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To cite this article: J Wahid *et al* 2021 *IOP Conf. Ser.: Mater. Sci. Eng.* **1101** 012026

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**240th ECS Meeting** ORLANDO, FL

Orange County Convention Center Oct 10-14, 2021



Abstract submission due: April 9

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# The Wood Carvings of Two Traditional Timber Mosques in Kelantan and Terengganu

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**Abstract.** Wood carving has a long history in Malaysia. It is greatly influenced by the rich landscape of tropical forest in the living environment of the locals. The motifs of the carving are primarily derived from the images of flora and fauna. It mimics the intricate nature of leaves and flowers of the plants. The craftsmen initially use the bas-relief design consisting also of animal imageries on the boat's sides or sometimes on the house components and even the dagger handle. However, with Islam's arrival in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, due to its teachings, contributed to the ban of animal images on art form. While most of the carvings are done on wood, there is no ample evidence of records available due to time and tides of the decaying process of the artwork. Likewise, there is no extensive research and documentation produced by academics to record the traditional wood carving of the Malays. Although few collections had documented the contemporary Malay houses produced by local scholars, sadly, there was no recount on the importance of housing elements and the technique of construction neither on wood carving. Hence, this paper attempts to examine the influence and pattern of wood carving on traditional mosques in Kelantan and Terengganu. The research conducted case studies, to seek the signs of the features and elements of wood carving on the traditional mosque in Kelantan and Terengganu, disclosing the influence of patterns and motifs on the selected images of its architecture. A measured drawing technique commonly used in conservation works guided the research operation which comprised of hand-drawn sketches to capture the details, measurement of building components, as well as transferring the images using tracing paper, while the other methods in gathering the information extended to direct interviews and photography. Then, the data collected were analyzed to determine the differences of each carving patterns and motifs in the two mosques in Kelantan and Terengganu. The result of the research established the future records on the variety of motifs and patterns of the Malay wood carving. Subsequently, it further elaborates the extensive techniques of wood carvings system



and records the patterns found at Kelantan and Terengganu's mosques for future inventory and recorded history.

**Keywords.** *traditional timber mosques, wood carving motifs, Terengganu and Kelantan*

## 1. Introduction to Traditional Mosque

The arrival of Islam in Malaysia has dramatically changed the way of thinking and the way of life of the locals [1]. Naturally, the people respect the environment and responses to cultural practices which are exemplified in the built form. Likewise, the architecture of dwellings is also adapted to the guidance of Islam. A Malay-Islamic architecture such as mosques, suraus, traditional Malay royal palaces and residences including tombs, or better known as *pusara*; were part of the historical remnants of the Malay built form that is often used as a reference for the architecture of the Malays [2]. Furthermore, the mosque is the center of the community. Thus the agglomeration of houses around the mosque symbolizes the unity in Islamic teaching evidently through architecture as well. As a result of its historical development, the mosque architecture has undergone various changes and transformation paralleled to the events of Islamic practice, as reflected in different forms and patterns of Islamic religious buildings in the region.

The traditional mosque architecture in the Archipelago and the mosque architecture built during the early Islamic civilization shows distinct form and construction. The Mosque in the Malay Archipelago is much simpler and greatly influenced by the availability of the building materials and the technique of construction exclusively in timber. Consequently, timber as a material that is hardly durable results in the traditional mosques in the Archipelago as almost forgotten by historians [3] and yet the architecture of these mosques is one of the essential architectural relics of Islamic civilization. Additionally, the power struggle and civil war also destroyed the buildings amidst the scarcity of citizen's involvement in the further creation of arts and crafts. Thus, this condition led to the architecture of the traditional building only being built for survival and immediate usage with weak materials [4]. On the other aspect, the deterioration in timber building construction technology is due to the Hindu and Buddhist civilization, which introduced the custom of stone and masonry as building materials that was then widely used since it was more durable.

## 2. Research Objective

There exists a dialectic discussion on the conservation of Malay Architecture, primarily focusing on the Malay house. The interests itself has been engaging scholars since the early 1980s, but with a little continuation on the subject of the Malay Mosque's ornamentation and relics. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate these elements in the traditional timber mosques both in Kelantan and Terengganu. Both of these regions are the centres of wood carving as well as related arts and craftworks that is fundamental to the Malay world. Finally, a comparative research on the motif and its influence in the mosque buildings was evaluated visually.

## 3. Research Methodology

The documentation of the written aspects related to carvings and artworks were reviewed from books and various journals. The field-work was carried out in July 2018 until March 2019 at the site in Kelantan and Terengganu. Several visits were done to have a detailed inspection of the components of the buildings. The visual interpretation of the carving's motifs and patterns are gathered by using carbon paper that was traced and drawn on the site. Meanwhile, the stages of inquiry are divided into three parts. The first part is on the floor plan, and the surrounding area, including the tombs and ablution area - annexed to the main building. The second level of the examination was on the envelope of the building that includes the fenestration elements and vent light of the wall sections and, lastly, the roof structure, and the fascia boards. Here, the technique of measured drawing was highly applied. Sketching method and tracing on-