

## Architectural Interpretations of Qur'anic and Hadith Influences in Traditional Indonesian Mosques During the Walisanga Era

*Penafsiran Arsitektural atas Pengaruh Qur'an dan Hadis dalam Masjid-Masjid Tradisional Indonesia Era Walisanga*

Ulya Fikriyati\*(a.)

(\*) Corresponding Author, email: [ulyafikriyati.instika@gmail.com](mailto:ulyafikriyati.instika@gmail.com)

(a) Institut Ilmu Keislaman Annuqayah (INSTIKA), Jl. Bukit Lancaran Pondok Pesantren Annuqayah, Kec. Guluk-Guluk, Madura, Jawa Timur 69463

### Abstract.

This research investigates the reception of the Qur'an within the realm of mosque architecture, traditionally assessed through the study of text integrated into mosque ornamentation. This article introduces a reception studies to Walisanga mosques architecture, encompassing considerations of spatial design, essence, illumination, and interior ambiance. Notably, this study diverges from conventional methods by abstaining from the inclusion of Qur'anic or hadith text. The primary objectives of this article are twofold: a) to elucidate the relationship between the architecture of traditional Indonesian mosques and the Qur'an and Hadith, and b) to unveil how architectural elements within traditional mosques visually interpret QS. 24:35 and the Hadith of Gabriel. In order to achieve a comprehensive analysis, this study employs both semantic and hermeneutic methodologies. The semantic approach is applied to dissect the atomistic structure of QS. 24:35 and the Hadith of Gabriel, with the intent of identifying foundational components that underpin the concept of *tajug tumpang* in traditional Indonesian mosque architecture. Subsequently, a hermeneutic approach is adopted to explore the interconnection between the verse QS. 24:35, the Hadith of Gabriel, and their architectural manifestations within the context of traditional Indonesian mosque construction. The result of the analysis culminates in the identification of two primary forms of architectural reception of QS. 24:35 and the Hadith of Gabriel within traditional Indonesian mosques. Firstly, instances wherein the textual meanings are directly translatable are actualized through elements such as light, lanterns, trees, and niches, all tailored to the Indonesian cultural milieu. Secondly, fundamental concepts derived from the Qur'an and Hadith, which resist tangible representation, are reinterpreted and incorporated into facets of spatial arrangement, lighting schemes, colour selections, ornamental details, and the harmonization of additional components, all resonating harmoniously with the Indonesian cultural identity.

Keywords: Divine Light; Reception of Text; Islamic Architecture; *Tajug Tumpang*; Mustaka

### Abstrak:

Penelitian mengenai resepsi Al-Qur'an dalam konteks arsitektur masjid umumnya dilakukan melalui pengamatan terhadap inskripsi-inskripsi yang menjadi bagian dari ornamen masjid. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menerapkan kajian resepsi terhadap arsitektur masjid-masjid Walisanga dengan mempertimbangkan aspek ruang, esensi, cahaya, dan interior, walaupun tanpa menghadirkan inskripsi dari teks Al-Qur'an atau hadis. Fokus utama artikel ini adalah pada dua isu pokok: a) Bagaimana keterkaitan antara arsitektur masjid tradisional Indonesia yang dibangun oleh Walisanga dengan Al-Qur'an dan Hadis, dan b) Bagaimana arsitektur dari masjid-masjid tradisional tersebut mampu

menggambarkan tafsir terhadap ayat QS. 24: 35 serta Hadis Jibril. Dalam menganalisis hal ini secara mendalam, artikel ini mengadopsi pendekatan semantik dan hermeneutik. Pendekatan semantik digunakan dalam menganalisis struktur atomistik dari teks QS. 24: 35 dan hadis Jibril, dengan tujuan menggali unsur-unsur utama yang menjadi dasar dari konsep tajug tumpang dalam arsitektur masjid tradisional Indonesia. Langkah selanjutnya melibatkan pendekatan hermeneutik, yang digunakan untuk menguji hubungan antara ayat QS. 24: 35, Hadis Jibril, dan interpretasi arsitektural keduanya dalam konteks bangunan masjid tradisional Indonesia. Hasil analisis menyimpulkan bahwa resepsi arsitektural terhadap QS. 24: 35 dan hadis Jibril dalam masjid-masjid tradisional Indonesia pada umumnya dapat diidentifikasi dalam dua bentuk: pertama, ketika makna teks dapat direplikasi secara langsung seperti dalam elemen cahaya, lentera, pohon, dan ceruk, elemen-elemen tersebut diwujudkan sesuai dengan konteks budaya Indonesia. Kedua, konsep-konsep inti yang terdapat dalam Al-Qur'an dan Hadis yang tidak dapat direpresentasikan secara konkret, diinterpretasikan ulang untuk kemudian tercermin dalam aspek struktur ruang, pencahayaan, pilihan warna, hiasan, serta integrasi unsur-unsur lain yang sesuai dengan identitas budaya Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Cahaya Ilahi; Resepsi Teks; Arsitektur Islam, tajug tumpang, Mustaka

## Introduction

During one of the roundtable discussions convened by the International Qur'anic Studies Association (IQSA) and documented by Karen Bauer, a pivotal inquiry emerged: Can tafsir, serving as an embodiment of Muslim interaction with the Qur'an, effectively reveal the intrinsic essence encapsulated within the Qur'an itself?<sup>1</sup> Despite the primary focus of the discourse then being directed towards the conceptualization of tafsir as an academic endeavor in written composition, the latent potential of tafsir as a conduit for engaging with the Qur'an can subtly permeate alternative expressions, such as within quotidian ritualistic practices or in artistic creations that derive inspiration from the Qur'an while animating its teachings. This article endeavors to furnish a response to this inquiry by means of a comprehensive exploration into the interrelation between the architectural manifestations of traditional Indonesian mosques as interpretative mediums and their textual source, specifically QS. 24:35 and the Hadith of Jibril. The analysis seeks to unravel the inherent connections and interpretative facets that unite these architectural creations with the mentioned textual sources.

This research has opted to focus its analysis on Indonesian traditional mosques for two primary reasons. Firstly, traditional mosques within Indonesia exhibit distinctive characteristics that are absent in contemporary Indonesian mosques as well as mosques in other Islamic regions. Among these notable attributes is the distinctively stepped triangular roof structure,<sup>2</sup> commonly referred to as “*tajug*

1 Karen Bauer, “The Current State of Qur'anic Studies: Commentary On a Roundtable Discussion,” *Journal of the International Qur'anic Studies Association* 1 (2016): 34,

2 Ashadi, “Makna Sinkretisme Bentuk Pada Arsitektur Masjid-Mesjid Walisanga” (Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta, 2017), 3.

*Kumpang*.”<sup>3</sup> Secondly, these traditional Indonesian mosques have at times been positioned as indicators of perceived shortcomings within Indonesian Muslim art, particularly in contrast to artistic creations from other locales. This perspective has been underscored by C. Israr, who underscores the impact of the colonial era as a pivotal factor leading to a diminished aesthetic quality in the architectural compositions of traditional Indonesian mosques compared to their counterparts in other Islamic regions.<sup>4</sup> While Israr’s assertion endeavors to unearth causal factors, it unavoidably conveys an implicit suggestion of cultural inferiority. However, while this perspective might hold merit in cases where aesthetics are solely evaluated through physical and architectural constituents, it is imperative to underscore that within the domain of architecture, the essence of space and the intrinsic “spirit” encapsulated within a creation equally contribute to its aesthetic evaluation. Consequently, within the realm of architectural artistry, a building’s aesthetic worth is not solely contingent upon its physical parameters, but also intertwined with the spiritual dimensions it encompasses.<sup>5</sup>

The majority of research endeavors related to Indonesian traditional mosques have primarily centered on aspects of syncretism between Islam and preceding religions (Ashadi,<sup>6</sup> Antariksa,<sup>7</sup> Maulida,<sup>8</sup> Zainuri<sup>9</sup>), the acculturation of Javanese-Islamic culture (Rahmanu,<sup>10</sup> Lee-Niinioja,<sup>11</sup> Siswayanti<sup>12</sup>), or the portrayal of Islam’s

3 Bambang Setia Budi, “A Study on the History and Development of the Javanese Mosque Part 3: Typology of the Plan and Structure of the Javanese Mosque and Its Distribution,” *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering* 5, no. 2 (November 2006): 231.

4 C. Israr, *Sejarah Kesenian Islam 1* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1978), 47.

5 Mário Kong, Maria do Rosário Montero, and Maria João Pereira Neto, eds., *Creating through Mind and Emotions* (Leiden, The Netherlands: CRC Press/Balkema, 2022).

