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## Architectural Symbolism in the Sultan Hasanuddin Tomb Complex: An Analysis of the Philosophy of the Punden Berundak and the Use of Andesite Stone Material

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#### ABSTRACT

The Sultan Hasanuddin Royal Tomb Complex in Gowa, South Sulawesi, embodies symbolic architecture that integrates local traditions with Islamic values. This study aims to analyze the philosophy of stepped pyramids (punden berundak) and the use of andesite stone as primary symbolic elements, representing spiritual hierarchy and harmony between humans and nature. Using a qualitative case study method, this research explores the symbolic, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of the tomb's design. The findings reveal that the tiered structure reflects a spiritual journey toward the afterlife, while andesite stone symbolizes eternity and the continuity of local traditions. The gibla orientation and minimalist ornaments further emphasize Islamic spiritual values integrated with local culture. This study offers new perspectives on the role of architecture as a medium connecting spiritual, cultural, and environmental values, while providing a foundation for preserving Indonesia's vernacular architectural heritage.

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#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Architecture is not simply the art of designing buildings, but also a reflection of the cultural, spiritual, and social values held by a society. In Indonesia, architecture often has deep philosophical meanings, one of which is seen in the form of terraced punden, a tiered structure rooted in megalithic traditions. More than just a physical function as a place of worship or burial, terraced punden is a symbol of a spiritual journey that reflects the relationship between the material and spiritual worlds. The Sultan Hasanuddin Tomb Complex in Gowa, South Sulawesi, is one clear example of the application of the terraced punden concept that integrates traditional values with Islamic influences.

Based on research by Nuraeni et al. (2024), the Sultan Hasanuddin Tomb Complex reflects a blend of local architecture with strong Islamic influences, particularly through the use of terraced punden structures. The tiered structure of this tomb not only signifies Sultan Hasanuddin's social status as a respected leader but also symbolizes the relationship between humans, ancestors, and God. These tiered elements represent the social and spiritual values of the Gowa people at that time. Furthermore, the use of andesite stone, as explained by Syahrul, the tomb's caretaker, not only demonstrates physical durability but also symbolizes the eternity and continuity of local traditions. (Nuraeni dkk., 2024).

The concept of terraced punden in architecture can also be found in other regions of Indonesia, such as the Penulisan Temple in Bali. As explained by Raharja (2024), the tiered structure at the Penulisan Temple is used to symbolize the journey of ancestral spirits to the mountaintop, which is considered the most sacred place. This philosophy demonstrates that the concept of terraced punden has universal meaning across Indonesian cultures. At the Sultan Hasanuddin Tomb Complex, a similar philosophy is applied with a different approach, where the tiered punden symbolizes spiritual closeness to ancestors and God, while also reflecting the cosmological views of the Gowa people integrated with Islamic values (Raharja, 2024).

In addition to the terraced punden structure, the dimension of symbolism is also visible in the orientation of the tomb which follows the Qibla, as well as the simplicity of the ornaments that depict spiritual values and the sacred function of the tomb. Andesite stone as the main material not only shows local identity, but also reflects the harmony between humans and nature, while also being a medium that connects the material world with the spiritual. This study aims to analyze the application of the theory of architectural symbolism in the Sultan Hasanuddin Tomb Complex, specifically through two main aspects: the terraced structure as a representation of spiritual hierarchy and andesite stone material as a symbolic architectural element.

This study focuses not only on the physical dimensions of architecture but also explores the social, cultural, and spiritual values reflected in the design of this tomb complex. By integrating various literature, interviews, and case study analysis, this research hopes to provide a deeper understanding of how architecture can be an effective medium for connecting the material world with spiritual values in local Indonesian traditions.

## 1.1. Sultan Hasanuddin Tomb Complex: Cultural, Historical, and Socio-Cultural Heritage

The Sultan Hasanuddin Tomb Complex, located on Tamalate Hill in Katangka Village, Somba Opu District, Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi, is a historic site steeped in significance. It not only serves as the final resting place for Gowa's kings, but also symbolizes the cultural and historical journey of the Gowa Kingdom. Covering an area of 13,330 m<sup>2</sup> and situated 30

meters above sea level, sea level, this tomb complex holds various stories which is closely related to the golden age of Gowa and the traditions of its people.

