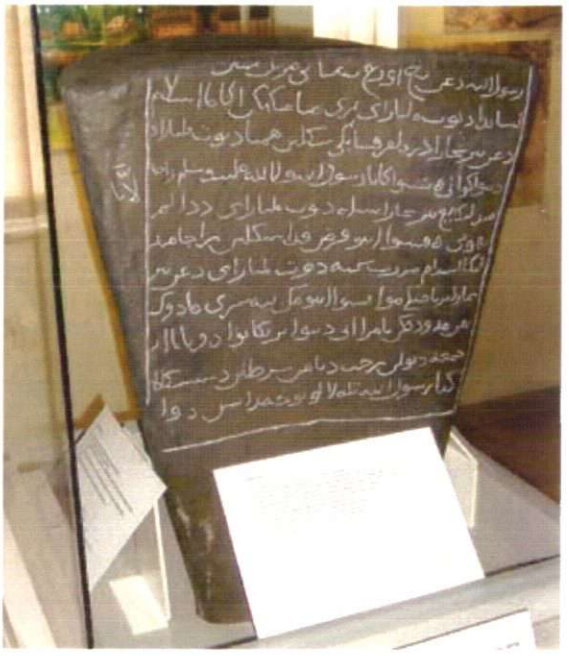

Figure 11, 1303, *Batu Bersurat Terengganu* (Terengganu Stone Inscription), Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia, stone. Collection of State Museum of Terengganu, Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia

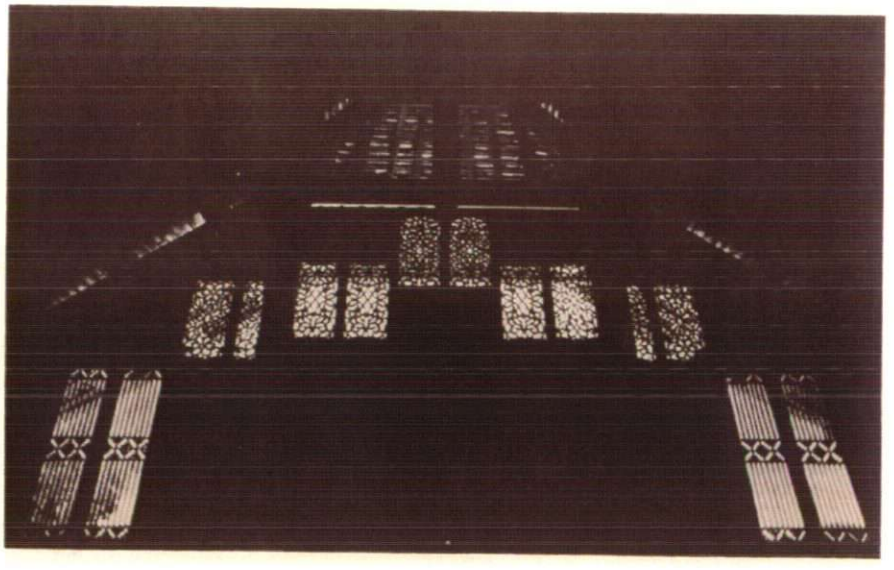

Figure 12, 19th century, *Wall panel*, interior of the end wall of Tengku Nik Palace, Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia. Source: Mubin Sheppard

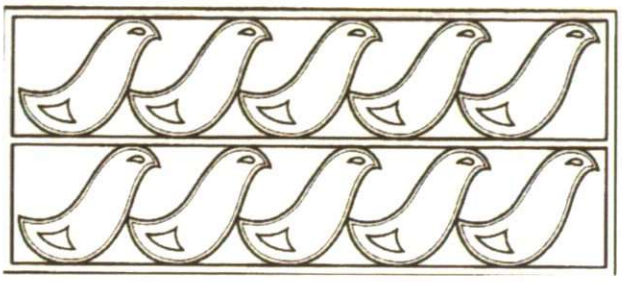

Figure 13, 'Duck returning home in the evening' motif. Usually found on Malay woodcarving. Source: N.A. Halim

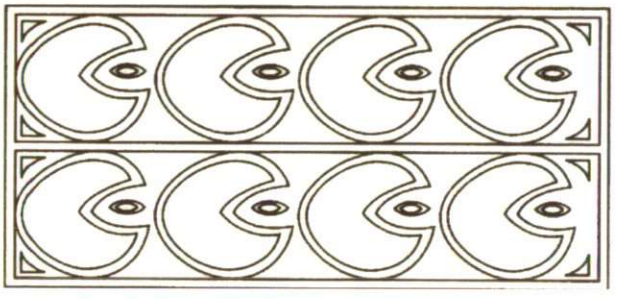

Figure 13a , 'rhinoceros moving upstream' motif. Type of wooden engraving, sometimes found in a traditional Malay house. Source: N.A. Halim

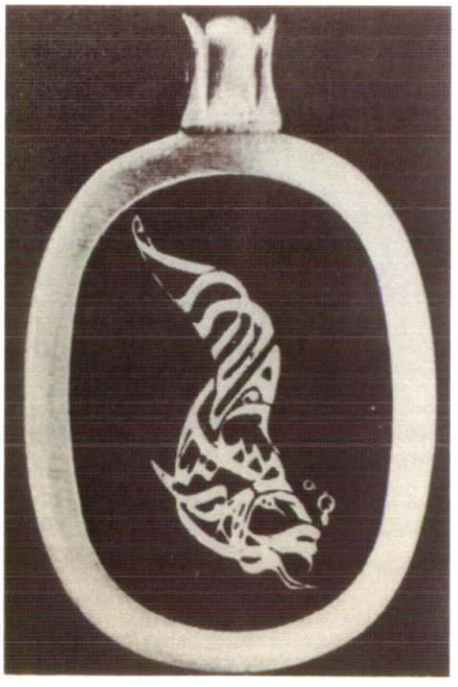

Figure 14, Syed Naguib al Attas, 1960s or early 1970s, *Basmala*, Malaysia. Photograph: L. al Faruqi

Figure 15, Awan Larat motif, one of the best known basic design adopted by Malay woodcarver and metal worker. Source: Mubin Sheppard

Figure 16, Pucuk Rebung motif, traditional motif that usually been used in Malay songket textile. Collection of Mubin Sheppard, Kuala Lumpur

Figure 17, late 19th century, *Wayang Kulit - Shadow puppet from the tale of Panji*, Surakarta, Central Java. Collection of National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Figure 18, 1874, *Pulpit and Pulpit Posts*, Surau Langgar, Kelantan, angsana and cengal woods, 148 x 69 x 20 cm. Photograph: David Look

Figure 19, 16th century, *Lion*, Makam Sunan Sendang, Sendang Duwur, East Java. Collection of National Museum of Indonesia, Jakarta

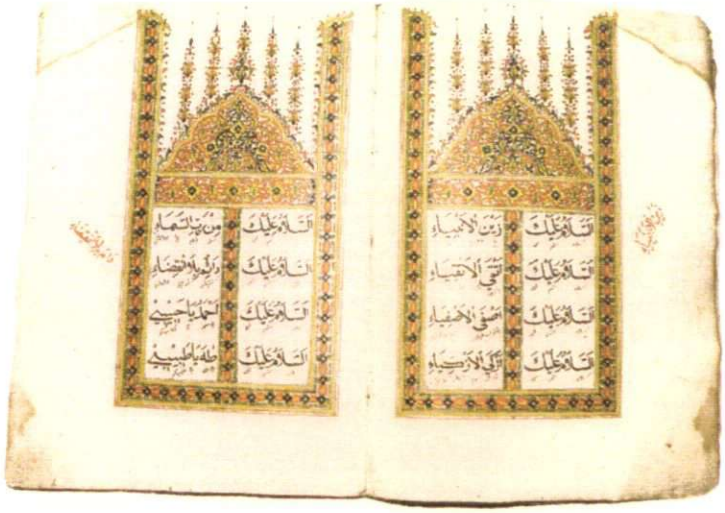

Figure 20, 19th century, *Kitab Maulid Syaraf al-Anam*, Italian paper, pigment, ink, 22.5 x 16.5 cm, Malaysia. Collection of National Museum of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur

Figure 21, circa 1900, *Man's head cloth*, Java, cotton, indigo, hand and stamp batik, 90 x 91 cm. Collection of Powerhouse Museum, Sydney

Figure 22, Brunei – Philippines, 18th - early 19th century, *Ceremonial urn*, Brunei, traded to Mindanao, Philippines, bronze, 70.0 cm high; Gift of Michael Abbott QC through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2007. 20073A21

Figure 23, 1445-1459, *Coin from the reign of Sultan Muzaffar Shah*, Sultan Muzaffar Shah was the fourth Sultan (ruler) of Melaka (from 1446-1456). On the reverse side of the coin is written 'The helper of the world and religion'. Collection of National Bank Museum of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur

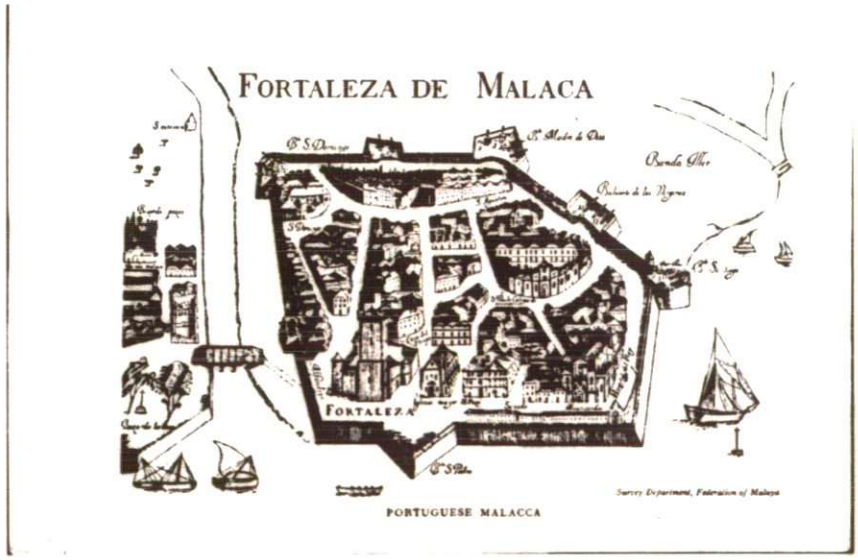

Figure 24, date unknown, *Fortaleze de Malaca* (Portuguese in Malacca), Map depicting Malacca city by Portuguese. Source: Survey Department, Malaysia

Chapter 3 The Art Gallery of South Australia *Pair of doors, lawon kori*

Introduction

This chapter examines the *Lawon kori* in relationship to the concept of Islamic art in Southeast Asia. The visual characteristics of the *Lawon kori* suggest this pair of doors are an example which fit into the conceptual framework for understanding Islamic aesthetics offered by the scholars Ismail al-Faruqi, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Othman Yatim, as well as other Malay scholars discussed in Chapters One and Two. The *Lawon kori* documents Md. Zain's theory, previously quoted, that the design characteristics of much early Southeast Asian Islamic art is not defined by one specific cultural context. Rather, the carving motifs imply the presence of diverse influences that crossed different geographical boundaries and manifested in its creation. These influences signal the complex history of Islamic art in Southeast Asia, especially during its early period of development, and also suggest how Islamic art from Southeast Asia was actively participated in the international world of Islamic aesthetics.

