

## SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF THE ORNAMENTAL MOTIFS ON THE TOMB OF YUNUS BIN ALI AFANDI IN BONTOALA TUA, MAKASSAR

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### ABSTRAK

Makam Yunus bin Ali Afandi di Bontoala Tua, Kota Makassar, merupakan salah satu warisan budaya dan seni Islam awal abad ke-20 yang menunjukkan kekayaan ragam hias serta makna simbolik. Makalah ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji makna ragam hias pada makam tersebut dengan menempatkannya dalam konteks jaringan budaya Islam Nusantara dan pengaruh global, khususnya dalam periode pemerintahan Hindia-Belanda. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif melalui analisis ikonografis, komparatif, dan kontekstual terhadap elemen dekoratif makam. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ragam hias pada makam ini didominasi oleh tulisan kaligrafi Arab, serta motif flora dan geometris. Secara tipologis, bentuk nisan menunjukkan kemiripan dengan tradisi makam Islam Ottoman di Turki dan Demak Troloyo di Jawa. Selain itu, penggunaan material seperti marmer dan tegel lantai menunjukkan pengaruh modernitas era kolonial. Dengan demikian, makam Yunus bin Ali Afandi tidak hanya dimaknai sebagai kuburan semata, tetapi juga media ekspresi simbol identitas budaya dan religius Islam di Makassar pada periode tersebut. Ragam hias makam tidak hanya merepresentasikan nilai-nilai Islami seperti pengingat kematian dan keesaan Tuhan, tetapi juga mencerminkan akulturasi budaya nusantara dan regional. Hasil kajian dalam makalah ini akan berkontribusi dalam memperkaya diskusi terkait pendekatan simbolik dalam upaya memahami dinamika warisan seni dan budaya Islam di Indonesia.

**Kata kunci:** ragam hias, makam kuno, Bontoala tua, simbol, seni Islam

### ABSTRACT

*The tomb of Yunus bin Ali Afandi in Old Bontoala, Makassar, is a cultural and artistic heritage of early 20th-century Islamic architecture, which features a diverse array of decorative motifs and symbolic meanings. This paper examines the meaning of the ornamental motifs on the tomb by contextualizing them within the network of Nusantara Islamic culture and global influences, particularly during the Dutch East Indies period. The method employed is a qualitative approach through iconographic, comparative, and contextual analysis of the tomb's decorative elements. The research findings indicate that the decorative motifs on this tomb are dominated by Arabic calligraphy, as well as floral and geometric patterns. Typologically, the tombstone's form bears similarities to the Ottoman Islamic tomb traditions in Turkey and the Demak-Troloyo tradition in Java. Additionally, the use of materials such as marble and floor tiles reflects the influence of*

*colonial-era modernity. The tomb of Yunus bin Ali Afandi is not only seen as a tomb but also as a means of expressing the symbolic identity of Islamic culture and religion in Makassar at that time. The tomb's decorative motifs represent Islamic values, such as the reminder of death and the oneness of God, and reflect the acculturation of Nusantara and regional cultures. The findings of this study will enrich the discussion regarding symbolic approaches in efforts to understand the dynamics of Islamic art and cultural heritage in Indonesia.*

**Keywords:** *decorative motifs, ancient tombs, old Bontoala, symbols, Islamic art*

## INTRODUCTION

Ancient Islamic tombs are notable works of architectural art, featuring a variety of forms and decorative motifs found throughout the Indonesian archipelago (Mulyadi & Nur, 2017; Rahim & Suseno, 2021). The most intriguing aspect of these artifacts is their decorative motifs (Ambariyanto, 1994). Ornamental patterns serve not only an esthetic function but also carry symbolic meanings, archaeological value, sociopolitical significance, and cultural-artistic value, in accordance with the context of their time (Chawari, 1997; Mulyadi & Nur, 2017; Rahim & Suseno, 2021). Through the study of decorative motifs, a deeper understanding of historical processes can be gained, aiding efforts to reconstruct cultural identity.