6 Ashadi, “Makna Sinkretisme”; Ashadi, “Sinkretisme Dalam Tata Ruang Mesjid Wali Songo,” *Nalar* 12, no. 1 (2013): 1–16.

7 Ashadi, Antariksa, and Purnama Salura, “Pengaruh Sinkretisme Agama Islam-Kejawen Pada Arsitektur Mesjid Menara Kudus,” *Jurnal Arsitektur NALARs* 14, no. 2 (2015): 107–116.

8 Rakha Maulida et al., “Sinkretisme Arsitektur Islam Dan Nusantara Pada Bangunan Masjid Agung Jawa Tengah,” *Historia: Jurnal Program Studi Pendidikan Sejarah* 9, no. 1 (2021).

9 Ahmad Zainuri, “Integrasi Islam Dan Budaya Lokal Dalam Seni Arsitektur Masjid Kuno Di Jawa: Sebuah Tinjauan Umum,” *Heritage: Journal of Social Studies* 2, no. 2 (2020): 125–144.

10 Rahmanu Widayat and Nadia Sigi Prameswari, “Acculturation of Javanese Culture and Islam in the Great Mosque of Surakarta Historical Site, Indonesia,” *Journal of the International Society for the Study of Vernacular Settlements* 9, no. 2 (April 2022): 78–96.

11 Hee Sook Lee-Niinioja, *The Continuity of Pre-Islamic Motifs in Javanese Mosque Ornamentation, Indonesia* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2022).

12 Novita Siswayanti, “Akulturasi Budaya Pada Arsitektur Masjid Sunan Giri,” *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 14, no. 2 (2016): 299–326; Novita Siswayanti, “Akulturasi Budaya Arsitektur Masjid Sendang Duwur,” *Al-Turas Mimbar Sejarah, Sastra, Budaya dan Agama* 24, no. 2 (2018).

development in Indonesia (van Dijk,<sup>13</sup> Wuri Handoko<sup>14</sup>). Nonetheless, Lien Iffah Naf'atu Fina presents a distinctive perspective within the realm of studies concerning Indonesian traditional mosques. Fina highlights that the capacity of Indonesian traditional mosques to uphold local traditions while undergoing processes of cultural assimilation serves as compelling evidence illustrating the Islamic identity intrinsic to these mosques.<sup>15</sup> Fina's viewpoint finds reinforcement in the insights of Sativa, who re-conceptualizes two pivotal terms: "Islamic architecture" and "Islami architecture." According to Sativa, architecture that embodies an Islamic essence need not adhere to uniform design, but rather pivots on shared visions and missions, all the while conscientiously considering the values of local wisdom.<sup>16</sup>

Conversely, the relationship between the architecture of traditional mosques in Indonesia and two fundamental texts within Islam has, in reality, received limited attention. One study particularly relevant to the focal discourse of this article is conducted by Saeid Hassanpour Loumer. In his research, Loumer delves into the ways in which themes from the Al-Qur'an are reflected in Islamic art and architecture.<sup>17</sup> While both endeavors seek to delve into the theological underpinnings of Islamic architecture, Loumer's approach centers more on the analysis of Islamic values such as equilibrium, beauty, unity in multiplicity, and the abundant geometry found in Islamic artworks. Nonetheless, despite referencing themes (which could be interpreted as values) stemming from the Al-Qur'an, Loumer does not specifically investigate Al-Qur'an verses directly connected to particular architectural works. Consequently, this article fills the void left by Loumer's approach.

This article is centered around two pivotal focal points, namely: a) The interrelation between the architectural features of traditional Indonesian mosques and the Qur'an and Hadith, and b) The capacity of architectural designs in traditional mosques to visually articulate the interpretation of QS. 24:35 and the Hadith of Jibril. This research employs both semantic and hermeneutic methodologies. The semantic approach is utilized to dissect the meaning inherent in the atomistic structure of QS. 24:35 and the Hadith of Gabriel. Conversely, the hermeneutic approach is

13 Kees van Dijk, "Perubahan Kontur Masjid," in *Masa Lalu Dalam Masa Kini Arsitektur Di Indonesia*, ed. Peter J.M Nas and Martien de Vletter (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2009).

14 Wuri Handoko, "Karakteristik Arsitektur Masjid Kuno Dan Perkembangan Islam Di Maluku," *Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pengembangan Arkeologi* 31, no. 1 (2013): 39–52,

15 Lien Iffah Naf'atu Fina, "Southeast Asian Islamic Art and Architecture: Re-Examining the Claim of the Unity and Universality of Islamic Art," *Sunan Kalijaga: International Journal of Islamic Civilization* 1, no. 2 (2018): 186.

16 Sativa, "Arsitektur Islam Atau Arsitektur Islami?," *NALARs Jurnal Arsitektur* 10, no. 1 (2011): 29–38.

17 Saeid Hassanpour Loumer, "Qur'anic Themes and Reflections in Islamic Art and Architecture," *Trends in Life Sciences An International Peer-Reviewed Journal* 3, no. 3 (2014): 474–481.

employed to undertake a visual reinterpretation of the architectural style of traditional Indonesian mosques, enabling the apprehension of the meaning and significance encapsulated within QS. 24:35 and Jibril's hadith.

### **The Qur'an-Hadith: The Epistemological Foundations of Traditional Mosque Architecture in Indonesia.**

The discussion concerning whether the architectural style of traditional Indonesian mosques can be categorized as a form of Islamic architecture rooted in the epistemology of the Qur'an and Hadith has arisen as a consequence of the discourse. This discussion emerges due to the fact that these traditional mosques deviate from the utilization of dome structures, which are prevalent in mosques within other Muslim regions. The endeavor to address this inquiry draws upon the research expounded by Fina and Sativa earlier within this article. These studies expound that the Islamic essence of a mosque's architecture, beyond its role as a place of worship, is also actualized through its robust epistemological nexus with the transcendental meanings embedded in the Qur'an and Hadith.<sup>18</sup>

An early exploration of the interrelation between architecture and conceptualization within the Islamic intellectual framework can be discerned through al-Jāhīz's theory of *al-bayān*.<sup>19</sup> The notion of *al-bayān*, denoting 'explanation' in literal terms, serves as a tangible embodiment of an object's norms, recollections, and import. This principle finds expression in various human artistic creations, encompassing the architecture of diverse structures scattered across civilizations. The existence of this import, among other facets, constitutes a fundamental underpinning behind the destruction often witnessed in the context of territorial conquest. Conclusively, edifices consistently possess the capacity to communicate import, simultaneously perpetuating human memories and life experiences, along with the underlying realities that configure them.<sup>20</sup>

From this perspective, a building's architecture can be perceived as a conduit capable of articulating and mirroring conceptual concepts into tangible reality. It possesses the capacity to translate the abstract into the visible and touchable for comprehension.<sup>21</sup> As a faith deeply rooted in sacred texts (the Qur'an and hadith),

18 Fina, "Southeast Asian"; Sativa, "Arsitektur Islam Atau Arsitektur Islami?"

19 Mohammed Hamdouni Alami, *Art and Architecture in the Islamic Tradition: Aesthetics, Politics and Desire in Early Islam*, Library of modern Middle East studies 104 (London; New York: I.B. Tauris; Distributed in the United States and Canada by Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 40.

20 Abū 'Usmān 'Amr al-Jāhīz, *Kitāb Al-Ḥayawān* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1965), 72–73.

21 Valerie Gonzalez, "Aesthetics in Surat Al-Mulk: Mathematical Typology as Metaphysical Mirror," *Darulfunun Ilabiyat* 30, no. 1 (June 30, 2019): 193.

Islamic architecture is intrinsically intertwined with both. The Qur'an and Hadith elucidate the fundamental tenets of Islamic teachings by employing artistic elements and aesthetic symbols within their narratives. These textual compositions stand as exemplars for the entirety of Islamic artistry. This foundational paradigm serves to inspire and foster the generation of art within Muslim societies, encompassing the realm of architecture. Consequently, it is not an exaggeration to assert that Islamic architecture is more than a product of culture; it perpetually functions as a consequence of the process of receiving religious sources.<sup>22</sup> Within this framework, among the four models of receiving Islamic sources posited by Ahmad Rafiq,<sup>23</sup> the architectural interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith within the milieu of traditional Indonesian mosques can be categorized as a manifestation of performative textual reception, given the semantic nexus between the infused text and the act of its reception. This aspect will be expounded further in a subsequent section of this article.

In the context of architectural discourse, the concept that encapsulates the inherent significance and intangible nature woven into a structure is denoted as its "essence." It is crucial for the design of a building to be grounded in discernible meanings that are collectively acknowledged, thus fostering and reinforcing both its distinct character and the evocative "spirit of place."<sup>24</sup> As posited by Chris Abel, the architectural "essence" embodies the pivotal factor that confers a singular identity upon every architectural manifestation.<sup>25</sup> This emphasis underscores our ability to recognize recurring patterns across architectural creations originating from disparate geographical contexts and historical epochs.

