



# Religious Moderation Values in Ancient Muslim Tombs in Palembang

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## ABSTRACT

As a universal religion, Islam has brought its own civilization that is deeply rooted in a very long tradition since the time of the Prophet (Rasulullah). When in contact with local and particular situations, Islamic civilization retains its true essence, although instrumentally it reveals conditional forms. Therefore, Islamic culture in Indonesia is distinctively different from Islamic culture in other Islamic countries. The evidence can be seen from several material cultures that have been studied archaeologically. The Islamic archaeological heritage can be grouped into two categories, namely: sacred -or sacralized- and profane buildings. The first category includes mosques and tombs. The second category includes palace buildings, public buildings, settlements, and others. Using an archaeo-historical approach, this paper will discuss the ancient Muslim tombs in Palembang as a cultural heritage of the Sultanate of Palembang Darussalam (1659-1823). This study intends to analyze the patterns or decoration on these ancient Islamic tombs. The archaeological evidence is then reconstructed historically. Based on the form of decoration on the tombs, it is known that there is a Hindu-Buddhist influence on the existing tomb complex. In fact, there is also a tomb decoration called the "Portuguese Cross". These archaeological traces reinforce the assumption that religious moderation has been practiced by the religious and political elites and Muslims of Palembang in the past. Religious moderation is the main basis for intercultural acculturation. In this way, Islam can be deeply rooted so that a lot of local wisdom is based on Islamic teachings. We need to learn from the past to realize Islam as a mercy for all nature.

**Keywords:** *Archaeological traces, Ancient tombs, The Sultanate of Palembang.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is common knowledge that Indonesia is diverse in religion, culture and ethnicity. Diversity has two opposing potential forces, as a "force of integration" and - at the same time - "potential disintegration" (Akhmadi, 2019). This diversity and plurality will become the basic capital of development in itself if managed properly, becoming uniqueness and strength. However, such socio-cultural conditions can be a challenge in itself if not addressed wisely and wisely so that it has the potential to become a threat of division and feud that leads to the collapse of the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia (Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia/NKRI).

The Republic of Indonesia has two important modalities to shape its multicultural character: democracy and local wisdom. These two values are believed and understood to be able to maintain religious harmony if managed properly. One of the important things that can be extracted from the nation's local

wisdom is the teaching of religious moderation. Framing religious moderation is important in order to manage a tolerant religious life in Indonesia's plural and multicultural society (Sutrisno, 2019). This local wisdom can be extracted from the historical heritage of Indonesian Islamic culture left behind by previous generations of Muslims.

Based on the historical background, the spirituality of religious moderation - among others - can be traced in the ancient Islamic tombs in Palembang. These ancient Islamic tombs are heavily influenced by prehistoric and Hindu-Buddhist cultural elements, both in the shape of the buildings and the decorations inside (Purwanti, 2022). In addition to reflecting cultural multiculturalism, the character of ancient Islamic tombs also contains spiritual values of religious moderation that need to be further revealed. Therefore, this study is important to obtain a historical foundation in cultivating religious moderation as part of the nation's culture and character education.

The question of this research is what elements of religious moderation are found in ancient Islamic tombs in Palembang City. Thus, this study aims to trace the traces of religious moderation in ancient Islamic tombs and ethnicity in Palembang City, South Sumatra. The expected result of this study is to provide an overview of the ethnic, cultural and religious diversity of Palembang society during the Palembang Sultanate (1659-1823). This study is based on archaeological sources, especially tombs, with a historical approach.

## 2. FRAMEWORK

The word moderation is derived from the Latin "*moderatio*" which means "moderation" (neither excess nor deficiency). In English, moderation means the quality or state of being reasonable and avoiding behaviour, speech, etc., that is extreme or beyond what is normal or acceptable

(<https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/moderation>).

Meanwhile, in the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI, Big Indonesia Dictionary), the word moderation has two meanings: [1] always avoiding extremes of behaviour or expression; and [2] a tendency toward moderation or the middle way (Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1990). In Arabic, moderation (*al-washath* or *washathiyah*) means "the middle" or "the best option". Among the principles of moderation (*washathiyah*) are *tawassuth* (middle) (Munawwir, 1997), *i'tidal* (fair, straight, and firm), *tawazun* (balanced), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *musawah* (equality or egalitarian), *shura* (deliberation), and *ishlah* (reform). People who apply *wasathiyah* principles can be called *wasith* (mediators).

