

## ISLAMIC ORNAMENTAL MOTIFS IN INDONESIA

**T**he Islamic epoch – lasting since the time when Islam gained dominance in Java (15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century) till today – is the time of a new great cultural impact on Indonesia, following the Indian influence.

Islam spread in Southeast Asia mainly (but not only) through trade contacts. The Islamisation of Indonesia was a long process that can be divided into three phases: the appearance of Muslim merchants (Arab, Persian and Gujarati traders arriving by sea), the formation of Islamic sultanates (the 13<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> c.) and later the expansion of the new religion to almost the entire archipelago<sup>1</sup>. The initial contacts of the country with the new religion began in Sumatra and could have already occurred in the 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>2</sup>.

Sources of Islam were different: 1. It reached Indonesia directly from the Middle East through the visits of merchants from the Middle East and India as well as Turkish craftsmen; 2. The fashion prevailing in the Indian Mughal court was imitated. As the Mughal emperors significantly supported decorative arts, so did the rulers in Southeast Asia. 3. Through merchants from southern China, some of whom were Muslims. 4. After the consolidation of the new religion in Indonesia, the obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca (*Al-Hajj*) was a very important factor uniting the country with the centres of Islam<sup>3</sup>; 5. What is more, already since the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> c. the Indian cultural influence on Indonesia, especially when

---

<sup>1</sup> Widyastuti (2009: 109).

<sup>2</sup> Widyastuti (2009: 108). Sumatra was recorded in Arab sources since the 7<sup>th</sup> century, especially a place called Zabag, having importance to trade; Widyastuti (2009: 156).

<sup>3</sup> Maxwell (2003: 300); Kerlogue (2001: 127).

it concerned fabrics, was inseparable from Islam<sup>4</sup>); 6. On Java the new faith had great missionaries – collectively called *wali sanga*, or nine saints – who were active in the 15<sup>th</sup> and partly in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. Till today they are worshipped in Indonesia, especially on Java<sup>5</sup>.

The area of Aceh – the today's northernmost province of Sumatra – is considered to be the cradle of Indonesian Islam<sup>6</sup>. It is currently assumed in science that the first **Muslim state** in Indonesia was Samudra – also called Samudra-Pasai – on the north coast of Sumatra (in today's Aceh), whose existence had been observed before the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>7</sup> Finally, the whole the northern part of the island was united as Aceh which, by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> and in the 16<sup>th</sup> c., gained reputation as the centre of Islam in Southeast Asia (all the more since the local Muslim competitor – Sultanate of Malacca on the Malay Peninsula – was in 1511 captured by the Portuguese)<sup>8</sup>.

Islam spread from Aceh to the people of Minangkabau (West Sumatra) and Riau (in the eastern part of the island) and next from the Minangkabau to Jambi (south of Riau). According to Tome Pires, a Portuguese chronicler and the author of the *Summa Oriental* written shortly after 1511 (the author was a pharmacist by profession and eyewitness to the Portuguese conquests in Southeast Asia), most rulers in Sumatra, from Aceh to Palembang in the south, were Muslim (however with the exception of the southern tip and also the Bataks in the northern part of the island).

Islam also spread from the area of today's Aceh to Java, which had been dominated by the new religion since the late 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> c. (starting from the north coast, called the *Pasisir*). Next, the so called coastal Malays from east Sumatra played an important role in the further Islamisation of Indonesia. Already at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> c. there existed the small, but dynamic, Muslim sultanates Ternate and Tidore in the Moluccas (Maluku). South Sulawesi became Muslim

---

<sup>4</sup>) Maxwell (2003: 154).

<sup>5</sup>) Maxwell (2003: 348).

<sup>6</sup>) Smith (1997: 5).

<sup>7</sup>) Although, according to unproven suppositions, Islam was also present in Palembang, South Sumatra, already since the 7<sup>th</sup> c. There is, too, an evidence that a Muslim community existed already in the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> c. in East Java, but we do not know whether it formed any state; Widyastuti (2009: 108).

<sup>8</sup>) The period of greatest prosperity of Aceh occurred in the 17<sup>th</sup> c., when the country controlled a large part of Sumatra and the Malay Peninsular area; Smith (1997: 6–7).

later, in the 17<sup>th</sup> c., and from there Islam spread to Lombok, Sumbawa (the Lesser Sunda Islands) and the coastal areas of Borneo<sup>9)</sup>.

The oldest Muslim polity in Java was the sultanate of Demak (1475–1548) on the North Coast (*Pasisir*). The new religion was gradually propagated from the *Pasisir* together with the political expansion, warfare included, of local Islamic states towards the centre of the island. There occurred the destruction of the kingdom of Majapahit (Hindu with Buddhist elements), which had existed since the late 13<sup>th</sup> till about the turn of the 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> c. (the capital: Trowulan in East Java) and controlled an area comparable to today's Indonesia. Since the late 16<sup>th</sup> to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> c. on Central Java there existed the sultanate of Mataram<sup>10)</sup>, the largest Muslim state of the Javanese. Its traditions are continued up to this day in the royal courts of Yogyakarta (with a large autonomy) and neighbouring Surakarta, which were the result of conflicts and divisions of Mataram<sup>11)</sup>.

Islam is now the dominant religion in Indonesia (approximately 88% of the inhabitants are Muslim) and basically comprise nearly the whole of its territory (other than Indian cultural influence, which was limited to Java, Sumatra and Bali) however the country is Islamised in varying degrees and on many islands adherents of other religions (Christianity, Hinduism, animism) live. On Java there remained small communities of non-Muslims and the neighbouring island of Bali is an enclave of Hinduism until now (with ancient forms of art, formerly typical of pre-Islamic Java).

