



Interpreting Avian Imagery in Minangkabau Patterns: Insights from Fiqh and Sufism perspectives

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Abstract

The ongoing study investigates the anomaly in decorative patterns within Minangkabau art. These ornamental designs, characterised by abstraction rather than naturalism, bear connections to Islamic thought and Sufism within Minangkabau culture in West Sumatra. This examination focuses on specific, selected decorative patterns and is considered part of the philosophy of Islamic art. The appropriate methodology involves field research encompassing hundreds of Minangkabau artefacts featuring these ornamental designs. The process of analysis includes looking into the connection between Islamic thought and specific examples of patterns used in Minangkabau art. This includes an inquiry into how the ornaments exclusively represent the characteristics of actual birds.

Keywords: Decorative art; Fiqh and Sufism; Islam; Minangkabau

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1.0 Introduction

This research is the continuation of the investigation into the peculiarities of the beautiful decorative patterns found in Minangkabau art. In the Minangkabau culture, the decorative pattern demonstrates an abstract quality rather than a naturalistic one tied to Islamic thought and Sufism. Through thorough and careful analysis, the decorative designs are chosen, and one can classify and map Islamic art according to its underlying philosophical principles. The proper procedures will be discovered through field study, and they will involve fieldwork with hundreds of artefacts and elaborative structures from Minangkabau. The analysis process is intertwined with the relationship between Islamic ideology and Minangkabau's selected sample of ornamental patterns. These patterns include how the ornaments or decorations exclusively represent the genuine birds' characters.

2.0 Literature Review

The Minangkabau ethnicity lives in the central part of Sumatra in the West Sumatra Province, Indonesia, and they are the most pious Muslims. In the beginning, they made their home in a communally constructed traditional house known as a *rumah gadang*. This house had a roof that was pointed or shaped like a buffalo horn at both ends, and they also shared a common cooking and eating area. There is also the *rumah gadang* was built and designed with a simple character. However, a number of them are decorated with vibrant decorative patterns. The Minangkabau decorative patterns have a long story (Herwandi, 2007). The decorative way has been seen and developed since the prehistory era, becoming the baseline of the appearance of Minangkabau traditional decorative designs (Herwandi, 2009; 2011; Nizar, 1986). In its progression, it develops rapidly under the influence of the Islamic vibes in Minangkabau.

An Islamic-based concept generally contains abstract patterns to avoid a naturalistic portrayal of nature. Hundreds of Minangkabau traditional decorative designs have already been recorded and viewed further. Marah already identified 150 decorative

patterns, all in abstract forms predominated by leaves and roots (Marah 1988). If there is a name for an animal, it appears abstractly, and none of it depicts the living creatures naturally (Herwandi, 2019). On the other hand, in the study associated with using appropriate methods, numerous local motifs and designs based on their features are created, where the fauna motifs are also commonly used as inspiration for motif design creation (Kari et al., 2018) and the floral or nature elements are also used (Zuhir et al., 2022).

Navis (1986) said that the motifs of the Minangkabause decorative patterns mostly look like the forms of plants, roots, leaves, branches, fruit, and flowers. There are still geometry motifs and primary structures of the triangle, rectangle, and rhomboid. Navis showed that the circular shapes become the prime ones and dominate the forms of Minangkabause traditional decorative patterns, although the existence of geometrical motifs still takes the position in the repertoire of the Minangkabause decorative variety (Navis: 1986:184). Furthermore, empirically, a deviation is found. There is an artistic anomaly in some places in Minangkabau, typically found in the artistic artefacts and the building of Rumah Gadang. There were decorative patterns depicting the living creature, precisely a naturalistic bird image, that should be avoided (Herwandi, 2011; 2013; 2022).

3.0 Methodology and Theoretical Framework

3.1. Methodology

This article is an output of field research that tries to apply the archaeological research method and history depending on the expected data type. The data used is heritage in the form of artefacts and old, decorated buildings. There are steps in history research, namely heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Gottschalk, 1985). Sedyawati said that recording art history must be based on a critical study through a given procedure (Sedyawati, 1981). Therefore, this research has three procedures: observation and data collection. At this point, the field data has been collected in decorative patterns in the artistic artefacts and decorated buildings found in several residences in West Sumatra. This research has involved as many as 155 buildings, from traditional houses to praying houses and several other old buildings. The third step is to analyse and make sense of the data to record the artistic history and narrative (historiographic level). This comes after criticism, description, and data classification (critical procedure).

