

# Pre-Islamic and Islamic Influences of Taman Ghairah Aceh

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## Abstract

According to the manuscript of *Bustanussalatin* by Nuruddin Ar Raniry, in 1637 Sultan Iskandar Thani built a private royal garden called Taman Ghairah (Ghairah Garden). The seventeenth-century garden of Aceh still holds some questions because most of its objects are no longer found in Banda Aceh. Three buildings such as: Gunongan, Kandang and Pintô Khôp which are close to the former Sultan's palace, are believed to be the remains of the garden. This present study is architectural research that incorporates direct observation and semiotic study on the garden simulation. The simulation is based on the *Bustanussalatin* manuscript. It is found that the existence of several symbols carry out meanings which relate to the influences of Islamic and pre-Islamic cultures in the past. Meru, tree of life, lotus, and *banjaran sari* may have derived from pre-Islamic culture, while the river, mosque and floral symbols indicate the presence of Islamic influence. This article underlines that Taman Ghairah has Islamic and Pre-Islamic cultural influences, reflecting the convergence of diverse backgrounds in Acehnese culture.

**Keywords:** *Taman Ghairah, Bustanussalatin, Sultanate of Aceh, Pre-Islamic and Islamic Culture*

### **Abstrak**

*Menurut Kitab Bustanussalatin karya Nuruddin Ar Raniry, pada tahun 1637 Sultan Iskandar Thani membangun sebuah taman kesultanan yang dinamakan Taman Ghairah. Taman Aceh abad ketujuh belas ini masih menyimpan beberapa pertanyaan karena sebagian besar objeknya tidak dapat ditemukan lagi di Banda Aceh. Ketiga bangunan seperti Gunongan, Kandang dan Pintô Khôp yang dekat dengan bekas istana sultan, adalah sisa-sisa taman. Artikel ini menggunakan kajian semiotika pada simulasi arsitektur taman. Studi ini menunjukkan adanya beberapa simbol yang membawa makna. Simbol meru, pohon kehidupan, teratai, dan banjaran sari mungkin berasal dari budaya pra-Islam, sedangkan simbol sungai, masjid, dan bunga menunjukkan adanya pengaruh Islam. Artikel ini mengindikasikan bahwa Taman Ghairah memiliki pengaruh budaya Islam dan pra-Islam, yang mencerminkan konvergensi ragam latar belakang dalam budaya Aceh.*

**Kata kunci:** *Taman Ghairah, Bustanussalatin, Kesultanan Aceh, Kebudayaan Pra Islam dan Islam*

## **Introduction**

Several sources mentioned that during the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, there were many gardens in Aceh. One of the earliest sources mentioning a garden in Aceh was Manuel Godinho de Eredia's map in 1610. This map was an attempt to give a depiction of northern Sumatra to The King of Spain from 1600 to 1610. This map was not drawn based on Eredia's direct survey but based on data from other people who was possibly Luis Monteiro Coutinho (Subrahmanyam, 2009: 28). In the detailed plans of the palace, Eredia drew the *Orthas del Rey* (the Sultan's garden) which consisted of three chambers. All chambers had different landscape patterns and were interconnected. This garden was located between the Sultan's residence and the main gate. This gate (*Pintu Thani*) was the palace's main entrance from the field in front of the Baiturrahman Grand Mosque (*Medan Khayyali*).

Admiral Augustin de Beaulieu, who led the third French expedition in 1621, described a beautiful garden near the mouth of a river in Aceh. The leisure garden was situated in front of a fort. Inside the garden,

there were several ponds and beautiful pathways. The garden was located near a settlement of about 3,000, and earthen fortifications surrounded it. (Lombard, 1986: 56).

Another source mentioning a garden in Aceh was by Nicholaus de Graff in 1641. He was a Dutch surgeon who attended the funeral of Sultan Iskandar Thani. According to him, the Sultan was buried in the garden behind the palace (Lombard, 1986: 182). The garden was probably Taman Ghairah (Ghairah Garden), the Aceh's seventeenth-century private royal garden, which was mentioned in Bustanussalatin manuscript.

Bustanussalatin manuscript was written in Malay by Nuruddin Ar-Raniry during Iskandar Thani's reign. The author, Nuruddin Ar-Raniry, arrived in Aceh in May 1637 from Gujarat. Iskandar Thani instructed him to write the manuscript of Bustanussalatin ten months after his arrival. Ten months period was enough for Ar Raniry to learn Malay because there was a source that mentioned that his mother was Malay (Lombard, 1986). This text has been used by scholars who studied Aceh such as Djajadiningrat (1916), Brakel (1975), Lombard (1986), Wessing (1988), and later Arif (2008) to describe the Taman Ghairah (Ghairah Garden). The present study uses Djajadiningrat's transcription of Bustanussalatin Book II, Chapter XIII, cited by Lombard (1986).

Most of the garden's elements mentioned by Bustanussalatin are not exist anymore in Banda Aceh today. Djajadiningrat (1916) argued that three buildings near the former Sultan's palace in Banda Aceh were remnants of Taman Ghairah. The first building, Gunongan, is a mountain-like structure (artificial mountain). The second building is Kandang, which is located to the north of Gunongan. In an

unpublished excavation held by Hasan Muarif Ambary in 1976, human remains and gold plates were found inside a coffin in the centre of this building (Wessing, 1991: 7). According to Wessing, the corpse was female (Wessing, 1991: 7). This finding was quite contradictory to the opinion that has developed until now saying that this is the mausoleum of Iskandar Thani. The third building is the gate of the garden complex, which is widely known as Pintô Khôp. The Gunongan and Kandang buildings are now in Taman Sari Gunongan Heritage Complex, managed by BPCB Aceh (Aceh Cultural Heritage Conservation Center).

Pintô Khôp is located at Putroe Phang Park, a separate park next to Taman Sari Gunongan. Besides the three objects, another vital object still exists is Krueng Daroy, an artificial canal formerly known as Darul Isyki River. According to Thomas Best's report, this canal was built during Sultan Iskandar Muda's era and finished in twenty days (Lombard, 1986: 176). Best was an English envoy that came to Banda Aceh in 1613. He was invited to a banquet in the water by Iskandar Muda. The banquet was held at Mata Ie bathing place. The deflection of the river was located at Geuceu, a southwestern village of Banda Aceh City. The name Geuceu, according to Kamal Arif, comes from the Acehnese word, which means 'crossed out by him' or the Sultan once made scribbles there. In other words, Sultan Iskandar Muda diverted the river flow toward his palace (Arif, 2013: 10). Today, the river that flows from the Mata Ie area branches in the Geuceu area, Banda Aceh, precisely behind the Baitul Musyahadah Mosque into two rivers. The river was originally called Krueng Doy (Shallow River) because its flow was divided, while the river that crossed Gunongan and Dalam Daruddunya (palace) was called Krueng Daroy (Deep River). Arif's note shows that the garden idea could have been

developed during Sultan Iskandar Muda, even though Raniry said that the entire garden was built during Iskandar Thani's period.