Javanese Islam is largely syncretic, permeated with earlier, animistic beliefs. Till the 15<sup>th</sup> c. Hinduism and Buddhism were religions of the upper strata of the society, and the lower class was animistic. Even rulers who accepted Islam in their small polities on the North Coast did not impose the Islamic Sharia law, but continued to let the traditional *adat* law exist<sup>12)</sup>. The religious syncretism resulted: a combination of elements of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam with

---

<sup>9)</sup> Bodrogi (1972: 68–69).

<sup>10)</sup> Called also Mataram II, to distinguish from the Hindu-Budhist kingdom of Mataram (8<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> c.) existing in Central and after c. 930 in East Java.

<sup>11)</sup> Apart from northern Sumatra and northern Java we can also count the following places as early centres of Islam in Southeast Asia outside Indonesia: sultanate of Terengganu on the east coast of the Malay Peninsula; sultanate of Brunei on the north-west coast of Borneo; the city of Jolo – the seat of the Sultanate of Sulu situated on the Archipelago of Sulu (which lies between the islands of Borneo and Mindanao) in the southern Philippines; they were all Islamic principalities; Maxwell (2003: 299).

<sup>12)</sup> Gil (2014: 151–152).

elements of animism. However, throughout the Malay Archipelago the coastal areas were subjected to Islamisation easier than the interior, due to external contacts; the interior of islands accepted later the new religion and to varying degrees. So, on the North Coast of Java from Indramayu in the west to Gresik in the east, Islam is more in line with orthodoxy than in the centre of the island<sup>13</sup>.

The adoption of the new faith was associated with changes in many areas of life, including art. These were as follows:

- Islam led to changes in art and ornamentation: a number of new ornamental motifs (as well as Arabic script and calligraphy) appeared; some of the old motifs experienced a renaissance (especially geometric patterns), while others have been transformed or have disappeared. This is the subject of this article, and is discussed below.
- The new religion practically halted the development of anthropomorphic sculpture and painting (due to the Islamic ban on representations of human and animal forms). Such representations are eliminated on Sumatra and largely on Java; however, on the latter island there are important exceptions such as the wayang stylisation (shadow theatre puppets, wayang-style illuminations of manuscripts, wayang motifs in decorative art), the wedding figures of Devi Śri (the goddess of rice and abundance) and her husband Deva Sadono, as well as the highly stylised Javanese hilts which depict a barely recognisable human figure.
- There followed changes in forms of architecture, such as the appearance of the dome in the architecture of mosques (although it was done with a delay)<sup>14</sup>;
- The Malay language, which was a tool for propagation of the new faith, became a *lingua franca* for peoples of Indonesia<sup>15</sup>;
- In the 16<sup>th</sup> c. Muslim sultanates of Sumatra established diplomatic relations with Turkey in order to get help against the Portuguese, then against the Dutch. Ottoman Turkey sent its experts in the field of manufacturing of weapons (cannons casting) to Aceh (which was indeed defended against the Portuguese in a decade after the fall of Malacca), but also sent there, among others, its goldsmiths. It is believed that

---

<sup>13</sup> Koentjaraningrat (1989: 86).

<sup>14</sup> Widyastuti (2009: 109–111).

<sup>15</sup> Bodrogi (1972: 69).

- granulation and filigree techniques – today so common in the decorative arts of Indonesia – reached the country this way<sup>16</sup>).
- There appeared new forms of theatre: presumably the heavy stylisation of shadow puppets in the Javanese wayang theatre was prompted by Islam;
  - New themes appeared in literature (adventures of Amira Hamza – Muhammad’s uncle) as did new forms, such as *suluk* – mystical poetry and *hikayat* – a long tale in prose;
  - There were changes in rulers’ titles who, instead of the Sanskrit term *raja* or Malay *datu*, began to use Muslim titles such as *sultan*, or *malik* (king);
  - There followed changes in dress. In general there appeared clothing whose manufacture required sewing skills – as opposed to earlier dress types, consisting of rectangular, large sheets of decorated fabric draped over the figure (however, they continued to be worn long after, to some extent until the present day). The new types of clothing were:
    - a headcloth (*iket*) for men, in the form of a square (approx. 1 x 1 m); a fez for men: in Java it is slim, reasonably tall and modestly decorated with some vertical stripes and a bump on the top; it is used by local dignitaries and called a *kuluk*. Among the Aceh it is quilted and not very tall, used on formal occasions and called a *kopiah*; it is modelled after the fashion of Turkey and Central Asia; men’s caps similar to a forage cap, characteristic of Muslim Indonesia today;
    - men’s trousers, shirts, jackets (waistcoats with sleeves) – under the influence of the Middle East (although the traditional skirts are also worn till now);
    - women’s headcloths, called *kudhung*, similar to the large, rectangular shawl known as *slendang* but larger: they are expansive enough to cover the head and partly the upper body; they are found only in certain regions (mainly Sumatra and north Java);
    - blouses and tunics with long sleeves for women in the whole of Malaya and Sumatra (although, as mentioned, traditional dress forms – the *sarong* and *kain panjang* skirts as well as the large *kemben* shawl to wrap around the torso – have not disappeared); trousers for women (regionally)<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Widyastuti (2009: 125).

<sup>17</sup> The section mainly according to: Maxwell (2003: 301–310).

MUSLIM ORNAMENTAL MOTIFS  
IN DECORATIVE ARTS OF INDONESIA<sup>18)</sup>:

Decorative motifs in the Islamic period can be divided into three groups:

- a) **new ones** – imported with the new culture;
- b) motifs known already earlier, but **revived** in the new situation (experiencing a renaissance of their popularity): mostly geometric patterns;
- c) **transformed ones** (for example, due to the Islamic prohibition of figural representations): either their shapes or symbolism have changed.

