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Analysis of symbolic meaning as an expression of Malay cultural values in the Malay ornaments of the Asserayah Al-Hasyimiyah palace, Siak Sri Indrapura Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the Malay ornaments in the Asserayah Al-Hasyimiyah Palace, Siak Sri Indrapura Regency, to uncover their visual forms and symbolic meanings. A qualitative descriptive approach combined with semiotic methods was employed to understand these ornaments' artistic elements, functions, and cultural values. The findings reveal that the palace's ornaments feature various motifs, including flora (jasmine, *ylang-ylang*, roses), fauna (dragon heads), Arabic calligraphy, and geometric patterns. Each ornament carries symbolic meanings that reflect Malay cultural values, such as honesty (mangosteen tree), noble character (a cluster of garden flowers), and honor (wall crown). Beyond their decorative function, these ornaments also serve as a medium of visual communication that embodies Malay cultural identity. This study underscores the importance of preserving traditional ornaments as cultural heritage while enhancing public understanding of Malay art. These findings are relevant for supporting arts and cultural education and enriching studies on traditional architecture.



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1. Introduction

The Asserayah Al-Hasyimiyah Palace is one of the research objects for ornamental art that reflects the rich culture and history of the Siak Sri Indrapura Kingdom. Art is an essential part of traditional buildings; the ornaments found in this palace not only serve as decorative elements but also carry aesthetic and symbolic values that represent the identity of the Malay community at that time [1]. Artistic analysis of these ornaments is essential to understanding their visual aspects, functions, and meanings. Furthermore, this research holds great potential as a source of knowledge in education, particularly in the context of Riau Malay culture. Towards developing its potential, the Siak Palace is planned to be used as an educational facility for schools and the community to learn about the art and culture of the region [2]. The Siak Palace is expected to serve as an educational medium for schools and society to understand Malay ornamental art better. Malay cultural art is distinctive, encompassing traditions, customs, and arts, providing profound meaning and enhancing the dignity and pride of the Riau community. This research aims to introduce the forms and meanings of Malay ornaments in the Asserayah Al-Hasyimiyah Palace as evidence of artistic imagination and the unique characteristics of Malay culture that have existed since ancient times. Thus, this study offers new insights into how the Malay community in the past appreciated art through ornaments.

The symbolic meaning of traditional ornaments needs to be analyzed to understand their impact on past works of art, and this study is also relevant to several previous studies, one of which is Hengki Satria's thesis titled Semiotics of Form and Meaning in Asserayah Al-

Hasyimiyah, which describes the forms and meanings of the palace building using a semiotic approach [3]. The case study method in that research is considered relevant because the data obtained is descriptive and cannot be interpreted through numerical analysis but rather through an in-depth examination of social and cultural interactions. The study *Reality Bangunan Bersejarah Berbasis Android* by Ause Labellapansa and Mega Restu Asrining Ratri highlights the importance of increasing public interest in historical buildings through Android-based technology [4]. This research is particularly relevant in the context of preserving the ornaments of the Asserayah Al-Hasyimiyah Palace as part of cultural heritage. The study employs a descriptive semantic approach to analyze the forms and meanings of the palace's ornaments. This approach is grounded in semiotics, emphasizing each artistic element's function, meaning, and symbolic significance within the palace. Semiotics play a crucial role in explaining how visual signs in the ornaments communicate with society through aesthetic and cultural values. As noted in educational semiotics studies, interpreting visual signs enriches public understanding of artistic beauty while supporting cultural arts education. This research preserves cultural heritage by leveraging semiotic analysis and promotes deeper appreciation and learning about Malay ornamental art. Semiotics and education are interconnected research fields that overlap with one another [5].

The study of signs and sign processes helps in understanding how teaching functions as a means of communication through signs and how learning involves the process of interpreting and developing the ability to understand those signs. With this approach, the research is expected to significantly contribute to promoting Malay ornamental art as a valuable part of cultural heritage while also strengthening the artistic identity of the Asserayah Al-Hasyimiyah Palace. Ornaments are often associated with mythology, spirituality, religion, culture, and social life [6]. They come in various forms and hold deep symbolic meanings, making their preservation essential. Ornaments significantly strengthen cultural heritage values, create beautiful aesthetics, and promote local wisdom in modern society. The artistic analysis of Malay ornaments in the Asserayah Al-Hasyimiyah Palace is closely related to semiotics in the field of art. Studying semiotics helps to understand how teaching communicates through signs and how learning involves interpretation. Semiotics, derived from the Greek word *sema*, meaning "sign," is an applied discipline that studies signs (semiology). Semiotics, derived from the Greek word *sema* (meaning "sign"), is the application of the science of signs (semiology) [7]. It assumes that cultures and cultural expressions such as language, art, music, and film are composed of signs and that each sign holds meaning beyond, and only beyond, its literal form.

