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Examining the Symbolism of the Ascension (*Mi'rāj*): Relationships Between Traditional Malay Prose Narratives (*Hikāyāt*) and Traditional Malay Mosques in Melaka

(Meneliti Simbolisme Darihal Penaikan (*Mi'rāj*): Hubungan Antara *Hikāyāt* Melayu Tradisional dan Masjid Melayu Tradisional di Melaka)

Hazwan Ariff Hakimi^{a,b}, Nik Lukman Nik Ibrahim^{a*} & Nor Zalina Harun^c

^aDepartment of Architecture and Built Environment, Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia

^bDepartment of Architecture, Faculty of Built Environment, Universiti Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

^cInstitute of the Malay World and Civilization, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia

*Corresponding author: lukman@ukm.edu.my

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ABSTRACT

The saying that the Islāmic ritual prayer (ṣalāh) epitomises the ascension (mi'rāj) of the believer has prompted some scholars to interpret the Prophet Muḥammad's Ascension (Mi'rāj) in the traditional mosque's symbolism in the Islāmic world, including those in Melaka. Despite being original in the Traditionalist sense of the word, their allusions to the symbolism remain methodologically deficient and conceptually limited. Given these circumstances, this article examines the symbolism of the Mi'rāj in the traditional Malay mosques in Melaka through the traditional Malay prose narratives (hikāyāt) which manifest the symbolism of the same. It employs a hermeneutic reading of MSS 2968 Risālat Laṭīfat fī Bayān al-Isrā' wa-al-Mi'rāj (1767), the earliest known manuscript narrating the story of Prophet Muḥammad's Mi'rāj in the Malay world as well as case studies of three significant and contemporaneous Malay mosques in Melaka, namely Masjid Tengker (1728), Masjid Kampung Hulu (1728), and Masjid Kampung Kling (1748). By capitalising on the combination of textual, document, and comparative analyses, it was found that there is a correlation between the text and the buildings, in which the symbolism of the Mi'rāj is manifested in several external and internal architectural elements of all three mosques. These findings present the unity of the traditional Malay-Islāmic heritage generally and the productive relationship between literature and architecture particularly through a provisional methodological and conceptual framework which endeavours to establish the basis for future research on the subject.

Keywords: Architectural symbolism; ascension; prose narrative; mosque architecture; Melaka

ABSTRAK

Pernyataan yang mengatakan bahawa tatacara sembahyang dalam Islām (ṣalāh) merupakan contoh penaikan (mi'rāj) orang beriman, telah mendorong beberapa sarjana untuk menterjemahkan simbolisme seni bina darihal Penaikan (Mi'rāj) Nabī Muḥammad dalam masjid-masjid tradisional di dunia Islām, termasuklah di Melaka. Sungguhpun bersifat asli dalam pengertian Tradisionalis, kilasan-kilasan mereka kepada simbolisme tersebut masih kurang dari segi perkaedahan dan terhad dari segi konsep. Berikutan keadaan ini, makalah ini meneliti simbolisme darihal Mi'rāj dalam masjid-masjid Melayu tradisional di Melaka menerusi hikāyāt Melayu tradisional yang memanifestasikan simbolisme yang sama. Makalah ini mengguna pakai pembacaan hermeneutik terhadap MSS 2968 Risālat Laṭīfat fī Bayān al-Isrā' wa-al-Mi'rāj (1767), iaitu manuskrip terawal diketahui yang menceritakan sirah Mi'rāj Nabī Muḥammad di alam Melayu selain kajian kes terhadap tiga masjid Melayu di Melaka yang penting dan sezaman, iaitu Masjid Tengker (1728), Masjid Kampung Hulu (1728), dan Masjid Kampung Kling (1748). Dengan

mengguna pakai gabungan analisis teks, dokumen, dan perbandingan, makalah ini menemui hubung kait antara teks dan bangunan-bangunan dan mendapati bahawa simbolisme darihal *Mi'rāj* telah dimanifestasikan dalam beberapa elemen seni bina luaran dan dalaman ketiga-tiga masjid. Hasil penemuan-penemuan ini memperlihatkan kesatuan warisan Melayu-Islām tradisional secara umum dan hubungan berdaya keluaran antara kesusasteraan dan seni bina secara khusus menerusi satu kerangka perkaedahan dan konsep yang bersifat sementara untuk dijadikan sebagai asas bagi kajian dalam lapangan ini pada masa hadapan.

