Journal of Design and Built Environment
E-ISSN: 2232-1500 |Print ISSN: 1823-4208
https://ejournal.um.edu.my/index.php/jdbe
Volume 26, Issue 2, 2026

Sacred Spatiality in Ta'alluq Martabat Architecture: The Great Mosque of the Buton Sultanate

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Article info:

Submission Date: 01st February 2026
Acceptance Date: 7th April 2026

Keywords:

Wolio-Buton, Sacred Space, Sufism, Seven Grades of Existence, Twenty Divine Attributes, Mircea Eliade.

Abstract

This study examines the layout of the Great Mosque of the Buton Sultanate (TGMBS). It focuses on its religious and cultural background. Most studies on Nusantara mosques focus on their types and symbols. However, they pay less attention to how spatial arrangements shape religious experiences. This study uses a qualitative phenomenological approach. It includes one year of fieldwork in Baubau, Southeast Sulawesi. The research involved interviews with eight people. It also examined architecture and analyzed religious texts and rituals. The findings show that the mosque's layout, direction, and movement patterns are well planned. They link to deeper meanings from Sufi cosmology. This includes the Seven Grades of Existence and the Twenty Divine Attributes. TGMBS is more than just a historical monument. It serves as a lively religious space. The layout helps shape how the congregation practices its faith. This study takes an interpretative look at sacred spaces in Nusantara Mosque architecture. It examines the links between cosmology, spatial order, and religious practices in Islamic architecture across Southeast Asia.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Baubau City, located in Southeast Sulawesi Province, Indonesia, has a rich historical connection to the Sultanate of Buton (SB). SB, which flourished from the 15th to the 20th century, was established in 1541 and officially dissolved in 1959, after which it was integrated into the Republic of Indonesia. The SB has left behind a profound legacy of tangible and intangible cultural heritages that are still preserved today (2026). A significant tangible legacy is the Great Mosque of the Buton Sultanate (TGMBS). This mosque was founded in 1712 during the reign of Sultan Saqiuddin Darul Alam (1712-1750), who was the 19th Sultan of Buton.

Architecturally, TGMBS exhibits unique and distinctive spatial and structural attributes within the broader landscape of Nusantara mosque design. Nestled within the Buton Palace Complex in Baubau City, the mosque features a rectangular plan, measuring 19.12 x 27.56 m, with a site area of 44.27 x 41.4 m and three stories. Its construction incorporates tiered limestone foundations, skillfully integrated with the natural terrain, limestone walls approximately 0.5-0.7 m thick, roughly 60 columns, and a roof structure supported by teak (wola) wood framing. These components indicate that the mosque is not merely a physical structure; it is also a spatial arrangement that may reflect particular organizational and functional norms.

Preliminary field research in 2024 identified challenges in interpreting the TGMBS architecture. An interview with local cultural figure Imran Kudus on March 15, 2024, revealed that no architectural study of TGMBS is documented in Wolio-Buton manuscripts. This lack of documentation suggests a disconnect between the mosque's physical structure and a systematic understanding of its meaning. Diverse and sometimes inconsistent interpretations of TGMBS's architectural form can lead to misinterpretation and weaken preservation efforts focused on historical and spiritual values. Heritage studies highlight that non-systematic and non-academic interpretations of cultural architecture can distort meaning and undermine value-based conservation practices (Arfa et al., 2022; Liang et al., 2023; Rebec et al., 2022).

Historical mosque studies reveal that these structures embody structured systems of meaning, encompassing symbolic, cultural, and spiritual dimensions (Dariyadi et al., 2025; Hussain & Juan, 2023; Qurrat Ul Ain, 2023). The Wolio-Buton community possesses a continuous oral tradition that links TGMBS with the Seven Grades of Existence (7GE) and the Twenty Divine Attributes (20DA). However, this association has not yet been integrated into a systematic architectural paradigm. So, its interpretation faces potential divergence and lacks academic substantiation. Prior research highlights the necessity of critically examining and scholarly articulating knowledge transmitted through oral tradition to ensure its accuracy and lasting significance (Funke et al., 2025; Idir & Bouchareb, 2023; Kleinhempel & Nicolaides, 2024; Patil et al., 2025; Salingaros, 2024).

Previous research on Nusantara mosque architecture has primarily viewed these structures as cultural and symbolic manifestations of the interplay between Islamic values and indigenous traditions. Sari et al. (2024), demonstrate that elements such as form, ornamentation, and spatial arrangement in mosques reflect Islamic philosophical and moral tenets within specific local cultural contexts. Complementing this, Handoko et al. (2024); Kartika et al. (2025); Nurjayanti (2022), highlight the function of mosque architecture in articulating historical, religious, and cultural identity through symbolic and interpretative perspectives. Furthermore, Sutrisno (2023) situates mosques and mausoleums within broader historical networks shaped by Persian traditions and the evolution of Islamic polities in the Nusantara region.

While existing studies offer valuable insights into symbolic representation and cultural identity, their analyses often prioritize representation over spatial organization and use. Although some research touches upon cosmological or experiential dimensions, how spatial arrangements structure religious practices and influence user experience remains underexplored. Consequently, the core issue is not a lack of symbolic interpretation, but rather a limited examination of the connection between spatial configuration and lived religious experience.

Umar et al. (2025a, 2025b) used a phenomenological lens to analyze the TGMBS architecture. They based this on Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. These investigations link the mosque to the Sufi notion of Insan Kamil by incorporating 7GE, 20DA, and the indigenous principle of Bhincibhinciki Kuli. Nevertheless, this framework predominantly accentuates human consciousness in the fabrication of meaning, situating architecture primarily as an emblem of spiritual concepts

Mircea Eliade's religious phenomenology presents an alternative perspective, interpreting the sacred as a reality that acquires significance through human experience and spatial context. From this vantage point, architecture can be examined not merely as a symbolic representation but also as a milieu that shapes and enables religious practices. This methodology permits an investigation into how mosque architecture might operate as an inhabited spatial environment.

The research gap identified in this review highlights a limited integration of three key aspects: 1) Phenomenological approaches to religious experience. 2) Local Sufi cosmological concepts, specifically 7GE and 20DA. 3) Detailed spatial analysis of a specific historical mosque. This gap informs the following research question: How can the spatial structure of TGMBS be understood in relation to religious meaning and lived experience within the Wolio-Buton community?

This study explores Ta'alluq Martabat Architecture as a provisional interpretative framework for examining TGMBS. The researchers don't see this concept as a strict architectural rule. Instead, they use a phenomenological approach. They explore how meaning arises from spatial layout, structural features, and usage. Through this approach, the research examines the possible relationship between spatial organization and the cosmological concepts of 7GE and 20DA within the Wolio-Buton context.

This study aims to analyze the spatial, structural, and experiential aspects of TGMBS, understanding how religious meaning is expressed through its architectural form. By situating the discussion within architectural and built environment studies, this research contributes to ongoing discussions on mosque architecture in the Nusantara region. Rather than proposing a definitive theoretical model, the study offers a focused interpretation integrating phenomenological perspectives, local cosmological concepts, and empirical architectural analysis.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Hierophany and Spatial Hierarchy in Traditional Mosque Architecture

Scholarship on Nusantara Mosque architecture increasingly perceives it as a conduit for cultural, symbolic, and religious expression. These studies largely fall into three categories: 1) Descriptive-symbolic analyses. 2) Interpretative approaches connecting architecture with cosmology. 3) Emerging frameworks for conceptual or systematic understanding. The initial discourse delves into mosque architecture as a symbolic and cultural manifestation. Examinations of the Great Mosque of Demak interpret its structural components, such as the saka guru, as embodying cosmological significance and serving as an axis mundi within Javanese Islamic heritage (Assadi et al., 2025; Idham, 2021; Kurmanbek et al., 2025).

