



STUDY OF ICONOGRAPHY AND ISLAMIC CULTURAL EXPRESSION AT THE GRAVE OF MARHUM PEKAN IN PEKANBARU

KAJIAN IKONOGRAFI DAN EKSPRESI KEBUDAYAAN ISLAM PADA MAKAM MARHUM PEKAN DI PEKANBARU

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Abstract

This study examines the visual symbols and cultural values contained in the Marhum Pekan Tomb, one of the historical sites inherited from the Siak Sri Indrapura Sultanate which is the cultural identity of Pekanbaru City. The purpose of this study is to reveal the meaning, philosophical values, and forms of acculturation of Islamic culture with local Malay traditions represented through the physical form and ornamentation of the tomb. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with Erwin Panofsky's iconographic approach which includes three stages of analysis, namely pre-iconography, iconography, and iconology. Data sources were obtained through field observations, in-depth interviews, as well as literature and documentation reviews. The results of the study show that visually (pre-iconography), the Marhum Pekan Tomb displays the architectural characteristics of the Selaso Jatuh Kembar House, the use of Malay regalia, stepped jirat forms, and headstones with gender-differentiating shapes, all of which are a blend of local and Islamic culture. Based on the iconographic analysis, all ornaments in the form of plant and flower motifs contain symbolic meanings of purity, fragrant names, good deeds, and obedience to Islamic teachings that prohibit the depiction of living creatures. Meanwhile, iconological analysis reveals the fundamental meaning that this tomb complex is a tangible manifestation of the Malay people's philosophy of life, namely "*Adat bersendi Syarak, Syarak bersendi Kitabullah*". The tomb of Marhum Pekan is not merely a burial place, but also evidence of the history of Islamic-Malay civilization and the collective memory of the community, which confirms that the development of Pekanbaru City grew and developed on a foundation of religious values and harmonious local cultural wisdom.

Keywords : Iconography, Cultural Expression, Archipelago Islam, Malay-Islam, Marhum Pekan Grave.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji simbol-simbol visual dan nilai budaya yang terkandung dalam Makam Marhum Pekan, salah satu situs bersejarah peninggalan Kesultanan Siak Sri Indrapura yang menjadi identitas budaya Kota Pekanbaru. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengungkapkan makna, nilai filosofis, dan bentuk akulturasi budaya Islam dengan tradisi lokal Melayu yang terepresentasikan melalui bentuk fisik dan ornamen makam. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif



dengan pendekatan ikonografi Erwin Panofsky yang meliputi tiga tahap analisis, yaitu pra ikonografi, ikonografi, dan ikonologi. Sumber data diperoleh melalui observasi lapangan, wawancara mendalam, serta kajian pustaka dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa secara visual (pra ikonografi), Makam Marhum Pekan menampilkan karakteristik arsitektur *Rumah Selo Jatuh Kembar*, penggunaan warna kebesaran Melayu, bentuk jirat berundak, dan nisan dengan bentuk yang membedakan jenis kelamin, yang keseluruhannya merupakan perpaduan budaya lokal dan Islam. Berdasarkan analisis ikonografi, seluruh ornamen berupa motif tumbuhan dan bunga mengandung makna simbolis kesucian, keharuman nama, amal perbuatan, serta ketaatan terhadap ajaran Islam yang melarang penggambaran makhluk bernyawa. Sementara itu, analisis ikonologi mengungkapkan makna mendasar bahwa kompleks makam ini merupakan wujud nyata dari falsafah hidup masyarakat Melayu, yaitu “*Adat bersendi Syarak, Syarak bersendi Kitabullah*”. Makam Marhum Pekan tidak sekadar menjadi tempat pemakaman, melainkan bukti sejarah peradaban Islam-Melayu serta ingatan kolektif masyarakat yang menegaskan bahwa perkembangan Kota Pekanbaru tumbuh dan berkembang di atas pondasi nilai agama dan kearifan budaya lokal yang harmonis.