3.2. Theoretical Framework

3.2.1 Artistic Artefact

Both history and human civilisation could be recognised through the civilisation track, a physical entity such as artefacts, architectural monuments, manuscripts, tools, and other human paths of living (Husein Ali, 2022). Ancient patterns in decorated buildings and artistic artefacts have sedimented the cultural and artistic values of the past. No matter how simple the artefacts and the decorated buildings are, they are evidence of the presence of activity in the past and are records of the past activity (Herwandi, 2003; 2022). Both artistic artefacts and decorated buildings truly reflected the style of their era and characterised the given periods. They are also filled with the sediments of human activities in the past, including personal prevalence and community. Hence, these, too, undoubtedly reflected the social-political dynamism prevailing in its era.

3.2.2. Study of Art History

This article is a study of art history. Hauser stated that it is a product of society's close relationship with the community (Hauser, 1974). Therefore, it covers all aspects of art and is closely associated with social dynamism at any time and place. It also shows the relatedness of artistic and social phenomena because art development is based upon the trend and the social group (Hauser 1974; Herwandi 2003; 2022). Art is a totality born from the spirit, Geist (Sunarto, 2015). Each era has its own spirit (Zeitgeist), growing into a typical artistic style in society (Herwandi 2003). Then, we must look at the artistic development style of the concerned. Still, we must anticipate the coming external factors, the idea appearing, and the group transition within the society supporting it (Sedyawati, 1985). Therefore, the development and growth of decorative art in Minangkabau were separate from the dynamism and phenomena in society. The Minangkabau decorative arts influenced the dominant thoughts and the influential social groups within the Minangkabau people. Islam thickly undergoes the Minangkabau people. As a result, the Islamic philosophy that predominates in Minangkabau controls the art dynamism in that region.

4.0 Findings

In the previous research, Herwandi (2003; 2009; 2011) said that the root of Minangkabause decorative pattern history has appeared since the pre-history era. In this period, several decorative patterns emerged and are still found today, particularly the one found around the Regency of Limapuluh Kota. Herwandi also said that the decorative design on the menhir at Limapuluh Koto Regency developed into straight and curved motifs. The consecutive lines depict a decorative pattern of broken and square (geometrical) forms, whereas the curved ones create floral and faunal forms. The floral arrangements include fern sprouts, leaves, and roots, whereas the faunal ones, such as worms and birds, are not. Because of the decorations on the menhirs, some of them are still in simple shapes, but some are already in full decorative patterns that look like traditional Minangkabau patterns. For example, the orifice motif looks like broken pieces and roots, and the triangular motif looks like sliced galamai and rhomboid, or triangle (Herwandi 2003; 2009; 2011). What is very interesting to say here is the drawing of a bird seen on a menhir found at the Adat Hall site, Limapuluh Kota Regency (see Fig. 1).