In addition one can mention of two other groups, which are not the subject of the article:

- ancient motifs that were **continued**; they were older than Islamic influence and well-established in Indonesian decorative art (the lotus, elephant, dragon/snake *Naga*, birds, domestic poultry included, horse and some other animals, also some geometric patterns: inclined ellipses – *kawung*, the eight-pointed rosette in a circle – called *jilemprang*);
- forms that have **disappeared**, as especially representations of the human figure in Java and Sumatra (except for its calligraphic and *wayang* stylisation).

A) NEW MOTIFS:

1. Some **plant motifs**. Plant patterns have been generally known at least since the Hindu-Javanese phase, but they are also typical of Islamic ornamentation, as they are not discrepant with the prohibition of figural representations. Islamic plant designs were:

**Arabesque** – pattern of tendrils with leaves and flowers, formed into spirals; it can be geometrical. It happens that the arabesque contains additional motifs: stylised birds (for example, the *Sari Manok* cock) and snakes, clouds, meander, the double spiral similar to the letter S, the so called keys and hooks.

**Tulips, carnations, roses and lilies**<sup>19)</sup>;

---

<sup>18)</sup> The illustrations in this article show Indonesian exhibits from the collections of the Asia and Pacific Museum in Warsaw. The Museum was created 1973 by Andrzej Wawrzyniak (b. 1931) on the basis of his private, Indonesian collection. He was also the first director of the Museum. The exhibits in illustrations 1–2, 6–8 and 10 (see pages 89ff) were donated by him – most of them in 1973 as part of his founding gift.

<sup>19)</sup> Żygulski (1988: 45).

**the Blooming tree** is a popular theme throughout Southeast Asia. A very elaborate version appeared on batiks from the North Coast of Java and from Jambi (it had a thin, sinusoidal trunk that looked like a twig (!), and a large number of leaves and flowers loosely arranged on the surface of the fabric). Also it was found on Sumatran fabrics for hanging on walls, embroidered in gold thread. In batik it was a variation of the pattern known from Indian *palampore* fabrics depicting a big tree growing out of the hill (the motif was either hand-painted with yarn mortar or printed with the use of this substance). The tree appeared also in a highly stylised version – reduced to a form similar to a vase (!).

2. **Taman arum** – sultan’s pleasure garden or paradise. The motif is till today repeated in batik in Cirebon (a city and subregion on the North Coast of Java and once a Muslim sultanate – the oldest in West Java). It has the form of several horizontal stripes showing the ground, overgrown with trees and flowers, also with stylised rocks and gates as well as with images of living creatures, including elephants, fantastic four-legged hybrids and birds, despite the Islamic prohibition of figural representations<sup>20</sup>. Cirebon, which received many cultural influences, mainly Muslim and Chinese, has an individual art style and its own motifs in batik<sup>21</sup>.

3. **Arabic calligraphy**. In Islamic culture, calligraphy is raised to the rank of an art form, however, in Southeast Asia it is less popular. The Malay language – one of the main tools for the promotion of Islam in the region – was also written in Arabic script and calligraphy<sup>22</sup>. The calligraphy is used on ceramic plates, decorative fabrics<sup>23</sup>, blades of weapons and other media (Fig. 1) and is believed

<sup>20</sup> Van Roojen (2001: 156–157), Maxwell (2003: 328). In Indonesia, animal forms were not fully eliminated; some of them survived, although sometimes changed.

<sup>21</sup> Wrońska-Friend (2008: 65–74).

<sup>22</sup> Maxwell (2003: 335–336).

<sup>23</sup> As far as Indonesian textiles are concerned, the calligraphy decorates: Muslim men’s headcloths, waistcoats, large elongated rectangle fabrics (used for example, as a throne or wedding canopy as well as a shroud for a man known as a hero – for example fighting against the Dutch), and flags, often made in batik technique. Most often the textiles contained words of the *basmallah* (the Muslim invocation *Bismillāhi rrahmāni rrahīmi* – “In the Name of Allah the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful”) that begins almost every sura of the Koran and every major project in the life of a Muslim; moreover the *shahada* – the Islamic profession of faith (*Lā ilāha illā-llāh, Muhammadun Rasūlu-llāh* – “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His prophet”). Often the letters are arranged in a stylised silhouette of a bird or lion and even



to have protective power (which is not compatible with Muslim orthodoxy). A frequent phenomenon in Indonesia is the repetition of Arabic script without understanding the sense and sometimes the texts are totally illegible<sup>24</sup>). However, this does not diminish the value of such an object in the eyes of local inhabitants: imitated handwriting is also believed to have properties of a talisman. Inhabitants of Southeast Asia treat Arabic script, even every singular letter, as holy and talismanic<sup>25</sup>).

4. *Sidomukti* – a diagonal grid (a grid rotated by an angle of 45°) filled in with motifs of flowers and leaves (under the influence of Persia and Mughal India), stars, quatrefoils, also butterflies – a Chinese symbol of marital happiness (Fig. 2). This pattern appeared in Javanese batik under the name of *sidomukti* (“long and successful life”) and it is used for weddings.

*Sidomukti* belongs to patterns repeated on the entire surface, known collectively as *ceplok* (from the word *ceplok* – metal fitting, metal frame).

5. **Sword Zulfiqar** (or Dhu al-Fiqar = Bifurcated). This sword with two blades was given by Mohammad to his son-in-law Ali, one of the righteous caliphs, especially revered by Shiites as a mediator between God and men. The Zulfiqar appears in Indonesia on flags and amulets – as a protective motif<sup>26</sup>).

6. **Mihrab lamp** alone (the mihrab is the niche facing Mecca in a mosque) or the mihrab with the hanging lamp. The lamp has the shape of a deep vase with a reasonably high and broad neck. The motif is found in Indonesia in relief on the tombstones of important persons, such as those who popularised Islam in Java. The lamp symbolises light, and more specifically – God’s light illuminating the soul of such a person<sup>27</sup>).

