

## Local Culture and Contextual Design: Visual identification on Lamuri Tombstone Ornaments

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify and analyze ornaments on Lamuri tombstones using a visual methodology encompassing production, image, circulation, and audience sites. An examination of the local culture and contextual design of these tombstones reveals symbolic meanings and socio-religious values, providing insight into how cultural identity and historical narratives are visually conveyed and preserved through funerary art. The identification results of the four sites show that the ornaments were made with traditional techniques that reflect high local skills, with design elements such as symmetry, floral patterns, and geometrics. The influence of trade routes resulted in the enrichment of ornaments from various cultures. The results indicate that the ornaments on the tombstones not only function as decorations but also have aesthetic and religious values that illustrate local identity and culture. Lamuri tombstone ornaments demonstrate the skills of local craftsmen who combine traditional techniques and Islamic art to create spiritual aesthetics through design elements. In addition, cultural interaction through trade routes has become a spiritual symbol and source of inspiration for modern design in the preservation of sustainable and cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** visual methodology, ornaments tombstones, contextual design, cultural heritage, symbolism

## Introduction

The Lamuri site, located in Lamreh Village, Mesjid Raya District, Aceh Besar Regency, Aceh Province, Indonesia, holds significant archaeological and historical value. Situated at an altitude of 40 meters above sea level, the site's topography includes hilly terrain mixed with karst rocks, offering a view of the Strait of Malacca to the east, the Andaman Sea to the north, and the Indian Ocean to the west (Hayati). The site's geographical coordinates are N 5°36'494" and E 95°32'011", covering an area of approximately 88.6 hectares. This strategic location, facing important maritime routes, contributed to Lamuri's prominence as a cross-regional trade hub in the 13th to 15th centuries. Archaeological finds, such as South Indian red pottery, Chinese ceramics, and Chinese coins, point to Lamuri's vital role in regional commerce (Feener 1).

Lamuri, once a powerful kingdom, played a key role in the development of the Aceh Sultanate. Following the relocation of Lamuri's political center to Makota Alam, the kingdom was unified with other regional polities, such as Pase, Daya, Lingga, Pedir (Pidie), Perlak, Benua Tamiang, and Samudera Pasai, under Sultan Ali Mughayat Syah in 1513, forming the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam. This unification marked a crucial moment in the history of Southeast Asia, as it led



**Fig. 1:** Location of Lamuri Tomb Complex (Google Earth 2025)

to the establishment of a dominant Islamic state motivated by resistance to Portuguese expansion after the fall of Malacca in 1511 (Ningsih and Nailufar).

The Lamuri site offers rich cultural heritage, particularly through its ancient tombstones and its role in bridging Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic influences. The Plak-Plieng (or Plak-Pleng) tombstone, one of the most significant archaeological finds at the site, is considered a symbol of this cultural transition (Husni et al. 60; Noval et al. 41). The site's topography includes steep hills, coastal cliffs, and valleys, with dense shrubs and Krung Raya Bay to the south. The bay, one of the widest along the Aceh coast, and a freshwater river flowing through a cove on the south side further contribute to the site's ecological and archaeological significance (Ibrahim et al. 3). Lamuri's location along the coast, near the Strait of Malacca, made it an important maritime trade center, facilitating cultural exchanges with regional powers such as India, China, and Arab countries. This location also enabled the spread of Islam in the region. The mangrove forests lining the Lamreh estuary play a crucial role in sediment transport and coastal stabilization, indirectly supporting the preservation of the site's archaeological remains. This highlights the importance of the relationship between the site's natural geography and the settlement patterns in Lamreh (Permatasari et al. 2).

The Lamuri Kingdom, considered one of the earliest Islamic kingdoms in Sumatra, played a key role in the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia, predating the more widely known Samudera Pasai. The kingdom served as a cultural bridge between Indian and Islamic influences, as seen in its architectural style and the mixed artifacts left behind. Archaeological research underscores the significance of Lamuri as a focal point for the early spread of Islam in the region, laying the groundwork for the rise of the Aceh Sultanate (Montana 94).

### **Typologi of Lamuri Tombstones**

At the Lamuri site, many ancient tombstone archaeological relics are rectangular in shape with a pointed top, Plak-Plieng (Maler et al. 122), but there are also those in the form of flat beams with wings. Both types of tombstones are made of sandstone and andesite stone. The Plak-Plieng presents a new dimension of knowledge in funerary practices in Aceh, offering insight into the evolution of Islamic art in the region and contributing to the understanding of the spread of Islam and the social structure of the Lamuri Kingdom (Noval et al. 43).