A selective survey of doors found in Islamic art from the period of the eighth to the sixteenth century prior to the creation of *Lawon kori*

The tradition of decorated doors, using the medium of wood, may be traced back as far as the eighth century to the Umayyad dynasty[168] (661-750) that marks the beginning of Islamic art. In the Great Mosque of Damascus (706-714/715) the decorative elements, including the doors, are an integral part of the facade of the mosque (figure 25). The ornament on the mosque doors is restricted to geometrical patterns (mostly square). In this early period, the doors were not an exceptional aspect of architectural design and evidence suggests that most elaborate ornament was applied to the façade of buildings[169]. This is true in the example of a piece of stucco decoration found in Samarra (Iraq) more than a century after the construction of the Great Mosque of Damascus. The stucco (figure 26), made during the Abbasid period (749-1258), reflects influences from pre-Islamic art traditions of Sasanian period[170]. The foliate decoration, with its stylization of vegetal motifs, is organic and elegant. It is confined within a geometric hexagonal field, which is notable in reference to the *Lawon kori* doors. The Samarra stucco decoration and *Lawon kori* both share the use of densely patterned ornament, derived from nature and geometrical themes, confined within clearly marked boundaries. It is apparent this style of art was already in use in Islamic art tradition in the ninth century and subsequently

[168] Umayyad was the first Islamic dynasty that exists after the death of Prophet Muhammad and the four 'Righteous' caliphs (Abu Bakar, Umar, Uthman, Ali).

[169] A good example was at the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (691/692), The Great Mosque of Damascus, Syria (706-714/715) and Mshatta Façade (now in Berlin Museum of Islamic Art). Enderlain, V., 'Architecture' and 'Building Decoration', Hattstein, M. (et. al.), *Islam: Art and Architecture*, Konemann, 2004, pp. 64-87.

[170] Enderlain, V., 'The Abbassids (749-1258)' in *Museum of Islamic art: State Museum of Berlin Prussian Cultural Property*, Museum fur Islamische Kunst, 2003, p. 22.

became a distinct hallmark of later Islamic art, especially for ornamenting architectural facades.

The most outstanding decorative elements appearing on architectural façades, including doors, in Middle Eastern, Northern Africa or Indian Muslim cultures, during the period of the seventh to fourteenth centuries, was applied in materials like dried clay, stucco or stone. This type of decoration is found at the Mosque of Ibn Tulun, Egypt (ninth century) (figure 27), Azhar Mosque, Egypt (ninth century), Mosque of Narin, Iran (tenth century) or the Mihrab in the tomb of Sultan Iltutmish, Delhi (thirteenth century) (figure 28). In these countries, due to climatic conditions, available resources and environmental factors, wood was less often used as a medium for art. As Jennifer Scarce has noted, only in certain regions where wood is abundant, like northern Persia (Iran), Turkey and the Balkans, was it used extensively as a building material whereas, in the countries where large trees are rare, such as Egypt and Arabia, it was an expensive import and was consequently reserved as a luxury material[171]. Even when Islamic decorative arts enjoyed their 'golden age', during the fourteenth century, in North African centers like Fez (in Morocco) there were few wooden doors made displaying complex decoration. By comparison, stone and dried clay was exploited as the favored medium. Magnificent architectural facades embellished with designs adorn Attarin Madrasa (1323-

[171] Scarce, J., 'Wood' in *The Arts of Islam*, The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976, p. 273.

1325) (figure 29) and Al-Sahrij Madrasa (1321-1328) (figure 30) while their wooden doors are only decorated in relatively simple geometric patterns[172].

This is not to say that there were few achievements in the woodwork in Islamic art. Indeed, there is strong evidence to propose that woodwork was used as one of the key creative platforms of Islamic art in Egypt and Syria, especially during the Fatimid period (909-1171) and in Iran during Saffarids, Tahirids and Seljuq period (820-1226)[173]. A wood panel found in Syria dated 1103 is a good example of how the artist could use wood as a creative medium (figure 31). Two wooden doors found in Mosul, now in Iraq, and Iran are a benchmark measuring the creative ability of early Islamic artists working in wood. The wooden doors, found in Mosul and dated around twelve century (figure 32), may be described as superb examples of design and carving. The repeated arabesque decoration, blended with almost undecipherable *kufic* calligraphy recording sacred sayings, such as 'pious exertions (which) will be duly rewarded' and 'sovereignty belongs to the sole God (Allah)', make them a definitive example of this form of Middle Eastern Islamic art. The Bastan Museum wooden doors (figure 33), made in Persia (Iran) in 1442, are unique as the craftsman signed his name with its date of completion. The signature, carved in calligraphic style, initially gives the impression that the writing is some kind of proverb or monumental inscription. The highly visible commemoration of the artist's name is rare in early Islamic art but subsequently became an important aspect

[172] Madrasa literally means school, but in this context it means a schools of Islamic law (*syari'ah*).
[173] Scarce, J., op. cit., p. 273-274, 277, 279.

of the Islamic art tradition besides the exploration of arabesque, geometric and organically inspired designs.

Doors in the Islamic culture of Indonesia and Malaysia

In this section the writer discusses a selection of surviving wooden doors, from the pre-modern era of the Malay Archipelago, relevant to our understanding of the Art Gallery of South Australia's *Lawon kori*. This survey, which is a result of conversations with James Bennett, Curator of Asian Art at the Art Gallery of South Australia, commences with an assessment of the evidence for the design of doors, and their significance, during the early Javanese Hindu-Buddhist period that pre-dated the arrival of Islam. The writer subsequently documents examples of wooden doors from eighteenth and nineteenth century Bali, in order to highlight the diverse evolution of doors in the Hindu culture that was heir to earlier Hindu-Buddhist traditions and continued after the arrival of Islam. This establishes a comparative context for the discussion of a small handful of surviving Javanese and Sumatran doors, dating from the fifteenth to nineteenth century, that display a direct connection to the *Lawon kori*. The writer categorizes these doors under three distinct stylistic groups.

In Southeast Asia, where the climate was tropical and an abundant variety of tree species grew, carved wood was a major component in building structures. Although there has survived no early wooden doors predating the sixteenth century, when the *Lawon kori*

was carved, there is archaeological evidence at Central Javanese Hindu and Buddhist temple sites that door structures were a device in architecture for defining ritual 'boundaries'[174]. The earliest example of this practice is incorporated into Hindu and Buddhist temple architecture, such as at Candi Sewu near Yogyakarta, in Java during the ninth century[175]. The evolution of Hindu and Buddhist temple design at this time included the innovative addition of doors to the shrine room[176]. The evidence of the vanished wooden doors can be still seen at Candi Sewu where they apparently were used to 'open and close' the sanctuary space when certain restricted, or secret, ceremonies were performed. Dumarcay believes that the decision to put a door at entrances to the Buddhist sanctuaries was influenced by Hindu religious practices[177].

It is important to evaluate the style of doors in the early Hindu-Buddhist period because Hindu and Buddhist art subsequently influenced the development of local Islamic traditions of architectural decoration[178]. Parmono Atmadi, in his comprehensive study entitled *Some Architectural Design Principles of Temples in Java*, documents the ornamentation of buildings and architectural monuments that are depicted in scenes on

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[174] Dumarcay, J.,"Buddhism Architectural change', Miksic, J., (et. al.), Indonesian Heritage series, *Volume 1: Ancient History*, Archipelago Press, 1999, pp. 76-77.
[175] Dumarcay, J., *The Temples of Java* (4th impression – 1991), Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1986, pp. 21-25.
[176] Dumarcay, J.,'Buddhism Architectural change', op. cit.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Mustopo, M.H., *Kebudayaan Islam di Jawa Timur: Kajian beberapa unsur budaya masa peralihan*, Jendela Grafika, Yogyakarta, 2001, pp. 182-183.

the stone reliefs at Candi Borobudur, dated eight century (figure 34)[179]. The plain and undecorated design of the doors is in marked contrast to the overall ornate style of these depicted structures[180]. Nevertheless, there is a notable exception in one building shown in a relief at the Brahma Temple at Candi Prambanam, in the neighboring region of Yogyakarta. This temple was built perhaps only about fifty years after Borobudur and yet the relief shows rich floral decorative elements incorporated into the door's design (figure 35)[181].

The early Javanese tradition of Hindu/Buddhist wooden doors was later to continue evolving new styles and techniques of decoration in Bali, which still continues to maintain its Hindu cultural identity until today. In the *puri* (palace) doors (figure 36) found in Singaraja, North Bali and dated around late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, the use of pigment and gold leaf suggests a decorative language that differs from doors made elsewhere in the Malay Archipelago. Animal imagery, such as the winged lions (*singa*), which are typically Balinese and clearly carved in three-dimensional forms on both upper sections of the doors, merges with floral motifs on these doors. As Helen Jessup has commented, the bold modeling of the floral spirals derives from chrysanthemum flowers and was much influenced by Chinese art[182]. The door suggests

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[179] Atmadi, Parmono, *Some Architectural Design Principles of Temples in Java*, Gadjah Mada University Press, Yogyakarta, 1994.
[180] Miksic, J., 'Chronology Timeline', Miksic, J., (et. al.), Indonesian Heritage series, *Volume 1: Ancient History*, Archipelago Press, 1999, p. 11.
[181] Dumarcay, J., *The Temples of Java*, p. 34.
[182] Jessup, H.I., *Courts Art of Indonesia*, The Asia Society galleries, New York in association with Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1990, p. 198, 242.

the continuing evolution of Hindu art in response to the presence of Chinese immigrant communities that settled in Singaraja and elsewhere in Bali. A second significant example of Balinese doors from the nineteenth century is represented in the collection of the San Francisco Museum of Asian Art (figure 37). Here the densely patterned foliate and fauna motifs ornamenting the doors are given visual coherence through the meandering stalks of the curving plant vines. The unknown carver has used a geometrical cartouche to contain and contrast the complex flora and fauna motifs against the undecorated background sections of the door. The cartouche appears surprisingly similar to geometrical configurations found in the Middle Eastern Islamic art tradition since the ninth century, especially during the Abbasid period. It is a reminder of the extent to which many motifs were exchanged along routes of international trade and stylistically connected through similarities in techniques. These motifs merged into a shared tradition in both Islamic and Hindu art found over a wide area of the globe from Southeast Asia to the Middle East. The international nature of many non-European art styles, with their repertoire of ancient motifs, such as the geometrical cartouche and foliate scroll motifs, contributed to creating a general similar general 'look' in many wooden doors found in diverse regions of the Malay archipelago.

