

## Baitul Rahmah: A Final Evolution of The Malay Classical Style Amidst Change

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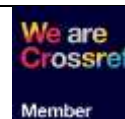
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### Abstract.

The paper highlights the significance and position of the Baitul Rahmah, an early 20th-century mansion in Kuala Kangsar, Perak, Malaysia, as a key milestone of stylistic evolution of local vernacular architecture. Its form embodies a typological variation at a time of growing Colonial imperialism, while its grammar and language refers to early modern stylistic expression reflecting the fundamental principles of indigenous architecture. The Baitul Rahmah brings to light how a final evolution and epitome of the vernacular projects an identity as a cosmopolitan manifestation. Its internal ornamentation recalls the stylized forms of local motifs and reflect a form of control and minimalism; i.e. an 'ornamental decorum'. Its wood-carved expressions seem stylized into increasing 'modernised' simplification and modularity, while its masonry-timber structure reflect the identity of hybridity in architecture which symbolise the tensions of local communities as they step into the 1900s into a global context.

**Keywords:** Malay aesthetic style, the Malay classical, the rules of Malay classical, the Malay modern vernacular

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## Introduction

Architectural discourses in South East Asia often dichotomise into the 'binary' poles of 'modernity' and 'tradition'. In their 'Modernity, and Urban-Architectural form', Jahn Kassim et.al. (2018) highlights the vast gap between the vernacular and forms of modernity for post-colonial nations which appear to be rushed into symbols of newness and nationalism. The past aristocratic building which reflect the absorption of Colonial

language of public buildings pre-independence are often classified as colonial variants. International stylisations of key governmental structures of post-independence, are said to be embodying the language of ‘national architecture’ designed in the ‘national’ or ‘merdeka’ spirit. Yet these are essentially part of the same ‘coin’ of the cultural pressure of globalization (Jahn Kassim, Mohd Nawawi, 2018 et al.). Regionalist critiques and discussions of nationalist architectural language thus only either focus on the evolvement of the ‘modern’ or they revert to romanticist nostalgia in expressing or highlighting the loss of the ‘native’. This paper highlights two buildings which are particularized, yet significant subtrends in aesthetic positions of the local vernacular, yet embodying a modern ‘classical’ style of architecture, which neither occupy the simplistic ‘modern’ position, nor the nostalgic ‘vernacular-native’ position.

These quasi-public typologies’ palaces and mansions, which generally include ‘public’ spaces and frontages of public life used for congregation, meetings, work and entertainment in the local Malay world. The frontages of these mansions consists of extended semi-outdoor rooms which serve as public or formal spaces and play the role of communal and social cycle of lives, and at times act as cultural prosceniums, porticos and ‘promenades. While the public buildings of Colonial architecture of Malaya and the tropical colonies, have ‘tropicalised’ outdoor extended portico used for rest and siesta; to create an aesthetic of tropical, a ‘frontage’ in the Malay traditional world, system and socio-cultural context, is fundamental a public space. The outdoor room, or verandah, locally called the ‘serambi’ or ‘anjung’<sup>1</sup> plays a more definitive role in the socio-political system with public functions as they facilitate and accommodate assemblies of people, and daily ‘public functions’ such as political meetings, legal and administrative processes, commercial transactions and cultural entertainments. The Malay world are characterised by spatial and format language which can be argued as a useful trope for design based on the language, position and significance of these structures.

Similarly in their useful essay, ‘A study of the Façade elements of jengki architecture’, Noor Zakiy Mubarrok and Sidhi Pramudito encapsulated a particular style in Indonesian architecture of the early modern era. They highlighted how certain stylisations in the Asia Nusantara could be defined as subthemes or substyles. A typological and architectural analysis of Malay Nusantara architectural language and styles can identify common recurring styles due to external and internal influences and thus representing underlying ‘sub-themes’. These needed to be recognised as substyles of an essentially universal Malay local aesthetic as they represent certain archetypical forms of the South East Asian region (Mubarrok and Pramudito) which occur as external and internal influences synthesise during a particular time and place. The style identified as the ‘Jengki style’ was, as they define, a substyle with key elements of character and language or grammar that constitutes its identity which had been encultured and bred due to specific conditions of time and place. These can be argued as having a common unique form and set of grammar i.e. ‘a roof feature that does not meet at its peak, the

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<sup>1</sup>There is a fundamental difference between the outdoor room anjung and serambi of Malay architecture than the normal verandah as it is significantly deeper than the normal verandah; hence the effect is a shadowed recess across the frontal elevation of a building.

sloping gavel, as well as the modification of concrete folds on the façade.’ They highlight their rules and vocabulary which make up this style as follows :

1. *‘The edges of the wall tilted outward, forming a pentagon ...*
2. *The roof area does not meet and does not have a ridge. The upright plane (a wall called Gawel) between the two sloped roof planes, is engineered into ventilation. Krepyak began to be known as the tool to keep the hot air above the ceiling to get out. Amongst others, they further define this style to be:*
  - a. *The flat roof for the terrace is supported by a V-shaped iron column. This porch is made possible by the use of a fairly high roof angle, so the porch becomes an independent element. Terrace as a door marker into the building called portico. The flat roof gives the difference of point of view with the main building with a saddle roof. In addition, the porch serves as the reception room, shade room, interior conditioning room*
  - b. *The use of rooster as a ventilation hole that is not just for air circulation, but more as a media to express new aesthetics. The use of unsymmetrical frame forms is another outstanding feature of the Jengki style house. The asymmetrical form is also visible in the windows’.* (Mubarrok and Pramudito)

### The ‘Colonial’ Experience

To understand the genesis of these styles, one must refer back to the confluences of the Colonial and the local. Gullick (1987) insightfully observes the momentous changes in 1800s within Malaya, a country affected by the onset and trajectory of Colonization in South East Asian urban centres:

*“The 19th century appears to have been the last age of unchanging stability and the 20th century marks the beginning of accelerating processes of social change which continue down to modern times. So, the 1900–1920 may be regarded as a watershed. This is perhaps the period when the modern Malaya (and later Malaysia) began to take shape.”*

Gullick also mentions an earlier milestone: To move back to 1874, when British political control was first imposed on some state, (but) does not provide a satisfactory benchmark for the measurement of change (Gullick).