Kata kunci: Simbolisme seni bina; penaikan; hikayat; seni bina masjid; Melaka

INTRODUCTION

The traditional mosque is a symbolic receptacle for the communal remembrance of God. Unlike other building typologies, it stands out as the most meaningful building of Islāmic civilisation owing to its symbolic agency as one of the most compelling condensers for divine remembrance through its didactic, pictorial, devotional, and interpretive dimensions (Akbaria & Leoni 2010). The Islāmic ritual prayer (*ṣalāh*) epitomises the ascension (*mi'rāj*) of the believer, according to a saying by the Prophet Muḥammad. Thus the architectural symbolism of the Prophet Muḥammad's Ascension (*Mi'rāj*) has been surmised to exist in the traditional mosques by Traditionalist and non-Traditionalist scholars. Even more poignant is the allusions to such symbolism in the traditional mosque in the Malay-Islāmic world. These include the ones in Melaka as posited by a few local scholars.

While due recognition should be given to these scholars whose pioneering attempts have profited us in recognising and acknowledging the spirituality of our ritual obligations and the traditional Islāmic built heritage, several pertinent problems in their works cannot simply be brushed under the carpet. A closer inspection of such works divulges a deficit of a lucid methodological and conceptual framework. None of the studies delineated how Muslims beheld the concept of Prophet Muḥammad's *Mi'rāj* or how the idea was applied in architectural interpretations. When descriptions exist, they are predominantly oriented to ideas and expressions abound in the Islāmic world's centres. To make matters worse, such interpretations are almost always made sweepingly without regard for the scientific method. Conceptually limited and methodologically deficient, these studies have only scratched the surface of the architectural symbolism of the *Mi'rāj* in the traditional mosque.

Circumscribing its scope to the traditional Malay mosques in Melaka, the purpose of this article is twofold: it fills the conceptual gap by systematically examining the concept of Prophet Muḥammad's *Mi'rāj* as understood by Malay-Muslims and ingeniously externalised in their mosques on the one hand, and on the other, it fills the methodological gap by demonstrating that the architectural symbolism of the

traditional Malay mosques in Melaka can be understood through a provisional methodological and conceptual framework that capitalises on the productive agency of traditional Malay literature. The authors take the readers on an ascending intellectual journey beginning with three conceptual confections of the Traditionalist School—architectural symbolism, the Prophet Muḥammad's *Mi'rāj*—the traditional mosque, and literature-architecture, before moving on with the methodology employed for the study of a traditional Malay prose narrative (*hikāyat*) and three traditional Malay mosques in Melaka, and finally ending with the symbolism of the *Mi'rāj* in the Melakan mosques.

THE TRADITIONALIST SCHOOL AND ARCHITECTURAL SYMBOLISM

The publication of an esoteric article such as this at a time when studies on the built environment in the age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution is ubiquitous may seem asynchronous. Still, such cerebral astigmatism only mirrors today's declining theorisation of architectural symbolism. Empirical studies on the subject have been encouraging since the third millennium, and we are currently delighting in the fruits of the Traditionalists' labour, whose seeds were sown by René Guénon and Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. Their scholarly yield continued through the rigorous works of other Traditionalists such as Frithjof Schuon, Titus Burckhardt, Martin Lings, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Other scholars exhibiting a strong Traditionalist influence are Nader Ardalan, Laleh Bakhtiar, Adrian Snodgrass, and Khursheed Kamal Aziz. As collective members of the Traditionalist School, they are the most erudite scholars in architectural symbolism.

The bodies of their work broadly differ from modern art historians' in three ways: (1) purpose—the former represents historical reality statically and vertically while the latter reconstructs the same dynamically and horizontally (Akkach 2005; Burckhardt 1987); (2) outcome—the former interprets the noumenal meanings of “symbols” while the latter the phenomenal meanings of “signs” (Snodgrass 1990); and (3) usefulness—the former's interpretations benefit the Muslim community (*ummah*) while the latter's benefit academic specialists (Akkach 2005; Khan 2003). Following on from this,

“traditional” architecture, according to the Traditionalist School, is *original* meaning entrenched in the Origin, *universal* meaning carrying multiple meanings, and *communal* meaning devoid of individual self-expression. The authors have, therefore, not used the term “traditional” nonchalantly in this article, for when conflated with “architecture,” it is an imitation of nature in her manner of operation (Burckhardt 2007; Oldmeadow 2011; Schuon 2007), a reminder or remembrancer of a higher state of being (Azzam 2013; Clark 2013; Schuon 2007), and the life or flesh of religion (Burckhardt 1987; Daharun 1991; Nasr 1997).