Research on the Wapauwe Mosque underscores the symbolic significance of its pillars and spatial divisions, interpreted as representations of spiritual progression and cosmic order (Chowdury, 2024; Gun, 2025; Handoko et al., 2024). Studies on other mosques, such as the Kudus Mosque Tower and Sultan Suriansyah Mosque, highlight the integration of cultural influences and hierarchical spatial forms. These elements are presented as expressions of religious and historical identity (Al-Khalifa & Ghasrah, 2025; Ashari & Maleka, 2023; Rosyid, 2022; Suryandari et al., 2023; Wahyudie et al., 2021). In these studies, architecture is primarily understood as a representational medium that conveys symbolic meaning.

The second strand extends this perspective by linking architectural form with cosmological and spiritual concepts. Research on traditional mosques, such as Kampung Laut Mosque (Kelantan, Malaysia) and Old Katangka Mosque (South Sulawesi, Indonesia), identifies vertical organization and centralized spatial structures as reflecting cosmological hierarchies and spiritual orientation (Akyurek, 2024; Aryanti & Achmadi, 2024; Fakriah & Bakri, 2025; Payandeh et al., 2024; Zuliana et al., 2023). While these studies highlight a robust engagement with cosmological interpretation, the nexus between spatial configuration and lived religious experience is frequently discussed obliquely. Consequently, although symbolic and cosmological significations are identified, the modalities through which these meanings are sculpted by spatial utilization and ritualistic practice remain less lucidly articulated.

Hakimi et al. (2023a, 2023b) present a fresh view on mosque symbolism. In their first study, they categorize symbolic theories in mosque architecture. They also address past inconsistencies. The second study links cosmological stories, such as Mi'raj, to architectural design. These connections deepen our grasp of modern architecture. Their work goes beyond explaining symbols. Few studies examine the links between cosmology, spatial hierarchy, and congregational experience. This gap is surprising, especially with recent

advancements. We often find ties between symbolic meanings and cosmic ideas. The link between space layout and daily religious practice needs more exploration.

This study looks at TGMBS. It uses a phenomenological approach to fill this gap. It builds on earlier symbolic studies and Hakimi et al.'s work. It explores how spatial hierarchy links to cosmological ideas and community experiences in Wolio-Buton Hakimi et al. (2023b, 2023a). Instead of replacing existing interpretations, this study enhances them. It highlights how people interact with spatial structures in their daily lives.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

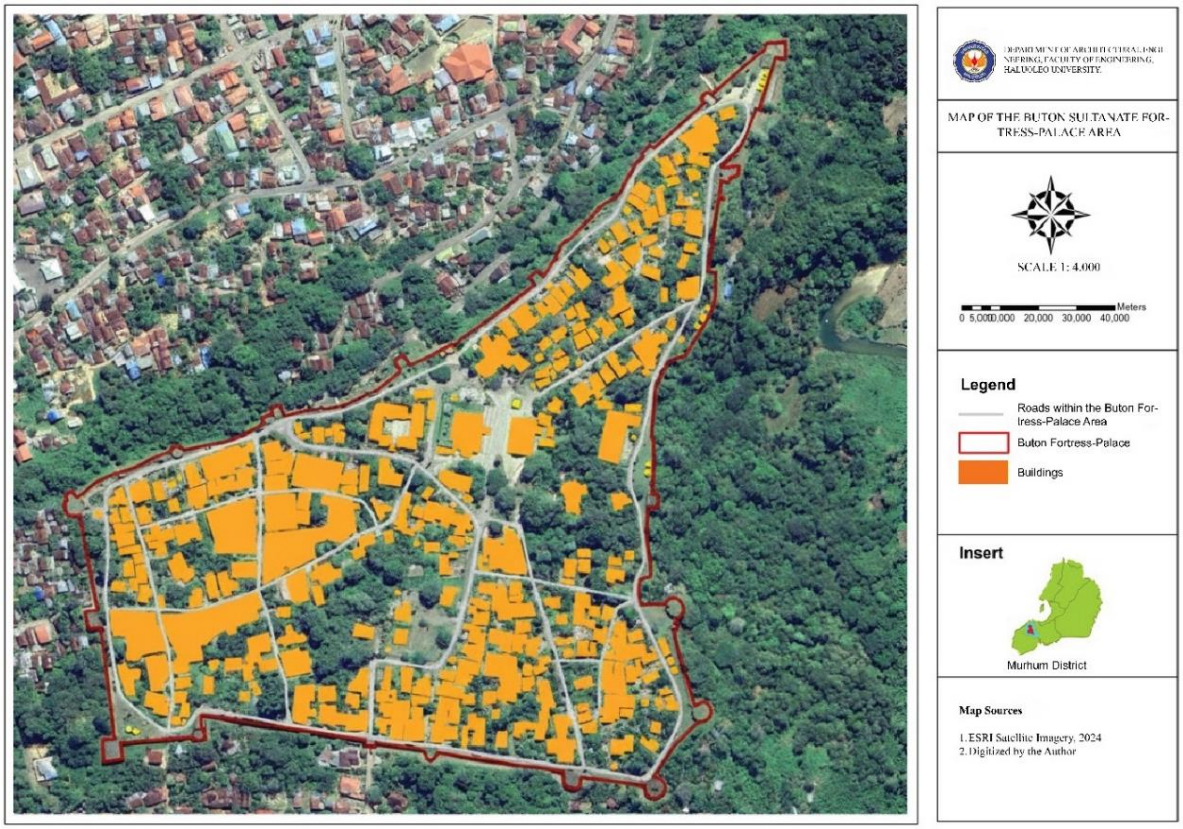


Figure 1. Research Location Map
(Source: ESRI Satellite Imagery (2024); highlighted and prepared by the authors)

TGMBS, established in 1712, is situated within the Buton Palace complex. Its location is on Sultan Labuke Street, Melai Village, Murhum District, Baubau City, Southeast Sulawesi Province. The mosque's boundaries are as follows: 1) To the west: SD Negeri 1 Baadia, a public primary school. 2) To the east: Baruga. 3) To the south: Residential areas. 4) To the north: The Office of the Cultural Heritage Preservation Unit of the Wolio Palace Fortress Area (Figure 1). This study employs a qualitative design, grounded in Religious Phenomenology and drawing on the work of Mircea Eliade. It examines how religious meaning is experienced and articulated through architectural space (Sandberg, 2025; Stochino, 2023). From this viewpoint, we see the mosque as more than a building. It's a space for users to practice their faith, find meaning, and share interpretations.

The research adopts a phenomenological-interpretative approach, focusing on understanding participants' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of the mosque's spatial organization. The researcher's prior familiarity with Sufi cosmological concepts, specifically 7GE and 20DA, may inform the interpretation of findings. To address potential bias, reflexivity was employed throughout the research process. A reflexive journal was maintained to record initial assumptions and field observations. Preliminary interpretations were discussed with selected participants to ensure analytical conclusions remained grounded in shared understanding, rather than being driven solely by prior theoretical assumptions. Evolving interpretations were also documented in the journal (Apostu, 2022; Sandberg, 2025; Tasmuji et al., 2024).

To capture both spatial and experiential dimensions of the mosque, data were collected through multiple qualitative techniques. First, we observed how they organized space. We examined circulation patterns, orientation, and how people used the space for rituals. This included prayer movements and the method the congregation set itself up with. Next, we held detailed semi-structured interviews with twelve participants. Researchers chose them for their relevance to the study. These included religious leaders, mosque custodians, traditional authorities, and senior congregants. Fieldwork was conducted over approximately three months in two stages, allowing for repeated observation and validation of findings. Participants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling to ensure depth of insight rather than statistical representation. Interviews explored participants' experiences, interpretations, and meanings associated with different parts of the mosque. Supporting data were obtained from religious and historical documents, architectural elements, and oral traditions related to the mosque.