Perak, Malaya was Malaya's richest state from the Colonial viewpoint, and 1874 was the year of the signing of the 'Pangkor Treaty' during which British imperial power would consolidate in the region, and a British resident would be set up. However, the Malaya political structure was such that communal chiefs were more powerful and wealthier than even the Sultan. It was inevitable that this would spark an internal crisis and tensions escalated into the murder of the British Resident, J.W.W. Birch in 1875.<sup>2</sup>Gullick added how such milestones would subsequently define the coming era and

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<sup>2</sup> Although some reference highlights the corroboration of the reigning Sultan, i.e. Sultan Abdullah Shah in the murder, this was never proven, and more and more studies and evidence had proven that the Sultan was never

decades to come as British political and economic influence would further consolidate and increase during a time when the 'dynamic economic energies penetrated ever more deeply into the Peninsula' (Gullick). In the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, Colonial control in lands in Malaysia and Indonesia increased as a political and cultural force in the South East Asian region. By the late 1800s, these external forces had been asserted more arkedly, and changes onto the physical landscape of towns and villages; localities and communities; reflect the intensity of capital investment and subsequent -political intrusions which eventually, wrought irrevocable changes to the physical landscape of towns and urban centres.

Anderson (1991) highlights another character of the Malay region's era of early modernity, by suggesting that it is a side-effect of growth of the immediate implantation of high Capitalism in one locality during the Colonial era (Anderson). Yet many refer to such stylistic effects as colonial when this term must essentially represent a position represented by a 'hybridity' in aesthetic language, character and language- a character of the era. Amongst others, these are found in certain aristocratic palaces and public buildings of the early Colonial era, and their stylistic form and proportion recall the same position. In the case of Malaysia, British Colonialism not only brought new technology and construction methods but certain cultural pressures. While some palaces are clearly expressed the language of Neo-classical and Georgian English architectural elements of Classical columns, arches, windows, and façade compositions – was seen as embodying the status quo and encroaching capitalism, Crimson (1999) said that these external pressures brought about the ingenuity in the development of the local vernacular communities. They were facilitated by colonial administrators started adorning the administrative and key structures in the capitals of Malaya during that time who became vectors of influence onto stylistic changes onto the local architecture values and forms (Abdul Majid).

## Methods

### The character of the Local Vernacular

The word 'Malay vernacular' certainly and generally conjures the image of the tropical native settlement which its elevated timber artisanal traditions and architectural forms amidst idyllic tropicality scattered throughout the Malay Archipelago. Yet 'Malay' can also be related to an assertive position in expressing a 'native' form of aesthetics, which then undergo evolution while responding to the need to modernise. Other similar studies and writings from cultural theorists and researchers from Japan, Vietnam and Indonesia (Kerr; Herbelin) highlight that the modern vernacular language and elements were not the result of 'copying 'or mimicking, but the desire of the locals to be modern and cosmopolitan at the same time .

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involved. However one of the Malay chiefs, Dato Maharaja Lela and the assassinator, Si putom was tried and hanged in Perak.

*The Malay architectural language of a 'public typology.'*

The 'public' aspects of Malay architecture, including its frontal spaces in its palatial buildings and aristocratic mansions, have been described as containing 'Cosmopolitan themes', and their language can be argued as a form of Classicism. Their heightened style refer to the key elements of the language of the vernacular of its time (Jahn Kassim, Abdul Majid, et al.). These structures are representative of the monarchy, who are according to Gullick, were the first to absorb external influences at a threshold of change but are also representative of figures and forces which resisted such changes. Palaces hold a significant position, as they represent the higher order of architectural design and whose details and 'Classical' proportion can be studied for purposes of design guidelines. Their elevational characters, details and identities can be harnessed, extracted, abstracted and infused into modern buildings. However, to attain this objective, patterns and details must be mapped to guide the layering of facades as elements of an identity of a city, in a region or nation. Its language suggests a way forward as these have significance in outlining identity and creating the sense of 'otherness' crucial in its survival in an increasingly globalising world.



**Fig. 1** The increasingly dominant Colonial expression onto Malay public buildings in Colonial Malaysia– as seen in one frontage of the Istana Hulu built-in 1896.



**Fig. 2** Ipoh Railway Station, built by Colonial architect, Arthur Benison Hubback, recall Palladian arches, rustic mannerist elements, with the only local element as the dome capping the structure.

In Perak and Penang, both centres which became Colonial strongholds, increasingly public architecture was expressed in Classical and Edwardian language. Figure 2 is the Ipoh Train Station, (1914) which is distinctively Western in design, drawing elements of late-Edwardian Baroque, rustication and Palladian elements. Figure 1 and 3 show how such stylisation has also affected selected palaces during the same era.