Human life does not become meaningful without practicing the purpose of life. Daily, we can seek truth and discover meanings or impressions from ourselves and our surroundings to gain knowledge. For example, semiotics is a field of study exploring symbols or statuses' meanings in specific visuals. Semiotics is the study of "signs," focusing on their function as signs and the production of meaning [8]. Semiotics seeks to identify meaningful signs and understand sign systems such as language, gestures, music, images, and more [9]. Advertising serves as a medium to convey information to the public. This study employs a qualitative research method. Understanding semiotics is part of the social sciences methodology, focusing on interpreting systems of relationships based on signs or symbols, which are influenced by social behavior and different perspectives [10]. In semiotics, artists and art observers adopt positions, attitudes, and perspectives influenced by their social relationships [11]. This ideological stance includes the use of signs (semiotics) and an aesthetic sensitivity rooted in the social system.

Using the word meaning as a connector in visual language provides new insights into how individuals perceive and understand one another logically and rationally. Human behavior toward architectural visuals offers sensory experiences such as taste, smell, hearing, and touch, similar to the physiological functions of the senses. Visual experiences are also heavily influenced by cultural backgrounds, helping to identify the presence of signs and meanings within a building. Architectural works are inseparable from the use of signs and meanings, often expressed explicitly, through analogy, or metaphorically [12]. Meaning becomes a linguistic form in artistic achievements, enabling the delivery of information that everyone can understand. While meaning is something that individuals can intuitively grasp, it cannot always be explained virtually, and its concept is best left undefined. Meaning is something that can be

intuitively understood by everyone but cannot be explained virtually, and the concept of meaning is best left undefined [13]. The use of the term meaning by certain groups can be explained as providing written information about the existence of a visual or non-visual object, which is always associated with the presence of signs in a particular culture. Meaning is determined by the context and culture of society [14]. The components related to signs are as follows.

1) *Meaning and Culture*

Culture plays a significant role in shaping human life goals, which vary from person to person. Additionally, culture determines how people communicate, influenced by language, rules, and norms specific to each culture, as well as a shared sense of ownership over creations. From an anthropological perspective, culture encompasses the entire system of feelings, ideas, actions, and creations produced by humans in society. Through learning and experiencing culture, individuals develop a sense of belonging. Culture and communication are inseparable because they shape who communicates with whom, about what, and how messages are interpreted [15]. This relationship is reciprocal: humans develop culture by communicating it, while culture influences communication practices. Together, they create distinctive characteristics that form communication habits or cultural communication patterns within specific cultural communities; the communication activities of a cultural member can represent the beliefs, values, attitudes, and worldviews of their culture [16]. Through communication, fundamental and essential cultural values can be reinforced, ensuring their continued relevance and understanding within the community.

2) *Meaning and Sign*

Communication is using symbols to achieve shared meaning or exchange information about an event or object [17]. The term symbol is used in various fields, such as logic, epistemology, mathematics, religion, psychology, semiotics, and linguistics. This concept connects meaning and interpretation with how individuals perceive a work. The concept of a symbol has a long history and is associated with diverse meanings and interpretations [18]. A symbol serves as a special sign representing sensual or spiritual reality, understood not literally but in a broader sense. It often tells a story or expresses a system of abstract ideas and can be seen as a riddle that needs to be solved. In communication, messages in the form of signs can encourage the creation of meaning for oneself or others. The meaning we create becomes the message. The more shared codes we have, the more we use the same system of signs.

The study of signs and phenomena is called *semeion*, derived from the Greek word for "mark" or "physical sign," as introduced by Hippocrates. According to Charles Sanders Peirce, the study of signs is called semiotics. Semiotics is also known as logic or the formal doctrine of signs [13]. For Peirce, semiotics is a branch of philosophy. Semiotics view all social practices as linguistic phenomena, meaning everything can be seen as a sign [19].