Erzen's research on various types of Islamic art substantiates this assertion. Despite originating from diverse artistic disciplines, materials, eras, and even geopolitical contexts, Erzen successfully identifies three core principles that constitute the identity and distinctive values that differentiate Islamic art from Western art. These principles are *the principle of constant change within permanence, the principle of illusion or reality, and the principle of love.*<sup>26</sup> The shared identity reflecting these principles, norms, and universal characteristics is rooted in one essential aspect: the

22 Wendy M. K. Shaw, *What Is "Islamic" Art? Between Religion and Perception* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 2.

23 Ahmad Rafiq, "Living Qur'an: Its Teks and Practices in the Functions of the Scripture," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 22, no. 2 (July 2021): 474–77.

24 Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci Towards A Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), 5 and 10.

25 Chris Abel, "Architecture as Identity, I: The Essence of Architecture," in *Semiotics 1980*, ed. Michael Herzfeld and Margot D. Lenhart (Boston, MA: Springer US, 1982), 1.

26 Jale Nejdert Erzen, "Islamic Aesthetics: An Alternative Way to Knowledge," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, no. 1 (2007): 70–72.

religious paradigm of the Muslim community itself,<sup>27</sup> which in practice renders Islamic art a reflection of the revelations of the Qur'an (and the sayings of the Prophet) in the material realm.<sup>28</sup> Now, turning to the subject of study in this article, what about the architecture of traditional Indonesian mosques? Do they also serve as representations of the interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith?

Insights shared by the custodian of the Great Mosque of Demak underscore the significance of the mosque's tripartite roof structure known as "tajug tumpang", which embodies a philosophical framework signifying the progression towards a deeper connection with the Divine: *islām* (submission), *īmān* (faith), and *iḥsān* (beauty), as delineated in the angel Gabriel's hadith. This philosophical underpinning is believed to have been transmitted across generations since the era of *Wali Sanga* (nine saint).<sup>29</sup> While the hadith is cited directly, there exists no explicit information regarding its interrelation with the Qur'an. However, the conveyed message from Sunan Drajat,<sup>30</sup> "*Nur cahya candra ghaib candra warsitaning candra lir handayani pasebaning jati*,"<sup>31</sup> alludes that the instruction regarding ascending levels of spirituality closely corresponds to the Qur'an, particularly in QS. 24:35, wherein certain sections encompass a parallel term to "candra warsitaning candra," denoted as "nūr 'alā nūr," signifying light upon light.

In the examination of mosque architecture, QS. 24:35 emerges as one of the verses most frequently embraced, both through calligraphic engravings and as complementary features within mosque architectural constructs.<sup>32</sup> The rationale behind this phenomenon may be associated with the profusion of artistic motifs, spiritual emblems, and Sufistic allegories encapsulated within QS. 24:35. Among the prevalent modes of incorporation evident in mosque architecture is the utilization

27 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2003), vol. 1, p. 10.

28 Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar, *The Sense of Unity: The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture*, Publications of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies; No. 9 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), xi; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 4.

29 Kiswoyo, "Melihat Peninggalan Walisongo Di Museum Masjid Agung Demak," April 29, 2022, accessed April 30, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HzXc-79fsE&t=728s>.

30 Agus Sunyoto, *Atlas Wali Songo*, Edisi revisi. (Depok: Pustaka IIMaN, 2016), 148; Basysyār al-Ja'farī, *Auliyyā' al-Syarq al-Ba'īd Riwāyah Tārīkhiyyah Ḥaula Kaiḥiyah Intisyār al-Islām Fī Arkhabīl al-Malāyū* (Damascus: Maktabah Dār Ṭalās, 2003), 370.

31 Translation: "Nur is the metaphysical moonlight. A moonlight beyond the moonlight (light above light), guiding life towards the true path."

The text can be understood to imply that God's light is the sole light worthy of being followed in the pursuit of realizing the essence of life as Divine creations. This message is believed to be one of the legacies of Sunan Drajat, passed down through generations and inscribed on a memorial billboard commemorating the 513th anniversary of Sunan Drajat, held on March 20, 2023. This information was also confirmed by the author during an interview with Abid (juru kunci masjid dan makam Sunan Drajat), April 24, 2023.

32 Hanan Amr, "The Divine Light, An-Nur, as an Aesthetic Concept in Islam," *Astrolabe: A CIS Student Research Journal* 4, no. 1 (2022): 2.

of calligraphic text adorning interior spaces, as observed on the dome of the Hagia Sophia Mosque in Turkey, the walls of the Mosque of Light in Dubai, or the mihrab of the Isfahan Mosque. Furthermore, artistic motifs present within the verse are also replicated, encompassing features like the mihrab niche, lanterns, light, trees, and glass. Intriguingly, however, traditional mosques in Indonesia traverse beyond the mere direct replication of physical constituents, embracing more abstract concepts as well.

### **Semantic Analysis of the Textual Structure of QS. 24:34 and the Hadith of Jibril**

Building upon the preceding elucidation, the architectural configuration of *tajug tumpang* in traditional Indonesian mosques draws explicit inspiration from the Hadith of Jibril, as well as implicit inspiration from QS. 24:35. This section will undertake a comprehensive analysis of both sources, delving into the atomistic structure of the verse and the *matan* (content) of the hadith. This analysis will be approached semantically, with the intent of extrapolating concepts amenable to architectural interpretation.

#### ***Textual Structure of QS. 24:34***

QS. 24:35, recognized also as the “verse of light,” constitutes a *Madaniah* verse within the *Madaniah* surah. This verse comprises 48 words. According to the chronological sequencing posited by Darwazah,<sup>33</sup> its revelation occurred subsequent to surah al-Bayyinah (clear evidence) and prior to surah al-Munāfiqūn (the hypocrites). In the layout of the *muṣḥaf*, it is positioned between surah al-Mu’minūn (Believers) and al-Furqān (Discriminators). This juxtaposition holds significance, for it conveys that the luminous divine essence serves as a palpable testament that poses difficulty for hypocrites to acknowledge, yet simultaneously empowers believers with the capacity to discern between the righteous and the malevolent.

Gerhard Böwering provides an intriguing *sitz in leben* for QS. 24:35 as follows:

“The simile of *ayat an-nur* replicates a night-time experience, one in which the desert traveler is surrounded by the stars and guided by “the light of the heavens and the earth.’ Moving under this canopy of stars that cast a mysterious glow over the night’s darkness, the traveler feels as if he has entered a huge house of prayer illuminated by burning oil lamps that hang from its ceiling.”<sup>34</sup>

33 Muḥammad ‘Izzat Darwazah, *Al-Tafsīr Al-Ḥadīth Tartīb Al-Suwar Ḥasb Al-Nuzūl* (Tunis: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2008), vol. VIII, p. 421.

34 Gerhard Böwering, “The Light Verse: Qur’ānic Text and Sūfi Interpretation,” *Oriens* 36 (2001): 129.



The analysis put forth by Böwering delineates a physical encounter that guides the individual into the realm of the spiritual. Alternatively, the verse of light can be interpreted as portraying an individual who traverses the obscurity of profound spiritual depths while simultaneously acknowledging personal shortcomings, prompting an earnest pursuit of the lucidity offered by faith. In this context, the individual is urged to consciously ignite the flame of faith, striving to ascend to an elevated spiritual plane and to draw closer to the God.<sup>35</sup> A similar perspective is echoed by Sa'īd Ḥawwā, who, through a content analysis of the verse within the broader context of the surah, shares a comparable viewpoint. Positioned after a series of elucidated laws and ethical guidelines pertaining to daily existence, QS. 24:35 appears to function as a reminder that the principles and ethics conveyed earlier should be accompanied by an earnest aspiration to elevate the spiritual dimension to its zenith.<sup>36</sup>

In comparison to all the verses within the Qur'ān, QS. 24:35 can fittingly be designated as “the most luminous verse.”<sup>37</sup> This distinction arises from the presence of five instances of the term *nūr* (light), two occurrences of *miṣbāḥ* (lantern), one usage of *kaukab durriyy* (twinkling star), one employment of *yudī* (shine), and one reference to *nār* (fire) within the verse. Notably, this verse encompasses three distinct sources of light (lantern, twinkling star, fire) and encompasses two diverse light attributes (radiance and light). Intriguingly, it stands as the sole verse in the Qur'ān that concurrently alludes to physical luminosity and metaphysical significance within a singular context.

In my perspective, this verse can be logically dissected into three primary segments:

No.	Part of the Verse	Sign	
1	<i>Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth</i>	God is the True Light	Introduction

35 Christian Lange, “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind: Light and Luminous Being in Islamic Theology,” *Critical Research on Religion* 9, no. 2 (August 2021): 152.

