Cultural Acculturation in the Architecture of the Kudus Tower Mosque: A Study of Art Semiotics

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Abstract

This study examines the process of cultural acculturation reflected in the architecture of the Al-Aqsa Menara Kudus Mosque using an art semiotic approach. This mosque is real evidence of the harmony of Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic cultures in Java during the spread of Islam. Architectural elements such as towers that resemble Hindu-Buddhist temples, lotus flower ornaments, and Islamic calligraphy reflect an inclusive and adaptive blend of cultures. This study uses a descriptive-analytical method based on case studies by combining primary data through direct observation and interviews, as well as secondary data from related literature. Semiotic analysis was carried out to identify the symbolic meaning in the architectural elements of the mosque, with the theoretical approach of Charles Sanders Peirce and Roland Barthes. The results of the study also explain that the Menara Kudus Mosque not only functions as a place of worship, but also as a symbol of cultural identity that emphasizes harmony in diversity. This acculturation process reflects the success of Islam in adapting local traditions without eliminating original cultural values. This study makes an important contribution to understanding cultural integration in architectural art and the preservation of local cultural heritage.

Keywords: cultural acculturation, Islamic architecture, Kudus Tower Mosque, art semiotics, cultural harmony.
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INTRODUCTION

The history of the development of the city of Kudus, is not only separated from one of the Walisongo, namely Sunan Kudus. Sunan Kudus, whose real name is Ja'far Sodiq, is also known as a charismatic preacher (Waliullah) in spreading Islam in the city of Kudus during the period around the 15th-16th century (Muhammad, 2010, p. 38). In spreading the teachings of Islam in Kudus, one of the Walisongo used a Fabian approach, namely placing himself, absorbing, behaving pragmatically, and taking a method by gradually implementing partial compromises with a spirit of tolerance towards the cultural values of the local community, many of whom at that time still embraced Hinduism (Hamiyatun, 2019, p. 42). There is one of the historical artifacts left behind by Sunan Kudus when he was carrying out the preaching of Islamic teachings, which is famously the Al-Aqsa Mosque building, which still stands strong to this day and is also known to the public as the Kudus Tower Mosque (Triyanto et al., 2019, p. 69).

Menara Kudus Mosque, as a work of architectural art, although it is a sacred building for Muslim worship, in its form it has its own uniqueness, namely not only expressing Islamic (Arabic) culture, but also being able to accommodate or absorb elements of local culture. This can also be seen especially in the tower, entrance (gate), and main building of the mosque. This acculturative expression can be seen as a symbol that reflects the values of multiculturalism (Triyanto et al., 2019, pp. 69–70).

Menara Kudus is a tower building that complements the old mosque in the city of Kudus, Indonesia. The tower is also a symbol as the identity of the city of Kudus as well as a historical monument. This building is an ancient building like a Hindu temple (Ashadi, 2009, p. 79).

The acculturation of culture in the architecture of this mosque did not happen by chance. The presence of Hindu-Buddhist elements in its architecture reflects the process of adaptation and cultural dialogue that took place when Islam began to develop in Java. At that time, the spread of Islam was carried out inclusively while still respecting local traditions, resulting in a unique architectural form full of symbolic meaning. This makes the Menara Kudus Mosque a real proof of the ability of the Javanese people to harmonize old traditions with new values. The mixture of the two traditions/more, which occurs when the community has also adopted a religion & tries not to collide with the old culture (Zainuri, 2021, p. 128).

As one of the mosques that has a wealth of cultural symbols, the Menara Kudus Mosque offers many meanings that can be interpreted through the study of art semiotics. Semiotics is one of the sciences of analytical methods to study a sign (Pratiwi, 2018, p. 117). Semiotics allows us to understand how the architectural elements of the mosque function as signs or symbols that represent the cultural and religious values of the society at that time. With this approach, we can dig deeper into the hidden meanings contained in the design and structure of the mosque.

Various studies have been conducted to examine the historical and architectural aspects of the Menara Kudus Mosque. A study conducted by Triyanto Triyanto, Mujiyono, Eko Sugiarto, and Ratih Ayu Pratiwinindya in 2019 highlighted how this mosque reflects the values of multicultural education. Meanwhile, Zainuri's research in 2021 discussed the integration of Islam and local culture in the architectural art of ancient mosques in Java. Although these studies have made significant contributions to understanding the historical background and physical characteristics of the Menara Kudus Mosque, there are still research gaps that need to be addressed.