Nevertheless, decorated doors, as they evolved in the Islamic cultures of Southeast Asia, on close examination also display diversity in their specific motifs and use of the medium despite their general similarity in appearance. From an examination of

a selection of early doors, the writer suggests they may be categorized in three stylistic groups.

1) Simple / Plain wooden doors

The undecorated pair of doors found in the minaret at Kudus Mosque (circa 1550) in Demak, North Java, is typical of this group (figure 38). The word Kudus is derived from a corruption of the Arabic word *quds* or *al-quds*, which was an early name for Jerusalem[183]. Oral tradition records that the holy man Sunan Kudus and his followers were responsible for establishing Kudus around 1540[184]. The Kudus mosque was believed to be completed ten years after that date and is sometimes the mosque is called the Al Aqsa mosque, in reference to the famous Dome of the Rock Mosque in Jerusalem[185]. The minaret's red brick construction is distinctly influenced by the Majapahit style of East Javanese Hindu-Buddhist architecture (around twelve to fourteenth century). Its doors are plain except for the hexagonal cartouche both on the middle and lower parts of the doors and a shallow carved section on both of the doors pillars. The design of the upper part of the doors is open fretwork. Its style is different with other wooden doors in Kudus Mosque, which are more intricately ornamented in the appearance. This Javanese example of a simple wooden door contrasts with the style of plain wooden doors found in the Islamic architecture of Kelantan, Malaysia, and Pattani,

[183] Ali, Zakaria., Islamic art, p. 293.
[184] Ibid., p. 294.
[185] The usage of Al Aqsa name was derived from an old Inscription found above the *mihrab* inside the *haram utama* at Kudus mosque. Ibid., pp. 302-303.

Southern Thailand. In the woodcarving tradition of Kelantan and Pattani, ornamentation is present but its application is selective. This may be seen in the doors which are part of the entrance gate the former Kelantan *Dato' Perdana* (a rank equivalent to viceroy) house dated to around the middle of the nineteenth century (figure 39). The entrance gate is decorated only on the upper part while the columns and paneled parts of the lower section remain plain. This style is also seen in two early photographs documenting the appearance of entrance gates of Kelantan and Pattani palaces built under the influence of Islam in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (figure 40 and 41).

2) Wooden doors decorated with motifs including vegetal, animal and geometric designs.

One of the earliest and most outstanding examples of this type of door is found in The Great Mosque, or *Masjid Agung* (circa 1479) in Demak, North Javanese. The Great Mosque of Demak could be described as among the earliest surviving mosques in the Malay archipelago. The door is decorated with imagery taken from both nature and myth (figure 42). The most obvious image, on both side of the door panel, is the head of a serpent dragon (*naga*) opening his mouth. This forms a Javanese chronogram (*sangkala*) called *naga saira wani*, symbolising 'thunder' and is derived from local folklore [186].

The appearance of the *naga*, that appears first in the earliest Hindu and Buddhist art of Java, (commencing around eight century) at Demak reflects a tradition of depicting

[186] Ibid., p. 282.

animals widely practiced in Islamic art and even in the heartlands of Islam in the Middle East. For example, the dragons, lions and bulls found in Islamic art in the Middle East were adopted from previous non-Islamic Persian Sassanid culture. Patricia L. Baker has proposed that most animal imagery was simply 'translated', from pre-Islamic decorative repertoires[187]. Sometimes the imagery in the Middle East is used merely for ornamental purposes, but elsewhere pictures of animals specifically illustrate narratives. This has been analyzed by Milikian Chirvani, when he investigated the twelve or thirteenth century Middle Eastern illuminated romance manuscript titled *Warqa wa Gulshah*. He notes the rabbit/hare, cat and grasshopper pictures have no intention of illustrating the actual text but appear only as ornament to amuse the reader[188]. In contrast, in the context of Southeast Asian Islamic culture, the use of animal imagery may have an intrinsic meaning in the context of local cosmological beliefs. Nevertheless, most of the imagery had been stylized and this device may have been in order to follow the Islamic restriction of copying natural objects (figure 43)[189].

Another pair of wooden doors found at Kudus Mosque (circa 1550) at Kudus in Demak, North Java, decorates the gateway to the shrine. The doors (figure 44) are carved with geometrical and vegetal designs though there is no apparent imagery of fauna. A second pair of doors is called the *Gapura kembang* doors (figure 45) and is distinctive in appearance with the combination of simple floral and geometrical motifs in the middle of

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[187] Baker, L. P., op. cit., p. 40.
[188] Ibid., For further understanding read Chirvani, A.S. Melikian., 'Le Roman de Varque at Golshah' in *Arts Asiatiques*, 1970, 22: 1-262.
[189] Mustopo, M.H., op. cit. pp. 204 – 211.

each panel. Bennett has noted that the main motif at the center of both doors recalls a similar motif commonly found in Bali *geringsing* textile and often interpreted as representing a stylized mandala, or Hindu or Buddhist temple plan (figure 46)[190]. This motif, like the distinct 'endless knot' design on the doors' frame pillars suggests a connection to the 'endless knot' design in the middle panels of the *Lawon kori* door (figure 47). The writer further discusses the significance of the 'endless knot' in the following analysis of the *Lawon kori* doors.

The Kudus *Gapura* doors differ slightly to the doors found at the Sendang Duwur Mosque (circa 1561) in Sendangduwur district, Lambungan, Northeast coast of Java. The importance of Sendang Duwur mosque is that, together with the mosque in Cirebon, Demak and Banten, it is amongst the oldest surviving mosques during the early Islamic period in Indonesia[191]. The wooden doors formerly decorated the mosque's graveyard (figure 48) whose shape symbolized *garuda* wings. The border design of these wooden doors is almost the same as found on the *Lawon kori* doors, as are the vertical hexagons panels, the dense ornament and squares decorated with vegetal motifs. There is also a pair of carved wooden doors, and panels, found inside the tomb-house (*cunkup*) of Sendang Duwur Mosque (figure 49). Here the rich variety of woodcarving uses floral motifs as its principal inspiration (figure 50). Vertical hexagon cartouche-like panels with dense carved ornamentation form the walls of the structure enclosing the saint's tomb

[190] Bennet personal communication, July 2007.

[191] Ambary, H.M., 'Early Mosque and Tombs', Early Islamic Period: 1300 – 1600, Miksic, J., (et. al.), op. cit. p. 126.

(figure 51). In general, the visual characteristics of the wooden doors and architectural panels at Sendang Duwur Mosque are clearly related to the *Lawon kori*. As James Bennett notes in *Islamic Heirlooms of South Sumatra*, their closely shared characteristics forms one of the bases for dating the *Lawon kori* to around 1560[192].

As well as plant and animal motifs, early Indonesian doors made during the Islamic period featured images inspired by the shadow puppet theatre (*wayang kulit*). The shadow puppet theatre flourished following the arrival of Islam, and several Muslim holy men, like Sunan Giri (active sixteenth century) are attributed with a significant role in the development of the distinct style of the Javanese puppets[193]. A Dutch colonial photograph dated around 1931-1935 in Lampung documents a pair of wooden *Lawon kori* doors decorated with *wayang kulit* figures and set in a richly decorated gateway (figure 52). A pair of doors carved in Cirebon, West Java in 1930s, and now in the National Museum of Jakarta (figure 53), documents the continuing use of *wayang kulit* characters as decorative motifs three or four centuries later and testify to the importance of puppet motifs in the art of Java and its cultural diaspora. Bennett proposes the style of the door in the photograph, and the apparent similarity in weathering, implies it may have been made around the time of the Art Gallery of South Australia's *Lawon kori*[194]. The use of a wide range of imagery, including not only of floral and animal subjects but also human figures

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[192] Bennett, J. '*Islamic Heirlooms from South Sumatra : Art Gallery of South Australia*', TAASA Review : The Journal of The Asian Arts Society of Australia. Volume 16 No 1, March 2007.
[193] Bennett, J., *Cresent Moon*, p. 276.
[194] Bennet personal communication, June 2007.

in the form of *wayang kulit*, indicates the visual variety and decorative trends that existed in Indonesian door carving in the sixteenth century.

3) Wooden doors decorated with calligraphy

A definitive example of this type of wooden door is a *Set of Ornamental Doors* found in Kalimantan, Indonesia (figure 54) and now in the collection of the Islamic Museum of Sarawak in Kuching[195]. The doors were originally made in Jepara and use black and red pigment, with gold leaf, as a decoration. These colors give the *Set of Ornamental Doors* strong visual impact. The doors are richly decorated with a few verses quoted from Al Qur'an in *surah Al Ahkaf* (46) and *An Nisa* (4). The interpretation of the meaning of a verses (135) from *surah An Nisa* is:

> O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even though it be against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, be he rich or poor, Allah is a Better Protector to both (than you). So follow not the lust (of your hearts), lest you avoid justice, and if you distort your witness or refuse to give it, verily Allah is Ever Well-Acquainted with what you do[196].

An unusual feature is the use of the gold decoration because gold has rarely been applied as ornamental finishing on woodcarving in the Malay archipelago.

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[195] Actually two names has been used for the door title. In the 'Crescent Moon' exhibition at The Art Gallery of South Australia (10 November 2005- 29 January 2006) the doors were titled as *Set of Ornamental Doors*, whereas in the official catalogue of The Sarawak Islamic Museum published in 1992 the doors were titled as *Door Leaves*.

[196] Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, op. cit., pp. 193-194.

Three points may be proposed regarding the use of gold leaf for the doors. First, the rich patron who commissioned the carving requested the use of gold leaf as an indicator of status and prestige. Secondly, the use of this technique reflected the involvement of Chinese carvers who popularized this technique in Southeast Asia during the last century of the Qing Dynasty (from mid seventeenth to mid nineteenth century)[197]. Thirdly, the application of gold color was influenced by Middle Eastern traditions of calligraphy in manuscripts that lavishly used gold leaf decoration. The tradition of using gold leaf to write Al Qur'an manuscript began around the ninth century during Abbasid Period[198]. In the Malay archipelago, the earliest Al Qur'an that features gold leaf embellishment dates from around the late eighteenth century[199].

The Islamic Museum of Sarawak collection also contains two other notable examples of wooden doors featuring Arabic calligraphy as a major decorative element (figure 55), and these clearly related to the *Set of Ornamental Doors* made in Jepara. All of the doors are believed to date from the end of nineteenth century. Their most interesting aspects are the visual similarities in a characteristic use of red, black and gold colors while the calligraphic inscriptions in Arabic script are a declaration of the Islamic identity of their original owners and cultural context.

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[197] See the previous discussion of 18th /19th century *Puri* (palace) door in Bali.
[198] Piotrovsky, M. B. (et. al.), op. cit. p. 53.
[199] Bennett, J., '*Cresent Moon*', p. 270.

The doors suggest the course of the evolution of wooden doors in Malay Archipelago. There is a similarity to the Balinese *Puri* doors (figure 36) in Bali, in the use of color and floral ornament. This documents the extent of connection in style and techniques between certain areas in the Malay Archipelago. Even though the *Lawon kori* doors never featured calligraphy, the reason to include it in the discussion of the calligraphic doors is to better understand the long evolution of wooden doors in the Malay archipelago that included influences that included cross-cultural influences.