Data analysis was conducted sequentially and transparently to elucidate the relationship between empirical findings and interpretation. The first stage involved organizing and coding all observational notes, interview transcripts, and supporting materials based on recurring themes related to spatial use, movement, and meaning. In the second stage, descriptive analysis was performed to present how participants experienced and utilized the mosque space, focusing on patterns such as spatial hierarchy, circulation, and areas of concentration during ritual activities. In the third stage, empirical descriptions were scrutinized to ascertain relationships between spatial organization and perceived meaning. This involved analyzing distinctions such as those between central and peripheral spaces, vertical and horizontal arrangements, and interior and exterior transitions. They first established these patterns. Then, they interpreted them within larger conceptual frameworks.

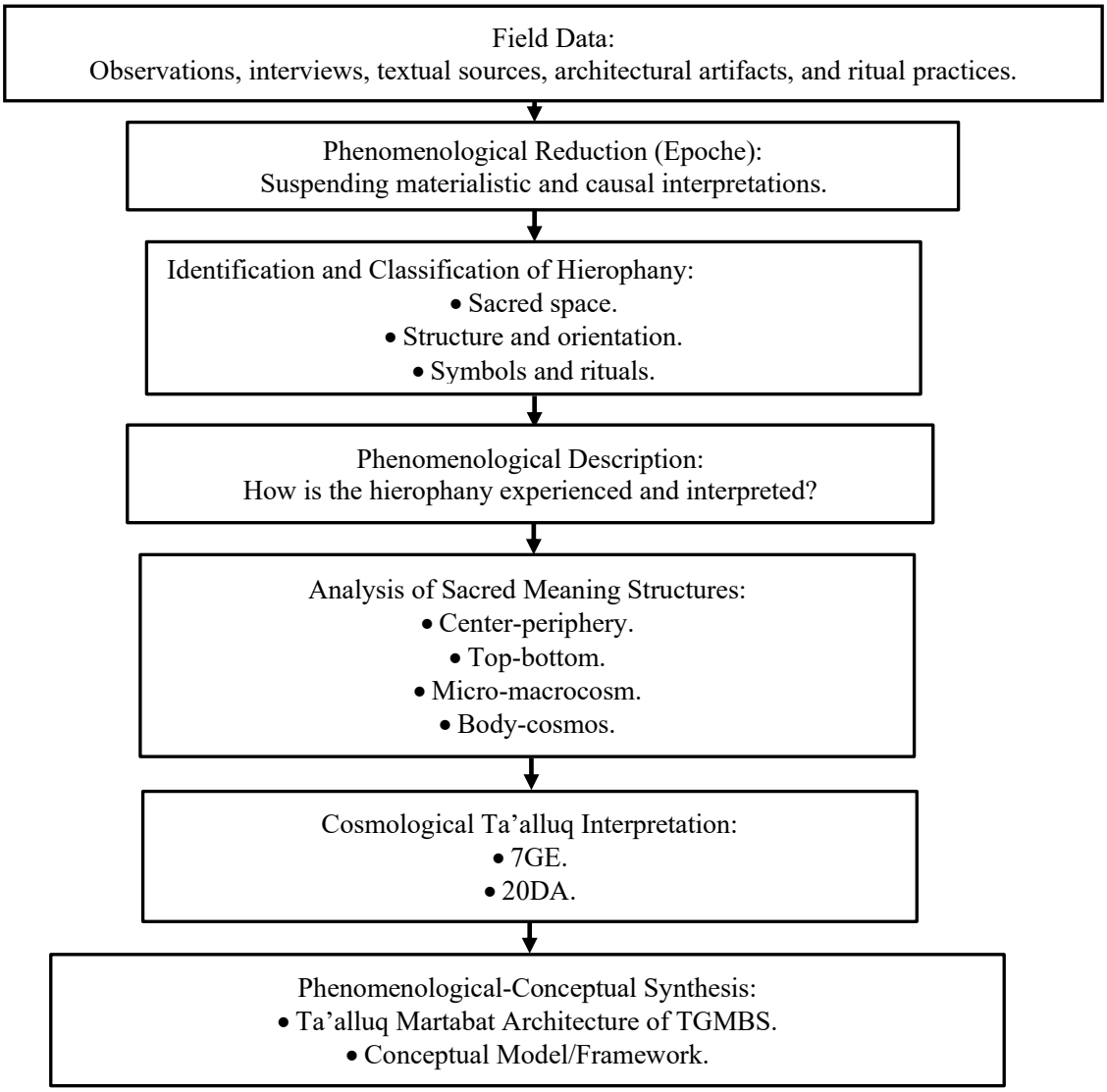


Figure 2. Data Analysis Techniques (Source: Developed by the authors, 2026)

To minimize interpretive bias, a process akin to phenomenological bracketing (*epoche*) was employed during the analysis. Initially, interpretations were deferred until a robust body of descriptive evidence was gathered. Researchers looked into other explanations and linked the findings to cosmology. We spoke with chosen participants to verify these interpretations. This helped us stay consistent with their lived experiences. This structured approach ensured that conceptual interpretation was grounded in and emerged sequentially from the empirical description, rather than preceding it.

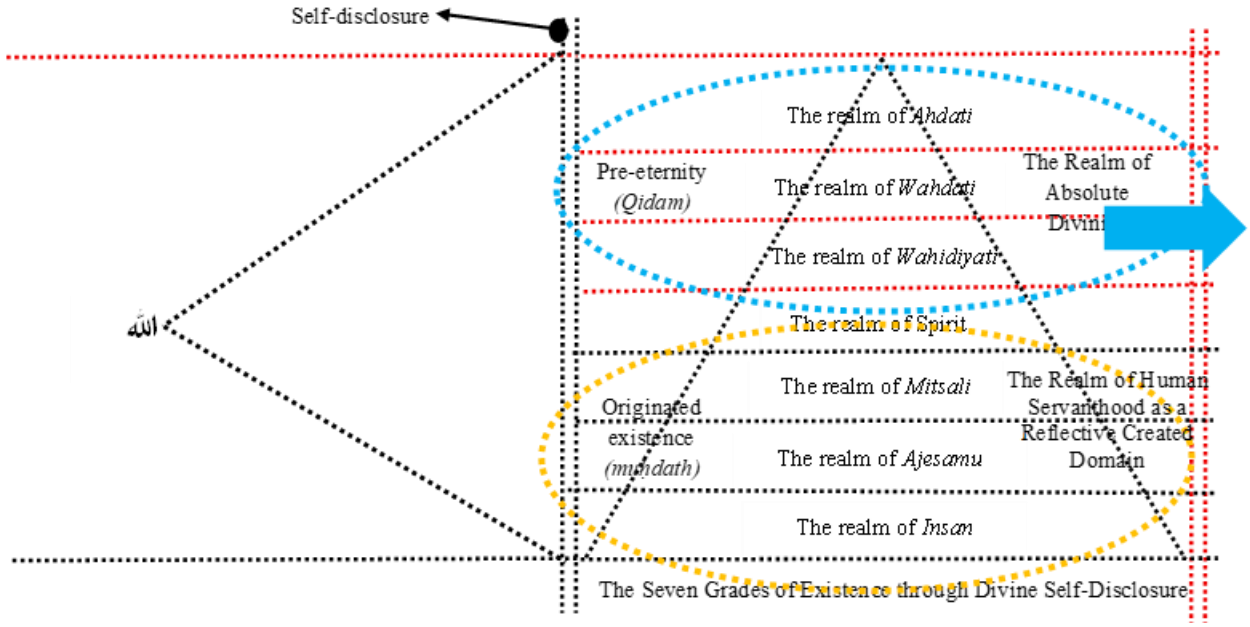
In the final stage, the identified spatial patterns and experiential meanings were interpreted in relation to the cosmological concepts of 7GE and 20DA. This interpretative step was conducted cautiously, treating cosmological frameworks as analytical tools rather than predetermined explanations. The aim was to examine possible correspondences between spatial organization and religious meaning without assuming a fixed doctrinal structure. The results of this process were then synthesized into an interpretative account of how spatial hierarchy, architectural elements, and congregational practices may be related within the TGMBS context (Figure 2).

