

EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS OF BALAI BESAR KEDAH ON THE MALAY TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE

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ABSTRACT

Balai Besar Kedah is a royal audience hall built within the complex of Kota Setar Palace. The grand hall has witnessed coronations of The Sultans of Kedah as well as a number of highly ranked social events throughout its existence since the year 1735. The architecture of this majestic structure is portraying the traditional Malay style, featuring some influences from Siam and the western world. The arrangements of spaces and ornamentations of Balai Besar signifying the high status of the Sultan, primarily as a host of the social events. The Sultan being well travelled, were said to be inspired by buildings in his journey and decided to build his own mixed style building as part of the royal complex. This study aims to reassess the architectural style of Balai Besar, focusing to explore the traditional Malay architecture of Kedah Tua. The methodology of the research is site visits, observation and interview. The architectural elements of Balai Besar were analysed and compared with the local traditional architecture to trace the underlying local and borrowed styles. The styles found is based on two major influence which is British colonial and Siamese. The Malay architectural element would fuse with these foreign styles and create a totally new form of Malay architecture.

Keywords: Palace, royal building, style, colonial, traditional Malay, Kedah Tua

INTRODUCTION

The civilization in Kedah is one of the oldest civilization in South East Asia. The findings of archaeological ruins in Lembah Bujang (Bujang Valley) show evidence of mosques alongside other religious structures related to Buddhism and Hinduism. The traces of foreign influence in the local architecture is predicted due to the different civilisations in history. Assimilation with local characteristics are also seen, for example, one of the oldest standing mosques in Kedah is the Kampung Kakap Mosque, Merbok has a pyramidal roof (which is a common form in the Nusantara region) with brick columns and colonnades. Exploration at the existing site of Bujang Valley found evidence of Islam arrival in Kedah Datuk Haji Wan Shamsudin Mohd Yusof (n.d). It is believed that Islam has arrived in Kedah since the 9th century (Rosmawati, 2005) and the development includes a mosque due to its preservation and clean surrounding. This research will look closely on the Balai Besar architecture through the perspective of history.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kerajaan Kedah Tua (The Old Kingdom of Kedah) has gone through a very long and interesting path in its own history (figure 1) with evidence of original local forms and borrowed

images through foreign influences. This paper try to unfold the Traditional Malay influence on the previously claimed as a borrowed styles of ornamentation. This claimed of browed style will be studied in detailed that would later on showed the originality of the building design.

Figure 1: Ancient A Bertuis Map, dated 1618 of Malaya Portraying Prominence of Kedah



Source: Noor (2005)

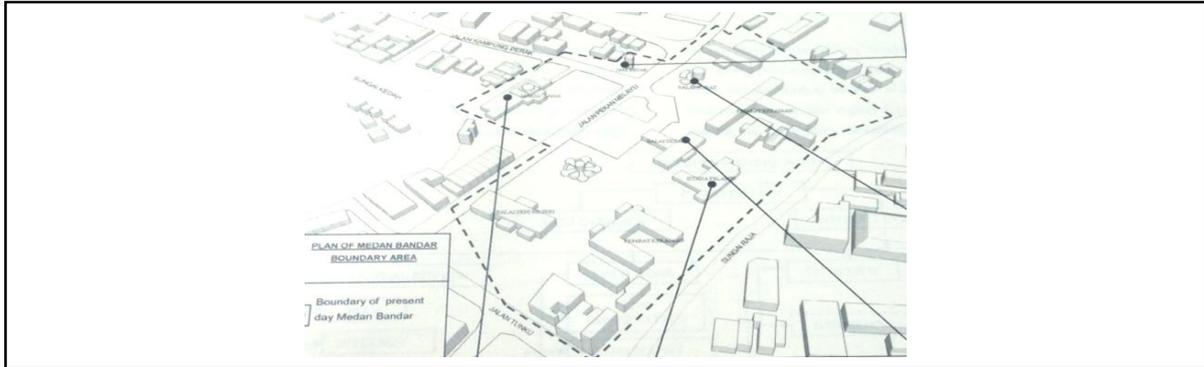
Capital of Kedah

Alor Setar was founded in 1735 by Kedah's 19th Ruler, Sultan Muhammad Jiwa Zainal Adilin II and is located at the edge of the Malacca Strait which separates Malaysia from Indonesia. Kota Setar is the state's eighth administrative centre since the establishment of the Kedah Sultanate in 1136. The earlier administrative centres were located in Kota Bukit Meriam, Kota Sungai Emas, Kota Siputeh, Kota Naga, Kota Sena, Kota Indera Kayangan and Kota Bukit Pinang. Alor Setar is surrounded by important river systems such as the Kedah River, Langgar River, Tajar River, Anak Bukit River, Alor Malai and Alor Merah.