The shape of three objects: Gunongan, Kandang, and Pintô Khôp depicts the relation between the Islamic Sultanate of Aceh and the older tradition that may have persisted before the seventeenth century Islamic Sultanate of Aceh. The models of the three buildings, Gunongan, Kandang and Pintô Khôp, have never been found in Persian and Mughal Islamic gardens. Based on this hypothesis, this study examines the extent to which the pre-Islamic and Islamic characteristics influenced this private royal garden.

Djajadiningrat (1916), Brakel (1975), Lombard (1986), Wessing (1988) and later Arif (2008) attempted to define the meaning of Taman Ghairah based on the features of the garden. What the present study attempts is to discover the meaning of a garden based on its symbols. The novelty lies on the simulated features of the garden (Gunongan, Kandang, and Pinto Khop) based on the descriptions in the *Bustanussalatin* manuscript. Using these simulations, semiotic method was used to traced the meanings of Taman Ghairah in the seventeenth century.

## **Literature Review**

Mangunwijaya in his *Wastu Citra* (1988) explains that architecture consists of two categories: Guna and Citra. Guna is related to function or benefits, while Citra or image which is related to symbols (Mangunwijaya, 2013: 47). In the realization of architectural images, specific meanings are embedded, which could be intentional or unintentional, by the designer. The meanings sometimes are hidden in the symbols that can be associated with the image of the architectural

work. In his book *Intention in Architecture*, Norberg-Schulz (1965) wrote about the role of symbols in one of the elements of the building task, namely cultural symbolization, which was not included in the classical theory of architecture such as the Vitruvian Triad (*firmitas*, *utilitas*, and *venustas*). According to Norberg-Schulz, architecture consists of a physical sphere (physical milieu) and a symbol sphere (symbol milieu). While the physical milieu consists of physical control (in Vitruvian Triad: *firmitas*) and functional frame (in Vitruvian Triad: *utilitas*), the symbol milieu consists of the social milieu and cultural symbolization (in Vitruvian Triad, both are included in *venustas*). This study focused on the symbol milieu to analyze the cultural background of Taman Ghairah.

Social milieu is defined as the social aspect related to architecture. Social milieu may accommodate activities according to social conditions that have been formed or to form a specific social order. “When the hut of the chief or the palace of the King was made larger than other buildings, it was to indicate a social status” (Norberg-Schulz, 1965: 118). In the seventeenth-century Aceh, Francois Martin reported that “the king did not allow stone buildings for fear that the people would build forts against him.” (Reid, 2010: 81). This shows that stone buildings only belonged to the sultanate in the sixteenth century. As a result, people outside the sultanate legacy could only have wooden properties.

The social aspect also refers to the role of humans when doing activities in it. Any activity that takes place in architecture will have its meaning. Norberg-Schulz exemplifies the aspect of the audience in the theatre in ancient Greece having a vital role in the show, those who watch serve as part of the story that the puppeteer narrate. This is in

contrast to the current theatre where the audience is only a passive aspect that acts as a spectator, not part of the show (Norberg-Schulz, 1965: 120-121). It can be concluded that the social milieu includes the role of architecture in shaping social conditions and the role of social activities in forming architectural meaning.

According to Norberg-Schulz, architecture is a cultural object because it is a human product that serves certain activities (Norberg-Schulz, 1965: 122). Culture contains values that are derived from a particular social situation. Those values are passed from generation to generation and can be realised through art. It means that culture was previously in the form of values (words), then is symbolized in art and architecture (images). Thus, architecture is a symbolization of specific values of a culture.

Cultural symbolization cannot be separated from social conditions. As in social milieu, certain symbols or patterns used in a building emphasize the social position of the people living there. Likewise, cultural symbolization can also be formed from the existing social life. Therefore, architecture's social and cultural aspects can be explored by studying symbols in architecture. Symbolisation in Norberg-Schulz's Cultural Symbolization means the representation of specific circumstances in other media by looking at the 'similarity of structure' (Norberg-Schulz, 1965: 57). To see the similarity of these structures, Norberg-Schulz introduced the 'symbol system' which can be interpreted as a sign. Therefore, signs are based on social conventions that must be linked again to the culture or subculture of society (Hoed, 2014: 10).

The term 'sign' in this study is used in a broader context, which is the process of linkage between symbols, representamen (other symbols

that have something in common) and meaning. In this sense, symbols are part of the symbol system. Symbol-System is a description of the properties of a symbol. According to Norberg-Schulz, a Symbol-System must consist of basic symbols that signify the basic properties of the main object. Symbol-System is also better known as Semiotics. (Norberg-Schulz, 1965: 59).

Semiotics refers to the science of signs which examines the marking systems and the things that arise from the use of signs. With semiotics, meaning can be studied objectively. In architecture, semiotics is used to recognize, identify, and understand the meaning of architectural forms. In this case, there is an assumption that architectural formations are symbols that contain meaning. Kevin Lynch argues that in architecture, symbols can be obtained through formations that can produce imageability (in Mangunwijaya: Citra), such as form and character (texture, color, material), the composition of mass and space, as well as natural elements such as rivers, trees and other natural elements (Lynch, 1960).

Peirce's Triadic Model is a semiotic method often applied to define architectural meaning. The Triadic model consists of three elements: sign (signifier), referent (*denotatum*), and meaning (signified). *Signifiers* or signs exist in the symbols of architecture and can be in the form of an architectural image as a whole; the elements it contains, such as texture, color, material, and specific details; the arrangement of time and space; as well as the natural elements in it. The second element of Pierce's model is *denotatum*, a reference for reading the sign's meaning. It can be in the form of a physical or textual picture, in the form of concepts and historical records. Furthermore, the third element is signified or the meaning inferred from the sign. This



meaning is read based on textual references contained in the *denotatum*. In short, architectural semiotics is the process of translating images of objects into textual meaning by using references.

## **Method**

The remains of Taman Ghairah witnessed today in Banda Aceh City may have been different in appearance from those obtained from historical information. In response to this, the study visualizes the past image of Taman Ghairah through architectural simulation. The simulation undergoes several processes, including collecting previous simulations, collecting historical information from objects, drawing simulations and superimposing old and new characteristics based on historical information. By doing so, the author created three simulations of Gunongan, Kandang, and Pintô Khôp objects in the past, and labeled them with their past name: Gegunungan Menara Permata, Kandang Baginda, and Pintu Biram Inderabangsa.

In order to understand the pre-Islamic and Islamic influences of Taman Ghairah, the meaning of their images (*Citra*) needs to be explored. *Citra* was obtained from the simulation of three remains (Gunongan, Kandang and Pintô Khôp) and historical information such as Chapter XIII Book II of *Bustanussalatin* about Taman Ghairah and other related historical records. Furthermore, the writer associated the sign that emerges from the image with other symbols (*denotatum*). In the end, the linkage of these signs will bring out the meaning that is deduced from the search for signs and *denotatum*. In this study, the meanings of signs are classified into Islamic symbols and pre-Islamic symbols.