#### *Baitul Rahmah, Perak, early 1900s*

The Baitul Rahmah, a private palace built by a local aristocrat is significant and should be positioned as the epitome of local vernacular expression in its resistance of the Colonial aesthetic position. The resistance embodies a sense of Malay Classical cosmopolitan style designed as to embody the 'modern', 'the progressive' and status of the time. While Baitul Rahmah's form as symmetrical 'Classicised' theme in elevations (Raja Abdul Kadir et al.), its expressions are not. Its decorations and ornamentations are local, while some may refer to the low wall surrounding its external space as 'Neo-Classical', some would prefer this to the essential base, column, hearth and wall of Semperian architectural principles which reflect a form of 'base'. The frontages or facades recall how certain progressive trends and recall eras before the advent of the motorcar during . They can be argued as expressing a style which have 'modernised' without significantly absorbed outside influences. The article argues towards this form of aesthetic style and asserts they represent certain rules in the Malay architectural character.

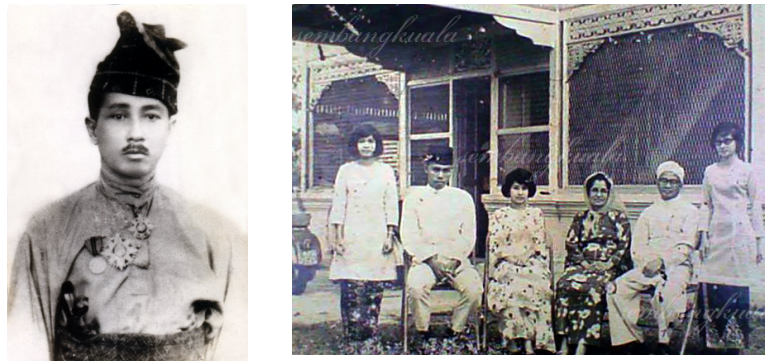
#### *The builder, architect and woodcarver*

Raja Harun Al-Rashid ibni Almarhum Sultan Idris the 1st ( Figure 1) was born in 1882 and was the son of Sultan Idris, the Sultan of Perak. In his prime, Raja ( Prince Regent) Harun Al-Rashid was given the responsibility as secretary for the Turkish relief fund to raise money in aid of the Turkish people who were suffering from the wars during the decline of the Ottoman Empire. On 4 January 1913, the amount of \$7610.33 was raised by Almarhum Sultan Idris I and the people of Perak, the amount of which was then channelled via the Turkish Red Crescent. At 36, Almarhum was granted the title of Raja Kecil Sulong in 1918, in conjunction with the installation of Sultan Iskandar. Almarhum was also Malay Secretary to Sultan Iskandar and was regarded as a staunchly patriotic Perak royal.

Raja (Prince Regent) Harun Al-Rashid was a keen sportsman, playing both polo and football. Almarhum had played polo with Sultan Iskandar Shah against a team that included Prince George, Duke of Kent in 1920. In football, Almarhum had captained his team against the 'Abdullah' team which comprised descendants of Sultan Abdullah Muhammad Shah II, captained by YAM (HRH) Raja Di-Hilir Chulan, in a match organised during the investiture week for Sultan Iskandar in 1921.

Raja (Prince Regent) Harun Al-Rashid was particularly known as leaving an architectural legacy in Bukit Chandan – majestic Malay mansions, there are three built, Baitul Rahmah, Baitun Anwar and Baitul Aman. Yet Baitul Aman was eventually destroyed in a fire. The skilled *Tukang Sofian* built these. His partnership with the carver became widely known as having an eye for architecture. He was known as skilled with his hands, especially in the art of Malay woodcarving, and he was frequently consulted for advice by other members of the Perak Royal Family. It was also no wonder that some

of his descendants possess a similar aptitude. Raja Harun Al-Rashid retired from his position as Malay Secretary to Sultan Iskandar in 1936, following which Almarhum made the pilgrimage to the holy city of Makkah for the *hajj*. Almarhum was accompanied by his wife, Raja Mahtra @ Mentera binti Raja Sir Chulan, and their son, Raja Amir. Almarhum died aged 63 on 10 May 1945 in Kuala Kangsar. He had an issue and his family tree can be seen below (courtesy of Raja Nur Jannah binti Raja Hirdan).



**Fig. 3** Raja Harun Ar Rashid and members of the family in front of Baintun Anwar mansion.

The Baitul Rahmah, was built about the same time as its partner mansion, the Baitun Anwar. There are various other contemporaneous palaces throughout the Malay world in the 'era of the Kerajaan' on the eve of full Colonial rule yet, it is these two surviving mansions – through the dynamics of regent-in-waiting Harun Ar Rashid and his craftsmen *Tukang Sofian* - had represented the last significant public composition which had withstood the cultural onslaught of Colonial language due to cultural pressures from pressures emanated from centres of Colonial control. It is argued that the elements of Malay classicality are characterised by proportions in its façade, degree and intensity yet control of lines, rhythm and intensity of columns in frontage systems or elevational style, controlled ornamentation, and in elements regarded as the 'celebration of the joint' and the ornamentation of edges.

#### *Background and Significance*

The Baitul Rahmah (Figure 3) mansion was built around near the compound of the main palace in Kuala Kangsar, Perak, built by monarch-in-waiting Raja Kechil Sulong Harun Al-Rashid ibni Almarhum Sultan Idris; it was built in 1911. It has a symmetrical 'double' extended portico or verandah which is a variant of the 'anjung' or verandah of the local Malay style.