First, the lack of semiotic studies of art in understanding the symbolic meaning contained in the architecture of the Menara Kudus Mosque. Most previous studies have focused more on historical and architectural analysis

without delving deeper into how these architectural elements function as signs or symbols that represent cultural and religious values. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by using the semiotic approach of Charles Sanders Peirce and Roland Barthes to reveal the symbolic meaning in the design of this mosque.

Second, an interdisciplinary approach in the study of the architecture of the Menara Kudus Mosque is still rarely applied. Most previous studies only highlight historical and cultural aspects without considering the relationship between art, architecture, and semiotics in the process of cultural acculturation. This study seeks to present a more holistic perspective by combining art, culture, and semiotic approaches to gain a deeper understanding of the integration of Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic cultural elements in the architecture of this mosque.

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Third, in-depth studies of symbolic meaning in the process of cultural acculturation are still limited. Although there have been many studies on the existence of Hindu-Buddhist elements in mosque architecture, not many have discussed how these symbols play a role in building the cultural and religious identity of the local community. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how the architectural elements of this mosque are not only historical relics, but also manifestations of the values of multiculturalism and harmony in diversity.

Fourth, the importance of preserving cultural heritage in a modern context has not been widely discussed in previous studies. The Menara Kudus Mosque is a concrete example of how Islam can adapt to local culture without losing its identity. However, there are not many studies that highlight how the principle of acculturation in mosque architecture can be a reference for the preservation and development of Islamic architecture in the modern era. Therefore, this study is expected to contribute to efforts to preserve cultural heritage by highlighting the relevance of cultural acculturation in a contemporary context.

Thus, this research has high academic and cultural urgency. Through the study of art semiotics on the architecture of the Menara Kudus Mosque, this research not only contributes to enriching the literature on cultural acculturation, but also helps understand how art, culture, and religion interact in forming architectural identity in Indonesia. The results of this study are expected to provide new insights into the relationship between art, culture, and religion in the context of Islamic architecture in Java, as well as become a reference for efforts to preserve and develop cultural heritage in the future.

The Menara Kudus Mosque is also a reflection of a religious building that not only functions as a place of worship, but also as a symbol of identity, a social center, and a reflection of the dynamics of Indonesian society's culture (Hilmy & Respati, 2024, p. 77). As a society accustomed to living with diverse traditions and beliefs, the integration of Hindu-Buddhist elements into the architecture of this mosque shows an open and inclusive attitude in accepting differences. This not only strengthens local cultural identity, but also shows that Islam in Java has an adaptive and contextual character.

However, the historical and symbolic value of the Menara Kudus Mosque has not been fully understood by the wider community. Many only see it as a historical relic without understanding the deep meaning contained therein. Therefore, in-depth academic studies

are needed to reveal the cultural, historical, and religious values contained in the architecture of this mosque. And uphold local cultural values (Habibullah et al., 2022, p. 21).

The study of art semiotics on the Menara Kudus Mosque is also relevant to understanding the role of art and architecture in building cultural identity. Through the analysis of signs and symbols, we can understand how these architectural elements contribute to conveying cultural and religious messages. Thus, this not only contributes to science, but also to the preservation of local culture and identity. Preserving local culture, society also plays a role in respecting and appreciating the various diversities and differences that exist among them (Febrianty et al., 2023, p. 177).

Therefore, about the acculturation of culture in the architecture of the Menara Kudus Mosque through the study of art semiotics is very important. This is not only aimed at understanding the process of cultural acculturation, but also to explore the symbolic meaning contained therein. Therefore, the results of this study are expected to provide new insights into the relationship between art, culture, and religion in the context of Javanese architecture. The main acculturation process is the element of accepting foreign culture which is processed into one's own culture without causing the disappearance of the personality of the original culture (Nunuk Giari Murwandani, 2007, p. 72).

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method to understand the phenomenon of cultural acculturation in the architecture of the Menara Kudus Mosque through a study of art semiotics. Using a qualitative research method with a descriptive-analytical approach makes it easier for a researcher (Imanina, 2020, p. 45). The design of this research is a case study that focuses on the Menara Kudus Mosque as the main object. The data collected consists of primary and secondary data. This data is used

to solve a problem & find a solution to the problem (Suprayogo et al., 2014, p. 21). Primary data were obtained through direct observation of the architectural elements of the mosque, such as towers, reliefs, ornaments, and spatial layout, as well as in-depth interviews with local historians, religious figures, architects, and cultural figures. Secondary data include historical documents, archaeological records, scientific literature, and visual documentation in the form of photographs and architectural sketches.