The development of human thought patterns forms the basis for creating understanding, leading to meaning formation. If we observe, our lives today are inseparable from meaning, perception, or knowledge of everything we see. This type of scientific study, which examines symbols or signs and their construction, is referred to as architectural semiotics. Semiotics presents a systematic framework and perspective on signs as if each sign has a clear structure [2]. Every sign can be interpreted logically but must adhere to scientific arguments. The interpretation of an argument should lead to statements supported by evidence and must align with the claims being made. Semiotics is a field of study that focuses on signs and symbols as a form of communication [20]. It is specifically categorized under non-verbal communication. Certain visual and non-verbal objects, such as a green light symbolizing positivity or a red light indicating danger, can convey messages accurately or inaccurately within specific contexts.

Semiotics is a branch of communication that studies signs and symbols. It is specifically classified as a form of non-verbal communication. Visual and non-verbal objects, such as a green light representing positivity or a red light indicating danger, can be effectively used to convey messages. A symbol is a unique sign that represents a sensual or spiritual reality, not in its literal sense but in a broader and more general context [4]. Symbols often convey a story and express an entire system of abstract ideas. They can be seen as puzzles that require interpretation. The

study of semiotics is divided into three areas of focus, each addressing different aspects. However, these areas are interconnected with related disciplines such as aesthetics and the philosophy of science.

2. Method

Research is a process in which we follow a series of logical steps [4]. The strategy involves determining the research methods and design in accordance with the concept of truth and clear guidelines. In studying and understanding the methods used to analyze ornamental art, researchers examine the history, symbolic meanings, patterns, types, methods of expression, as well as the function or application of ornaments in an object or building [21]. Qualitative descriptive research is a method that provides a detailed description using qualitative data based on research findings [22]. It analyzes events, phenomena, or social conditions clearly and straightforwardly. This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive approach to analyze the artistic ornaments of Malay culture found in the Asserayah Al-Hasyimiyah Palace, located in Siak Sri Indrapura Regency. The descriptive method is chosen because it aims to provide a systematic, factual, and accurate depiction of the forms and meanings of the ornaments on this historic building. This approach allows researchers to deeply describe the artistic elements of the ornaments, both in terms of their visual aspects and symbolic meanings. The author created a research diagram to outline the research structure, as shown in Fig.1.

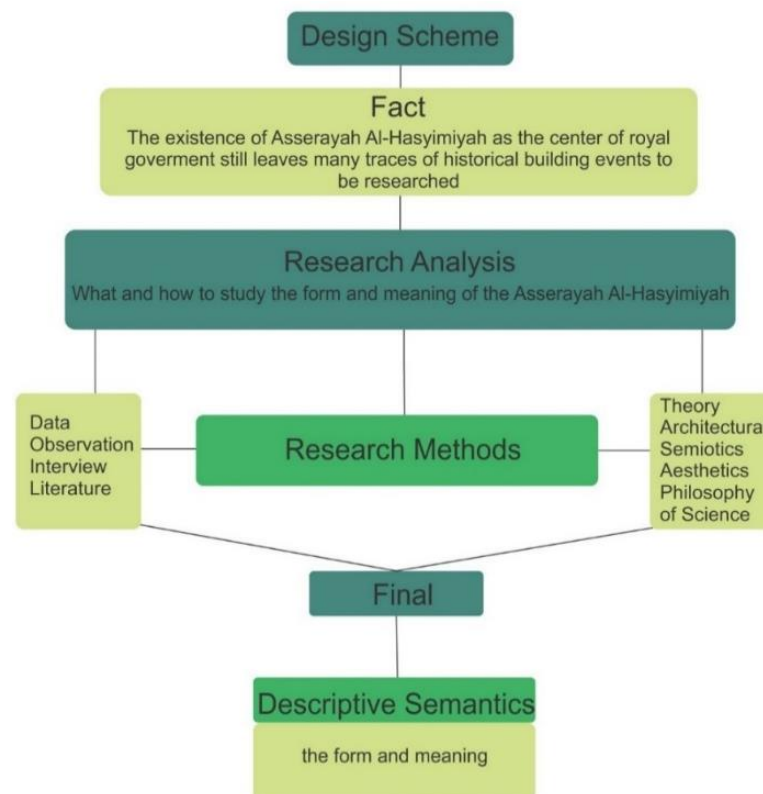


Fig. 1. Research Design Scheme.

Based on the research design diagram, the methodology employs an artistic and semiotic approach to analyze the forms and meanings of the ornaments in the Asserayah Al-Hasyimiyah Palace. Below is an explanation of the research methodology.

