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The philosophical meaning of the façade of the traditional Noble House of the Bugis Bone

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article history: Received January 02, 2025 Received in revised form June 30, 2025 Accepted November 23, 2025 Available online December 01, 2025 Keywords: Bugis nobili Façade composition Philosophical meaning Traditional architecture *Corresponding author: Andi Muhammad Akbar Architecture Study Program, Faculty of Engineering, Universitas Muslim Indonesia, Makassar Email: am.akbar@umi.ac.id ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5334-5336	<i>The former kingdom system in Bone has shaped social stratification within the Bugis community, influencing the differentiation in the façade design of traditional houses. The traditional houses of Bugis nobility in Bone exhibit architectural characteristics that reflect high social status and noble cultural values. This study aims to reveal the philosophical meanings manifested in the façade composition of traditional Bugis noble houses in Bone. A qualitative method with an exploratory phenomenological approach was employed, involving direct observation and in-depth interviews with homeowners. The study focuses on both tangible and intangible phenomena. Bone Regency was selected as the research site due to its representative role as the center of the largest Bugis kingdom in South Sulawesi. The sample consists of three types of noble houses: (1) Bola Saoraja (king's house), (2) Bola Salassa (royal official's house), and (3) Bola Sada (descendant's house), all of which maintain their original architectural forms. Findings indicate that Alliri Awa Bola, the lower part of the house, symbolizes the grandeur of the kingdom; Ale Bola, the main body of the house, represents the perfection of leadership qualities; and Timpa Laja, the roof section, embodies noble thoughts and the duty to care for society. Thus, the composition of the façade of the Bugis Bone noble house is interpreted as the embodiment of a large royal system that has character and protects its people.</i>

Introduction

Traditional architecture represents a cultural expression that reflects the social, spiritual, and political values within a community's life. In the context of the Bugis society in South Sulawesi, the form and structure of its traditional houses are not merely determined by functional considerations or the tropical climate but also serve as symbolic representations of social hierarchy and the cultural values that live within the community. The monarchical governmental structure that once played a major role in

traditional Bugis society in Bone produced a complex social stratification system, which is reflected in the typology of its traditional houses, particularly in the noble houses of the Bugis Bone such as *Bola Saoraja*, *Bola Salassa*, and *Bola Sada* (Akbar 2007).

These noble traditional houses function not only as dwellings but also as symbols of power, honor, and social control. Previous studies affirm that the Bugis noble house embodies kinship values, social status, and the political structure of the once-flourishing Bugis kingdoms in South Sulawesi (Hamka and Winarni 2024). The façade



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of the house consists of three main compositional components: *Awa Bola* (the underfloor space), *Ale Bola* (the main body of the house), and *Timpa Laja* (the roof), each of which carries symbolic roles and philosophical meanings related to leadership, spirituality, and the cultural values of Bugis society (Yushand A.M 2024).

However, studies on Bugis traditional houses have thus far focused predominantly on tangible visual elements such as ornaments and the physical form of buildings (Carina, Marji, and Imam 2023), while largely neglecting the intangible aspects that are philosophical and symbolic in nature. This gap presents a significant research opportunity, considering that many architectural elements represent the local wisdom values of the community, such as the principles of *Sipakatau* (mutual humanization), *Sipakalebbi* (mutual respect), and *Sipakainge* (mutual reminder), which are embedded within the spatial structure and layout of the house (Abidah 2017).

Recent studies in vernacular architecture have also highlighted the importance of *Sulapa Eppa* symbolism, which represents the four natural elements earth, water, fire, and wind as the philosophical foundation of balance and interconnection between humans, nature, and spirituality. Although the study by Hamka and Winarni (2024) does not directly discuss this symbolism, their research on the spatial organization of Bugis houses indicates that local values and tropicalism remain integrated into the house design, supporting both environmental adaptation and social transformation.