Data collection was conducted through field observations, semi-structured interviews, and literature studies. Data analysis techniques refer to semiotic methods, by identifying denotative and connotative meanings, and classifying iconic, indexical, and symbolic signs based on Charles Sanders Peirce's theory. Roland Barthes' pproach is used to read myths or cultural values contained in architecture. This analysis is complemented by a historical and contextual approach to understand the integration of Hindu, Buddhist, & Islamic cultural elements during the founding of the mosque. Data triangulation is applied to increase the validity of the research results by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and literature studies. Carrying out data triangulation, with the intention of testing the validity of the data held in a study (Saadah et al., 2022, p. 54).

The results of this study are expected to identify architectural elements that reflect cultural acculturation, analyze the semiotic signs contained therein, and provide a broader interpretation of cultural meaning. This study aims to make a significant contribution to the study of art, culture, and architecture, as well as being an important reference in understanding cultural integration in Indonesia.

This study uses Roland Barthes' semiotic theory in analyzing cultural acculturation in the architecture of the Al-Aqsa Menara Kudus Mosque. Barthes' approach is applied in the analysis of denotation, connotation, and cultural myths. Denotative meaning is the literal meaning of an architectural element,

connotative meaning is related to cultural and social interpretations, while myths reflect the values that develop in society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 : semiotic analysis based on the architectural study of the Al-Aqsa Menara Kudus Mosque by Roland Barthes

Detonative Meaning	Connotative Meaning	Cultural Myths
Bedug in the Tower, a tool to mark prayer times in the Islamic tradition in the Archipelago	Bedug in the Tower, an influence of Hindu-Buddhist ritual musical instruments used for worship	Bedug in the Tower, Islam in Java developed with a non-confrontati onal, but for adaptive approach
Seven fountains for ablution, a means of cleansing oneself before prayer	Seven fountains for ablution, the number seven in Hindu-Buddhism symbolizes perfection and enlightenme nt	Seven fountains for ablution, Islam in Java uses local symbols to strengthen the meaning of Islamic spirituality
Kentongan on the tower, a traditional communicat ion tool used to give signals	The kentongan on the tower has the same function as the bedug in disseminatin g information to the public	Kentongan on the tower, Islam adapted into existing traditional communica tion systems

The semiotic approach in this study shows how the architectural elements of the Menara Kudus Mosque are not just physical buildings, but also have deep cultural meanings. Using the theories of Peirce and Barthes, this study reveals that the architecture of this mosque is the result of the integration of Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic cultures that reflect harmony in diversity.

This approach is relevant in understanding how architectural symbols function not only as artistic expressions, but also as a medium of cultural and religious communication in a multicultural society such as Java.

The Process of Cultural Acculturation Reflected in the Architecture of the Kudus Tower Mosque

Before the arrival of Sunan Kudus in Kudus (previously in the Demak Kingdom), the Kudus community was dominated by Hindus. Sunan Kudus then also subtly incorporated their customs into Islamic law, such as on Eid al-Adha, slaughtering buffalo/goats as a form of respect, not cows because cows are animals that have majesty according to Hindu beliefs. Sunan Kudus also built a tower for the call to prayer with a shape resembling a Hindu building (Purwadi & Maharsi, 2012, p. 136). In the Menara Kudus Mosque building, the blend of Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic ornaments reflected in the mosque building, tower, and tomb complex has a diversity. The existence of a canopy and gate reflects continuity with Hindu culture.

The Kudus Tower Mosque is an Islamic site that is similar to a temple as a form of respect for the culture that developed around the area (Rosyid, 2019, p. 23). In Kudus, there are many Hindu heritage sites close to the Menara Kudus Mosque, namely Langgar Bubrah which has the uniqueness of Hindu cultural heritage. As a Hindu heritage site, it has unique features in the form of Yoni & Lingga which are still intact to this day. It does not eliminate the Hindu cultural heritage in Kudus, but has been developed or acculturated as a positive reaction and is managed and maintained by the surrounding generations.

Al-Aqsa Menara Kudus Mosque is one of the real evidences of the process of acculturation of Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic cultures in Indonesia, especially in Java (Ansor, 2014, p. 203). This mosque, which was founded by Sunan Kudus, has unique architectural characteristics, namely a blend of Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic cultural elements.