To ensure the credibility of its findings, the study employed several validation strategies. These included triangulation across observational, interview, and documentary data, prolonged engagement in the field, participant feedback on key interpretations, and the use of detailed descriptive accounts. Through these procedures, the study clearly demonstrates how interpretations are grounded in empirical material. This approach allows the study to present conclusions based on reason and evidence. It avoids being a theoretical claim.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 The Seven Grades of Existence at the Great Mosque of the Buton Sultanate

Field observations and interviews indicate that congregants perceive the spatial organization of TGMBS as structured, rather than uniform. Worshippers consistently concentrate in the central bays aligned with the mihrab axis during daily and Friday prayers. Peripheral areas, conversely, are occupied more flexibly. Participant P3, a senior congregant, observed that “the middle rows feel more focused and orderly, while the outer sides are used when the mosque is full.” This suggests that spatial hierarchy is both physically defined and reinforced through repeated use.



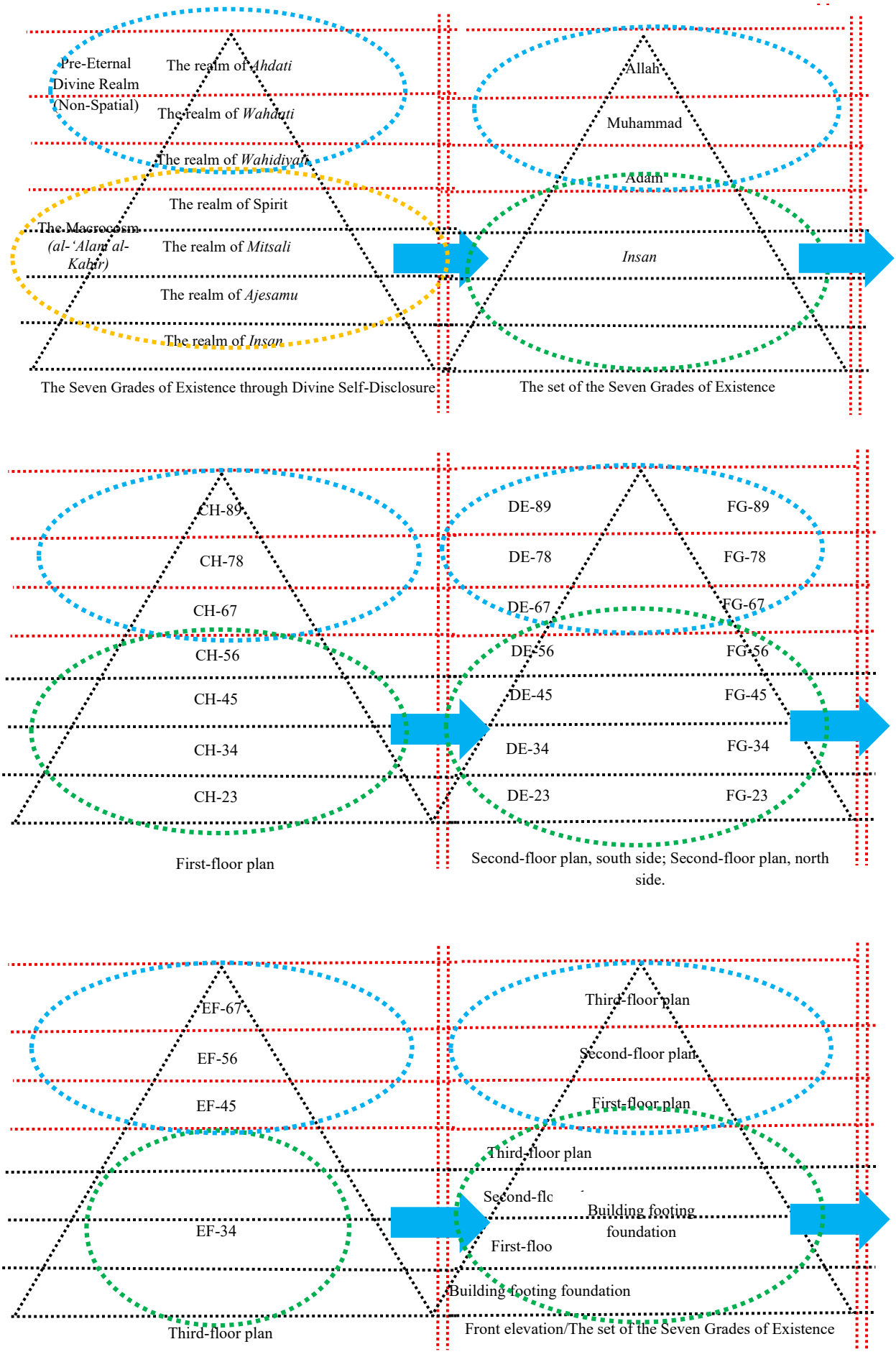


Figure 2. Ta'alluq Martabat Architecture at TGMBS (Source: Authors (2026)

Table 1. Legend of the Ta'alluq Martabat Concept at TGMBS.

No.	Symbol	Description
1	Blue dashed circular line	Pre-eternity (*Qidam*); The Realm of Absolute Divinity; Pre-Eternal Divine Realm (Non-Spatial).
2	Yellow dashed circular line	Originated existence (*muḥdath*); The Realm of Human Servanthood as a Reflective Created Domain; The Macrocosm *(al-'Alam al-Kabir).*
3	Green dashed circular line	The Microcosm *(al-'Alam al-Saghir).*

(Source: Authors' analysis (2026)

The column grid profoundly influences the prayer experience within the mosque. Approximately sixty columns, arrayed at regular intervals, delineate a series of spatial bays. Observational data suggest that these bays orchestrate both movement and positioning during prayer. Numerous participants articulated how this arrangement facilitates bodily alignment. As observed by a mosque custodian (P7), "when we stand in rows, the columns help us maintain direction and spacing." Consequently, rather than serving merely as structural supports, the columns contribute to an emergent order that governs collective practice.

Analysis of interview data indicates that some participants associate this spatial ordering with stages of spiritual awareness. For example, a religious leader (P1) stated that "people move from outside to inside, from less focus to more focus, and this is part of learning concentration in prayer." While not all participants explicitly referred to cosmological concepts, recurring references to progression, focus, and inner orientation suggest a shared experiential pattern. This pattern can be analytically related to the concept of graded spiritual awareness, as it emerges from participant narratives rather than being imposed a priori.

Vertical spatial differentiation is an important aspect of the experience. The mosque's three levels create different patterns of use. The ground floor accommodates the largest congregation and is associated with communal prayer activities. The upper levels, particularly the third floor, are used more selectively and are described by participants as quieter and more contemplative. One informant (P9, elder community member) noted that "upstairs feels calmer, not crowded, so it is easier to reflect." This indicates that vertical arrangement contributes to variations in perceived atmosphere and use (Figure 3).

From an analytical perspective, the observed spatial patterns suggest a relationship between architectural configuration and experiential differentiation. The interplay of column grids, layered floors, and axial orientation creates a structured environment that organizes movement, positioning, and attention. These findings align with previous research highlighting mosque architecture as a vehicle for symbolic and cosmological expression (Handoko et al., 2024; Idham, 2021). However, this study extends that understanding by demonstrating how these meanings are actively encountered and experienced within the built environment.

Studies of traditional mosques, such as the Great Mosque of Demak, have revealed a connection between spatial form and cosmological meaning, with structural elements like the *Saka Guru* linked to cosmological symbolism (Ashadi et al., 2025; Idham, 2021; Kurmanbek et al., 2025). While these studies primarily focus on symbolic representation, the present findings suggest that in TGMBS, spatial hierarchy is also perceived through bodily movement, positioning, and variations in spatial atmosphere.