The tombstone displays a range of carved ornamental motifs, including geometric patterns, stylized decorative forms, and representations of natural elements, reflecting the artistic conventions and symbolic expressions of its period. Motifs of geometric patterns such as lines, dotted lines, and intersecting circles are common motifs, similar to the inscriptions in the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* (Schwitter 134).

Decorative motifs that are synonymous with ornamental varieties that are widely developed in Aceh are tendrils with floral motifs (Andeska et al. 352; Hasanah 292) and motifs of natural objects (Yuzaili 236–37). These motifs are found in Acehese tombstones and Rumoh Aceh (Dedy Afriadi et al. 206).

The decorative elements observed on the two types of tombstones, including geometric motifs, floral patterns, and calligraphic inscriptions, are considered to carry symbolic significance beyond mere ornamentation. These motifs are thought to reflect a particular aesthetic sensibility, consistent with Sheppard's (77) argument that every work of art contains inherent value expressed through its form, beauty, and capacity for aesthetic engagement. The Lamuri tombstone, a funeral monument with artistic characteristics, certainly has significant value. This tombstone is unique because it comes with design, calligraphy, and art on a stone charged with religiosity. This entity has a relationship with life and religion (Raden et al. 133; Suprayitno 366); it can be said that a very valuable spiritual aesthetic is attached to the tombstones. Therefore, uncovering the essence of the spiritual aesthetics manifested in the tombstones at the Lamuri site can be a means of reflecting on cultural identity and understanding local visual traditions to stimulate creativity and innovation among artists.

## **Conceptual and Scholarly Context**

To situate the discussion of Lamuri tombstone ornaments, this study engages with earlier scholarly perspectives on symbolism, cultural interaction, and Islamic artistic influences in Southeast Asian funerary traditions. These studies provide an important conceptual background for understanding how ornamental forms function as cultural markers within historical contexts.

Research by Rajes Ikhlas Rosaguna, Mauliy Purba, and Agus Priyatno investigates the symbolic significance of the Plak-Plieng tombstone, attributed to the Lamuri

Kingdom, which was rediscovered in 1890 and dated to the 12th century CE. Their study emphasizes the tombstone's distinctive features, which are reflective of the specific funerary practices of the Lamuri polity. The authors highlight its historical importance, particularly the intricacy of its carved ornamentation and the limited scholarly attention it has received to date (79-90).

Similarly, Dedi Satria conducted a comprehensive study on the decorative motifs of the Plak-Plieng tombstones, analyzing their cultural and religious significance. The study explores the transformation of motifs as a result of the synthesis between local traditions and external, particularly Islamic, influences. In addition to examining the inscriptions, the research investigates the broader implications of tombstone production during the 13th to 15th centuries. The analysis aims to provide insights into the cultural development of early Muslim communities in Aceh, which emerged through sustained interaction between local and foreign groups. Particular attention is given to the distinctive artistic styles and the arrangement of motifs that characterize the Plak-Plieng tombstones (87-106).

Further discussion offered by Ismail et al. examines the influence of Islamic art on Acehnese tombstones in Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula, with particular emphasis on the tombstones of Sultan al-Malik al-Saleh (d. 1297 CE). The study identifies the use of calligraphic styles characteristic of 10th-century artistic developments in regions such as Iran, Iraq, Anatolia, and Egypt. The authors argue that decorative features, including *mihrab*-shaped motifs and interlacing knot patterns, demonstrate variations in design that reflect a synthesis of local traditions and Islamic artistic influences. Their analysis offers a comparative perspective on the calligraphy and ornamental elements of Sultan al-Malik al-Saleh's tombstones within the broader context of Islamic art across the Muslim world (1-37).

Archaeological perspectives are presented by Husni, S. Saryulis, et al. who conducted archaeological research at the Lamuri site, uncovering significant cultural artifacts including the Plak-Plieng tombstones, imported ceramics, glassware, and Chinese coins. Their study identifies the Plak-Plieng tombstone, dated to the 15th century CE, as a material representation of the transitional period between Hindu-Buddhist and early Islamic influences in the region. The coexistence of Arabic calligraphy with Hindu-Buddhist ornamental motifs on the

tombstone illustrates a distinctive phase of cultural and religious syncretism characteristic of that era (59-88).