It is no surprise that Traditionalist scholars put their best foot forward in dwelling on the architectural symbolism of the traditional mosque. Even some non-Traditionalist Malay scholars have recently issued a clarion call to examine the traditional Malay mosque in Melaka in terms of its symbolic meaning rather than its aesthetic form (Ahmad Zakaria 2022; Dahlan & Abd Manan 2021). Although the phenomenal meanings of “signs” were implied, there is an overt consensus among local scholars that the traditional Malay mosque offers unending insights into the Malay-Islāmic tradition (Ahmad Zakaria et al. 2021; Dahlan & Abd Manan 2021; Harun et al. 2022; Ismail et al. 2022; Md Sharif 2019). Not only is the mosque typology the exemplar par excellence of “traditional” Islāmic architecture, but it is also a centrepiece of Islāmic architecture (Aziz 2004) which demands considerable attention to the symbolisms it inheres, including the symbolism of Prophet Muḥammad’s *Mi’rāj*.

PROPHET MUḤAMMAD’S ASCENSION (*MI’RĀJ*) AND THE TRADITIONAL MOSQUE

Being the cardinal Islāmic rite congregationally performed in mosques and identified with the *mi’rāj* of the believer, the *ṣalāh* is symbolically substantial in several ways. Not only is it the principal spiritual technique through which man returns to God (Mohamed 1978; Nasr 2001) by journeying along an *upward* path (Lings 2011; Nasr 2001), but it is also the access to the *higher* states of being accessible only to those who have achieved the degree of human perfection (Lings 1975, 2011). The *ṣalāh* is also an *ascent* to experience the ecstasy in divine worship (Qasimi 1987) through perfect concentration and constant remembrance of God (Syed Ali Ashraf 1987). Motifs such as “upward,” “higher,” and “ascent” all generally denote an ascension. In particular, they are affiliated with Prophet Muḥammad’s *Mi’rāj* to the heavens on the 27th of Rajab as alluded to in the Qur’ān and detailed in the Prophetic traditions (*Aḥādīth*) (Gibb & Kramers 1953). We can thus logically posit that since the *ṣalāh*,

which symbolises the *Mi’rāj*, is performed congregationally in the traditional mosque, the latter, in one way or another, symbolises the same.

A précis of the symbolism of the *Mi’rāj* in the traditional mosque is in order here. Inspired by the miraculous event, Burckhardt proposed that the parable of the *Mi’rāj* is embodied in the dome, octagonal drum, and cube of the mosque building (Burckhardt 1967). He then put forth the Ladder of the World theory nearly a decade later, essentially an extension of his earlier theory under a different name, which analogised the *Mi’rāj* to the pulpit (*minbar*) (Burckhardt 1976). While Aziz acknowledged Burckhardt’s later interpretation, he also accentuated the symbolic qualities of the building height of mosques, staircases, minarets, and tomb towers (Aziz 2004). The base or foundation rock of the mosque also symbolised the Ascension (Humphrey & Vitebsky 2005). Only two studies on the symbolism of the *Mi’rāj* in the traditional Malay mosque have been carried out—one underlining the symbolic agency of the prayer niche (*miḥrāb*) and multitiered roofs of mosques (Prijetomo 1992), and the other of the mosque floor, four-cornered prayer hall, multitiered roofs, lamps, and spire or pinnacle (El-Muhammady 2016).

Neither of the above studies expounded how the concept of the *Mi’rāj* was perceived by those who built or frequented the mosques. What is also conspicuous in these studies is that none of them attempted to make explicit their conceptual and methodological frameworks employed in decoding the symbolism of the *Mi’rāj* in the mosques. The dearth of an illustration of how the symbolism of the *Mi’rāj* is materialised in the mosques’ external and internal architectural elements only rubs salt into the wound. This article addresses these issues by examining the symbolism of the *Mi’rāj* in the mosques through the symbolic agency of the *ḥikāyāt*. It takes a closer look at how literature can inform architecture.

LITERATURE AND ARCHITECTURE

Interdisciplinary research such as this may at first appear peculiar as the fields of architecture and literature are deemed strange bedfellows in local disciplinary scholarship. Curiously, the call for such intellectual matrimony was made as early as 1969 by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, who espoused the consultation of language and literature to truly comprehend their concomitant impression on the Malay-Islāmic worldview (Al-Attas 1969, 2015), and it may also be added here on its artistic outputs such as the traditional mosque which manifest that worldview. Mohamad Tajuddin Mohamad Rasdi added that a

correlative study between traditional Malay literature and architecture would facilitate us in inferring how the Malay-Muslims viewed their contemporaneous world (Mohamad Rasdi 2000). Such studies alter the theorisation of architectural history from being a chamber into a transformer, rendering the discipline germane and meaningful to everyone (Borden & Rendell 2000).

