

Aesthetic and Cultural Values in Lawang Bledheg Ornaments at the Great Mosque of Demak

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ABSTRACT

The Great Mosque of Demak is a historical entry of Islam into Java. In its architectural development, it has been influenced by many non-Islamic cultures such as Javanese, Hindu-Buddhist and Chinese. Therefore, the architecture of the Great Mosque of Demak has a philosophy in every form, especially the variety of ornaments used in the interior of the mosque. One of the most phenomenal forms of ornamentation is the decoration on the main door, which is usually called the Lawang Bledheg (lightning door). This decoration is not part of the structure of the mosque, but rather serves as the aesthetic value of a building which contains cultural values. The aim of this research is to find out the philosophy of aesthetic and cultural values in Lawang Bledheg ornaments, this is motivated by the fading of public knowledge about these ornaments at the Great Mosque of Demak. The research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach to Lawang Bledheg ornaments through field observations at the Great Mosque of Demak, interviews with experts, object documentation, and literature studies. The results of this research prove that the Lawang Bledheg ornaments have high aesthetic and cultural value, where the ornaments are a source of historical heritage that can be enjoyed and protected by visitors and worshipers of the Great Mosque of Demak.

Keywords: *Demak Grand Mosque, Lawang Bledheg, Aesthetics, Cultural Values*

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a multi-ethnic country that has a variety of cultural customs. Culture does not come purely from the birth of an individual, but is formed through social life, starting from norms, social patterns of society, even to the physical results of society's work. Every cultural custom has various traditions. However, these traditions will continue to be passed down to the next generation.

One of the historical remains of the early development of Islam on the island of Java, especially in the form of mosque buildings scattered along the north coast, is the Great Mosque of Demak. The Great Mosque of Demak is an important milestone in the history of the early development of Islamic culture in Java. Until now, the Great Mosque of Demak is the main icon of the city of Demak, Central Java. This mosque is known as the sacred mosque because it was built by Walisongo.

From an architectural perspective, the Great Mosque of Demak has beauty and uniqueness which are the characteristics of the building. A mosque with a triple tumpang roof (without a dome) has very deep historical value. In the interior of this mosque there are many carvings that decorate the building, giving it a traditional and classic impression. The details in each carving have a philosophy which of course cannot be separated from the folklore and legend behind the construction of a mosque, a historical legacy of the spread of Islam in Central Java.

One of the most phenomenal ornaments is the presence of the Lawang Bledheg at the main door of the Demak Grand Mosque. The legend behind this ornament is very unique and contains cultural and historical value during the Demak Kingdom era. Currently, people rarely know the details of its philosophy. On the other hand, the ornament is only a non-structural element that has aesthetic value in a building. This actually becomes an interesting viewpoint for mosque visitors to worship while enjoying the beauty of the historic heritage mosque. Lawang Bledheg is a Candra Sengkala inscription which reads Naga Mulat Sarira Wani.

This research aims to provide explanation and proof that Lawang Bledheg ornaments have high aesthetic and cultural value where these ornaments are a source of historical heritage that can be enjoyed and protected by visitors and worshipers of the Great Mosque of Demak.

1.1. Demak Grand Mosque

The Great Mosque of Demak is in the middle of the city, precisely in Kauman Village, Demak Regency, Central Java. This mosque is the oldest building in Indonesia which is thought to have stood during the leadership of Raden Patah (the first Sultan of Demak) in the early 15th century AD. It has a building area of 31x31 m, with a porch measuring 31x15 m.



Figure 1. Demak Grand Mosque (source: Google)

The mosque building has 4 saka guru, 50 pillars supporting the mosque, 28 pillars supporting the veranda, and 16 pillars around it. One of the guru's saka is known as saka tatal, because it is believed to contain wood chips (tatal: Javanese) by Sunan Kalijaga. The building has a pyramid roof on the veranda and 3 layers (tumpang) pyramids on the main mosque building. The roof has the meaning of faith, Islam and ihsan [1].



Figure 2. *Saka Guru* (source: Google)

The Great Mosque of Demak has a variety of decorations. These decorations become ornaments on every exterior and interior of the mosque which can be enjoyed by mosque visitors as the aesthetic value of a building. This value is actually a dimension of the actualization of Islamic decoration and the history of the story. The Great Mosque of Demak has several dominant ornaments, including Saka Majapahit ornaments, porcelain ornaments on the walls, Sengkalan Memet ornaments with fleece motifs, Lawang Bledheg ornaments, and Surya Majapahit ornaments.

1.2. *Bledheg Lawang Ornament*

Lawang Bledheg is the main door of the Great Mosque of Demak. The Lawang Bledheg ornament on the main door has a very sacred meaning. The material used is teak wood with a picture of two dragon heads. It is said that this image is of lightning that was captured by Ki Ageng Selo. Lawang Bledheg ornaments are dominated by red. Lawang Bledheg is also called the Candra Sengkala inscription which reads "Naga Mulat Sarira Wani", meaning the year 1388 Saka [2].