Lawon kori: introduction and history

The *Pair of doors, lawon kori* is part of a former heirloom collection, consisting of three wood architectural carvings, found in the Lampung region of South Sumatra, Indonesia. The other two carvings was a *Throne rest, sesako* (figure 56), dated 1650-1750, and an *Architectural panel* (figure 57), featuring two stylized *kala* faces, which is currently believed to also date to the eighteenth century. Both these pieces are now also in the collection of the Art Gallery of South Australia. As Holmgren and Spertus (1989) have noted:

> Little is known about the early Lampung culture…material manifestations of early Lampung – such as…elaborately decorated architecture – that would help elucidate iconographic meaning have virtually disappeared. Our knowledge of the culture and its imagery remains largely speculative[200].

[200] Holmgren, R.J. and Spertus, A.E. *Early Indonesian Textiles from Three Island Cultures*, 1989, The Metropolitan Museum of Art & Harry N. Abrams, Inc. New York, p. 72.

The textiles of Lampung, such as the 'ship cloth' *tampan*, have been extensively researched (figure 58). They are commonly included in standard studies on Indonesian textiles although only discussed in terms of theories relating the cloth imagery to indigenous ancestral beliefs or early Hindu-Buddhist influences[201]. Until now, there has been no major study published of the wood carving traditions of Sumatra including the southern region of Lampung. The few published references to Lampung woodcarving, such as Maxwell (in Brand) (1995) and Jessup (1990), only refer to the Islamic aesthetic of this art in terms of contextual chronologies[202].

The Art Gallery of South Australia's *Lawon kori*, according to its style and condition of the timber, which is heavily weathered, is assumed to be have been made around the mid sixteenth century (circa 1560). The date was proposed by examining certain motifs that parallel other wooden doors existing in the East Javanese mosques of Demak (circa 1479), Kudus (circa 1550), Mantingan (circa 1559) or Sendang Duwur (1561)[203]. In proposing the date, Bennett argues that the use of foliate scroll motifs in *Lawon kori*, is a distinguishing feature of the oldest tradition of Islamic woodcarving in Indonesia. A definitive example appears in the decoration on the *soko guru* pillar and its base in the Demak mosque (figure 59 and 60). Bennett notes further strong evidence for

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[201] Maxwell, R., *Textiles in Southeast Asia: Tradition, Trade and Transformation*, Singapore, Periplus, 2003. Holmgren. R.J. and Spertus, A.E. ibid. and others.
[202] Brand, M. (et. Al.) *Traditions of Asian Art*, 1995, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, p. 39. Jessup, H.I., op. cit.
[203] Bennett, J. '*Islamic Heirlooms*', p. 14..

the dating is found in the 'endless knot' motif in the middle of *Lawon kori* doors[204]. An almost exactly similar design is found at Mantingan mosque (figure 61) and Sendang Duwur *cunkup* (figure 62). This motif first appears in Islamic grave decoration in Samudra-Pasai (central Sumatra) and Aceh (north Sumatra) during the fifteenth century and subsequently may have reached Lampung (south Sumatra) during the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century.

The door most likely formed part of a gateway to a house, owned by a local noble clan that has now vanished. An old Dutch photograph depicts wooden doors on an elaborate ceremonial gateway in the district of Lampung and these probably also are examples of *Lawon kori* (figure 64 and 65). There is a strong connection between the Art Gallery's *Lawon kori* and those doors in their design and style. Both of the doors are believed to be have been made around the same time. The distinct double wings, described in the Art Gallery of South Australia's title for the object as 'pair of doors', is a feature of traditional Southeast Asian door construction. Henry Forbes (1885) a British naturalist who traveled in the Lampung area from 1878 to 1883 describe the *Lawon kori* as an 'honor-door'[205]. According to Forbes, the display of *Lawon kori* was the privilege of the third-highest rank of Lampung noble person[206]. In this Sumatran region where

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[204] Ibid.

[205] Ibid., p. 13. Read also Forbes, H.O., *A naturalist's wonderings in the eastern archipelago*, 1885/1989, Oxford University Press, Singapore.

[206] Bennett, J., Ibid. p. 14.

society was much concerned with the protocols and expressions of social hierarchy, the *Lawon kori* could be read as a sign of status for the noble person who owned it[207].

Surviving historical evidence suggests there was an outstanding tradition of woodcarving in Lampung area during the sixteenth century at a time when the region came under the influence of the Islamic sultanate of Banten, West Java. This tradition may already have been ancient when the *Lawon kori* was made as a Lampung *Pepadon* throne of honour, in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia, is now believed to date to the fourteenth century on the basis of unpublished recent radio-carbon dating tests (figure 66). According to Forbes, *sesako* were objects of prestige and status in Lampung society second only to the *pepadon* [208].

Thomas Murray in his article *Adat textile of South Sumatra*, states that the *Lawon kori* 'honor door' was part of the *sesako* tradition or status system in Lampung area, which declined as a result of the environmental catastrophe, resulting from the 1883 eruption of Mt. Krakatau, and changing of spiritual values at the last quarter of nineteenth century[209]. The production of doors probably stopped also around the time the *sesako* ceased to be carved.

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[207] Ibid.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid., p. 15. Read also Murray, T., 'Adat Textiles of South Sumatra', *Hali*, issue 101, 1998.

Lawon kori: **visual analysis**

The immediate visual impression of the carving on the *Lawon kori* is lavish and dense because there are many varied details in its appearance. It is obvious that the much of the carving imitates the vegetal growth widely found in tropical regions. The dense application of the flower, leaf and vine designs leave no empty space and the result is no visually dominant section among each of the three major panels that form the upper, middle and lower part of both doors (figure 67). The upper panel designs carved on the doors is not symmetrically mirrored yet there is an impression of balance throughout the design of the two wings of the door creating a sense of order in its organic arrangement. The deep intricate carving conveys a visually rich texture heightened by the dark brown color of the timber.

There is no evidence for the use of any paint pigment on the door. Maybe because of exposure to the elements or poor conservation care by the previous owners, there are several areas where the woodcarving has completely weathered away, especially on the middle of the right door (figure 68). Nevertheless, the carving technique used for the *Lawon kori* is meticulous and superb. Its design demonstrates the skill and aesthetic sensitivity of the unknown sculptor who created it.

For the purpose of closer contextual analysis, the *Lawon kori*, and its various integrated designs, may be divided into four parts; namely the upper, middle, lower and

border sections of the door. The term 'contextual' here refers to the visual ideas and cultural traditions that relate to the imagery found on this object.

1) Upper section of the door

The upper section consists of two different foliate scroll motifs unlike those found on the middle and lower parts of the doors (figure 69). The foliate motif, together with numerous small ornate flower and leaf images, is placed in a vertical hexagon field with a border. The foliate scroll recalls the same motif carved on the pillars of the Great Mosque at Demak (figure 59 and 60). The use of vertical hexagon panels on doors has also been noted previously in early Indonesian Islamic art, such as the minaret door of Kudus Mosque (figure 38). The motif may be associated with the image of *pakis* (fern) leaves easily found in tropical areas (figure 70) and a popular motif in Southeast Asian decorative art.

The 'stalk' of the scroll is in the shape of bold curve consisting of two parallel relief lines. According to John Miksic, a leading historian of Southeast Asian art, this motif is often used as an architectural device in sixteenth century *pesisir* (coastal) art sites (figure 71)[210]. The motif conventionally represents a cave and so transforms the doorway into the entrance of an ascetic's mountain retreat[211]. Bennett agrees with Miksic and

[210] Miksic, J., 'The art of Cirebon and the image of the ascetic in early Javanese Islam', *'Cresent Moon'*, op. cit. pp. 125-126.
[211] Ibid., p. 126.

suggested this as one possible reading of the parallel relief lines. He added that the same motif appeared in the construction of the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century rockery garden in the Pangkugwati Palace, Cirebon, West Java (figure 72)[212]. According to Bennett this motif is still popular today among batik makers in Cirebon region where it is used regularly in the stylized pattern known as *taman harum* ('fragrant garden') (figure 73)[213].

As noted previously, the foliate scroll could be interpreted as a plant sprout whose growth as a leaf symbolized the whole tree and hence life. This may also be a symbol of Pohon Beringin (the Tree of Life) in Hindu cosmology. Khurseed Kamal Aziz in his book *The Meaning of Islamic Art*, describes the tree as a representation of the total cosmos[214]. It symbolizes both birth and death, and thus could also mean (by implication) eternity[215]. The importance of tree symbol in Islamic art is underlined by Al Qur'an, which offers the parable of a good tree and goodly act:

> See you not how Allah sets forth a parable. A goodly word as a goodly tree, whose roots is firmly fixed, and its branches (reach) to the sky (i.e. very high). Giving its fruit at all times, by the Leave of its Lord, and Allah set forth parables for mankind in order that they may remember. And the parable of an evil word is that of an evil tree uprooted from the surface of earth, having no stability[216]. (*Surah Ibrahim* (14), verse 24-26).

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[212] Bennett, J. '*Islamic Heirlooms*', p. 14.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Aziz, K.K., *The Meaning of Islamic Art : Exploration in Religious Symbolism and Social Relevence (Vol 2)*, 2004, Al Faisal, Urdu Bazar, Lahore, p. 817.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, op. cit., p. 460.

2) Middle section of the door

The most obvious motif on the middle part of the door is an arabesque (figure 74). It recalls the famous arabesque often ornamenting the façade decoration of Islamic mosques or other buildings (figure 75). The arabesque seen on the *Lawon kori* is called *muttasil* ('conjunct'). According to Louis Lamya Faruqi, a scholar in Islamic art and culture, the aim of the arabesque in Islamic art was to give aesthetic expression to the idea of the absolute transcendence of Allah and the unutterably not-like-Nature quality of the divine realm[217]. In addition, she noted that, instead of the single focal point, the arabesque present a series of mini-climaxes, as the end of each unit is reached and a new pattern begins[218]. The arabesque could be read as expressing the concept of *tauhid* (the oneness and the uniqueness of Allah) because the pattern that has no beginning and no end[219].

Bennett associates the doors' arabesque with an 'endless knot' motif. Uka Tjandrasasmita, an Indonesian scholar who has published the only detail study on the Sendang Duwur Mosque and graveyard complex describes the motif as 'woven bamboo' motif and associates it also with the *waru* leaf border[220]. In Indonesian tradition, the 'endless knot' is probably derived from the well-known auspicious motif of the same

[217] al faruqi, Louis Lamya., 'The Aisled Hall and The Dome Chamber – Their use in Islamic Culture', *Islamic Culture*, July 1976, pp.156-166.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Tjandrasasmita, U., *Islamic Antiquities of Sendang Duwur*, 1975/1984, Pusat Penelitian Arkeologi Nasional, Jakarta.

name found throughout the Buddhist world, especially China, and which is talismanic in its significance. The doors' 'endless knot' motif is also found at the Mantingan mosque (figure 61) and Sendang Duwur *cunkup* (figure 62). The elegant *waru*, likewise appears at the same art sites (figure 76). The central diamond motif in the middle of the 'endless knot' is called a *ceplok*. *Ceplok* designs are found at a Muslim tomb in Troyolo, East Java, which is dated around the mid fifteenth century, and as early as the eighteenth century appears as a category of Javanese batik design (figure 77).