## 1.1.1. Origin and History

The name "Katangka" comes from a large tree considered sacred in pre-Islamic Gowa.



Figure 1. Location of the Sultan Hasanuddin Cemetery Complex Source: Author's Personal Documentation

This tree was the meeting place and inauguration of kings, a tradition that is realized in the discovery of the Pallantikang Stone artifact. Tamalate Hill, once the administrative center of the Gowa Kingdom, became a strategic location for building tombs for kings, a symbol of respect and sanctity in local culture. This tradition continued even after the Gowa Kingdom adopted Islam in the 16th century.

This tomb complex bears silent witness to the long journey of the Gowa Kingdom, from its glory as a respected maritime power to its transformation into a center for the spread of Islam in South Sulawesi. One of its most famous figures, Sultan Hasanuddin, was buried here after his struggle against the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in the Makassar War (1666-1669).

## 1.1.2. Structure and Type of Tomb

This complex has four types of tombs that reflect the social status, culture and beliefs that developed at that time:

- a. Punde Berundak Type: A stepped structure made of andesite stone with three main components—base, body, and roof. This type reflects the acculturation of pre-Islamic and Islamic cultures. Tombs such as those of Sultan Alauddin and Sultan Hasanuddin fall into this category...
- b. Dome-shaped roof: Has a dome-shaped roof, symbolizing the transition from animism to Islam. One example is the tomb of King Gowa XI, I Tadji Barani Daeng Marompa.
- c. Stone Coffin Type: Rectangular tomb made of andesite stone, often used by nobles, such as Arung Lamoncong from Bone.
- d. Stone or Earth Mound Type: The simplest form which is usually used for graves with unknown identities.





Figure 2: Several tombs in the form of terraced burial mounds and new mounds, along with adjacent land

Source: Author's Personal Documentation

Every detail, from the size to the decoration of the tomb, reflects the social status and influence of the person buried. For example, Sultan Alauddin's tomb is larger than that of Sultan Hasanuddin, symbolizing the hierarchy of the royal family.

## 1.2. Symbolic Architecture: A Theoretical Approach

Symbolic architecture is a design approach that places symbols as the primary element to convey profound meanings related to cultural, social, and religious values. Symbols in architecture serve not only as aesthetic elements but also as communication tools that

connect physical design to the social and spiritual context of society. This approach is rooted in the theories of semiotics, symbolic interpretivism, and hermeneutics, which highlight how design elements reflect cultural identity and beliefs (Geertz, 1983; Saussure, 1973) in (Punto Hendro dkk., 2020)

## 1.2.1. Semiotic Approach and Symbolic Interpretivism

Semiotics, as proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure, views symbols as the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Symbols in architecture can be physical forms, ornaments, or structures designed to convey a specific meaning. In Islamic architecture, for example, the dome reflects the unity and greatness of God, while the minaret symbolizes the vertical relationship between humans and the Creator. Roland Barthes added that symbols have layers of meaning, ranging from denotation (direct meaning) to connotation (implied meaning), which allows architecture to become a rich medium of communication. (Punto Hendro dkk., 2020)

The symbolic interpretivism approach, as described by Clifford Geertz, views architecture as a "text" containing symbolic patterns. Interpretation of these symbols allows for a deeper understanding of how cultural and religious values are articulated in design. Symbols in architecture serve not only as aesthetic representations but also as tools for conveying a society's collective identity. (Punto Hendro dkk., 2020)

## 1.2.2. Implementation in Islamic Architecture

The Sultan Hasanuddin Tomb Complex in South Sulawesi is a prime example of symbolic architecture. Design elements within the complex integrate local and religious symbols, reflecting the acculturation of pre-Islamic culture with Islamic influences (Geertz, 1983). One key element is the stepped punde structure, reflecting respect for ancestors and local cultural influences. The geometric ornaments and traditional motifs within the complex serve not only as decoration but also as symbols of Gowa community identity integrated with Islamic values (Barthes, 1964; Hidayat, 2004; (Punto Hendro dkk., 2020)).