Studies on the decorative motifs of ancient Islamic tombs in South Sulawesi have been conducted fairly frequently; however, most have focused on the tombs of nobles and religious scholars from the early period of Islamization, around the 16th to 18th centuries. Studies specifically highlighting the decorative motifs of Islamic tombs from the early 20th century remain relatively limited. Yet, this period represents a crucial phase in the history of Islamization, marked by the influence of the Dutch East Indies government. Therefore, a study of the decorative motifs of the Yunus bin Ali Afandi tomb is necessary, as it serves as a representative example of that period.

Several studies have been conducted in the South Sulawesi region, including one by Mulyadi and Nur (2017) on the Turikale Tomb Complex in Maros Regency. This study has contributed to our understanding of the function of decorative motifs as indicators of social status and Islamic identity among the Turikale noble families.

Another study was conducted by Wulandari, Syahrin, and Suseno (2020) on the tombs of Petta Pallase-lase-e and Datu We Tenri Olle, the 20th Queen of Tanete (1856–1910), in Barru Regency. Through this study, various cultural elements influencing the form and decorative motifs of the tombs can be identified, ranging from megalithic, Hindu-Buddhist, Islamic, and colonial cultures.

The tomb of Yunus bin Ali Afandi had previously been studied by Zubair (2011), focusing on the meaning and function of the tomb inscriptions alongside other tombs in the Lajangiru Bontoala Tomb Complex. All tomb inscriptions serve as a medium for spreading Islam and as markers of Islamic identity. This study has provided valuable information regarding the identity of Yunus bin Ali Afandi, who died in 1916. However, this study has not yet fully addressed the issue of the decorative motifs on Yunus bin Ali Afandi's tomb, leaving a gap for further research, particularly regarding the symbolic meanings of these motifs.

The decorative motifs of Yunus bin Ali Afandi's tomb are worth studying because they possess unique attributes that differ from those of other ancient Islamic tombs in South Sulawesi in general and in the city of Makassar in particular. In this context, the tomb's decorative motifs are not viewed merely as esthetic ornaments but as objects containing latent meanings. Thus, the research questions in this study are summarized into two main inquiries: 1) What are the forms of the decorative motifs on the tomb of Yunus bin Ali Afandi, and 2) What is the symbolic meaning of these motifs? This study is expected to fill a gap in research regarding the forms and meanings of tomb ornamentation that reflect the dynamics of Islamic art and culture in the Bontoala Tua area during the early 20th century.

## **METHOD**

This paper employs a qualitative archaeological research method. The subject of study is the Yunus bin Ali Afandi Tomb in the Bontoala Tua area of Makassar City. Technically, the primary data—the tomb's decorative motifs—were obtained through field surveys, which included documentation, measurement, and recording. Additional supporting data were gathered through interviews with the caretaker of the tomb, as well as a literature review of relevant written sources, such as research reports, books, and scholarly articles.

Analytical techniques include iconographic, comparative, and contextual analysis. Iconographic analysis involves morphological, technological, and stylistic analysis. Morphological analysis identifies attributes of form, parts, and size. Technological analysis identifies attributes related to raw materials and decorative techniques. Stylistic analysis identifies attributes of architectural and decorative ornamentation, including color, motifs, and patterns. In contextual analysis, observations are made regarding the relationship between the findings and their physical environment to understand issues of cultural contact (Puslit Arkenas, 2008). In comparative analysis, attributes are compared with those of other tombs from various periods and cultures to identify the meaning of the decorative motifs.

## DISCUSSION

The tomb of Yunus bin Ali Afandi is located within the Bontoala Tua area, Bontoala Subdistrict, Makassar City. Bontoala Tua was a significant location in the history of the Islamization of South Sulawesi, as documented in the *Bontoala Lontara Lakatoanna*. This region was the first centre for developing Islamic teachings after Islam was officially accepted by the Gowa-Tallo Kingdom. One of the well-known religious scholars known to have received an Islamic education there was Syekh Yusuf Al-Makassari (Muhaeminah & Makmur, 2015).

The tomb is located outside the Lajangiru Cemetery Complex, directly to the north across the street. The tomb is set slightly back from the roadside, nestled among local residences. The area surrounding the tomb is enclosed by a stone wall. At the time of the visit, the tomb was still intact, though it appeared dirty and poorly maintained.