Discussing the use of floral motifs in Islamic art, Aziz proposes that Muslim people around the world are lovers of flowers[221]. The images of various species of flowers, such as rose, tulip, lotus, jasmine or peony are found in traditions of Islamic art from Egypt to China (figure 78). Aziz observes: "...a flower, in its generic sense, because of its shape, is an image of 'center', and hence an archetypal image of the soul"[222].

3) Lower section of the door

Here there is an image of a lively tiger, with bared fangs, along with numerous small and tiny ornate flower and leaves on each door (figure 79). The tiger is in an upside down posture (figure 80). Bennett notes the tiger does not resemble the leonine *singa* (lion or tiger) found at older Javanese Hindu-Buddhist temples (figure 81), or the pair of winged lion statues formerly at Sendang Duwur mosque (figure 19). The tiger was an

[221] Aziz, K.K., op. cit., pp. 814-817.
[222] Ibid., p. 817.

important part of Malay folklore and credited with supernatural powers[223]. Forbes in his *A naturalist's wonderings in the eastern archipelago* also mentions seeing a Kisam wood sculpture described as a 'coat of arms' depicting rampant tigers together with *naga* (dragon serpents)[224].

The Southeast Asian Islamic tradition adopted the emblematic image of the 'lion of Ali' that was popular in the Islamic heartland (figure 82)[225]. The lion has long been associated with Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad (MPBUH), because it was a popular epithet for him[226]. But in the context of Southeast Asia, the lion image was transformed into a Malay tiger, which was more familiar. The tiger was an important animal in the traditional cosmology of the Malays, as well as being associated with symbolizing the figure of the Muslim sultan and government (Figure 83). This idea may have originated indirectly from Mughal art, such as seen at Agra Fort (1565 – 1569), where the depiction of animals has symbolic meaning: "The elephant, horse and lion 'signified royalty and imperial dignity; the bird symbolized divinity and the divine right of the Emperor"[227]. The tiger is still used today by the Malaysian government, as a symbol of sovereignty, leadership, bravery and dignity (figure 84).

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[223] Bennett, J. '*Islamic Heirlooms*', p. 14.
[224] Ibid.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Baker, L. P., op. cit.
[227] Aziz, K.K., op. cit., pp. 827 – 828.

Nevertheless, the depiction of the tiger on the *Lawon kori* is ambiguous in its presence. In his reading of the image, Bennett suggests that the tiger superficially appears to be camouflaged by vegetal forms, reminiscent of certain Islamic taboos against the depiction of living beings, but close inspection reveals the plant forms to be superimposed over the delineated outline of the creature[228]. The vegetation is not integrated to form the actual image, as we would expect from other instances of this subject, such as calligraphy, found elsewhere in Southeast Asian woodcarving (figure 7 and 8). Bennett concludes the visual ambiguity of the image, suggests that the artist was "...working in a sophisticated aesthetic environment that valued visual pun and allusion rather than following certain constrain provincial convention" [229].

4) Frame and border sections of the *Lawon kori*

The frame and borders of *Lawon kori* consist of repeated vegetal and geometrical motifs. Both the left and right border motifs of each door (figure 85) are similar to designs found on the verandah pillars in Demak's Great Mosque (figure 59). The repetitive motif recall the *pakis* or *pucuk paku* (fern) leaves commonly found in tropical areas and popularly eaten as a lightly cooked vegetable. Zakaria Ali in his book *Islamic art in Southeast Asia 800 – 1570*, suggests the fern designs found on the Demak pillars

[228] Bennett, J. '*Islamic Heirlooms*', p. 14.
[229] Ibid.

were "...largely devoid of overt religious meaning, and as such, could not possibly desecrate the place, or invalidate the ablution of the believer".[230]

On the upper frame of each door are two lines of flower motifs, which are ordered in a geometrically repeated format (figure 86). This recalls a typical pattern often found on Malay textiles, especially *limar* and *songket* cloth (figure 87). The geometrical floral motifs are repeated at regular intervals on *songket*, although it is not clear if the maker of the *Lawon kori* purposely intended to imitate fabric. Nevertheless, the repetition of floral motifs on the upper and lower part of *Lawon kori* (figure 88) suggest the design structure of later Malay textiles of which the earliest surviving examples date to the nineteenth century. Their patterns consist of repetitions of floral motif on the *kepala* (head) and *hujung* (feet) of the cloth.

It is typical in the carving traditions of Southeast Asia to see a certain kind of repetition at the end or border section of woodwork, especially in architectural design (figure 89). The repetition could be described as 'edge ornamentation', and is reminiscent of the *kaki* (literally 'foot') patterns that act as borders on Malay textiles. The use of flower motifs in a geometrical format can be seen as epitomizing beauty and so intrinsically suggest the archetypal image of 'soul'. As Aziz has proposed earlier, Muslim people are traditionally lovers of flowers.

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[230] Ali, Z. '*Islamic art*', p. 291.

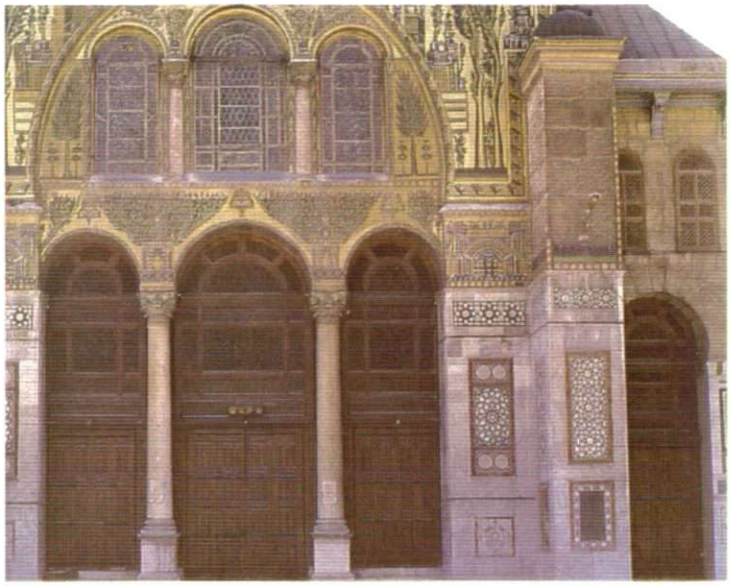

Figure 25, 706-714/715, *Great Mosque of Damascus* – courtyard of the transept, Syria. Photograph: Henri Stierlin

Figure 26, 9th century, *Stucco decoration from room 4 in house 1 in Samarra* (Iraq), Berlin, Collection of Museum of Islamic art. Photograph: Henri Stierlin

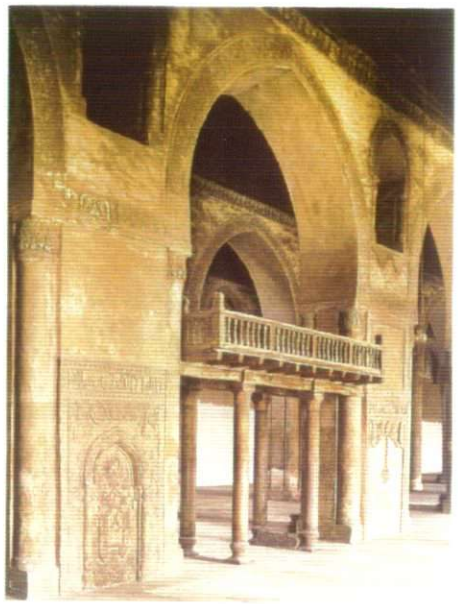

Figure 27, 11th century, *Mosque of Ibnu Tulun* (interior), Cairo, Egypt. Photograph: G. Dagli Orti

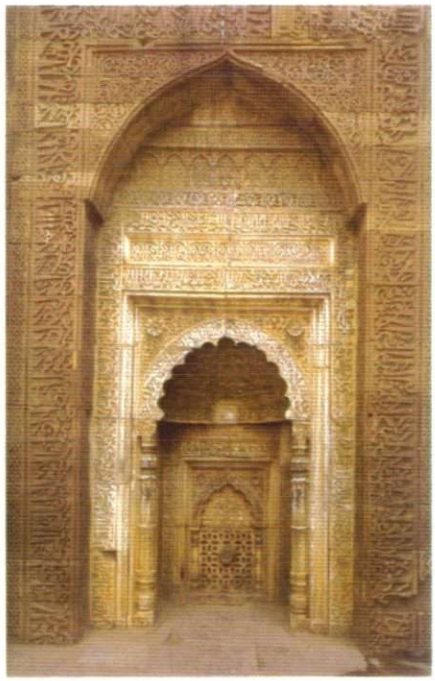

Figure 28, 1236, *Mihrab in the tomb of Sultan Iltutmish*, Delhi, India. Photograph: Thomas Dix / Grenzach-Wyhlen

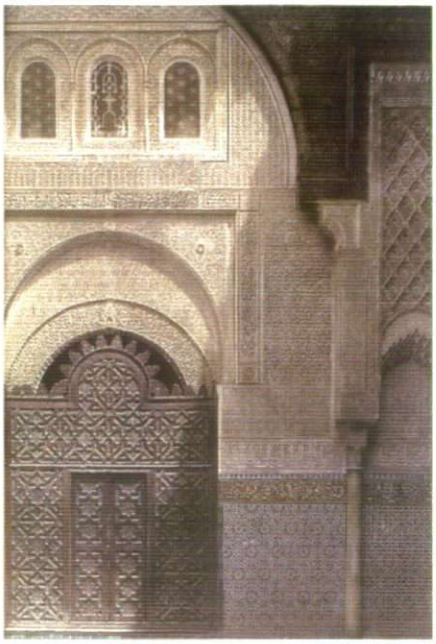

Figure 29, 1323-1325, *Wooden doors at Attarin Madrasa*, Fez, Morocco. Photograph: Roland and Sabrina Michaud

