
REINTERPRETING WEST JAVANESE ORNAMENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE: AESTHETIC MORPHOLOGY ANALYSIS OF THE AL-JABBAR MOSQUE MA'RODH

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Abstract

This article explores how traditional West Javanese ornamentation contributes to the construction of regional aesthetic identity through its integration in the architectural design of the Al-Jabbar Grand Mosque in Bandung, Indonesia. In 2020, when the designer researched this work, aesthetic morphology was precisely applied to investigate the visual forms, structural elements, and symbolic meanings embedded in the decorative ornaments of the gate of ma'rodh (museum). The study identifies specific traditional ornaments—such as mega sumirat, wadasan, and other West Java geometric ornaments—and examines how these forms are transformed and contextualised within a contemporary Islamic architectural framework. Using aesthetic morphology analysis as the primary approach to support the exploration and literature on Sundanese or West Java cultural aesthetics, the article reveals that the Al-Jabbar Grand Mosque is a spiritual and cultural landmark. It represents Islamic identity and preserves and reinterprets local traditions through form. The findings suggest that incorporating regional ornamentation through the aesthetic morphology approach strengthens cultural continuity while fostering a dialogue between heritage and modernity in public architecture. This research contributes to broader discourses on cultural identity representation, architectural character, and the role of ornamentation in place-making.

Keywords: Aesthetic morphology, Al-Jabbar Grand Mosque, cultural identity, Islamic architecture, ma'rodh, West Java ornaments

1. INTRODUCTION

Mosques are an essential part of the social and spiritual life of Muslims. Mosques are not only used as places of worship but also as places where people gather to discuss religious, social, political, and cultural issues [1]. In Islamic architecture, mosques are more than just functional buildings; they are visual media that convey Islamic principles through their form, layout, and ornamentation, which are rich in symbolic meaning. Every architectural element of a mosque, such as the door, dome, mihrab, and minaret, can convey philosophical messages and reflect the cultural identity of the community where the mosque is located.

Mosques in Indonesia have developed with diverse local characteristics, reflecting the rich cultural heritage, traditions, and ethnic backgrounds of each region. Islamization in Indonesia has been inclusive and tolerant, involving various local elements that have shaped a hybrid and varied expression of Islam in thought, behaviour, and cultural products. The architecture and decorative elements applied to the Red Mosque (Panjunan) in Cirebon, the Mantingan Mosque in Jepara, and the Sendang Duwur Mosque in Tuban are concrete examples of how syncretic, eclectic, and compromising Islamic values are reflected in the visual expressions and architectural aesthetics of these buildings [2][3].

In 2022, the Al-Jabbar Grand Mosque in Bandung, West Java, as a contemporary mosque, stands as a new representation of contemporary Islamic architecture that retains its cultural roots. This monumental mosque was designed by combining modern architectural styles with elements characteristic of Turkish mosques, and is decorated with ornamentation that reflects the traditional art of West Java. Its main structure is a giant half-sphere with no clear boundaries between the walls, roof, and dome [4]. The architecture was designed and supervised by the then-governor of West Java, M. Ridwan Kamil. At the same time, the details of the ma'rodh gate, carpets, and illumination art of the Al-Qur'an manuscript were done by Achmad Haldani Destiarmand and team.

In developing Islamic architecture in Indonesia, ornaments that adapt local cultural values are essential to strengthen community identity while preserving cultural heritage in the face of globalisation. One region that stands out for its openness is West Java; it serves as a meeting point for culture, ethnicity, education, and religion, making the decoration of mosques an integral part of its tradition, reflecting the openness of the province [2]. The Al-Jabbar Grand Mosque not only showcases architectural beauty on a macro level but also features diverse

ornamental details on its doors, which have been meticulously designed [5]. As an architectural element, the mosque's gate (ma'rodh) plays a crucial role in shaping the visual image and carrying deep symbolic value, as it connects the outer space with the sacred inner space of the mosque.

In the design of these symmetrical gates, decorative elements are not merely for aesthetic purposes but serve as a cultural narrative representing the strong Sundanese cultural identity in West Java. Traditional ornaments such as flora, fauna, and geometric patterns reinforce local character and visualise philosophical values. The interaction between traditional craft techniques and modern design principles is reflected in the creative process of making the door, resulting in a work rich in cultural and spiritual meaning and of high artistic value.

2. METHOD

The primary purpose of constructing the Al-Jabbar Grand Mosque is to serve as a place of worship and an Islamic education center in West Java. At the basement floor of the mosque building is the ma'rodh, which functions as the Prophet's Gallery [6]. This gallery showcases historical content and enhances the cultural atmosphere by applying West Java-specific ornaments, which are aesthetically integrated into the room's design. In the context of contemporary Islamic architecture in Indonesia, the decorative elements designed on this mosque building strengthen the mosque's visual identity and serve as a means to represent local values.

2.1 Research Design

This research adopts a Design-Led Research (DLR) approach combined with the analytical framework of Aesthetic Morphology (AM). DLR positions the act of designing as both a creative and investigative process, allowing the generation of knowledge through design rather than merely about design (Frayling, 1993; Wrigley, 2017; Koskinen et al., 2011). Within this framework, the ma'rodh gate of the Al-Jabbar Grand Mosque serves as both the subject of analysis and the product of inquiry.