36 Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān*, XII. (Kairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1986), vol. IV, p. 2520.

37 Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, *Al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras Li Alfāz al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2007), 817–818.

2	<i>The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within glass, the glass as if it were a pearly [white] star lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light upon light</i>	The Gradational Metaphor of Light	Elaboration
3	<i>Allah guides to His light whom He wills, And Allah presents examples for the people, and Allah is Knowing of all things</i>	Light as a Divine Gift	Conclusion

*Part 1 (Introduction): God is the True Light*

The initial segment of QS. 24:35 commences with the invocation of God’s renowned epithet, “Allāh.” This invocation is strategically employed to impart a robust emphasis to both the reader and the listener that this verse revolves around the loftiest metaphysical facets within the universe. The term “Allāh” had already attained familiarity within the pre-Islamic Arabic context, particularly within the pagan community. Subsequently, it was integrated into the Arabic linguistic system under the influence of Jewish and Christian traditions, subsequently adapting to encapsulate the notion of divinity in alignment with the beliefs of the Arabs. Within the belief framework of pre-Islamic Arabia, the term “Allāh” designates the supreme deity, surpassing the pre-existing local gods. This conception stands at odds with Islamic belief, which recognizes the singularity of God. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that introducing an entirely novel and foreign concept to a community can be ineffective, and at times, counterproductive within the ambit of dawah endeavors. The utilization of the term “Allāh” retains a linguistic element familiar to the previous cultural milieu, albeit with a distinct understanding encapsulated within the framework of the new worldview.<sup>38</sup>

The depiction of God as the illuminator of the heavens and the earth subsequent to the invocation of “Allāh” introduces another captivating facet within the introductory framework of this verse. Diverse interpretations surround the import of this opening statement. Zamakhsharī construes this segment as signifying “It is God who possesses all the light in the heavens and the earth.”<sup>39</sup> In the initial stages of his commentary, Rāzī also entertains a parallel interpretation, albeit by the conclusion

38 Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung*, New ed., 2. repr. (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2008), 105.

39 Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf ‘an Ḥaqāiq al-Tanzīl Wa ‘Uyūn al-Ta’wīl Fī Wujūh al-Ta’wīl* (Kairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2012), vol. III, p. 220.

of his commentary, an inclination emerges for augmenting the interpretation with the inclusion of “God created both darkness and light (Q. 6: 1), and He alone is the true light (Q. 24: 35).”<sup>40</sup>

The focal point to underscore within this initial statement is the Qur’ān’s adeptness at conjoining metaphysical and physical constituents in a harmonious manner. The juxtaposition of God, epitomizing the metaphysical realm, with the tangible reality of the light encompassing heaven and earth, underscores this fusion. This amalgamation of disparate elements serves the purpose of concurrently stimulating the cognitive and emotional involvement of the recipient, thereby rendering them more receptive to the forthcoming explication within the subsequent segment of the same verse.

*Part 2 (Elaboration): The Gradational Metaphor of Light*

The subsequent section of QS. 24:35 commences with the inclusion of the metaphorical term “*maṣāl*,” signifying the intent of this portion to furnish an analogy to expound upon the content outlined in the preceding section. The array of elements linked with light presented in this verse, encompassing alcoves, lanterns, glass, fire, and olive oil, is founded upon entities that held familiarity for the communicators of the Qur’ān during that era. While certain exegetes propose that the term “*misykāb*” originates from Ethiopian origins, it has undergone a process of Arabization and is frequently integrated into the vernacular of the Arab community.<sup>41</sup> This underscores the verse’s underlying motive to prompt the reader’s realization that the conveyed message genuinely resonates with them and holds pertinence within their daily lives.

In a broader context, the utilization of the term ‘light’ serves multiple objectives, encompassing elements that are both equivocal, literal, and metaphorical.<sup>42</sup> Within these three potentialities, Quraish Shihab undertook an analysis of the term ‘light’ within the Qur’an, discerning approximately 11 distinct variations in its usage.<sup>43</sup> As previously mentioned, QS. 24:35 effectively harmonizes the metaphysical and physical dimensions of light. This harmonization is executed with the intention of engendering a more palpable and comprehensible visual representation. The light of

40 Fakh al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2005), vol. XXIII, p. 203.

41 Muḥammad al-Tāhir ibn ‘Āshūr, *Tafsīr Al-Tahrīr Wa al-Tanwīr* (Tunis: Dār Suḥnūn, 1997), vol. VIII, p. 235; M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsīr Al-Mishbāh Pesan, Kesan, Dan Keserasian Al-Qur’an* (Ciputat: Lentera Hati, 2011), vol. VIII, p. 549.

42 Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, *On the Hermeneutics of the Light-Verse of the Qur’an: Tafsīr Āyat al-Nūr*, trans. Latimah-Parvin Peerwani (London: ICAS Press, 2004), 35.

43 Among the eleven diverse usages of the term “light” are: moonlight, sunlight, light of knowledge, light of justice, light of Islam, light of faith, and light of the Qur’an. For a more see Shihab, *Tafsīr Al-Mishbāh*, vol. VIII, p. 550.

tauḥīd finds embodiment through the imagery of a glass lantern positioned within a niche, thereby illuminating both the lantern and its surrounding niche. This approach undeniably renders the discussion more accessible to the reader's cognitive faculties compared to abstract concepts.<sup>44</sup> The portrayal of the radiant light emanating from the lantern (glistening within the glass and illuminating the encompassing niche) as it pierces through the darkness of the night encapsulates a profound theological message, elegantly conveyed through the conduit of metaphor.

The architecture of the lantern and its strategic placement carry substantial symbolic significance. The foremost element expounded in this section is the “*misykāh*,” or niche. In the portrayal of a nocturnal scene, the alcove stands as the inaugural point that emanates luminosity discernible from a distance. Its relatively larger size, exceeding that of the lantern, facilitates its identification as a luminous source even from a considerable distance. However, upon closer inspection, it becomes evident that the radiance emitted by the alcove originates solely from the lantern nestled within it. Consequently, it becomes apparent that the luminosity emanating from the niche is inherently congruent with the lantern's radiance. In this context, the niche serves as a symbol for the level of islām. This stratum is foundational and extends over a broader expanse, mirroring the design of the niche itself which is wider compared to the lantern.



Figure 1, arranged from left to right, presents the following components: Fire, serving as the lantern's primary light source; A lantern featuring gleaming glass; The lantern illuminated while situated inside a niche; A wall niche illuminated by lamplight.

Another symbol bearing significant relevance is the lantern. Within the verse, the lantern is delineated as comprising three fundamental constituents: *miṣbāḥ* (the core light-emitting element within the lantern), *zujājah* (the glass element that

44 Gonzalez, “Aesthetics in Surat Al-Mulk,” 191.

reflects the intrinsic light while safeguarding it from external disturbances), and zait (the transparent oil functioning as fuel for the lantern). Despite its position as the introductory component of the lantern's composition, the discourse will hone in on the 'glass' as the outermost constituent in this discussion.

If the niche symbolized *islām* (submission), then the *zujājah* epitomizes *īmān* (belief). Undoubtedly, the luminosity exhibited by the glass in the lantern surpasses that of the alcove. The glass not only reflects light but also refracts it, resulting in an amplification of the emitted radiance. Unlike the niche, which solely radiates light externally, glass possesses the capability to radiate both outward and inward. This analogy harmonizes with the concept of *īmān*, which extends beyond mere verbal articulation, resonating in the domains of the heart's sentiments and manifested through actions.

The *miṣbāḥ*, positioned as the most prominent constituent, is introduced prior to the other elements of the lantern, signifying that the true essence of the lantern resides within its flame. Within the spiritual realm of piety, the *miṣbāḥ* symbolically embodies *iḥsān*, or beauty. The flame constitutes the smallest yet most radiant facet within the lantern's composition. Distinguished from the glass and the niche, the flame exudes a distinct beauty. It possesses the ability to sway, dance, and emit a powerful illumination. Remarkably, the heat emanating from the flame can incinerate anything in its proximity until it vanishes without leaving a trace. In a parallel vein, this mirrors the condition of those who have ascended to the pinnacle of piety. They can confront challenges with unwavering resolve, derive contentment from adversities,<sup>45</sup> and exhibit an unwavering devotion to their spiritual connection with God. Analogous to the luminous radiance emitted by the flame, they too possess the capacity to "perceive" and cherish God within every facet of existence. And what of zait, elucidated in QS. 24:35 as a lucid and nearly radiant oil? This oil doesn't connote a specific level, but it does convey the significance of high-quality fuel in the expedition toward God. In the piety analogy, oil essentially signifies deeds that can function as fuel for attaining distinct levels—be it *islām*, *īmān*, or *iḥsān*.