The portico unites elements of roof finials and decorative panels with the columnar nature of the form, and these are embellished by woodcarving inspired by the character of honey bees while the head of the columns is decorated by 'kerawang' woodcarving. Baitul Rahmah, Kuala Kangsar - The hybrid masonry plinth and column base fused with timber columns, portico, side balconies and decorative eaves. The significance of Baitul Rahmah lies in the following:



1. It is located on a site, i.e. Kuala Kangsar, Perak which had receive the dynastic splintering of the Melaka empire of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and in a more isolated region without overlapping influences of syncretic forces (Shireen Jahn kassim, Majid 2018, Bali paper, Regional Continuum of the Malay world) and hence has less absorption of neighbouring region, preserving the initial character of the region.
2. Since it is palace for personal use of the regent-in-waiting, there are not overt influence from external administrators and hence not subjected to Colonial pressure;
3. It recalls a degree of modernisation but not colonisation.
4. It is a splinter of the Melakan Sultanate which is univerasally agreed as the Classical beginning of the Melayu culture.

*During the 15 centuries, Islam was adopted by the rulers of Melaka, and from there it spread to other parts of the region. The founding of Melaka n the emergence of Islam marks the beginning of Malay history as it has been traditionally remembered in recent centuries. the Malay history as a collective memory can thus be said to begin with Melaka (Tarling 176)*

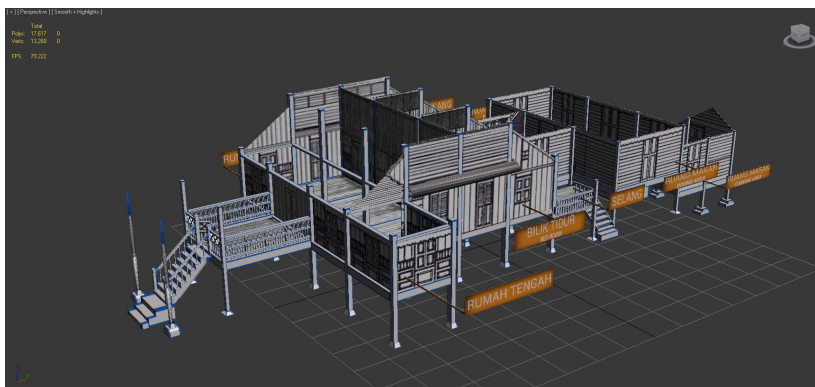
### **The Fundamental characterisation of the Malay vernacular**

The Malay vernacular house form and language epitomises the local vernacular and is a 'natural ecological extension and growth' of the region's culture, topography, climate, ecology and geography. While there are wide variations throughout communities and states, the archetypical form can be described as emerging from an essentially timber-based language into its recognisable elevated, has columnar character, with decorative variants, decorative eaves, roof finials and filigrees. The roof is typically decorated by pointed or decorative finials; or in the form of silang gunting or crossed scissors.; and its gable end is often, decorated by panels or ornamented carved patterns (tebuk timbul). The hot, humid climate alongside a jungle-infested inhospitable ecology, necessitates an elevated form attuned to its environment with wide openings, layered spaces, wide protective roofs and linear-like arrangement of functions. The Malay roof of the vernacular is replete with variations a key expression of Malay cultural identity have pitched forms commonly derived from the ubiquitous 'Rumah Bumbong Panjang' or Rumah limas, with embellishments on its fascia boards and on its finials and ridges.

A critical hallmark is the 'serambi or anjung' (the verandah) (Figure 3) which in general, refers the characteristic outdoor room or large protruding verandah that protrudes or extends from the body of the house or main spaces. The Malay word 'se-ram-bi' means a space that is extended (see Figure 2). The serambi is a covered but open outdoor portico in which the host or owner of the house can sit and entertain guests and/ or relaxes and enjoys the evening and night air. This portico has two main types, either the normal verandah or hanging verandah or 'serambi gantung', build semi-enclosed with lattice detailing or fully closed by walls and windows, to allow the flow of air in and out. The Anjung, on the other hand, is more enclosed like an extended and enclosed porch. Space is also usually raised up 1 one or two steps to delineate them, and even used as temporary bedrooms and are protruding parts at the front of the main building. It is a marker or a fulcrum to a home. At times these serve as a final transition space between the public and the private realms.

### Palaces

Palaces and aristocratic houses a monumental scale of the vernacular - reflect the social centring of the ruler of the Malay society, including secondary palaces built for the regent or Sultan-in-waiting. As Andaya (2012) highlights the ruling class in the Malay culture is typically supported by a retinue of royal siblings and courtiers whose residence fall into the boundary or orbit of the major palaces (Andaya and Andaya). These are smaller versions with variations in size and complexity, and within similarly large and widely ranging forms in terms of external expression. Variants of elevational characteristics full height windows, decorative wall, wallboards, with ventilation openings are due to the requirement of maximum ventilation, and these are refined through decorative eaves and finials and ventilative panels with varied interpretations.



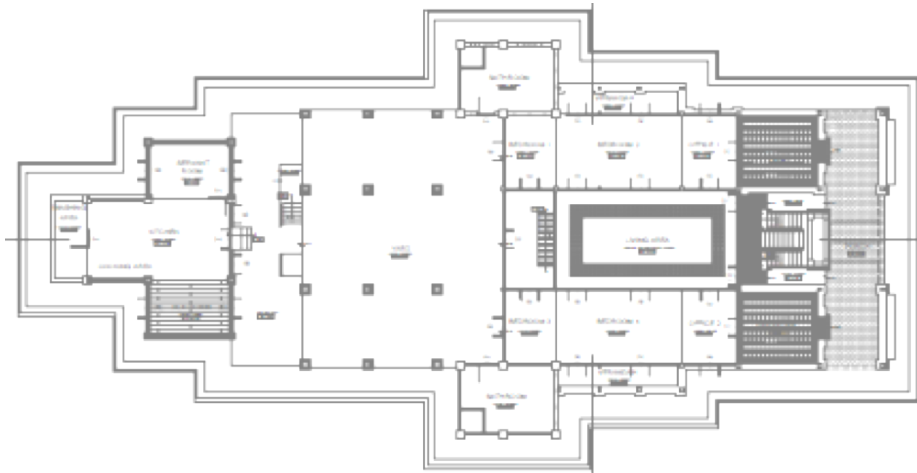
**Fig. 4** The traditional Malay house with spatial protrusion known as the ‘serambi’ (outdoor room or verandah).