The DLR framework was chosen because it accommodates iterative exploration, where each design decision reflects conceptual, cultural, and aesthetic reasoning. This methodological orientation enables the researcher-designer to investigate how traditional West Javanese ornaments can be transformed and reinterpreted in a contemporary Islamic architectural context.

To deepen the analysis, we also incorporate Aesthetic Morphology (AM), which provides a theoretical and analytical structure to examine the visual form of artifacts. Unlike conventional aesthetic evaluation, AM emphasizes descriptive and comparative analysis of formal attributes such as line, shape, rhythm, symmetry, proportion, and composition. The combination of DLR and AM thus allows a twofold perspective: design as process and form as analytical.

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2.2 Data Collection

The study integrates both primary and secondary data sources.

Primary data were derived from the designer's documentation during the ma'rodh's creation, including initial sketches, design drawings, and photographic records of the fabrication and installation stages. These materials represent the design process as an evolving dialogue between traditional aesthetic principles and modern architectural form.

Secondary data were gathered from visual observation of the completed ma'rodh, archival photographs, architectural reports, and existing literature on West Javanese ornaments and Islamic architectural aesthetics. References include works that catalogue Sundanese ornaments such as mega sumirat, wadanan, and sulur padjadjaran, and prior studies on ornament typology and symbolism.

All collected data were organized into three analytical categories:

- (1) Visual structure (line, rhythm, composition, proportion),
- (2) Symbolic meaning (cultural and spiritual significance of ornaments), and
- (3) Transformational process (adaptation from traditional to modern expression).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After determining the approach, the next step is to select the units to be analyzed. Mosques have several categories, periods, locations, and initiators, so they should be first identified.

3.1 The Identification of The Object

Destiarmand (2013) [2] described some mosques' divisions, including general and specific object limitations. General object boundaries include modern mosques and grand mosques in cities and districts. The term "modern mosque" here refers to the contemporary meaning of mosques built or renovated by local governments in the present era and those included in grand mosques in cities and districts. Special object boundaries include decorative elements and architectural components. Non-structural architectural elements such as doors, gates, floors, walls, and roofs that are related to worship processes. These processes can be main processional (interior), such as mihrab/maqsura (qibla, imam), zulla (congregational prayer, ma'mum); supporting processional (exterior), such as the minaret (adhan), pool/fountain (wudu), and mimbar (khutbah, khatib); or non-processional (complementary), such as columns, portals, gates, pillars, domes, and drums. Figure 1 shows the identification of the objects, focused on the specific location of the gate of ma'rodh at the indoor basement area.

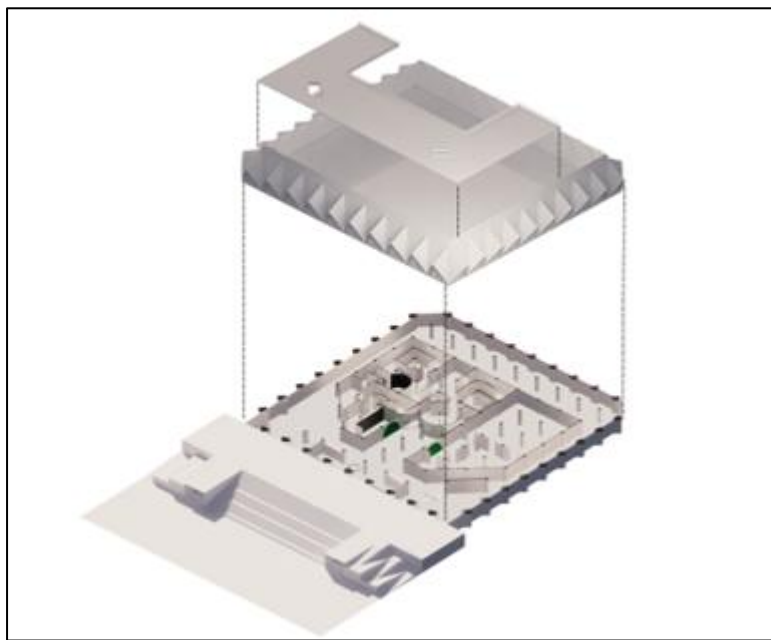


Figure 1. Exploded view of the ground floor and the basement floor of Al-Jabbar Grand Mosque. The ma'rodh is situated on the basement floor. (The illustration was reconstructed for this article, as no floor plans were found from the designer or the mosque's official website.)

3.2 Ornamentation as a representation of identity

According to Taylor (1991) [12] and Burke (2003) [13], ornamentation represents identity. The lack of clarity in the formulation and strategy to maintain Sundanese culture as the primary culture in West Java blurs the Sundanese profile and posture. In the context of mosques located in West Java, the evolution of the architectural renovation of the Masjid Agung Bandung, or Great Mosque of Bandung, has left behind the local character and distinctive diversity of Sundanese culture. At least four vital forces must be observed in Sundanese Culture: adaptability, mobility, growth and development, and regeneration. Instead, the style of the West Java Grand Mosque turned to the form of a Pan-Arabist mosque [14].