Reservations on the relationship between literature and architecture may be remitted if we investigate how the former enriches the latter through the relief decorations of the Hindu-Buddhist temples constructed by the Malays. Willem Stutterheim found that the narratives from the Malayan *hikāyāt* of *Ramayana* and the old Jawanese *Ramayana kakawin* were extensively depicted at Candi Prambanan (or Candi Loro Jonggrang) and Candi Panataran in Indonesia, respectively (Stutterheim 1989). Similar observations were made by Ann R. Kinney, whose analysis of Candi Jago in Indonesia evinced the temple’s portrayal of the narratives from the Tantri tales and the stories of *Angling Dharma*, *Kunjarakarna*, *Parthayajna*, *Arjunawiwaha*, and *Krsnayana* (Kinney 2003). Although Robert L. Brown asserted that the visual representations of the tales on these monuments were purely iconic (or symbolic) rather than didactic (Brown 2002), the authors likewise theorise that the impressive skills of the Malays who built them have been transferred to the construction of no less remarkable mosque architecture upon the Islāmisation of the Malay world and that the traditional Malay mosque vis-à-vis its pre-Islāmic counterpart is equally symbolic through the expediency of narratives.

Prose narratives are defined as “the ordinary form of written or spoken language, without metrical structure; especially as a species or division of literature [...] that narrates or recounts; occupied or concerned with, having the character of, narration” while *hikāyāt* are defined as “prose narrative[s] combining romance and biography” in classical Malay literature (Simpson & Weiner 1989). In the Malay-Islāmic tradition, they mainly refer to mythical biographies of Prophet Muḥammad replete with various stories about his life (*sīrah*) and prophetic miracles (*mu’jizah*) (Braginsky 2004), which appeared in the Malay language through the process of translation, copying, and writing (Hamid 1983) and were recited at festivals honouring the Prophet to deliver instructive examples for the audience to emulate concerning spiritual life (Braginsky 2004; Hamid 1983). In this article, they entail tales written by Malay-Muslims recounting Prophet Muḥammad’s *Mi’rāj* to the heavens, whose contents bear the community’s Weltanschauung and whose literary symbolism will be correlated to its architectural compeer.

METHODOLOGY

The authors employed a hermeneutic reading of a traditional Malay *hikāyāt*, namely the MSS 2968 *Risālat Laṭīfat fī Bayān al-Isrā’ wa-al-Mi’rāj* which provides the means to arrive at the text’s symbolic meanings in greater depth. The heterogeneous ways the literary dimensions and parameters of the text embody the symbolism of the *Mi’rāj* were examined. The text was singled out for three reasons: (1) it was composed during the most productive period in the history of traditional Malay literature (Braginsky 2004); (2) it was contemporaneous with the construction of the traditional Malay mosques in Melaka; and (3) it is complete, legible, and readily available to the authors.

MSS 2968 titled *Risālat Laṭīfat fī Bayān al-Isrā’ wa-al-Mi’rāj* (Malay: *Suatu Risalah yang Kecil pada Menyatakan Isrā’ dan Mi’rāj*; English: the Small Message to Describe the Night Journey and the Ascension) (Figure 1) was authored by ‘Abd al-Ṣamad al-Jāwī al-Falimbānī on 17 Rajab 1181 A.H. (9 December 1767 C.E.). It is the earliest manuscript describing the Night Journey and the Ascension in the Malay world in the 18th century, 43 years earlier than MSS 4177 (A) *Kifāyat al-Muhtāj fī al-Isrā’ wa-al-Mi’rāj* authored by Dāwūd ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Faṭānī in 1224 A.H. (1809 C.E.). Comprising 55 folia, the text begins on folium 4verso and ends on folium 52verso. Folium 18verso to folium 46verso (29 folia) chronicles the story of the *Mi’rāj* pertinent to this article.



FIGURE 1. Opening pages of the manuscript of the MSS 2968 *Risālat Laṭīfat fī Bayān al-Isrā’ wa-al-Mi’rāj*

Case studies of three traditional Malay mosques in Melaka, namely Masjid Tengker (1728), Masjid Kampung Hulu (1728), and Masjid Kampung Kling (1748), have also been drawn upon to procure a conceptually rich or theoretically consistent depth to data analysis. The

manifold means by which the architectural dimensions and parameters of the buildings express the symbolism of the *Mi'rāj* were examined. The buildings were selected for three reasons: (1) they were constructed during the Dutch colonial rule, a period when they were claimed to be decoratively enriched; (2) they were built in the administrative quarter of the colony, hence their formidable architecture compared to their rural equals; and (3) they are national heritage buildings protected by Jabatan Warisan Negara, thus warranting the verity of their architectural elements.