History of Balai Besar Kedah

Balai Besar of Kedah is a royal building built in the 18th century during the modern Kedah era. The Balai Besar is part of the Royal Complex in Alor Setar that comprises of Istana Pelamin (Palace), Masjid Zahir (Mosque), Balai Nobat (Traditional Music Hall) as well as the Clock Tower (figure 2). These buildings play an important role in the socio-culture of the royals of Kedah. These structures are located near to the place where Alor Setar is founded, a small stream (*alor*) where the *setar* tree (*gandaria* or plum mango) grows.

Figure 2: The Map Showing The Location of Balai Besar in Medan Bandar



Source: KAED Heritage Lab (2007)

Balai Besar Kedah function as the state building for formal events or where the people meet the Sultan to convey their problems. It is also known as Balai Rong Seri, Balai Penghadapan or royal audience hall where significant events of the royalty were held. The original Balai Besar was a timber building built in the year 1735 by the 19th Sultan of Kedah, HRH Sultan Muhammad Jiwa Zainal Abidin II.

Balai Besar Kedah was completed in 1735. The grand hall was initially used as Royal Audience Hall for weddings, state assemblies and royal gatherings, and has witnessed the coronation of 4 sultans of Kedah as well as several highly ranked events. The events are highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1: A timeline of Balai Besar throughout the years

Year	1735	1770	1805	1821
Event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Year originally built -built by Sultan Muhammad Jiwa Zainal Adilin Mu'adzam Shah II (1710 - 1778) -function as Royal Audience Hall for weddings, state assemblies and royal gatherings -part of an Istana Kota Setar complex (now a museum) -the original Balai Besar was constructed with <i>Chengal Emas</i> (timber) 	Bugis armada attack and damaged the building	Installation of Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Halim Shah II , the 22nd sultan of Kedah (1804-1845)	Siamese invasion and Balai Besar were burnt and damaged
Pictures				
Sources	(source: memori-kedah.com)			
Year	1882	1896	1904	1909

Event	Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah ascended the throne	King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) visited Balai Besar	-1896-1904 the building restoration works started. -Construction work was led by Muhammad bin Lebai Tambi, an architect from the Kedah Public Works Department (from Penang) with Malay intricacy skills -Grand Weddings of the five princes and princesses of Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah	Siam handover Kedah to British. -Sultan regained power in 1909
Pictures				
Sources	(source: http://archive.li/vKY4H)		(source: http://archive.li/vKY4H)	(source: tranungkite.net)

British Colonial Architecture

British first contact in Malaya was in 1786 when the British East India Company attained the island of Penang through a treaty with the Sultan of Kedah for protection from Siam. During their occupation period, the British built buildings with imported architectural characteristics from the ‘west’ and its colonies. The style that can be traced in Balai Besar is Neoclassical style, Palladian style and Regency style. One of the most prominent style to be applied in the Balai Besar is the Neoclassical style, that manifests the return to the classical designs of the ancients. The pure form of Neoclassical is a style principally derived from the architecture of Classical Greece and the architecture of Italian Andrea Palladio (Britannica, 2013). The influence in Balai Besar Alor Setar has been diffused with the local details.

The existence of this style had been slowly hybrid into the vernacular style of Malay architecture which result in the syncretic formation of both styles. In Southeast Asia, there are no published agreement on the use of the term to describe particular periods in history and the architectural languages or terminology associated with it (Osborne, 2016). Yet this syncretism shows how there is an undefined style in the Malay architecture that had not been discussed. This style is on the syncretism of the Malay architecture with the British colonial architecture. Following the definition by Osborne (2016), classical means the height of civilisation. In the Malay civilization and architecture, the term classical may be associated with architecture that reflects the height of artisanship. This period may be related to the architecture of palaces at the end of the 19th century to early 20th century that demonstrates the rules of symmetry, proportion and decorum.

