

# On the origins of the Javanese mosque

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THE ARCHITECTURAL GENESIS of the 'Javanese mosque' has yet to be adequately studied. The earliest mosques date to the 15th-17th century transitional era from 'Indianization' to 'Islamization' in the wider Southeast Asian Archipelago. The most notable mosques are in Java, where some of the oldest remaining examples of Islamic material culture in Southeast Asia reside.

Common features of the earliest mosque type, found with variations throughout the Malay world, are superimposed roofs (generally three) and a concentric post-pattern. Four tall posts in the centre hold the highest roof. Around this centre, a gallery of 12 posts and a second gallery of 20 posts (in average) hold the lower second and third roofs (fig. 1). The oldest examples of this architectural type can be found in towns such as Cirebon, Banten, and Demak along the North Java coastline. These settlements became important downstream international commercial centres between the 15th and 17th centuries. The mosque of Demak is considered to be the oldest.

In the 1940s and 1960s two Dutch scholars published differing hypotheses concerning the Javanese mosque type. G.F. Pijper (1893-1988) considered the Javanese mosque structure to be an "ancient native one [of prior Javanese Hindu and Buddhist temples] adapted to the requirements of the Moslem worship." Although he did not prove it, Pijper believed this type of mosque construction shared common features with Balinese architecture, as well as Javanese architecture and sanctuaries from the Hindu-Buddhist period.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, H.J. De Graaf (1899-1984) initially suggested that early Indonesian archipelago Muslim converts 'modelled' this architectural type on early Indian mosques, citing three examples from Malabar and Kashmir.<sup>2</sup> In his subsequent study of the historical Chinese diaspora communities in Java, De Graaf and his colleague Th. Pigeaud (1899-1988) suggested that Chinese pagodas could also have inspired Java's earliest mosque builders.<sup>3</sup>

To this day De Graaf's and Pigeaud's hypotheses of Indian Muslim or Chinese architectural influences are the most popular among historians of Javanese Islam. However, recent archaeological findings suggest that Pijper's assumption seems more plausible, especially when paired with previously known examples of Java's Hindu-Buddhist period architecture. Three temple remains in Western and Central Java, dating from the 7th to the 13th centuries, provide evidence of the existence of concentric patterned buildings that supported superimposed roofs, eight centuries prior to Java's Islamization.

The first temple, Candi Blandongan, dating to the 7th-10th centuries, is located in West Java. It is a square terrace base measuring 25 meters wide, with an upper level bearing a smaller elevated square terrace in the centre where a *stupa* once stood. The stupa was made of brick covered with stucco. The temple included eight bases and two postholes at the ground level (blue dots in the plan); 12 bases on the first upper level; and four bases closer to the stupa at the top (fig. 2). The distribution of the bases suggests the two-tiered terrace temple was sheltered under a timber structure with superimposed roofs.

Two sites in Central Java, the Ratu Boko and Candi Plaosan religious complexes, show even clearer concentric patterns. The syncretic Hindu and Buddhist Ratu Boko complex was founded in the 8th century. One of the largest structures of this site is a 20m wide square terrace built before a smaller rectangular terrace. Traces of 24 post bases placed in a concentric pattern were found on the platform of the main square terrace: four central bases surrounded by a gallery of 20 bases (fig.3). As in the previous example, this pattern seems to document a structure with an upper central roof supported by four posts and a lower roof supported by 20 posts.

The final example (fig. 4), the 'C structure' of the Plaosan Lor complex, approximately 1.5km from Ratu Boko, is a rectangular terrace (21.7m x 18m). Two concentric galleries of post bases can still be seen: 16 bases in the centre, surrounded by another gallery of 24 quadrangular bases.

The three temple examples leave little doubt concerning the antiquity of concentric patterned wooden buildings with two or three superimposed roofs in Java. These examples collectively demonstrate they were each used for Hindu and Buddhist cult purposes from the 7th century in West Java, and from the 8th and 9th centuries in Central Java. A more thorough study of the distribution of this architectural type in South and Southeast Asia, as well as in the wider Sinicized world, will be carried out. It may well demonstrate that the Javanese and Malay mosque types should no longer be considered as sub-types of East Asian pagodas or Indian Muslim Mosques, but as worthy Southeast Asian innovations.