In terms of terms, religious moderation is a religious practice that spreads peace, spreads love, anytime, anywhere, and to anyone. Thus, religion is not to homogenize diversity, but to respond to diversity with a wise and thoughtful attitude. Therefore, supposedly, the presence of religion is intended so that the dignity and degree of humanity are always guaranteed and protected. Yusuf al-Qaradlawiy (1926-2022) -an Egyptian scholar- once said that the concept of *washathiyah* (moderation) is one of the important factors in the universalism, flexibility, and suitability of teachings in every time and place as a characteristic of Islam (Tim Penyusun, 2023). Among the benchmarks of religious moderation are: humanitarianism, harmony, mutual agreement and public order. This concept is promoted by the government - especially the Ministry of Religion Affairs- and is a national commitment to prevent religious radicalism, instill a tolerant attitude and accommodate local culture. Through this institution, the government always campaigns for a moderate understanding of Islam and prevents the spread of radical ideas in society. The culmination of religious moderation is the preservation of the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia (Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia/NKRI) from destruction. In terms of terms, religious moderation is a religious practice that spreads peace, spreads love, anytime, anywhere, and to anyone.

Even though the concept of religious moderation is new (around 2019), this concept is used to analyse ancient Islamic tombs in Palembang, both in terms of the shape of the building and the existing motifs. The reason, these tombs show the character of multiculturalism despite being a Muslim tomb complex. Palembang city has a long history and is the oldest city in Indonesia. Its location on the banks of the Musi River - as the main supporter of water transportation - makes Palembang a politically and economically strategic city. This is shown by the history of Palembang City which was once the centre of government of the Sriwijaya Maritime Kingdom (VI - XII centuries), a colony of the Majapahit Kingdom, and the Demak Sultanate. Furthermore, Palembang City became the centre of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate (16th - 19th centuries).

Palembang City is also an important entrance and exit point for South Sumatra and a meeting point for land and sea transportation. Such topographical and geographical conditions have supported Palembang City as an economic and business centre in Sumatra. Palembang's greatness as a trading city distributor for areas outside Palembang and as a link in the trade network of the western Dutch East Indies commercial centres. Palembang was nicknamed as *de groote handelstad van Sumatra*, state of production, commerce and trade, and state of estates. These nicknames emphasize that all business affairs are dominant in Palembang (Santun, 2010).

The important political and economic role of Palembang City above has attracted ethnic groups to come and live in this city. This is shown by the diversity of Palembang's population. Besides the indigenous people of Palembang, there are Arabs, Chinese, and Indians (Sevenhoven, 1971). There are also tribes: Malay, Javanese, Banjar, Bugis, Madurese, Minang, and others. This diversity shows that Palembang people are a society that is open (welcome) to every different group. They have a high level of tolerance towards every difference. The character of Palembang people has facilitated and supported the occurrence of high cultural acculturation and assimilation. This assumption can be seen in the architecture of buildings, both profane and sacred, in Palembang. An example of a sacred building is the Great Mosque of Palembang, which is an acculturation of three cultures: Indonesia, China (mosque roof) and Europe (mosque gate) (Purwanti, 2004). Another is the building of ancient Islamic tombs which is the focus of the study in this paper. Thus, Islamic culture in Indonesia has its own distinctiveness that is different from Islamic culture in other Islamic countries (Ali, 2021). As a universal religion, Islam has brought its own civilization that is deeply rooted in a very long tradition since the time of the Prophet. When it comes into contact with local and particular situations, the Islamic civilization retains its true essence, although instrumentally it reveals conditional forms (Maksum, 1999).

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

The research on tracing the traces of religious moderation in ancient Islamic tombs in Palembang was conducted by means of data collection, verification, and data analysis. The data collection process was carried out by using primary and secondary data sources. Primary data sources were obtained through field surveys of tomb sites in Palembang City. Secondary data sources were obtained through relevant literature and research reports on the same place. The field survey was conducted by identifying the typology of headstones and tombs, decorations, and their placement.