From a design perspective, Saputra discusses creating interior works inspired by plaques with a structured process that includes three main stages: the first is the exploration stage, the second is the design stage, and the third is the realization stage. The exploration stage involves researching the decorative design of plaques and their relevance to the elements of the living room. The design stage is the stage of preparing sketches and designs based on the findings of the exploration results. The realization stage is the final stage that transforms the design into a real work of art (134-44). Additionally, Maler et al. highlight the similarities between the tombstones of Barus and the tombstones of Plak-Plieng from Aceh. According to them, both illustrate the historical relationship and cultural exchange between these regions during the spread of Islam. They suspect that the design and motif of the Barus tombstone have influenced the Plak-Plieng tombstone (119-24).

Elizabeth Lambourn provides a critical analysis of material culture, particularly Islamic tombstones, as an essential source for understanding the early spread of Islam in Southeast Asia. The study focuses on the importation of tombstones from Gujarat, India, to major Islamic centers such as Samudera-Pasai in Sumatra and Gresik in Java during the fifteenth century. These tombstones, crafted from Gujarat stone, are interpreted as tangible evidence of cultural, religious, and political relationships across the Indian Ocean region. The analysis underscores the role of transregional religious, commercial, and material networks in facilitating the diffusion of Islamic beliefs and practices. This process enabled the integration of Islamic elements into pre-existing local traditions, resulting in localized Islamic expressions within Southeast Asian societies (221-84).

Lambourn also examines the origins and evolution of the Batu Aceh tradition, a distinctive tombstone style found in the Aceh region within the historical context of Samudera-Pasai. The study suggests that characteristic forms and decorative elements emerged through interaction between indigenous cultural expressions and external Islamic influences, particularly from South Asia. This perspective highlights how the Batu Aceh tradition reflects processes of assimilation and cultural adaptation during the spread of Islam (211-48).

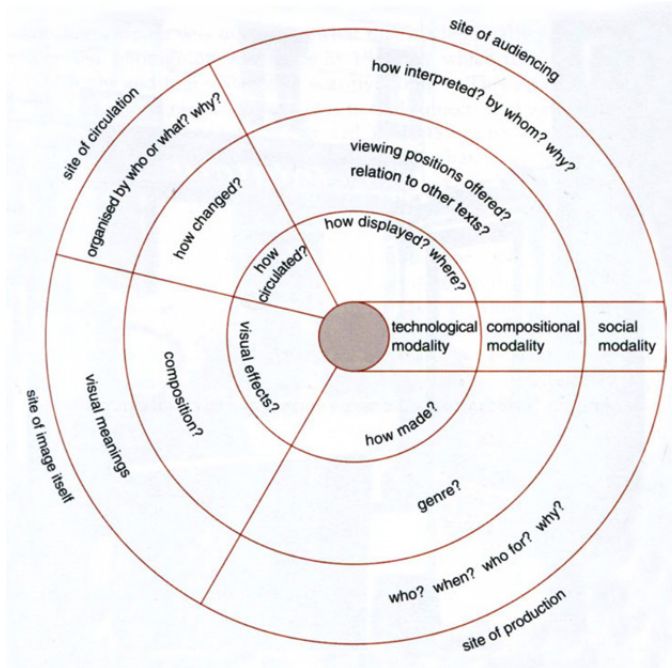
Furthermore, Lambourn investigates early Islamic history in Southeast Asia through typological analysis of tombstones and epigraphic evidence. The analysis demonstrates that Islamic tombstones function not only as religious artifacts but also as primary historical sources for understanding the establishment and expansion of Islam in the region. These monuments reveal patterns of Islamic dissemination, local adaptation, and the formation of a distinct Southeast Asian Islamic identity (252-86).

Overall, existing scholarship demonstrates substantial attention to the historical and cultural significance of tombstones in Aceh and Southeast Asia (Rahman et al. 1). Most studies emphasize historical interpretation, symbolic meaning, Islamic artistic influence, and comparative material culture. However, limited attention has been given to the spiritual aesthetics embedded within the ornamental structures of Lamuri tombstones. This study addresses this gap by examining how aesthetic expression and spiritual meaning are articulated through ornamental design at the Lamuri site.

### **Visual Analytical Framework**

Gillian Rose's visual methodology, which examines visual objects such as paintings, photographs, and sculptures, among others, is the approach used in this study of Plak-Plieng tombstone ornaments. Visual works that are represented could be responded to based on social circumstances, production techniques, and how the designer or artist sees himself, the surrounding environment through the visual representation he designed (Rose 24-25). Visual methodology is the act of reading or looking at works of art to find the essence, source of art, and methods and techniques. The focus of the study on artworks is the substance, source, method, and procedure (Sunarto 620).

