

UNDERSTANDING ANCIENT ARCHITECTURE AS A CULTURAL SYMBOL

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Ancient Architecture, Cultural Symbols, Cultural Identity, Architectural Analysis

ABSTRACT

Ancient architecture has a significant role in representing the values, beliefs and identity of society in the past. By delving deeper into the structure, form and meaning of ancient architecture, this research aims to understand how this architecture became a cultural symbol that depicts aspects of people's lives in certain time periods. This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. The results of this research show that ancient architecture is not just a monumental physical structure, but is also a symbol of culture, power and identity. The technical expertise in the construction of large structures reflected the intellectual capabilities of ancient societies, while the art of carving and sculpture in ancient buildings provided a visual language that conveyed values and beliefs. Ancient buildings function as centers of social, religious, and political life, reinforcing cultural norms and maintaining societal stability. As a symbol of power, ancient architecture reflects the dominance of powerful entities and designs hierarchical order in society.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ancient architecture is not just the physical structure of buildings, but is also a symbolic container containing the beliefs and cultural values of a society (Waluyo, 2013). Every detail, line and architectural element in the past reflects not only technical expertise, but also a deep narrative about a culture's way of life and identity (Budiwiyanto, 2008). Through its physical form and structure, ancient architecture became a strong medium of expression, capable of depicting the value system, beliefs and norms that were the foundation of society at that time (Zainuri, 2021).

In many cases, ancient architecture is often closely linked to religious beliefs. Sacred buildings such as temples, churches or mosques not only function as places of worship, but also as a visual embodiment of the spiritual relationship between humans and the Almighty (Handoko, 2013). This architecture forms ritual spaces that guide people's daily lives, reflecting the importance of religious values in the social structure. Apart from that, ancient architecture also reflects the aesthetic values and beauty that were appreciated by society at that time (Defa, 2018). The shapes and ornaments used in architecture reflect artistic preferences that are appreciated and considered beautiful. Thus, ancient architecture not only creates physical space, but also creates visual and aesthetic experiences that enrich people's daily lives (Karunia & Setianingsih, 2021).

No less important, ancient architecture also plays a role in the formation of cultural identity. The physical structure of a building is not only a symbol of technical elegance, but also a marker of the presence and existence of a community (Siregara et al, 2022). Through architecture, people create a visual legacy that is passed down from generation to generation, reinforcing and celebrating their identity. Ancient architecture not only presents physical forms from the past, but also shapes and maintains the beliefs, cultural values and identity of a society (Sadana, 2017). As a marker of time and space, ancient architecture is a silent witness to the journey of human culture, providing inspiration and learning for future generations to better understand the complexity and beauty of cultural heritage that has been formed throughout history (Soedigdo et al, 2014).

Ancient civilizations around the world have utilized architecture as a primary means of expressing and crystallizing their unique beliefs, values, and identities (Jones, 2011). Architectural wonders from the past are not only astonishing in terms of their scale and technical complexity, but also exude deep symbolic and cultural meaning (Bermudez, 2015). Monumental buildings such as the pyramids in Egypt, the Parthenon Temple in Greece, and the Angkor Wat Temple in Cambodia, are only a small part of the evidence of how ancient civilizations understood the symbolic power of architecture to imbue spiritual, social and cultural meaning in their daily lives (Borges, 2003).

Architecture in ancient times was not just the result of technical skills, but was a medium of expression that reflected the worldview and role of society in the cosmos (Pearson & Richards, 2003). The Egyptian pyramids, for example, are not only monumental structures, but also physical representations of the Egyptian people's spiritual beliefs regarding life after death and immortality (Verner, 2007). Likewise, the Parthenon Temple shows the beauty and harmony of ancient Greece, reflecting their aesthetic values and religious beliefs (Wang, 2018).

These architectural wonders also create symbolic spaces that play an important role in the formation of cultural identity. These structures are characteristics that differentiate one civilization from others, summarizing the essence of their culture and history (Canizaro, 2007). Ancient architecture in all its beauty is not only a technical achievement, but also encapsulates stories about daily life, value systems, and intellectual achievements of that civilization (Berke & Harris, 1997).