## 1.2.3. The Role of Hermeneutics in the Interpretation of Symbols

Hermeneutics, as an interpretive method, helps understand symbols within their social and historical context. Symbols in Islamic architecture, such as those in the Sultan Hasanuddin Tomb Complex, can be understood as representing a dialogue between local traditions and Islamic influences (Palmer, 2003). This approach allows architecture to be seen as a medium of communication that is not only aesthetic but also reflective of societal values. (Punto Hendro dkk., 2020)

#### 2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method, which allows for an in-depth exploration of the architectural philosophy of the stepped punden of Sultan Hasanuddin's Tomb in the Gowa Kings' Cemetery Complex in Katangkang, Gowa, South Sulawesi. This approach focuses not only on the physical aspects of the building, but also on the symbolic and cultural dimensions of the architecture.

## 2.1. Data Sources

This research relies on two main types of data sources: primary data and secondary data.

2.1.1. Primary Data: Direct observations were conducted at the Sultan Hasanuddin Tomb Complex in Katangka, Gowa. These observations were conducted to understand the architectural elements of the terraced pyramids in detail, including their structure, symbolic function, and the materials used. Interviews with architectural experts, cultural experts, and local historians were also conducted to gain an in-depth perspective on the symbolic meaning of these structures.

**2.1.2. Secondary Data**: Secondary data consists of literature studies covering previous research on terraced punden architecture, from both local and international sources. Important references used in this research include journals by Nuraeni et al. (2024) (Nuraeni dkk., 2024), Masgaba dkk. (2023) (Masgaba dkk., 2023), Raharja (2024) (Raharja, 2024), and several studies related to terraced punden at other sites such as Gunung Padang (Yondri, 2014)

## 2.2. Data collection technique

Data collection techniques are carried out through several approaches:

- **2.2.1.** Field Observation: Observations were conducted by directly observing the terraced punden structure in the Sultan Hasanuddin Tomb Complex. Researchers recorded every element related to the terraced structure, architectural symbolism, and building materials.
- **2.2.2.** In-depth Interviews: Interviews were conducted with experts in the fields of architecture and local culture to delve deeper into the meaning of this tomb's architecture. The interviews focused on the historical, social, and spiritual aspects of the tomb, as well as how the terraced punden is used as a medium for spiritual communication.
- **2.2.3.** Literature study: The literature study was conducted by reviewing various journals, books, and academic articles relevant to this research topic. The literature analyzed included studies on terraced punden architecture in various regions in Indonesia, as well as the influence of Islam on tomb architecture.

## 2.3. Data Analysis Techniques

The data obtained were analyzed using a descriptive-analytical method. This approach allowed researchers to describe in detail the elements found during observations and interviews and relate them to architectural theory and symbolism. Comparative analysis was also conducted by reviewing the application of the terraced punden concept in other areas, such as Gunung Padang and Pura Penulisan, Bali.

This analysis process aimed to understand how the architectural philosophy of the terraced punden reflects the social, spiritual, and cultural values of the Gowa people in the past. Findings from field observations and interviews were comprehensively analyzed to yield a deeper understanding of the meaning and function of the terraced punden architecture in the Sultan Hasanuddin Tomb Complex.

#### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Sultan Hasanuddin Tomb Complex in Gowa, South Sulawesi, is a concrete reflection of the application of architectural symbolism theory that integrates local cultural values with Islam. Through an analysis of symbolic elements such as stepped pyramids, geometric ornamentation, and the use of Aceh-Demak-style headstones, this study reveals the social, cultural, and spiritual meanings contained in the tomb's architecture. This discussion covers the philosophical meaning, social function, and contribution of these architectural elements to preserving the cultural identity of the Gowa people.

#### 3.1. The Architecture of Sultan Hasanuddin's Tomb as a Representation of Local Spiritual and Cultural Values

#### 3.1.1. Architectural Form of Sultan Hasanuddin's Tomb

The architectural form of Sultan Hasanuddin's tomb represents a synthesis of local South Sulawesi traditions, Hindu-Buddhist influences, and Islamic values. Some of its main characteristics and developments are:

#### Multi-level structure:

- The stepped pyramid design not only reflects the Hindu-Buddhist architectural heritage but also serves as a symbol of a profound spiritual journey. Each level of the pyramid can be interpreted as a stage in human life on the path to enlightenment and closeness to the Creator, in accordance with Islamic tradition.
- o Architecturally, this form also provides physical stability, because the multistorey structure is able to withstand pressure and weight evenly.