- Initial Facts: The research begins with the fact that the Asserayah Al-Hasyimiyah Palace serves as the center of governance for the kingdom and contains Malay artistic ornaments within its structure, which are worth analyzing.

- **Research Analysis Focus: Form Analysis.** Examines the visual and architectural aspects of the ornaments and **Meaning Analysis:** Investigates the symbolic and philosophical aspects of the ornaments.
- **Research Methods:** The study uses a combination of field data collection and theoretical data analysis: Direct observation of the palace's ornaments. Interviews with resource persons knowledgeable about the palace's ornaments. Literature review to gather historical and theoretical references.
- **Artistic Semiotic Approach:** Identifies artistic elements in the palace's ornaments and Analyzes the symbols embedded within the ornaments using semiotic theory, focusing on the relationship between signs (ornaments) and their meanings in cultural and historical contexts.
- **Final Objective:** The research aims to produce a semantic description that explains. The form of the ornaments (visual characteristics, patterns, and structures) and the meaning of the ornaments (symbolic interpretation based on cultural, historical, and local values). This methodology seeks to strengthen scientific studies on the role of ornaments as an integral part of the palace's cultural identity while emphasizing their historical significance. This approach can also incorporate quantitative elements to provide a more comprehensive overview of the research findings [23].

3. Results and Discussion

This section will explain in detail the form and meaning of the ornaments in the Siak Palace using semantic semiotic science.

3.1. Discover

Buildings with ornaments can be seen as a form of language that communicates symbolic meanings to the community [24]. The findings of this study's analysis of symbolic meanings are in Table 1.

Table 1. General form and findings of research

Form	Findings
Wood carving	This ornament is found in traditional Malay houses, such as the ceiling of the Siak palace. These wood carvings typically feature intricate geometric, floral, and faunal motifs, often with deep symbolism.
Flower and leaf motifs	There are several ornamental motifs. These motifs usually depict natural beauty and are often connected with spiritual and aesthetic values.
Dragon Head	In some designs, the dragon's head is an important decorative element symbolizing strength and courage.
Heritage of Khat Art	Arabic calligraphy or khat art is often integrated into Malay Siak ornaments, reflecting the influence of Islam in Malay culture.
Geometric Pattern	Geometric patterns, such as triangle motifs and interlocking lines, are part of a traditional aesthetic that gives a dynamic and structured impression.
Carved Metal	In the context of carved metal ornaments, it is part of Malay Siak ornaments, often decorated with complex and symbolic carvings, for example, at the Syahabudin Mosque in Siak.

These ornaments not only function as decoration. However, the meaning of geometric motifs can be understood by observing their shapes, but they also have deep meaning and symbolism in the cultural and spiritual context of the Siak Malay people [25]. They are a reflection of rich cultural values, history, and identity. The basic results of this research are explained through a study of descriptive semantic semiotics, all of which are summarized in the discussion below.

3.2. Define

In the field of palace meaning, descriptive semantics is very appropriate in analyzing this research, considering specifically the meaning that applies and when that meaning appears as material for studying the Siak Palace building.

1) Ornament

In architecture, ornaments are defined as elements that enhance or decorate a building. They hold historical and aesthetic value that evolves over time, distinguishing between their role as products of specific stylistic periods and their decorative function, which reflects cultural values [26]. In the Siak Palace, ornaments are prominently featured in elements like ceiling-mounted lamps adorned with intricate wood carvings. The palace's Malay design primarily draws inspiration from nature, heavily utilizing stylized floral motifs. These floral patterns are favored for their symbolic meanings and specific purposes. Ornaments not only add to the beauty of a building but also carry deep symbolic meanings that reflect Malay culture and identity [27]. For instance, Fig. 2 depicts a wooden carving ornament located on the ceiling beneath the staircase. This design is a stylization of the mangosteen tree motif, symbolizing honesty. The carving narrates the life of the mangosteen tree, incorporating its branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit, with the fruit placed at the center. The mangosteen fruit conveys a profound meaning: its outer appearance always aligns with its inner content. This reflects human values, where one's words should align with reality and emphasize truthfulness and integrity in life.



Fig. 2. Wooden Carving Ornament on the Ceiling Under the Staircase

Still, showcasing woodcarving art, the base of the lamp in the crystal room features a stylization of a "cluster of garden flowers." The carving, as shown in Fig 3, incorporates decorative elements such as jasmine, ylang-ylang, and roses, forming a unified floral wheel design.