The architecture of this majestic structure is portraying the traditional Malay style, featuring some influences from Siam (Esmawee, 1993), Colonial and the rest of Malay Archipelago. The arrangements of spaces and ornamentations of Balai Besar were designed to indicate the high status of the Sultan, primarily as a host of the prestigious social events. Significant events were held here including the handing back of Perlis and Setul (now Satun)

to Kedah by the Siamese in May 1897 after being separated from Kedah since 1821. Another significant event is the 90-day festival from June to September 1904 was held here to celebrate the wedding of the five children of Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The three main methodologies to answer the objectives are as follows:

- i. Literature research and content analysis on related topics especially on Traditional Malay Architecture of Kedah. The data was collected from the online publication and also KAED Heritage Lab, KAED, IIUM (2007).
- ii. Site visit and observation of Balai Besar Kedah.
- iii. Interview with a renowned Kedah Historian, Dato' Hj. Wan Shamsudin Mohd. Yusof on the influences of Kedah buildings and the chronology of events
- iv. The analysis measured drawings of IIUM heritage lab and identified motifs used especially Malay origin.
- v. The Motif chosen is focusing on the outside of part of the building.

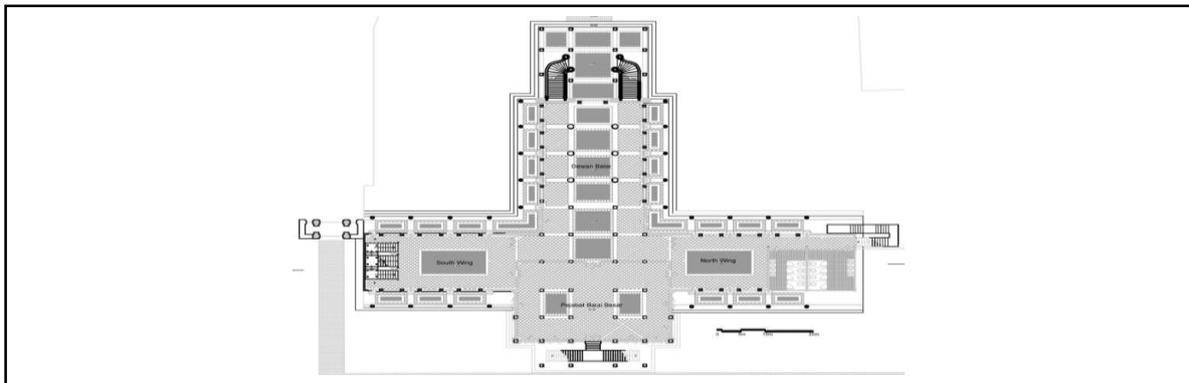
RESEARCH FINDINGS

Balai Besar architectural influence is associated with the travels made by the Sultan. After the Bugis and Siamese attack that left the building in bad condition, the restoration works started in 1896 and is finish in 1904. The focus of this paper is to study the current design of Balai Besar which is built in 1904. This is because there is a lack of records of the original building except for the building materials; timber structure with attap roof. On this research there is 2 part of the architectural element that is being analyzed. The first part is the study of the form of Balai Besar which include the study of spatial, level and circulation. The second part is a study of the decorative motif which consists of the building component of Balai Besar such as column, roof, window, door and others. The aim is to seek the architectural styles of Balai Besar in details, unfolding the traditional Malay influence which was claimed to have borrowed styles of in its form and ornamentation.