Like most Islamic tomb, this one is oriented north-south. The entire is made of white marble. It sits on a 2.4 m x 1.8 m base, surrounded by an iron fence, and sheltered by a corrugated iron roof. The floor surface is covered with printed tiles featuring a red eight-pointed star motif with a black vine-like leaf and tulip border. This decorative floor pattern with such a border reflects the influence of the Art Nouveau style, similar to the floor at Villa Yuliana Soppeng, built in 1906 (Hasrianti, 2019).



**Figure 1. A. The Tomb of Yunus bin Ali Afandi, B. Grave structure, C. Tomb floor, D. North tombstone, and E. South tombstone.**

The decorative motifs on the tomb are classified into several types: figurative, geometric, floral, and inscriptions. The floor motifs are created using a printing technique, whereas the base, sides, and Gravestone are crafted using carving and engraving techniques. Decorative motifs cover the entire surface of the tomb, with floral motifs serving as a border surrounding the geometric patterns and inscriptions.

**Table 1 Analysis of grave decoration**

No	Shape	Classification	Technique	Color	Placement	Symbolic Meaning
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1	Headgear	Figurative	Chisel, carve	White	Tombstone	Social and professional identity
2	Medallion	Geometry	Carving	White	Tombstone	Perfection, unity
3	Repeating triangle	Geometry	Chisel	White	Tombstone	Awareness, respect, purity, and fragrance
4	Eight stars	Geometry	Print	Red	Floor	The gates of heaven, glory, and Muslim identity
5	Seam	Geometry	Chisel	White	Tombstone	Solidarity, monumentality
6	Leaf tendrils and grapes	Flora	Carving	White	Gravebase, Grave structure	Rebirth, regeneration, life cycle, wealth
7	Tulip leaf and flower tendrils	Flora	Print	Black	Floor	Life, continuity, and regeneration
8	Pinnate leaves	Flora	Carving	White	Tombstone	Peace, death, protection, and spirituality
9	Finger-like leaves	Flora	Carving	White	Tombstone	Growth, life
10	Arabic Calligraphy	Inscription	Carving	White	Tombstone, Grave structure	Identity and religious propagation

### Figurative motifs

The figurative motifs on the tombs are reminiscent of the typology of Ottoman-era tombstones in Turkey. In Ottoman tomb tradition, headgear-shaped ornaments carved onto tombstones indicate that the tomb's occupant was a man (Zeyada, 2025). The shape of the headgear ornament resembles a fez turban—a red felt cap wrapped in a shawl, which served as the official attire for religious figures and the urban elite in the Ottoman Empire since the mid-17th century. Well-documented 19th-century European Orientalist history also notes that the fez was a common symbol of the exotic Ottoman imperial culture (Ismail, 2021). This can be associated with the symbolic meaning of the ornament as an indicator of the tomb owner's social identity and profession.

Unfortunately, the author was unable to find definitive data regarding the origins and life history of the tomb owner. However, based on information gathered from interviews and previous research, Yunus bin Ali Afandi is known to have been an immigrant from Turkey. He was a respected figure as a propagator of Islamic

teachings during the reign of King Gowa I Makkulau Daeng Serang Karaeng Lembangparang Sultan Husain Tuminang ri Bundu'na (Zubair, 2011).

Research into the name Ali Afandi suggests that the family lineage of the tomb's owners is connected to Sheikh Muhammad Ali Afandi (d. 1815), the son of Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdullah Afandi, a Yemeni scholar born in Izmir (Turkey) who came to preach in Jampue Pinrang during the reign of Datu Lanrisang in the 18th century, from his marriage to a local woman (Hamid, 2019). Afandi is also known to be an honorary title for individuals or officials associated with the network of scholars in Turkey.

The use of fez turban-shaped ornaments on the tombstone and the name Afandi indicate a connection between Makassar and the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century. Although further investigation is needed, this may be linked to the dynamics of pan-Islamism in the previous century.