This observation can be further situated within the framework proposed by Hakimi et al. (2023a), which classifies different approaches to mosque symbolism into representational and interpretative models. The present study aligns with the interpretative strand, extending it toward experiential analysis. Hakimi et al. (2023b) also demonstrate how cosmological narratives can be systematically related to architectural form through structured interpretation. In the case of TGMBS, however, the relationship between spatial hierarchy and 7GE is not derived solely from symbolic decoding. Instead, it emerges from patterns observed in spatial use and participant interpretation.

The layout of TGMBS creates a layered experience. Moving from the edges to the center and from low to high changes our use of space. This shift also changes our focus and the atmosphere. These patterns link

architectural space to the idea of 7GE. Researchers view 7GE as an analytical tool rather than a strict rule. The consistent reappearance of ordered spatial sequences suggests a potential embedding of cosmological ideas within spatial practices. However, this relationship is subject to interpretation and is firmly rooted in empirical observation.

The findings show that TGMBS is a place for devotion and a well-designed space. Here, the spatial layout connects with the ceremony flow and user experience. This research elucidates how cosmic significance can be investigated through architectural engagement by anchoring analysis in observable behaviors and participant accounts. Therefore, the conclusions enrich current dialogues on mosque iconography and sacred environments by illustrating how symbolic, spatial, and experiential facets can be explored within a unified analytical approach.

4.2 Plan (Horizontal Layout)

4.2.1 First-Floor Plan

The first-floor plan of TGMBS exhibits a clear spatial organization. This organization is defined by its alignment toward the qibla, a regular column grid, and seven horizontal rows (saf) that extend from the mihrab towards the rear, as illustrated in Figure 4. Field observations conducted during congregational prayer reveal a consistent pattern of occupancy: the front rows are always filled first, with individuals arriving later occupying the middle and rear zones. This behavior shows a shared view of spatial hierarchy. Being close to the mihrab matters a lot.

The mihrab area (CH-89) serves as the primary focal point within the prayer hall. Its enclosure by thick, visually distinct stone walls limits direct access for most congregants. Observations confirmed that all prayer rows aligned both visually and bodily towards this point. A participant (P2, imam assistant) explained, “Everyone follows the imam from this point, so all attention goes forward.” This shows how architectural enclosure and axial alignment create a clear focus together. Analytically, this arrangement establishes a spatial center that effectively organizes the entire prayer hall. In the context of community explanations of tawhid, this centrality can be interpreted as representing the highest level of unity. This spatial concentration may correspond to the concept of *Ahdati,* offering a grounded interpretative reference.

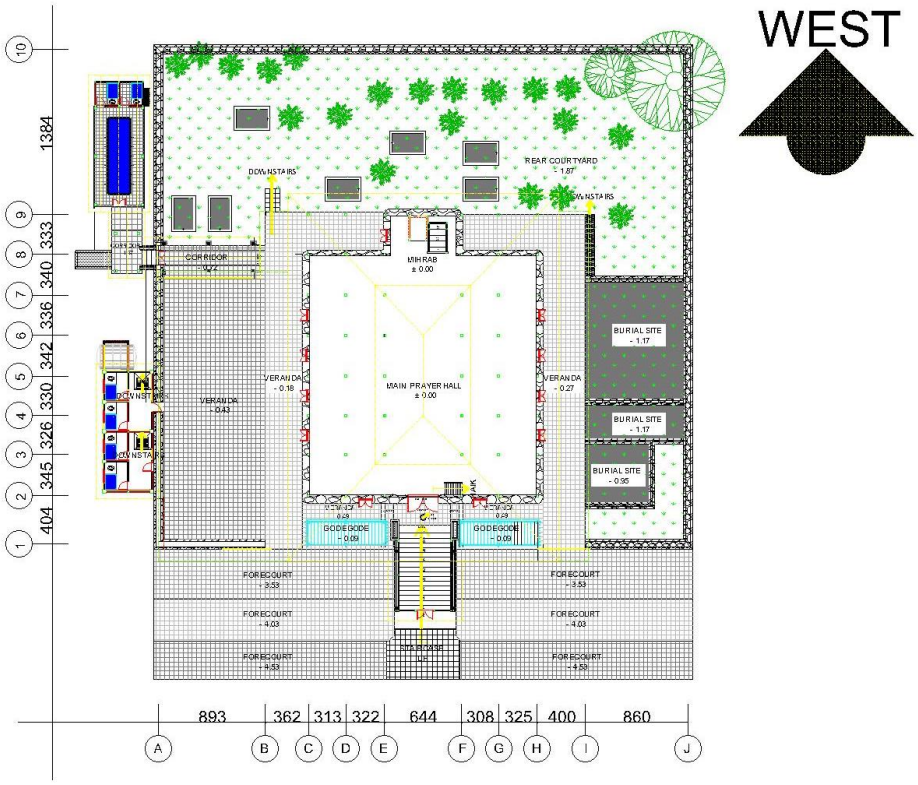


Figure 3. First-Floor Plan of TGMBS (Scale 1:100) (Source: Authors, 2026)

In the second row (CH-78), the spatial condition transitions to a more continuous and uniform field. Observations indicate that the rows are tightly aligned, with minimal visual interruption due to consistent flooring and column spacing. Participants described this area as the "most comfortable and balanced" zone for prayer (P5, regular congregant). The absence of spatial differentiation supports synchronized movement and collective focus. This suggests that architectural continuity contributes to a shared experience of equality and cohesion. Within the analytical framework of this study, such conditions may be related to *Wahdati,* understood as an experiential sense of unity emerging from spatial uniformity.

The third row (CH-67) exhibits subtle differentiation. Field observations indicate that specific community cohorts, encompassing local administrators, habitually occupy designated spots. While the prayer movement maintains its synchronicity, the spatial occupation becomes more heterogeneous. This implies a cohabitation of uniform ritualistic observance and social stratification. One participant (P8, a community elder) remarked, "People have their usual places, but we still pray together in the same line." Analytically, this scenario illustrates how spatial arrangement can accommodate both cohesion and divergence. This pattern may be associated with *Wahidiyati,* wherein multiplicity resides within a broader, cohesive framework.

In the fourth row (CH-56), repetition emerges as the dominant spatial characteristic. While the column grid, floor surface, and enclosure remain consistent, establishing a stable and predictable environment, observations during prayer reveal fewer interruptions and a steady rhythm of movement. A participant (P6) described this area as "quiet and steady, nothing distracting," suggesting that repetition and consistency foster sustained attention. From an analytical standpoint, this condition signifies a shift from central focus to distributed awareness, potentially correlating with deeper concentration during practice.

The fifth row (CH-45) functions as a transitional stratum, harmonizing the more contained central precinct with the external perimeter. This layer changes how we sense things. Openings in the side walls let in soft light. This boosts our visual link to the outside. During observation, fluctuations in luminance intensity were discernible across the prayer cycle, notably in the late afternoon. Participants conveyed that "light from the side imbues the space with a sense of openness" (P10), suggesting that environmental elements such as light and permeability shape spatial cognition.

The sixth row (CH-34) highlights bodily movement. Gestures like bowing and prostration are clear, thanks to their visibility and position. Field notes show that alignment and synchronization stay consistent, but individual expressions become more noticeable. A participant (P4) noted, "prayer is about how the body moves correctly." Architecture shapes how we engage with space. The openness here allows movement to be a vital form of interaction.

The seventh row (CH-23) is the outermost layer of the prayer hall. It serves a wider range of users, including late arrivals and overflow congregations. Observations show more variation in positioning and movement. Still, people align toward the qibla. A mosque custodian (P7) noted, "Even at the back, people still follow the same direction and rhythm." This shows that spatial continuity exists across all rows, despite differences in occupation. This outer layer blends various spatial conditions into one area of practice.