### *Baitul Rahmah: its frontage*

Its ‘double’ extended portico (serambi) or verandah is symmetrically organised and spatially extended as a double feature in elevation. It has a double roof which has the Malay characteristic of the 30-degree pitch, reminiscent of the local archetype of rumah bumbong panjang (Malay longhouse) with its characteristic Malay gable and decorative eaves adorning the frontage (Figure 4). The decorations on walls and door panels include the fanlight which was found to be very typical, the flat balustrade, the utilisation of pelamin, and the choice of colour. Other Decorative elements include the Carved cleaf, Fanlight and Balustrade and Finials.



**Fig. 5** Baitul Rahmah, Perak – Elevation



**Fig. 6** Layout of Baitul Rahmah

Baitul Rahmah demonstrates elements in an essentially Classical language and comparing Figure 2 and 5; one can see how the palaces is a monumental expression of the local vernacular. Overall its form still retains vernacular origins despite the use of the continuous masonry plinth at the foot of the columns. The column themselves are at times, partially mutated into masonry elements, yet they retain the proportions of Malay columns.



**Fig. 7** Baitul Rahmah – a view from the side



**Fig. 8** Baitul Rahmah – closer view of balcony



**Fig. 9** Refined Carved decorations on the balcony



**Fig. 10** Front elevation.

character, i.e. which during after eating, families would sit on the porch for chatting, relax, lie down and have supper.

Tabel. 1 Malay aesthetic style, the Malay classical, the rules of Malay classical, the Malay modern vernacular

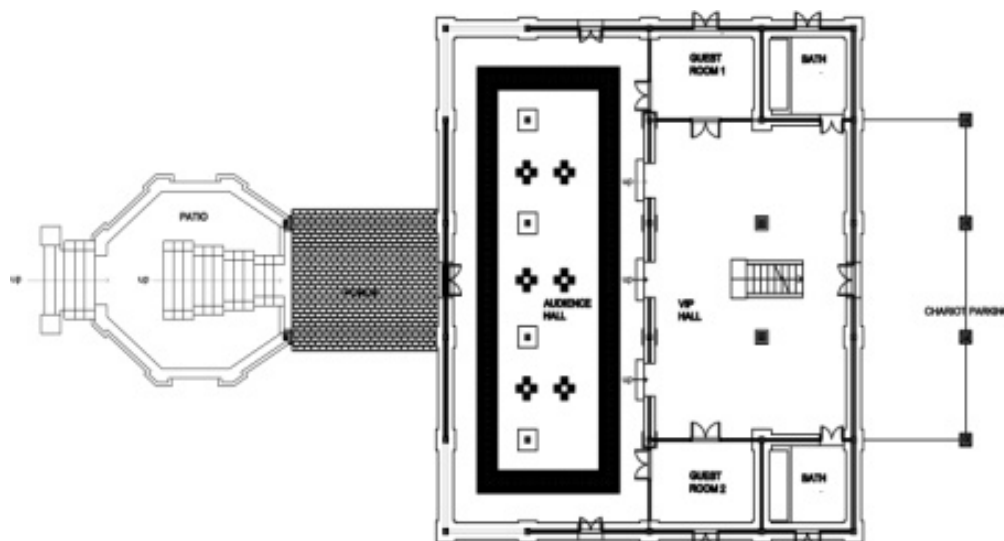
<p>Rumah Kutai- the indigenous house of Perak state, Malaysia</p>	<p>A wealthy official's house in Beruas Perak</p>	<p>The higher aesthetic cosmopolitan language of the Baitul Rahmah</p>

Table 1: Baitul Rahmah can be argued as the peak of evolution from indigenous form of the Perak Kutai vernacular that differentiates into a complex monumental layered form.

#### *A comparison with Baitun Anwar, Kuala Kangsar*

To understand further the significance of Baitul Rahmah, it can be compared to its partner mansion, which was built at the same time. Throughout all states, vernacular forms had initially absorbed such modern influences during the time in which Colonialist powers penetrated the boundaries of their control more deeply and hence such increasing dominance was reflecting in the strength of the Colonial elements and vocabulary which was adopted by syncretic Malay-Colonial architecture which thrived during the late 1800s and 1900s. Baitun Anwar, Kuala Kangsar, was another mansion built by the same regent, but unlike Rahmah, it has a more reticent skyline which lack of finials and exudes a language of restraint, characteristic of Modern traits in architecture. The Genting singgora roof, which usually found in Kelantan and Terengganu is typically being used as material for the roof. In Baitul Rahmah however, the diamond shape of the roof tiles forms the Perabung Lima roof and cover the two protrusion anjung. This can be viewed clearly from the attic or 'loteng' area.

Unlike the ordinary Malay houses, it contains a significant 'royal' space which is the hall (balai) often found in palaces. The whole ground area consists of a series of halls, and the positioning of entrances and verandahs provides an uninterrupted t to the surroundings. Similar to Rahmah, it has distinctive combination of a complete upper timber body with a ground moulded masonry base or plinth and a projected masonry verandah. Both depict the essential Classical trait of symmetry, with a central staircase and entrance inserted axially.