Tabrani (1995) [15] said that the concepts of 'function', 'beauty' and 'meaning' merge with moral rules, customs, taboos and religion. Furthermore, he said that in terms of style and visual styling, traditional art in Indonesia is not as naturalistic or abstract as that in the West, but rather decorative. The composition is not as symmetrical or asymmetrical as the West but has harmony or dynamic balance. Meanwhile, the way of expression and thinking is not as concrete or abstract as in the West, but rather symbolic. In line with Primadi, it is said that ornaments are inspired by two factors, namely emotion (belief, religion, mysticism) and technique (material and method of making) [16].

Designing ornaments for Al-Jabbar Grand Mosque means realising a design that supports the interior concept and collection objects of the ma'rodh (the museum or the gallery, specifically on its gate in the indoor basement) that are good, artistic, and contain West Java cultural and historical elements. This leads to the identification and observation process, which begins by comparing the designed sketches with the existing elements of the unit and systematically collecting data on the distinctive West Javanese decorative ornaments found in each case to be applied in Al-Jabbar Grand Mosque.

The aesthetic morphology for visual description was applied for identification. This method includes classifying shapes based on motif or ornament typology, such as floral, geometric, repetitive pattern, and linear, and examining visual structures, such as proportion, symmetry, repetition, and top-middle-bottom composition.

3.3 Ornamentation as an aesthetic object: A morphological study

According to Munro (1970) [7], aesthetic value encompasses visual beauty, the creative process, symbolic value, and the psychological meaning of the form. Traditional craft techniques and modern design principles generated a complex aesthetic variety in designing the doors of the Al-Jabbar Grand Mosque, as demonstrated by the forms' lines, rhythm, proportions, and composition.

West Java also has unique arts and culture. However, decorative elements in architecture of West Java can be said to be challenging to find (Muanas [17], there is a distinctive 'sisik ikan' (fish scale) ornament which designed by Maclaine Pont, the architect who also built ITB's main building [18], Which appears on the Great Mosque of Bandung (formerly) and also on the walls of the official residence of the regent or mayor in Bandung. Other West Javanese (Sundanese) ornaments can be found on batik cloth, such as batik cloth in the Banten region (kain simbut), Batik in Garut, Tasik, Ciamis regions (as lereng cerutu, batik kumeli, tiwu, sidomukti kembang, sidomukti payung, lereng areuy kacang, semen, pinggiran, lung-lungan, peksi, rereng sintung, kalapa useup geometric & non geometric, sapujagat / bulu hayam geometric ornament, rereng galuh pakuan [19], buket terang bulan, manuk kembang, bilik sisi kembang, arjuna menekung, lereng arben, lereng calung, gambir saketi, kurung hayam, cupat manggu, lereng kaktus, batu, lereng barong, limar, lereng peuteuy, patah tebu, kraton galuh, banji, balabag/papataran, angklin, lereng serutu, lereng camat, lereng dokter, lereng panganten, pegat maru, drintin, kipas, buketan [20].

In Indramayu batik, there are also some ornaments, such as jarot asem, dara kipu, ganggeng, urang ayu, iwak etong, sawat gunting burung hong, banji, obar-abir, lok chan, sawat riweh, pintu raja, si juring, kembang kapas, rama, liris, kapal kandas, pacar china, and bangun tulak [20]. In Cirebon batik, there are some ornaments called peksi naga liman, singa barong, taman arum sunyaragi, gedongan sunyaragi, ayam alas gunung jati, tanjakan gunung giwur, semen rama, liris patran kembang, calligraphy, buraq, kangkungan, banji, naga seba, kapal keruk, ganggeng, lengko-lengko, ikan, wadasan, to the mega mendung and mega sumirat ornaments. Meanwhile, in the architecture of noble houses, palaces, tombs, and mosques in Cirebon, among others, other ornaments vary. One of those is based on nature, such as wadasan, which means rock, appears in the Sunyaragi batik ornament, symbol of samadhi, symbol of earth or land [21]. Mega: mega sumirat (bright cloud) is clean and symbolizes a cheerful mood or happiness [22]. On the other hand, Megamendung shows cloudy clouds, a symbol of a gloomy mood, as well as a symbol of fertility, rainwater. Combining the wadasan ornament and the megamendung ornament symbolizes the underworld and the upper world.

Traditional references such as the wadasan (rock ornament) and mega sumirat (bright cloud) from Cirebon batik informed the design of the ma'rodh gate. These ornaments were selected for their symbolic association with spiritual clarity and groundedness, aligning with the mosque's conceptual theme.

Based on aesthetic morphology findings, the following table describes the ornaments chosen for the Al-Jabbar Grand Mosque ma'rodh design.

Table 1. Table explaining the ornamentation of the gate design of the Al-Jabbar Mosque based on aesthetic morphology.