Kata Kunci : Ikonografi, Ekspresi Budaya, Islam Nusantara, Melayu-Islam, Makam Marhum Pekan.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the cultural traditions of the Indonesian archipelago, ancient tombs are viewed as sacred sites (as a form of public respect for important figures) and held in high esteem, both because they contain historical sources of past civilizations and represent local identity in a region. Evidence that ancient tombs hold social value is evident in the enthusiasm of pilgrims, researchers, students, and those simply seeking to learn about the historical values of the civilizations they hold. Quoted from detik travel, Alfian said in the BRIN Goes to Industry 4 agenda on Tuesday, May 17, 2026, in his experience conducting research for years in several regions, he saw great potential in religious tourism, this is supported by the existence of cultural traditions and religious artifacts (detiktravel 2026). In the context of Nusantara Islamic culture, the existence of ancient tombs often demonstrates the acculturation of Islam and local cultures within a region. This is evident in the symbols found on tomb ornaments, the variety of headstone shapes, and the building structures themselves, which serve as visual representations of culture. Several studies have examined the intersection between Islam and local traditions found in tombs, such as the research of Fanisa Putri et al., which discusses the Islamic heritage and local wisdom at the Sabongkingking tomb in Palembang (Fanisa et al., 2025), and research conducted by Nazil Fahmi discussing the Symbols of Religious Culture at the Datokrama Tomb in Palu City (Fahmi, 2023).

In Islamic culture in the archipelago, the symbols found on tombs, the shape of the tombs, the ornaments, motifs, and also the architectural elements contained within them often show the process of adaptation of Islam to local culture. Evidence that the architecture of ancient tombs is the result of maintaining acculturation between the Pre-Islamic and Islamic eras is, such as research conducted by Rizal Wahyu with a study of Architectural Iconography on the Tomb of Sunan Giri (Rizal, 2019). The results of his research show that the architecture of the tomb dome is composed based on the concept of pre-Islamic religion, namely Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. A similar study was also conducted by Muh Fakhrihun with the title The Meeting of Hinduism, China, and Islam in the Ornaments of the Mosque and Tomb of Mantingan, Jepara (Muh, 2019). The results of the study show that the ornaments in the mosque and tomb of Mantingan Jepara, are a mixture of local indigenous culture with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. This shows that Islam in the archipelago did not develop instantly. Islam entered the archipelago through a long process of dialogue with the culture of the previous society, which means through the process of Islam meeting with the old traditions that existed in that society. Therefore, in this research, the study of the tomb of Marhum Pekan as a tomb that stores the history of Islamic-Malay civilization, especially in Riau, is important in order to see how the expression of Islamic culture is represented through the visual symbols found on the tomb site.



The existence of ancient tombs amidst today's modern urban development is a sign of their vital importance to the collective memory of a society. Collective memory, as a constructor of historical awareness, connects the memory of a community, its culture, and its community groups (Aulia et al., 2020). The tomb of Sultan Muhammad Ali Abdul Jalil Muazzam Syah, also known as Marhum Pekan, the object of this research, is a historic tomb for the people of Pekanbaru City, possessing historical and cultural value. For the people of Pekanbaru, Marhum Pekan's tomb represents the city's Malay-Islamic cultural identity. The researcher here provides a brief historical overview of Sultan Abdul Jalil Muazzam Syah or known as (Marhum Pekan), he was the 5th Sultan of Siak. It is known that when the 4th Sultan of Siak (Marhum Pekan's father) moved the capital from the Siak Kingdom to Senapelan, it did not develop as expected. Then during the reign of his son, the 5th Sultan of Siak (Marhum Pekan), he established a market (Pekan) on the banks of the Siak River. This market (Pekan) also developed and even became a major trading center as well as the main link between the west coast and the interior of Sumatra to the east coast of the Malacca Strait and the Malay Peninsula to Temasek. Due to the increasingly rapid development of the Senapelen region, the name Senapelan was changed to Pekan Baharu which means (New Market) so that it is now known as Pekanbaru.

So far, research related to the tombs of local figures in Pekanbaru is still relatively limited, especially those using iconographic approaches and Islamic cultural perspectives. Previous research has been conducted by several researchers such as Suroyo, et al., entitled *The Utilization of Virtual Reality in Introducing the History and Architecture of the Tomb of Marhum Pekan in School Learning*, which focuses on the application of Virtual Reality which is very effective and efficient in introducing history and cultural heritage to the younger generation through technology-based learning (Suroyo et al., 2025). Then the research conducted by Sulaiman Achmad, namely, *Management of the Pekanbaru City Culture and Tourism Office in Managing the Marhum Pekan Tomb Tourist Attraction*, the conclusion of which was the lack of budget for guides, data archives, and security so that this incident had an impact on the human resources of the Marhum Pekan tomb tourist attraction (Sulaiman, 2019).