Historically and culturally, the noble houses of the Bugis in Bone also possess significant value within the context of cultural heritage preservation. Cultural heritage protection policies in South Sulawesi have designated these houses as part of the heritage assets that must be preserved, both in their physical form and in the cultural values they embody (Rahim and Abbas 2021). The conservation of noble houses is thus not only directed toward maintaining the structural integrity of the buildings but also toward strengthening the cultural values internalized within their spatial and symbolic architectural systems.

Unfortunately, field surveys indicate that many Bugis noble houses remain in a deteriorating condition. A considerable number have undergone alterations in form, been relocated from their original sites, or even abandoned by their descendants (Subroto 2019).

Without proper documentation, these houses risk disappearing, along with the cultural values embedded within them. Such loss would hinder efforts to reconstruct historical narratives and to comprehend the concept of local wisdom that has been transmitted across generations (Rahmansah and Rauf 2014).

Methodologically, research on traditional architecture and its embedded philosophical meanings requires an approach capable of deeply exploring cultural dimensions. A combination of field observation, interviews with cultural informants, and thematic analysis has proven effective in uncovering symbolic meanings within the sacred spaces of Bugis traditional houses (Naing, Hadi, and Djamereng 2019). Moreover, ethnographic approaches, such as those employed by Faisal and Sari (2019) demonstrate that architectural forms can be interpreted as ritual media and social narratives, reinforcing the role of architecture as a representation of identity and social relationships.

Comparative studies with other ethnic architectural practices in Indonesia further strengthen the unique position of Bugis houses as distinctive cultural heritage. For instance, the research by Masseleng, Sir, and Sampebulu (2019) on *pangrampak* in Toraja houses reveals that the attic's function as a spiritual space also exists in Bugis architecture, albeit with different meanings. In Minangkabau, the attic's role as a sacred space is also recognized, although documentation remains limited. This indicates that the symbolic function of vertical space in vernacular houses is a common phenomenon in the architecture of the Indonesian archipelago, despite its locally varied interpretations.

Within this framework, this study focuses on revealing the philosophical meanings manifested in the façade composition of the traditional noble houses of the Bugis Bone. The three principal façade elements *Awa Bola*, *Ale Bola*, and *Timpa Laja* are examined for their symbolic and philosophical meanings to understand how architecture reflects the systems of values, leadership, and social structures within Bugis society. This research is expected to enrich our understanding of vernacular architecture as a material embodiment of cultural identity and to contribute to cultural heritage preservation efforts that extend beyond the physical realm into conceptual and symbolic dimensions.

Furthermore, this study aims to fill the gap in the existing literature concerning the

philosophical interpretation of Bugis noble houses while simultaneously bridging the relationship between cultural studies and architectural practice. The symbolism of *Sulapa Eppa* as a spatial guide and the leadership values of *Lempu* (honesty), *Warani* (bravery), *Macca* (wisdom), and *Getteng* (firmness) form the conceptual framework for interpreting the façade's form. Consequently, the results of this study are not only significant for advancing architectural knowledge but are also relevant to efforts aimed at preserving the values of local cultural wisdom embedded within traditional architecture.

Ultimately, it is crucial to emphasize that the preservation of Bugis traditional houses does not merely involve maintaining their physical form but also ensuring the continuity of the meanings and philosophies embedded within them. In the context of modernity and globalization, which tend to homogenize cultural expressions, the noble houses of the Bugis in Bone stand as vital symbols of local cultural resistance and the strengthening of community identity rooted in ancestral heritage values.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative approach within an exploratory phenomenological framework, as described by Creswell and Poth (2016), emphasizing a deep understanding of meanings shaped by participants' experiences and their surrounding socio-cultural contexts. This approach is relevant because the object of study encompasses not only tangible physical aspects but also intangible dimensions namely, the symbolic and philosophical values inherent in Bugis traditional architectural forms. Consistent with Kurniawan (2018), traditional architecture is not merely regarded as a visual physical form but as an expression of cultural values and the collective identity of a society.