Located at Jalan Tengker, the first mosque, Masjid Tengker (Figure 2), was built in 1728 and was restored several times—1812 (as evidenced by the commemoration of the mosque renovation on its central gateway frieze), 1850, 1890, and 1910. The mosque used to be the state mosque of Melaka (Masjid Besar Tengker) until 1990 (Ismail 2015; Kamsari 1998) and features a seven-tiered octagonal minaret resembling a Chinese pagoda or a minaret of southern India, Chinese motifs on the *mihṛāb*, and four Greek Corinthian pillars in the prayer hall.



FIGURE 2. Masjid Tengker, Melaka

The second mosque, Masjid Kampung Hulu (Figure 3), is located at Jalan Kampung Hulu. It was built in 1728, in conformity with the commemoration of the mosque building and renovation on its decorative tympanum situated in the middle of the prayer hall's front side. It was restored in 1819, 1892 (as evidenced by the same

commemoration cited earlier), 1995, 2010, and 2013 (Anjung Teknik 2013a). The mosque features a covered timber balcony above the gateway doors, a covered ablution pool, a mausoleum adjacent to the prayer hall, and a three-tiered octagonal minaret resembling a lighthouse or a minaret of Ḥaḍramawt.



FIGURE 3. Masjid Kampung Hulu, Melaka

The third and final mosque, Masjid Kampung Kling (Figure 4), is located at Jalan Tukang Emas. Built in 1748, it was restored in 1782, 1808, 1872 (as evidenced by the commemoration of the mosque door installation on its front gateway frieze), 1908, 1940, 1988, 1999, and 2013 (Anjung

Teknik 2013b). Features of the mosque include Islāmic calligraphy motifs on porches, Chinese motifs on marginal ridges, a seven-tiered square minaret resembling a Chinese pagoda or a minaret of southern India, and six Greek Ionic pillars in the prayer hall.