Meanwhile, stylistic analysis was carried out on the shape and decoration of the tombstones and tombs. Next, an analogy is made based on the decoration of the tomb forms and certain symbols or emblems on the tomb. These symbols and emblems hold many meanings and particular meanings from the point of view of religious moderation. Referring to the results of this analogy, the values of religious moderation attached to graves or tombstones can be revealed. The results of this identification are then connected to secondary data sources to determine the meaning of ancient Islamic headstones or tombs in Palembang City. The sciences of history, culture and ethnicity can be used as a basis for describing the existence of spirituality of religious moderation in ancient Islamic tombs in Palembang.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Islam in the archipelago left a large number of tombs or tomb complexes, from Aceh to Ternate-Tidore. Most of these tomb complexes, especially the tombs of cleric, kings or sultans, more specifically in Java, still receive a certain treatment from some people. Some of these tombs are considered holy and sacred, sometimes even mistakenly used as a place to ask for blessings. Islam certainly does not recognize mourning ceremonies or death commemorations beyond the standard procedures in the care of the body until the funeral.

According to the hadith narrated by Ahmad Muslim, Abu Dawud, Tirmizi, and Nasa'i, building a grave in Islam is only allowed as a sign of the grave by raising the ground above it by about "an inch", which is given a stone or other object to mark the head, with a note that it is not allowed to be walled, inscribed or made buildings on it (Ambary, 1998).

Islamic funerary traditions do not recognize funeral goods, the use of coffins, unless the coffin includes soil that is touched to the corpse. Some hadiths that regulate funerals in the tradition include:

1. The grave should be elevated from the surrounding ground to make it more recognizable (Baihaqi);
2. Marking the grave with a stone or other object at the head (Abu Daud);
3. It is forbidden to wall the grave (Ahmad and Muslim);
4. It is forbidden to write on the grave (Nasa'i);

5. It is forbidden to make buildings on graves (Ahmad and Muslim);
6. The grave should not be elevated; if it is already hilly, it should be levelled (Muslim);
7. It is forbidden to make graves into mosques (Bukhari and Muslim).

The hadiths should be seen as normative rules of Islam. While the construction of tombs in Indonesia - some of which clearly contradict the above hadiths - should certainly be seen as another reality, although still not in the context of a denial of the Islamic creed. It is rather at the level of *mu'amalat*, the technicalities that continue from the roots of pre-Islamic traditions, especially regarding ethnographic permanence in ancestor veneration. Pre-Islamic traditions hardly recognized or acknowledged death, hence it was often disguised or interpreted as "returning to the divine realm", "disappearing", "vanishing", "having passed away" and so on. Tombs are therefore not regarded as graves in the Islamic sense, but as places of "long sleep" (*pasarean*), "astana", or "place of tranquillity" (*kasunyatan*). In addition, the remains of early Islamic tombs also often connote the type of occupation of the Islamic (Muslim) community, which also shows the diversity of dating evidence of the presence of Islam in the archipelago.

In general, Islamic tombs in Indonesia have three elements that complement each other, namely tomb, headstone and cupola (dome) (Masyudi, 1999). A tomb or grave is a hole where a dead human body is buried (Montana, 1983). Islamic tombs are characterized by their longitudinal north-south direction with a depth of between 2-5 fathoms for adults. At the base of the western wall, a groove is made called a burrow where the body is laid with the position tilted to the right, so that the face in the north faces the qibla. After the body is buried in the grave, it is then covered with soil and a marker is placed on it (north and south). This grave marker is made of stone, wood, or bamboo, called a *nisan* (headstone), which is a building structure consisting of a cupola, tomb and gravestone (Montana, 1983).

The overview of the tomb above is still incomplete, as there are other components that form the unity of the tomb. The other components of the tomb are the tomb, the headstone, and the roof and walls of the tomb. The shape of the roof varies, including pyramid or dome-shaped. Tombs with complete components like this are usually not the tombs of ordinary people, but of honourable figures, who are considered to have advantages over the general public. They may be the tombs of kings, cleric, famous scholars, or the founders of a village or countryside.

Of the 12 cemetery complexes studied in 2020, it can be seen that not all tombs have complete components, because there are a number of tombs that are only marked with headstones that are directly planted in the ground (Purwanti, 2020). In addition to these tombs, there is the Saka Tiga tomb, in Indralaya, Ogan Ilir Regency, Palembang. In this cemetery is buried Prince Sideng Rajek, the king of Palembang who ruled in 1653-1660

(Purwanti, 2006). Tombs with complete components are only found in the tomb of Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin Jayawikrama, the tomb of Prince Kamuk, the tomb of Sultan Muhammad Najamuddin Adikesumo, the tomb of Sultan Muhammad Bahauddin, in Kawah Tekurep Cemetery Complex. In addition, a tomb with complete components is found in the Talangkerangga Cemetery Complex, although the roof has been destroyed and the walls damaged. Another tomb is the Prince Syarif Ali Tomb Complex.