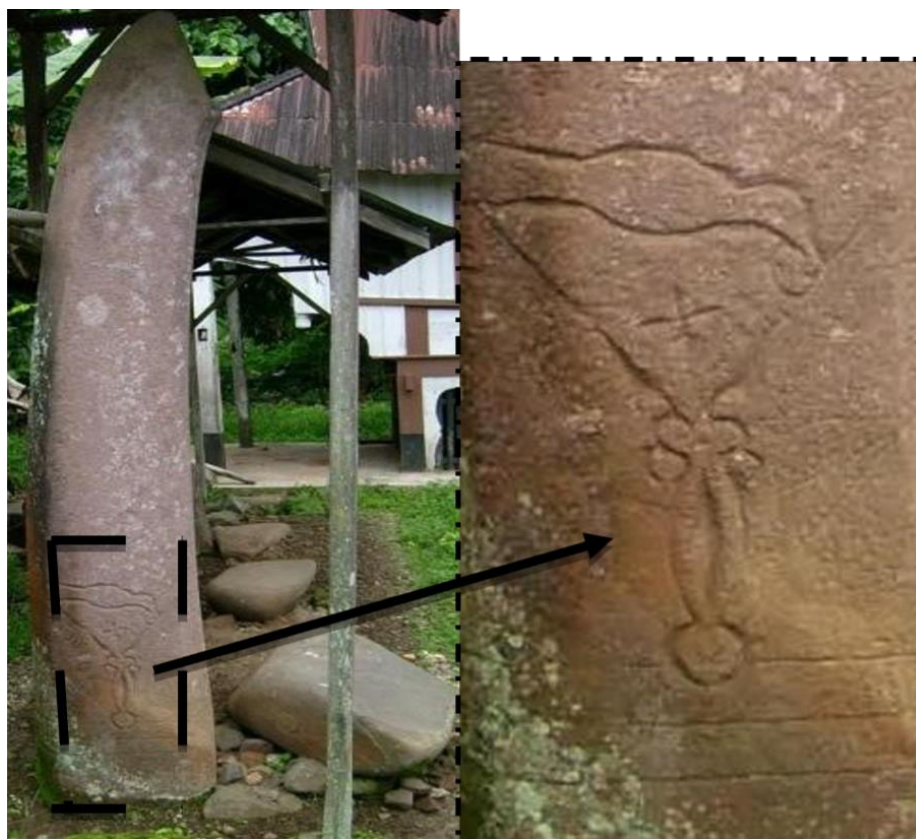


Fig. 1. Bird decoration on Menhir at Adat Hall Site, Regency of Limapuluh Koto.

The bird decoration engraved on the menhir at this Limapuluh Kota Regency is evidence that, since pre-history, such a form has already existed in the Minangkabause's art history development. At that time, the drawing of the bird was just symbolically naturalistic. The bird was drawn sufficiently naturally, for it was completed in scratches in the form of a full head and beak, and there were wings, a body, and a tail. However, this decoration truly reflected a significant symbol. The bird drawing on the menhir is interpreted as a matrilineal symbol spreading in Minangkabau. It is symbolised by a bird that brought grains and was used to draw a woman's genitals. The bird feeding its child is the female one and is strengthened with the image of a woman genital, symbolising the matrilineal in Minangkabau having existed since pre-history (TPTMSB 1984; Herwandi 2003; 2011; 2019).

4.1 The imaging of Birds between Abstract and Naturalistic Patterns

4.1.1 Abstract Imaging

The artistic elements of the Islamic era have already influenced the decorations found in the Minangkabause traditional buildings. Many traditional buildings are filled with decorations, such as traditional houses (Rumah Gadang), mosques, surau, adat halls, and ancient grave attributes (Herwandi, 1994; 2003; Herwandi & M. Nur, 2009; Sugiharta, 2005). Marah (1988) already identified the decorative patterns in as many as 153 Minangkabause decorative patterns. The traditional Minangkabause pattern for decorating comes from the environment. This is related to the Minangkabause philosophy that "nature is the teacher," which means that patterns often come from the environment and the natural things that are around them (Herwandi, 2003; 2019; 2022).

Generally, the prevailing decorative patterns are abstract in nature, taboo, and prevent natural drawing. Even though it could just be taken from the animal's name, the decorative pattern appearing is abstract (Herwandi, 2019). Marah (1988) already grouped the names of Minangkabause's traditional decorative design into three major categories: the motif name originated from plants, animal name and object name, and human name. Based on Marah's grouping, there are forty decorative patterns whose names are taken from animals, the other 44 are taken from objects' names, and so on (Herwandi, 2013; 2018; 2022). The ones taken from animals, for instance, are *bada mudiak* (counter-flowing little fish), *gajah badorong* (pushed elephant), and *harimau dalam parangkok* (the tiger in the trap) (Marah 1988; see also Herwandi, 2022).

In such a case, in the Minangkabause decorative art repertoire, the nomenclature of the bird in the decorative pattern is not avoided. However, such a decorative pattern is burung abstract. Even the names of the decorative patterns are taken from several bird types close to the lives of the Minangkabau people. Just say, for example, the decorative designs of *itiak pulang patang*, *itiak pulang patang babungo* (the ducks going home in the dusk flowery), and *ayam moncotok dalam kandang* (the chickens pecking in the pen). All of the decorative patterns are in the form of curved lines that conform to leaves and flowers. However, it presents the bird's nature and clearly shows a truly abstract design, either scratched or dense and complicated (see Fig. 2 to Fig. 4).

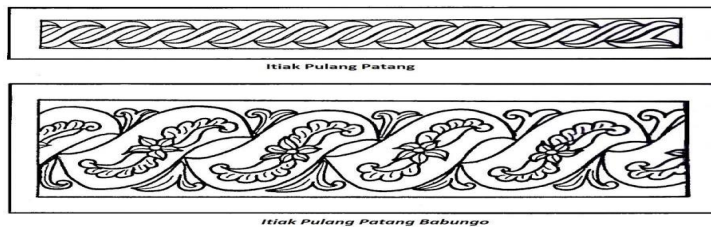


Fig. 2: Decorative Pattern of *Itiak pulang patang*.