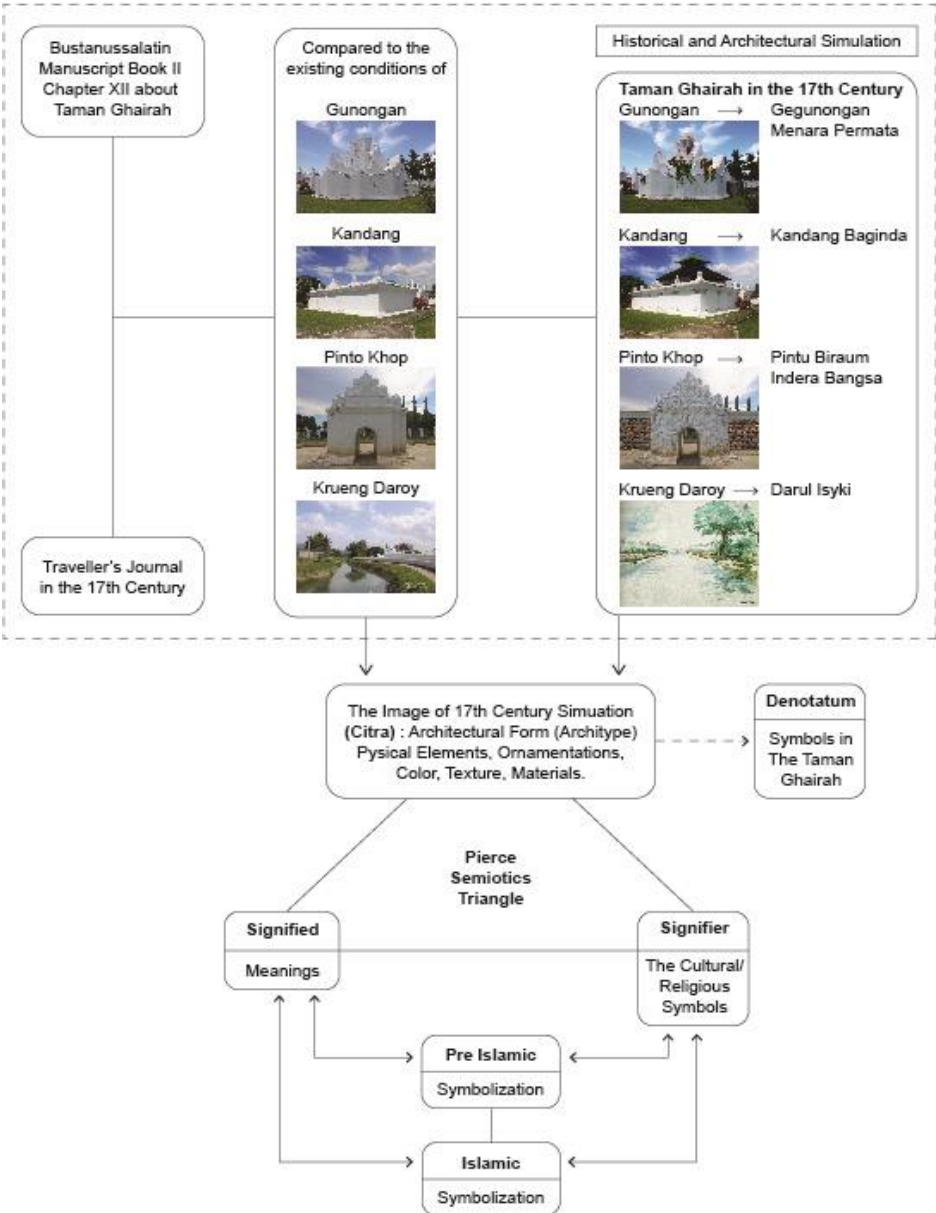


Figure 1. Research Flow Chart (Author’s collection, 2022)

Figure 1 describes the procedures that this study was undertaking. Two sources namely the Bustanussalatin manuscript and the traveller’s note in the 17th century served as the main references for analysing the data. Datasets consist of: (1) the current situation of Gunongan,

Kandang, Pintu Khop and Krueng Daroy, and (2) the simulated situation of Gunongan, Kandang, Pintu Khop and Krueng Daroy based on Bustanussalatin manuscript. Both datasets were compared based on the physical elements, ornamentalisations, color, texture and materials (of which serve as the denotatum in Pierce's model), the meanings (signified) and the cultural/religious symbols (signifier). Then, semiotic analysis was conducted which resulted the pre-Islamic and Islamic influence on the architecture of Taman Ghairah.

## Result and Discussion

According to Arif's simulation, the area of Taman Ghairah includes several villages in Banda Aceh City, such as Neusu Jaya, Neusu Aceh, Lamlagang, Geuceu Complex, Seutui, and Blower (Sukaramai). The author indicated the positions of *gampongs* (villages), present garden objects, and virtual sultanate objects that still exist in Banda Aceh City today on Arif's simulation map (Figure 2). According to Raniry, a beautiful garden was created about a thousand fathom wide during the reign of Sultan Iskandar Thani (probably started from Iskandar Muda). A thousand fathoms are equivalent to the length of the Krueng Daroy river, which is 1.78 km (Figure 3) (cited in Arif, 2008: 313). Krueng Daroy, in the old toponym, is called Darul Isyki, which according to Raniry, was located precisely in the middle of Taman Ghairah. Arif drew the river right in the middle of his simulation and divided the garden equally on the left and right of the river.

Arif's map also shows the boundary of the garden and its surroundings. The hedges around the gardens and palace grounds were probably bamboo trees. Beaulieu, a French envoy, said that around the palace, there was a mound of dirt due to the trench excavation surrounding the

palace. Bamboo trees were planted in the mound which was tall and thick like trees in a forest (Reid, 2010: 91). The king forbade anyone to cut even a few of these bamboos; whoever violated will be sentenced to death (Reid, 2010: 91).