7. Some **animal motifs**:

**Sari manok**. A new motif which appeared during the Islamic period was the bird called sari manok (literally: “the artificial cock”), which in spite

---

of a human figure as well as the text can be written in a mirror image or inverted. In addition, there are *tughras* – decorative signatures of Ottoman sultans; Kerlogue (2001: 124).

<sup>24</sup>) It is also known that other, non-Arabic scripts had been used as talismans in the region prior to the advent of Islam; Kerlogue (2001: 127).

<sup>25</sup>) Maxwell (2003: 336).

<sup>26</sup>) Maxwell (2003: 329).

<sup>27</sup>) Irmawati M.-Johan (2012: 98–99).



of the name not always resembles the cock. It has a fan-shaped tail and sometimes is similar to a crane and holds a fish or chain in its beak. In its form there are a melted Garuda, hornbill and the Chinese phoenix. The sari manok is a symbol of the soul. Its image appears, among others, on ritual diadems for dancers and brides from Sumatra, Lampung included<sup>28</sup>). Also its representation, in a version with a comb, similar to a cock (and also to Garuda) sometimes decorates oil lamps.

**Al-Buraq** (“Lightning”) – a celestial steed (mare-hybrid). Muslims believe that Muhammad was taken – during the Night Journey in 621 – on the back of the steed Al-Buraq from the mosque of Al-Kaaba in Mecca to the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, then to heaven (it is treated both as a physical and spiritual journey), after which he returned. The Night Journey is mentioned in the Qur’an and the detailed descriptions are in the traditions (Hadith); in the Islamic world it is the subject of literature (poetry included), book illuminations and folk art. Al-Buraq is a hybrid, whose representation probably originated from the Greek centaur, and perhaps Pegasus: it is shown as a horse with wings and with the head of a woman (sometimes of a man). In Indonesia images of the steed appeared on wall-hangings (fabrics), flags and sails (but not on cloths, just as in the case of representations of Indian deities which had never been shown in this place<sup>29</sup>), as well as in embroidery from the Malay Peninsula. It was generally a popular image in Southeast Asia<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>28</sup>) Maxwell (2003: 255, 330).

<sup>29</sup>) Maxwell (2003: 318).

<sup>30</sup>) A specific case of the image of a winged horse (but with the head of its own species) appears in relief on kris hilts from the island of Madura. It is present also in the coat of arms of the royal palace in Sumenep, the cultural centre of the island. The steed is referred to as Kuda Sembrani (literally: “winged horse”) with the name Mega Remeng (“Shadow of a Cloud” or “Shadow of a Silhouette”). This suggests that the horse strides in the sky and only its shadow on the clouds is visible, when Tako Dole, a hero of the Sumenep legends, rides on its back. The representation is realistic, although Madura is an Islamic area. What is more, these hilts can show a dragon as well, along with a winged horse, and they both are situated on either side of a cartouche. Besides, also an angel is presented on these hilts – as a winged man. Belief in angels is found in many religions, including Islam; Kerner (1996: 38–39). Also the motif of a horse without wings is known in Indonesia – since prehistoric times – but is not Muslim. It was shown on bronze drums; also in the Majapahit era as the steed of Surya – the Hindu god of the sun; it is used also in art of megalithic tribes (eg. on the island of Sumba and by the Batak of Sumatra); van der Hoop (1949: 144f).

## B) PREVIOUSLY KNOWN MOTIFS

## THAT GAINED IN POPULARITY IN THE ISLAMIC PERIOD:

## 8. Purely geometric patterns and lines:

**Checks and stripes.** These, and geometric motifs in general, existed much earlier. However, during the Islamic period more opportunities inherent in the checks and stripes have been used, for example different hues of colour<sup>31</sup>. The checkered skirt with a white shirt without the collar and with a black cap was popularised in the whole of Malaya as an Islamic dress code for men (mostly from the coasts) by the Bugis – daring sailors from South Sulawesi engaged in sea trade and staunch followers of Islam. Such a checkered skirt – the Bugis call it *lipa sabai* – is worn by men in many areas of the archipelago to this day, and only recently can it be replaced by trousers. The checker was also imitated in Javanese North Coast batik and in the supplementary weft technique on the island of Salayer (to the south of Sulawesi). The pattern influenced also decorative motifs of Sumatran brocades<sup>32</sup>.

The popularity of some of the oldest motifs in Southeast Asia have come back; these were geometric ones: the **spiral**, the so-called **hook** (or hook and key motifs) and the **rhomb**<sup>33</sup>. Although they were used for a long time, the increase in their popularity stemmed from the fact that they in no way infringed the Islamic prohibition of figural representations. For example, in Aceh one applies the motif *Bungong Awan Si On*, similar to a short, forked leaf, of which one half is coiled in a spiral<sup>34</sup>. In Aceh is also found an ancient motif of a row of double spirals, as well as a series of spirals / coils. The latter motif is interpreted as clouds (*bungong awan*)<sup>35</sup>.

The **diagonal grid** of rhombs or squares rotated by an angle of 45° was known in Indonesia earlier, but its popularity in the Islamic period has increased, as in the case of all geometric motifs<sup>36</sup>.

The diagonal grid – apart from the *sidomukti* version with wings, plants and butterflies inside – decorates *songket* textiles from Sumatra and Bali

<sup>31</sup> Maxwell (2003: 328).

<sup>32</sup> Maxwell (2003: 328–329).

<sup>33</sup> Maxwell (2003: 333).

<sup>34</sup> Smith (1997: ill. 10 on p. 30).

<sup>35</sup> Maxwell (2003: 335).

<sup>36</sup> Maxwell (2003: 347–348).