The Influence of Hindu Culture in the Architecture of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Kudus Tower

The influence of Hindu culture in the architecture of the Al-Aqsa Menara Kudus Mosque is an important aspect that shows the process of cultural acculturation in Java during the early spread of Islam (H & Arahap, 2016, p. 4). Architectural elements that are characteristic of Hindu tradition are maintained in the design of this mosque as a form of adaptation and respect for local culture. This reflects an inclusive approach to preaching, as carried out by Sunan Kudus, the founder of this mosque.

The shape of the mosque tower that resembles a Hindu temple is one of the most prominent features of Hindu cultural influence. The tower is shaped like a terraced temple-punden, which is a symbol of the Hindu cosmological concept. The terraced punden symbolizes the mountain as a holy place and spiritual center in the Hindu-Buddhist tradition. In the context of the mosque, the tower functions as a place to call to prayer, but its design still maintains visual elements that are familiar to Hindu society at that time.

The use of traditional Hindu ornaments is seen in the patterns and decorations in various parts of the mosque. Motifs such as vines, lotus flowers, and geometric carvings that are common in Hindu art are used to decorate the walls and gates of the mosque. These motifs are maintained because they have become part of the local aesthetic that is widely accepted by the Javanese people. The use of these ornaments does not conflict with Islamic teachings because they do not contain human or animal figuratives, which are prohibited in Islamic art.

The structure of the mosque gate that resembles a paduraksa or sacred gate in the Hindu-Buddhist tradition also shows the influence of Hindu culture. This gate is usually used to mark the transition between profane and sacred space, a concept that also fits the function of the mosque as a place of worship. The presence of this gate shows the continuity of local traditions in Islamic architecture in Java.

The red brick material used to build the tower and part of the mosque structure is also a characteristic of the Hindu-Buddhist architectural tradition, especially during the Majapahit era. Red brick is a symbol of local technology and aesthetics that are deeply rooted in the Hindu tradition in Java. Its use in the mosque shows the continuity of this tradition, despite changes in its function and symbolic value.

By combining Hindu cultural elements into its design, the Al-Aqsa Menara Kudus Mosque has succeeded in becoming a symbol of harmonious cultural acculturation. These elements not only maintain local identity, but also facilitate the acceptance of Islam by the Hindu community at that time. This acculturation shows Islam's ability to adapt to local traditions, while creating a new identity that reflects intercultural harmony.

The Influence of Buddhist Culture in the Architecture of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Kudus Tower

The influence of Buddhist culture in the architecture of the Al-Aqsa Mosque Menara Kudus is an important part of the process of cultural acculturation that occurred in Java during the spread of Islam. The process of acculturation (baseline of acculturation), between the recipient group and the group carrying elements of foreign culture (agent of acculturation) which are each autonomous (Supatmo & Syafii, 2019, p. 2). Elements inspired by Buddhist traditions can be found in the physical design of the mosque, reflecting a

harmonious adaptation between Islamic values and previous cultural heritage. This shows how Islamic preaching at that time respected local traditions as a strategy to build community acceptance.

The shape of the mosque's tower that resembles a temple is not only influenced by Hindu culture, but also contains elements of Buddhist tradition. The structure of the tower that is shaped like a stupa in Buddhist teachings symbolizes enlightenment and purity. Stupas, which are often used in Buddhist architecture, serve as a symbol of the connection between humans and the Divine. In the context of the Menara Kudus Mosque, this design was adapted to introduce a new function as a place for the call to prayer, while maintaining an architectural form that is familiar to the local community.

The use of lotus flower ornaments in mosque decoration reflects the influence of Buddhist teachings. The lotus flower in Buddhist tradition symbolizes purity and enlightenment, even though it grows in dirty environments such as mud. This lotus motif is used in decorative art on the walls and gates of the Menara Kudus Mosque, showing the symbolic continuity between Islamic teachings and local values understood by the community at that time.

The spatial concept and spiritual orientation of the mosque also reflect the influence of Buddhist values, especially in terms of spatial harmony. In the Buddhist tradition, architecture is often designed to create a meditative and calming atmosphere. This is also reflected in the spatial arrangement of the Menara Kudus Mosque which creates a peaceful and comfortable environment for worship. In addition, these elements show harmony with the Islamic concept of the sanctity of the worship space.