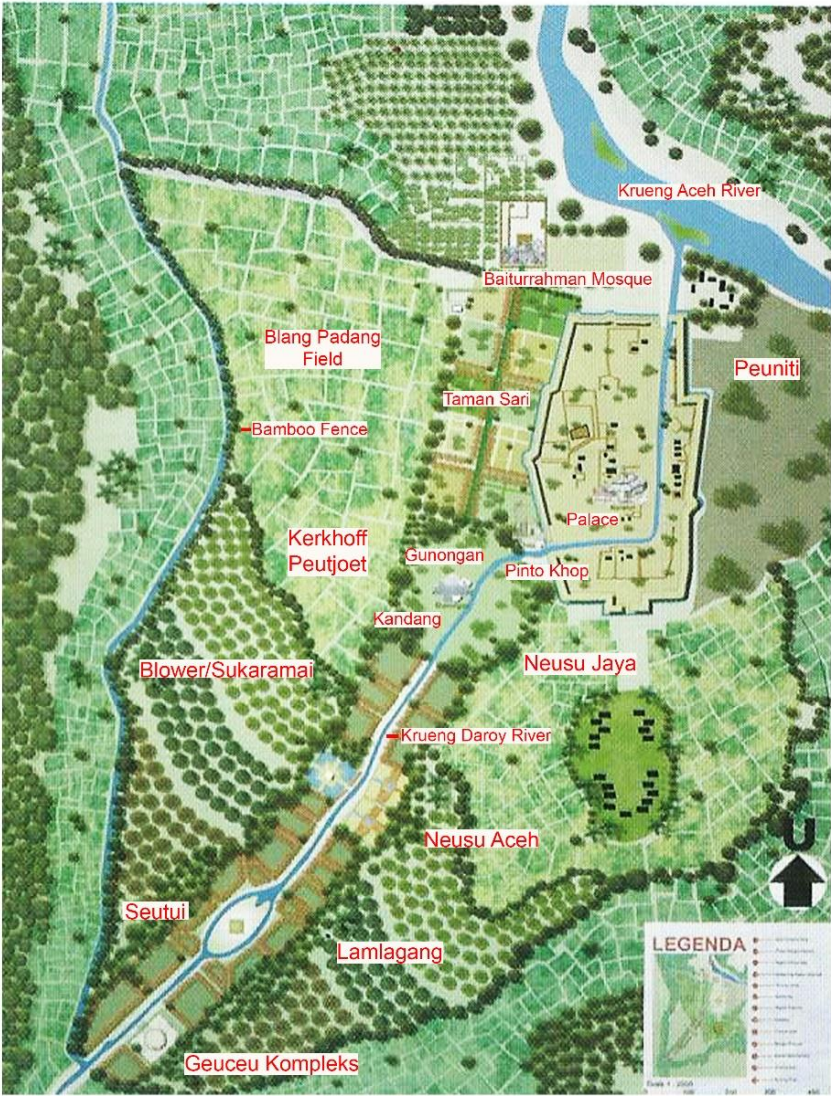


Figure 2. The map of the Taman Ghairah simulation, superimposed with current location information of Banda Aceh (edited from Arif, 2008)

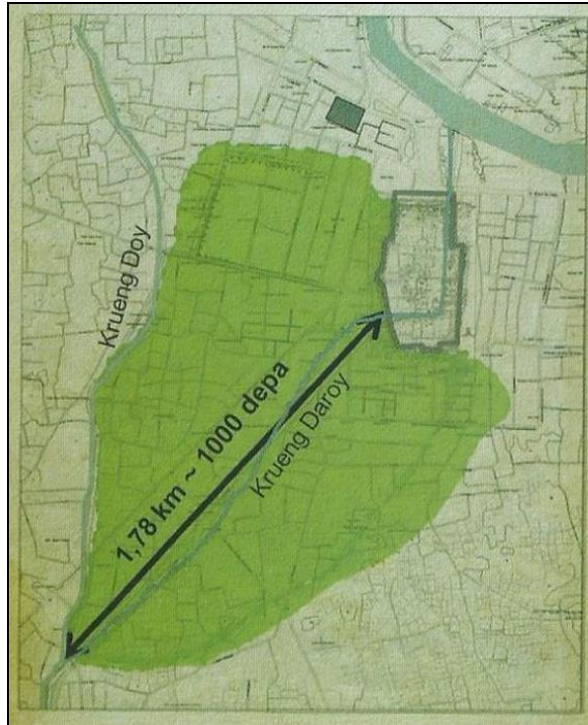


Figure 3. The length of Taman Ghairah, which is 1,000 fathoms and the area of the garden (green) according to Arif (Arif, 2008)

Raniry said the garden gate was called the Pintu Biram Indrabangsa, which faced the palace. Now, the gate is well-known as Pintô Khôp.

*“Adalah dewala taman itu daripada batu dirapatnya, maka diturap dengan kapur yang amat bersih seperti perak rupanya dan pintunya menghadap ke istana dan perbuatan pintunya itu berkup, di atas kup itu batu diperbuat seperti biram berkelopak dan berkemuncakkan daripada sangga pelinggam terlalu gemerlap sinarnya, bergelar Pintu Biram Indrabangsa. (Cited in Lombard, 1986: 268-272).*

[The surrounding wall of the garden was made of stone, and it was plastered with lime which was very clean as silver. The gate of the garden was facing the palace and it had crown in the form of a hat with a tapered top (berkup), on top of the hat, the stone was made like a kilt with petals and the peak was made of sparkling alabaster. The door was called Pintu Biram Indrabangsa].

Detailed architectural characteristics of Pintu Biram Indrabangsa based on Bustanussalatin are summarised in the table Table 1.

Table 1. The architectural characteristic of Pintu Biram Indrabangsa based on Bustanussalatin

Object	Form	Location	Material	Color
Pintu Biram Indrabangsa (the gate of Taman Ghairah)	The door with <i>kup</i> (crown in the form of a hat with a tapered top)	Facing the palace (the gate to access the garden from the palace enclosure)	<i>Pelinggam</i> stone (alabaster)	White alabaster
	<i>Biram</i> with petals (pearls in flower petals as also found in the <i>Gunongan</i> )			
Dewala Taman	The wall that surrounded the garden		Limestone	Silvery white

The Figure 4 is the simulation of Pintu Biram Inderabangsa and Dewala Taman based on the current image of Pintô Khôp superimposed with the characteristic given by Bustanussalatin.



Figure 4. The simulation of Pintu Biram Inderabangsa or Pintô Khôp (Author’s collection, 2015)

The next object of Taman Ghairah is the Gemunungan Menara Permata.

“Syahdan dari kanan sungai Dar ul-Isyki itu, suatu medan terlalu amat luas, kersiknya daripada batu pelinggam, bergelar Medan

*Khairani. Dan pada sama tengah medan itu sebuah gunung, di atasnya menara tempat semayam bergelar Gegunungan Menara Permata, tiangnya daripada tembaga dan atapnya daripada perak seperti sisik rumbia dan kemuncaknya suasa. Maka apabila kena sinar matahari, maka cemerlanglah cahayanya itu. Adalah dalamnya beberapa permata puspa ragam dan sulemani dan yamani. Dan ada pada Gegunungan itu suatu guha pintunya bertangkup perak. Dan ada tanam-tanaman atas gunung itu beberapa bunga-bunga dari pada cempaka dan air mawar merah dan putih dan serigading.” (Cited in Lombard, 1986: 268-272).*

[And from the right side of the Dar ul-Isyki river, there was a very wide field, whose gravel was made of cement stone, called Medan Khairani. And in the middle of the field there was an artificial mountain, on top of which there was a tower for meditate, the mountain was called Gegunungan Menara Permata. Its pillars were made of copper and its roof was made of silver like reed scales and its tip was made of suasa (a mixture of gold and cooper). So, when it hits the sun, then the light shines. There were various gems of puspa ragam and sulemani and yamani inside the mountain. And there was a cave on the mountain with a silver gate. And there were several plants on the mountain, Champaca Flowers, Red Roses, White Roses and Ivory Betel].

Building on Figure 4 is an artificial mountain which is now known as Gunongan. The architectural characteristics of Gegunungan Menara Permata based on Bustanussalatin are summarised in the Tabel 2.