The first-floor plan shows a clear pattern across all seven rows. It moves from a strong central focus to a more flexible and distributed use. This progression is observable through spatial occupation, movement, light conditions, and participant descriptions. The plan does not just act as a static symbol. It shapes experiences with measurable design elements. These include alignment, repetition, enclosure, and openness.

This finding can be related to broader discussions on mosque symbolism and spatial meaning. Hakimi et al. (2023a) highlight that symbolic meanings in mosque architecture often stay focused on representation. In contrast, the present analysis shows how spatial meaning is also shaped through use and experience. Similarly, Hakimi et al. (2023b) show that cosmological ideas link to architectural form through interpretative frameworks. In TGMBS, the link between spatial sequence and 7GE comes from observed patterns. It is not a set structure.

Based on these observations, the first-floor plan of TGMBS can be understood as supporting a graded spatial experience. The sequence from the mihrab to the outer rows shows: 1) Differences in focus. 2)

Variations in uniformity. 3) Levels of differentiation. 4) Changes in transition. 5) Degrees of bodily engagement. These patterns help connect spatial organization to cosmological ideas like 7GE. They also keep a clear line between what we observe and how we interpret that data. The findings help us see how architectural space shapes religious experience. It does this through physical layout and shared practices.

4.2.2 Second-Floor Plan on The North Side of The Mosque

Field observations on the north side of the second floor (FG-78 to FG-23) show this area serves as a circulation zone and extends the prayer space. During Friday prayer, worshippers entered from the stairs. They paused briefly to adjust their direction and then lined up with the existing rows before joining the congregation. This sequence was repeated consistently across observation sessions. A participant (P3) noted that "people come from the stairs, stop for a moment, then follow the row before starting prayer."

This pattern shows that movement is not random. It is guided by spatial cues like column alignment, floor direction, and visibility to the qibla. Combining circulation and alignment creates an organized space in a dense area. This shows that unity comes from coordinated movement, not just from being enclosed. This study suggests that this condition may be connected to *Wahdati. Wahdati* is a feeling of unity that comes from shared experiences and movement.

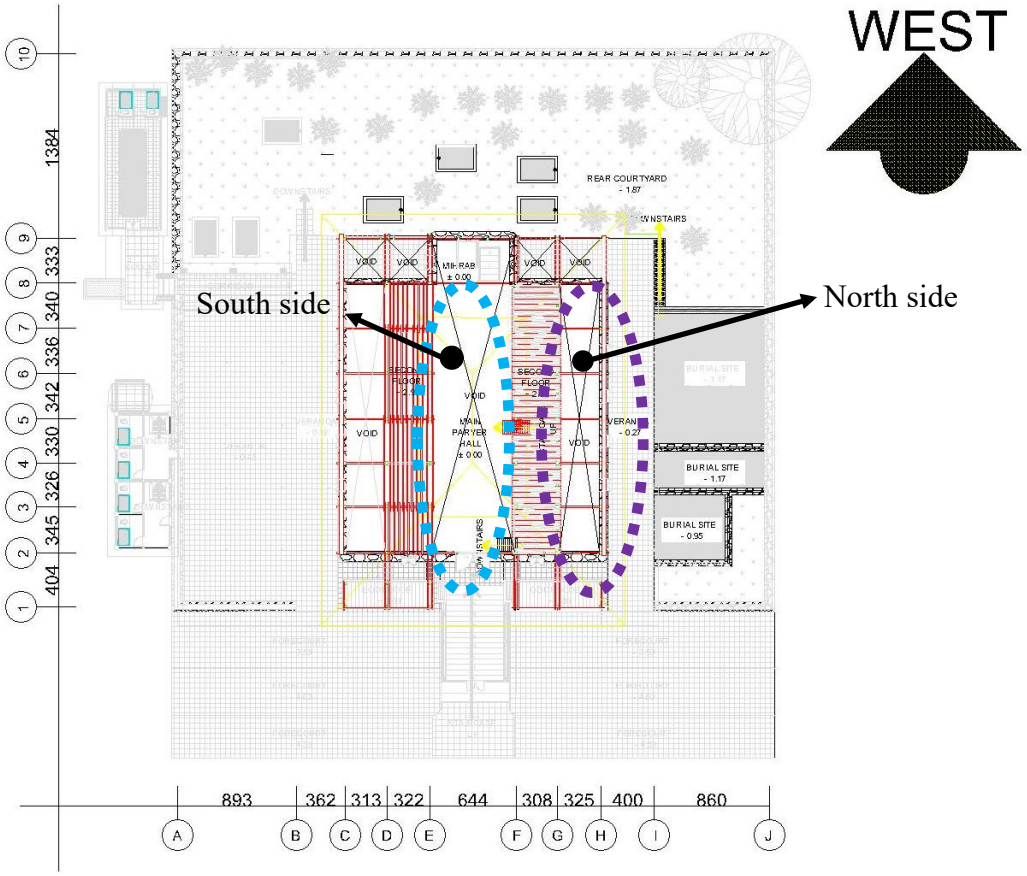


Figure 4. Second Floor Plan of TGMBS (Scale 1:100) (Source: Authors, 2026).

In FG-67, the space accommodates additional congregants without disrupting the existing prayer structure. New rows form by extending existing lines. They keep the same spacing and direction. A congregant (P6) explained that "even if the space is full, people still try to keep the line straight." This reflects a collective effort to preserve order under changing spatial conditions.

This shows how variety is arranged in a single spatial system. The architectural layout allows flexibility while maintaining coherence through alignment and repetition. This condition can be related to Wahidiyati, where multiple elements coexist within a structured whole. Importantly, this relationship is derived from observed behavior rather than assumed symbolic meaning.

FG-56 presents a different spatial atmosphere. Compared to the previous zones, this area is less crowded and acoustically quieter. During observation, several worshippers remained seated after prayer, engaging in individual supplication. One participant (P9) said, “This part is calmer. People stay here longer after prayer.” This suggests that reduced movement and lower density influence how the space is experienced. Analytically, the quieter environment supports a longer duration of occupation and inward attention. This condition comes from how a space is used and occupied, not just from its structure. In this study, this zone might relate to a more thoughtful way of experiencing things.

FG-45 functions as a transitional area where circulation and prayer overlap. Some worshippers move through, while others stay in prayer. This creates overlapping movement patterns. Changes in light intensity from side openings were also recorded, especially in the afternoon. A participant (P10) noted that “light from the side makes this area feel more open compared to the inside.” This indicates that both movement and environmental factors shape spatial perception. The mix of circulation and stillness creates a balance. This balance lies between focused areas and more flexible ones. This transitional quality is an in-between space in the overall sequence.

In FG-34, the spatial configuration emphasizes bodily alignment. The floor lines (saf), column spacing, and clear orientation toward the qibla guide posture during prayer. Movements like bowing and prostration happen closely together. A participant (P4) stated that “the important thing is that the body follows the line correctly.” This highlights the role of architectural elements in regulating bodily practice. Analytically, the space functions as a framework that supports coordinated physical action.

Meaning in this area is closely tied to repetition and alignment rather than symbolic representation. FG-23 is at the outer end of the sequence. It serves a wider range of users, including late arrivals and overflow congregants. Observations show greater variation in positioning, although alignment toward the qibla is maintained. A mosque custodian (P7) explained that “even at the back, people still follow the same direction and rhythm.”

This shows that spatial order spans the whole sequence, even with variations in density and occupation. This outer zone combines different usage patterns into a smooth system of alignment and movement. Across FG-78 to FG-23, the second-floor north side shows a steady shift from controlled entry to shared use. You can see this change in: 1) Circulation patterns. 2) Row formations. 3) Light conditions. 4) Participant descriptions. 5) The spatial sequence does more than symbolize. It shapes experience through measurable architectural elements and regular practice. This indicates that spatial order extends across the entire sequence despite differences in density and occupation.