(cloths patterned in the supplementary weft weaving technique, usually with the use of metal thread, i.e. it is brocade)<sup>37</sup>. In Sumatra the *songket* technique serves just to obtain the grid with simple, geometric patterns inside. These are (up to this day): eight-pointed rosettes and stars, rhombs, and crosses (Fig. 3).

9. The **Star** (with different number of points) **and rosette**. Already in the Hindu-Javanese epoch, the eight-pointed star (and eight-pointed rosette) was important: according to Indian symbolism, the star had cosmological connotations, as it meant eight directions and the centre (deities of the Hindu pantheon were associated with them, and the centre was for Shiva). So there is a similarity to the symbolism, and to the shape, of the mandala.

In the empire of Majapahit (late 13<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> c.) the eight-pointed star often took the specific form of a circle with eight triangular rays around (inside the circle an image of one or more deities could have been present) and it symbolised the **Sun**. This version was a popular theme, common on many monuments, tombs, buildings, on the ceiling of the sanctuary (the most sacred part of the temple), and as a halo behind the heads of sculptures of deities. Presumably it was used also as the coat of arms of the state and sometimes it is referred to as the “sun of Majapahit”<sup>38</sup>.

Both the **eight-pointed star** and **eight-pointed rose** have been continued in Muslim Indonesia. Generally, the **star** is one of the most important symbolic and decorative motifs in Islamic art, connected with the idea of divinity and suzerainty (Fig. 4). In addition, the eight-pointed star symbolises nine Muslim saints (apostles of the new faith on Java) – *Wali Sanga*<sup>39</sup>. The star in Indonesian art can have different numbers of points, and the eight-pointed version is frequent.

Also the **star shown as a circle with** various number of **triangular rays** (so it is identical with the previously mentioned “Sun of Majapahit”) in the Islamic epoch symbolises the Sun, and hence – light (as same as the mihrab lamp) and the God’s illumination<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> The diagonal grid is found on brocades from Islamic Sumatra, and on Hindu-orientated Bali the patterns achieved in the *songket* technique are different: wayang forms, crowned *Naga* snakes and vegetable patterns (the vegetable tendril with flowers).

<sup>38</sup> Kinney, Klokke, Kieven (2003: 34).

<sup>39</sup> Maxwell (2003: 348).

<sup>40</sup> Irmawati M.-Johan (2012: 99).

Stars were often rounded up to the plant form – the **eight-petalled flower rosettes** (which can also mean the lotus). They both – stars and rosettes – may have been present together on the same fabric. This is typical of *songkets* of Sumatra (fabrics with gold thread), including Palembang – where they are sometimes placed within the diagonal grid pattern. The **eight-pointed rosette has the same symbolism as the star**. In Southeast Asia it is repeated in a number of techniques and materials<sup>41</sup>). However, the weavers of Palembang interpret them nowadays as the *kembang manggis* – characteristic petals on the mango-steen fruit<sup>42</sup>).

10. **Vegetal tendril with leaves and flowers**, similar to a vine and often shaped like stylised flames, were already known. Winding plants and creepers, or the vegetal tendril – are also typical of Islamic art, as they reflect the Islamic concept of paradise. The vegetal tendril with dense foliage is in general one of the distinguishing features of Indonesian ornamentation (Fig. 5).

#### c) Modified motifs:

11. Some animal forms. A number of ancient, pre-Islamic animal motifs have survived, especially birds and snake, and in some cases changes have occurred (for example, making them less realistic). Among the modified motifs are:

The **Lion**. This was a motif from India (one of the royal symbols) and from China. Islam changed it into a symbol of the Caliph Ali. The lion can wield a banner, and also the sword Zulfikar may appear next to the animal<sup>43</sup>). Besides, the whole figure (as in the case of birds and wayang figures) can be constructed from calligraphy. The lion also appears in Indonesia outside the Muslim context.

The eagle **Garuda** was transformed (in Java) either into a highly stylised wing (*lar*), a pair of such wings (*mirong*), or into a pair of the wings and a fan-shaped tail (*sawat*). *Sawat* is also found on silk weft ikats (called *lemar*) from Malay regions of Sumatra – Fig. 6. Besides, it survived in art as a real bird, but in wayang styling: as a theatre puppet, a shadow theatre oil lamp *blencong*, or a form decorating weapons. Garuda is in Southeast Asia a symbol of power, and it is also associated with light. An interesting variant is a motif similar to the *sawat* but with one or two

<sup>41</sup>) Maxwell (2003: 348).

<sup>42</sup>) Maxwell (2003: 205).

<sup>43</sup>) Maxwell (2003: 329).

heads (very similar to the two-headed peacock) – Fig. 7. There is no sure explanation of its symbolism and origin. Hypothetically, this should mean that Garuda is not only associated with the world of gods, but also with the human world<sup>44</sup>).

The **Peacock** was known in the era of Indian influence, but it is also popular during the Islamic phase – under the influence of Mughal and Gujarati ornamentation. It is one of the royal symbols of Islam<sup>45</sup>).

A specific phenomenon is the two-headed peacock, styled like the *sawat* motif, perhaps by analogy to Garuda. The symbolism is not clear. However, merely aesthetic reasons could also have been decisive. Ernst Gombrich quoted the opinion according to which in Java a decorative form was invented first and symbolic interpretation was added to it only later<sup>46</sup>). Anyway, such a peacock appears on Javanese batiks and sometimes is embossed on metal fittings of the kris.

12. **Curvilinear forms in Lampung** (souther tip of Sumatra). Under Muslim influence there occurred the phenomenon of strong stylisation of patterns on festive *tapis* skirts, densely and thickly embroidered with gold thread for aristocratic women from Lampung. The *tapis* skirts are very impressive and are a sign of status and wealth of the family. In the Islamic period the anthropomorphic and animal decoration of the *tapis* has become practically unrealistic. The figures riding the buffalos and mythical creatures have changed into curvilinear spots. The forms of ships – very typical of Lampung art – have become partly unreal. Also vegetable forms have survived, but sometimes stylised and geometrical – converted into six-pointed stars or crosses with plant ends. There are also simple geometric shapes. In these fabrics is observed a transition from figurative to decorate<sup>47</sup>) (Fig. 8).