The visual methodology developed by Rose offers a structured approach to analyzing visual artifacts through four interrelated sites: production, image, circulation, and audiencing. When applied to the study of Lamuri tombstone ornaments, this framework allows for a contextual reading rooted in local culture and contextual design. The site of production reveals the cultural and historical context of artifact creation, while the image site focuses on the visual elements such as motifs and inscriptions that reflect local Islamic aesthetics. The



**Fig. 2:** Visual Methodology Diagram (Rose 24, fig. 2.1)

circulation site addresses the spatial and ritual placement of the tombstones, and audiencing considers community interpretations shaped by regional beliefs and traditions. This approach highlights how local values and spiritual expressions are embedded within visual forms, contributing to a deeper understanding of Acehese Islamic heritage.

The visual methodology adapted from Rose is grounded in an interpretive framework that emphasizes how meaning is constructed through images. It analyzes visual artifacts through interconnected analytical sites addressing production context, visual representation, circulation, and audience interpretation. These dimensions are examined through three key modalities: technological, compositional, and social. Technological modality refers to the materials and techniques employed in the creation of visual objects, encompassing everything from manual craftsmanship to digital reproduction technologies. Compositional modality addresses the formal elements of an image such as color, line, content,

and spatial organization which collectively construct aesthetic styles and visual coherence. Social modality considers the broader socio-political, cultural, and economic contexts in which visual artifacts are produced and interpreted, including the relationships between image and audience (24-47).

To enrich this framework, the analysis in this study incorporates the concept of patron agency, especially relevant in examining production-centered artifacts such as tombstones. Visual artifacts are not only shaped by the hands of artisans or the constraints of available technologies but also by the values and intentions of those who commission them. In the context of the Lamuri tombstones, patrons likely influenced key aspects of the visual design, including epigraphic content, stylistic decisions, and symbolic ornamentation. These choices served not merely decorative purposes but actively communicated messages of social hierarchy, religious identity, and lineage. By integrating patron agency into Rose's framework, this study offers a more nuanced application of the social modality highlighting how visual production operates within negotiated cultural, religious, and political dynamics. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how meaning is constructed materially and symbolically in the visual culture of Islamic Southeast Asia.

### **Visual Interpretation of Lamuri Tombstone Ornaments**

Four aspects need to be discussed in this research. First is the site of production, which includes the Lamuri tombstones' place of production, techniques and materials of production, concepts that reflect local culture, and external influences such as spirituality at the time of production. Second, site of image itself which provides visual data to help understand the aesthetic, symbolic, and contextual values of the design. Third, site of circulation which influences the interpretation and understanding of ornaments. And fourth, site of audience, which refers to how the ornaments on Lamuri tombstones are understood by the audience in the past and present.

#### **Site of Production**

Lamuri has a relationship with the pre-Islamic period. Before gradually transitioning to an Islamic kingdom, Lamuri in pre-Islamic times was an important settlement during the Hindu-Buddhist period. Archaeological evidence, such as

pottery, beads, and bronze objects at the Lamuri site, indicates traces of previous cultural influences. These artifacts reflect the region's long-standing relationship with the wider Asian civilization (Hayati).

The discovery of an Acehnes tombstone at Lamreh, known locally as the “Aceh Tombstone,” suggests that Islamic civilization had already been established in the region. Semiotic traces are evident in the visual elements of these tombstones, including calligraphic inscriptions, symbolic motifs, and ornamental compositions, some of which date back to the fourteenth century. The carvings and inscriptions indicate that the person buried was of Islamic faith. This tombstone is significant not only because it shows religious symbolism but also because it is adorned with a rich diversity of artistic elements. A brief description of the tombstones of Islamic figures is presented in Figure 3, which depicts one of the tomb complexes at the Lamuri cemetery, believed to include the tomb of Malik Syamsuddin, who passed away in 822 H.