Based on the description above, this study attempts to examine the iconography found at the tomb of Marhum Pekan and the Islamic culture represented through the visual symbols on the tomb. Observations and readings of the tomb's symbols are expected to provide a deeper understanding of the construction of Malay-Islamic cultural identity in Pekanbaru. Thus, this research contributes to the development of cultural studies, local history, and Islamic studies in the archipelago, particularly those related to tomb symbolism within the Islamic-Malay tradition in Pekanbaru.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The implementation of this research uses qualitative descriptive with the approach used being Erwin Panofsky's Iconography approach (Erwin Panofsky, 2018). Panofsky's iconography is divided into three analyses, namely, Pre-Iconography, Iconography, and Iconology. Pre-Iconography analysis describes the visual form, Iconography as the identification of the meaning of symbols, and Iconology as the understanding of cultural meaning and the outlook on life of the community (Hatt and Klonk, 2025). The data sources in this study were taken from primary data from the field through observation, in-depth interviews with the caretaker of the tomb as a party who understands the history of the tomb of Marhum Pekan, and secondary data obtained from books, journals, and library sources related to Iconography research on the tomb, as well as photographic image documentation. Thus, this study is expected to be able to read comprehensively the Tomb of Marhum Pekan as a representation of the expression of Islamic culture in the Archipelago, especially Malay Islam.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The tomb of Marhum Pekan is located within the Pekanbaru Grand Mosque complex in Kampung Bandar Village, Senapelan District, Pekanbaru City, Riau Province, to the south of the mosque grounds. The tomb was constructed before the mosque. The tomb complex dates back to 1765,



while the mosque was built in 1926. The entrance to the tomb complex features floral ornaments with green hues and arches, characteristic of Islamic culture.



Entrance to the Tomb Complex

Source: Personal Documentation

After the entrance to the tomb, in the inner courtyard there are several tombs known to be the Sultan's followers or relatives. Then the style of the house building which is used as a place for pilgrimage, shows the characteristics of a traditional Malay house or in Malay Tamadun called the Selaso Fall Kembar House, this can be seen from the characteristic carved decoration and the shape of the roof. Apart from that, there is also a dome depicting Islamic culture. In this case it is clear that the Marhum Pekan tomb complex is a representation of Malay-Islamic culture.



Image: Tomb Building

Source: Personal Documentation

Inside the house there are five tombs, namely, the tomb of Sultan Abdul Jalil Alamudin Syah (Marhum Bukit) / the 4th Sultan of Siak and Marhum Pekan's father (actually his first title was Marhum Senapelan / who moved the center of government from Mampura to Senapelan), then the tomb of Sultanah Khodijah (Daeng Tijah) Empress Marhum Bukit, the title Sultanah means (Empress who can replace the role of the King when he is absent), then the tomb Syaid Syarif Usman Shabuddin (Marhum Barat) / son-in-law of Marhum Bukit, next is the grave of Tengku Embong Badariah / daughter of Marhum Bukit and sister of Marhum Pekan and wife of Marhum Barat, and in the corner near the entrance is the grave of Marhum Pekan. The names of these titles are death titles/posthumous titles, which according to Mr. Dadang, as the caretaker of the tomb, said that it was customary in the Siak Sultanate for someone to have various names. The name when he was small, then the name when he was appointed Sultan, and when he died he was given the title. Based on Law No. 20 of 2009



concerning titles, awards or honors and the decision of the Governor of Riau, Sultan Muhammad Ali Abdul Jalil Muazzam Syah (Marhum Pekan) was officially appointed as a Riau Regional Figure and Fighter on August 1, 2025 by the Governor of Riau, Abdul Wahid.



Image: Marhum Pekan Warrior Charter

Source: Personal Documentation



Mr. Dadang (Guardian of the Tomb of the Deceased Pekan)
(people who know the history of the Marhum Pekan)

The researcher interviewed Mr. Dadang, a person with authority and a deep understanding of the history of Marhum Pekan, as well as the history of the construction of Marhum Pekan's tomb and the founding of Pekanbaru. Mr. Dadang said, "As a grave guard, I must understand the history, because the grave guard's job is to be a clear informant when visitors want to know the complete history of the deceased's life."

The following discussion will focus on the iconography found on the tomb, which will be divided into three sections: Pre-Iconography, Iconography, and Iconology. Pre-Iconography analysis



describes visual forms, Iconography identifies the meaning of symbols, and Iconology understands cultural meaning.