Table 2. The architectural characteristic of Gegunungan Menara Permata based on Bustanussalatin

Object	Form	Location	Material	Color
Gegunungan Menara Permata	Artificial mountain (Gunongan)	In the middle of Medan Khairani (a field inside Taman Ghairah)	The pole of the mountain was made of cooper	Cooper yellow
			The roof of the mountain was made of silver, scaly like sago palm	Silver
			The tip of the mountain was made of suasa (a mixture of gold and cooper)	Reddish yellow
	A cave inside the mountain	The door of the cave was coated	Silver	

Object	Form	Location	Material	Color
			with silver	
	Various jewels were located inside the mountain		Sulemani and Yamani stones	Multi-color
	The mountain was planted with several plants: <i>Champaca</i> Flowers, Red Roses, White Roses and Ivory Betel			

The Figure 5 is the simulation of Gegunungan Menara Permata based on the current image of Gunongan superimposed with the characteristic given by Bustanussalatin.



Figure 5. The Simulation of Gegunungan Menara Permata or Gunongan (Author’s collection, 2015)

Beside the Gunongan, there is a Kandang Baginda. Arif described the Kandang Baginda as:

*“Dan ada di sisi gunung itu kandang baginda dan dewala kandang itu diturap dengan batu putih diukir pelbagai warna dan nakas dan selimpat dan temboga dan mega arak-arakan. Dan barang siapa masuk dalam kandang itu, adalah ia mengucap salawat akan nabi salla Allahu alaihi wa’s salam. Dan adalah dewala yang di dalam itu berteterapan batu putih belazuardi perbuatan orang benua Turki. Dan tiang kandang itu bernama Tamriah dan Naga dan Puspa dan*



*Dewadaru pegawainya daripada kayu jantera mula. Dan adalah atap kandang itu dua lapis, selapis daripada papan dicat dengan damrak hitam, gemerlap rupa warnanya seperti warna nilam, dan selapis lagi atap kandang itu daripada cat hijau warnanya seperti warna zamrud dan kemuncaknya daripada mulamma emas dan sulur bayungnya daripada perak dan di bawah sulur bayung itu buah pedandang daripada cermin kilau-kilauan dipandang orang.” (Cited in Lombard, 1986: 268-272)*

[And there was Kandang Baginda on the side of the mountain, the surrounding wall was paved with white stone carved in various colors: nakas, selimpat, copper and Mega arak-arakan. And whoever enters that kandang, they said salawat on the Prophet Salallahu Alaihi Wa's salam. And the inner part of the wall of the Kandang was plastered with Belazuardi white stone made by Turks. And the four pillars of the kandang were named Tamriah, Naga, Puspa and Dewadaru which were made of wood. And the roof of the Kandang was two layers, the first layer was glittering black damrak wood, like the color of sapphire, and another layer of the roof was green, like the color of an emerald. The pinnacle of the Kandang was made of gold and its sulur bayung (decoration on the corner of roof edges) were made of silver. And under the sulur bayung, there were glittering hanging mirrors]

Kandang is a mausoleum of Sultans. Today, this building is still located side by side with Gunongan. Detailed architectural characteristics of Kandang Baginda based on Bustanussalatin are summarised in the Table 3.

Table 3. The architectural characteristic of Kandang Baginda based on Bustanussalatin

Object	Form	Location	Material	Color
Kandang Baginda (the final resting place of Sultan Iskandar Thani)	Surrounded by a carved wall ( <i>Dewala Kandang</i> )	Beside the Gunongan, in the Medan Khairani	Stone	White
	Various carvings inside the Kandang			Various colors: <i>Nakas, Selimpat, Cooper, and Mega arak-arakan</i>
	Turkman created the inside part of the Kandang wall		Stone	White and Lazuardi (bluish color)
	Kandang had four poles, namely Tamriah, Naga,		<i>Jantera Mula</i> wood	

Object	Form	Location	Material	Color
	Puspa and Dewadaru			
	Kandang has two layers of roof		Wooden board	First layer: glossy black Second layer: emerald green
	The pinnacle of the roof		Pure gold	Gold
	<i>Sulur bayung</i> (decoration on the corner of a roof edge)		Silver	Silver
	<i>Buah Pendentang</i> (four mirrors that were hung on the sulur bayung)		Mirror	Sparkling

The Figure 6 is the simulation of Kandang Baginda based on the current image of Kandang Sultan Iskandar Thani superimposed with the characteristic given by Bustanussalatin.



Figure 6. The simulation of Kandang Baginda, or The mausoleum of Sultan Iskandar Thani (Author's collection, 2015)

### Pre-Islamic Symbolisation

Gunongan, Pintô Khôp, and a carving on Kandang Sultan Iskandar Thani are garden objects that symbolize Meru. According to Wessing

(1988), Lombard (2006) and several other historians, Gunongan is a symbol of Meru, a cosmic mountain in Hindu-Buddhist cosmology. Meru is usually represented in three vertical layers in the form of terraces, which can be seen in Gunongan (Wessing, 1988: 170). The lowest level is the position of humans, while the top level is the position of Gods (Chihara, 1996: 26). This cosmology is reflected in the Gunongan, where the first floor is the place for humans, while the upper part of it is the place to meditate, probably for the sultans to meet God.

Pintô Khôp also represents the symbol of Meru. Based on field observation, the shape of the Pintô Khôp resembles the shape of a Hindu temple, which also symbolises Meru. The upper part of the Pintô Khôp is divided into three parts, similar to the Gunongan (Figure 7).

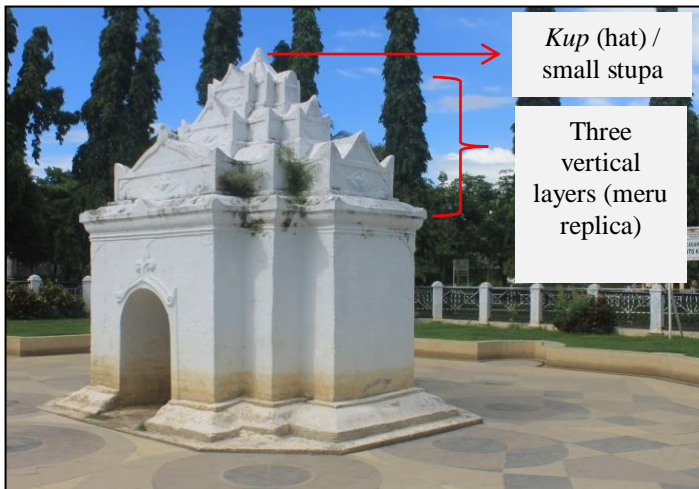


Figure 7. Meru replica on the Pintô Khôp (Pintu Biram Indrabangsa) (Author's collection, 2015)

Meru is also the place where the 'Tree of life' grows. The tree of life was usually made of gold or gems (Wessing, 1988). The Bustanussalatin mentioned this character of the tree of life in the

Gegunungan Menara Permata (Gunongan). Gunongan had a tower of gems (Menara Permata) with a tip made of *suasa* (a mixture of gold and copper). In “Upon a White Stone Under a Nagasari Tree”, Hooykaas (1957) mentioned the pre-Islamic concept in Indonesia where the king performed a sacred ritual sitting on a white stone under a Banyan Tree or Nagasari Tree. However, the king not only sat on the white stone but also leaned against the Tree of Life (Hooykaas, 1957: 336). If the tower of gems in the *gunongan* was the symbol of the tree of life (Figure 8), the *gunongan* might act as the white stone where the sultans performed sacred rituals in the garden.