13. In addition to these themes, **wayang stylisation** has been continued and typical of Javanese and Balinese art till now. It has been a refuge for depictions of the human figure (Fig. 9). However, Javanese shadow puppets are more unrealistic than Balinese ones: their heads are deeper stylised, necks

<sup>44</sup>) The analyses of the double-headed Garuda and peacock are according to the Australian researcher of crises, Alan Maisey, on the blog of fans and collectors of old weapons [www.vikingsword.com](http://www.vikingsword.com).

<sup>45</sup>) Maxwell (2003: 348).

<sup>46</sup>) Gombrich (2009: 226).

<sup>47</sup>) Maxwell (2003: 332).

and especially hands are extremely elongated. This seems to be a relatively new phenomenon. Balinese puppets are more natural and also similar to the wayang-style bas-reliefs on Javanese temples of the Hindu period (such images are known since in the late 13<sup>th</sup> c.). More unrealistic style of the Javanese theatre puppets may have been a way to circumvent the Islamic ban on figural representations<sup>48</sup>.

Wayang forms are a frequent decorative motif in Indonesian arts and crafts, depicted for example, on kris sheaths and everyday objects. Among wayang representations the most popular is obese Semar – a wise and loyal servant of the Pandava brothers, heroes of the Mahabharata. He is not present in the text of the epic (neither are other servants), but is a very important, locally added element in Indonesian theatre. Primarily, Semar was a tutelary god of the Javanese, prior even to the Hindu epoch. Till today his images are believed to be talismanic.

The human figure has largely disappeared in the Muslim period, however, with important exceptions. These are (apart from the wayang form): a human figure deeply stylised – as kris hilts from Central Java (a characteristic and frequent phenomenon of Javanese decorative art – Fig. 10); a human figure consisting of Arabic calligraphic letters; as well as images of angels (as humans with wings) on kris hilts from Madura.

The Islamic rulers who also were early teachers of Islam in Java, supported art and it seems that they even used art to promote the new faith<sup>49</sup>. It is widely believed in Java that three-dimensional puppets referred to as *goleks* (puppets made of carved wood, with polychrome, dressed in cotton fabrics and animated from below by a wooden rod) were created to popularise the religion. This is a paradox, given the generally realistic nature of these puppets (although they repeat many of the conventions of flat shadow wayang puppets, such as the symbolism of facial colours)<sup>50</sup>. A large proportion of the *goleks* is used to present the Indian epics: the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, although also a Cirebon variation of the puppets was created (called *wayang golek cepak*; as *cepak* means “flat” – an allusion to the characteristic, low headgear), which

<sup>48</sup> Brandon (2004: 124).

<sup>49</sup> Brandon (2004: 124).

<sup>50</sup> All *dalangs* (puppeteers – narrators) of Javanese wayang *golek* theatre are of the opinion that wooden, tri-dimensional puppets derive from shadow ones. The *dalangs* also think that *goleks* were used to propagate Islam on Java; Herbert (2002: 10–11).

serve to present Muslim stories about the life and deeds of Amir Hamza – uncle of Muhammad.

At the same time as Islam was spreading on Java, the art of batik also evolved. This technique had never thrived on neighbouring Bali, where the Hindu-Javanese aristocracy emigrated after the fall of the Majapahit empire, which confirms that the proper flourishing of batik occurred after the coming of Islam. However, the development of batik should not be associated with Islamic impact: among batik ornamental motifs there are typically Javanese ones (such as the *parang*), as well as Indian motifs (*kawung*, or even those related to Hindu cosmology – for example, Garuda), not only Muslim ones<sup>51</sup>. Presumably, batik was to replace the supplies of Indian fabrics for royal courts of Central Java. The supplies were interrupted when the North Coast became Islamic and the interior was still Hindu-Buddhist<sup>52</sup>. Anyway, although batik had existed before, it developed around the 16<sup>th</sup> century and it was a gradual process. Probably at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> c. the pen *canting* was invented (a pen for molten wax with a copper or brass container having one or more spouts and a bamboo handle). It was essential for the creation of precise patterns. Next, in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. the brown dye *soga*, distinguishing batik from Central Java, started to be used. Since then, the typical colours in that region were: indigo, brown, black from the imposition of both colours as well as white background in Yogyakarta and bright yellow in Surakarta. Finally, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> c. the sultan of Surakarta announced the set of patterns reserved (*larangan*) for himself, his family and senior officials; and at the beginning of the nineteenth century a similar set was also introduced by the ruler of Yogyakarta<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>51</sup> Maxwell (2003: 222, 236–237).

<sup>52</sup> Maxwell (2003: 325).

<sup>53</sup> These were in Surakarta: the *sawat* – a pair of wings and a fan-shaped tail of the eagle Garuda, which is on Java and Southeast Asia royal symbol; *parang rusak* (“crushed rock” or “broken knife”) – a pattern from the group of diagonal geometric patterns – made up of diagonal stripes with forms similar to the letter S; *cemukiran* – (a band of tiny, flame-like forms; *modang* – a large, sometimes elongated rhomb, a symbol of the mirror, probably derived from the Buddhist *mandala* and its simplified version – the Hindu *yantra*; *udan liris* (“drizzle”) – a set of small geometric patterns arranged in diagonal stripes; *tumpals* (triangles arranged in series) in the case they were on a white background.