Fig. 3. Wooden Carving Ornament on the Ceiling of the Crystal Room

The second ornament, named "*Serumpun Bunga Taman*" (A Cluster of Garden Flowers), is crafted using decorations of various local flowers. Generally, this carving symbolizes the hope that the palace environment remains filled with fragrance, representing good intellect and noble character. Specifically, each flower used carries its own symbolism. For instance, Jasmine symbolizes purity and simplicity. It teaches that every word spoken should be based on sincerity for the sake of goodness. Ylang-ylang signifies emulating virtuous behavior and becoming a legacy worth remembering. Rose represents a heartfelt intention to undertake actions selflessly, seeking only divine rewards. The woodcarving art in Siak Palace reflects the richness of local ornamentation. This can also be observed in the placement of carvings at the base of the lamp in the Gading Room, as shown in Fig. 4. The design features a "*Roda Kaluk Pakis*" (Fern Tendril Wheel) positioned within a circular field at the base of the hanging lamp. This ornament is grouped into leaf (betel leaf) and root motifs arranged in an unbroken circular pattern. At its center lies the "*Tapuk Pinang*" element, reminiscent of Malay customs where betel nuts are used in daily traditions, such as enhancing lip color. The betel leaf motif was chosen for its climbing growth habit that does not harm its support, symbolizing harmonious coexistence. The meaning of betel chewing is that it serves as a foundation for building moral values in traditional customs.

It is applied in community life as a way to open the doors of both homes and hearts, bringing those who are distant closer and turning adversaries into friends. The betel nut symbolizes courtesy and mutual respect within the Malay cultural context. Crystal chandeliers serve a dual purpose as both a source of illumination and a decorative element.



Fig. 4. Wooden Carving Ornament on the Ceiling of the Gading Room

In Siak Palace, such chandeliers are often installed in prominent spaces like ballrooms or grand reception rooms to enhance the interior's grandeur and lighting. **Lighting Technology:** Before the advent of electricity, kerosene lamps were the primary source of illumination in homes and buildings, including palaces. These lamps are operated by burning kerosene through a wick to produce light. The chandeliers in Siak Palace, as seen in Fig. 5, reflect this historical use while also showcasing their ornamental value. **Functionality and Aesthetic Value:** The base of the chandelier not only supports the lamp but also adds an element of luxury to the interior space. Beyond providing artificial light, the chandeliers in Siak Palace function as aesthetic pieces, elevating the visual appeal of the rooms. Each kerosene-fueled decorative chandelier has a unique character tailored to its specific room, creating an atmosphere of warmth and inner tranquility for the palace's inhabitants.



Fig. 5. Hanging Lamp of Siak Palace

The spiral staircase in Siak Palace, renowned for its beauty and distinctive ornamentation, is one of the architectural elements that reflects the grandeur and cultural richness of the palace. This spiral staircase is functional and highly decorative, designed to maximize space efficiently while enhancing the room's aesthetics. The Spiral Staircase Ornament can be seen in Fig. 6.

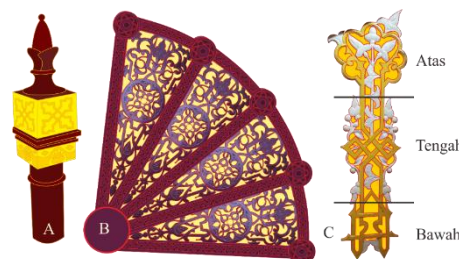


Fig. 6. Spiral Staircase Ornament

Materials and Design The staircase is crafted from high-quality materials such as wood and cast iron, which are combined to form intricate ornamental patterns. As depicted in Fig. 6, the staircase is adorned with flora and subtle fauna motifs. Key components include the main railing post, Stair treads, and Stair railing. The overall design represents a stylization of growth, illustrated by climbing plants on the railings and steps, which are intertwined with floral and

butterfly motifs. The butterfly, essential for pollination, symbolizes its vital role in nature and is celebrated through these ornaments. Climbing plants are depicted as growing upward and extending outward, symbolizing resilience and progress. Philosophical meaning The spiral staircase carries deep philosophical significance. It is divided into three stages: (1) The base Represents the soil or source of nutrients; (2) The middle Acts as a connector where leaves and flowers begin to form; (3) The top Symbolizes perfection, represented by fruits. Ornaments are design elements that represent a location's cultural heritage and identity; Fig. 7 depicts ornamental ceramic wall art, which serves as a decorative element to enhance the aesthetics of the palace's interior [28]. This artwork features stylized Arabic calligraphy, specifically the word "Muhammad," making it a classic ornament with a fixed structure, rhythm, and pattern that remains unchanged over time. The design reflects the enduring presence of Islamic art and its significant influence in Siak, symbolizing the growth of Islam in the region.