Data collection techniques were conducted through direct observation within a natural setting and in-depth interviews with the owners of Bugis

noble traditional houses. This process was complemented by reflective discussion methods as a feedback approach to obtain narrative reconstructions concerning the history, symbolic values, and inherited perceptions of these architectural forms (Palandi 2020). These narratives are known in Bugis culture as *Attauriolong'e*, an oral knowledge tradition passed intergenerationally to preserve cultural validity and local interpretation. The research involved key cultural authorities, including local cultural experts and historians Yushand A. M (2024); Pamelleri A. P (2024), as well as Panre Bola the traditional Bugis house architects (Baitullah 2024). These informants possess the expertise to interpret the forms and functions of the façades of Bugis noble traditional houses and the philosophical meanings embedded within them.

The observation objects were focused on the vertical structural composition forming the house façade, encompassing three primary sections: (1) the underfloor space (*Awa Bola*), (2) the main body of the house (*Ale Bola*), and (3) the roof or upper structure (*Timpa Laja*). Each section was analyzed in terms of its physical form and symbolic meaning through an ethnically grounded approach to comprehend the living local knowledge held by the community. The study was conducted in Bone Regency, South Sulawesi, which historically served as the central seat of power for the largest Bugis kingdom in the region (Pelras 2006). The selection of this location was based on its relevance as a representative of Bugis noble culture. The total sample comprised 12 traditional houses validated by cultural experts and historians as authentic noble houses of the Bugis Bone. Sampling was carried out purposively, with the criterion that these houses retained their original façade forms and had not undergone significant structural modifications. As explained by Akbar (2007), the typology of Bugis noble houses can be classified into three main categories based on social hierarchy, namely:

1. *Bola Saoraja'e* (royal house)
2. *Bola Salassa* (house of royal officials)
3. *Bola Sada* (house of royal descendants)

Table 1. Typology of the Façade Form of Bugis Bone Noble Houses

No	Type of house sample	Number of samples	Vertical spatial composition of the façade		
			<i>Awa bola</i>	<i>Ale bola</i>	<i>Timpa laja</i>
1.	<i>Bola Saoraja</i>	1	Large pillars without partitioned space	With terrace and stair covering	5 tiers
2.	<i>Bola Salassa</i>	4	Large pillars without partitioned space	Without terrace, with stair covering	4 tiers
3.	<i>Bola Sada</i>	7	Large pillars without partitioned space	Without terrace and without stair covering	3 tiers

Methodologically, data organization was carried out through thematic categorization and meaning coding (*thematic coding*) to identify recurring symbolic patterns. The analysis was performed inductively, with triangulation of sources obtained from interviews, observations, and reflective discussions to ensure data consistency and the depth of qualitative interpretation derived from each house and informant involved in the research.

Results and discussion

The discussion of traditional Bugis aristocratic house architecture in Bone is fundamentally inseparable from social structure, local cosmology, and cultural values passed down through generations. In the context of phenomenological studies of vernacular architecture, the ideal structure of discussion encompasses three main aspects: cultural context, user experience, and visual representation (Agustiyan et al. 2023; Tedy Wiraseptya and Stefany 2023). Therefore, the facade structure of Bugis aristocratic houses is analyzed not only from a morphological perspective but also in relation to the value system and cultural experience of the Bugis people.

Cosmologically, the Bugis community recognizes the concept of *Sulapa Eppa*, a four-sided form symbolizing the perfection of life through the elements of earth, water, fire, and wind (Putra 2022). This principle underlies the organization of house structures, which are positioned to resemble the anatomy of the human body: *Awa Bola* as the feet (lower part of the house), *Ale Bola* as the body (main space), and *Timpa Laja/Rakkeang* as the head (roof). These three components not only serve spatial functions but also imply relationships between humans, nature, and God (Maulana Kurniawan et al. 2020).

Pamelleri A. P (2024) explains that *Sulapa Eppa* represents the values of leadership, wherein

the house, as the center of power, reflects the character of its owner. This is reinforced by Yushand A. M (2024), who introduced the term *Sulapa Eppa'na Arung*, referring to the four ideal qualities of a Bugis leader: *Lempu* (honest), *Warani* (courageous), *Macca* (intelligent), and *Getteng* (firm). These characteristics are visualized in geometric forms and house structures, making the building not merely a dwelling but an expression of power and aristocratic personality.