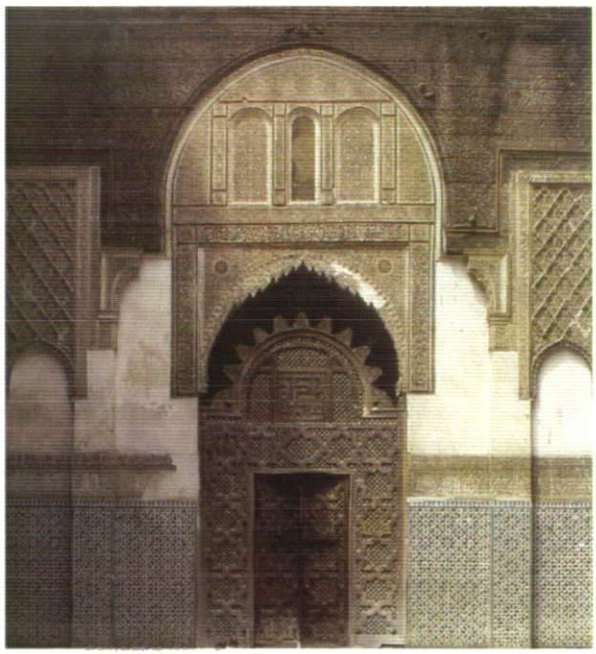

Figure 30, 1321-1328, *Wooden doors at the Al-Sahrij Madrasa*, Fez, Morocco.
Photograph: Alexandre Orloff

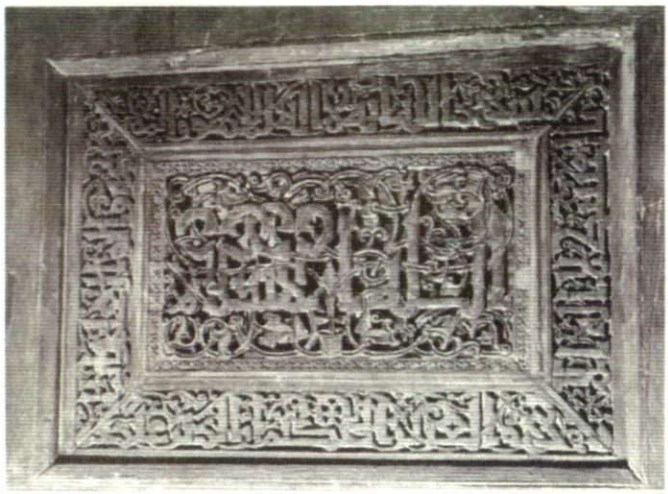

Figure 31, 1103, *Wood panel carved on both sides with kufic inscripstions*, Poplar wood, 248 x 292 cm, Collection of National Museum, Damascus, Syria. Photograph: Robert Harding Associates

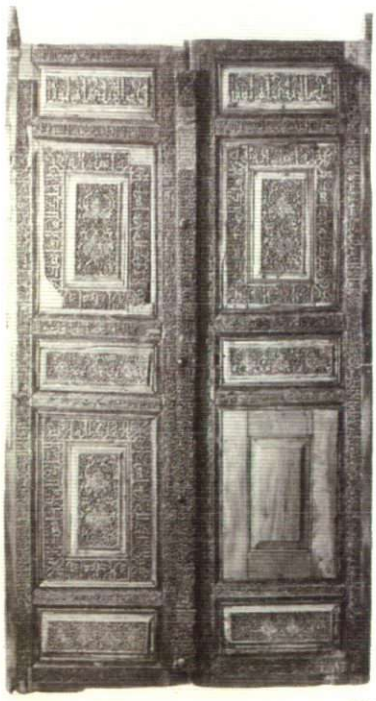

Figure 32, 12th century, *Pair of Doors decorated with arabesque and kufic inscription*, plane wood, 230 x 61.5cm (each door), Collection of Iraq Museum, Baghdad. Photograph: Robert Harding Associates

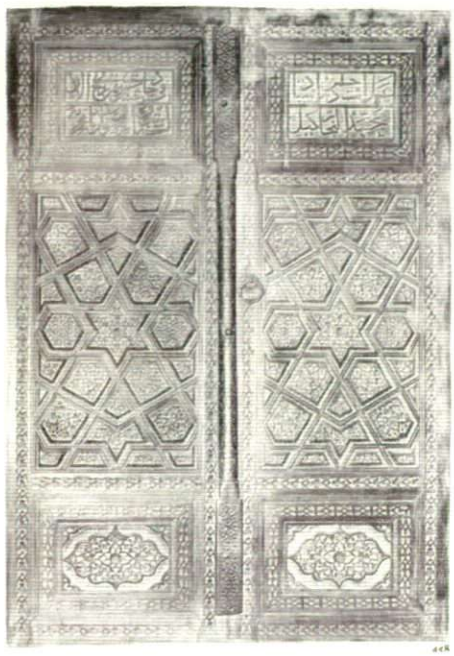

Figure 33, 1442, *Pair of Doors with geometrical and floral carving and inscription*, wood, 206 x 148cm, Collection of Iran Bastan Museum, Tehran. Photograph: Iran Bastan Museum

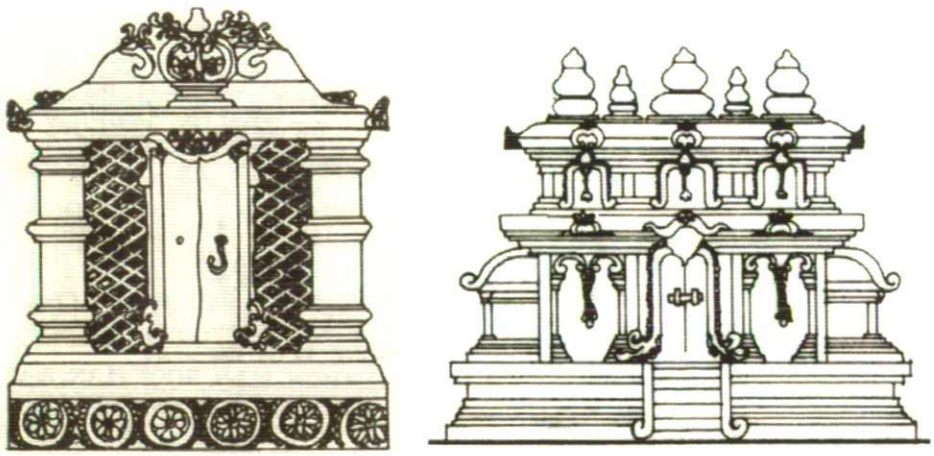

Figure 34, 8th century, *two elevation drawings of temples facade in Borobudur*, Central Java. Drawing by Parmono Atmandi

Figure 35, 835 - 856, *Candi Prambanan*, Central Java. Drawing by Jacques Dumarcay

Figure 36, late 18th or early 19th century, *Puri* (Palace) *doors*, Singaraja, North Bali, Nangka (jackfruit) wood, painted and gilded, 211 x 210.9 x 31 cm, Collection of Museum of Bali. Photograph: John Gollings

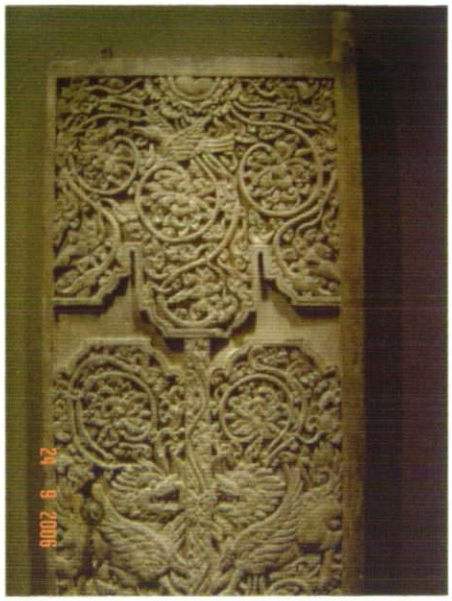

Figure 37, 18th / early 19th century, *Bali Wooden Doors*, Collection of Museum of San Francisco. Photograph: James Bennett

Figure 38, circa 1550, *Minaret doors*, Kudus Mosque, Demak, North Java. Photograph : James Bennett

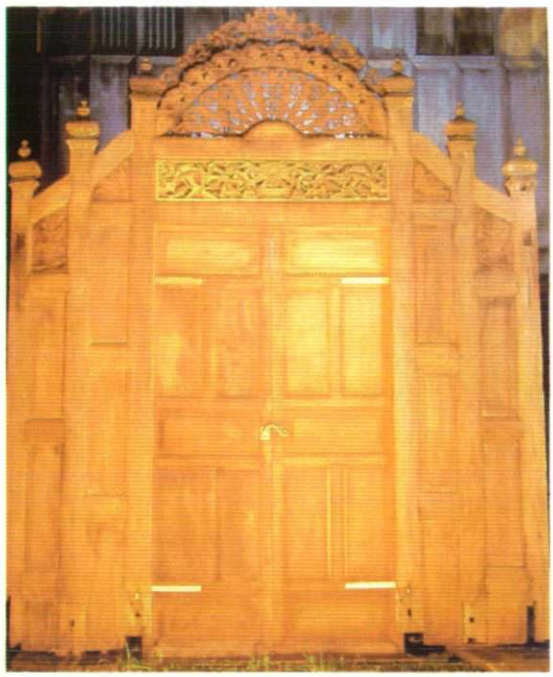

Figure 39, mid. 19th century, *Pintu Gerbang* (Entrance Gate) at former Kelantan Dato' Perdana House, Kelantan, cengal wood, brass handle and hingers, 351.5 x 274.5 x 13 cm. Photograph : David Lok

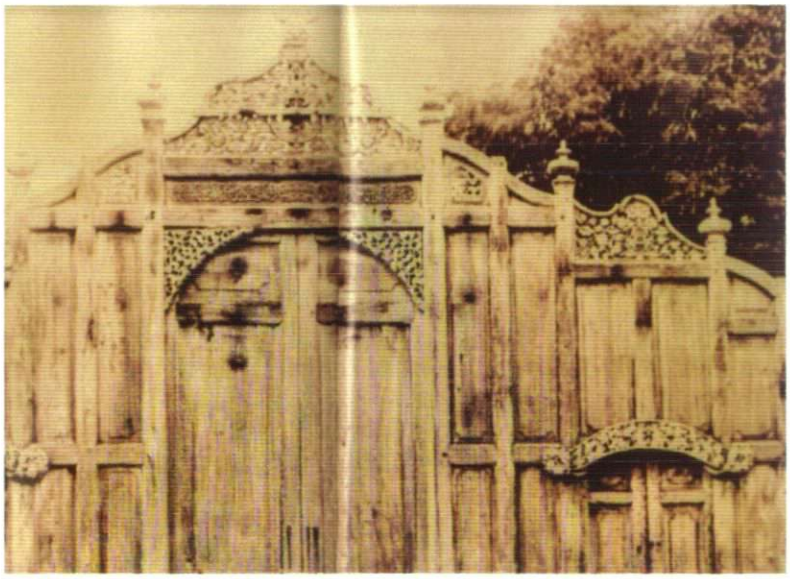

Figure 40, circa 19th century, Photograph of an early *pintu gerbang* (gateway) in Jambu, Pattani (Southern Thailand). Resource: Syndics of Cambridge University Library

Figure 41, Sultan Muhammad V and his son outside the gates of the Balai Besar, Kota Bharu, Kelantan (Malaysia). The door has been called as *pemeleh*. Sir Frank Swettenham took the photograph in October 1902. Resource: Syndics of Cambridge University Library