#### Crowned Roof:

- o The mountain-shaped crown atop the tomb serves as a symbolic element connecting the material world with the spiritual. In local culture, the mountain is often seen as a symbol of majesty, a center of power, and access to the spiritual dimension.
- o Aesthetically, this crown provides vertical emphasis that reinforces the visual hierarchy of the tiered structure.

#### Andesite Stone Material:

- The choice of andesite as the primary material was based not only on its local availability but also on its durability and malleability. This stone reflects the continuity of local traditions in utilizing available natural resources.
- Andesite stone as the main element also creates harmony with the tropical environment, both in function and aesthetics, as well as strengthening the symbol of eternity in a spiritual context.

## Basement

 The small space beneath the tomb not only serves as a place to store the body, but also represents the philosophy of human life returning to its origin, the earth. This space can be interpreted as a symbol of the eternal cycle of life.

## 3.1.2. Symbolism and Cultural Values

## Spiritual Hierarchy:

- The tiered structure reflects humanity's journey from this world to the afterlife, which aligns with Islamic teachings. This demonstrates cultural syncretism, where local South Sulawesi traditions, adapting the terraced punden structure, are combined with Islamic values.
- o These stages also reflect the cosmological views of local communities, where each level represents a spiritual phase that humans must pass through.

#### Simplicity of Ornaments:

 The minimalist ornamentation on the tomb reflects the values of simplicity typical of South Sulawesi culture. This emphasizes the primary focus on spiritual function and sacredness, without overemphasizing luxury.

## Local Materials and Cultural Identity:

Andesite stone, the primary material, is a powerful symbol of local identity. Its use reflects not only practicality but also respect for local resources, which hold sacred value in local traditions.

## • Qibla Orientation:

 The tomb's orientation, which follows the Qibla, reflects the Islamic values that served as the spiritual foundation of Sultan Hasanuddin and the people of Gowa.
This reinforces the tomb's function as a link between the physical and spiritual worlds.

## 3.1.3. New Perspectives in the Context of Vernacular Architecture

The tomb of Sultan Hasanuddin not only serves as the final resting place of a great figure, but also reflects the ever-evolving cultural and spiritual dynamics of South Sulawesi. The tomb's architecture represents the successful integration of local traditions, Islamic values, and megalithic architectural influences, creating a unique and highly valuable cultural heritage.

## Manifestation of Cultural Dynamics

The tiered structure of this tomb reflects the continuity of the terraced punden tradition, inherited from the megalithic era and adapted to the Islamic cultural context. This confirms the ability of the people of South Sulawesi to absorb and adapt prehistoric traditions to their religious values without losing their local identity.

## Symbolism in Vernacular Architecture

- Sultan Hasanuddin's tomb is not only a physical object, but also a symbolic medium that reflects the local community's cosmological views. Its tiered structure serves as a metaphor for humanity's journey to the afterlife, with each level representing a spiritual stage that must be traversed.
- The use of andesite as the primary material reinforces the symbolism of steadfastness, eternity, and the close relationship between humans and nature.
  Andesite is not just a material, but also a representation of respect for the earth as a source of life and a spiritual medium.

## Adaptation of Megalithic Architecture into Islamic Values

- O This tomb is proof that megalithic heritage can remain relevant in modern society through the integration of religious values. In this case, the tradition of terraced punden (pillars) has been reinterpreted into a simple, multi-level structure in accordance with Islamic principles of simplicity and spirituality.
- The mountain-shaped roof at the top of the tomb symbolizes the connection between the material and spiritual worlds, in line with the Islamic concept of the relationship between humans and the Creator.

## A Unique Representation of Living Vernacular Architecture

- The architecture of Sultan Hasanuddin's tomb demonstrates that vernacular architecture is not merely about static design, but also about living, adaptive, and relevant values in the face of social and cultural change. This makes it not only a historical legacy but also an inspiration for the development of architecture that values both tradition and innovation.
- As part of South Sulawesi culture, this tomb also reflects the pattern of local people's relationship with nature and spirituality, where the building not only functions as a physical space, but also as a symbol of collective identity.