Fig. 7. Ceramic Wall Ornament

The ceramic ornament combines luxurious materials like gold and silver, creating a stunning metallic sheen. Blue tones further accentuate the intricate patterns, enhancing the visual appeal of the palace's ceramic wall decorations. This blend of materials and colors highlights the elegance of Islamic art and underscores the cultural and spiritual heritage of Siak Palace.

2) Wall

Fig. 8 depicts a wall carving symbolizing the Siak Kingdom's glory during Sultan Syarif Hasyim's reign. The primary function of this emblematic ornament is not merely decorative but serves as a symbolic reminder of the kingdom's development, which began under Sultan Syarif Kasim I.



Fig. 8. Wall Carving of the Symbol of Glory

The placement of the crown ornament, symbolizing nobility and honor, signifies the status and prestige of the Siak Palace. Its presence represents the palace's governance's dignity, grandeur, and authority. The application of the crown as a symbol on the palace walls reflects the role of leadership, with the Sultan as the highest authority in the Siak Kingdom, bearing the responsibility to nurture and maintain harmonious governance and cultural traditions. One of the most valuable legacies of the Asserayah Al-Hasymiah Kingdom is the royal crown, a symbol of greatness and honor in Malay Sultanate customs. This crown is incorporated into carved art directly applied to the palace walls.

The stylized crown is painted in gold and inscribed with "Sultan Syarif Hasim," emphasizing its significance. Geometric motifs are not just visually appealing; they also carry profound spiritual and religious meanings; in addition to the crown emblem on the walls, the exposed wall designs feature geometric moldings such as circles, rectangles, and triangles, creating a unique unity [29]. Fig. 9 illustrates a circular design intended to captivate viewers, whether royal guests or common visitors, drawing their attention to its contents. These contents include sculptures of animals in hunting scenes in inner corridors and a deer statue in the meeting and coronation room. These elements further enhance the palace's aesthetic appeal while symbolizing its cultural and historical richness. The depiction of statues often appears static, yet a realistic nuance is evident in sculptures with a naturalistic style [30]. In addition to the circular elements, rectangular features are prominently incorporated, specifically designed to house classic mirrors. The addition of mirrors aims to create a lively and dynamic atmosphere within the space. These mirrors reflect the surroundings, transforming otherwise blank walls into more visually engaging surfaces. The classic wall mirrors not only enhance the aesthetics of the palace but also provide an illusion of spaciousness. By reflecting light and decorative elements, they make the rooms feel larger and brighter. During its time, the royal inhabitants paid meticulous attention to every detail of interior design, including the strategic placement of these mirrors on the walls. This allowed other decorative objects to be clearly visible through their reflections, further enriching the visual experience and adding a sense of grandeur to the palace interiors. Can be seen in Fig. 9.

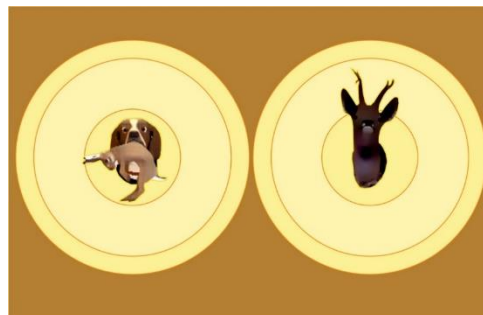


Fig. 9. Circle with Animal Sculpture

4. Conclusion

This study successfully reveals that the Malay ornaments in Istana Asserayah Al-Hasyimiyah possess high aesthetic value and carry symbolic meanings closely tied to Malay culture. Through semiotic analysis, the research demonstrates how these ornaments serve as a medium of visual communication, reflecting the Malay community's local values, history, and spirituality. This study is expected to strengthen efforts in preserving cultural heritage while also enhancing appreciation for traditional ornamental art.

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BH, QU: analyzed the data and wrote the article.
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