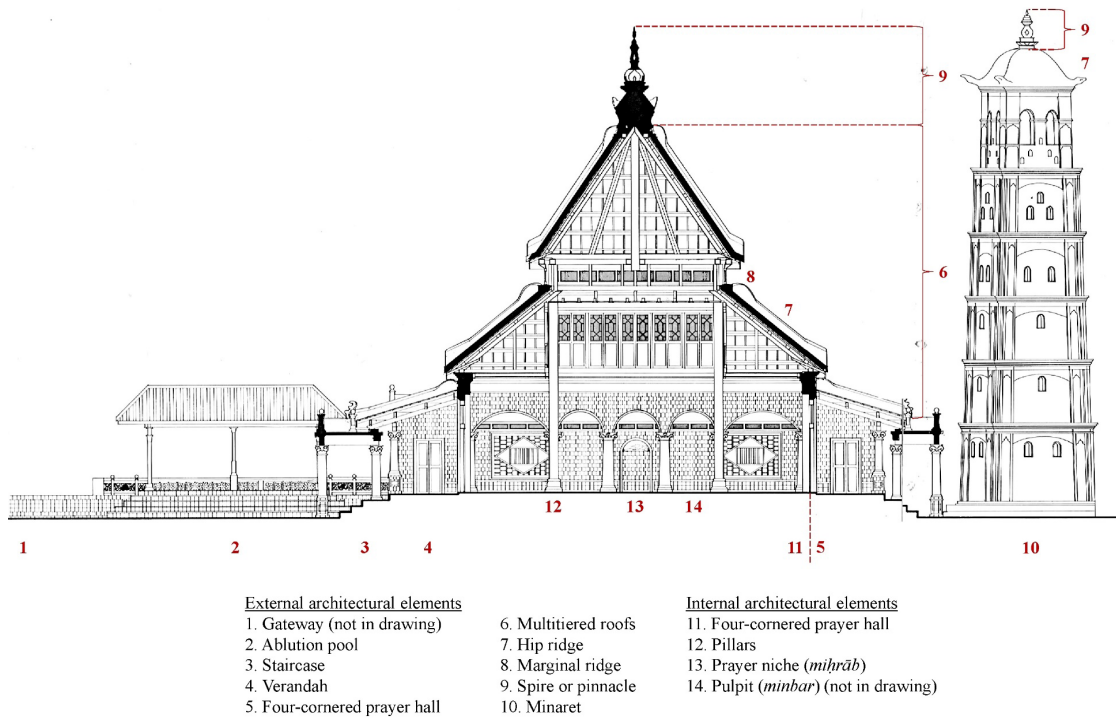


FIGURE 4. Masjid Kampung Kling, Melaka

Findings from the text were organised and analysed using textual analysis according to their literary dimensions and parameters of symbolism. Analysis of the text furnishes not only the specifics and subtleties of the *Mi'rāj* story, which would remain dormant and unknown if a cursory examination was done but, most importantly, a provisional conceptual framework for analysing the mosques. Concurrently, findings from the buildings were organised and analysed using document and comparative analyses according to their architectural dimensions and parameters of symbolism. Analysis of the buildings furnishes the physical conditions and idiosyncrasies of the mosques besides interpretive meanings within them. Subsequently, literary and architectural findings were further organised and analysed using comparative analysis according to their attendant dimensions and parameters of symbolism. A combined analysis of the text and the buildings enables the authors to determine similarities and differences between aspects of the *ḥikāyat* and the mosques and develop explanations for the possible affinities between them derived from the conceptual framework established earlier.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 13 dimensions of symbolism were found in the text and buildings, listed alphabetically: ascension, centripetality, contraction, descension, enclosure, expansion, hierarchy, horizontality, invisibility, limitlessness, number, union, and verticality. These dimensions correspond to 14 architectural parameters of symbolism typified by the mosques' external and internal architectural elements, as exemplified in Figure 5. They also correspond to 15 literary parameters of symbolism typified by the *ḥikāyat*'s plot, as enumerated in Figure 6, which also illustrates the relationship between the literary and architectural parameters of symbolism. The *Mi'rāj* was attributed to seven parts of the *ḥikāyat*'s narrative arc comprised of the story's rising action (nos. 7 to 10), climax (nos. 11 and 12), and falling action (no. 13). The remaining eight parts meanwhile, comprised of the story's exposition (nos. 1 to 6) and resolution (nos. 14 and 15), was attributed to the *Isrā'* and are thus excluded from further analysis. It is important to note that only essential interpretations are presented in this article due to space constraints.



External architectural elements

- 1. Gateway (not in drawing)
- 2. Ablution pool
- 3. Staircase
- 4. Verandah
- 5. Four-cornered prayer hall

- 6. Multitiered roofs
- 7. Hip ridge
- 8. Marginal ridge
- 9. Spire or pinnacle
- 10. Minaret

Internal architectural elements

- 11. Four-cornered prayer hall
- 12. Pillars
- 13. Prayer niche (*mihrāb*)
- 14. Pulpit (*minbar*) (not in drawing)

FIGURE 5. Architectural parameters of symbolism
 Source: Adapted from Pusat Kajian Alam Bina Dunia Melayu, Skudai 1987/1988