QS. 24:35 does not draw a comparison between the magnificence of *tauḥīd* and the brilliance of the sun or moon, despite both celestial bodies appearing grander than the light emitted by a lantern emanating from a diminutive flame within. Notably, the feeble fire lacks self-sustaining combustion and necessitates a source of fuel. Rāzī posits that this choice stems from the impossibility of the lantern's radiance encountering an eclipse akin to that of the moon or sun.<sup>46</sup> While Rāzī's rationale holds

45 al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 4, pp. 147; 314–15.

46 al-Rāzī, *Mafāṭīḥ Al-Ghayb*, vol. VIII, p. 214.

merit, I propose an alternate perspective that might prove more fitting. Sunlight and moonlight are inherent natural occurrences beyond human manipulation, governed by God's decree and the established rotational laws of celestial entities. Conversely, the light within a lantern is subject to human volition—readily ignited or extinguished by choice. This eloquent metaphor aptly aligns with tauḥīd's illumination amidst the obscurity of misguidance. An individual must possess unwavering determination and exert maximal endeavors to ignite the beacon of tauḥīd within their heart. Relying solely on dreams and imaginings is inadequate for acquiring or upholding tauḥīd. This concept finds manifestation in the utilization of oil as fuel for the flame, which constitutes the essential fount of the niche's luminance.

The inclusion of transparent olive oil sourced from meticulously selected trees offers further compelling evidence. The luminosity of a lantern is contingent upon the caliber of the oil that sustains its flame. Within the context of QS. 24:35, adherence to God's commands, the purity of one's heart, and the avoidance of all manifestations of malevolence are analogous to the unblemished oil extracted from the chosen olive tree. This oil is capable of yielding an intensely radiant lantern light. This facet also underscores the reality that not all individuals possess an equal capacity to produce oil of identical quality for their lanterns, thus perpetuating varying levels of spiritual progression in the journey toward God.<sup>47</sup>

The concluding segment of this second section, “nūr ‘alā nūr,” signifying light upon light, serves as the culmination of all the preceding allegories: God represents the ultimate light. His light stands as the sole eternal and unextinguishable illumination.<sup>48</sup> The resplendence of God and the chasm between human limitations<sup>49</sup> and His boundless perfection are liable to engender variances in levels along the path to God. Consequently, the Qur’ān affirms that the loftiest and most exalted are those who exemplify the utmost piety.<sup>50</sup>

### *Part 3 (Conclusion): Light as a Divine Gift*

The concluding segment of QS. 24:35 culminates with “Allah guides to His light whom He wills, And Allah presents examples for the people, and Allah is Knowing of all things.” At first glance, the final part of QS. 24:35 might appear to

47 Al-Qusyairī designates this highest level as nūr musyāhadah, the illuminating vision, which is authentic as illustrated in the definition of iḥsān in the Hadith of Jibril. See ‘Abd al-Karīm Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushairī, *Laṭā’if al-Isyārāt* (Cairo: al-Hai’ah al-Miṣriyyah al-‘Āmmah, 2000), vol. II, p. 613.

48 Lange, “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,” 143.

49 al-Qushairī, *Laṭā’if al-Isyārāt*, vol. II, p. 611; Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq al-Tafsīr Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīz* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2001), vol. II, p. 45.

50 QS. Al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13

suggest that human endeavor is inconsequential, as God arbitrarily bestows His guidance upon those He chooses. Nevertheless, it is imperative to bear in mind one of the principles of Qur'anic coherence in the interpretive discourse, which underscores that the invocation of *asmā' al-ḥusnā* in a verse invariably reinforces a pivotal element of the verse's narrative.<sup>51</sup> Hence, the notion of "guiding anyone to His light" is circumscribed by the clause "Allah knows everything." To gain further insight into this matter, we can delve into Ibn Rushd's elucidation. Ibn Rushd delineates a distinction between God's knowledge and the knowledge possessed by creatures. God's knowledge is *qadīm* (ancient), whereas creatures' knowledge is *ḥadīth* (contingent). Based on this conceptualization, human knowledge is of recent origin, characterized by its derivation from experience and observation of objects. Conversely, God's knowledge serves as the causal agent for the existence and unfolding of all phenomena.<sup>52</sup> Given that God is best aware of those who will traverse the path illuminated by His light, He guides them toward this radiance; in the same vein, He discerns those who will gravitate towards the path of obscurity and accords them their pursuits. Consequently, God never perpetrates injustice upon individuals, for it is they themselves who transgress against their own well-being.<sup>53</sup>

The composition of the final segment of QS. 24:35 aptly exemplifies the elegance of God's equity. The splendor inherent in the light of guidance bestowed by God is not merely perceived as the exquisite culmination of the odyssey, but also underscores the trajectory elected by God to impart this radiance, namely, the avenue of justice.

### ***Textual Structure of the Hadith of Jibril***

The textual structure of Hadith of Jibril comprises two distinct versions. Imam Bukhārī documented two renditions with the sequence of *īmān*, *islām*, followed by *iḥsān*, whereas Imam Muslim recorded two versions as well. One mirrors Bukhārī's arrangement, while the other interchanges the sequence of *islām* and *īmān* with the sequence of *islām*, *īmān*, and *iḥsān*.<sup>54</sup> Several references of this latter version are also present, including Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal's Musnad, Sunan Nasā'ī, and Sunan

51 Khālid 'Uthmān al-Sabt, *Qarwā'id al-Tafsīr Jam'an Wa Dirāsatan* (Cairo: Dār ibn 'Affān, 2018), vol. II, p. 744.

52 Abū al-Walīd Ibn Rushd, *Faṣl Al-Maqāl Fīmā Bain al-Ḥikmah Wa al-Sharī'ah Min al-Ittiṣāl* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1999), 75.

53 QS. Yūnus [10]: 44

54 Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī* (Būlāq: al-Maṭba'ah al-Kubrā al-Amīriyyah, 1311), vol. 1, p.19; vol. 6, p. 115; Abū al-Ḥasan Muslim al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, t.th.), vol. 1, pp. 36, 39.

Ibn Mājah.<sup>55</sup> Among these two versions, it is the latter that pertains to the context of traditional Indonesian mosque architecture. By extending our inquiry to more authoritative sources, such as the Qur'an, the selection made by the Walisanga as an epistemological foundation for the architectural design of the tajug tumpang roof gains its validation. QS. 49: 14, at the very least, lends credence to this decision:

“The Bedouins say, “We have believed (āmannā)” Say, “You have not [yet] believed; but say [instead], ‘We have submitted (aslamnā),’ for faith has not yet entered your hearts. And if you obey Allah and His Messenger, He will not deprive you from your deeds of anything. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.”

Within the verse, the terms islām and īmān are presented within the same context. Intriguingly, the verse suggests that the plane of faith surpasses that of Islam. This observation aligns with the Prophet's response to a Bedouin who approached him asserting that he had attained the level of īmān (faith). The Prophet rectified the Bedouin's statement, advising him to express “we have entered īmān (at the level of Islam),” as the depth of īmān had not yet entirely permeated their hearts.

From a semantic perspective, the hadith text can be divided into three parts:

No.	Hadith Text	Focal point of the text
1.	On a sunny day, a man approached the Prophet Muhammad and asked, “O Muhammad, tell me, what is Islam?” The Prophet Muhammad responded, “Islam is that you bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, establish prayer, give zakat, fast during Ramadan, and perform Hajj if you are able.” The man replied, “You are right.”	External actions: bearing witness, establishing, giving, fasting, and performing pilgrimage.
2.	The man then inquired further, “So, tell me, what is faith?” The Prophet Muhammad replied, “Faith is that you believe in Allah, His angels, His holy books, His messengers, the Day of Judgment, and you believe in fate, both good and bad.” The man responded, “You are right.”	Internal action: believing.
3.	The man then asked again, “Explain to me, what is ihsan?” The Prophet Muhammad elucidated, “Ihsan is to worship Allah as if you see Him. And if you cannot achieve this state of seeing, know that He sees you.”	Experiencing beauty: seeing and/or being seen by Allah.

55 Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Al-Imām Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2001), vol. XXIX, p. 46; Ahmad ibn Shu'aib al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan Al-Nasā'ī* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tijāriyyah al-Kubrā, 1986), vol. VIII, pp. 101–102; Abū 'Abdillāh Muḥammad Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, ed. Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī (Cairo: Dār Ihyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1431), vol. I, p. 24.



There are at least three important elements within the semantic structure that distinctly portray the varying levels of the three stages of piety outlined in Gabriel's hadith. When delineating the concept of Islam, the hadith employs language that signifies observable physical conduct. The term "testify" denotes a manifest verbal declaration, "establish prayer" pertains to bodily engagement, "give zakat" pertains to manual actions, "fasting" relates to both the stomach and genitals, and "hajj" is more closely associated with movement involving the feet. The selection of these terminologies suggests that at the foundational stage, an individual is considered to have embraced the Prophet's teachings (Islam) by complying with the injunction to undertake these five acts.