**Figure 1.** Stepped pyramid in Talang Kerangga Cemetery.



**Figure 2.** Pyramid in Talang Kerangga Cemetery.

Research on the tombs in Palembang revealed the existence of tomb, gravestones, ornaments and inscriptions. The form of tomb in a number of tombs in Palembang shows elements of prehistoric culture and Hindu-Buddhist culture. The elements of prehistoric culture are found in the tomb in the form of pyramid (Figure 2) and stepped pyramid (Figure 1). The pundits are made of rectangular bricks. Tomb in the form of pyramid and stepped pyramid are found in the Talangkerangga Tomb Complex, Sultan Mansyur Tomb Complex, and Kawah Tengkuerep Tomb Complex. On top of the pyramid and stepped pyramid, headstones are placed. The influence of Hindu culture can be seen in the yoni-shaped tomb found in the Sabokingking Tomb Complex and the Prince Sideng Rajek Tomb Complex in Sakatiga. Yoni is a manifestation of Dewi Parwati, the wife of Lord Shiva (Figure 3). Lord Shiva is one of the gods in Hinduism. Hindu-Buddhist elements can also be seen in the use of antefix ornamental motifs on the corners of this yoni-shaped tomb. Antefix is one of the decorative motifs on Hindu and Buddhist temples (Purwanti, 2021; 2023). Other ornamental motifs that show Hindu-Buddhist elements are leaf vine, paste paper, Greek cross and antefix (figure 4; Purwanti, 2021).

The tombstones in Palembang based on their typology can be grouped into Demak-Tralaya type, Aceh type, local type and Yemen type (figure 5; Purwanti, 2023). The diversity of gravestone shapes can be used as an indication of the ethnicity in Palembang, namely Javanese, Acehnese, Palembangese and Arab ethnicities. All of the gravestone shapes have geometric, plant and

animal decorations. Most of the decorations show the influence of Hindu-Buddhist religion, namely medallions, Majapahit suns, stylized kala heads, lotuses, and paste paper, plants in urns (Hiranyagarbha), camouflaged kalahead motifs, lotuses and swastikas (Purwanti, 2021). Similar ornaments can be found on temples in Central Java and East Java (Munandar, 1999; Istari, 2015). During the period of Islamic influence, these ornaments were also found on the minarets of the Kudus Mosque, Demak Mosque, Mantingan Mosque and tomb, the tomb of Sunan Bonang, and the Great Mosque of Banten (Munandar, 1999).



**Figure 3.** Yoni-shaped at Sabokingking Cemetery



**Figure 4.** Antefiks motif ornament at Sabokingking Cemetery

The cloud or meander ornamental motif is a form of development of the swastika motif. This swastika ornamental motif is also found on tombstones in the

Kawah Tekurep Cemetery Complex Palembang. Swastika is an ornamental variety known in Chinese, European (German), Egyptian and Indian cultures. The swastika symbol is also known in Hinduism and Buddhism.



a. Tombstones type of Demak Tralaya



b. Tombstones type of Aceh



c. Local tombstones type



d. Tombstones type of Yemen



a. Meander motif ornament



b. Medallion and sun of Majapahit motif ornament



c. Greek cross motif ornament



d. Jasmin motif ornament

**Figure 5.** The various motif ornament of tombstones at Palembang

Chinese influence on tombstones in Palembang can be seen in the use of decorative motifs of rhino horns, bottle gourds, ribboned paper scrolls, book, swords, phoenixes and butterflies. Phoenix and butterfly decorations are also known in Ancient Egyptian, Persian and Arab cultures. Apart from that, the decoration that is influenced by Persia is the shape of plants that come out of pots/vases. Yemeni (Arabic) influence can also be seen in the shape of the cupola of the tomb of Sultan Muhammad Badaruddin Jaya Wikrama which is similar to the shape of the dome of the Sufi tombs in Aynat, Yemen.