The tomb reflects the adoption of Islamic funerary practices. Rather than cremation, burial was commemorated through the installation of a gravestone typical of Muslim graves. The tombstone bears Arabic inscriptions that record the date of death according to the Islamic calendar (Taylor 74). At the Lamuri



**Fig. 3:** The Lamuri burial complex includes the grave of Malik Syamsuddin, who died in 822 AH. (Raden et al. 2024)

site, according to Arya Purbaya, an Acehnese tombstone archaeologist, there are two private tombs with the title of Sultan and eight tombs with the title Malik (interview, August 12, 2024). The rulers of Lamuri and Pasai expressed their Islamic identity to Muslim maritime networks by assuming the title of Sultan and adopting Arabic names. This practice is reflected in figures such as Sulaiman bin Abdullah bin al-Basir, who died in 608 H/1211 CE, and Malik al-Saleh, who died in 1297 CE (Taylor 74).

The Lamuri site holds significant historical and cultural value, reflecting continuous human occupation and intercultural exchange from the pre-Islamic to Islamic periods. Archaeological evidence, including Islamic gravestones bearing royal and religious titles, confirms Lamuri's role as one of the earliest Islamic polities in the region (Montana 77). The study of tombstones and associated artifacts provides critical insights into Aceh's historical landscape. Ongoing archaeological and environmental research continues to deepen our understanding of the site, contributing to broader analyses of cultural transformation in Southeast Asia.

### **Site of Image Itself**

The tombstones located at the Lamuri site have shapes and ornaments that resemble pre-Islamic forms. However, the various tombstones with their ornaments are the first evidence of Indonesian Muslims in northern Sumatra. In the Lamuri or Lamreh cemetery, the tombstone of Sultan Sulaiman bin Abdullah bin al-Basir, who died in 608 H / 1211 AD, was found (Ricklefs 4). These tombstones, known as Plak-Plieng, feature vertical, pillar-like forms with pyramid-shaped tops, resembling menhirs, and exhibit clear influences from Hindu-Buddhist traditions. Ornamental motifs, such as tendrils and lotus petals, commonly found in pre-Islamic art, are prominently carved on these stones (Husni, S. Saryulis, et al.).

Based on early observations on the north and east coasts of Aceh, early Muslim grave markers carved in distinctive obelisk-like forms, locally known as Plak-Plieng, bear possible southern Indian stylistic overtones (Feener 1). Therefore, the shapes and motifs on the Plak-Plieng tombstone ornaments strongly influence pre-Islamic Hindu-Buddhist culture (Husni, Saryulis, et al. 59-88). The term Plak-Plieng was first mentioned by Montana, who adopted a local term from the locals, calling the tombstones at the Lamuri site as Plak-Plieng (Montana 77).

“Plak-Plieng,” which means open at the top and bottom, is associated with a floral motif with petals that open upwards and downwards on tombstones.

An overview of the various Lamuri tombstones can be seen in Figure 4 showing the types of ornaments on various tombstones at the Lamuri site. These ornaments are generally in the form of flowers, tendrils, and calligraphy as epitaphs, artistic entities with cultural significance. The headstone shape that resembles a menhir is found in the Hindu tradition. The Plak-Plieng tombstone is shaped like a pillar with a square or rectangular base, tapering upwards until the tip is rounded. These headstones appear in several variations, with typical types based on the specific elements of their finial shape (Maler et al. 122; Feener et al. 5). The Plak-Plieng tombstone ornaments at the Lamuri site are dominated by flowers, geometric, and/or calligraphy. The ornament is usually also supplemented with text containing verses of the Qur’an, the date of death, and the name of the person buried (Feener et al. 5).



**Fig. 4:** Variations of Lamuri tombstones with distinct shapes and symbolic ornaments (Raden et al. 2024)

In the Islamic world and Southeast Asian indigenous cultures, floral motifs symbolize vitality and aesthetic beauty. These symbols often represent beauty, life, and growth, reflecting the continuity of existence and the splendor of nature. Moreover, flowers hold profound spiritual significance, serving as emblems of divine connection and transcendence within these cultural contexts (Tahani 83). In the Hindu tradition, flowers are a symbol of spirituality that is connected to a high supernatural entity. In addition, flowers have an aesthetic meaning because flowers are often present as visual beauty that creates a harmonious and calming atmosphere. The use of flowers in Hindu religious practices is deeply embedded in scriptural traditions, notably the Vedas, which highlight their role in worship and spiritual connection (Tresna and Saputra 178; Desmond 258). In Hindu art and architecture, floral motifs are prominent, symbolizing fertility, life, and the harmonious interaction between humans and nature (Susanti et al. 75-76).