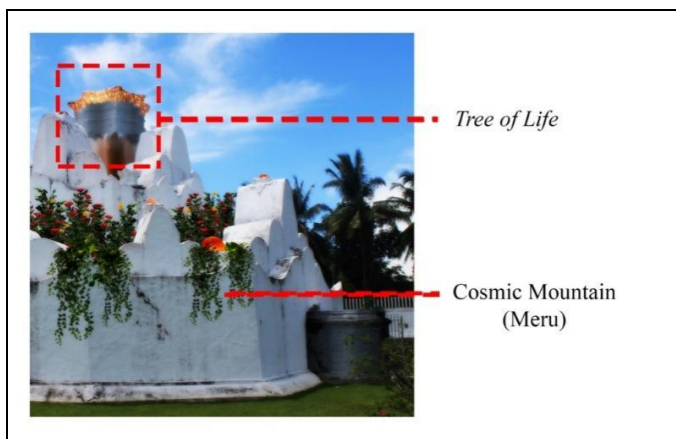


Figure 8. The tree of life and Meru concept on Gegunungan Menara Permata (Author’s collection, 2015)



Figure 9. Meru symbolisation on the Kandang Sultan Iskandar Thani (Author’s collection, 2015)

Three identical carvings on the outer wall of Kandang Sultan Iskandar Thani are likely symbols of Meru (Figure 9). These engravings show a

mountain-like object emerging from the top of which a plant appears, probably the Tree of Life symbol.



Figure 10. (A) Lotus-shaped seat type 1 in the Gunongan (Author's collection, 2015); (B) Lotus-shaped seat type 2 in the Gunongan (Author's collection, 2015); (C) Lotus-shaped seat type 3 in the Gunongan (Author's collection, 2015)



Figure 11. (A) Lakshmi is sitting on a lotus-shaped seat (Source: [journeyingtothegoddess.wordpress.com](http://journeyingtothegoddess.wordpress.com), 2012); (B) Buddha statue on a lotus-shaped seat (Source: [lotussculpture.com](http://lotussculpture.com), 2022)

Most of the flower-shaped seat stones in Gunongan resemble lotus (Figure 10). Besides supporting the functions of the artificial mountain as a place to sit and meditate (*semayam*), those lotus-shaped seats also have meanings. The lotus flower-shaped seat often appears in Hindu and Buddhist religious symbols, as seen in Goddess Lakshmi and Buddha, who is depicted sitting on a lotus flower (Figure 11). In Hindu

Cosmology, the lotus symbol is closely related to the female symbol. “The lotus is the foremost symbol of beauty, prosperity and fertility... The lotus is used to describe feminine beauty, especially female eyes” (Lotus Sculpture, 2015). The female symbol corresponds to the story of Gunongan (structure filled with lotus), which was a gift from Sultan Iskandar Muda to Putroe Phang (The Princess of Pahang). Meanwhile, according to Buddhist belief, the lotus is one of the symbols of luck (Shiva, 2011).

Although the lotus flower has more than eight petals, Hinduism and Buddhism always depicted it with eight petals. This lotus symbolism with eight petals is also depicted in Gunongan. The Gunongan shape is octagonal, and each of its segments is in the form of a flower petal. The Gunongan itself also resembles a large lotus (Figure 12).

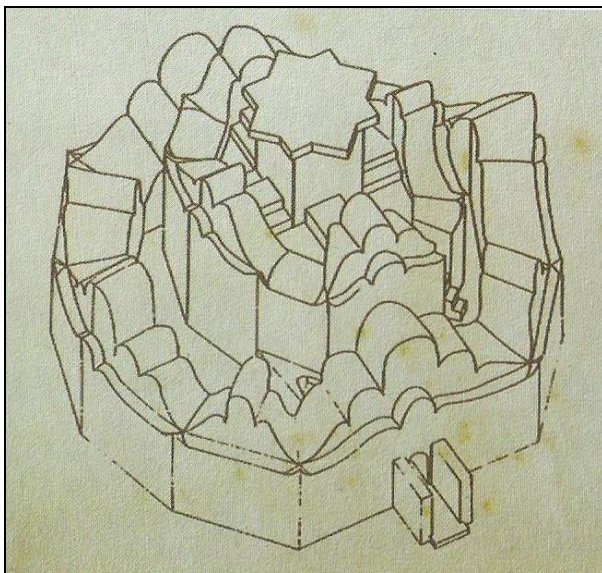


Figure 12. The oblique view of Gunongan showing the octagonal shape, which might mean a lotus as a whole (Arif, 2008)

“The white color may signify in Javanese classification that one is supposed to be in the heaven of Siwa. White and multicolored as well

as East and Holy centre are interchangeable” (Hooykaas, 1957: 335). According to Javanese Hindu belief, multicolor is the nature of heaven. The diversity of colors within Taman Ghairah may have originated from the idea of heaven itself. Bustanussalatin mentioned objects carved with several colors, such as Tebing Sangga Safa (the Dar U-Isyki riverbank), Karang Pancalongan and the carvings on the wall of the Kandang. In addition, the diversity of colors also arises from the diversity of flowers and fruits.

Hooykaas also mentioned how the King of Majapahit entertained his guest Maharaja Sultan Kutai in his garden.

“... The King and Maharaja Sultan got up and the king took his guest to a small tank with streaming water to bathe. Noblemen brought garments for them to wear in the water, other noblemen kept garments on their laps to change into. When they had bathed, their hair was cleaned and washed and then they went into the tank with streaming water called *Segaran*. They bathed together for some time and when they came out of the water, the king and Maharaja Sultan changed their garments.

Then the king took Maharaja Sultan to a Nagasari-tree and made him sit there, on a white stone.

Only then the Permaisuri also bathed, with Her Highness the Mahadéwi and Her Highness the Matur and Her Highness the Léko and with the other wives and concubines of the king and of all the nobles. They splashed noisily in the tank of Banjaran Sari (the Flower-garden) giving joy to the Permaisuri. Having bathed for some time, the Permaisuri came out of the water with Her Highness the Mahadéwi and all the others and they walked about picking all sorts of flowers and fruits to their hearts' content.

Thereafter the king sat with Maharaja Sultan on the white stone under a Nagasaritree, all by themselves, the King and the Sultan; all the nobles had been told to go for a walk and they had gone to the garden (taman) to pick fruit. Then the king taught to Maharaja Sultan all the knowledge (ilmu) necessary for a man who is to become a king.’.”

(Hooykaas, 1957: 325)

In this story, various flowers and fruits were the elements of a royal garden. Princesses and noblemen, bathing and picking flowers and

fruit, acted as angels of heaven because this garden represents heaven in the world (Hooykaas, 1957: 327). In Hindu Cosmology, the diversity of flowers and fruit around the Gunongan of Taman Ghairah, which can be seen as the Tree of Life (Nagasari Tree), might mean the garden of heaven. Meanwhile, the role of the flower-picking angel may be carried out by women in the palace. Beaulieu reported, “The king employed female bodyguards both in the palace and to serve all his needs. It is said that there are 3,000 female bodyguards, and they rarely leave the palace” (Reid, 2010: 88).