In Yogyakarta: for the sultan, the heir to the throne and closest associates were the patterns: *parang rusak* and *Garuda ageng* (lit. “Huge Garuda”, presumably the motif *sawat*); for further members of the ruler’s family: *semen* – a complicated vegetable pattern with winding tendrils and with the accumulation of other motives, like miniature hills, temples, animals; *lar* – a single wing of the eagle Garuda; *mirong* – a pair of its wings; while distant relatives could wear *kawung* (the



In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> c. batik also blossomed on the North Coast of Java. In that area since the 1850's the copper stamp *cap*<sup>54)</sup> (for the quick application of wax on large surfaces) was frequently used<sup>55)</sup> along with the traditional *canting*. North Coast designs are fanciful, sometimes very complex and often precise; among others bouquets in realistic styling are often repeated there. Typical colours are blue and red with the use of yellowish background, giving the impression of colourfulness. On the other hand in *Pasisir* batik one has really introduced some other colours, including synthetic dyes, so local batik is indeed multicolour<sup>56)</sup>.

Islam in insular Southeast Asia has influenced many aspects of life, but the Muslim cultural impact was not so revolutionary as the earlier influence of India: the new religion has not created a new material culture that would replace the earlier one. On Indianised areas (the western part of the region) it only corrected art and ornamentation (Islam stopped anthropomorphic sculpture and painting, but on Java there has been an asylum for anthropomorphic forms: wayang styling), as well as some forms of theatre, literature, dress. On the terrains of tribal cultures the new faith led to changes in the traditional common law *adat*, but did not repudiate it. So, the Islamic cultural impact did not replace other influences; it became a new, important element of the Indonesian multicultural mosaic, composed of ancient-genuine, Indian, Chinese and European-Christian impacts.

---

pattern of intersecting ellipses or four overlapping circles). The impact of the ban decreased with distance from the courts of Central Java. But even today an appearance at the court in a costume decorated with reserved patterns (if the person is not entitled to wear them) is considered to be a *faux pas*. Presumably, combining of the patterns allowed with the restricted ones, which took place in many batik fabrics, was a way to the gradual weakening of the ban; Khan Majlis (1984: 56–57, 59).

<sup>54)</sup> It was invented about 1840–1850, presumably in the Islamic Principalities of Central Java; Heringa, Veldhuisen (1996: 42).

<sup>55)</sup> Van Roojen (2001: 27–28).

<sup>56)</sup> The third centre of Javanese batik was later West Java. Other centres, outside the island are South Sumatra and Madura.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bodrogi 1972 = Bodrogi, Timor, *Kunst in Indonesien*, E.A. Seemann Verlag, Leipzig 1972.
- Brandon 2004 = Brandon, James, R., *The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004.
- Gil 2014 = Gil, Sylwia, "Syekh Siti Jenar – jawajski mistyk" (Syekh Siti Jenar – a Javanese Mystic), in: Lesner-Szwarc, Renata (ed.), *Odcienie Indonezji* (Hues of Indonesia), Oficyna Wydawnicza Kucharski (& other co-publishers), Toruń 2014.
- Gombrich 2009 = Gombrich, Ernst, Hans, *Zmysł porządku. O psychologii sztuki dekoracyjnej* (*The Sense of Order. A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art*), collective translation by Folga-Januszewska, Dorota (ed.), Universitas, Kraków 2009.
- Herbert 2002 = Herbert, Mimi, *Voices of the Puppet Masters. The Wayang Golek Theatre in Indonesia*, The Lontar Foundation (Jakarta) & University of Hawai'i Press (Honolulu), Honolulu 2002.
- Heringa, Veldhuisen 1996 = Heringa, Rens & Veldhuisen, Harmen, C., *Fabric of Enchantment. Batik from the North Coast of Java*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art & Weatherhill, Los Angeles 1996.
- van der Hoop 1949 = van der Hoop, Abraham, *Indonesische siermotieven* (Indonesian Ornamental Design), Koninklijk Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen, Batavia 1949.
- Irmawati M.-Johan 2012 = Irmawati, M.-Johan, "The Representation of Rays in Islam Ornamentation Tombstones in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century", in: Kopania, Izabela, (ed.) *South-East Asia. Studies in Art, Cultural Heritage and Artistic Relations with Europe*, Polish Institute of World Art Studies & Tako Publishing House, Warsaw–Toruń 2012.
- Kerlogue 2001 = Kerlogue, Fiona, "Islamic talismans: the calligraphy batiks", in: van Hout, Itie (ed.), *Batik. Drawn in wax. 200 years of batik art from Indonesia in the Tropenmuseum collection*, Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam 2001.
- Kerner 1996 = Kerner, Martin, *Keris-Griffe aus dem malayischen Archipel* (*Kris Hilts from the Malay Archipelago*), Rietberg Museum, Zürich 1996.
- Khan Majlis 1984 = Khan Majlis, Birgitte, *Indonesische Textilien. Wege zu Göttern und Ahnen* (*Indonesian Textiles. Ways to Gods and Ancestors*), Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum (Köln) & Deutsches Textilmuseum (Krefeld), Köln 1984.
- Kinney, Klokke, Kieven 2003 = Kinney, Ann; Klokke, Marijke; Kieven, Lydia, *Worshipping Siva and Buddha. The Temple Art of East Java*, Hawai'i University Press, Honolulu 2003.
- Koentjaraningrat 1989 = Koentjaraningrat, *Javanese Culture*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies & Oxford University Press, Singapore 1989.
- Maisey = Maisey, Alan, blog: [www.vikingsword.com](http://www.vikingsword.com).
- Maxwell 2003 = Maxwell, Robyn, *Textiles of Southeast Asia. Tradition, Trade and Transformation*, Periplus, Canberra 2003.
- van Roojen 2001 = van Roojen, Pepin, *Batik Designs*, The Pepin Press BV, Amsterdam 2001.

Smith 1997 = Smith, Holly, S., *Aceh. Art and Culture*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur 1997.