In terms of social representation, the architectural structure of aristocratic houses significantly differs from that of ordinary houses. While common houses (*Bola Ata*) are simpler and more functional, aristocratic houses (*Bola Arung*) are built with grand and symbolic structures. Although both follow a vertical arrangement *Awa Bola*, *Ale Bola*, and *Rakkeang* the function and meaning of each element differ substantially (Sabil et al. 2021). Similar phenomena are found in the Rejang community, where building forms and materials reflect social status (Ramawangsa, Prihatiningrum, and Haidi 2020), as well as in studies of traditional houses in Nusa Tenggara, which demonstrate the symbolic power of the house owner (Fanggidae and Bahar 2023).

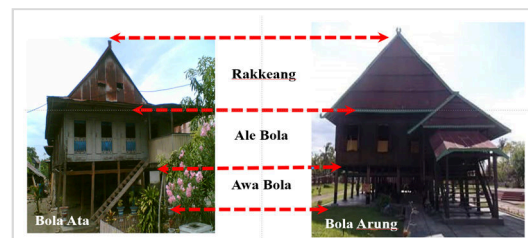


Figure 1. Composition of spatial arrangement

1. Composition of the lower structure (*Awa Bola*)

The lower part of the house (*Awa Bola*) in Bugis aristocratic houses holds important philosophical and functional meaning. Physically, this component consists of a series of large posts without spatial partitions, known as *Alliri Maraja*.

According to Yushand A. M (2024), this lower area is considered a sacred space inhabited by supernatural beings and is therefore not used for human activities. Some homeowners even install tiled floors to maintain cleanliness, believing that cleanliness drives away evil spirits and negative energy.

Structurally, however, the large posts play a critical role in supporting a two-story house with expansive upper spaces. Baitullah (2024), a *Panre Bola* (traditional Bugis architect), explains that the large dimensions of *Alliri Maraja* are necessary because aristocratic houses also function as royal offices, deliberation spaces, and reception areas for numerous royal guests. This lower space establishes a clear territorial division:

- *Watampola*: Higher floor occupied exclusively by the aristocracy.
- *Tamping*: Lower floor used by commoners or non-aristocratic guests.

This spatial concept reflects the vertical social structure typical of aristocratic societies. Similarly, Damayanti and Jasjfi (2022) describe the lower spaces of Minangkabau *Rumah Gadang* as reflecting hierarchical functions and social boundaries. Likewise, the large column structures in Toraja traditional houses (*Tongkonan*) demonstrate structural strength and the status of the owning family (Sri Wahyuni et al. 2023). From an architectural expression perspective, Kurniawan (2018) emphasizes that the grandeur of traditional buildings relies not only on physical size but also on proportional scale and the psychological impression it creates. Sabil et al. (2021) further note that large columns and the openness of lower spaces are part of a visual perception uniquely identifiable as local cultural identity.

Thus, the composition of *Awa Bola* is understood not only as a structural element but also as a reflection of social status, power structures, and aristocratic symbolism. The larger the posts and the more expansive the lower space, the higher the social status of the owner. This aligns with Rikyanto, Maximillian, and Darmayanti (2023), who assert that the complexity and scale of aristocratic architecture signify the power and influence of the owner within the community.



Figure 2. Composition of the lower structure of a traditional Bugis aristocratic house in Bone

2. Composition of the house body (*Ale Bola*)

The body of the traditional Bugis aristocratic house, known as *Ale Bola*, is the central part of the house's spatial system and plays a vital role in representing social structure and leadership values within the Bugis community. The spatial composition of *Ale Bola* consists of two main areas: *Watampola*, the main elevated space used by the aristocracy, and *Tamping*, a lower space serving as a common area for ordinary activities and daily domestic life. This configuration establishes a strong hierarchical representation within the vertical spatial arrangement.