No	Ornament	Principles of Morphology					Symbolic Meaning
		Basic Form	Transformation	Composition	Orientation & Symmetry	Material	
1	The sun (sunflower)	Radial lines, symmetrical petals (symbol of radiance), central circle	Modification of the petals to make them more geometric	Radial, centre to outer	Radial symmetry	Stained glass	symbol of life, source of light, light of Islam
2	Moon & Stars	Crescent moon, five-pointed star	Adjustment of line thickness & spacing	Symbolic, a star inside the moon	Horizontal symmetry	Stained glass	Islamic preaching
3	Mega Sumirat	Cloud arcs, waves	Simplification of the curve becomes more pronounced	Repeat	Horizontal symmetry	Stained glass	Optimism, hope, enthusiasm, light and clean, joy, opposite of Mega Mendung

4	The Fish Rib (Rusuk Ikan)	Diagonal lines, zigzags	Abstract scales and ribs form a zigzag pattern	Diagonal repeat	Repeating symmetry	Stained glass	Resilience, natural balance
5	Sulur Padjajaran	Spiral curve, organic lines	Streamlining of tendrils	Dynamic	Regular asymmetry	Stained glass	Growth, spiritual continuity
6	Sarigsig	Cross-diagonal line	Cross pattern reinforced thickness	Geometric, repetitive	Diagonal symmetry	Stained glass	The dynamics of life, rhythm, spirituality
7	Kain Simbut	Triangular field, bold lines	Reducing fabric patterns to contour lines	Repeating symmetrically	Repeating symmetry	Stained glass	Strength, protection, local heritage
8	Wadasan	Irregular polygon	Abstract of rock fragments	Dense at the base	loose symmetry	Stained glass	Symbol of earth/land, world, natural balance, stability
9	Simbar Kendo	Tapered curved line	Sharpening the tip of the blade	Vertically symmetrical	Vertical axis symmetry	Stained glass	Magnificence, growth

3.4 Design Process to Implement Ornaments using Aesthetic Morphology Approach

After conducting a morphological analysis, the ornaments obtained in the analysis process were developed into the design of the ma'roth gate. The manual design process continued after the architect provided an overview of the architectural framework. The framework of the ma'roth gate itself was inspired by Achmad Haldani Destiarmand's design on the Ummul Qur'an mushaf Sundawi page, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. The inspiration of the ma'roth framework/outline from the Sundawi Mushaf (Source: Documentation of The Design Process)



Figure 3. The manual process of designing the ma'roth gate (Source: Documentation of The Design Process)

As shown in Figure 3, the designer implemented the ornaments by drawing them manually to fill each pattern of the ma'roth framework.

1. The sun (sunflower)

The sun (sunflower) is the ornament at the top right and left of the design in Sundanese visual aesthetics. The sun symbolizes life, light (Q.S. As-Syam dan Q.S. An Nur: 35,36,37) [23], and spiritual awareness. Referring to Islam and the Qur'an as bearers of light/illumination and guidance. Ornaments in Islam are closely related to the function of illumination, which gives the effect/signal of light [24]. Its visual form is modified to resemble a sunflower

with petals, to which rays of sunlight resembling divine energy (nur) are added. This ornament represents the sky as a transcendent dimension, as shown in Figure 4.

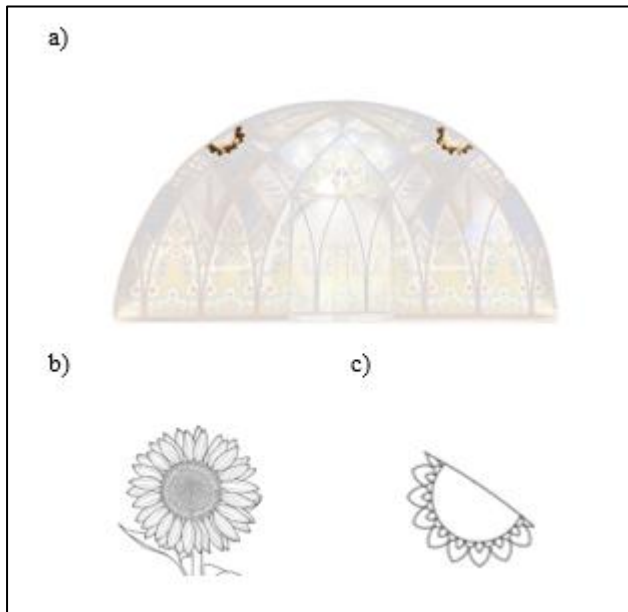


Figure 4. a) Implementation of the sun (sunflower) ornaments in the ma'rodh gate, b) Form source, c) Design created using aesthetic morphology principles

2. Moon and Stars

The crescent and star symbol is very common in the Islamic world, including Indonesia, especially in architectural carvings, embroidery, and the symbols of organizational and political flags. In architecture, particularly in Indonesia, it can be seen in the decorations on the entrance to the Malay royal palace and Pontianak in West Kalimantan. Meanwhile, in embroidery and weaving, it can be seen in Acehese embroidery and Riau Malay weaving. In general, this moon and star symbol is associated with the propagation of Islam and the Islamic religion [25][26]. According to Al-Faruqi [27], decorations in Islam have various meanings, so they are considered one of the most important elements that not only serve an aesthetic and socio-economic function, but have also become a necessity and a requirement of tawhid in the book "Signs and Symbols." [28] states that the crescent moon symbol is associated with Islam, signifying the sun and moon as markers of time or the division of time into days, months, and years.