Analytically, this outer zone integrates multiple patterns of use into a continuous system of alignment and movement. Across FG-78 to FG-23, the second-floor north side demonstrates a consistent progression from controlled entry movement to distributed occupation. This progression is observable through circulation patterns, row formation, light conditions, and participant descriptions. Rather than functioning as a fixed symbolic representation, the spatial sequence organizes experience through measurable architectural elements and repeated practice (Figure 5).

These findings relate to bigger discussions about mosque symbolism and space. Hakimi et al. (2023a) note that symbolic interpretations often remain at a representational level. The present analysis extends this by showing how meaning is also produced through spatial use and movement. In addition, Hakimi et al. (2023b), cosmological ideas can connect to architectural form through structured interpretation. In TGMBS, spatial sequence links to 7GE. This happens through patterns of circulation, alignment, and occupation. It is not based on set symbolic meanings.

The second-floor north side acts as a space that connects movement and prayer. The sequence from FG-78 to FG-23 shows how architecture, user actions, and environment work together. This creates a structured experience. This gives a real basis for linking spatial organization to cosmological ideas. It also keeps observation and interpretation clearly separate.

4.2.3 Third-Floor Plan of The Mosque

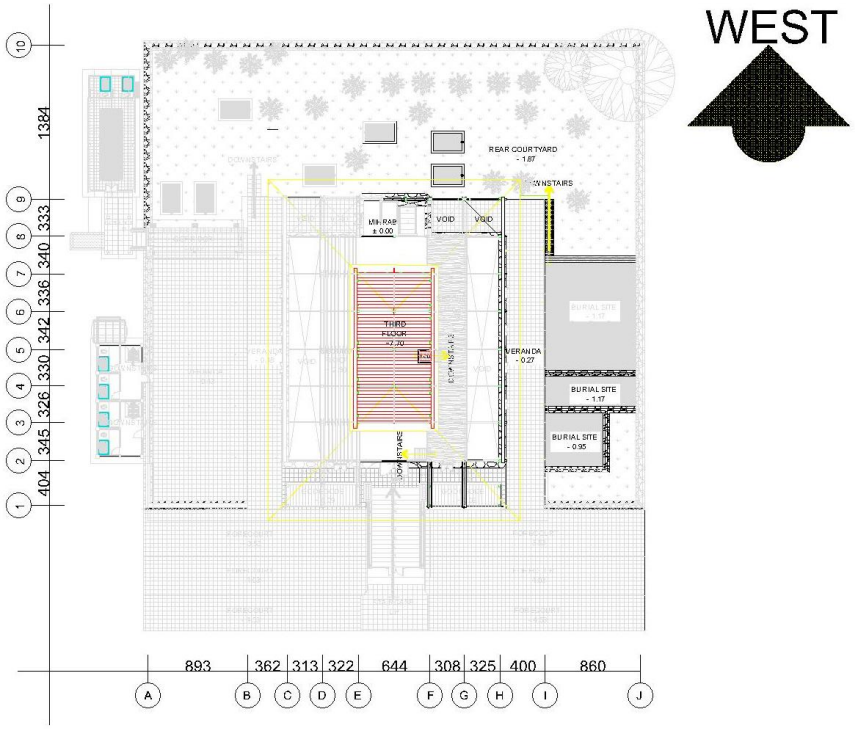


Figure 5. Third-Floor Plan of TGMBS (Scale 1:100) (Source: Authors, 2026).

Field observations indicate that the third-floor spaces (EF-67, EF-56, EF-45, and EF-34) are significantly different from those on the lower floors. They vary in both use and spatial character. These rooms are small. They have timber floors and minimal furniture. They aren't set up for group prayer. During multiple observation sessions, no structured prayer activity was recorded in these areas. Instead, people sometimes used the spaces briefly for sitting, resting, or quiet observation. A mosque custodian (P2) stated that "this upper space is rarely used for prayer; people usually come here just to sit quietly."

This indicates that the third floor does not function as an extension of ritual space but as a distinct spatial layer within the mosque. These rooms lack prayer rows, mihrab orientation, and a congregation. So, they don't follow formal rituals for meaning. Instead, spatial experience is shaped by enclosure, light, material, and outward views.

In EF-67, the highest room, observations recorded very limited movement and prolonged stillness. The space is enclosed, with filtered light entering through small openings and a clear visual connection to the sea horizon. A participant (P5) described the experience as "very quiet, you feel separated from the activity below." This means the spatial condition comes from less sensory input and a disconnect from the main congregation. The mix of enclosure, elevation, and silence creates spatial isolation. This study may show a type of withdrawal. Here, the layout helps cut down distractions and boosts self-awareness.

EF-56 shows similar material and dimensional characteristics but differs in visual openness. Observations indicate that light penetration is more even, and the horizon view is wider. A participant (P8) noted that "here it feels more open, not as closed as the room above." Small changes in opening and light can greatly impact how we see space. The room feels enclosed but offers a strong connection to the outside. This produces a more balanced spatial condition between interior containment and outward orientation. Compared to EF-67, the experience here is less isolated and more visually integrated.

In EF-45, the space changes more because of several openings that face various directions. We recorded changes in light, airflow, and outside views during the day. A participant (P11) stated that "you can see different sides of the sea from here, depending on where you stand." This indicates that the space introduces perceptual variation within a consistent structural frame. Analytically, the presence of multiple visual directions creates a more dynamic spatial experience. Rather than a single focal orientation, the room supports

shifting attention depending on position and time. This shows a shift from seeing space the same way to interacting with the environment in different ways.

EF-34, at the lower end of the third floor, has more interaction between the inside space and the outside view. Occupants often stand near openings and look outside, but they stay inside the room. A participant (P1) explained that "from here, you can still feel inside, but your view is already outside." This suggests that the space functions as a threshold between enclosure and openness. Analytically, EF-34 mediates between the inward condition of the upper rooms and the more active spatial layers below. The balance between containment and exposure creates a transitional spatial experience. The third-floor sequence from EF-67 to EF-34 shows a shift. It moves from quiet, enclosed spaces to more open and varied areas. This progression is observable through differences in light, view, airflow, and patterns of use. These variations come from clear architectural and environmental factors, not from symbolic ones (Figure 6).

In relation to existing scholarship, Hakimi et al. (2023a) notes that many views on mosque architecture focus on symbols. They often overlook how meaning is felt in the space. Spatial meaning in TGMBS comes from the environment and how users interact with it. It's not just about symbolic representation. Furthermore, Hakimi et al. (2023b) demonstrate how cosmological narratives can be systematically related to architectural form. On the third floor, you see a strong link between layout and meaning. This comes from clear differences in how spaces are enclosed, visible, and used.

The third-floor spaces are like a quiet layer in TGMBS. They support personal and thoughtful use. The sequence from EF-67 to EF-34 shows how enclosure, light, and orientation change our spatial experiences. This gives a solid basis for seeing the third floor as part of a larger layout in the mosque. It also keeps a clear line between what we observe and how we interpret it.

4.3 Building Elevation (Vertical Organization)

4.3.1 Mosque Front Elevation

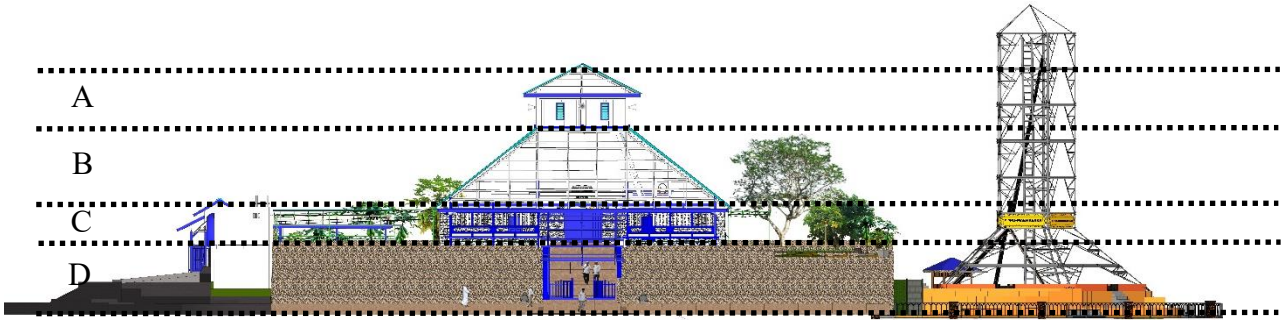


Figure 6. Front Elevation of TGMBS (Scale 1:100); Illustrating the Seven Grades of Existence and the Realm of Human Servanthood as a Reflective Created Domain.

