

**THE STUDY OF MOSQUE ARCHITECTURE IN SARAWAK UNDER THE
LEADERSHIP OF PEHIN SRI HAJI ABDUL TAIB MAHMUD**



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Contents

1. Letter of Report Submission	iii
2. Letter of Offer (Research Grant)	iv
3. Acknowledgements	v
4. Enhanced Research Title and Objectives	vi
5. Report	1
5.1 Proposed Executive Summary	1
5.2 Enhanced Executive Summary	2
5.3 Introduction	3
5.3.1 Background of Mosques in Sarawak	3
5.3.2 Roles and Functions of a Mosque	5
5.3.3 Statement of the Problem	6
5.3.4 Objectives of the Study	7
5.3.5 Significance of the Study	7
5.3.6 Research Limitation	8
5.3.7 <u>Definition</u> of Terms/Concepts	8
5.3.8 Conclusion	9
5.4 Brief Literature Review	10
5.4.1 Mosques as Places of Worship	10
5.4.2 Other Social Functions of Mosques	11
5.4.3 Mosque Area Utilisation	11
5.4.4 Mosque Architecture	12
5.4.5 Mosques in Sarawak	13
5.4.6 Conclusion	14
5.5 Methodology	15
5.5.1 Research Method	15
5.5.2 Mosque Population and Categories in Sarawak	15
5.5.3 Selection of Sample Mosques	15
5.5.4 Photographic study	17
5.5.5 Conclusion	17
5.6 Results and Discussion	18
5.6.1 Classification of Styles and Architecture of Mosques in Sarawak	18
5.6.2 Descriptive Presentation of Mosque Architectural Design in Sarawak	18
5.6.2.1 Traditional Vernacular Design	18
5.6.2.2 Modern Vernacular Design	20

5. Report

5.1 Proposed Executive Summary

This research aims at identifying mosques with distinctive design concepts and architecture in Sarawak built or reconstructed under the leadership of the Chief Minister Pehin Sri Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud and then reproducing these mosques in pictorial representations for the purpose of documentation and recording. The information and documentations gathered will then be compiled in a database system for future use. Producing a database on mosques in Sarawak is significant in the context of UiTM Sarawak as The Borneo Islamic Research and Propagation Centre, the base for research work and experiences on Islamic propagation in Borneo.

It is a known fact that the aesthetic and architectural values and roles of mosques in Peninsular Malaysia have been well documented. However, there is a dearth in attempts to capture and study the design concepts and architectural forms as well as the roles of mosques in Sarawak, and as such this study is proposed.

Only mosques that have distinctive design concepts and architecture will be studied. A random survey on the possible locations of the mosques in Sarawak which have aesthetic designs and architectural concepts will be conducted, guided by the book on the profile of the mosques in Sarawak (2009) produced by the Majlis Islam Sarawak. Photographic study will be carried out to establish the different design concepts and architectural elements of the selected mosques in Kuching, Samarahan/Asajaya, Serian, Lundu, Sri Aman Sibul, Mukah, Bintulu, Belaga, Miri, Bario, Lawas, Bakelalan, Long Semdoh, Limbang, Marudi, Long Bedian and Mulu.

The study is significant in that the published work, particularly, the pictorial documentation that will be produced will be able to provide the views and evidence of mosques in Sarawak which have distinctive design concepts and architectural elements.

5.4 Brief Literature Review

Mosque is one of the most predominant and concrete symbols of the existence of Islam in any place. The English word “mosque” is derived from the Arabic word *masjid*, which means “place of prostration (*sujud*)” or bowing down to Allah. Prostration is understood as the prayer’s (solat) highpoint which symbolises the utter submission and surrender of the human being to Allah (SWT). Also frequently referred to as the houses of Allah (SWT) by the Muslims, there are various mentions of the mosques and the merits associated with them in the Holy Quran and Hadith.

Theoretically the existence of mosques in Islam requires nothing more than marking the direction of prayers and as such in the olden days, the construction of the early mosques in the Muslim world served only that conventional purpose, not as a means to glorify and raise the profile of Islam. As the early traders and missionaries who spread Islam to this region were religious teachers, not building experts or architects, the buildings that were used as mosques or *surau* in the early days were just simple houses which resembled a house architecturally (Abdul Halim Nasir, 2004). However, with the progression of Islam and the Islamic community, coupled with the advancement in modern technology, the mosques have developed a number of rich and distinctive Islamic design concepts and architectural forms. Their social and functional roles have also expanded in tandem with their progression and grandeur.

5.4.1 Mosques as Places of Worship

Prayer is universally accepted as one of the main reasons for the existence of mosques and the mentions of the merits of mosque and the places of worship in the Holy Quran and Hadith are plentiful. In one Hadith on the significance of mosque, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said, “Whoever builds Allah (SWT) a mosque, even though it be as the nest of a partridge, will have Allah (SWT) build a palace for him in the Garden”.

5.4.2 Other Social Functions of Mosques

Despite the different outward appearances, design concepts and architectural elements, mosques maintain their roles as the most important concrete symbol of Islam as places for prayers and various other social functions. Muslims are required to perform the five obligatory prayers a day, ideally in a mosque and in congregation for men as a prayer done in congregation is rewarded with seventy times the reward of a prayer done alone. Muslims also meet in mosques at other congregational prayers: the weekly Friday noon prayer and prayers in the morning of Aidil Fitri on the 1st of Syawal or Aidil Adha on the 10th of Zulhijjah.

In the history of Islam during Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) time, besides being used as places for prayers, mosques were then also functioned as places for socialisation, dakwah (calling to Islam), celebration, meetings and deliberation, as places for medical care, and also for education. The association of mosques with education remains one of their main characteristics throughout history and in the present day, the mosques still serve both secular and sacred roles (Murata & Chittik, 2006).

5.4.3 Mosque Area Utilisation

The main components of a mosque are the main prayer hall, wudhu (ablution) area, toilet and Serambi (verandah). It is typical in the local mosque building that *Serambi* areas are designed around the prayer hall, to cater for overflowing of worshippers for Friday, Terawih and Eid Prayers as well as for *kariah* (attendees) to meet, to rest and to have *kenduri* (feast) or break of fast or *iftar* (Mohamad Tajuddin Mohamad Rasdi, 2007). If there are extra fund, a minaret, classroom, administrative office, kitchen, store, Imam's room and a library are provided in some of the mosques.

It is also a practice to build the main components or what is seen as essential first, according to the fund collected. Improvements or extension to the mosques are normally carried out in stages when allocation or donations are received in the subsequent years.