The use of red brick as the main material for the tower and other elements in the mosque reflects the Buddhist construction tradition in Java, especially during the era of kingdoms such as Majapahit and Singasari. Red brick is often used in the construction of Buddhist stupas and temples. In the Menara Kudus Mosque, this material is still used as a form of respect for local architectural traditions as well as a symbol of historical continuity.

Finally, the integration of Buddhist architectural elements in the Menara Kudus Mosque not only reflects respect for local traditions, but also shows the adaptive nature of Islam in the context of Javanese culture. This acculturation creates a unique and iconic architecture, which is not only a spiritual symbol, but also concrete evidence of the harmony between religions and cultures that once occurred in Java. This makes the Kudus Tower Mosque a priceless cultural heritage in the history of Indonesian architecture.

The Influence of Islamic Culture in the Architecture of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Kudus Tower

The influence of Islamic culture in the architecture of the Al-Aqsa Mosque Menara Kudus plays a central role in shaping the religious and functional identity of the mosque. As the main place of worship for Muslims, the mosque adopts various architectural elements typical of Islam that not only meet practical needs, but also reflect the aesthetic and spiritual values of Islam (Hujaeri, 2019, p. 2). This influence is clearly visible in the structure and design of the mosque, which integrates Islamic architectural principles with local elements, creating harmony between Islamic traditions and Javanese culture.

The layout and orientation of the mosque show a strong influence of Islamic architectural principles. The Al-Aqsa Menara Kudus Mosque is designed to face the Kaaba in Mecca, in accordance with Islamic guidance regarding the direction of the Qibla. The placement of a spacious and well-organized prayer room reflects the functional needs of Islam to worship in an orderly and structured manner. In addition, the presence of the mihrab (a niche that indicates the direction of the Qibla) and the pulpit (a podium for sermons) are important elements that show the

adaptation of Islamic religious functions in the structure of the mosque.

The use of geometric motifs and calligraphy in the decoration of the mosque is a manifestation of deep Islamic aesthetics. The complex geometric patterns and Arabic calligraphy that adorn the walls, ceilings, and ornaments of the mosque not only function as aesthetic elements, but also as artistic expressions that contain spiritual meaning. Calligraphy, especially those containing verses from the Qur'an, is a means of conveying religious messages and strengthening the religious atmosphere in the mosque. Geometric motifs, which reflect order and harmony, also reflect the Islamic concept of balance and beauty that comes from God.

Structural elements such as the dome and minaret in the Al-Aqsa Menara Kudus Mosque show the distinctive influence of Islamic architecture. The dome, which is often considered a symbol of the sky and the abode of God, provides a significant visual touch to the silhouette of the mosque. In addition, the minaret used to broadcast the call to prayer is a common feature in Islamic mosques that serves as a call to worship. Although the minaret is inspired by local architecture, its specific function as a means of religious communication emphasizes the Islamic identity of the mosque.

The use of open spaces and gardens around the mosque reflects the Islamic concept of openness and harmony with nature. These spaces not only serve as areas for gathering and resting, but also as a symbol of Islam's openness to the wider community. The well-maintained gardens and pedestrian paths surrounding the mosque create a calm and peaceful environment, in accordance with Islam's goal of creating a place of worship that supports spiritual tranquility and personal reflection.

Finally, the multifunctional function of the mosque also shows the influence of Islamic culture in the architecture of the Al-Aqsa Menara Kudus Mosque. In addition to being a place of worship, the mosque is often used for various community activities such as education, social gatherings, and other religious activities. The flexible interior design allows the spaces within the mosque to be transformed according to needs, reflecting the Islamic principles of community involvement and social service. The integration of these functions within the mosque structure demonstrates the responsive adaptation of Islamic architecture to the needs of the local community, while reinforcing the mosque's role as a center of religious and social life.

By combining various authentic Islamic architectural elements with local adaptations, the Al-Aqsa Menara Kudus Mosque is not only a functional place of worship, but also a symbol of harmony between Islamic tradition and Javanese culture. The influence of Islamic culture in the architecture of this mosque reflects the success of the cultural acculturation process, which results in a unique and meaningful design. This makes the Al-Aqsa Menara Kudus Mosque a real example of how Islamic values can be integrated with local wisdom to create a harmonious and sustainable religious space.