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## References

- 1 Pijper, G.F. 1947. 'Minaret in Java', *Instituut Kern, India Antiqua: A volume of Oriental Studies Presented by his Friends and Pupils to Jean Philippe Vogel, on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of his Doctorate*, Leiden: Brill, p.275.
- 2 de Graaf, H.J. 1963. 'The Origin of the Javanese Mosque', *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 4:1-5.
- 3 de Graaf, H.J & Th.G.Th. Pigeaud (translation and comments) & M.C. Ricklefs (ed.) 1984. *Chinese Muslims in Java in the 15th and 16th Centuries: The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon*, Monash Papers on Southeast Asia, p.179.
- 4 This paper is excerpted from a forthcoming article: Njoto, H. 'On the origins of the "Javanese Mosque"', BEFEO 100 (in press, 2014).

Fig. 1

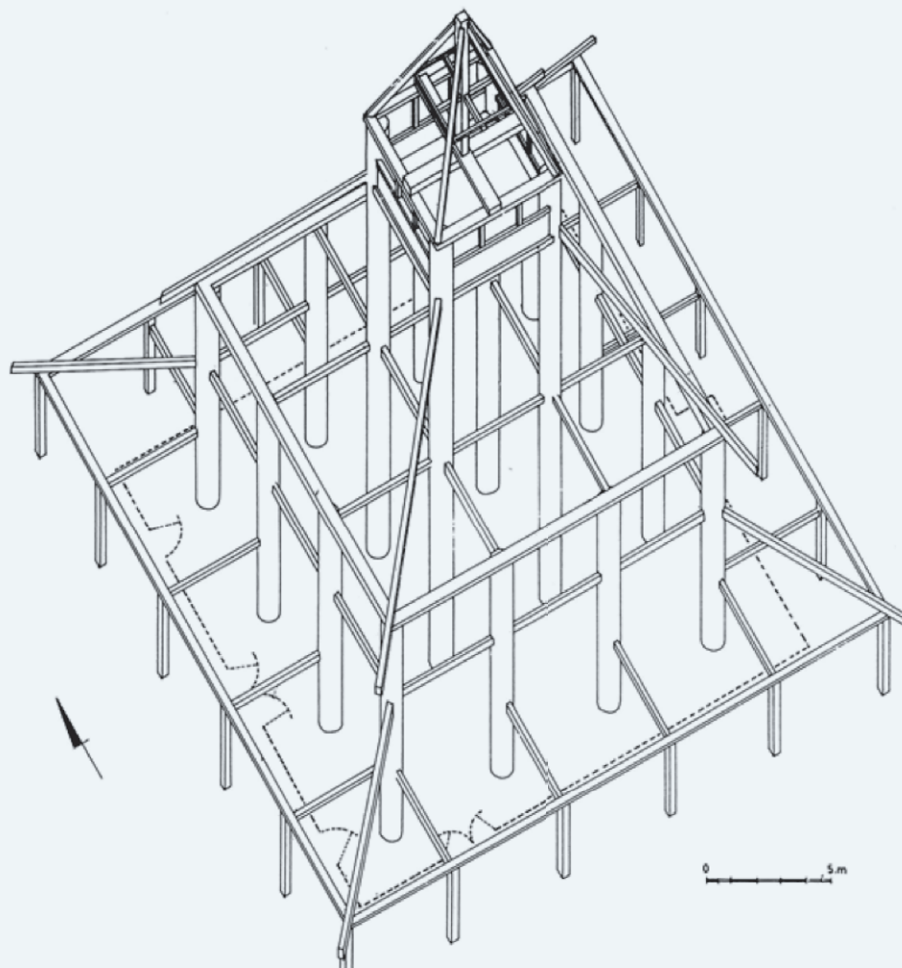


Fig. 1: 'Demak's mosque, restitution of its original state of conservation', in J. Dumarçay, *Histoire de l'architecture de Java*, p.140, pl. VI-YG 544.