Widyastuti 2009 = Widyastuti, Desrika, Retno, "Islam in Sumatra: History and Culture", in: Brinkgreve, Francine & Sulistianingsih, Retno (ed.), *Sumatra. Crossroads of Cultures*, KITLV, Leiden 2009.

Wrońska-Friend 2008 = *Sztuka woskiem pisana. Batik w Indonezji i w Polsce (Art Drawn with Wax. Batik in Indonesia and Poland)*, Gondwana, Warszawa 2008.

Żygulski 1988 = Żygulski, jun., Zdzisław, *Sztuka turecka (Turkish Art)*, PWN, Warszawa 1988.



Fig. 1. Decorative ceramic plate with Arabic calligraphy; Java, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> c., MAiP (The Asia and Pacific Museum) 18001, photo by Eugeniusz Helbert (MAiP)





Fig. 2. Batik skirt *kain panjang* with motif *sidomukti*; Java, 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c., MAiP 1301, photo by E. Helbert



Fig. 3. Shawl *slendang* with metallic thread; motif: diagonal grid; Sumatra, 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> c., MAiP 3761, photo by E. Helbert

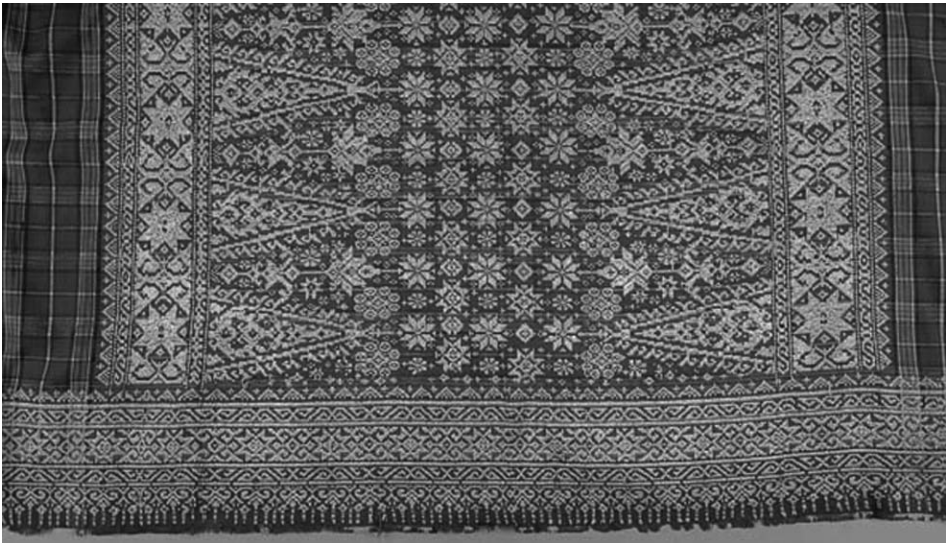


Fig. 4. Skirt *sarong* with metallic thread; motifs of stars and rosettes; Sumatra, 20<sup>th</sup> c., MAiP 3762, photo by E. Helbert



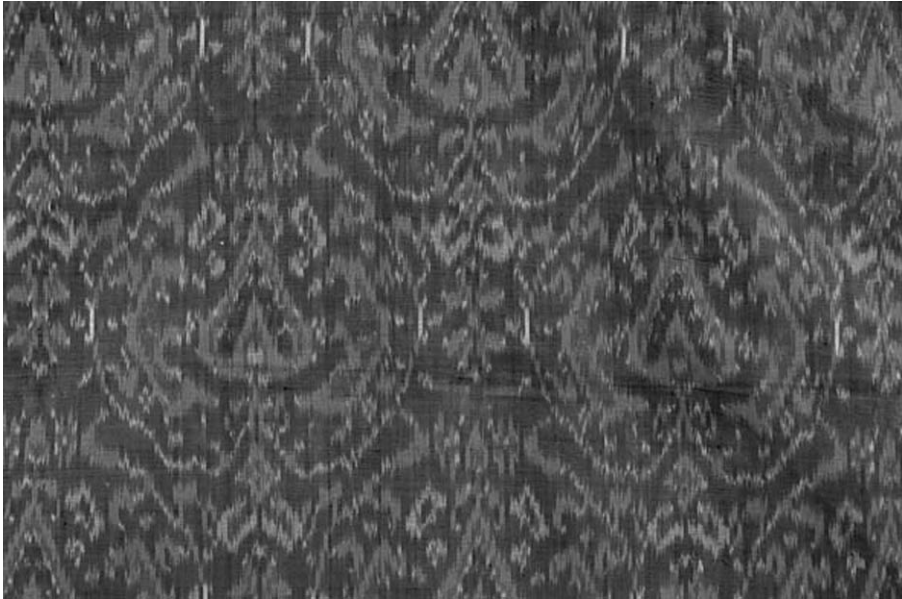


Fig. 5. Knife *sewar* with vegetal tendrils; Sumatra, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c., MAiP 20230, photo by E. Helbert



Fig. 6. Two-headed version of Garuda eagle embossed on the kris sheath, Java, late 19<sup>th</sup> c., MAiP 3, photo by E. Helbert





↑ Fig. 7. Skirt *sarong* decorated with wings and tail of Garuda (motif *sawat*) – silk weft ikat; Sumatra, early 20<sup>th</sup> c., MAiP 1505, photo by E. Helbert



← Fig. 8. Woman's festive skirt tapis with curvilinear motif embroidered, Lampung, South Sumatra, 19<sup>th</sup> c., MAiP 1465, photo by E. Helbert



↑ Fig. 9. Kris with wayang figures, Cirebon, North Coast of Java, 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c., MAiP 18788, photo by E. Helbert



← Fig. 10. Kris hilt in a stylized human form, wood, Central Java, mid-20<sup>th</sup> c., MAiP 332, photo by E. Helbert