In the subsequent stage of faith, the hadith employs the term "believe." The action of "believing" is an internal process undertaken by the heart. Among the six tenets that a believer is required to hold faith in, only two are directly perceivable upon hearing the hadith: some of the divine scriptures (the Qur'an) and one of God's chosen messengers (Prophet Muhammad). Beyond these two, a believer must nurture faith within their heart for matters that elude the grasp of the five senses. This poses a considerable challenge, as beliefs conventionally necessitate empirical substantiation. However, this marks the second phase of assessment for a devotee: having faith in concepts transcending the bounds of their physical perception. According to Ṭabarī, the distinction between Islam and faith resides in the fact that Islam entails a concrete acknowledgment through overt actions, whereas faith entails internal belief within the heart, followed by outward deeds.

The final segment of the hadith text opts to merge the term "seeing," which is inherently physical, with Allah, a decidedly metaphysical entity. The eye functions as an organ that transmits visual data to the brain. Yet, the conundrum arises as to how the human eye can perceive the divine splendor of God beyond the confines of the physical realm. There exists but one answer: through the profound love for God. The concept of *iḥsān* embodies the amalgamation of virtuous deeds and the zenith of affection, as exemplified by Allah's words in QS. 5:54: "*yuḥibbuhum wa yuḥibbūnahum.*" Those who harbor love for God are perpetually endowed with the capacity to fathom more profoundly and derive greater significance from their relationship with the Divine. Beholding God becomes the pinnacle of beauty, denoting one of the paramount rewards in the afterlife. Al-Qusyairī contends that when a servant attains the ability to perceive God akin to moonlight in an unclouded sky, it is then that their inherent beauty shall radiate upon their countenance.

### **From Text to Architecture: Tracing QS. 24:35 and the Hadith of**

## Jibril in Traditional Indonesian Mosques

The transformation of the texts QS. 24:35 and Jibril's hadith into the architectural embodiments of traditional Indonesian mosques can be elucidated via two primary categories: direct replication of tangible elements and embodiment of interpretations of abstract concepts. The materializations of objects amenable to direct replication essentially mirror those found in typical mosques. The mihrab niche, illumination, tree motifs, and luminaries bear resemblance to those in other mosques, although each of these symbols is enriched with unique local characteristics.

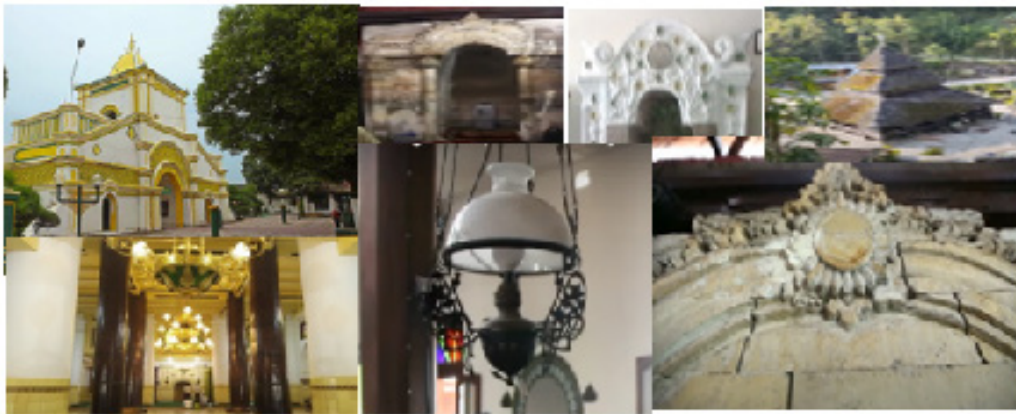


Figure 2 (above): Large tree in front of the entrance gate of Masjid Agung Sumenep; Niche of the mihrab in Sunan Gunung Jati Mosque; Niche of the mihrab for the imam in Sunan Muria Mosque; Tajug tumpang at Tuo Kayu Jao Mosque; (below): Sun carving radiating light on the mihrab niche of Cirebon Mosque; f. Illuminated lamp in Demak Mosque; g. Lantern in Kudus Mosque.

The term “misykāt,” denoting a niche, for instance, is not rendered as a mihrab contour in mosques within Middle Eastern, Persian, or Turkish contexts. Nevertheless, in traditional Indonesian mosques, the interpretation of “misykāt” is adjusted to align with contemporary local customs. The niche is frequently augmented by the inclusion of two pillars on either side, embellished with stone carvings directly onto the surface, reminiscent of the gate style observed in Hindu and Buddhist temples, or adorned with stone embellishments, porcelain, or even representations of local kingdoms.

The lantern, referred to as “al-miṣbāḥ” in QS. 24:35, constitutes the second element directly incorporated with a local influence in the architecture of traditional Indonesian mosques. In the Arab world, the representation of a pentagonal lantern enveloped by glass on each side is commonly employed to portray the concept of “miṣbāḥ.” However, in traditional Indonesian mosques, the notion of “miṣbāḥ” is often materialized through the utilization of traditional Javanese lamps that do not possess complete glass coverage, as exemplified by the Sunan Kudus Mosque and

### Asmaraqandi Mosque.

Another adaptation observed within the architecture of traditional Indonesian mosques is the incorporation of the concept of “syajarah mubārahah,” which translates to a blessed tree. Almost every courtyard of a traditional Indonesian mosque features a substantial tree that aligns with the description found in the verse. However, the interpretation of this blessed tree is tailored to the Indonesian culture and environment. Indigenous trees that hold comparable significance, such as the sawo trees, are frequently employed to symbolize these blessed trees. In addition to its luxuriant foliage, the sawo tree also carries symbolic importance within Javanese and Madurese communities as a harbinger of good fortune. This interpretation can also be linked to the essence of the directive “sawwū şufūfakum” (align the rows), frequently pronounced by the imam prior to commencing the prayer, or known as “salat jhe’ bhu-ambhu” in Madurese tradition, which translates to “do not stop praying.” The adoption of such localized interpretations is likely to have been influenced by geographical and climatic factors, as well as the historical process of Islamization in the Indonesian region, which notably differed from the armed conquests often seen in other regions. Meanwhile, the conceptual components found within both religious texts, owing to their inherent non-literality, are transmuted into designs that fundamentally convey this essence.

#### *1. Allah: The Light of the Heavens and the Earth*

In the visual representation, the initial segment of the verse, “Allāh nūr al-samāwāt wa al-arḍ,” which translates to “Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth,” seems to give rise to two distinct interpretations. Firstly, there is the inclusion of a mustaka (crown) atop it, as evidenced by the minaret of the Holy Mosque and the pinnacle of the stepped triangular roof of the Great Mosque of Demak. This mustaka is accompanied by the Arabic-script inscription of “Allah” and a straight pole that points skyward. Beyond symbolizing the exalted position of God in the celestial realm, it also conveys the intimate connection between God and humanity on earth. This is vividly illustrated by the vertical line that links the mustaka at the rooftop zenith to the central lamp within the mosque’s main hall.

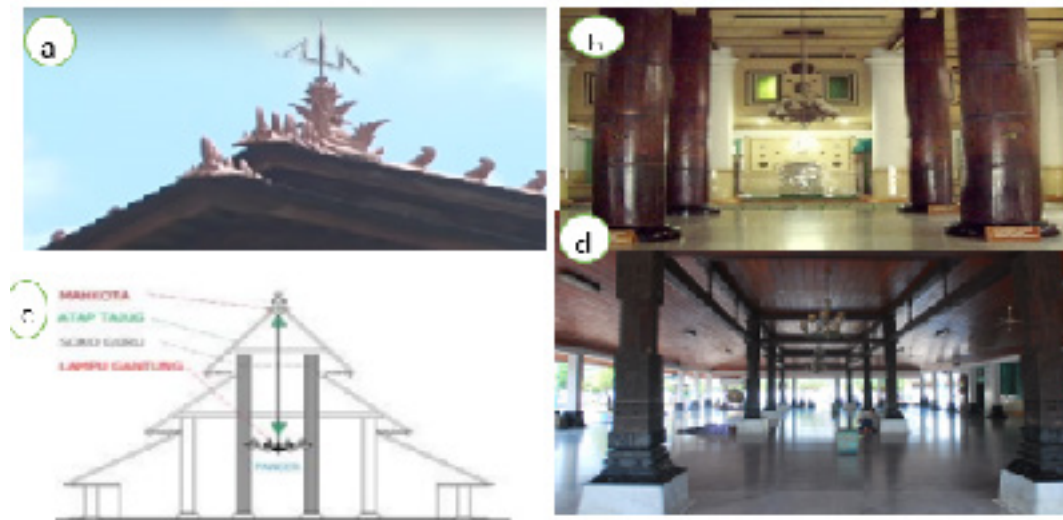


Figure 3: a. Mustaka with the name of Allah at the top of the tower in Mosque of Kudus; b. Central beam (soko guru) in the Grand Mosque of Demak; c. Crown linked with the main light source; d. Majapahit gift beam (soko hadiah) on the veranda of the Grand Mosque of Demak.