The tendril ornament symbolizes growth, development, and interconnectedness. Tendrils represent entities that expand, adapt, and relate to their surroundings, embodying the spirit of integration across elements of life. Their curved forms suggest flexibility and adaptability, while their balanced patterns imply stability and order. As symbolic forms, such ornaments convey cultural and historical meaning, serving as mediums of intergenerational communication and markers of collective knowledge (Katsevych). Beyond aesthetics, ornaments function as cultural guides, shaping behavior and mediating the internalization of cultural values (Valsiner 68).

Calligraphy in the Islamic tradition is a highly esteemed art form, as its written content often reflects expressions of devotion and reverence toward God. Since the emergence of Islam in the seventh century, Islamic calligraphy has played a central role in Muslim intellectual and artistic endeavors, transcending cultural, linguistic, and religious boundaries (Akin-Kivanç and Ellis). Calligraphic lettering functions not only as visual art and figural representation but also as a symbolic medium deeply rooted in religious, cultural, and aesthetic traditions (Raden et al. 133). Historically, calligraphy has been intrinsically linked to human existence, spirituality, and modes of communication, with its origins traceable to prehistoric times. In the context of Acehese tombstones, calligraphy serves both decorative and symbolic purposes. It enhances the aesthetic quality of the tombstones while

reflecting the high artistic sensibility of the Acehnese people, their craftsmanship, and the cultural importance of written language in honoring the memory of their rulers (Rosaguna et al. 86).

Ornaments in the form of flowers hold a significant place in traditional Southeast Asian art and aesthetics. There are at least five important types of floral ornaments commonly found in this cultural context: *bungong seuleupok* (lotus flower), *bungong geulima* (pomegranate flower), *bungong awan sitangke*—scientifically defined as a stylized floral motif characterized by spiral, cloud-like elements integrated with a central stem—*bungong pucoq rebung*, a stylized floral motif derived from the form of a bamboo shoot, characterized by upward-pointing elements symbolizing growth, vitality, and spiritual renewal, and *on cirih* (betel leaf). It reflects Acehnese cultural values related to life cycles and continuity (Novianti et al. 147). Each of these floral motifs carries deep symbolic meaning, often associated with beauty, fertility, prosperity, and spirituality. The lotus flower, for example, symbolizes purity and enlightenment in many Southeast Asian cultures, while the pomegranate flower is linked to abundance and vitality (Dominas 113). These decorative elements are not merely ornamental but are embedded with layers of cultural, spiritual, and social values, reflecting the intricate relationship between nature and tradition in Southeast Asian societies (Indriati et al. 762).



**Fig. 5:** Lotus Flower (*Bungong Seuleupok*) motif (Raden et al. 2024)

Figure 5 shows the *bungong seuleupok* (lotus flower) motif on the waist of the tombstone. *Bungong seuleupok*, or lotus flower/*nymphaea*, symbolizes perseverance and spiritual growth, reflecting the idea that purity and renewal can emerge from difficult or impure conditions (Andeska et al. 356). *Bungong seuleupok* in Hinduism and Buddhism is often associated with purity, enlightenment, and spiritual awakening. Usually, the *bungong seuleupok* grows in muddy waters yet, this flower blooms beautifully. Therefore, *bungong seuleupok* is a symbol of purity, spirituality, resilience, and the ability to overcome various challenges.



**Fig. 6:** Pomegranate Flower (*Bungong Geulima*) motif (Raden et al. 2024)

Figure 6 shows the *bungong geulima* (pomegranate flower) motif on the waist and body of the Lamuri tombstone. In Greek and Roman cultures, the pomegranate symbolizes life and love and is associated with marriage rituals. In Greek tradition, the fruit is offered to the groom, whereas in Roman tradition the bride wears a wreath of pomegranate branches on her head. (Dominas 114). Novianti et al. argue that the *bungong geulima* motif is prominently featured in Acehese architecture (Novianti et al. 148). The motif symbolizes fertility, abundance, and prosperity, with its cultural significance rooted in the natural characteristics of the pomegranate, namely its numerous seeds and perceived nutritional richness. Across various cultures, the pomegranate is widely regarded as a symbol of vitality, continuity of life, and enduring legacy (Nigro and Spagnoli 49).



**Fig. 7:** *Bungong Awan Sitangke* motif (Raden et al. 2024)

Figure 7 shows the *bungong awan sitangke* floral motif, which symbolizes both protection and cultural identity. The term *awan sitangke* derives from the Acehese language and translates to “a single-stemmed cloud,” reflecting a poetic conceptualization commonly found in Acehese decorative motifs, where natural elements are stylized to convey cultural symbolism and aesthetic values (Novianti et al. 149). This motif is associated with protection and prosperity, as it is traditionally linked to blessings in local customs (Maulin et al.). At the same time, it serves as a marker of cultural identity by reflecting indigenous flora and reinforcing the relationship between local values and the natural environment.