## Potential for Education and Conservation

 The tomb of Sultan Hasanuddin has great potential as an educational medium for the younger generation and architectural researchers, especially in understanding the dynamics of cultural heritage that continues to develop. o The importance of preserving this tomb is not only to maintain its historical and cultural value, but also as a model of the sustainability of vernacular architecture that respects tradition and integrates modern values.

By blending elements of tradition, religion, and local innovation, Sultan Hasanuddin's tomb is a testament to the adaptability of vernacular architecture to diverse contexts without losing its cultural essence. This makes it one of the finest representations of sacred architecture that continues to thrive in the Indonesian archipelago.

## 3.2. Comparison of the Architecture of Sultan Hasanuddin's Tomb and the Punden Berundak Pura Penulis in the Context of Spiritual and Cultural Symbolism

Sacred architecture in Indonesia reflects diverse cultural values, spirituality, and local identities. Among these important legacies are the tomb of Sultan Hasanuddin in Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi, and the Penulisan Temple in Kintamani, Bali. Both structures are characterized by their tiered form, rooted in the concept of terraced punden, an Indonesian megalithic tradition.

## 3.2.1. The Multilevel Concept as a Vertical Hierarchy

- Tomb of Sultan Hasanuddin
  - o The simple tiered structure reflects the spiritual journey to the afterlife, in line with Islamic teachings. Each tier signifies a transition from this world to eternity.
  - According to Syahrul, the caretaker of the tomb, this design was influenced by local Sulawesi traditions which adapted Islamic values into a tiered architectural pattern, without losing its sacred essence.
- Temple of Writing, (Yondri, 2014):
  - o The concept of the terraced punden at Pura Penulisan is more complex, consisting of 11 levels which depict the journey of ancestral spirits to the realm of the gods.
  - o Each terrace has a specific ritual function, with the main terrace considered a sacred point for direct communication with the gods. This tradition is supported by the Hindu-Balinese cosmology, which places mountains as a symbol of closeness to the gods.

The vertical hierarchy of Sultan Hasanuddin's tomb and Pura Penulisan reflect the syncretism of Nusantara culture, where the prehistoric tradition of terraced punden was able to assimilate with Islamic values in South Sulawesi and Hindu-Balinese in Bali, demonstrating the continuity of architectural traditions rooted in local spirituality. The emphasis on the vertical direction in both of these architectures not only strengthens the symbol of the spiritual journey but also reflects the universal human desire to draw closer to the Creator, both through the concept of heaven in Islam and kahyangan in Hindu-Balinese.

## 3.2.2. Sacred Value as a Holy Place

- Tomb of Sultan Hasanuddin
  - The sacredness of the tomb does not only come from Sultan Hasanuddin's status as a great leader, but also from the local community's respect for historical and religious values.
  - The simplicity of the ornaments on this tomb emphasizes the spiritual meaning of Islam which prioritizes core values, not excessive aesthetics.
- Temple of Writing, (Yondri, 2014):
  - As a Living Monument, the Penulisan Temple remains the center of Hindu rituals to this day, proving the continuity of sacred values that transcend time.
  - o Its sacredness is also enhanced by its strategic location on a hilltop, creating a more profound ritual experience for Hindus.

The sacredness of the tomb of Sultan Hasanuddin and the Penulisan Temple not only functions as a spiritual space, but also as a symbol of the identity of the local community, where the tomb of Sultan Hasanuddin represents the struggle and pride of the Makassar people, while the Penulisan Temple reflects the Balinese spiritual cosmology that continues to live and is relevant in the modern context.