Elements of Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic Culture Visible in the Architectural Design of the Kudus Tower Mosque

Menara Kudus Mosque combines elements of Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic culture in its architectural design, creating a work that reflects the harmonious acculturation of cultures in Java. The architecture is not just a practical need, but also spiritual (Ashadi, 2017, p. 101). The influence of Hindu culture is seen in the form of towers that resemble stepped temples, reflecting the Hindu cosmological concept of the relationship between the human world and the spiritual world. In addition, the mosque gate, which is shaped like a traditional Hindu paduraksa, functions as a divider between sacred and profane spaces. The paduraksa-shaped gate (the upper part is connected) on the right is one of the entrances to the tomb enclosure (Syaifuddin, 2016, p. 41). Ornaments such as vines and lotus flowers also reflect the influence of Hindu art in mosque

decoration. From Buddhist culture, its influence can be seen in the shape of the tower which resembles a stupa, a symbol of enlightenment and purity in Buddhist teachings. The Kudus Tower, which has the exact shape of a temple from the bottom to the top of the building, is arranged in steps with an entrance, for example a temple in general & has a peak above the building, all sides of which are in the form of a temple (Nurmanita, 2018, p. 43). The tiered structure of the tower contains spiritual symbolism that connects the mortal world with the Divine. In addition, the use of lotus flowers in the mosque's ornaments reflects the value of purity in Buddhist culture, where this flower symbolizes enlightenment growing from darkness, a symbol of spiritual transformation. Islamic culture is clearly visible in the orientation of the mosque's qibla which faces the Kaaba in Mecca, in accordance with the basic principles of mosque architecture in Islam. Arabic calligraphy that adorns the walls of the mosque, with verses from the Qur'an, and geometric motifs used in the decoration reflect Islamic aesthetics that prioritize order and beauty that comes from God. In addition, the dome that symbolizes the sky and closeness to God, as well as the tower for the call to prayer, are also typical features of Islamic architecture that are adapted in the design of this mosque.

By combining elements from these three cultures, the Kudus Tower Mosque is not only a religious symbol of Islam, but also a representation of the cultural acculturation process that occurred in Java, where Islam was able to adapt to local traditions, creating a new identity that was accepted by society. Religious symbols integrate and synthesize the world as lived and the world as imagined, and are useful for producing and strengthening religious beliefs (Supatmo, 2014, p. 77). Menara Kudus Mosque is an example of architecture that reflects elements of Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic culture integrated into its design. This acculturation process shows how local Javanese traditions can adapt to Islamic teachings. So it is not surprising that early Islamic moral messages also use symbolic language such as songs, art and various local traditions (traditional ceremonies) (Syamsul Bakri, 2001, p. 37). The following are elements of Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic culture that are visible in the architectural design of the Menara Kudus Mosque:

Elements of Hindu Culture

The Hindu cultural elements seen in the architectural design of the Menara Kudus Mosque reflect the cultural acculturation that occurred in Java during the spread of Islam. One of the architectural elements influenced by Hindu culture is:

The Hindu influence on the placement of the bedug in the Menara Kudus can be seen from the Hindu-Buddhist tradition which considers percussion instruments, such as gongs and drums, as an important part of religious rituals and a symbol of communication with the spiritual world. Religious symbols that combine to become spiritual power (Murni & Rupa, 2015, p. 100). In Hindu tradition, drums are used in sacred ceremonies, including in temples, as an accompaniment to offerings to the gods. The bedug in Menara Kudus, although it functions in the Islamic context as a marker of prayer times or a call to worship, is placed in a structure that resembles sacred Hindu spaces, such as the pendopo or the great hall, which are usually the center of religious activities. This reflects acculturation, where local traditions are adapted to the spread of Islam by Sunan Kudus, while still maintaining cultural symbols that are already known to the local community. The mosque tower is the same as a Hindu building, in addition to the exterior resembling a temple, the Menara building has a unique arrangement in the form of the placement of the bedug which is located on the roof of the mosque tower which resembles the presence of a kul-kul hall building (Azzaki et al., 2021, p. 13).

Analysis of the placement of the bedug in the Kudus Tower using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach can be done by describing three levels of meaning: denotation (literal meaning), connotation (symbolic meaning),

and myth (cultural meaning). This approach reveals how the placement of the bedug in the Kudus Tower reflects the adaptation and acculturation of culture between Hindu and Islamic traditions.