Another type of decoration applied to gravestones is calligraphy, which emerged in the Arab world and is a development of the art of writing beautifully in Arabic letters called khat (Ambary, 1998). Calligraphy is one of the most important works of Islamic art. The variety of calligraphy found on tombs in Palembang includes the *Tsuluts*, and *Riq'ah* styles (Purwanti, et al. 2021).

The diversity of Islamic tomb shapes and decorative motifs is a form of expression from artists in the form of ideas expressed in the form of lines of colour and rhythm in the form of works of art. Art is a product of activity carried out consciously, aimed at obtaining or achieving aesthetics, and at the same time functions as a way to translate symbols. The quality of symbols and aesthetics is influenced by the sublimation of harmony, contrast, frequency, rhythm and intensity in the process of the birth of art (Ambary, 1998). Islamic culture, according to Ismail al-Faruqi (1989), views beauty as a value on which the entire validity of Islam depends, which is spread through the values of the absolute beauty of the Qur'an. Al-Faruqi suggests that aesthetics in Islam is a sublimation of evidence of the Divine, where the *I'jaz* (quality) of the al-Qur'an cannot be imitated and matched, both in terms of literature, composition, rhythm, beauty, *balaghah*, perfection of style and power in displaying meaning. In the Islamic concept, Allah is the centre of these aesthetic values (Ambary, 1998). The aim of art in the Islamic conception is the same as the aim of life of a Muslim, namely the search for material and spiritual happiness in this world and the afterlife, as well as being a blessing for all of nature under the auspices of the pleasure of Allah SWT.

Muslim artist, just as Allah permeates his life. In this case, sincerity is the starting point, *mardhatillah* is the destination point, while *amar ma'ruf* is the line of practice. There is an opinion that even though God loves beauty and created everything beautifully, there are strong symptoms among Muslims that Islam reduces the progress of one branch of art, especially with the assumption that there is a "prohibition" on making statues or depicting humans (Alisyahbana, 1982), although There is not a single verse in the Qur'an that clearly refers to the prohibition of depicting these living creatures (Grabbar, 1987). On the other hand, it is clear that in the development of Islamic civilization, there was an even distribution of local features that enveloped Islamic civilization, including artistic products in the dimensions of space and time, as seen in Muslim tombs in

Palembang. Pre-Islamic elements are carved throughout the tomb. Not only pre-Islamic elements from local culture, but also elements of foreign culture, such as ancient Chinese, Egyptian and Arabic culture. The application of non-Islamic cultural elements to Muslim graves in Palembang shows the flexibility of artists in expressing their artistic creativity and understanding that matters of art include: *antum a'lamu bi umuri dunyakum* is mean "you are more understanding of the your bussines on the world" (you are an expert in that field). And these artists also understand that Islamic art is part of Islamic civilization as well as showing dynamics and enrichment, in addition to the fact that the function of art is to appreciate God's gilding (*shibgha-tullah*) (Ambary, 1998).

The Muslim graves in Palembang in this research are the graves of the sultan and his family, the sultan's ulama and the sultanate's bureaucrats. The choice of the shape of the grave and its decoration is the family's choice. The selection process of course has gone through a discussion process between family members to obtain the best results (*wasatiyah*). The selection process certainly took into account Islamic values, as proven by the non-use of anthropomorphic decorations on graves. Depictions of phoenix birds and butterflies are still acceptable, because in the Koran there is no verse that prohibits depictions of living creatures. The tolerance shown by the sultan's family, ulama and families in the arts is one form of manifestation of an attitude of religious moderation. This attitude is of course also followed by the people of Palembang.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Muslim graves in Palembang have gravestones and tombstones that embody elements of pre-Islamic culture, cultures from abroad and ethnic groups. The elements of pre-Islamic culture are prehistoric (megalithic) and Hindu-Buddhist culture. Cultural elements from abroad come from China, Egypt, Arabia and Europe. The ethnic groups that can be identified from the shape of the tombstones are Javanese, Acehnese, Palembang (local) and Arab (Yemeni).

The identification of elements of pre-Islamic culture, culture from abroad and ethnic diversity shows the values of tolerance of Palembang society during the sultanate. These values of tolerance are the result of the Palembang society's attitude of religious moderation, which prioritizes humanity, harmony, mutual agreement and public order. This historical fact is an important asset in fostering religious harmony in Indonesia in order to maintain the integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI/Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia).

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