Table 2. Legend of the Ta'alluq Martabat Concept on the Front Elevation of TGMBS.

Symbol	Description
A	Allah; The realm of *Ahdati.*
B	Muhammad: The realm of *Wahdati.*
C	Adam; The realm of Wahidiyati.
D	*Insan*; The realm of *Insan.*

(Source: Authors' analysis, 2026)

Field observation shows that the TGMBS foundation follows the site's natural shape. This causes noticeable differences in floor height in the entrance area. The structure uses local limestone. It has uneven steps, so users must adjust their footing when entering the mosque. Some worshippers slowed down as they stepped onto the elevated platform. A participant (P3) stated that "when entering, we automatically step more carefully because the ground is not flat."

This indicates that the foundation is not only a structural response to topography but also shapes bodily movement. The change in level creates a clear boundary between the outside ground and the inside space. Elevation, material differences, and movement changes show that we feel a transition in our bodies. In this study, this condition appears to be the first stage of spatial differentiation between the outer and inner zones.

On the first floor, records show a strong enclosure made of thick walls. There are a few openings, and everything points toward the mihrab. The interior lighting is relatively controlled, with daylight entering through a series of doors and windows along the façade. During congregational prayer, all movement and orientation are directed toward the qibla. A congregant (P6) explained that "once inside, the focus is only forward, there is nothing to distract from the prayer."

Architectural features like wall thickness, window placement, and orientation help cut visual distractions. They also support clear directional alignment. The space creates focused attention by using enclosure and controlled light. The *Pusena Tana* is in the mihrab. Informants said it's an important focus point. However, it looks like a small cavity. Its importance comes not from how eye-catching it is, but from where it stands in the directional and ritual system. Spatial intensity comes from alignment, enclosure, and collective attention, not from symbolic elaboration.

The second floor shows a different spatial condition. Access to this level is more limited. The circulation paths are narrower, and visibility is reduced compared to the first floor. The north side is sometimes used by congregants. The south side mainly provides structural support. A participant (P8) noted that "upstairs is quieter, not as crowded as below."

This suggests a reduction in density and activity. The second floor acts as a middle layer. Here, space is used less collectively and more in a regulated way. The difference between the north and south zones shows a split between how things are used and how they're supported. This level doesn't focus on rituals. Instead, it keeps a clear spatial flow throughout the building system. The move from the first to the second floor shows less congregational activity and more spatial control.

On the third floor, we see a big change in materials and the environment. The structure becomes lighter, with more openings and increased exposure to natural light and airflow. The roof design and window layout provide clear views of the sky and nearby landscape. During site visits, we saw occupants standing by openings or sitting quietly for a bit. A participant (P1) stated that "up here, you can feel the wind and see far outside."

This indicates that the third floor is experienced differently from the enclosed spaces below. The blend of openness and light lets people focus on the outside world, not just themselves. The absence of a formal prayer arrangement further distinguishes this level from the main ritual space. The building shows a gradual change in space from the ground up. It starts with an uneven entry. Then, it leads to a closed prayer area. Next is a controlled intermediate space. Finally, it opens up to an elevated environment. You can see these changes in the material, enclosure, light, circulation, and how users behave (Figure 7).

In relation to existing scholarship, Hakimi et al. (2023a) stress that mosque studies often look at symbolic meaning. They don't fully explore how people experience spatial hierarchy. The current findings show that vertical organization in TGMBS creates meaning. This happens through physical changes and shifts in the environment. Furthermore, Hakimi et al. (2023b) demonstrate how cosmological ideas can be systematically linked to architectural structure. The vertical sequence gives us a way to connect spatial hierarchy to larger interpretative frameworks. This approach doesn't depend only on symbolic representation.

A comparison with the Old Katangka Mosque highlights this distinction. Studies show the Old Katangka Mosque has one main prayer hall. This design creates a sense of unity in the space (Akyurek, 2024; Aryanti &

Achmadi, 2024; Khan, 2025). In contrast, TGMBS distributes spatial differentiation vertically across multiple levels. Sacred spatial organization has two forms: central concentration and layered progression. The front elevation of TGMBS shows how vertical design affects the way we experience space. It uses clear architectural elements to create this effect. The shift from a thick foundation to an open upper level shows a clear change in how space is enclosed, what materials are used, and how each area functions. This gives a clear basis for understanding how architectural hierarchy works in the building. It helps interpretations stay rooted in what we see, not in assumed meanings.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

This study views TGMBS through *Ta'alluq* Martabat Architecture. It sees architecture not just as a physical structure but as an important event that reveals deeper meaning. The mosque reflects the Sacred, as described by Mircea Eliade. It shows transcendent reality through its design. The teachings of 7GE and 20DA shape its architecture, rituals, and daily religious life. The findings show that TGMBS changes from the foundation to the upper levels. This reflects a clear path, helping move from servitude to recognizing the Divine Names, and then to unity and transcendence. The study doesn't say that architecture controls everything. Instead, it shows a back-and-forth relationship between space, rituals, and worshippers' thoughts. This interaction helps bring sacred meaning to life.

This research shows that *Ta'alluq* Martabat Architecture helps us study architecture. It enhances the study of Nusantara Islamic architecture. It redefines the mosque as a sacred experience, not a symbol. It provides a phenomenological model to analyze sacred architecture. This model combines cosmology, spatial hierarchy, ritual practice, and collective consciousness. The framework has three main contributions: 1) It helps to analyze historic mosques and sacred spaces. 2) It also serves as a design-thinking model for modern mosque design. It emphasizes experiences over appearances. 3) It offers a way to conserve these sites. This method focuses on their spiritual meaning and physical preservation. Ta'alluq Martabat Architecture is not an interpretation of TGMBS. It offers a new way to understand, design, and protect sacred architecture.

6.0 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Despite its theoretical and methodological contributions, this study has several limitations. It starts with Eliadean phenomenology. This approach prioritizes lived religious meaning over historical-positivist or causal validation of 7GE. Second, empirically *Wolio*-Buton-based findings are contextually deep but not statistically generalizable. Third, using oral traditions and personal stories can lead to different interpretations and gaps in memory. Triangulation can help reduce these issues, but it can't completely fix them. Fourth, the single-case design offers deep insights but restricts comparisons. To apply findings more widely, further systematic studies are needed.

7.0 FUTURE RESEARCH

This study suggests several paths for future research. We need comparative studies of historic mosques in Buton and Nusantara. This will show if *Ta'alluq* Martabat Architecture matches local, regional, or wider Islamic trends. Interdisciplinary methods mix religious phenomenology, architectural anthropology, and cognitive science. These methods show how spatial hierarchy and ritual movement shape religious awareness.

The framework also provides a basis for design strategies. These strategies translate cosmological ideas into spatial sequences, moving beyond mere replication. Phenomenological approaches in conservation help protect material aspects. They also keep rituals and experiences alive. We need more research on how modernization and globalization impact sacred spaces. This should go beyond one case study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors gratefully acknowledge Universitas Halu Oleo for its institutional support in the preparation, revision, and publication of this manuscript.

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