At the denotative level, the bedug in the Kudus Tower is a large cylindrical percussion instrument placed in a specific area in the tower complex. Its function is literally as a prayer time marker or a call to worship in the Islamic tradition. Its placement in an open area, often close to a tower or mosque, makes it the visual and acoustic center of attention in religious activities.

At the connotative level, the placement of the bedug in the Kudus Tower has a symbolic meaning related to the acculturation of Hindu culture. In the Hindu-Buddhist tradition, percussion instruments such as drums or gongs are used in religious ceremonies to create a sacred atmosphere and as a medium of communication with the spiritual world. The bedug in the Kudus Tower, although used for Islamic purposes, continues this symbolic function as a means of communication between humans and God. Its strategic placement in the tower area reflects respect for local traditions, where the structure resembles the layout of Hindu places of worship, such as the pendopo which is the center of sacred activities.

At the mythical level, the placement of the bedug in the Kudus Tower represents a narrative of harmony and cultural tolerance in the spread of Islam in Java. Sunan Kudus, as one of the Wali Songo, understood the importance of using symbols familiar to Hindu-Buddhist society to facilitate the acceptance of Islam. In Barthes's view, the bedug became a cultural sign that integrated the religious function of Islam with the heritage of Hindu tradition. The myth that emerged was that Islam in Java not only brought new teachings, but also respected and adapted local values, creating harmony between old and new cultures.

Figure 1. Placing the Bedug (Simposium Nasional RAPI XX, 2021)

Elements of Buddhist Culture

The Buddhist cultural elements seen in the architectural design of the Menara Kudus Mosque reflect the acculturation that occurred in Java, where the influence of Buddhist culture, which has developed since the Majapahit kingdom, was integrated with Islamic teachings. One of the architectural elements influenced by Buddhist culture is: The Buddhist influence on the seven ablution places of the Menara Kudus can be seen from the use of architecture and symbolism that adapt elements from the Buddhist tradition that had developed in Java before the arrival of Islam.

These seven ablution places, which are carved in the form of pools with symmetrical designs, are reminiscent of the structure and philosophy of rituals in Buddhist temples, which often have pools or bathing places as a symbol of self-purification before entering the sacred area. The existence of these seven ablution places, with their organized and structured forms, indicates the influence of Hindu-Buddhist ritual design, where self-purification rituals have an important place in spiritual preparation. In the Buddhist tradition, the number 7 has the meaning of achieving perfection (Hastangka, 2014, p. 52). Although its primary function in the Islamic context is to cleanse oneself before prayer, this design element retains aspects of local culture influenced by Buddhist practices in purifying the body and soul, which were later adapted into Islamic ablution practices. This shows how Sunan Kudus successfully integrated Hindu-Buddhist cultural elements in the spread of Islam, creating a place of worship that respects

local traditions while introducing new teachings. Mutual respect and appreciation in good communication within religious communities and between religious communities (Atulwafiyah et al., 2023, p. 1097).

Analysis of the seven ablution fountains of Menara Kudus using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach can be done by dissecting three levels of meaning: denotation (literal meaning), connotation (symbolic meaning), and myth (cultural meaning). This approach helps us understand how these seven fountains are more than just architectural elements, but also contain deeper cultural meanings, connecting local and Islamic traditions.

At the denotation level, the seven ablution fountains of Menara Kudus are a series of water fountains located outside the mosque area and used by Muslims to cleanse themselves before praying. Each fountain is neatly arranged, with seven fountains in total, allowing people to perform ablution in turn. Its main function is to maintain physical cleanliness before worship, in accordance with the requirements for the validity of prayer in Islam.

At the connotation level, these seven fountains have a deeper symbolic meaning. The number seven in Islamic tradition is often considered a number that has spiritual value and blessings, including those related to the seven heavens in Islamic cosmology. On the other hand, in Javanese cultural traditions and Hindu- Buddhist influences, the number seven also has an important meaning in the context of rituals and ceremonies. In this case, the seven fountains can be seen as a symbol of self- purification that involves not only physical cleanliness, but also spiritual preparation to enter the worship space. This reflects the integration of spiritual values from local culture with Islamic teachings.

At the mythical level, these seven fountains create a narrative of cultural acculturation that shows how Hindu-Buddhist elements were adapted into Islam in Java. The myth that emerges is that in the spread of Islam, local cultural elements, such as the number seven and purification rituals, were respected and given new meanings that were in accordance with Islamic teachings. These fountains also function as a symbol of the transition from the profane world to the sacred before worship. In this context, the myth that is constructed is that Islam in Java not only brought new teachings, but also accommodated and reinterpreted existing traditions, creating a bridge between the past and the future of religion in society.