Secondly, within the context of the Great Mosque of Demak, an alternative interpretation of QS. 24:35 is manifested through the utilization of two distinct categories of pillars, differing in both origin and form. Within the mosque's interior, all the columns bear a cylindrical shape accompanied by circular bases. In the realm of Islamic art, circles frequently serve as symbols denoting the ceaseless connection between God and His devotees.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, the strategic placement of these cylindrical columns within the mosque signifies that the revered Wali (saintly figures) occupy a spiritual rank intimately proximate to God.

Conversely, the columns possessing square bases, a donation from the Majapahit kingdom, are situated in the entrance hall of the mosque.<sup>57</sup> While Wahby offers an explanation for the distinct styles of columns used in the mosque's main hall and veranda, he does not explicitly establish a direct connection between these architectural elements and references from the Qur'an or Hadith. Instead, he focuses on elucidating the common thread that binds Arab merchants, Sufistic tariqahs, and religious adaptability. From the perspective of QS. 24:35, which reads, "Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth," the juxtaposition of two different column shapes (cylinder and square) and two disparate origins (scholar and king) within

56 Ardalan and Bakhtiar, *The Sense of Unity*, 6.

57 Ahmed E. I. Wahby, "The Architecture of the Early Mosques and Shrines of Java: Influences of the Arab Merchants in the 15th and 16th Centuries? Volume 1: The Text" (Dissertation, Universität Bamberg, 2007), 52.

the pillars of the Demak mosque becomes significant. This architectural approach in the Great Demak mosque visually represents the opening of this verse in a manner that enhances its accessibility and comprehension. It underscores the idea that Allah is not only the divine presence associated with scholars and students who ascend the heavens but also the God of kings and ordinary individuals. If the holy figures epitomize the celestial realm and the monarchy symbolizes the terrestrial sphere, then the Great Mosque of Demak seamlessly blends the two, underscoring that the bond with God transcends particular factions. This serves as a poignant reminder that spirituality and communion with the divine are open and accessible to individuals across all strata of society.

## 2. *Light Above Light*

The hierarchy of guiding light, as delineated in textual descriptions such as the levels of *islām*, *īmān*, and *iḥsān* within Jibril's hadith, as well as the phrase “*nūr 'alā nūr*” in QS. 24:35, can be elucidated through two facets within the context of features present in traditional Indonesian mosques. Firstly, the manipulation of natural illumination is orchestrated in a manner that endows the ingress of light into the mosque space with varying degrees of luminosity. This is reinforced by the provided illustration, which distinctly showcases that the luminous element infiltrating the central chamber of the Sang Cipta Rasa Mosque in Cirebon does not arise from a solitary centralized light source. Instead, the strategy employed encompasses the incorporation of apertures along each tier of the *tajug* or *limasan* roof, serving as conduits for natural light. This design methodology imparts the sensation of light upon light, thereby instilling a hierarchical dimension akin to the tenets of *islām*, *īmān*, and *iḥsān* encapsulated within Jibril's hadith, as well as the concept of “*nūr 'alā nūr*” in QS. 24:35.

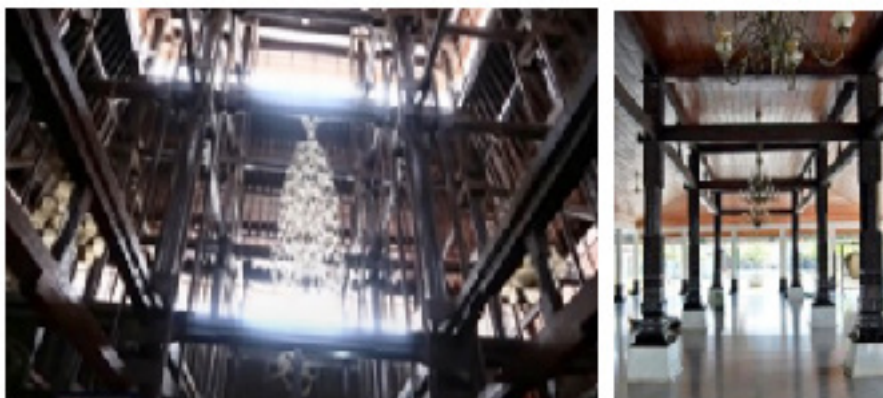


Figure 4: Left: Gradational lighting in Sunan Gunung Jati Mosque, Cirebon; Right: Play of light and shadow on the columns and base of the columns in Demak Mosque;



Figure 5: Left: Mirador de Lindaraja at the Alhambra Palace, Spain; Right: One of the muqarnas in Masjid al-Jāmi' Isfahan, Persia.

The architectural interpretation of the concept “light on light,” evident in traditional Indonesian mosques, presents significant disparities when compared to the light and shadow arrangement observed in mosques across other Muslim regions, such as the Alhambra palace in Granada or mosques featuring muqarnas elements in Persia and the Middle East.<sup>58</sup> In the context of the Alhambra palace, for instance, the differential luminosity levels are actualized through the utilization of varying intensities of golden hues on the stalactite-adorned roof, walls, and porcelain embellishments along the lower architectural sections. A parallel conception emerges within the muqarnas elements of Persian mosques, where certain angles evoke visual depth. The inner recesses bestow gentle illumination, while the exterior arches usher in heightened luminosity, reinforced by the exposed roofs of the muqarnas structures that facilitate zenithal radiance.

Conversely, in traditional Indonesian mosques, the stratification of light levels is unequivocally demonstrated by harnessing the distinctive tropical natural light, counterposed with the somber tones of the predominant wooden material that constitutes the mosque’s primary structural composition. This immersive experience becomes palpable upon stepping into the principal chamber of the mosque. The quadrilateral apexes of the mosque’s roof ingeniously channel a tripartite cascade of light, symbolizing the architectural embodiment of islām, imān, and iḥsān. The interplay of dark and light shades also engenders a sense of harmony, exemplified by the soko featuring dark wood composition upheld by marble soko legs or juxtaposed with light-toned walls. This chiaroscuro effect resonates through the ceilings and columns, crafted from wood yet manifesting distinct chromatic gradients in response

<sup>58</sup> Titus Burckhardt, *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning*, Commemorative ed., Sacred art in tradition (Bloomington, Ind: World Wisdom, 2009), 83–84.

to the dynamic light fluctuations within the space.

This design facet is closely aligned with the prevalent use of wood as a quintessential element in traditional Indonesian mosque architecture, a choice harmonizing with Indonesia's bountiful tropical resources and the indigenous populace's adeptness in woodcraft. The presence of wood stands as a pivotal component in mosque construction, even evident in certain traditional mosques characterized by *soko tunggal* element or solitary pillar serving as the central load-bearing support.<sup>59</sup>

The concept of light levels (*islām*, *īmān*, and *iḥsān*) is tangibly manifested through the arrangement of three roof steps forming a pyramid or triangular structure, denoted as *tajug* in the realm of traditional Indonesian mosque architecture. Significantly, each *tajug* carries its own symbolic connotation, correlating with the respective levels of Islam, faith, and excellence. The *tajug* at the lowest tier symbolically encapsulates the sphere of Islam, the intermediary *tajug* encapsulates the sphere of faith, and the apex *tajug* encapsulates the sphere of *ihsan*. The dimensional proportions of each *tajug* also bear significance, directly relating to the population segment associated with each level.

The bottom-most *tajug* boasts the greatest expanse, mirroring the populace predominantly at the level of Islam. This architectural facet concurs with the laity category, who are primarily obligated to adhere to the five fundamental tenets of outward conduct, with relatively lesser emphasis on delving into the inner spiritual dimension. The intermediate *tajug*, emblematic of the level of *īmān* (faith), encompasses a more constrained space, indicative of a smaller demographic compared to the first *tajug*. In a similar vein, the topmost *tajug*, signifying the pinnacle of *iḥsān* (excellence), occupies the narrowest area, denoting an even more limited number than the preceding tier. This design approach is emblematic of the reality that the number of individuals attaining the second level (*īmān*) is fewer than those at the first level (Islam), and that an even more exclusive group reaches the third level (*iḥsān*).