Figure 42, circa 1479, *Front Doors - Painted Carving*, Kudus Mosque, Demak, North Java. Photograph: Zakaria Ali

Figure 43, circa 1559, *Monkey image stone plaque*, Mantingan Mosque, North Java. Photograph: Ali Akbar

Figure 44, circa 1550, *Wooden doors - Gateway to the shrine*, Kudus Mosque in Demak, North Java. Source: N.A.D. Dekker

Figure 45, circa 1479, *Gapura kembang,* Al Aqsa Mosque at Kudus in Demak, North Java. Photograph: James Bennett

Figure 46, 19th Century, *Geringsing motif* (detail from Nobleman's ceremonial wrap textile), Bali. Collection of National Gallery of Victoria

Figure 47, circa 1479, *Gapura kembang – endless not motif and door pillar,* Al Aqsa Mosque at Kudus in Demak, North Java. Photograph: James Bennett

Figure 48, circa 1561, *Wooden doors at gateway E (to graveyard)*, Sendang Duwur Mosque, Jepara, East Java. Source: Kempers, A.J.B

Figure 49, circa 1561, *Cunkup platform*, Sendang Duwur Mosque, Jepara, East Java. Photograph: James Bennett

Figure 50, circa 1561, *Cunkup platform* (detail), Sendang Duwur Mosque, Jepara, East Java. Photograph: James Bennett

Figure 51, circa 1561, *Cunkup panel*, Sendang Duwur Mosque, Jepara, East Java. Photograph: James Bennett

Figure 52, A pair of wooden *Lawon kori* doors decorated with *wayang kulit* figures, Lampung area, South Sumatra. Believed to be made around 16th to 17th century. Photograph was taken around 1931-1935 by unknown Dutch researcher. Source: Don Longuevan (San Francisco)

Figure 53, 1930s, *Cirebon doors with wayang kulit image*, Cirebon (West Java), Collection of National Museum of Jakarta, Indonesia. Photograph: James Bennett

Figure 54, late 19th century, *Set of Ornamental doors*, Kalimantan, Collection of Sarawak Islamic Museum.
Photograph: Sarawak Islamic Museum

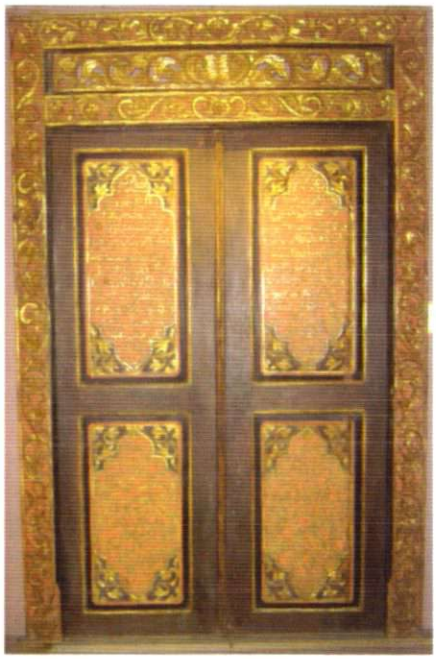

Figure 55, late 19th century, *Ornamental doors*, Kalimantan, Collection of Sarawak Islamic Museum.
Photograph: James Bennett

Figure 56, 1650-1750, *Throne rest, sesako*, Lampung, South Sumatra, wood, 141.5 x 240 cm. Collection of Art Gallery of South Australia

Figure 57, Indonesia, *Architectural panel*, 1650-1750, North Lampung Regency, South Sumatra, wood, 288.0 x 53.0cm; Public Donations Fund and South Australia Government Grant 2007 20072A16

Figure 58, Lampung textile (Tampan). Source: Robyn Maxwell, From Sari to Sarong

Figure 59, circa 1479, *Verandah Pillar,* Masjid Agung, Demak, North Java. Photograph: James Bennett

Figure 60, circa 1479, *Pillar base,* Masjid Agung, Demak, North Java. Photograph: James Bennett

Figure 61, circa 1559, *Endless knot stone plaque*, Mantingan Mosque, North Java. Photograph: Ali Akbar

Figure 62, circa 1561, *Endless knot wood panel*, Sendang Duwur Mosque, Jepara, East Java. Photograph: James Bennett

Figure 66, 18th century or earlier, *Nobleman's throne*, Lampung, South Sumatra. Collection of National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Figure 64, Wooden doors from Lampung area, South Sumatra. Believed to be made around 16th to 17th century. Photograph was taken in 1940 by unknown Dutch researcher. Source: Don Longuevan (San Francisco)

Figure 65, Wooden doors from Lampung area, South Sumatra. Believed to be made around 16th to 17th century. Photograph was taken in 1928 by unknown Dutch researcher. Source: Don Longuevan (San Francisco)

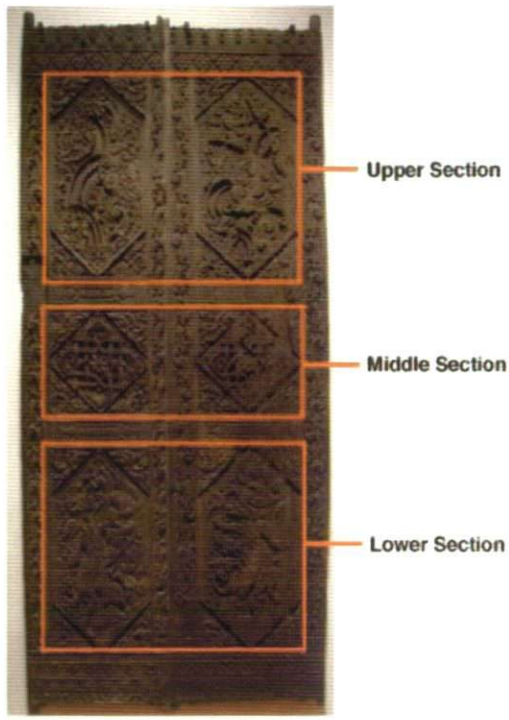

Figure 67, *Lawon kori* - divided by three sections of the door

Figure 68, *Lawon kori* (detail) – middle section of the right door

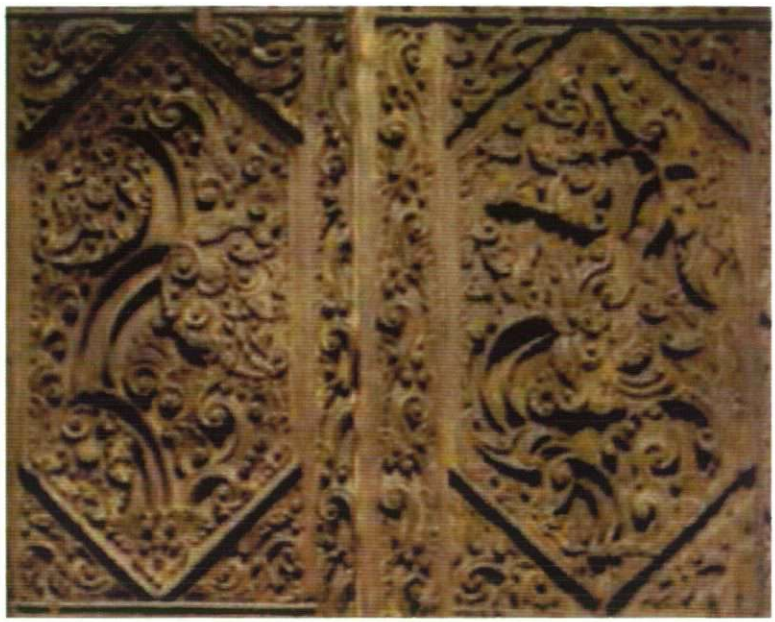

Figure 69, Lawon kori (detail) – upper section of the door

Figure 70, young fiddlehead and wild fern shoots. Easily could be found in tropical area of Malay Archipelago. Source: www.biologyreference.com, www.biology.duke.edu, www.crabcoll.com

Figure 71, late 16th or early 17th century, *Portico entrance*, Kraton Kesepuhan, Cirebon, West Java. Source: John. M. Miksic

Figure 72, late 16th or early 17th century, *Ornamental rockery*, Kraton Kesepuhan, Cirebon, West Java. Source: John. M. Miksic

Figure 73, 19th century, *Skirt cloth*, Cirebon, North coast Java, natural dyes, hand-drawn batik, 98 x 220 cm. Collection of National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

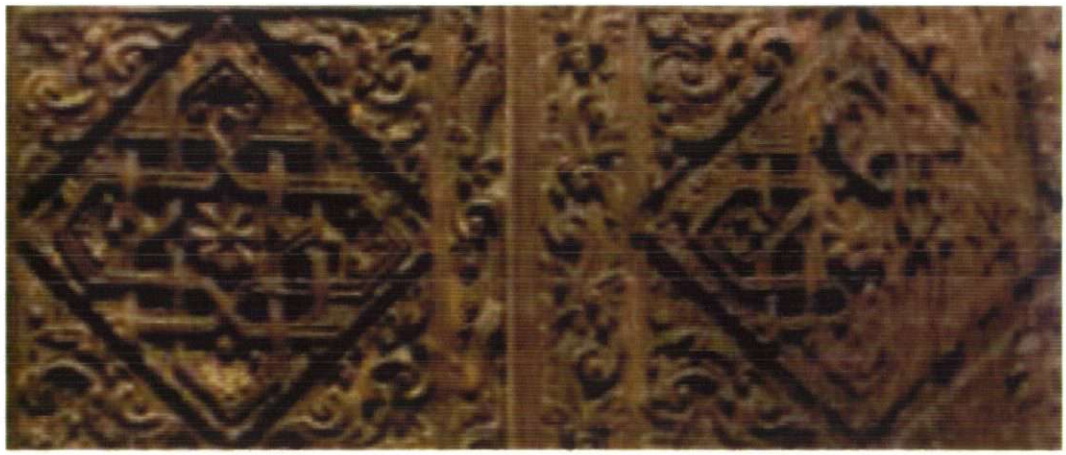

Figure 74, *Lawon kori* (detail) – middle section of the door

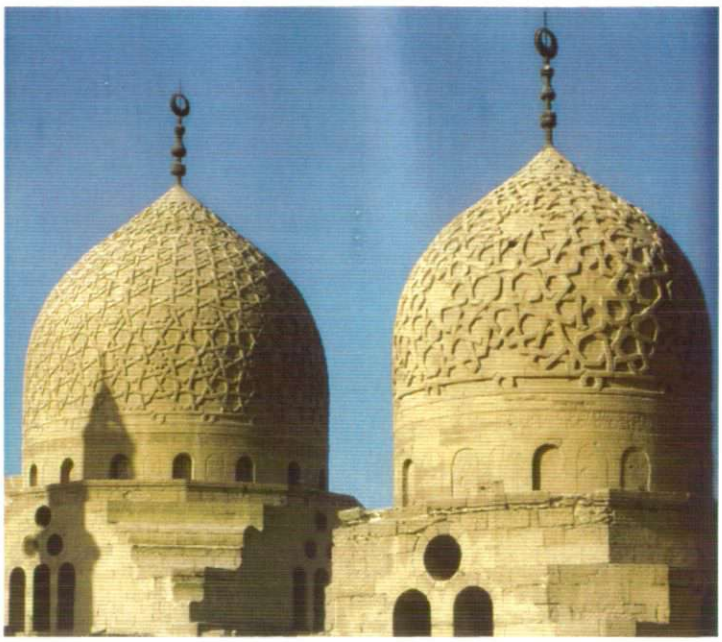

Figure 75, 1432, *Geometrical arabesque dome*, Sultan Barsbai's complex in the Eastern Cemetry of Cairo, Egypt. Photographer: Abdelaziz Frikhar, Copyright: Bildarchiv Steffens, Mainz