## 3.2.3. The Tradition of Punden Berundak as a Transformation of Megalithic Architecture

- Tomb of Sultan Hasanuddin
  - Simplicity of Design with Deep Meaning: Although the tiered structure of Sultan Hasanuddin's tomb appears simple, its profound philosophy radiates through.
    Each tier depicts a stage in humanity's spiritual journey toward eternity, integrating Islamic values with local traditions.
  - The Use of Andesite as the Main Element; The use of andesite as the main material symbolizes its physical strength and high resistance to weathering in tropical climates. This material reflects the human relationship with the environment, where local natural resources are used for spiritual purposes.
  - Symbolism of Resilience and Eternity; Andesite stone is not only a construction material, but also a symbol of steadfastness and eternity, representing the noble values inherited from Sultan Hasanuddin as a historical figure and great leader.
  - Sacred Value and Spiritual Sustainability: This material is considered to have sacred value, creating a spiritual connection between the grave as a final resting place and the hope of the continuity of the values left behind by the deceased. Andesite stone as an architectural medium emphasizes the role of the grave as a link between the mortal world and the afterlife.
  - Living Megalithic Traditions: The andesite stone elements demonstrate the continuity of the megalithic tradition, which, despite its simplicity, carries strong symbolic value. This reinforces the tomb's representation as part of South Sulawesi's dynamic local cultural heritage, remaining relevant in the modern era.
  - Local Philosophy Integrated with Islamic Values; The use of andesite stone also reflects cultural syncretism, where local traditions that prioritize stability and harmony with nature are assimilated with Islamic values that prioritize spirituality and simplicity.

With its simple tiered design and andesite stone material, Sultan Hasanuddin's tomb not only serves as a symbol of historical respect but also reflects a spiritual journey and a representation of local wisdom preserved to this day. This material also strengthens the continuity between the physical elements and the spiritual values passed down to future generations.

- Temple of Writing, (Yondri, 2014):
  - Representation of Megalithic Traditions; The terraced punden at Pura Penulisan is one of the most striking examples of the Indonesian megalithic tradition. The use of terraced structures demonstrates the continuity of prehistoric traditions that use tiered structures as symbols of spiritual hierarchy. The menhirs found at this site serve as a symbolic medium for honoring ancestors, symbolizing the presence of ancestral spirits believed to reside at the sacred peak.
  - Cosmological Landmark; Pura Penulisan boasts a prominent cosmological landmark, with each tier designed to align with the natural shape of the hill in the caldera of Mount Batur. This reflects the Balinese people's deep understanding of cosmology, where mountains are viewed as the abode of the gods. By adapting to the hill's morphology, this terraced temple also creates harmony between

- architecture and the natural environment, emphasizing the philosophy of the unity of humans, nature, and spirituality.
- Symbolism of the Levels; each level has a specific spiritual function, reflecting the journey of ancestral spirits from the mortal world to the spiritual realm at the mountaintop. This is in accordance with Balinese Hindu beliefs that place mountains as the most sacred places.
- o Integration with the Natural Environment; The design that follows the natural contours of the hill not only facilitates physical access but also creates a more profound ritual experience, where each step up the level is considered a process of getting closer to the gods in heaven.
- The Importance of Cultural and Natural Harmony; Pura Penulisan is not only a place of worship but also a symbol of harmony between cultural values and natural conditions. This philosophy emphasizes the importance of maintaining harmony between architecture, tradition, and the environment as part of a sustainable heritage.

With this multi-level approach and cosmological adaptation, Pura Penulisan is a prime example of how megalithic traditions were adapted in a Hindu-Balinese context, making it a site of not only spiritual but also archaeological and ecological value.

#### CONCLUSION

The Sultan Hasanuddin Tomb Complex serves as a profound architectural testimony to the synthesis of South Sulawesi's local traditions, megalithic heritage, and Islamic values. Its stepped pyramid structure, crowned roof, and use of andesite stone embody both spiritual symbolism and cultural identity, reflecting the journey of life, the connection between the physical and spiritual realms, and respect for nature as a sacred resource. Through its minimalist ornamentation and Qibla orientation, the tomb emphasizes the Islamic principle of simplicity while preserving local Makassar cultural values.

When compared with the Pura Penulisan in Bali, both structures demonstrate the enduring influence of the terraced punden tradition as a medium for expressing spiritual hierarchy and cultural continuity. While Sultan Hasanuddin's tomb integrates this form within an Islamic context to symbolize the path to the afterlife, Pura Penulisan represents the Hindu-Balinese cosmology of ascent toward the divine. This parallel underscores the adaptability of Indonesia's vernacular architecture to different religious and cultural frameworks while maintaining its core symbolic essence.

Ultimately, the Sultan Hasanuddin Tomb is not only a historical monument but also a living representation of cultural resilience and spiritual depth. It highlights how architecture can serve as a bridge between past and present, local identity and universal spirituality, making it a vital heritage site for education, conservation, and the ongoing dialogue between tradition and innovation in Indonesian sacred architecture.

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