**Fig. 11** Baitun Anwar - Plan of ground floor showing the projected portico.

Like the traditional Malay form, it has a veranda (anjung) of the house has a T-shape plan. This space was linked directly from ground by a centrally located main

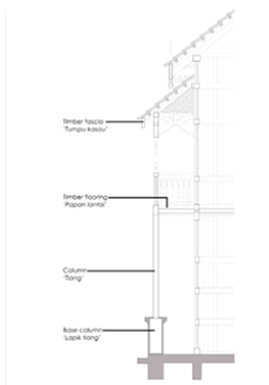
staircase with a protrusion which was a semi-private outdoor area where the owner could entertain close visitors or guests. This element recalls how hospitality is a hallmark of the Malay custom and 'adat'. Such characterisation is an outcome of the intense hot and humid climate which engulfs people perpetually throughout each day of the year, and thus produce forms which prioritise the passive strategies of its climatic form into elements that enable both its structure – allowing its occupant to cool down in late evening and at night hence. The *serambi* acts as an outdoor room that allows occupants to sit outside to cool off and enjoy the evening breezes which alleviates the humid and heat from the body.

Next to the veranda (*anjung*) are the balconies on both sides of the house and connected directly from the two-bed rooms. The balcony projects from the upper wall with a one-layer brick balustrade or parapet that is identical to the main staircase. It was covered by a flat roof. Adjacent to the veranda (*anjung*) is the core area of the house called the *rumah ibu*, perhaps the most private and even sacred part of the house. Most daily activities are conducted by the occupants here, including praying, sleeping and any other house chores. In 1915, there were four-bed rooms on the first floor with two of the smaller rooms in front dedicated for the sons and a bigger room on the left used for the daughters. The other bigger room on the left functioned as the master bedroom. Later, the two small rooms were knocked down, and as a result, the veranda (*anjung*) is wider.

#### *Key Elements of language*

All four key characteristics of the Malay vernacular style, i.e. The generous shading devices, brackets, ornamental railings and ventilative panels are all expressed in this palace, including:

1. Ornamented railings recalling vestiges of the palatial portico or verandah yet decorated with the signature floral and vegetal Malay motif;
2. Tectonic expression of structure seen in the Malay brackets which appear to be expressed rather than hidden;
3. 'lean-to' shading devices for windows, and a controlled yet refined ornamentation for balconies.
4. Even the main columns are expressed at the corners of the building. At the corner part of the roof, fascia of the building are elements decorated with woodcarving inspired by the character of honey bees. Both houses have the ornamental 'papan pator' (*tumpu kasau*) teratai at the end of the roof eaves. The head of the columns was decorated by a kind of 'kerawang' woodcarving enhanced with carved panels and balustrades (*Sabriza*).



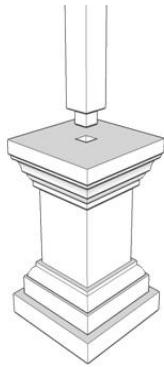
**Fig. 12** Elevation of a column at the portico.



**Fig. 13** Carved bracket and balustrades at the portico.

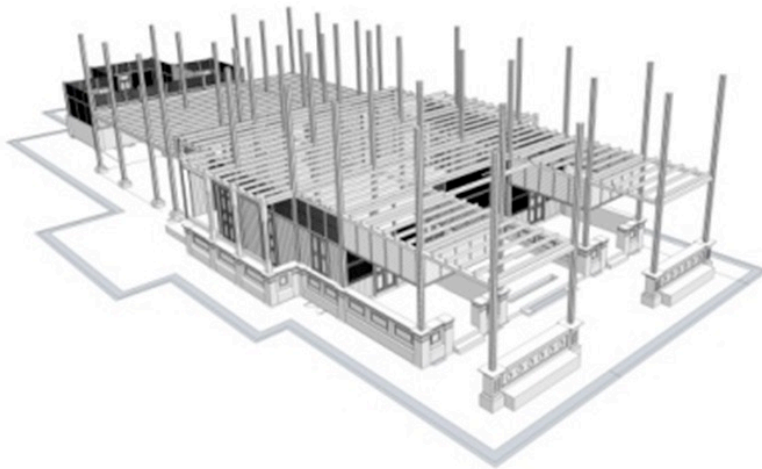
#### *From construction to style – the Hybrid column*

The system of timber columns slotted into simple square base or pedestals creates a particular vocabulary localised yet modern hence ‘classical’ at the same time. These are at times, refined to fluted or stepped pedestals. These are characteristics by a clear tectonic distinction between the white stepped masonry base and the slender proportions of emerging timber columns. In the case both Baitul Rahmah and Baitun Anwar, constructionally timber columns are slotted into square bases, and a variety of pedestal refinement can be observed, from the stepped types to a more complex fluted type. For example, in Baitun Anwar timber posts are erected on a stone base and secured with tenon and mortise joints.



**Fig. 14** The masonry-timber stepped 'hybrid' column

Internally, the bases are more refined and shaped, and typically, the pedestal bricks arranged to form like a stepped base. The footing is laid to half of the wall height. Its surface finished with decorated plaster cornice detail that influenced colonial style. In Baitul Rahmah, the masonry pedestal form is elongated into moulded pedestals half the height of a column. These form a continuous half-wall with cornices and mouldings. These, in aristocratic examples, are typically moulded or stepped to introduce stylisations into the columns. The stepped pedestal is surface finished with decorated plaster cornice detail that influenced colonial style. Timber posts are integrated into the brick footing and secured with a wedge on brick footing at the centre.