Figure 76, circa 1561, *Waru motif at Cunkup platform*, Sendang Duwur Mosque, Jepara, East Java. Photograph: James Bennett

Figure 77, Mohammad Hadi (designer), 1965, *The peasant's grid design (ceplok tani)*, Surakarta, Central Java, cotton, natural dyes, hand drawn batik, 105.4 x 251.2 cm. Collection of National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Figure 78, circa 1650, *Pen box with flower motifs*, Mughal, India, jade set with rubies. Collection of Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Figure 79, *Lawon kori* (detail) – lower section of the door

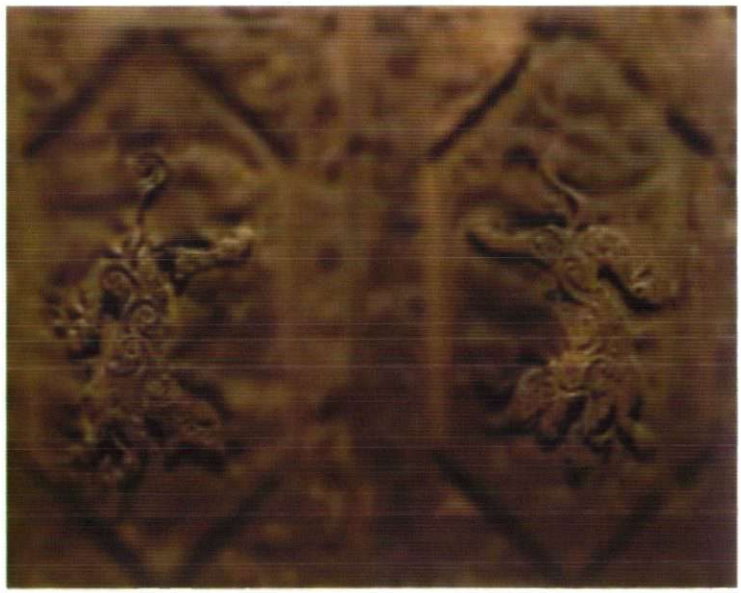

Figure 80, *Lawon kori* (detail) – tiger image (lower section of the door)

Figure 81, 20th century, *Wahana* (miniature vehicle for a votive figure - a clear image of tiger at the back of the two head dragon), Bali, wood, pigments, gold leaf, fish glue medium, 48.5 x 49 x 22 cm. Source: Courts Arts of Indonesia book

Figure 82, late 19th or early 20th century, *Lion of Ali image* (detail from man's head cloth), Ceribon West Java, cotton, natural dyes, hand batik, 86 x 84 cm. Collection of Jakarta Textile Museum, Jakarta

Figure 83, Tengkolok Diraja (The Royal head-dress), part of Malaysian King regalia. At the center of the star there were 'The coat of Arms of Malaysia'. Source: www.malaysianmonarchy.org

Figure 84, The coat of Arms of Malaysia. Source: myGovernment – Malaysian government's official portals

Figure 85, Lawon kori (detail) – both left and right border frame of the door

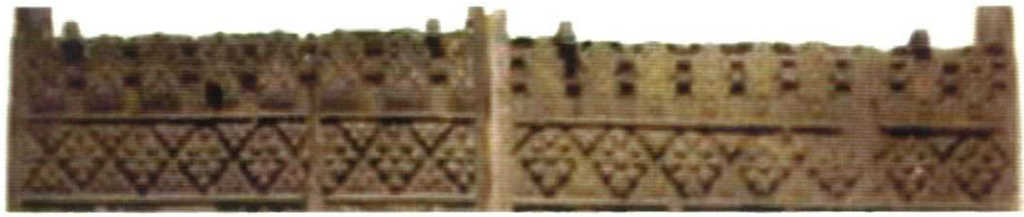

Figure 86, *Lawon kori* (detail) – upper frame of the door

Figure 87, 20th century, *Songket (tepi kain)*, Malaysia. Collection of Tan Sri Mubin Sheppard, Kuala Lumpur

Figure 88, *Lawon kori* (detail) – lower frame of the door

Figure 89, circa 18th century, *Slender - low relief panel*, Masjid Aur Menatjung, Pattani, Southern Thailand. Photograph : David Lok

Conclusion

This dissertation has endeavored to explore a framework for a deeper appreciation of Islamic art from Southeast Asia through presenting the *Pair of doors, lawon kori*, from South Sumatra, as a case study. The conclusion may be likened to the statement of Islamic art scholar, Oleg Grabar:

> ...any conclusion automatically become a hypothesis for further research and, tenuous though it may be at any one time, a conclusion must also consist of some sort of equilibrium between a concrete object and a general hypothesis[231].

The survey of diverse definitions of Islamic art is underlined by the assumption that the fundamental basis of Islamic art is the *tauhid* (the belief in the immutable oneness and uniqueness of Allah). The concept and practice of *tauhid* is essentially the most important aspect in any discussion about Islam and Muslims as it forms the first of the Five Pillars of Islam. The other Pillars are *solat* (prayer), *sawm* (fasting), *zakat* (charity) and *hajj* (pilgrimage). The source of each Muslim's spiritual and devotional life revolves around these pillars and is based on the Al Qur'an and *sunnah*, which are the practices, customs and traditions of the Prophet. *Tauhid* plays a major role in all aspects of Muslim identity and thus, it can be assumed, is the fundamental internal force in the artistic expression that is intrinsic to Islamic art. The discussion of these elements is important in order to understand that Islamic art does not merely address the questions of

[231] Grabar, O., 'Notes on the decorative composition of a bowl from Northeastern Iran', in (ed.) R. Ettinghausen, *Islamic art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1972.

form and style. The subtle interrelation of spirituality and art in Islamic art is so intense that Syed Hossein Nasr has declared: "Without Islamic spirituality there is no Islamic art"[232].

The general summary of literature has uncovered the extent to which historical Islamic art became a merging ground for *tauhid* and local aesthetic traditions in Muslim societies. The merging of the two elements created the diverse heritage of Islamic art around the world. Islamic art not only originated from the Middle East but has also been produced outside this region and is of equal quality. Furthermore, some art objects display distinctly 'secular' attributes because their main purpose was for domestic or court patronage. It is important to analyze the historical and cultural context of each individual object before determining the extent that it overtly communicates the values of Islamic philosophy.

The term 'Islamic art' was constructed in an 'outside' (Western) context and thus contains inherent difficulties. For example, there was no clear concept of 'art' in Islamic doctrinal teaching and, hence, neither was there a hierarchy separating 'high' and 'low' art media. Consequently, discussions about the definition of Islamic art have often been constrained by fundamental misconceptions or parochial viewpoints. In the context of this thesis, the writer has chosen and broadened the definition of Islamic art in order to

[232] Nasr, S. H. op. cit.

gain a more encompassing understanding of the subject. This is based on the encompassing definition by Wijdan Ali that Islamic art is:

> ...the sum of artistic manifestation created under Muslim patronage, by both Muslim and Non-Muslim artists and artisan who adhere to Islamic aesthetics, for the usage and enjoyment of Muslims[233].

By using this definition, the scope expands to include an appreciation of the Islamic art from different cultures or periods of history, such as sixteenth century Lampung where the *Lawon kori* was created. Nevertheless, the concept of *tauhid* is still considered the most important element for the artist and the product, whatever local sensibility or stylistic fashion may appear evident in its interpretation.

The lack of appreciation for Islamic art from Southeast Asia resulted from early narrow definitions of the subject and academic neglect of research into Islamic civilization in Southeast Asia. It is erroneous to suggest, as often implied, that no Islamic art existed in the Malay archipelago or to conclude that the art works created there were of little global significance. The existence of Islamic Kingdoms in the Malay archipelago from the fourteenth century onwards clearly signals the existence of Islamic art within these local societies.

[233] Ali, W. op. cit. p. 8.

From a Muslim perspective, Southeast Asian Islamic art discovered its visual language by merging belief and wisdom with local styles. These transformations enabled the possibility of new forms of visual expression on new ground. The interweaving of Islam and local tradition is clearly stated in an old Malay proverb: *Adat bersendikan syarak, syarak berpaksikan kitab'ullah* (Tradition relies upon Islamic law, Islamic law hinges on Al Qur'an).

Islam created a new artistic landscape by channeling artistic expression into the path of Islam and transformed the ideas and philosophy of the art of the Malay archipelago. Like elsewhere in the Muslim world, Islam in Southeast Asia did not so much create a new art but generated a new philosophy of creativity that led to new visual styles. The uniqueness and important of these artworks has often been unrecognized by academics and writers from elsewhere, including both the West and Middle East, because they failed to appreciate the subtle relationship of Islam's spirituality, and law, with local tradition.

The *Lawon kori*, is a definitive example of the complexity and importance of the Islamic art of Southeast Asia. It was produced by commission from patrons as an indicator of social status and prestige, similar to much Islamic court art made during the Middle Eastern Savafid and Ottoman periods, and reveals a sophisticated world-view reflecting the cosmologies of Islamic people from Lampung, South Sumatra.

Examination of the doors has presented evidence that the Lampung artist was capable of conveying a sophisticated aesthetic message inspired by Islamic belief and the local heritage of woodcarving. This is exemplified by several of the *Lawon kori* motifs which are derived from previous Hindu-Buddhist art, just as ninth to eleventh century Islamic art from Iran or Iraq, made during the Abbasid or Seljuq period, appropriated elements of earlier Byzantium and Sassanian art.

The *Lawon kori's* floral motifs had particular local significance and also echoed the style of decoration implemented in the Islamic art tradition during Mamluk, Savafid or Ottoman periods. The use of tiger imagery suggests a parallel application of such imagery in the Mughal tradition. Repetition of motifs and tiny organic and geometrical design as a border or frame and the arabesque are also one of the key aspects of Islamic art to also be implemented in *Lawon kori*.

The *Lawon kori*, with its intricate ornamentation and confident carving, demonstrates that there is no reason to neglect Islamic art from Southeast Asia. It documents an aesthetic heritage, with its own regional flavor and characteristic, which extensively contributed to the rich diversity of Islamic art around the world.

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