Figure 2. Seven Fountains of Ablution (*Dokumentasi Pribadi, 2024*)

Elements of Islamic Culture

The Islamic cultural elements seen in the architectural design of the Menara Kudus Mosque reflect Islamic religious principles applied in the local Javanese context. One of the architectural elements influenced by Islamic culture is:

The influence of Islam on the kentongan in the Menara Kudus is seen in its social function as a communication tool to give signs or warnings to the community. Although the kentongan is a traditional instrument that has existed in Javanese culture for a long time, its use in the Menara Kudus shows how local cultural elements are adapted in the Islamic context. The kentongan in the Menara Kudus is used to remind prayer times or provide other important signs for the congregation, replacing traditional communication systems with ways that are more in line with the needs of the Muslim community. The Menara Kudus is a high place used to announce the entry of the five daily prayer times by beating the bedug and

kentongan (Hermanto, 2023, p. 4). The use of this kentongan shows how Islam in Java accommodates local cultural elements, creating a bridge between tradition and new religious teachings. Thus, the kentongan not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a symbol of cultural continuity in the process of acculturation of Islam in Javanese society. The placement of the bedug under the roof of this tower is closely related to the placement of the kentongan under the roof of the Bale Kulkul (Pradisa, 2017, p. 216).

Analysis of the Menara Kudus kentongan using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach can be done by exploring three levels of meaning: denotation (literal meaning), connotation (symbolic meaning), and myth (cultural meaning). This approach helps us understand how the kentongan in Menara Kudus is not only a traditional instrument, but also a symbol that is more deeply connected to the culture, communication, and acculturation of Islam in Java.

At the denotation level, the kentongan is an instrument made of wood or bamboo that is used to produce a loud and clear sound. In Menara Kudus, the kentongan functions to provide signs or warnings to the community, such as prayer times, as well as reminding people of other religious activities. This kentongan is usually hit in a certain way to produce a sound that can be heard from a distance, making it an effective communication tool in a wider environment.

At the connotation level, the kentongan not only functions as a communication tool, but also symbolizes the presence of local traditions in Javanese Muslim society. The use of the kentongan in Menara Kudus connects the community with traditional communication methods that existed before the arrival of Islam. The kentongan also reminds us of social order and community ties, where the sound of the kentongan becomes a sign that unites people to gather or attend prayer times. This reflects how Islam in Java adapts and utilizes existing cultural elements to support religious practices, while maintaining

connections with local cultures that have long been accepted by the community.

At the mythical level, the kentongan at Menara Kudus functions as a symbol of the acculturation between local Javanese traditions and Islamic teachings. In Barthes's view, the kentongan is a cultural sign that not only functions practically but also conveys a message about how Islam is accepted and practiced in the context of Javanese culture. The myth that is formed is that Islam in Java is not a religion that separates itself from old traditions, but seeks to accommodate and integrate existing local cultural elements. The kentongan becomes a symbol of the fusion between local communication traditions and Islamic worship functions.

Figure 3. Drum (Sertam Abadi Jaya, 2023)

CONCLUSION

The Al-Aqsa Menara Kudus Mosque is one of the real evidences of the process of cultural acculturation in Indonesia, especially in Java. Through the integration of Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic architectural elements, this mosque is not only a symbol of cultural harmony, but also a reflection of Islam's adaptation to local traditions. Its unique architectural elements convey the values of multiculturalism, tolerance, and inclusivity, which are very relevant to the context of a pluralistic society in Indonesia.

This research also shows how the art semiotic approach can reveal the symbolic meanings contained in the architecture of the Menara Kudus Mosque. The process of cultural acculturation that occurs in this mosque not only enriches the local art and cultural heritage,

but also strengthens the contextual and adaptive Islamic identity. The results of this study are expected to be an important reference in the study of art, culture, and architecture, as well as provide a real contribution to the preservation of the nation's cultural heritage.

Through a deep understanding of the historical, religious, and cultural values contained in the Menara Kudus Mosque, we can better appreciate our ancestral heritage and make it an inspiration to build harmony in diversity. Further research is still needed to explore other potential of similar cultural artifacts, so that this heritage can continue to be preserved and appreciated by future generations.

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