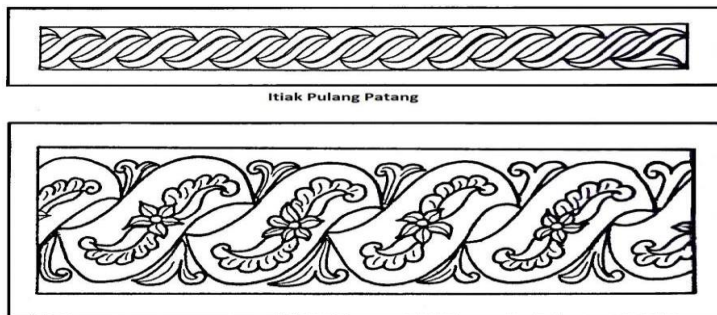


Fig. 3. Decorative pattern *itiak pulang patang babungo*.

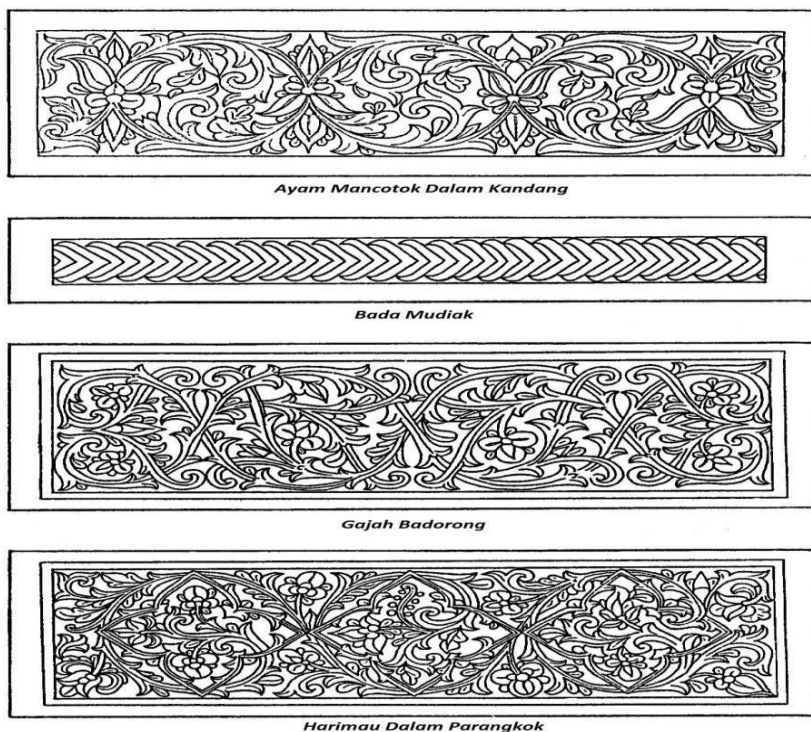


Fig. 4: Decorative pattern *ayam mancotok dalam kandang*.

In Figures 2 and 3, the decoration is in the form of simple scratches and rubs and is designed in such a way to reflect the state of a bird straightly lining up. Figure 2 is a decorative pattern named “*itik pulang patang*,” presenting an abstract picture of a duck walking in a group. Figure 3 is given an additional decoration in the form of flowers that is much richer and more complicated, and this decorative pattern is called “*itik pulang patang babungo*.” However, as seen in Figure 3, it is clear that it presents a dense rub and a scratch filling up the entire space, much more complicated than Figures 2 and 3, showing a very abstract picture titled “*ayam mancotok dalam kandang*”.

4.1.2 Naturalistic Drawing of Birds: Anomaly in Art?

Based upon the findings on the field, several decorations depict the bird naturalistically, undisguised. An example might be the decoration found on the pointed part (*gonjong*) of the traditional house of Dt. Majo Indo, Pasa Usang Nagari Cupak Kabupaten Solok. The use of the bird motif could be seen on the *gonjong* of the traditional house (see Figures 5 and 6). Figure 5 depicts two pigeons of birds, and

Figure 6 shows two birds of *balam* naturalistically. The other example is the decoration found at the *Rumah Gadang* of Dt. Rajo Bandaro, Solok Regency, and the bird decoration at the *Melayu Rumah Gadang*, Koto Baru, and at the *Rumah Gadang Padang*, Rajo Mudo Gl. Bangek, Padang City. Similar to the drawing on decoration at *Rumah Gadang* of Dt. Majo Indo, the decorations found at the houses in Padang City are also naturalistic (Herwandi, 2013).