According to Thomas Best, the Sultan of Aceh invited him and his team to bathe in a bathing pond five to six miles from the palace (Lombard, 2006). This bathing procession is similar to that of the King of Majapahit to welcome his guest, Maharaja Sultan. Apart from bathing to welcome guests, there is another bathing procession in the Sultanate of Aceh called *Mandi Safar* (Safar Bathing). In the third part of the Adat Aceh manuscript, the rules for the ceremony and committee were regulated by the Safar Bathing Council. The council was called “Majelis Syah Alam of the Safar Bathing” (Lombard, 2006). The council was in charge of organising a parade and the Sultan’s bathing ceremony. The ceremony was held on the last Wednesday of each Safar Month (the second month of the Hijri Calendar). This bathing procession is still widely practised in the Malay world and might have derived from the pre-Islamic culture.

### **Islamic Symbolization**

The central element of the Taman Ghairah is the Dar Ul-Isyki river, or in the current toponym is called the Krueng Daroy river. This river is an artificial canal that deflected from the Krueng Doy River towards the palace. The artificial water element in Islamic gardens was first



developed in Persia. One of them is Bagh E Fin (Fin Garden) in Kashan, Iran, which was the work of the Islamic Safavid Dynasty (Figure 13). According to Daneshdoust in “Islamic Garden in Iran”, one of the features present in the centre of all Iranian Gardens is the central canal (artificial river). Water from this artificial river was sent through underground tunnels known as *Qānat* system. *Qānat* allowed water from distant sources to be pumped naturally through a series of wellbores to a lower place. With this water pressure, the water flowing through the canal would be heavy and produce the sound of flowing water (Daneshdoust, 1993: 46).



Figure 13. The water canal and fountain in the centre of Bagh E Fin, one of the Persian Gardens built in the sixteenth century (Source: [sworld.co.uk](http://sworld.co.uk), 2022)

“At the end of the Islamic period, the assessment of a good garden design is a garden that is as close as possible to the characteristics of the Garden of Heaven” (Daneshdoust, 1993: 46). Therefore, this artificial canal might also an attempt to present the river described by the Qur’an as being in heaven.

“Is the description of Paradise, which the righteous are promised, wherein are rivers of water unaltered, rivers of milk the taste of which

never changes, rivers of wine delicious to those who drink, and rivers of purified honey, in which they will have from all [kinds of] fruits and forgiveness from their Lord, like [that of] those who abide eternally in the Fire and are given to drink scalding water that will sever their intestines?" (QS. Muhammad [47] : 15)

"But Allah will surely admit those who believe and do good into Gardens, under which rivers flow, where they will be adorned with bracelets of gold and pearls, and their clothing will be silk, ... (QS. Al-Hajj [22] : 23)

The characteristics of the heavenly river were also mentioned in the Bustanussalatin. Dar Ul Isyki was an artificial canal designed to produce the sound of water. The sound of water came from the *Jeram Tangisan Naga* (a dragon-shaped water fountain) (Figure 14). People who hear the sound of water from the fountain will be pleased. Francois Martin, a French merchant who came to Aceh in 1604, said the river water flowing through Daruddunya Palace (Sultanate Palace of Aceh) was very clear (Lombard, 2006).

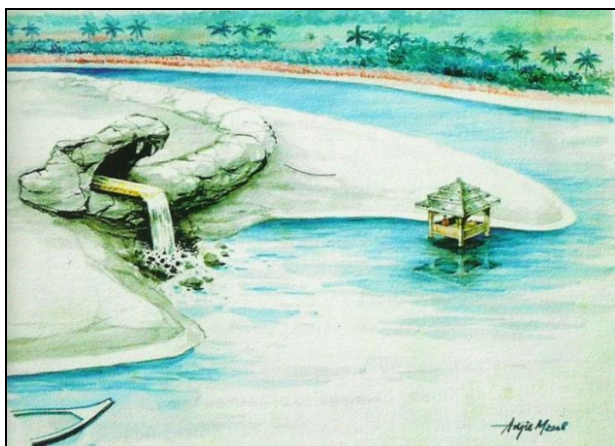


Figure 14. The simulation of Jeram Tangisan Naga fountain (Arif, 2008)

This river comes from the mountains and then passes through the desert, and beautiful trees such as Camphor, Cinnamon, Sandalwood, and other sweet trees are numerous. The people around them think that these trees maintain the quality of this water so that it can be used as a

healer (Reid, 2010). Those water advantages made the Sultan deflect the flow of the river from Mata Ie to his palace. Mata Ie is the Acehnese word for Mata air (Indonesian), which means spring water. In this article, the Mata Ie refers to a pleasant spring water and bathing place to the south of Banda Aceh. The spring water is the source of Krueng Daroy river.

As a Muslim leader, Sultan Iskandar Muda built many mosques during his reign. There were three important mosques in the Sultanate of Aceh: Baiturrahim Mosque at Ulee Lheue, Baitul Musyahadah Mosque at Setui as the cultural centre, and Baiturrahman Grand Mosque as the main mosque. In Bustanussalatin, Baitul Musyahadah Mosque was called Isyki Musyahadah and was located inside the Taman Ghairah. In modern-day Banda Aceh; this mosque has a dome of Kopiah Meuketop (Acehnese hat) (Figure 15).



Figure 15. Baitul Musyahadah Mosque or Masjid Kopiah Meuketop (Author's Collection, 2015)

The mention of the word *Isyki* in the Isyki Musyahadah mosque refers to a title given by the kingdom because of their love for the work of this mosque (good work), as is the Dar Ul-Isyki River, which has

Heritage of Nusantara:

high-quality water. Giving the name Isyki (love) is an expression of sacred love to the creator. Isyki's idea in the Sufi tradition originated from their belief that high-quality works of art can awaken the love that has fallen asleep in the heart, both worldly and sensory, as well as spiritual love, namely divine love (Arif, 2013: 10). This beauty represents the esoteric dimension of Islam. As such, the treasures of Tamaddun Aceh that glorify Islam radiated strongly through the art of landscape architecture in the spatial layout of the Aceh sultanate.

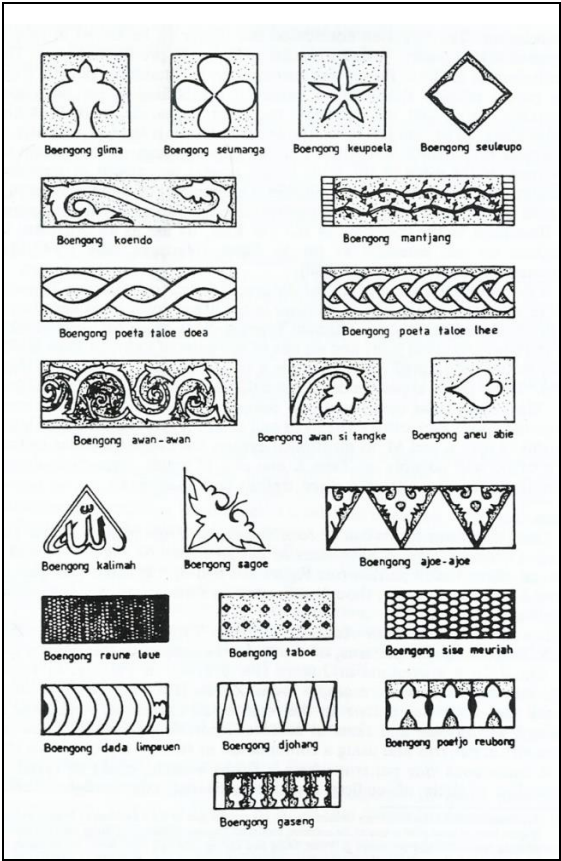


Figure 16. Aceh floral ornaments (Kreemer in Yatim, 1988)

Islam prohibits symbols that resemble humans and animals. Therefore, Islamic patterns develop forms in the nature, such as stars, flowers and leaves. The forms of carvings of leaves and flowers are also found in

the arts in Aceh (Bugong Aceh). Yatim mentioned that Kreemer (1922) had grouped several floral patterns that appeared in Acehnese art (Yatim, 1988: 91). The variety of floral motifs can be seen in Figure 16.