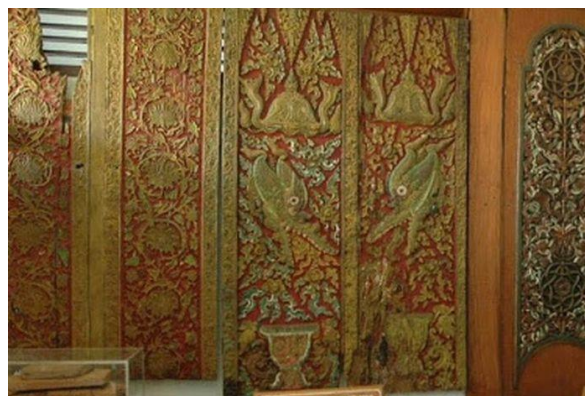


Figure 3. *Lawang Bledheg* (source: Google)

Overall, the dragon ornament with a crown is a depiction of power holders who are tasked with maintaining balance on the face of the earth in the form of prosperity and well-being.

2. AESTHETIC AND CULTURAL VALUE

The uniqueness of the Lawang Bledheg ornament in the Great Mosque of Demak is the aesthetic value applied to the main door of the mosque which is in the shape of a butterfly door. The application of the red base color symbolizes the courage of the dragon, combined with detailed green carvings and white graffiti to make the main door appear majestic on the face of the mosque.

Apart from having aesthetic value, the Lawang Bledheg ornament also has a symbolic function which is of cultural value for the community. This element contains the meaning of the story of Ki Ageng Selo's capture of lightning which was successfully painted into a decorative ornament. Lawang Bledheg ornaments have cultural value in the form of teachings about life and religion.

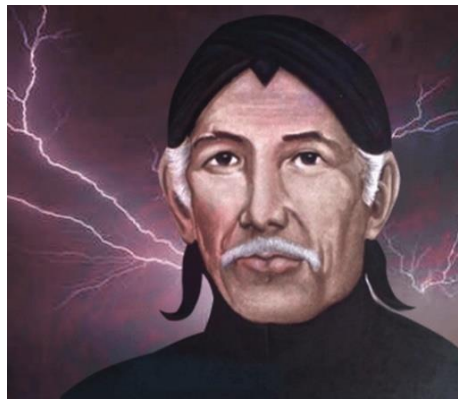


Figure 4. Ki Ageng Selo (source: Google)

In the book entitled "Kiai Ageng Selo: The Conqueror of Lightning" it is said that Kiai Ageng Selo, whose youth name was Bagus Songgom, was famous as an arrogant young man. This is because he is an authoritative Majapahit descendant. However, after going through a bitter period of life's journey, Ki Ageng Selo finally realized that humans have limitations as a servant of God. So Ki Ageng Selo repented to Allah and meditated. The courage to defeat lightning is a gift that is mastered and obtains religious values in the process of changing attitudes in Ki Ageng Selo.

Ki Ageng Selo's journey to conquer lightning had a big influence on the people. Influences in the form of prohibitions and advice that must be avoided and implemented by us as humans and servants of God to always have faith and piety and be careful in our behavior.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

The research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach. According to Sukmadinata (2006), the descriptive method is defined as a form of research aimed at describing existing phenomena, both natural phenomena and man-made phenomena.

This research observation was carried out on Wednesday, October 25 2023 at the Great Mosque of Demak, Kauman, Demak Regency, Central Java. Postal Code 59511.

3.1. Data Collection Techniques

Observation

The data collection method is by making observations in the field and then drawing conclusions. The research was taken on October 25 2023 at the Great Mosque of Demak. In this observation, the researcher took several documentation in the form of photos and videos as evidence and objective material for the research process.

Interview

Interviews are a data collection technique carried out by two researchers who want to know things from respondents in more depth. This technique was taken to obtain data in the form of valid descriptive explanations from the sources. Interview activities were carried out by 5 informants, namely, 2 practitioners in the field of fine and applied arts, 2 academic lecturers, and the takmir guard at the Great Mosque of Demak.

Documentation

Research documentation is evidence in the form of photos and videos. The documentation results will support data collection through field observations and interviews. This is very important to do as the main material in researching the Lawang Bledheg object.

Study of literature

Literature studies are carried out by collecting references from various sources such as journals, websites or government documents. This data is used as a supporting reference for field data.

4. RESULTS

The Great Mosque of Demak is a historical Islamic heritage mosque based in Demak City. This mosque was founded by Raden Patah, the first Sultan of the Demak Kingdom. This mosque is the oldest mosque in Indonesia which is used as a gathering place for saints to spread Islamic teachings.

The Great Mosque of Demak has 2 parts of the building, namely the main building and the foyer. In the main building used as the main prayer room, there are 4 main columns/pillars (saka guru) made from wood chips, usually called saka tatal. The main building has a three tumpeng pyramid roof which has the philosophy of faith, Islam and ihsan. The veranda building is an open part with a pyramid roof.

At the main door of the mosque is the Lawang Bledheg which is a phenomenal icon of the Great Mosque of Demak. Lawang Bledheg is not just a carving, this motif has the philosophy of a cultural value in the form of a folklore which is said to be often considered a myth. This door tells the story of Ki Ageng Selo's capture of lightning as told in the book "Babad Tanah Jawa".