Fig. 5: Image of pigeon On the Gonjong of Rumah Gadang of Dt. Marajo Indo, at Pasa Usang, Cupak, Solok Regency.



Fig. 6: The Decorative Pattern with Pigeon Motifs at *Rumah Gadang* of Dt Marajo Indo, Pasa Usang, Cupak Solok Regency

Figures 5 and 6 above show a couple of pigeons and a couple of bird *percutut*. They are naturalistically depicted. The form of their beaks, bodies, wings, and tails is seen, though they are presented as very tiny and hidden in the dense and vast forest of decoration. The decoration in these images shows several efforts to conceal the bird decoration so that they are drowned within the rank, and vast decorative patterns and embellishments in the form of leaves and flowers are dominantly seen. Indeed, this finding is scarcely met. Only 4 traditional buildings out of 155 investigated have natural bird decorations, and they are only in certain spots. It means that the finding could be said to be rarely found in Minangkabau.

5.0 Discussion: The Drawing of Bird between Fiqh and Sufism in Minangkabau

Furthermore, the history of bird drawing in Minangkabau has prevailed since the pre-history era up to the Islamic period, even up to the moment. The bird's drawing is frequently coloured with the influential primary consideration of its age. In the prehistoric era, it was evident that artistic creations had an impact on the natural environment, which led to the appearance of a sufficiently naturalistic image. In the period of Islam, the influence of Islamic thoughts, primarily fiqh and sufism, also coloured the pervasion of art in Minangkabau.

5.1. Drawing the Living Creature because of Fiqh

There are two words strongly related to bird drawing in the Islamic fiqh. The first word is *surah*, 'picture,' and the second is their distinctive factor. As the church is a picture (Purnama, 2021), their making a particular form differentiates one form from another (Hilmi, 2018). However, drawing a picture might be grouped into three main groups in Islamic Fiqh if it is seen further. An Islamic Clergy is illegalizing it, and there is also an Islamic Clergy allowing it, and there is also a moderate stance allowing to draw and paint pictures in one circumstance but prohibiting it in another. The one strongly prohibited is the living creature in the form of three dimensions, and when it is done thus, such an activity is included in a huge sin (Hilmi, 2018). In Islamic fiqh, drawing a picture of a living creature is forbidden, including a picture of a bird. Purnama (1443H/2021) stated that a hadith narrated by Ibnu Abbas over ash shura, namely to draw a picture of a living creature, is prohibited from being done. It means that it can be said that any attempt to draw a picture of a living creature is illegal. Islamic clerics are illegalizing the typical picture drawn on a flat surface, and they are also legalising it. There are four

influential schools of thought in Islam: Shafie, Hanafi, Maliki, and Hambali. All four unanimously prohibit three-dimensional images, such as engraving a statue, if they are related to the drawing of living creatures. However, in two dimensions, the image has ulama that legalises it, and there is also ulama that legalises it. In both Maliki and Hanafi schools of thought, it is makruh to do so and make use of pictures, such as wearing the dress on which the living creature is drawn. Anyhow, the state of being makruh is removed as it is covered with the other cloth, no matter whether to wear it when praying. Whereas Mazhab Shafie's school of thought considered it permissible, it belongs to the act of Munkar. However, Hambali's school of thought allows it as long as it does not bring about slander, and some do not allow it because there is an attempt to liken it to compete with Allah's creation (Zuraidah & Setiawan, 2023). In this respect, the Shafie school of thought has pervaded for a long time in Malay cultural areas, including Minangkabau. At least since the 13th century AD, Islam has influenced every aspect of Malay society's life, including art. In this school of thought, drawing a living creature, primarily a three-dimensional one, is highly prohibited, for it means something similar to equalising God's creation. Furthermore, the decorations found on the artistic artefacts and decorated buildings in Minangkabau are generally more two-dimensional than the ones found on a flat surface. Say, for instance, that the decorations on the menhir, buildings of Gadang, mosques, and other traditional buildings are two-dimensional pictures. Most of the decorative patterns in traditional buildings are abstract to avoid realistically picturing living creatures. It is done to adapt both Islam's rule and art values.