### **Geometric Motifs**

The geometric motifs on the tomb of Yunus bin Ali Afandi consist of medallions, repeating triangles, folds, and eight-pointed stars. The oval-shaped medallions serve as a visual frame symbolizing perfection and unity. The repeating triangles carved around the base of the tombstone, resembling a belt, are identical to the tumpal motif. These motifs can be interpreted as symbols of cosmic harmony, the transcendent, consciousness, reverence, and purity of heart (Hidayat, 2008). However, the slightly curved visual form of the triangles, with variations in size and arranged in an alternating pattern, evokes the image of a blooming lotus flower. The flower, synonymous with fragrance, can be linked to the saying that when a person dies, they leave behind only their fragrance—a metaphor for a good reputation or acts of kindness—serving as a bridge to attain happiness in the afterlife (Ramadhan & Ismurdiyahwati, 2022). The medallion decoration, featuring Arabic calligraphy, a tumpal, and a lotus, characterizes the Demak Troloyo-style tombstone (Rosmawati, 2018).

The eight-pointed star is a universal symbol commonly used in religious iconography. In Islam, this motif is also known as the “star of victory,” a symbol of the eight gates of Paradise as narrated in a hadith by Abu Hurairah, and a marker of

Islamic identity (Muntazori, 2013). The fluted or layered profile conveys a sense of strength and monumentality, reflecting the influence of classical European architecture.

### **Floral Motifs**

The floral motifs on the tomb of Yunus bin Ali Afandi consist of grapevine tendrils with leaves and grapes, tulip tendrils with leaves and flowers, pinnate leaves, and palmate leaves. Grapes are frequently depicted in cultural artifacts as symbolic decorations with deep roots in the Euro-Mediterranean artistic traditions. These decorative motifs are used in various cultural contexts, including Islam. As an iconographic representation from the past, the grapevine—with its round, fleshy fruits, numerous varieties, seasonal dimorphism, and potential for processing into beverages like wine—symbolizes rebirth, regeneration, the cycle of life, transformation, happiness in the afterlife, peace, and divine grace. In early Islamic art, the grape motif expressed ideas of wealth and prosperity, although its representation was limited to stylized forms for religious reasons (Savo et al., 2016).

The motif of a pair of pinnate leaves resembling palm branches represents of peace, death, protection, and spirituality. The finger-like leaf motif bears a resemblance to the anthemion or palmette form, which has its roots in the tradition of classical Greek architecture (Khazie, 2005). This motif, featuring seven leaflets, is interpreted as a symbol of growth and life.

The vine-like leaf and tulip motifs on the floor of Yunus bin Ali Afandi's tomb symbolize the relationship between Europe and Turkey. Tulips have been cultivated in Turkey since the 15th century and were exported to Europe in the mid-16th century, leading to the tulip mania in the Netherlands in the early 18th century. In Ottoman culture, the tulip symbolizes divine love, monotheism and paradise, and is also associated with Sufism (Zhou & Guo, 2020). In Indis culture during the Dutch East Indies period, this floral motif symbolized altruism (Hasrianti, 2019; Soekiman, 2000). The stylization of the tulip into the form of vine leaves and flowers can be interpreted as a symbol of life, continuity, and regeneration. Overall, the application of fruit motifs paired with leaves and flowers serves as a metaphor for the Garden of Paradise (Bacci et al., 2016; Zeyada, 2025).

## Inscription

Arabic calligraphic inscriptions cover the entire surface of the tombstone and Gravestone of Yunus bin Ali Afandi. The calligraphic style is characteristic of Khat Tsulus, one of the eight standard variations of Arabic calligraphy (Mulyadi & Nur, 2017). Based on Zubair's (2011) study of tomb inscriptions and direct observations, it can be determined that the inscriptions contain literal (denotative) and implied (connotative) meanings. The denotative meaning is found on the Gravestone inscription and the upper surface of the Grave structure on the northern side. These inscriptions clearly state the name of the tomb's owner and the year of their death, as well as an expression of gratitude from the person who commissioned the tomb. The connotative meanings contained in the other inscriptions found throughout nearly the entire tomb consist of prayers, expressions of gratitude, the shahada, the names of the Prophet's companions, and excerpts from the Qasidah Burdah.