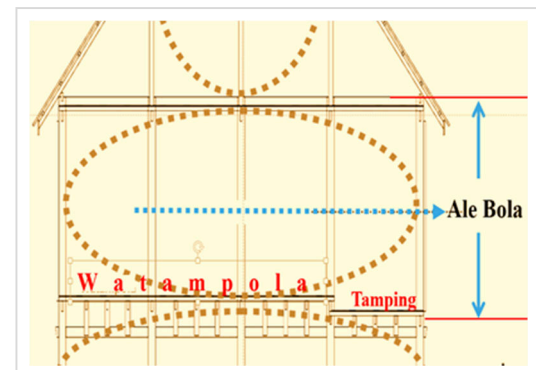


Figure 3. Forms of Watampola and Tamping

Spatially, this division creates a specific orientation toward the house facade. In *Bola Saoraja* and *Bola Salassa* houses, *Watampola* is located on the left side of the facade and usually features *Tellongeng* windows, while *Tamping* connects directly to the main entrance (*Tange*)

and stairs (*Sapana*) on the right side. In *Bola Sada*, *Tamping* is positioned centrally along the facade, aligned with the main access route. This arrangement follows not only functional logic but also conveys a visual representation of the social status of the inhabitants. From a phenomenological approach, the experience of occupants in space is critical to understanding the architectural dimensions of traditional houses (Agustiyar et al. 2023; Tedy Wiraseptya and Stefvany 2023). *Ale Bola* thus functions not only as living space but also as a space for social interaction and political decision-making, especially within aristocratic households. The spatial experience reinforces the social status of the house owner and symbolically legitimizes leadership.

Symbolically, *Ale Bola* represents the “middle world” or microcosm, bridging the lower world (*Awa Bola*) and the upper world (*Timpa Laja/Rakkeang*). Yunus (2012) states that this microcosmic representation reflects human life that regulates dynamics between worldly and spiritual activities. In symbolic studies of vernacular architecture, such spatial forms often embody local ideological and belief systems (Imam Faisal Pane, Nila Rahmaini Siregar, and Rizki Namira Lubis 2020; Matondang, Sani, and Kurniawan 2021). *Ale Bola* is quadrilateral in form, which in Bugis culture carries deep meaning through the philosophy *Sulapa Eppa'na Arung'na Ogi'e*. This form is associated with the four principal qualities of a leader: *Lempu* (honesty), *Warani* (courage), *Macca* (intelligence), and *Getteng* (firmness) (Yushand A. M 2024). Each side of the quadrilateral body represents one of these traits:

- Top side → *Lempu* (honesty)
- Bottom side → *Warani* (courage)
- Left side → *Macca* (intelligence)
- Right side → *Getteng* (firmness)

This philosophy underpins the notion that an ideal Bugis leader must balance all four qualities. The physical form of the house concretely embodies these abstract values, linking the building with social identity and authority legitimacy. Similar studies of *Rumah Gadang* in Minangkabau demonstrate that architecture can reflect communal values and the matrilineal system (Damayanti and Jasjfi 2022; Mirsa et al. 2023). Vertical spatial division and *Ale Bola* orientation directly relate to the social status and leadership function of Bugis aristocrats. Houses serving as local administrative centers have

larger, more complex *Ale Bola* with intricate interior decoration. Similar patterns appear in *Tongkonan* architecture in Tana Toraja, where social status and religious roles of the owner are clearly reflected in structure and ornamentation (Sri Wahyuni et al. 2023; Wong, Hussin, and Saat 2022).