5.2. *The Drawing of Bird in the Scope of Tasawuf*

The drawing of a bird is not something weird in the art repertoire of the Malay world. In literary art, chiefly sha'ir (Arabic poems), several works are associated with the drawing of a bird, which significantly influenced the academic work of Malay in the 17th and 18th centuries. Say, for example, the sha'ir of pingai birds, poultry, and owls (Hasymy, 1977; Braginski, 1994; Yani, 2019). In the literary world, the picture of a bird is not taboo, but it is true, growing fertile in step with the development of Islamic Malay society. The primary consideration of the bird picture drawing lived in the mind of tasawuf developing in the Malay world, especially in Aceh, the tasawuf teaching of Wujudiyah. From the end of the 16th to mid-17th centuries, the tenet of wujudiyah tasawuf gained a position in the Acehnese society, and several trading activity centres on the Sumatra West Coast of Minangkabau. Two influential Acehnese wujudiyah figures in Aceh in the 17th AD were Sheikh Hamzah Fansuri and Sheikh Shamsuddin as-Sumatrani (Al Atas 1970). Since then, Hamzah Fansuri's and Shamsuddin as-Sumatrani's thoughts (Ahmad, 1972; Azra, 1994; Drewes & Brakel, 1986) have received support, endorsement, and protection from several Acehnese Sultans and ulee balang (Hurgronje, 1996). Sheikh Hamzah Fansuri has published several works in the form of religious books made by the community of Wujudiyah Path at that time, among others: *Syarab al-Asyiqin*, *Asrar al-Arffin*, and *al-Muntahi*. In the form of the poem, Hamzah Fansuri has written some lyrics, too, having something to do with birds, such as poems about pingai birds and poultry poems (Hadi, 1995). It could be said that in the era of Sulthan Ali Riayat Syah (1604-1607 M) and Iskandar Muda (1607-1637 M), the teaching of wujudiyah tasawuf achieved its victory era in the Aceh Darussalam Kingdom. When a dispute erupted between Al-Raniri and his disciples in the 17th century, Shaif ul Rijal, a Sufi ulama, participated in assisting the wujudiyah ulama in Banda Aceh. It was believed that the wujudiyah tasawuf had spread to Minangkabau. Abdul Hadi WM recorded that Sheikh Shaif ul Rijal was a Minangkabause who defended the "group" of the wujudiyah community when al-Raniry's disciples committed arson over the books of the wujudiyah's tenets di Banda Aceh in 17th AD (Hadi, 1995). At this moment, the tradition of drawing the bird image naturally took over. The trend of wujudiyah tasawuf offered stimulation and opportunity, so drawing pictures of birds was permitted.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

In both the tradition and history of Minangkabause decorative pattern growth, drawing a picture of a bird is usual. Starting from the pre-history era, it has been found in an artistic artefact in Limapuluh Kota. It kept going on when Islam was influential in Minangkabau. Some were naturalistic, and several others were abstract. The decorative patterns showing up in the pre-history era tended to be naturalistic. During the Islamic period, however, most of the patterns that were used for decoration were very abstract. This was because they had to follow the rules set by Islamic Fiqh, which were mostly meant to stop people from drawing full-on living things, let alone three-dimensional ones. In the Islamic era, apart from the abstract pattern, the painting of a naturalistic bird in Minangkabau was also found in reality. The natural designs probably showed up because of the influence of wujudiyah tasawuf ideas that spread through the Acehnese ulamas to Minangkabau in the 17th century AD. When you look closely at the bird parts in Minangkabau patterns, you can see that they contain a lot of different symbolic meanings that have deep roots in Islamic thought and Sufism. Instead of looking like realistic pictures, the intricate designs show deep meanings and cultural associations connected to the bird themes. This research shows that these patterns are a mix of artistic expression and religious meaning, giving us a new way to look at Islamic art in the Minangkabau tradition. To make sure that the cultural, historical, and artistic importance of the intricate bird elements in Minangkabau patterns is understood and appreciated by everyone, including academics, these suggestions are meant to help with more research, preservation, and sharing of information about these topics.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

The related field of study provides a comprehensive analysis of the incorporation of avian elements in Minangkabau patterns within the frameworks of Fiqh and Sufism. The research delves into the symbolism and cultural significance of these patterns, shedding light on the abstract representation of birds and their connections to Islamic thought.

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