Fig. 2

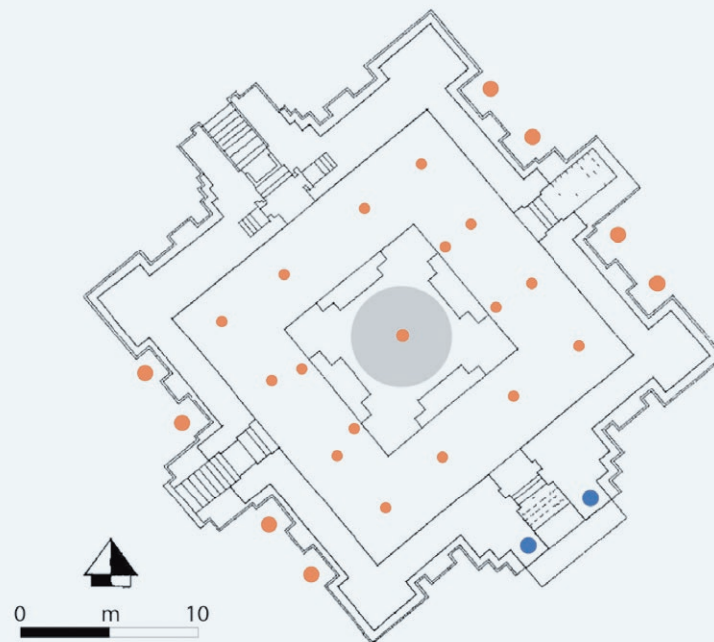


Fig. 2: Batujaya, Candi Blandongan. In red, the approximate position of post bases. In blue, post holes seen during the monument's restoration (drawing by P.-Y. Manguin, adapted from a plan of the Balai Pelestarian Cagar Budaya Serang).

Fig. 3

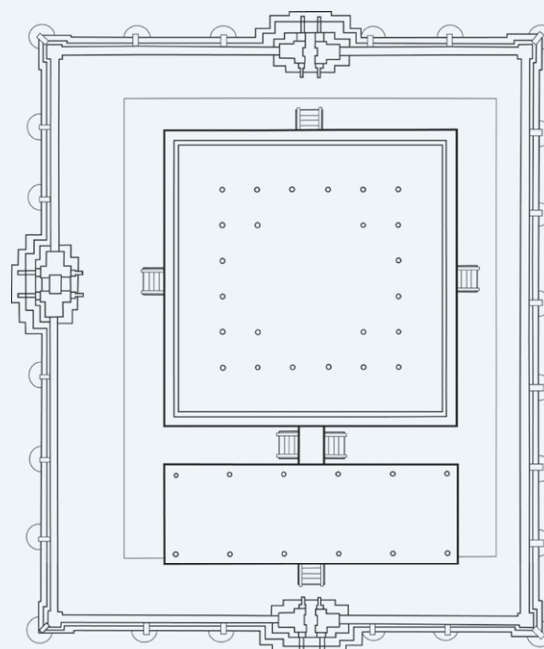


Fig. 3: 'Ratu Boko's pendopo,' V. Degroot, 'The Archeological Remains of Ratu Boko, from Sri Lankan Buddhism to Hinduism,' *Indonesia and the Malay World* 34/98, fig. 2, p. 58, included with the authorization of V. Degroot.

Fig. 4

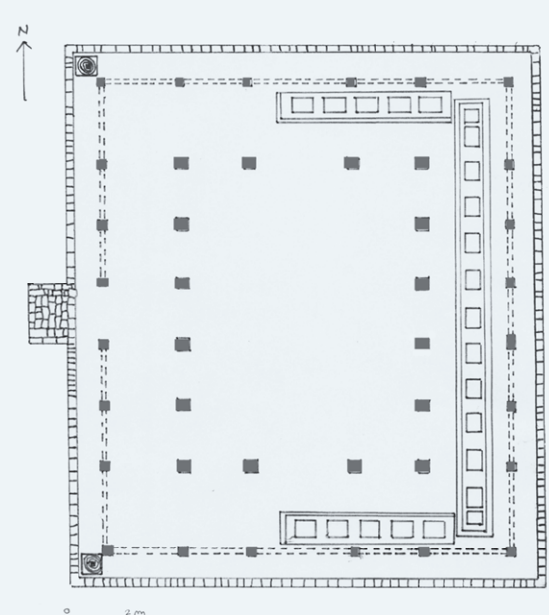


Fig. 4: Reconstruction plan of Candi Plaosan Lor's 'C structure.' Drawing by H. Njoto, adapted from a plan by Sri Ediningsih, Respati Hardjajanta, *Laporan purna pugar. Kompleks Candi Plaosan Lor*, Direktorat Jenderal Sejarah dan Purbakala. Departemen Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata, 2001, p.49.