**Table 2. Transliteration of tomb inscriptions and their symbolic meanings**

No.	Transliteration of inscriptions	Location	Meaning
1	<i>Hadza qabri l'marhuum Yuunus bin 'Alii Afandii 1335 H :</i>  This is the tomb of the late Yunus bin Ali Afandi 1916 AD	Tombstone – north	Information: Name and year of death
2	<i>Al-Fatihah Li ruuhi Yuunus bin 'Alii Afandii 's mercy be upon him 1335 H :</i>  Al-Fatihah Addressed to the spirit of Yunus bin Ali Afandi May Allah bless him 1916 AD	Foot Headstone – south	Prayer: Hope that the soul of the deceased will be at peace and that respect will not be cut off from the family and pilgrims.
3	<i>Hadzaa min fadhli rabbii :</i>  This is a gift from my Lord	Upper Grave structure – North	An expression of gratitude and laughter

4	<p><i>There is no god but Allah Muhammadurrasuulillah :</i></p> <p>There is no God but Allah Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah</p>	Upper Grave structure – south	Shahada: a symbol of monotheism and Islamic identity
5	<p><i>Abuubakr – 'Umar – ' Uthmaan – 'Alii :</i></p> <p>Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali</p>	Body of Grave structure – south	The names of the four companions of the prophet: a symbol of respect.
6	<p><i>1) Maulaya shalli wa greetings preaching abadaa 'ala habiibika Khairil khalqi kullihimi</i></p> <p><i>2) Yes, it 's lust taqnatii min zallatin ' azumat ' inna l'kabaa'ira fii l'ghufraani you l'lamami :</i></p> <p>1) O my Lord, always bestow blessings and safety on Your lover, the best among all creatures 2) O soul, do not despair because of sin, even though it is great Indeed, sins are great compared to His forgiveness very small</p>	Body of Grave structure – east	Qasidah burdah: 1) Praise and prayer, as symbols of love and respect for the Prophet 2) Poetry, advice not to give up hope for His forgiveness , reminding the nature of Allah, the Most Forgiving ( <i>Al-Ghafur</i> )
7	<p><i>1) La'alla mercy rabbi hyena yaqsimuhaa ta'tii 'ala hasabi l'isyaani fii l'qisami</i></p> <p><i>2) Yes rabbi wow j'al king Ghayra mun'akisin ladayka wow j'al hisaabii Ghayra munkharimi :</i></p> <p>1) May God's mercy be upon him when He distributes it according to the magnitude of the sin. 2) O my Lord, make my hopes no different from what is with You and make my faith never break in You</p>	Body of Grave structure – west	Qasidah burdah: 1) Prayer, reminder of the nature of Allah who is Most Just ( <i>Al-' Adl</i> ) 2) Prayer, a medium of tawassul

8	<p>1) <i>Wow l'tuf Bi ' Abdika fi d' daarayni Inna lahu Sabran eyes tad' uhu l' ahwaalu Yanhazimi</i>                  2) <i>Wa'dzan lisuhbi prayer Minka daa'imatin 'ala n'nabiyyi bimunhallin wa munsajimi :</i></p>	<p>Upper Grave structure – west</p>	<p>Qasidah burdah:                  1) Prayer, a medium of tawassul                  2) Prayer, a symbol of love for the Prophet</p>
	<p>1) Have mercy on Your servant in this world and the hereafter. In fact, his patience cannot last when disaster strikes                  2) And always pour out clouds of Your blessings on Your Prophet like torrential rain</p>		
9	<p>1) <i>And I aali wa s'shahbi Tsunami t'taabi'iina knowledge of experts t'tuqaa wa n'naqaa wa l'hilmi wa l'karami</i>                  2) <i>Maa rannahat ' adzabaati l'baani riihu Shabban wa atraba l'iisa haadii l'iisi bi n'naghami :</i></p>	<p>Upper Grave structure - east</p>	<p>Qasidah burdah:                  1) Praise and prayer, as symbols of respect                  2) Poetry, hope for the uninterrupted outpouring of God's grace</p>
	<p>1) Also to his family, friends and followers because they are pious , holy, polite and generous                  2) As long as the east wind still sways the branches of the Tire tree and the herdsman pleases the camels with his sweet voice</p>		