Pre Iconography

The Pre-Iconographic Stage as the identification of objects, which includes natural representations such as nature and plants (Panofsky, 1955:33-34). The style of buildings in the archipelago, especially those inherited from the Islamic era, has a strong characteristic, namely in the form of cultural acculturation, which combines elements of local traditions with Islam. The main characteristic of tomb buildings in the archipelago is Kijing or (Jirat in Malay Tamadun). Headstone, Tombstone, and Location. A tombstone is a base used as a boundary for a grave. In Indonesian culture, it usually has a stepped shape. Then there's the tombstone, which serves as a marker for the grave, placed on top of the gravestone. Each region has its own unique characteristics. Next is the tombstone, or protective structure for the grave. These tombstones also differ from region to region, with some being large and others being small. Then, location, the selection of a burial site in Nusantara culture usually chooses a place considered sacred such as on a hill or highland. Physically, the Marhum Pekan Tomb is an ancient building that has been renovated, this building is very thick with traditional Malay-Islamic characteristics with influences from the Siak Sri Indrapura Sultanate. The characteristic of the tomb building in Malay civilization uses the dominant colors of Malay grandeur, namely a combination of yellow, green and white which symbolizes the symbol of splendor, sovereignty, fertility and purity (Suroyo et al., 2025). Furthermore, the shape of the headstone is adapted to gender. Traditional Malay headstones are specifically designed to distinguish gender. To indicate a male, the headstone is cylindrical/club-like, and to indicate a female, the headstone is flat. The headstone features floral carvings, with jasmine or melur motifs in Malay culture.

Iconography

Iconographic analysis is the process of identifying secondary meanings. At this stage, the meaning of previous aspects of the text is read in relation to themes and concepts. Observations of the relationship between forms, themes, and concepts in practical experience and themes from works of art derived from imagery, literary sources, and allegory are examined (Panofsky, 1955: 35). Conceptual analysis of art is a philosophical effort to understand the thoughts and creations that form the basis for the formation of an object.



Image: Gravestone of the deceased in Pekan

Source: Personal Documentation

Based on the patterns and shapes of the gravestones, carvings with floral motifs and tendrils are characteristic of Islamic art in the archipelago. This is due to restrictions on depicting living creatures



such as animals and humans. Islamic teachings prohibit depictions of living beings (Hudaidah et al., 2023). Therefore, the carvings on the tombstones use natural elements as symbolism. The Gada tombstone shape represents a man with strength. Floral motifs are often represented as symbols of fragrance. In Indonesian culture, fragrance is often represented as the fragrance of a name, and in Islamic culture, fragrance is represented as charity. The floral motif also symbolizes purity of heart and soul, while the vine and flower bud motifs depict growth, fertility, and a symbol of hope that will continue to grow. The top of the headstone, which resembles a flower bud, has a philosophical meaning of the purity of the soul that will return to the creator. Then the round shape reflects the cycle of human life that begins from birth until returning to its origin, namely Allah SWT. Headstones with carvings like this demonstrate the acculturation between Islamic values and local culture. Overall, the meaning of the headstone is not merely decoration, but a visualization that reminds us of the purpose of human creation, which is to always strive for good deeds to be accounted for before Allah SWT.



Image: Jirat Marhum Pekan

Source: Personal Documentation

The philosophical symbols found in Jirat Marhum Pekan are closely related to Malay-Islamic traditions and social status. The shape of the steps philosophically symbolizes the level of rank or nobility of the person being buried. As a figure known as the founder of Pekanbaru, the stepped structure of the building shows Marhum Pekan's high position in the social and spiritual strata of the Malay-Islamic society. Then the color of the maroon stone material gives the impression of the authority and solidity of a King which is in line with the concept of Izzah (glory) in Islam which is applied to a leader who has made great contributions. The yellow plaque depicts the shape of Tabarruk as a reminder of the King's lineage which is considered to have historical links to the spread of Islam in the Riau region. The position of this jirat is in the same building space along with the rest of the Siak Sri Indrapura royal family, in this case showing the values of kinship and unity which represent the unity of the people in Malay tradition. From Jirat, this tomb is comprehensively a historical artifact that confirms Pekanbaru's identity as a city born from the sovereign Malay-Islamic Sultanate.

Iconological Interpretation

Iconological analysis is a stage of in-depth interpretation aimed at understanding the essential meaning, philosophical values, and outlook on life that underlie the creation of the forms and symbols on the tomb of Marhum Pekan. At this stage, the reading is no longer limited to the physical form or symbolic meaning alone, but rather reveals the basic ideas, cultural principles, and character of the Malay-Islamic community reflected through the artifacts (Panofsky, 1955: 36). The tomb of Marhum Pekan is not just a burial structure, but a tangible manifestation of the synthesis of local culture and Islamic teachings that have fused to form the Malay-Islamic cultural identity in Riau.