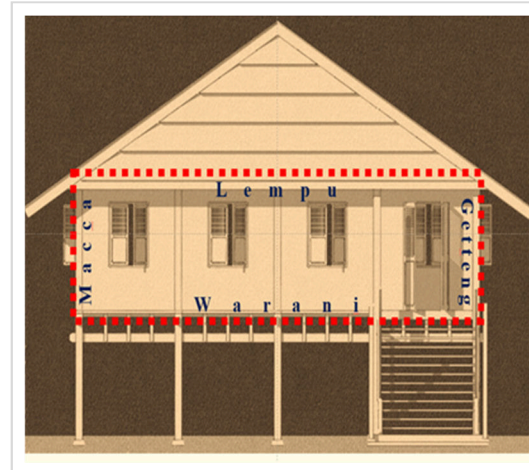


Figure 4. Manifestation of *Ale Bola* form

3. Composition of the house head (*Timpa Laja*)

The head of the house (*Timpa Laja*) is a critical architectural element in traditional Bugis aristocratic houses. It takes the form of a tiered triangular roof with a visually prominent structure and contains the sacred *Rakkeang* space, used to store heirlooms and for spiritual devotion to God (Akbar 2007). This structure not only differentiates aristocratic houses physically but also emphasizes symbolic distinction between commoners' and elite residences. The *Timpa Laja* roof on *Bola Saoraja* and *Bola Salassa* is a symmetrical gable, while *Bola Sada* features two adjacent asymmetrical gables, reflecting the social stratum of the owner. Pamelleri A. P (2024) notes that asymmetrical forms in *Bola Sada* indicate lower aristocratic status or village chief rank. This supports the findings of Ramawangsa, Prihatiningrum, and Haidi (2020); Fanggidai and Bahar (2023) that roof structures and ornamentation reflect the social position and power of the owner.

Philosophically, the triangular *Timpa Laja* embodies three directional lines representing Bugis cultural wisdom:

1. Vertical upward → *Sipakalebbi*: respect for God.

2. Vertical downward → *Sipakainge*: responsibility to remind and guide others.
3. Horizontal → *Sipakatau*: respect among humans (Yushand A. M 2024).



Figure 5. Manifestation of *Timpa Laja* form

The number of roof tiers is also regulated by custom:

- *Bola Saoraja*: 5 tiers
- *Bola Saoraja*: 4 tiers
- *Bola Saoraja*: 3 tiers

The number of tiers indicates aristocratic rank. Hamka and Winarni (2024) state that more roof tiers signify higher social status. This concept is rooted in the philosophy of *Mappakaraja*, which teaches that the higher a person's position, the greater their humility before God and social responsibility (Baitullah 2024).

From a symbolic architectural perspective, the tiered triangular form creates a visual impression of hierarchy and authority. The higher the roof, the smaller each triangle, symbolically reinforcing spirituality and human limitation awareness. This aligns with Toraja traditional houses, where upward-reaching roofs represent the connection between the human and spirit worlds (Sri Wahyuni et al. 2023). Thus, *Timpa Laja* serves as the primary symbol integrating religious values, social structure, and traditional architecture. Its presence and form reinforce both the house's aesthetics and the social legitimacy and responsibilities of its owner within Bugis culture.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that the facade composition of traditional Bugis aristocratic houses in Bone functions not only structurally and

aesthetically but also embodies philosophical values rooted in the social and cultural order of the local community. The three main parts of the vertical façade *Awa Bola* (lower structure), *Ale Bola* (house body), and *Timpa Laja* (house head) contain symbolism intertwined with social hierarchy, spirituality, and leadership concepts.

Awa Bola, with its large unpartitioned columns, symbolizes power and high social rank of the owner, reflecting structural solidity and societal position. *Ale Bola* represents the middle world, where life activities occur, embodying ideal leadership qualities in Bugis culture: honesty, courage, intelligence, and firmness. *Timpa Laja*, with its tiered triangular form, functions not only as a roof but also as an expression of spiritual values, the vertical relationship between humans and their creator, and the social responsibilities of a leader.

Through a phenomenological and symbolic approach, this research shows that traditional houses are not merely buildings but cultural artifacts rich with meaning. Interpretation of the facade composition is a crucial step in preserving vernacular architecture and strengthening local cultural identity amidst the forces of modernization.

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Author(s) contribution

Andi Muhammad Akbar contributed to the preparation of the research concept, methodology, investigation, supervision, data analysis, visualization, drafting, validation and revision of the article..

Sahabuddin Latif contributed to methodology, supervision, validation and revision.

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