Carvings of several forms of this flower are also found in Gunongan, Kandang and Pintô Khôp. These carvings appear quite a lot, filling the corners of the walls and the legs of the two buildings (Figure 17, 18, 19, 20). None of the engravings contains legible inscriptions. According to Bustanussalatin, the various carvings are colorful, but what is found today is white. The old colors might have disappeared and been covered with white paint since the colonial period.



Figure 17. Bungong Glima ornaments on the foot of Gunongan and Kandang (Author's collection, 2015)



Figure 18. Bungong Aneu Abie ornament on one of the stone seats in the Gunongan (Author's collection, 2015)



Figure 19. Bungong Ajoe-Ajoe on the wall of Kandang  
(Author's collection, 2015)



Figure 20. Bungoeng Sagoe on the wall of Kandang  
(Author's collection, 2015)

In addition to Aceh floral ornament, above the gate of the Gunongan's cave, a carving is similar to the shape of the Aceh Tombstone type C (based on Dr Othman Yatim's classification) (Figure 21). One of the tombstones with type C is the tombstone of Sultan Malik Ash Shalih (Figure 22), the ruler of Samudera Pasai who died in 1297 AD, about four centuries before Taman Ghairah was built. The shape of the Type C gravestone, as shown in the carving above the gate of the Gunongan cave consists of three parts: head (upper part), shoulder (middle part), and foot (lower part) (Figure 23). The Awan Sitangke floral motif on the shoulders is arranged symmetrically with a rose circle in each center. In contrast, the head of the tombstone symbolizes the shape of Mount Meru. The Meru symbol is the center of the universe in Hindu cosmology. The presence of the Mount Meru motif along with florals and calligraphy containing Islamic *Tauhid* (monotheism) sentences,

indicate that the pre-Islamic tradition also influenced Aceh's burial tradition in the Islamic era.

The shapes of Aceh tombstone also describe the world, life, death, and the day after death of Acehnese and Malays. The three parts: the lower part, the middle part and the upper part, have different meanings that can be read from engraving and calligraphy. According to A.D. Pirous, the lower part of the tombstone means birth, the middle part means life, and the upper part means death (Arif, 2008).

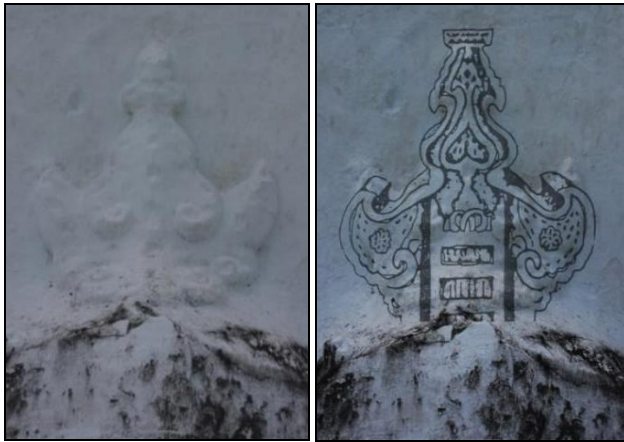


Figure 21. The engraving on the head of Gunongan's gate resembles Aceh gravestone (Author's own, 2015)



Figure 22. The gravestone of Sultan Malik Ash-Salih in Samudera, North Aceh (MAPESA, 2021)

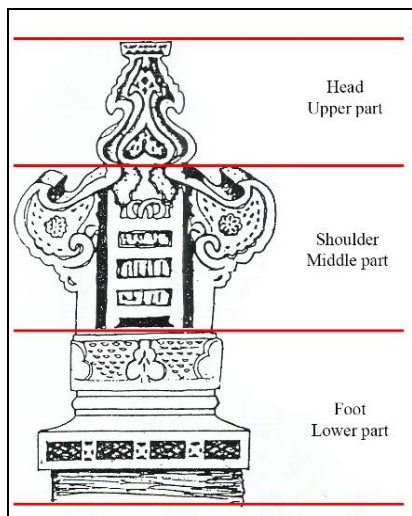


Figure 23. Parts of Aceh Gravestone (Batu Aceh) Type C  
(Edited from Yatim, 1988)

## Conclusion

This study has found that Aceh has solid intercultural and multi-religious connection to the pre-Islamic kingdoms. Both the influence of Islamic culture and pre-Islamic culture can be found in the symbols in Taman Ghairah. Although this garden was most likely built in seventeenth-century Islamic Aceh (the era of Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani), it still shows Aceh's long-rooted connection to pre-Islamic culture, especially Hindu-Buddhist. The presence of river symbols in the Islamic concept of heaven, the existence of a mosque, the use of floral ornaments to avoid human and animal manifestation were juxtaposed with the symbols of Meru, lotus and *banjaran sari* which were identical to the pre-Islamic culture. This architectural diversity reflects that the ornaments came through different religious and cosmological thinkings.

This research can be enriched with further studies related to the Bustanussalatin manuscript on the Taman Ghairah section. The



investigation of symbols that exist in both past and present could be explored further and associated with the various findings of symbols in the architecture of Taman Ghairah. Future studies can also focus on other symbols in Taman Ghairah as mentioned in Bustanussalatin, for instance: the Jambangan Rambut Kemalai, Tebing Sangga Safa, Tanjung Indrabangsa, Pulau Sangga Marmar, Banar Nilawarna, Karang Pancalogan, Pasu Sangga Sumak, Pantai Ratna Cuaca, Pantai Sumbaga, Pancuran Naga, Jeram Tangisan Naga, Teluk Dendang Anak, Balai Kambang, Pantai Indrapaksa, Lubuk Taghyir, Pohon Rindu Reka, Kolam Cendera Hati, Pulau Sangga Sembega, Kolam Jantera Rasa, Kolam Jantera Hati, Jambangan Caiyu Cina, Jambangan Peterana Sangga, Peterana Kembang Lela Masyhadi, Peterana Kembang Seroja Berkerawang, Balai Cermin Perang, Balai Rekaan Cina, Jambangan Kembang Seroja, Balai Keemasan, Batu Medabar Laksana dan Balai Gading. These objects are no longer exist in Banda Aceh, so it requires further study of historical sources and writings of foreign explorers to be able to simulate and discuss certain symbols in them.

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