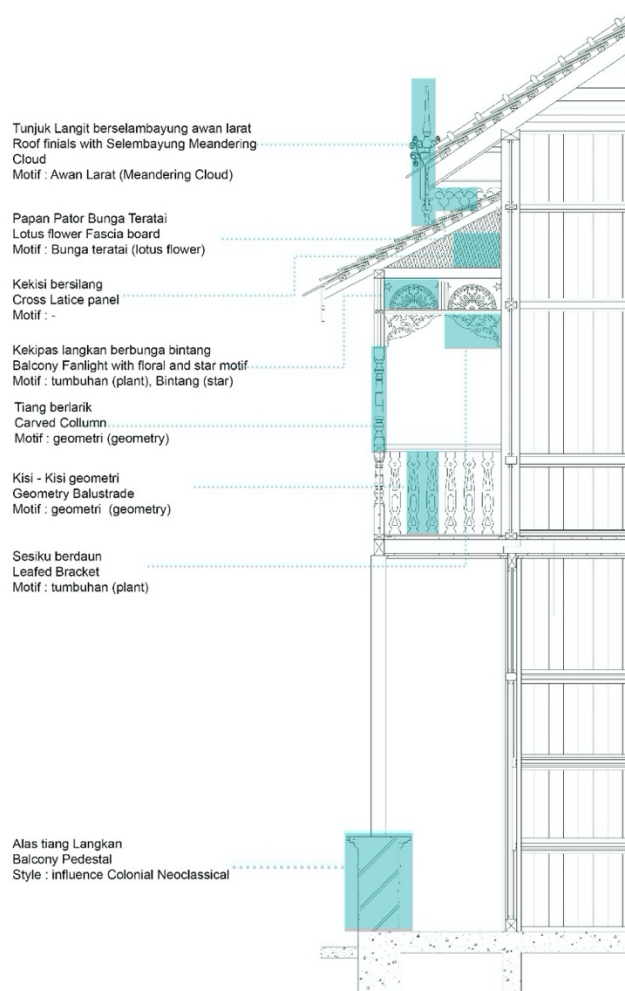
**Fig. 15** The masonry-timber combined construction system of the Baitul Rahmah (Source: IIUM Heritage Lab, 2011)

### *The ornamental vocabulary*

The ornamental character of the external façade is summarised in Figure 14, while internally, local elements are architecture found in both palaces:



1. Detail of wood carving can be found identical between Baitul Aman, baitul Anwar and even another neighbouring palace (with Colonial-style), i.e. Istana Gahara;
2. Have variations of screen panels that allow tropical ventilation into the internal spaces;
3. The attic or known as 'astaka' by the owner is Topmost space at the centre of the house, meant as a space for hiding for the daughter of the house;
4. Each of the roofs is embellished with roof finials and special features of curly awat larat/ kerrawang;
5. The latticed 'arches' which are elliptical rather than Palladian, are placed in between columns and found in all façades, particularly those at the frontage. It is both a climatic device (the extension of such louvres ensures the protection of wind-driven rain and reduce tropical glare), yet these are aesthetically enhancing the façade elements;



**Fig. 16** Baitul Rahmah – a detailed section through the side balcony and elevation showing the range of typical strategies of local Malay ornamental grammar which ‘localise’ the structure, including .

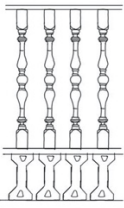
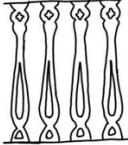

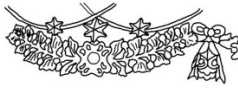

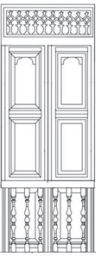






1. The cross lattice used as narrow wood strips which are placed diagonally with mainframes connected to the columns and beam;
2. Features such as bracket with curved vegetal or 'kerawang' features. The motifs are florals and the wood carvers put efforts on the intricacy of the features;
3. The carvings essentially signify the status of the building owners. Harun Al Rashid's mansions, for example, have a certain similar expression of decorative elements, particularly found in the "papan meleh" or fascia board features. The motif of the florals is identical (Table 1);
4. The fanlight which was found on top of windows and doors are also identical with the same features and designs (Table 1);
5. The balustrades are mostly flat balustrade with the combination of two vertical plates and rounded circular on top;
6. The rooms are subdivided with wall partitions which the wall itself rearranged with timber panels and frames;
7. The ceiling for the building is constructed with timber strips and at the main area/ 'rumah ibu'

The internal ceiling shape represents a design that is concave if seen from the inside. This particular concave construction system is unique as it gives a different ambience to the local internal spatial form. It can be argued as a 'modern' evolution of the vernacular as it recalls the palatial architecture of Deli and Serdang in Sumatera. From an interview conducted with the owner-occupier, the owner said that Sultan Harun was a well-travelled regent and was in-fact inspired the design from Istana Deli and had tried to implement the concave design for the inside interior even though it cannot be seen clearly from the outside.



**Fig. 17** The Lacelike Fanlights in Baitul Rahmah

Table 2. Elements of Malay classical infused into the ‘Classical’ vernacular form.