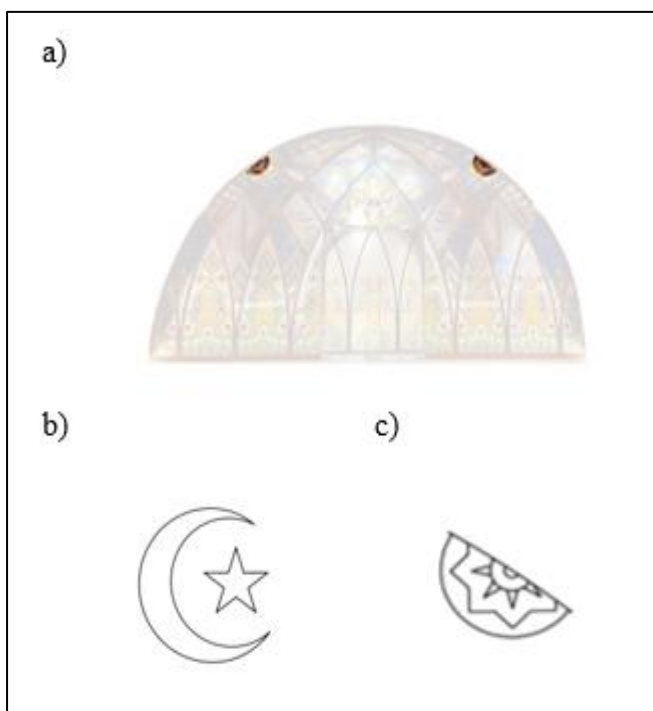


Figure 5.a) Implementation of the moon and the star ornaments in ma'rodh gate, b) Form source, c) Design created using aesthetic morphology principles

3. Mega Sumirat

The mega sumirat ornament demonstrates how regional ornament can be reinterpreted through morphological simplification. Initially characterized by soft cloud curves symbolizing clarity and optimism, the ornament was redrawn into geometric arcs reflecting the mosque's structural curvature [22]. This abstraction aligns visual rhythm with the architectural form while maintaining its symbolic association with light and renewal. Compared to the floral intricacy of Cirebon's mega mendung, the Al-Jabbar reinterpretation embodies a minimalist yet regionally rooted expression, bridging tradition and modernity

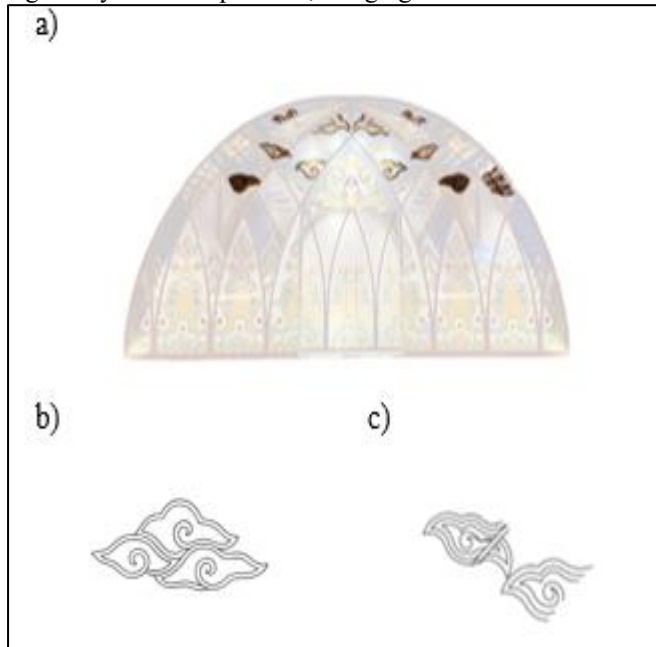


Figure 6. a) Implementation of mega sumirat ornaments in ma'rodh gate, b) Form source, c) Design created using aesthetic morphology principles

4. The fish rib (Rusuk Ikan)

The fish rib ornament, characteristic of Sundanese culture, is placed in the centre of the design, unified by a simbar kendo ornament. Arranged vertically and horizontally, it shows the community's rhythm of movement, solidarity, and unity. The bones' structure also shows the local culture's strength and fatigue.