**Fig. 8:** Bamboo Shoots (*Bungong Pucok Rebung*) motif (Raden et al. 2024)

Figure 8 shows the motif of *bungong pucok rebung* or flower of *pucok rebung*, namely bamboo shoots in the form of young leaves at the end of the young (stem) bamboo, which is still very young and small. The term *pucok rebung* originates from the Acehnese language, meaning “bamboo shoot,” referring to the young sprout that grows from the root of the bamboo. Culturally, this motif symbolizes early-stage development, with the philosophical belief that a strong foundation in early education will shape good character in the future (Novianti et al. 147).



**Fig. 9:** Piper Betle (*Bungong on Ciri*) motif (Raden et al. 2024)

Figure 9 shows the piper betle motif (*bungong on ciri*). The ornament *on ciri* (sirih leaf/piper betle) is a plant with many benefits and advantages. Betle leaves in many cultural practices have a very important position, especially in ceremonies and social life (Rizal et al. 2; Yuli Astuti et al. 85). The piper betle

motif (*on cirih*) symbolizes core social values such as modesty, respect for guests, and the cultivation of peace and social warmth within the community (Sahputra and Rahmi 33).

### Site of Circulation

Muslim artists create beauty by producing works that adhere to Islamic beliefs. They transform representational forms, such as human and animal figures, into vegetal, geometric, and calligraphic designs, allowing them the freedom to develop innovative artistic concepts. Tombstone artists in Lamuri combine vegetal concepts, represented by the *geulima* (pomegranate flower), which symbolizes beauty and fertility. The pomegranate (*Punica granatum*), known in Arabic as *al-rummān*, is a fruit originating from Persia and is mentioned in the Qur'an in Surah Al-An'am (verses 99 and 141) and Surah Ar-Rahman (verse 68) (Afroogh 14; Mansur et al. 70).

In addition to pomegranate, the vegetal concept often encountered is *bungong seuleupok* or *seuleupa* (lotus flower). The lotus flower, or *Padma*, was sacred in ancient Egypt, symbolizing the sun, beauty, and purity. Hindu and Buddhist cultures believe in the lotus as a symbol of knowledge, spirituality, and strength. The lotus further symbolizes spiritual purity, reflecting the ideal of human beings who maintain moral integrity despite worldly influences. (Elnashar et al. 95; Schiffer et al. 127) The lotus flower has been widely adapted into Islamic art through processes of Islamic acculturation and vernacular expression. In Islamic thought, all objects and creations in the visible and invisible universe originate from Allāh and reflect His divine attributes, such as beauty, harmony, balance, and perfection. God is the supreme creator of the universe, known and unknown to man (Kāzmī 126-27).

The floral motifs *bungong geulima* and *bungong seuleupok* symbolize fertility and beauty (Husni 224). The arrangement of floral ornaments, characterized by symmetrical patterns, embodies mathematical order and reflects the divine harmony inherent in the concept of Godhead (Purniati et al. 2097). Islamic ornaments, whether vegetal, geometric, or depicting human or animal forms, appear to have certain connotations or symbolize certain ideals or concepts,

such as well-being or cosmic forces, in Islamic art and architecture (Zahra and Safrizal Bin Shahir 126).

Based on the interaction between local traditions and external Islamic influences, the ornaments are shaped by cultural circulation through trade routes. Lamuri served as a significant hub on the maritime Silk Road from the 9th to the 16th centuries CE, with archaeological findings at Lamreh, recognized as the historical Lamri, revealing abundant ceramics and Muslim funerary steles that underscore active trade and cultural interactions with areas including China, India, and the Middle East (Daly et al. 120). The site of circulation reinforces the development of ornaments that become an integral part of local cultural identity. These ornaments not only serve aesthetic functions but also carry meanings and symbols related to Islamic spirituality. The spread and circulation of ornaments through trade routes and intercultural interactions add to the value and diversity of ornaments in Lamuri.