This story contains cultural values whose origins are currently unknown to many people. Ki Ageng Selo caught lightning in the form of a dragon which was finally tied up so that it would not strike his people in a Gandrik Tree. This form was then painted on the orders of the Sultan of Demak on teak wood. The shape of a dragon with a crown at the top and flowers at the bottom. It is said that Lawang Bledheg's carvings do not contain all the forms of lightning that have been captured, this is because the lightning changes like the face of an old grandfather. The old grandfather was finally reported to the first Sultan of Demak at that time. At that time, an old grandmother came and splashed the grandfather, then there was a thunderous sound and the old grandfather disappeared and uniquely, it is said that the old woman was Ki Ageng Selo who was incarnate.

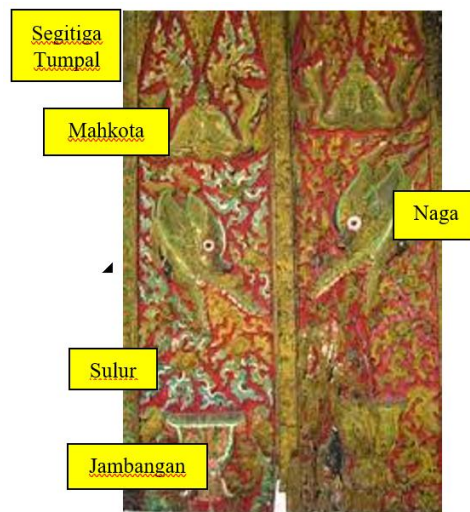


Figure 5. Details of Bledheg Lawang Ornaments (source: Google)

The Lawang Bledheg painting is based on Javanese philosophy and has its own meaning.

- a. Dragon means recognizing that dragons exist in the universe. The bottom layer is known as saptapratala which is responsible for maintaining the stability of the earth.
- b. The lung/stylized leaf carvings on the carvings have the meaning of prosperity.
- c. The crown means depicting government officials such as kings, queens and sultans at the Great Mosque of Demak.
- d. The flower latrine means making the kingdom you lead proud.
- e. Tumpal means the holder of the power to educate the nation he leads.

Therefore, as a whole, the Lawang Bledheg ornament depicts the meaning of the holder of a territory on earth which symbolizes a form of human prosperity and well-being.

Currently, this folklore is considered a myth by society. In fact, many have concluded that there are significant cultural values in these folk tales in accordance with the wishes of the King of Demak for all his citizens, as in the philosophy of each part of the Lawang Bledheg carving.

The current Lawang Bledheg ornament is a replica of its original form. The original form of Lawang Bledheg is now kept in a museum in an old condition.



Figure 6. Condition of Original Bledheg Lawang (source: Google)

The door leaf has a red background with white and green ornamental details. The dragon's eyes also have bright sun ornaments like the Surya Majapahit symbol.

The Lawang Bledheg decoration is part of the aesthetic value of the interior design of the Great Mosque of Demak. The ornaments created have very complicated decorative shapes, starting from the depiction of a dragon's head which is the main object of the door. This causes Lawang Bledheg to have high aesthetics with complicated, beautiful and smooth shapes or also known as (Ngarawit; Javanese). The shape of the dragon has gone through a process of exaggeration based on a fantasy environment with a layout of dragons facing each other. Around the main ornament there are also isen such as tendrils and flowers which embellish the details of a dragon with its mouth wide open as if it were about to grab and spit out fire.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the folklore of catching lightning, it was immortalized in a carving on the main door of the Great Mosque of Demak. These ornaments are a non-structural category in a mosque building. Dragon ornaments are characterized by a combination of Chinese and Javanese art.

Based on the value of beauty, the Lawang Bledheg ornament has a majestic, alluring shape with typical Chinese colors and is synonymous with courage. The embodiment of the beauty of ornaments lies in "Ngremit" a carving, which means it is very detailed and smooth, giving the impression of being beautiful and expensive. Lawang Bledheg is currently a phenomenal ornament that beautifies mosque buildings and is recognized as an inscription in Demak City. On the inscription there is a memet in the form of a year number which reads "Naga mulat sarira wani" (1388 S).

Based on the cultural value of Lawang bledheg ornaments, it is part of the development journey of the spread of Islam in Indonesia regarding tolerance of various religions, so that the ornaments have been mixed with a combination of Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic and even Chinese decorative arts. Apart from that, the folklore contained in the story of Ki Ageng Selo's conquest of lightning has high cultural value and must be upheld by the community as a form of appreciation and adoption of papali values or teachings in the form of Ki Ageng Selo's prohibitions and advice while he was young with his arrogant attitude. aware of his position as a human being. This is a lack of faith in Allah SWT, resulting in bad attitudes. In terms of the shape of the ornament, it contains a story with the meaning of mutually protecting nature with the presence of flower tendrils surrounding the dragon as a form of human relationship with the environment. All of these things are human relationships with God, each other, and nature.

6. AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This research was conducted by two authors. The first and second authors conducted field observations together. The first author conducted literature studies and interviews with experts, while the second author carried out object documentation and assisted with language translation in this research.

7. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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