(i) *Architectural Elements*

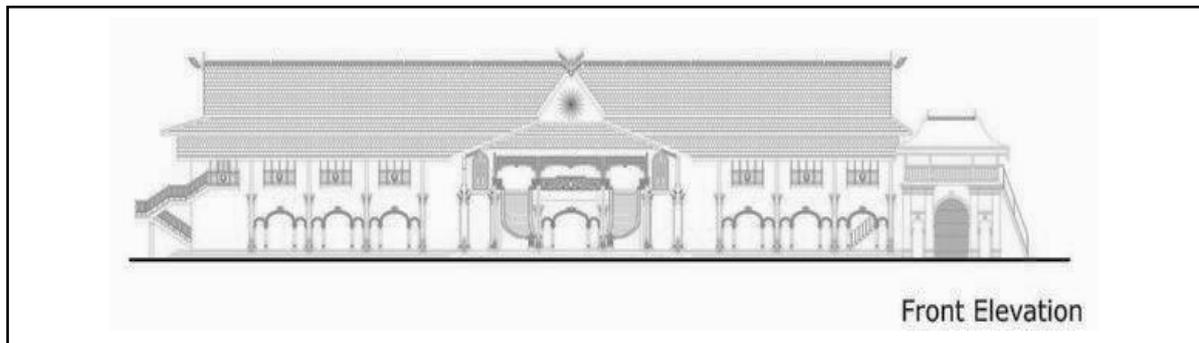
The final form of the Balai Besar is an infusion of styles and an eclectic mix of Malay, Thai and Colonial influences (Shireen et.al, 2018). It has a formal symmetrical layout with semi-outdoor colonnades. The columns are slender with enhanced proportion in comparison to the vernacular houses. However, the image of the local Malay houses was reinterpreted at a larger scale suiting the building function.

Figure 3: Plan of Balai Besar, Symmetrical Plan



Source: KAED Heritage Lab (2007)

Figure 4: Front Elevation of Balai Besar



Source: KAED Heritage Lab (2007)

(ii) Foreign Architectural Style of Balai Besar

The building of the new Balai Besar would show a syncretisation process that saw the absorption of neighbouring elements into the decorative language of the palace without losing its Malay archetypical form (Shireen et al,2018). There are 2 major foreign architectural styles that could be defined in the design Malay, Siamese and British colonial style.

(iii) The Malay Style

The roof area of Balai Besar, notably on the roof finials in which the cross finials of Riau origin were merged with the 'ogee'-like the curve of a perpendicular finial enclosing a *selembayung* ornamental motif (figure 5). Though the motif is Malay, the form of the dominant finial recalls the *makara* form of thai roof embellishments (Shireen et al,2018). This would show how the ornamentations decorating the roof, combining the sharper riau-based roof finial with curved finial, reflect the symbolic link between the Malay centre power and with the centre of Siamese civilization.

Figure 5: Image of The Roof Finial Close Up



Source: Left (TRGS16-03-003-0003 3d model) Right (left, <http://tenzerofour.com/balai-besar/>)

(iv) The Siamese style

Siam had forged a closer bond with Kedah in the latter period including the time of this building second construction. Both nation welcome era of close political and cultural style. In the context of the overall form of the building, the entrance from the roof gable ends mimicked the vernacular architecture of the Langkasuka region that can be traced to Surau Aur in Southern Thai and also the Siamese temples. The motif that span between the columns that support the roof over the foyer verandah is also reflecting the Siamese temple. The colour scheme of green and yellow recalled the varnish roofing tiles of palaces and temple of Siam, with slender columns reaching a height of over nine meters, with openwork at the joint between the roof and column (Shireen et.al,2018).

(v) The British colonial style

As said in the literature review the British colonial architecture style that had an influence on the Balai Besar are Neoclassical style, Palladian style and Regency style. The Neoclassical and Palladian style is mostly seen on the columns, doors and windows of the Building. While the Regency style can be seen clearly on the cast iron balustrades at the staircase (figure 6) which recalls similar decorative form from Glasgow with geometrical forms and floral details derived from classical repertoire known as the rinceau design.

Figure 6: Image of The Cast Iron Balustrade at Staircase



Source: Author picture

Column capitals on the upper floor recalled Victorian-style cast iron columns-possibly modelled by styles in neighbouring Penang – but regionalized with the Malay *sulor paku* motif – eight pieces of local fern patterns carved from wood was secured to the plain column (figure 7).

Figure 7: Image of The Front Column of The Building with Sulor Paku Motif



The window mostly has style from the neoclassical style and Palladian. The window on figure 8a is an influence of Palladian style. While the picture on figure 8b showed Venetian motif is the same as a Palladian motif in the context of windows. But one thing that is different is that Venetian is also included using the ogee arch for its windows decoration.