Fundamentally, all the visual elements in this tomb complex reflect the concept of Malay civilization based on Islamic law. The natural elements found on the tombstones, in the form of plant and flower motifs that dominate all ornaments, are a manifestation of the understanding of Islamic teachings that prohibit the depiction of living creatures as a form of respect and obedience to Allah SWT. This shows that the Malay people in expressing their art and culture do not eliminate religious values, but rather adapt their forms of expression to remain in line with the principles of faith. The use



of yellow, green, and white as the main characteristics of the building, is not merely the identity of the sultanate, but a representation of the Malay people's philosophy of life: yellow symbolizes sovereignty and honor that comes from piety, green as a symbol of fertility, peace, and Islamic identity, and white signifies purity of soul and sincerity of heart. This unity of color teaches that power and glory in Malay culture must always be based on noble religious and moral values.

The building form of the Selaso Fall Twin House, which is used as a tomb protection building, has a very deep philosophical meaning. This architectural form symbolizes the concept of balance and unity which is the core of Malay custom, namely "*Adat bersendi Syarak, Syarak bersendi Kitabullah*" (Tiara, 2025). Custom and religion are seen as two things that cannot be separated, go hand in hand and strengthen each other. The existence of Marhum Pekan's grave in the same building with other members of the royal family, confirms the values of family, brotherhood and unity of the people. This reflects the Malay people's view that leadership is an inherited trust, and the royal family is the axis of unification of a society that lives under the guidance of religious values and customs.

The existence of this tomb, built before the mosque, and its location within the mosque's vicinity, signifies that Pekanbaru's historical development is inseparable from the role of religious figures and the spread of Islam. The tomb of Marhum Pekan bears witness to the progress of Pekanbaru, which began with the market he founded, built on a foundation of Islamic values. As a collective memory of the community, this site serves as a confirmation of Pekanbaru's identity, demonstrating its birth, growth, and development as a center of Malay-Islamic civilization. Through this iconological study, it is clear that the tomb of Marhum Pekan is a cultural expression that teaches harmony between humans and God, humans with each other, and humans with nature and history a manifestation of Nusantara Islamic culture that is down-to-earth, local in character, yet remains universal in spirit.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the iconographic study and discussion regarding the expression of Islamic culture at the Tomb of Marhum Pekan in Pekanbaru, several conclusions can be drawn as follows:

1. Visually (Pre-Iconographic Stage), the Marhum Pekan Tomb displays the characteristics of a heritage building from the Siak Sri Indrapura Sultanate, which is strongly influenced by Malay-Islamic cultural patterns. This is evident in the architectural form of the Selaso Jatuh Kembar House, the use of yellow, green, and white, the stepped jirat (pillar) shape, and the different headstones for men and women. These physical elements are the result of the harmonious acculturation of local culture with Islamic values.
2. In terms of symbolic meaning (Iconographic Stage), all the ornaments and shapes of the building have a deep meaning and are not just decoration. Plant and flower motifs symbolize purity, fragrant name, and good deeds which are in line with Islamic teachings which avoid depicting living creatures. The shape of the stepped headstone symbolizes the level of nobility and social status, while the distinctive shape of the tombstone is a symbol of strength, steadfastness, and the cycle of human life that will return to the Creator. Each existing element is a visualization of religious values translated into cultural expressions.
3. Through an iconological approach, it is revealed that the Marhum Pekan Tomb is a concrete representation of the Malay people's philosophy of life, namely "*Adat bersendi Syarak, Syarak bersendi Kitabullah*". The existence of this site reflects the community's outlook on life that places religion and customs as an inseparable whole. This tomb is not only a burial site, but also historical evidence that the development of Pekanbaru City and its people's civilization grew and developed on the foundation of Islamic values and a strong Malay cultural identity. The Marhum Pekan Tomb also functions as a collective memory that confirms the identity of the Pekanbaru community as a society that upholds the cultural and historical heritage of Islam Nusantara.



Recommendation

1. For the Government and Cultural Managers: Efforts to preserve, maintain, and manage the Marhum Pekan Tomb are expected to continue, given its significant historical and cultural value as a regional identity. Information regarding the meaning of its symbols should be publicized so that it is recognized not only as a pilgrimage site but also as a space for historical and cultural education.
2. For further researchers: This research can be developed using other scientific approaches, such as architectural studies, social history, or cultural heritage management, as well as conducting a more in-depth study of other historical sites in the Riau region that have not been widely researched, in order to complete the knowledge base regarding Islamic-Malay culture.
3. For the Community: It is hoped that they will develop a greater sense of pride and concern for the historical heritage in their environment. Understanding the meaning behind existing cultural symbols is expected to strengthen patriotism, preserve local wisdom, and preserve the noble values of Islamic-Malay culture for future generations.

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