### Site of Audiencing

Ornaments on Lamuri tombstones play an important role in connecting artworks with audiences who have different backgrounds and perspectives, especially in terms of culture, time, and social contexts that have developed over time. The *bungong geulima* (pomegranate) and *bungong seuleupok* (lotus flower) ornaments which were spiritual symbols for the people of the Lamuri region at that time also conveyed aesthetic and religious values to the community and its subsequent generations. *Bungong geulima* (pomegranate) symbolizes life and hope for a blessed life and closeness to God (Afroogh 14; Mansur et al. 70), while *bungong seuleupok* (lotus) symbolizes spiritual awakening and purity that relate to the physical world and the spiritual dimension (Elnashar et al. 25).

In contemporary contexts, the interpretation of these ornaments has extended beyond their original spiritual meanings. The ornaments on the Lamuri tombstones are now appreciated not only as historical elements but also as references for contemporary design and cultural heritage preservation. Contemporary designers see the ornaments on the Lamuri tombstones from an aesthetic perspective that is associated with the function and context of design and culture that are relevant

to the present. Thus, the ornaments of Lamuri tombstones could be treated as a bridge between the past and the future; this broadens the meaning of the relationship between art, spirituality, and local cultural identity. The preservation process of these ornaments can reveal the importance of cultural sustainability in preserving the visual heritage, values, and symbols embedded in the ornaments (Zahra and Safrizal Bin Shahir 119; Kāzmī 129).

Ornaments on Lamuri gravestones may be broadly understood, thus, not only as beautiful works of art but also as a medium of communication that can adapt to the times, inspiring and providing different interpretations for each generation. Across various cultures, gravestones function as a medium through which the deceased communicate with the living, transmitting cultural identity and values across generations. These markers commemorate the deceased while embodying the community's spiritual, cultural, and social values (Bada and Ulum 5420).

Also important to consider is how the Plak-pling gravestones display geometric and abstract motifs that reflect the Lamuri Kingdom's Hindu-Buddhist heritage and spiritual values. These early designs, dated to the 11th–13th centuries CE, bear strong stylistic parallels with Hindu-Buddhist sacred architecture, indicating their local religious and cultural origins (Rosaguna et al. 81; Noval et al. 42). With the gradual introduction of Islam from the late 13th to 15th centuries CE, Islamic artistic elements such as arabesques and Qur'anic calligraphy began to appear, marking a transition in religious expression while retaining indigenous visual traditions (Akin-Kivanç and Ellis). The coexistence of pre-Islamic and Islamic motifs during this period illustrates a process of cultural adaptation rather than replacement. These ornaments thus represent a synthesis of spiritual meaning, local tradition, and external influence, reinforcing their relevance in contemporary cultural heritage (Schiffer et al. 127).

The existing Lamuri tombstones bear traces of broader cultural syncretism at its creation. The proof is that the tombstones incorporate elements of Islamic, Hindu-Buddhist, and local Acehnese visual culture (Husni, S. Saryulis, et al. 66). The decorative design and inscriptions on the Lamuri tombstones show expertise in art creation with very high aesthetic considerations. Geometric patterns, Arabic calligraphy, and floral motifs typical of Islamic funerary art characterize the decorative design and inscriptions of the Lamuri period (Saryulis et al. 65-72).

## **Cultural Continuity and Contextual Transformation in Lamuri Tombstones Ornaments**

The ornaments of Lamuri gravestones link artworks with diverse audiences across cultures and eras. Floral motifs such as the pomegranate and lotus symbolize life, hope, spiritual awakening, and purity, bridging the physical and spiritual realms. Over time, the interpretation of these ornaments has evolved, and they are now valued for both their spiritual significance and aesthetic appeal, influencing contemporary design and cultural heritage preservation. These ornaments connect past and present, reflecting the interplay of art, spirituality, and cultural identity. The Plak-Plieng gravestones, with their geometric and abstract motifs, illustrate Lamuri's Hindu-Buddhist heritage and Islamic incorporation. This continual adaptation underscores dynamic cultural exchange and highlights the ornaments' role in shaping and preserving the region's visual and spiritual heritage.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Appreciation and gratitude to the Directorate of Research and Community Service, Director General of Strengthening Research and Development, Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education for financing Fundamental-Regular Research activities with the title "Digitization of Batee Jeurat Ornaments as Cultural Heritage of the Acehese Community," Fiscal Year 2024 DIPA Number: 023.17.1.690523/2024 01st Revision, dated February 4, 2024 and SPPK Number: 033/E5/PG.02.00.PL/2024. Thank you also to the Institute for Research and Community Service of the Indonesian Institute of the Arts (ISI) Surakarta for assisting this research activity through the Research Derivative Contract Number: 1056.C/IT6.2/PT.01.03/2024 dated June 14, 2024.

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