In its broadest view, ancient architecture enriches global cultural heritage by involving various aesthetic concepts, construction techniques and symbolic meanings that continue to influence contemporary architecture (Muktiono & Masfud, 2022). Therefore, through the pinnacle of their architectural achievements, ancient civilizations not only provided an impressive physical legacy, but also bequeathed deep and diverse stories about humans, their beliefs, and the lives they lived (Saputra & Muktiono, 2019).

This research aims to explore the role of ancient architecture as a cultural symbol with a focus on understanding the values, beliefs and identity contained within it. By analyzing various architectural forms from various civilizations and historical periods, the main aim of this research is to reveal the symbolic and cultural meanings embedded in the physical structures of ancient buildings. It is hoped that the research results can make a significant contribution to the preservation and documentation of global cultural heritage, as well as become a source of inspiration for contemporary architectural designs that integrate ancient values. In addition, it is hoped that this research will provide further insight into the relationship between architecture and cultural identity, encourage greater appreciation of cultural diversity in today's global society, and stimulate the development of sustainable design concepts.

2. METHOD

In this research, descriptive research methods were used with a qualitative approach to explore the understanding of ancient architecture as a cultural symbol. This qualitative research method, as explained by Creswell & Poth (2016), is based on postpositivism philosophy and is generally used in researching the condition of natural objects. Different from experiments, this method utilizes the researcher as the key instrument, with data collection techniques carried out through triangulation, combining several approaches. Data analysis is inductive and qualitative, emphasizing meaning over generalizations. It is hoped that the choice of this method will produce more complete, in-depth and meaningful data and information regarding the understanding of cultural symbols in ancient architecture. The collected data will be analyzed using an interactive analysis model, which involves three main aspects: data collection, data reduction, and conclusions. Data validity will be checked through data triangulation techniques, by examining various data sources to ensure the reliability of the information obtained. It is hoped that this research method can provide a deeper understanding of the symbolic role of ancient architecture in a cultural context.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ancient architectural structures bear an indelible imprint on their cultural identity through several key factors. These factors are as follows.

Symbols and representation

Ancient structures often serve as canvases for intricate carvings and sculptures, creating works of art that contain deep meaning and reflect various religious, cultural, or political themes. In ancient Egypt, pyramids were a symbol of life after death, and the intricate carvings on the walls of the pyramids told mythological stories and religious ceremonies that included life after death. With its extraordinary detail, this carving is not only an embodiment of artistic beauty, but also a visual explanation of a deep spiritual belief.

As another example, the Parthenon in Athens, ancient Greece, displays the beauty of sculptures that represent imperial power and domination. The frieze surrounding the structure tells heroic mythological and historical stories that are an integral part of Greek cultural identity. Through these sculptures, the Parthenon not only becomes a place of worship, but also a visual narrative that confirms the greatness of Greek civilization in the eyes of the world.

The symbols embedded in these carvings and sculptures create a powerful and immersive visual language, conveying messages to local residents and visitors. Each carving has its own meaning, connecting people to their cultural and historical values. Thus, carvings and carvings on ancient structures are not just mere decoration, but also a means of visual communication that speaks about the essence of civilization and people's lives in the past.

Architectural design and engineering

The technical skill displayed by ancient civilizations in the construction of huge structures is an extraordinary and fascinating achievement. In the aspect of precision engineering, civilizations such as ancient Egypt demonstrated amazing abilities in organizing and building monumental pyramids. The use of simple but effective tools, such as shovels and measuring ropes, as well as a deep understanding of geometry and mathematics, was the basis of their success in creating structures with astonishing precision.

The architectural designs used by ancient societies did not only pursue visual beauty, but also incorporated practical aspects that were important for the survival and sustainability of society. For example, in Sumer, buildings were surrounded by high city walls, not only as a form of physical defense, but also as a symbol of the strength and identity of the city itself. Their skill in designing and building complex irrigation systems, as seen in the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, reflects a deep understanding of agricultural techniques and water resource management.