The incorporation of the *tajug* or *limasan* architectural form in traditional Indonesian mosques is not solely influenced by the *meru* structure observed in Hindu edifices,<sup>60</sup> but it also encapsulates a metaphorical representation of a spiritual odyssey towards God, reminiscent of the ascent to the summit of a mountain found across diverse world traditions.<sup>61</sup> This analogy carries the implication that as one ascends higher up the mountain, the allure of earthly pleasures diminishes in its capacity to provide contentment. Elements such as oxygen depletion, intensified wind pressure,

59 Budi, "A Study on the History and Development of the Javanese Mosque Part 3," 233.

60 Siswayanti, "Akulturasi Budaya Arsitektur Masjid Sendang Duwur," 212.

61 Edwin Bernbaum, "The Spiritual and Cultural Importance of Mountains," in *Montology Palimpsest*, ed.

and restricted sustenance become increasingly palpable. This parallel bears semblance to the spiritual expedition, where the further one progresses, the greater the impetus to detach from material concerns becomes apparent. Notably, all these constraints and sacrifices converge to facilitate an encounter with ultimate beauty. The individual attains a profound realization of this beauty – a spiritual connection with God, epitomized by the rapport between the uppermost *tajug* and the *mustaka*.

### 3. *The Justice of God in Bestowing the Light of Guidance*

An architectural interpretation that elucidates the concept of God's justice, as encapsulated in the concluding verse of QS. 24:35, "God guides to His light whom He wills. Allah makes parables for mankind. Allah knows all things," is discernible through the horizontal and vertical transitions woven into the mosque's spatial layout and roofing design. This perspective becomes evident in the mosque's spatial orientation, which progresses from east to west. The eastern precinct of the mosque comprises an external area, often in the form of a pavilion or veranda. This area subsequently transitions westward, merging with the central prayer hall, and ultimately extends to the westernmost section, taking the shape of the mihrab niche. In contrast to modern or other regional mosques, traditional Indonesian mosques typically feature a solitary mihrab niche, serving both as the qibla-facing mihrab and the platform for the imam to lead the congregation in prayer.<sup>62</sup>

This spatial configuration effectively embodies the visualization of Allah's justice in bestowing the light of guidance. This conception harmonizes with human endeavors in pursuit of this light, akin to the contrast between the endeavors of an individual praying in the mihrab niche versus those worshipping on the mosque's veranda. In a broader context, traditional mosques often interconnect with city squares or royal palace precincts that are synonymous with worldly affairs. This accentuates the idea that the symbolized guiding light of the mosque is omnipresent yet necessitates active pursuit. Through this architectural design, traditional Indonesian mosque architecture conveys the concept of God's justice in furnishing spiritual guidance, contingent upon individual exertion and steadfastness. This analogy is effectively concretized via spatial arrangements that allegorically map the spiritual voyage and human resolve to draw closer to the radiance of divine guidance.

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Fausto O. Sarmiento, vol. 1, *Montology* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 213–224, accessed July 26, 2023, [https://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-031-13298-8\\_12](https://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-031-13298-8_12).

62 Nuha N. N. Khoury, "The Mihrab: From Text to Form," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30, no. 1 (February 1998): 15,



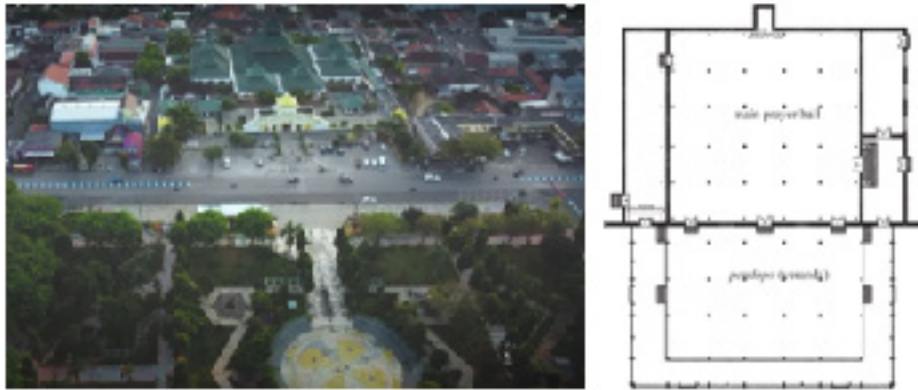


Figure 6

In response to the discontent expressed by certain Muslims who contend that the architectural caliber of traditional Indonesian mosques falls short of the standards observed in other countries,<sup>63</sup> it becomes imperative to address this concern within the scope of this paper. As a mode of interpreting textual meanings, it is crucial to recognize that the viewpoints and cognitive underpinnings of the mufasir (Qur'anic commentator), along with the socio-cultural context enveloping the interpretative process, wield substantial influence over the construction of meaning. The interplay between architectural values and religious texts finds its expression in the “unadorned” design inherent in traditional Indonesian mosques. This comprehension of architectural aesthetics corresponds to the interpretation of beauty in accordance with Javanese philosophy, which, among its facets, emphasizes the restraint of desires for material wealth, authority, and worldly possessions. This sentiment finds resonance in the Sanguloro text, which offers the following insight:

*Elinga wong urip sami, pira lawase neng dunya, lamun becik ing lakune, saengga wong marang pasar, pesthi mulih mring wisma, lawas endi pamenipun, neng pasar lan aneng wisma.*<sup>64</sup>

Remember, everyone's life has a limited time in this world, but if they do good deeds, people will return to their homes, whether it's in the market or at home

The fundamental paradigm inherent in Javanese society, wherein “nothingness” is held in esteem and worldly grandeur is disregarded, likely serves as the impetus behind the Walisanga's decision to abstain from erecting mosques characterized by ostentatious displays. The mosques associated with the Walisanga convey a

<sup>63</sup> Israr, *Sejarah Kesenian Islam* 1, 47.

<sup>64</sup> Translation: *Remember, human life is fleeting in this world. No matter how long one's stay, if their deeds are virtuous, it is akin to someone going to the market; they will inevitably return home. Consider, which is longer: the time spent in the market or the time spent at home.* Moh. Hasim, “Falsafah Hidup Jawa Dalam Naskah Sanguloro,” *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 10, no. 2 (2012): 309.

message that underscores the compatibility of Islam with Javanese teachings. In these mosques, the concept of beauty, representing the most sacred aspect of the journey towards God, diverges from the conventional depiction seen in mosques in other Muslim regions. Unlike those adorned with opulent materials such as gold, gems, and various forms of architectural luxury, the beauty in Walisanga mosques doesn't rely on worldly splendor and extravagance. For the Javanese, the epitome of beauty lies in a sense of "vanishing" in the presence of God. Achieving this spiritual transcendence does not necessitate the display of material luxury in the construction of the mosque, which serves as the focal point of spiritual attainment. The essence of God's guidance can be accessed by anyone who seeks it, even in the absence of opulence and worldly extravagance.

## Conclusion

The texts of the Qur'an and Hadith are interlinked with Islamic architecture, forming a relational pattern wherein textual sources are visually transposed into the realm of human existence. The Qur'an and Hadith serve as fundamental cornerstones for architectural concepts. Concurrently, architecture facilitates the visualization of Qur'anic and Hadith ideas, enhancing comprehension among Muslims. This interpretive process entails accommodations to local cultures and traditions, resulting in divergent interpretations. Consequently, the architectural portrayal of traditional Indonesian mosques diverges from counterparts in regions like the Middle East, Europe, and Persia.

The architectural embodiment of QS. 24:35 and the Jibril hadith within traditional Indonesian mosques generally manifests in two modes: instances where textual meanings can be directly emulated, such as light, lantern, tree, and niche, are visually represented with minimal adjustments to accommodate Indonesian cultural nuances. In cases where underlying concepts from the Qur'an and Hadith cannot be depicted literally, reinterpretation takes place, subsequently influencing spatial arrangement, illumination methodologies, color palette selection, decorative motifs, and the incorporation of elements harmonizing with Indonesian culture.

Despite extensive investigations into the nexus between mosque architecture and Qur'anic and Hadithic texts, certain dimensions of this relationship remain inadequately elucidated. Pertinent considerations encompass the impacts of temporal progression and information technology on the synthesis and visual elucidation of these sacred texts within architectural contexts during the digital age. Furthermore, avenues for research could extend to probing the responses and interactions of modern Muslim communities with mosque spaces embodying visual exegeses of religious

texts. Given the escalating intricacies of socio-cultural dynamics, delving into how Islamic architecture can sustain relevance and significance within the contemporary global milieu, while retaining its moorings in traditional spiritual values enshrined in the Qur'an and Hadith, emerges as a compelling imperative.

### **Supplementary Materials**

The data presented in this study are available in [insert article or supplementary material here] (Usually the datasets were analyzed from library research can be found in the whole data references ).

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### **Authors' contributions**

I did this research by myself, from preparing the materials, writing the paper, reviewing, and revising.

### **Data availability statement**

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

None of the authors of this study has a financial or personal relationship with other people that could inappropriately influence or bias the content of the study.

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