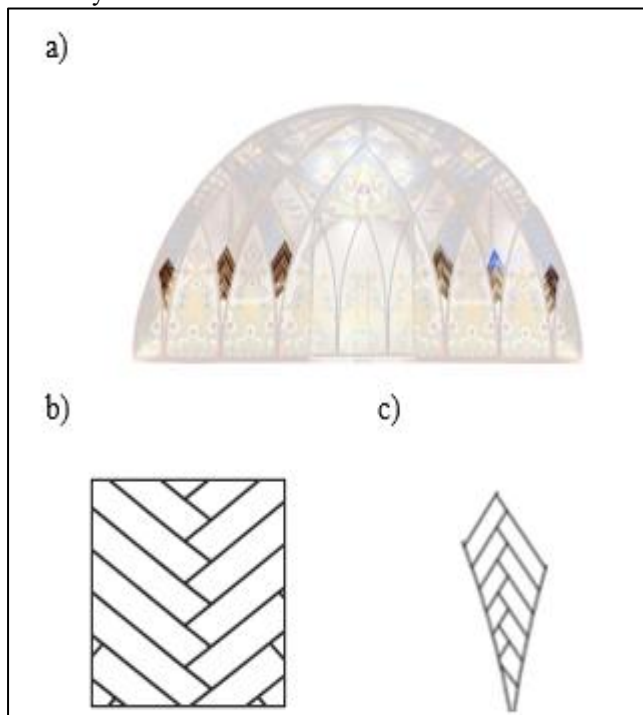


Figure 7. a) Implementation of the fish rib (Rusuk Ikan) ornaments in ma'rodh gate, b) Form source, c) Design created using aesthetic morphology principles

5. Sulur Padjadjaran

Sulur Padjadjaran serves as a unifying symbol, as the padjadjaran vine encompasses the North, South, West, and East [21][29]. It is placed as an ornamental filler on the upper side of the door. It shows progress, balance, and the ongoing tradition of culture. The softly rounded form creates a peaceful and smooth visual flow.

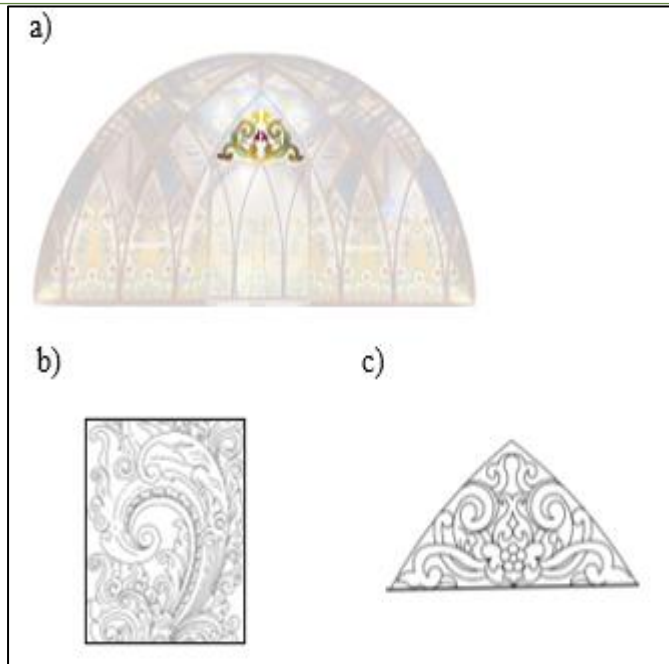


Figure 8.a) Implementation of sulur padjajaran ornaments in ma'rodh gate, **b)** Form source, **c)** Design created using aesthetic morphology principles

6. Sarigsig

The sarigsig, shaped like a bat's wing, resembles the letter 'W' [22]. A zig-zag pattern is depicted as an accent in the sunlight, pointing downwards, indicating dynamism, energy, and progressive movement in the religious life of the Sundanese people. This motivation shows that traditions can survive and change.

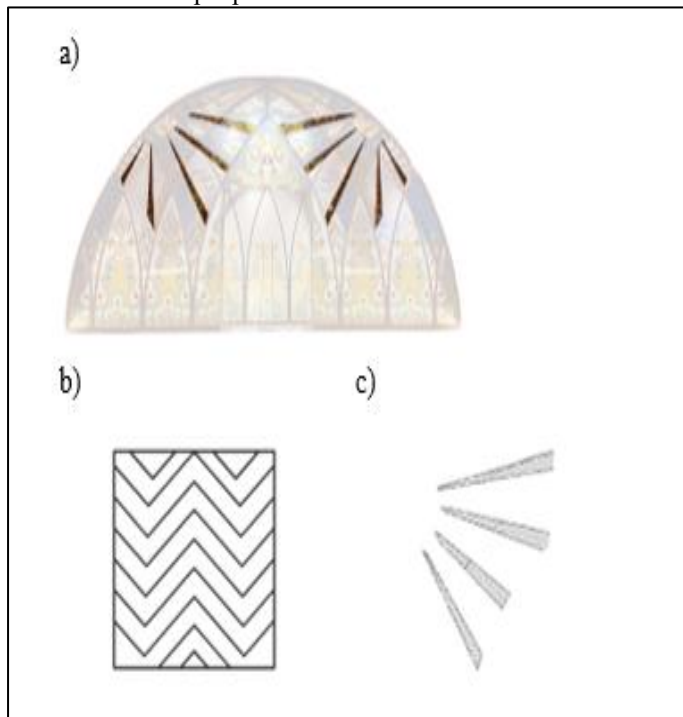


Figure 9.a) Implementation of sarigsig ornaments in ma'rodh gate, **b)** Form source, **c)** Design created using aesthetic morphology principles

7. Kain Simbut

The oldest batik tradition in the western part of Java is in the Banten region, known as the simbut. Simbut, made by the Baduy people who inhabit the Kendeng mountain region, features simple ornamentation of white geometric shapes on an indigo background. Over time, the batik found in the various areas of West Java has influenced one another in terms of ornaments, colors, and the naming of batik ornaments [30][33].