The prayers on the tomb serve as a symbol of respect and a manifestation of the enduring love and affection of the bereaved family toward the tomb's occupant. Through these inscriptions, every family member or visitor who comes and reads the text—whether consciously or not—has sent prayers to the deceased. Prayer phrases express the hope that the soul of the tomb's occupant may always find peace and tranquility, remind us of Allah's attributes, such as the Most Just (Al-'Adl) and the Most Forgiving (Al-Ghafur), and serve as a means of tawasul—or

intercession—to draw closer to Allah. Furthermore, the prayer inscriptions serve as a spiritual bridge of communication between the living (visitors) and the deceased (the tomb's owner).

The prayers and praises that dominate the tomb of Yunus bin Ali Afandi are largely taken from verses of the Qasidah Burdah. This is a poem containing praise and supplication, the author's expressions of regret, as well as the life story and struggles of Prophet Muhammad, composed by Imam Al-Busiri (Zubair, 2011). These inscriptions demonstrate a sense of love and respect for the Messenger of Allah, along with his entire family, companions, and followers. Additionally, the inscriptions contain advice not to easily lose hope in seeking His mercy and forgiveness.

Expressions of gratitude carry a denotative meaning and a connotative one, signifying humility (*tawadhu*) and acknowledgment of Allah's grace. The inscription of the Shahada is a symbol of monotheism, representing the acknowledgment of Allah's oneness and Muhammad's prophethood as His messenger. The shahada is the first pillar of Islam; thus, this inscription implicitly serves as a sign of Islamic identity and a medium for the propagation of the Islamic faith. The names of the Prophet's companions inscribed on the tomb are interpreted as symbols of respect for the values of sacrifice, love, devotion, and loyalty to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.

Overall, the decorative motifs of Yunus bin Ali Afandi's tomb reflect the fundamental principles of Islamic aesthetics, namely, aniconism—which avoids the depiction of human and animal forms—in accordance with the concept of representative art that tends to avoid the worship of creatures (Mulyadi & Nur, 2017). The recurring stylized floral motifs can be categorized as Arabesque. This decorative art evolved from the late pre-Islamic period, reached its peak in the 16th century, and continued to develop in line with Arab traditions. To avoid a monotonous impression in Arabesque decoration, early artists combined it with various decorative elements, such as ancient script, geometric patterns, and figurative ornaments. Arabesque is the element that distinguishes Islamic figurative motifs from pre-Islamic art. As an iconographic ornament, the arabesque reflects an effort to avoid the depiction of living beings, in accordance with Islamic

principles, and serves as a symbolic representation of tawhid (Bacci et al., 2016; Destiarmand & Santosa, 2017; Khazie, 2005).

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that the decorative motifs on the tomb of Yunus bin Ali Afandi possess iconographic representations carrying symbolic meanings within the context of Islamic art and culture. The forms and types of decorative motifs on the tomb are classified into figurative, floral, geometric, and inscription motifs. Symbolically, these motifs are interpreted as markers of identity and social status, signs of respect and hope for the deceased, and convey messages to the living regarding Islamic religious and spiritual values.

Floral motifs, such as grapes, tulips, and palms, are plant types associated with Euro-Mediterranean culture. The shape of the tombstone, adorned with a medallion containing an Arabic calligraphic inscription in the Khat Tsulus style, along with geometric motifs such as the tumpal or lotus, tends to evoke the typology of the Demak Troloyo-style tombstone. On the other hand, the tombstone also exhibits the characteristics of Ottoman tombstones, featuring a head covering ornament shaped like a fez turban. The materials used in the tombs, as well as the colors and patterns of their decorative motifs, indicate global interactions and the influence of colonial architectural styles in the early 20th century. Thus, the decorative motifs of these tombs can also be interpreted as symbols of the negotiation of cultural identities between Islam, local Nusantara traditions, Europe, and the Ottoman Empire within a sacred space. The implications of this study can enrich the discourse regarding the symbolic analysis of Islamic tomb ornamentation and the dynamics of cultural interaction in the Indonesian archipelago during the Dutch East Indies period.

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