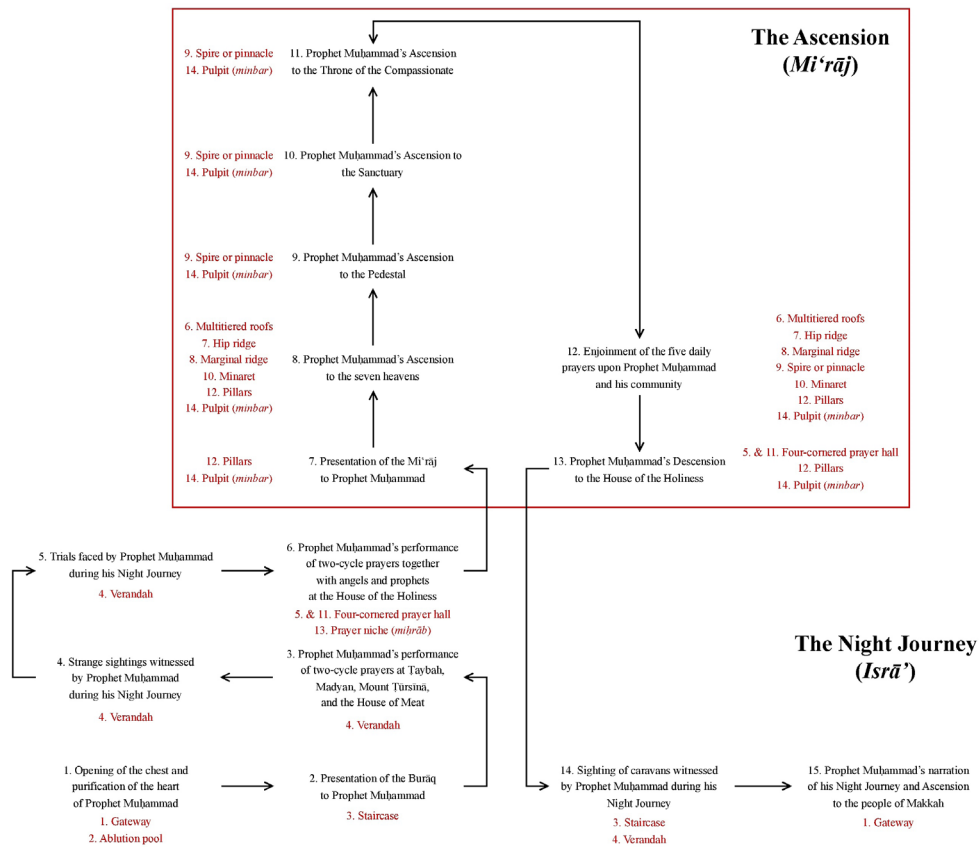


FIGURE 6. Relationship diagram between literary and architectural parameters of symbolism

The presentation of the Mi'rāj to Prophet Muḥammad (no. 7) constituted the first stage of the *Mi'rāj*. The Mi'rāj's descension from the heaven named Gardens of Paradise to the House of the Holiness (f. 18v) is symbolised by the four central foot poles of the pulpits (*manābir*) of all three mosques descending from the roofs to the foot poles. The symbolism of the Mi'rāj's descension also becomes evident on Fridays when the sermon-giver (*khaṭīb*), a communicator of heavenly messages, walks down the steps of the *manābir* of all three mosques from the top step to the prayer hall floors. The roofs of all three *manābir* symbolise the seven heavens, while their spires or pinnacles symbolise the Pedestal, the Sanctuary, and the Throne of the Compassionate (f. 18v).

Prophet Muḥammad's Ascension to the seven heavens (no. 8) constituted the second stage of the *Mi'rāj*. Prophet Muḥammad and Jibrā'il's Ascension from the House of the Holiness to the seven heavens (f. 19r) could not be emblematised otherwise than by the three-tiered pyramidal roofs of all three mosques ascending from the verandah beams to the spires or pinnacles. While the contracting sizes and areas of the three-tiered pyramidal roofs of all three mosques are emblematic of Prophet Muḥammad's receding knowledge of the seven heavens witnessed during his Ascension, the expanding steepness of the three-tiered pyramidal roofs of all three mosques contrastingly emblematised the aggrandising riches of the seven heavens witnessed by Prophet Muḥammad during the same.

Prophet Muḥammad's Ascension to the Pedestal (no. 9) constituted the third stage of the *Mi'rāj*. Prophet Muḥammad and Jibrā'il's Ascension from the seven heavens to the Pedestal (f. 32v) is manifested in two distinguishable ways: on the one hand, by the spire or pinnacle ascending from the third roof tier to a decorative ornament finished with geometry and lotus scroll motifs consisting of a pyramidal-like spire at Masjid Tengkerā; while on the other, by the spires or pinnacles ascending from the third roof tiers to decorative ornaments finished with geometry motifs consisting of groundward truncated square pyramidal-like volumes at Masjid Kampung Hulu and Masjid Kampung Kling. The union of the four curvilinear volumes in the decorative ornaments finished with geometry motifs of all three mosques' spires or pinnacles, however, manifests the four rivers' emergence from beneath the Lote Tree of the Utmost Boundary, two being outward and another two inward (f. 33r).

Prophet Muḥammad's Ascension to the Sanctuary (no. 10) constituted the fourth stage of the *Mi'rāj*. Akin to the preceding stage, Prophet Muḥammad and Jibrā'il's Ascension from the Pedestal to the Sanctuary (f. 36v) is materialised at Masjid Tengkerā by the spire or pinnacle ascending from the decorative ornament finished with geometry and lotus scroll motifs consisting of a pyramidal-

like spire to a central point. In contrast, the same is materialised at Masjid Kampung Hulu and Masjid Kampung Kling by the spires or pinnacles ascending from the decorative ornament finished with geometry motifs consisting of four curvilinear volumes to the central points. The open sky's natural enclosure of all three mosques' spires or pinnacles is also symbolic. It materialises Prophet Muḥammad's shade by a cloud with several colours (f. 36v).