			
<i>Kisi - kisi berlarik geometry</i> Geometry carved balustrade	<i>Kisi - kisi geometry</i> Geometry balustrade	<i>Papan pator Bunga teratai</i> Lotus flower fascia board	<i>Papan pator kelawar gantung</i> Hanging bat fascia board
			
<i>Alas tiang Langkan</i> Balcony Pedestal	<i>Tingkap daun dua berembang berkisi</i> 2 panel window with window head and balustrade	<i>Papan pator kelawar gantung</i> Hanging bat fascia board	<i>Tunjuk langit hujung tajam</i> Pointy edge finials
			
<i>Kekipas geometri</i> Geometry fanlight	<i>Hias langit-langit tampuk manggis</i> Mangoesteen stalk Ceiling decoration	<i>Tunjuk langit hujung tajam</i> Pointy edge finials	<i>Tunjuk langit berselembayang awan larat</i> Finials with Selembayang meandering cloud

## Results and Discussion

Rybczynski (2001) highlights how the phenomena of stylization is not a single event but an event which evolve,, occur and recur every century. These are essentially part of the human or elitist desire to appear different and in sync with the times and which swing as the pendulum of style changes from pole to pole. The Baitul Rahmah can be argued as a classical form which must be argued as the peak of Malay architecture while at the same time, there were other buildings built using the Colonial style which is a separate tree which include Colonial forms that are ‘Malayalised’. The classical in local terms are those which embody a position and principle that embody the ever present intention and desire of the elite levels of society to transcend the nativist forms of every day; yet to resist Colonial globalization including the cut-and-paste in an ‘urbanized form of the ‘vernacular’ (Rybczynski).

The dynamism of partnership between local woodcarver-craftsmen and the aristocrats were social structures and relations that perpetuated the ‘classical forms’ and were instrumental in creating this unique stylisation or tree of style with its hybrid language. They must be seen as the need to reflect and withstand such ‘Modern’ yet global

hegemonic pressures while grasping to the roots of their local identities and traditions. Modernity was a tempestuous and stronger blowing tidal force, culturally obliterating traces of vernacular roots in its path. They are irrevocable last to the present time, while in their time, their effects are reflected in the gradual infusion of masonry elements of the architecture of the region to different extents and degrees, whether in the stylisations of full or half columns, in facade, in their roof profiling including moulded staircases and Palladian balustrades. The architecture of the elite are not merely followers of the global and the modern. The Baitul Rahmah reflect the extent of their resistance to such growing forces. As natural, cultural custodians, they would generally attempt to reflect their sense of identity and create a sense of place emerged from their will to assert their independence, landscape and their local language.

Across tropical Asia in the 1800s, the same phenomena would occur but in different manifestations. They resonate how the natives are overwhelmed by the increased presence of the colonialists, which threaten to sweep their culture off forever. As the trajectory progresses, the Nusantara world, namely Malaysia and Indonesia would gradually enter into an era of gradual Colonial dominance, i.e. the British and the Dutch architectural presence would, until today, be stamped in their urban landscape. The dominance slowly began to be diffused into the built environment and the imagination of the populace. These diffusions came either from the Colonialists themselves, or through the locals engaged with them, or from the travels, meeting and seeing Western culture, including its architecture, as part and parcel on the hallmark of progress and modernity. Malay architecture will inevitably borne the imprint of European-based ‘Industrial revolution’ and its technology.

Although there are various other contemporaneous palaces throughout the Malay world in the ‘era of the Kerajaan’ on the eve of full Colonial rule, it is the Baitul Rahmah – and its sister mansions, Baitun Anwar and Aman, that are the outcome of the dynamics of an aristocrat and his craftsmen which represent perhaps the last branch of the Malay style or the last stream of resistance. Their language and rules should be recalled as a standard-bearer and from which all other stylization of public buildings should be benchmarked against

Similarly, the Malay architectural language may vary horizontally (i.e. geographically) and vertically (temporally). Substyles can be recognized based on a series of recurring elements of language. By identifying and classifying such as subthemes and narratives, a localized rhetoric can be built, from which new basis and interpretations of design can be developed. Because local architectural ‘vernacular’ discourse of the Malay world has often swirled onto native language timber structures, the diversity of the Malay architectural language and themes have been overlooked. The range of vocabulary or elements that underwent ‘modernization’ and evolved into a hybrid ‘otherness’ style must be recognized and identified. That which embody a position of resistance but which retained the essence of the vernacular of place must be defined.

Its occasional overlapping with Colonial architectural language or grammar has at times, been mistaken as being part of Colonial graftings. Yet these actually are, the modernization of the vernacular, signifying perhaps the last era of the Sultanate, before economic energies from external influences changed the cultural landscape and the built environment in the post-colonial era. The attainment of independence in the Malay world has exacerbated the decimation of identity in public structures.

## Conclusion

As Asian nations and regions encountered the direct or indirect impact of Colonialism, these struggles are manifested in public works such as palaces and aristocratic mansions that represent the sense of the push and pull factors, as well as the pressure vectors of modernity. Pressures were perhaps encountered from multiple directions: the pressure from Colonial representative to create physical structures that represent their benevolent yet necessary positions; pressure from the trading and commercial communities to appear as modern by having modern amenities and comfort.

The significance of the Malay classical is in its position representative of resisting neo-Classicism, and nativist inclinations. The Malay classical architecture is argued to be able to be identified and observed in cases when the builder, designer or creator is given free rein and not within the cultural pressure zone induced by the 'Colonial' gaze. These enable due to the high artisanship still available and active relationship between master (the Regent or royal elite) and his craftsmen. The dynamic allows a rapidly evolving form to be rooted in the expressions and Malay classical emotiveness of the vernacular. The Malay form, i.e. the 'locus classicus' of Malay architecture' is no longer the romanticized vernacular but a rationalist infusion of emotive expressions onto a Classically themed structure. Principles and elemental rules of this aesthetic style have been objectively studied by past researchers such as Tengku Anis et al., (2017) and earlier, Wan Burhanuddin Helmi (1981) who has attempted to outline this in his insightful Master dissertation (MIT, 1987): 'the Malay House: Rationale and Change', within the typology of houses. This stylistic form is an emerging hybrid language which can contribute to the elements of expression of the Asian identity and character amidst rapid urbanization and alarming loss of character in Asian cities.

## Acknowledgements

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