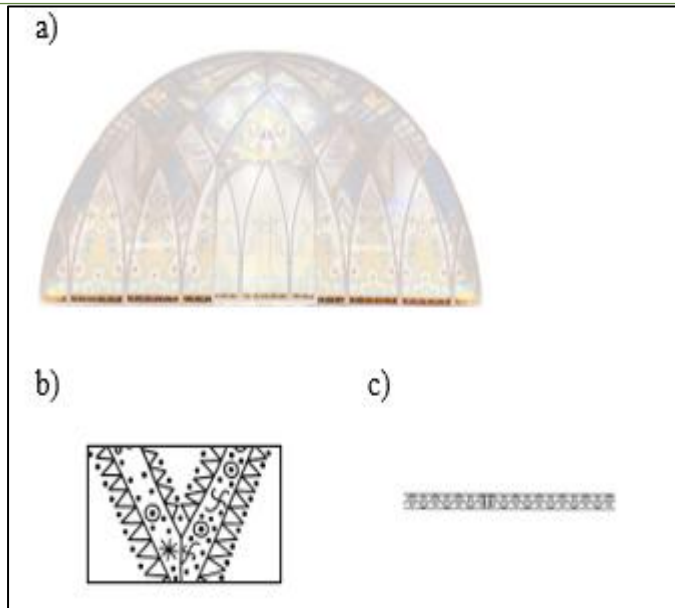


Figure 10. a) Implementation of kain simbut ornaments in ma'rodh gate, b) Form source, c) Design created using aesthetic morphology principles

8. Wadasan

This ornament is located at the bottom of the design, providing a fundamental visual strength that symbolizes power [3]. This ornament is also known as the decorative ornament of rocks or rocky soil [21]. This ornament originates from Cirebon, with irregular curved lines resembling storm clouds, distinguished by rocky hills covered with creeping plants [31].

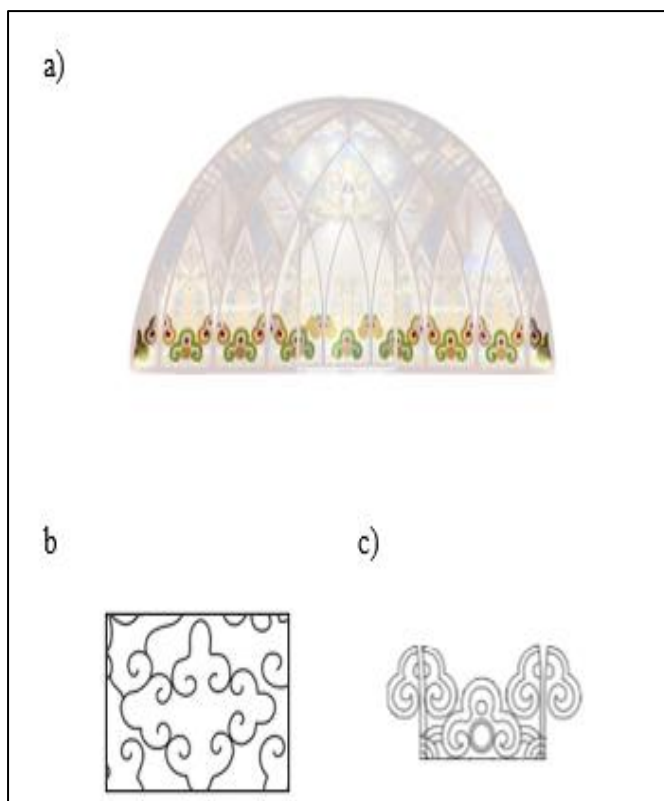


Figure 11. a) Implementation of wadasan ornaments in ma'rodh gate, b) Form source, c) Design created using aesthetic morphology principles

9. Simbar kendo

Simbar kendo is an ornament originating from the Cirebon palace. This ornament is taken from the name of a tough climbing plant that is believed to symbolize strength and tenacity [31]. This ornament is one of the oldest decorative patterns [20]. The meaning of simbar is plants that grow attached to other plants without damaging the plants they attach to. According to belief, those who use simbar wood for mosques or other places of worship will have a calm and peaceful heart, as simbar ornaments symbolize tranquillity and peace. This ornament is located at the top of the wadasan ornament.