Prophet Muḥammad's Ascension to the Throne of the Compassionate (no. 11) constituted the fifth stage of the *Mi'rāj*. Unlike the preceding two stages, Prophet Muḥammad and Jibrā'il's Ascension from the Sanctuary to the Throne of the Compassionate (f. 36v) is represented solely by all three mosques' spires or pinnacles ascending from the central points to the open sky beyond. Linked to the symbolic dimensions of invisibility and limitlessness, the open sky beyond the spires or pinnacles of all three mosques represents, respectively, Prophet Muḥammad's sight of Allāh, who is without appearance and colour upon passing the Throne of the Compassionate (f. 38v) as well as the Throne of the Compassionate's immensity vis-à-vis all seven layers of heaven which is comparable to a field whereupon a kernel of wheat is placed in the middle of it (f. 36v to f. 37r).

The enjoinder of the five daily prayers upon Prophet Muḥammad and his community (no. 12) constituted the sixth stage of the *Mi'rāj*. The marginal ridge ascending from the second roof tier to the third roof tier, which can only be found at Masjid Kampung Kling, objectifies Prophet Muḥammad and Jibrā'il's Ascension from the sixth heaven to the Throne of the Compassionate (f. 42v), in which the marginal ridge on the second and third roof tiers objectified the sixth and the seventh heaven respectively. When scrutinised, the symbolic dimension of number this distinctive architectural element inheres becomes intelligible. The decorative panel finished with plum blossom motifs, each one consisting of five petals in full bloom on the western side of Masjid Kampung Kling's second roof tier marginal ridge, objectifies not only Allāh's mentioning of five prayers lessened from the enjoined fifty upon each request by Prophet Muḥammad (f. 42v), but also Prophet Muḥammad's mentioning of his satisfaction with five prayers in his response to Prophet Mūsā (f. 44v). Besides the number five, the number ten is also foregrounded in that the decorative panel finished with pearl motif consisting of a pearl containing a lotus flower with ten petals in full bloom on the northern and western sides of Masjid Kampung Kling's third roof tier marginal ridge objectifies Allāh's mentioning of a tenfold reward for the community of Prophet Muḥammad who performs a good deed in the former's command to the latter (f. 43r).

Prophet Muḥammad's Descension to the House of the Holiness (no. 13) constituted the seventh and last stage of the *Mi'rāj*. The four central pillars of all three mosques descending from the multitiered roofs to the prayer hall floors symbolise Prophet Muḥammad and Jibrā'īl's Descension from the sixth heaven to the House of the Holiness (f. 45r). These pillars, all of which support the third roof tiers of the prayer halls which are indirectly connected to the second and first roof tiers, symbolise the seven heavens. Meanwhile, their enclosure by the multitiered roofs symbolises the seven heavens' enclosure by the Throne of the Compassionate.

CONCLUSION

This article attests to its preamble that the traditional mosque is a symbolic receptacle for the remembrance of God. Theoretical relationships between the Traditionalist School and architectural symbolism, as well as between Prophet Muḥammad's *Mi'rāj* and the traditional mosque, position the traditional Malay mosque within the scholarship of architectural symbolism established by the Traditionalist School, whose corpus on both research subject and objects is still desperately inadequate. Affinities between literature and architecture, which were then tested and proven in the examination of the symbolism of the *Mi'rāj* in three traditional Malay mosques in Melaka through the *ḥikāyat* present the unity of the traditional Malay-Islāmic heritage generally, and the integration of the branches of knowledge in architecture and literature specifically, which have been divorced from one another and from Islāmic sources. Such concordance is achieved through a provisional methodological and conceptual framework, forming the basis for future research on the subject.

To enhance the validity of the theory posited in this article, the authors recommend further examination of the research subject and objects through an analysis of literary subparameters of symbolism typified by the *ḥikāyat*'s characters and settings in addition to architectural subparameters of symbolism typified by the motifs in the external and internal architectural elements of the mosques. This theory can also be generalised by replicating its methodological and conceptual framework to other traditional Malay *ḥikāyāt* and mosques. Even if the results of other replication studies may differ from this article's, it is essential to note that its generalisability stems not from the direct sampling of some distinct objects of research but from the development of a conceptual framework of the processes operating in them. These processes may run in other research objects and produce different results in

different circumstances (Maxwell 2013). Nevertheless, the authors postulate that Prophet Muḥammad's *Mi'rāj* is merely one piece of tile, albeit an important one, used in creating a decorative tile work. Completing the tile work offers us a full depiction of how the architectural symbolism of the traditional mosque is theorised, and the authors urge a prompt search for the remaining pieces.

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