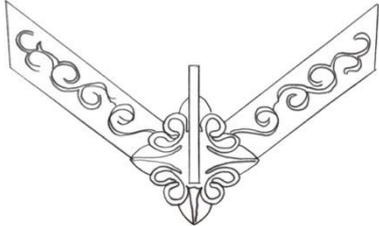
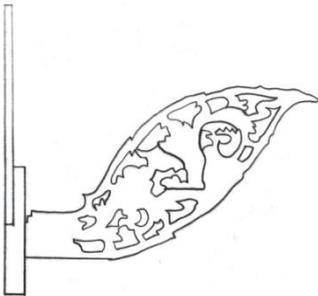
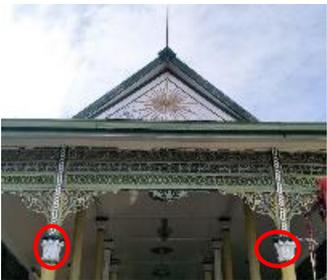
Figure 8: Image of Windows



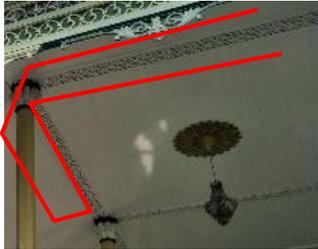
Source: Author picture

To further discuss the component of Balai Besar a table analysis (table 2) of the elements from the building is conducted to see in detail the exact motif used to design each element of the component. External part of the Balai Besar building ornamental component is chosen.

Table 2: Analysis of Element in Balai Besar

Building Component	Element	Influence
<p>Tunjuk Langit in the form of Silang Gunting <i>Roof Finial</i></p>  <p>(source: author picture)</p>	<p>Selembayung bermotif awan larat <i>Cross Scissor with Awan Larat motif</i></p>  <p>(source: redrawn from Heritage Lab IIUM)</p>	<p>Malay Riau / Southeast Asia</p> <p>Motif: Awan Larat</p>
<p>Tunjuk Langit <i>Roof Finial</i></p>  <p>(Source: Author picture)</p>	<p>Selembayung bermotif Makara <i>Cross Scissor with Makara motif</i></p>  <p>(Source: Redrawn from Heritage Lab IIUM)</p>	<p>Malay Riau</p> <p>Motif: Makara</p>
<p>Tiang <i>Columns</i></p>  <p>(Source: Author picture)</p>	<p>Bunga tiang bermotif Sulur Paku Tinjau Meninjau <i>Capital with eyeing Sulur Paku motif</i></p> 	<p>Neo-classical Corinthian / Malay</p> <p>Motif: Sulur Paku Tinjau Meninjau</p>

Langit-langit
Ceiling



(Source: Author picture)

(Source: Redrawn from Heritage Lab IIUM)

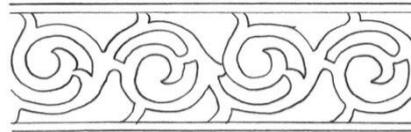
Hiasan Langit-langit bermotif Awan Larat

Malay

Ceiling décor with Awan Larat motif

Motif:

Awan Larat



(Source: Redrawn from Heritage Lab IIUM)

Sesiku
Brackets



(Source: Author picture)

Sesiku bermotif Sulur Paku

Malay

Bracket with Sulur Paku motif

Motif:

Sulur Paku



(Source: Redrawn from Heritage Lab IIUM)

Kekisi Tangga Besi
Cast-iron balustrade



(Source: Author picture)

Kekisi bermotif rinceau

Regency / Malay

Balustrade with rinceau motif

Motif:

Rinceau



(Source: Redrawn from Heritage Lab IIUM)

Langit-langit
Ceiling

Hiasan gantungan tanglung bermotif Bunga Terung

Malay

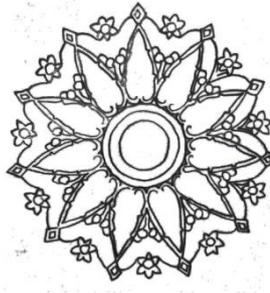
Hanging Lantern decoration with Eggplant flower motif

Motif:

Bunga Terung



(Source: Author picture)



(Source: redrawn from Heritage Lab IIUM)

Pintu Lengkung Separuh Bulat Berdaun
2

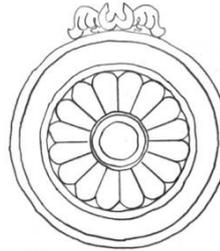
*Round arch double swing Timber
louvered door*



(source: author picture)

Ambang Pintu bermotif bunga Tampok
Manggis dan burung Tekukur

*Overdoor with Tampak Manggis flower
and tekukur bird motif*



(Source: Redrawn from Heritage Lab IIUM)

TOP
Malay

Motif:
Bunga tampok manggis

BOTTOM

Malay

Motif:
Burung tekukur

Pagar Musang
Fence Enclosure
(fox fence)

Papan Ukiran tebul timbul bermotif
Sulur Paku

*Timber Carving half pierced with Sulur
Paku motif*

Malay
Motif:



(Source: Author picture)



(Source: Redrawn from Heritage Lab IIUM)

Sulur Paku

Pagar Musang

Fence Enclosure

(fox fence)

Kekisi bermotif jerajak

Balustrade with jerajak plant motif

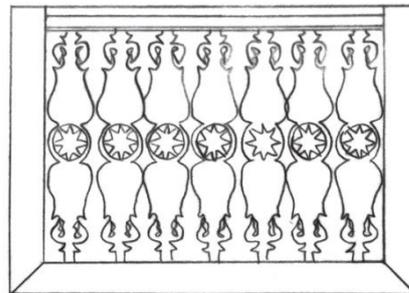
Malay

Motif:

Jerajak



(Source: Author picture)



(Source: Redrawn from Heritage Lab IIUM)

Tingkap lipat 2 bergaya Palladian bermotif Ketam Guri

Double swing Window with Palladian style with Ketam Guri plant motif

Alang tingkap bermotif ketam guri

Overwindow with ketam guri motif plant

Malay

Motif:

Ketam Guri flower

(side view)



(Source: Author picture)



(Source: Redrawn from Heritage Lab IIUM)

DISCUSSION

Based on the table above it can be seen that most element would have a local floral motif. The use of local floral is a proof that Malay influence is still strong on every elements of the

building. Another aspect that is interesting regarding on the table is the named given specifically to the front column called *Tiang Menungkat Pisang Sesikat*. The word ‘*tiang menungkat*’ is maybe related to the view of columns supporting the supporting the roof. To understand this ‘*menungkat*’ is a derivation from the word ‘*tongkat*’ which is an item used to support a person standing, hence in the case of building component the column (*tiang*) is supporting the roof. The term *pisang sesikat* is referring to the lean-to-roof construction, which in this case is the extended roof to shade the colonnade area.

Traditional Malay Architecture that can be found in the audience hall can be summarized as focal and central point – Main Hall (*Balairong Seri*), frontage open double volume resembling a large-scale veranda, Riau based double pith roof, the use of local flower as a motif for the building decorative component, flexible spaces on the ground floor with open halls, open linear plan unit, more emphasis on the importance of hierarchy (of Royals), no physical boundary/fence, minimal partitions/physical boundary, separate entrance male and female.

CONCLUSION

The mix of architectural style and influence in *Balai Besar* architecture are identified as Vernacular Malay Architecture, Siamese Architecture, Sumateran Architecture, Colonial Architecture, Regional Climatic Response and Islamic Approach of Building. Malay architecture as are the Malay people, is a style that tends to assimilate rather than discriminate. The Malay architecture tries to blend and re-adapt its original form to any foreign style its face with. The recent discovery of old structures in Kedah were yet to be studied, but may uncover another style of architecture, the *Kedah Lama* style. There is a clear relationship in identifying the chronological historical studies of the building with the foreign influence on its ornaments motif. This ways of relating historical facts with Architecture of a building could give a clearer and justifiable to a reason on a certain design of any Old prominence Building. This paper aims at contributing to new discoveries of Malay Architectural style in the Kedah region. The lack of documentation of Traditional Malay Architecture in the past is such a loss, and researches retrace back as much as possible what is left to be recorded for the future generations.

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