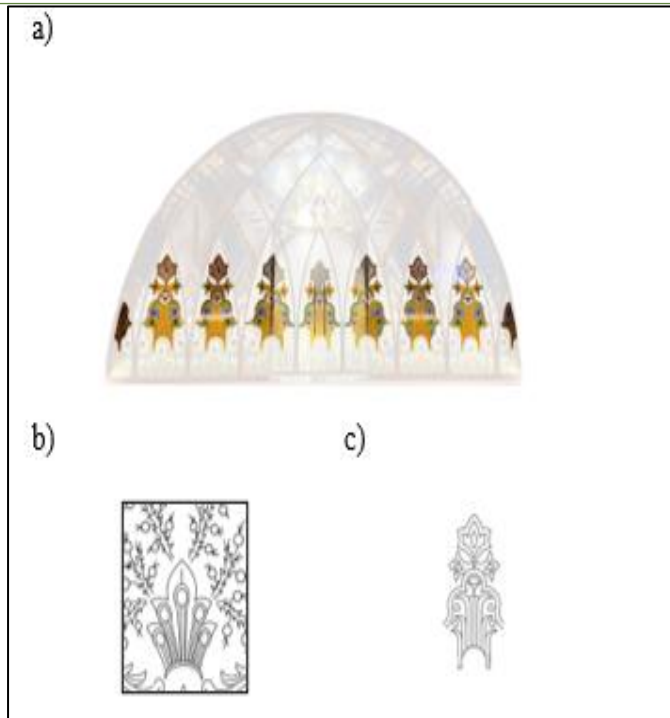


Figure 12. a) Implementation of simbar kendo ornaments in ma'rodh gate, b) Form source, c) Design created using aesthetic morphology principles

Based on the implementation of the source ornaments, the design process resulted in the final realization of the ma'rodh at The Al Jabbar Grand Mosque. It encapsulates the translation of conceptual ideas into architectural and spatial form, reflecting the integration of religious, cultural, and aesthetic values. The design emphasizes harmony between tradition and modernity, embodying the Al Jabbar Grand Mosque's vision as both a spiritual and educational landmark.

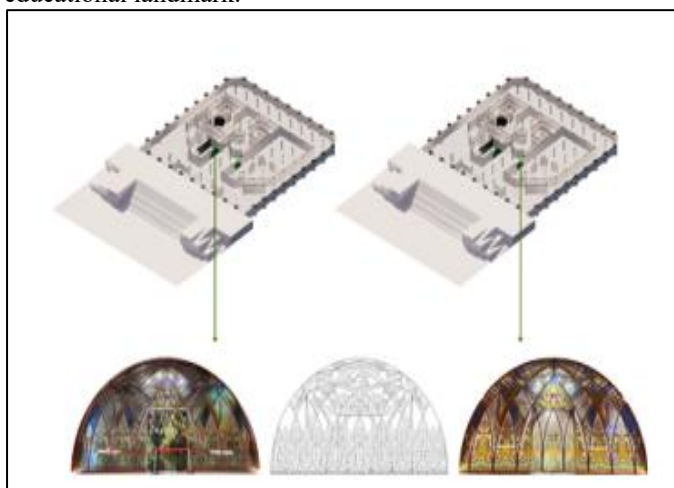


Figure 13. The design concept and final implementation of the ma'rodh gate of Al Jabbar Grand Mosque

3.5 Conflict (contradiction) between tradition and modernity in modern Islamic architecture

During the development of mosque architecture in Indonesia, there was a conflict between two perspectives. One was the desire to preserve local traditional values, and the other was to purify Islam's expression in a more general and standardized form. Rahmat's (2003) [32] research shows that this disagreement is between traditionalists, who focus on taklid, textualism, and keeping cultural values alive, and modernists, who promote tajdid, ijihad, and putting Islamic values globally and rationally.

According to research conducted by Rahmat (2003) [32], this dispute stems from the conflict between traditionalists, who focus on taklid, textualism, and the preservation of cultural values, and modernists, who promote tajdid, ijihad, and the contextualization of Islamic values globally and rationally. It can also be seen in the style of contemporary mosque decoration; traditional types of decoration are often considered 'less Islamic' or not reflective of Arab-centric Islamic authenticity. Nevertheless, local ornamentation has been an essential component of the architectural identity of Islam in the Nusantara region for centuries. Traditional local customs are threatened by symbols associated with the Middle East. This occurs amid the spirit of formalizing Islam as

singular and universalistic. This phenomenon has the potential to eliminate the diversity that characterizes pluralistic Islam.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that integrating aesthetic morphology within a design-led research framework systematically interprets and transforms traditional ornamentation in contemporary Islamic architecture. The morphological analysis of the ma'rodh gate of the Al-Jabbar Grand Mosque reveals how West Javanese ornaments, such as mega sumirat, wadanan, and sulur padjajaran, can be recontextualized through processes of abstraction, stylization, and proportioning to produce new visual identities that remain rooted in regional culture. Theoretically, this research contributes to design scholarship by positioning aesthetic morphology as a methodological bridge between heritage studies and architectural innovation. Practically, it underscores how regional ornamentation can sustain cultural identity within modern architectural expression, offering a replicable model for designers seeking context-sensitive approaches to Islamic architecture.

From an educational standpoint, the study highlights the value of design-led inquiry in architectural pedagogy, where visual analysis and creative experimentation function as parallel tools for knowledge generation. The research, however, is limited by its single-case focus on the Al-Jabbar Mosque; future investigations could expand the framework across different regions or building typologies to compare how aesthetic morphology operates within diverse material, climatic, and cultural contexts. Further studies may also incorporate digital design methods or parametric modeling to explore how computational tools can extend the reinterpretation of traditional ornaments. By articulating both analytical rigor and cultural sensitivity, this study affirms the potential of morphological design research to advance the discourse on identity, innovation, and continuity in contemporary Islamic architecture.

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