The importance of these technical skills was not limited to physical construction achievements alone, but also reflected the intellectual abilities of ancient societies. Mastery of mathematics, geometry and other sciences provides a strong foundation for the process of planning and building monumental structures. Thus, this technical expertise not only served practical purposes such as defense and irrigation, but also strengthened the civilization's position on the intellectual map of the ancient world.

Through this technical expertise, ancient civilizations became experts in planning and executing astonishing construction projects, leaving a physical legacy that remains awe-inspiring today. From the pyramids of Egypt to the city walls of Sumer, this technical sophistication is not only a testament to construction ability, but also marks the high level of knowledge and intelligence underlying these ancient civilizations.

Social and Community Functions

Ancient buildings that emerged as centers of social and community life provide a physical form for the essence of community life in the past. Whether it is a temple that symbolizes spiritual piety, a palace that reflects political power, or a gathering place that is the center of social activity, its function goes beyond just the physical structure. Ancient temples, such as those in Egypt or Greece, served not only as places of worship, but also as gathering centers for communities to celebrate religious ceremonies and unite believers in a common belief.

As centers of government and culture, ancient palaces were also important places for social and political interaction. Ancient Egyptian palaces, for example, were not only residences for rulers, but also administrative centers and gathering places for social elites. The existence of the palace as a center of community activity helps maintain social structure and maintain political stability.

Gathering places such as the Roman forum or the Greek agora became primary places for social interaction, commerce, and discussion. These buildings facilitate face-to-face community meetings, reinforce cultural norms, and stimulate the exchange of ideas. Thus, the social function of ancient buildings is not only limited to religious or political aspects, but also includes a vital role in shaping and maintaining the social and cultural life of society at that time. This existence and function also marks how ancient buildings are not only silent witnesses to the course of history, but also become living architecture, strengthening and representing the dynamics of social life in past communities.

Furthermore, ancient architecture plays an important role in shaping cultural beliefs and values. Let's explore how various architectural elements and features influenced the thought patterns and beliefs of these ancient communities:

Religion and Spirituality

Ancient buildings, often considered religious or spiritual shrines, reflect deep religious and divine values in society. The presence of these temples and religious structures is not just a physical form, but also an expression of a strong sense of connection between the people and the spiritual aspects of their lives. The monumental nature of these buildings creates an enchanting and awe-inspiring aura, cementing a sacred connection and inspiring reverence for divine power.

For example, the Maya civilization built monumental temples such as Chichen Itza, which were not only centers of worship but also reflected their deep understanding of the universe. The precise

alignment of buildings with celestial phenomena, as seen in the Chichen Itza pyramid which has stairs leading to its top, indicates a close connection to the movements of celestial bodies. The cycles of life and seasonal changes are reflected in this architectural design, becoming a manifestation of the Maya concept of spirituality which is closely related to the harmony of the cosmos.

The importance of these buildings as places of worship is not just about religious rituals, but also about strengthening community identity and unity. People gather at these temples not only to worship, but also to celebrate togetherness, affirm collective values, and strengthen feelings of solidarity. Thus, ancient temples and religious buildings were not only places to serve the gods, but also became powerful symbols of togetherness and people's connection to the spiritual dimension in their daily lives.

Through their architectural beauty and the spiritual meaning embedded in every detail, these buildings speak further to the way ancient civilizations understood and respected the universe. The entire religious experience therein creates a memorable and profound impression, leaving behind a legacy of spirituality that continues to amaze and inspire to this day.

Power and Authority

Ancient buildings are often visual manifestations of the power and authority of ruling entities in the past, becoming strategic self-promotional tools to communicate dominance and control. These monolithic structures became symbols of power, creating a monumental impression that reflected the hierarchical structure of society. Pharaohs, emperors, or kings utilized these buildings as an expression of undeniable power, reflecting their authority and control over their territory and people.

For example, the Forbidden City in Beijing, China, became an imperial icon that inspired reverence and awe. Serving as an imperial palace for centuries, the Forbidden City reflected the power and authority of the emperor. Its massive walls and imposing gates served not only as physical security, but also as symbols that restricted access to the emperor's divine presence. Its architectural complexity and artistic details create an atmosphere of grandeur that underscores the empire and the hierarchical structure it contained.

More than just a physical building, the Forbidden City became the administrative center of the empire, bearing silent witness to government orders and decisions. With its magnificent palace buildings and meticulous layout, the Forbidden City not only radiated political power but also became the symbolic center of the empire that cemented and imbued the people with respect and loyalty.

The importance of ancient buildings as representations of power and authority lies not only in their practical function, but also in how they create a rich cultural and historical heritage. By studying and caring for these buildings, we can understand more deeply how power and authority were articulated and explained in societies of the past, providing insight into the political dynamics and social structures that shaped ancient civilizations.

Cultural Identity and National Pride

Ancient architecture plays a key role as a tangible representation of a nation's cultural identity and pride. These monumental structures were not simply physical buildings, but rather visual symbols of the attributes, values, and achievements unique to a civilization. The Taj Mahal in India, as one of the world's most iconic architectural masterpieces, reinforces this concept by exuding the majestic cultural heritage of the Mughal Empire. Built by Emperor Shah Jahan as a monument of love for his late wife, Mumtaz Mahal, the Taj Mahal is not only a physical structure, but also an expression of love and pride in the richness of Mughal art and culture.

The beautiful designs and intricate floral motifs of the Taj Mahal reflect a blend of Persian, Islamic and Indian architectural styles. This building is a harmonious representation of the influences of various cultures that shaped the richness and diversity of Mughal civilization. The choice of materials such as beautiful white marble and precisely arranged ornaments demonstrate the high level of technical skill and artistry that was characteristic of Mughal architecture. With its precision and elegance, the Taj Mahal is not just a building, but a manifestation of cultural beauty and grandeur that inspires national pride.

The Taj Mahal is not only a monument to the Mughals, but is also a global cultural heritage that inspires and attracts the attention of people from all over the world. The uniqueness and elegance of this structure teaches us about the universal values of beauty and love, which transcend cultural and ethnic boundaries. Thus, the Taj Mahal is not only a hallmark of India, but also represents the extraordinary contribution of the Mughal civilization to the history of world art and architecture.

Through a deep understanding of ancient architecture such as the Taj Mahal, we can reflect on how these physical structures shape and reflect cultural identity. As a symbol of pride and love for cultural heritage, ancient architecture plays an important role in passing on values and traditions from one generation to the next, contributing to the overall cultural heritage of humanity.

4. CONCLUSION

Ancient architecture is an important pillar in understanding and recording human cultural heritage. These monumental structures not only create impressive physical forms, but also become real representations of the values, beliefs and identity of a civilization. The extraordinary technical expertise in the construction of large structures, the intricate art of carving and sculpture, and their functionality as centers of social and religious life, all lend profound layers to the role of ancient architecture. These buildings function as symbols of power and authority, becoming a visual manifestation of the dominance of powerful entities in the past. Its monumental nature not only creates awe, but also signals the depth of hierarchical structures and the role of authority in society. As religious shrines, ancient architecture evokes a sense of spiritual connectedness in society, expresses collective values and strengthens cultural identity. Ancient buildings, such as the Taj Mahal in India, are unique representations of a nation's achievements and pride. Beautiful designs and a mix of architectural styles that reflect the influence of various cultures create historical monuments that preserve cultural and artistic heritage. In addition, ancient architecture not only creates local cultural identity, but also becomes a global heritage that inspires and teaches universal values. By understanding the role of ancient architecture in various contexts, we can reflect on the ways in which these structures have shaped and reflected the course of history, cultural identity and human heritage more broadly. In this study, it has been illustrated that ancient architecture is not only a physical record of the past, but also a medium that expresses the spiritual, social and cultural essence of a civilization.

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