

Research Article

The Mythology Behind the Creation of Blambangan Keris and Its Influence on the Creative Industry

Furoidatul Husniah* , Sukatman , Akhmad Taufiq , Fitri Nura Murti 

Department of Language and Arts Education, University of Jember, Jember, Indonesia

Abstract

Given its meaningful and artistic values, Indonesian keris has been recognized by UNESCO as a world cultural heritage. However, contrary to the values in Indonesian culture, many view keris as a mystical object and even consider it an infidel. Keris manifests power and strengths. This interpretation needs to be restored to preserve the cultural meaning associated with keris. The inquiry on the mythological code/symbol of keris is a follow-up research from previous theses (Myth of Mahesa Sura; Toponymy of the Ancient Nusantara Perspective; and Batik Mythology, Meaning of Code, Function, and Strengthening of its Industry (Oral Tradition Perspective), which points to the relevance of mythological symbols in batik and keris. The present study highlights the critical role of triangulating findings about the power of ancient kings manifested in the Blambangan keris. It aims to disseminate findings on (1) the mythology of the creation of Blambangan keris, (2) the meaning embedded in the Blambangan keris motifs, and (3) the function of keris in Blambangan tradition, from the Indonesian oral tradition lens. This study was conducted using a qualitative-critical ethnographic design with a multi-interdisciplinary approach covering mythology, toponymy, semiotics, linguistics, archeology, and arts. Data were garnered through (a) documentation, (b) observation, (c) free-in-depth interviews. The data were analyzed using critical ethnography theory coupled with interactive flow model analysis with modifications. This study portrayed a comprehensive narrative about the mythology of the kings in Indonesia based on existing cultural products, especially keris. It corroborates previous studies noting that the symbols on the Blambangan keris indicate that Medang Kawulan existed and that Blambangan was established in Jember region, East Java. Keris mythology can inform the development learning resources and the Indonesian keris industry. This becomes increasingly crucial as keris has experienced economic secularization (profane) into freely traded goods such as replicas, displays, ornaments, and merchandise, leading to the segregation between keris and family/ancestor/lineage symbols.

Keywords

Blambangan, Keris, Mythological Symbols, Oral Tradition

1. Introduction

Ancient societies relied on oral communication and dissemination of myths to maintain values and convey ideas and ideology between generations. This endows myths with historical values. States that oral evidence can be a novel alter-

native to overcoming data deadlocks in historical studies [1]. Likewise, suggests using oral traditions as material for historical studies in the absence of other sources [2].

In the mythological lens, myths are seen to convey histor-

*Corresponding author: furoidatulhusniah@unej.ac.id (Furoidatul Husniah)

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ical accounts and knowledge, manifest in the genealogies of ancestors, names of countries, territories, and ancient buildings. For example, the Kelapa myth captures the origins of the Indonesian nation [3]. In the study of mythology, several historical myths account for the past of a community, although not all of these stories can be proven. While some historical evidence from a historical myth can be verified, some are simply symbolic.

Keris was first found in Sukuh and Borobudur Temples. This proves that long before the 9th century, the people in Indonesia had preserved keris. Furthermore, keris is continuously intertwined with the life philosophy and practice of Javanese culture. The present study underlines the appealing relationship between the philosophy, values, and culture associated with keris and the mythology of Javanese kings.

Keris is a short sword, from Java but can also be found in Bali and even Malaysia and Philippines. I believed we can trace Keris to 9th CE.



Image in Borobudur Temple from 9th CE of a person handling Keris.

Figure 1. The use of keris in the past (source: <https://www.quora.com/What-does-the-kris-in-Indonesian-families-look-like>) [4].

2. The Mythology Underpinning the Creation of Blambangan Keris

This study employed a critical qualitative-ethnographic design with a multi-interdisciplinary approach covering mythology, toponymy, semiotics, linguistics, archaeology, and arts. It delved into (1) the mythology of the creation of keris, (2) the meaning of the code in keris pattern/motif, and (3) the function of keris in Javanese tradition. These were explored through the perspective of Indonesian oral tradition science. Data were garnered through (a) documentation, (b) observation, (c) free-in-depth interviews, (d) focused discussions (FGD), and (e) workshops (in the second and third years). These techniques were followed by analysis using [5] critical ethnography theory combined with interactive flow model

analysis [6] with modifications. The analysis encompassed (1) data collection, (2) data reduction, (3) domain analysis, (4) taxonomic analysis, (5) componential analysis, (6) cultural theme analysis, (7) presentation of findings, and (8) concluding and verifying the findings against similar evidence in other Indonesian communities.

Blambangan first stood in Silo when Majapahit collapsed. The myth of Ronggo Anis Raya emerged in this era. The child of Ronggo Anis Raya, Menak Sembar, occupied the area currently known as Semboro, Menak Koncar in South Malang. The center of his kingdom, however, was in Lumajang. He then moved the entire kingdom to Rowo Bayu in Banyuwangi in the 1600s. From Paleran, the center of government moved to Jember Regency. This only lasted for two years because of internal conflict so the government moved to Rowo Bayu, Banyuwangi. This explained the origin of the name Bangsal in Jember, which was the center of the kingdom. Jember also has a bus station named Tawang Alun (grandson/descendant of Ronggo Anis Maya) which was then moved to Paleran. This was first captured in the story of Tawang Alun once dreaming of riding a Macan Putih to go south, which was interpreted (symbolic) as the guidance of Ratu Sima. This association was attributed to the myths and legends surrounding the Macan Putih Temple (Blambangan) and Watu Lumbung (Banyuwangi, Balai Kambang). Stated that religious experiences shape human understanding of the world, both in traditional and modern societies [7].



Figure 2. Macan Putih mythology is a symbol of the Blambangan Macan Putih keris.



Figure 3. The Macan Putih Temple of the Blambangan Kingdom has now collapsed.

That images contain the symbols of “macan putih” (white tiger) and it’s difficult to deny that the symbol was the ancestral power of Blambangan people [8]. These symbols massively

appear to regional symbols, force institute/agency, art, and culture in Banyuwangi and Jember. The period of power can be traced through the candra sengkala in the oldest keris.



Figure 4. Blambangan Keris with the chronogram *Manunggaling sasrira* (1) *Baya lan Hiu* (8) *ing wave segara* (4) *Agung* (0) *jinejer* (1) *ing luk* 19”.

The Candra sengkala contains a time marker for the 19th month of the 1st year 0481 Saka (Sukatman, 2023). The message is that King Buaya and King Hiu lined up as kings of the Nusantara in 481 Saka or approximately 559 AD continuing the Medang Kamulan dynasty. The death of King Singa Samudera was marked by the Bajulmati region in Banyuwangi and South Malang, East Java, and also Boyolali, Central Java. The chronogram “Tanah (1) bajul (8) ing samudra (4) mati (0) is the code for the year 0481 Saka or 559 AD [9]. Jember has a myth of Padas Bajul in Jombang district, Jember Regency.

In the historical records of Kepakisan in (East) Java, the oldest brahmana was Kepakisan Blambangan, while its younger siblings were Kepakisan Pasuruan, Kepakisan Lombok, and Kepakisan Bali. It was strongly believed that the Pakis or Paku area was where the Brahmanas. The babad story can be studied in Babad Manik Angkeran by Tattwa (2003). This coheres with the fact that multiple Pakis toponyms are found in the Bondowoso-Jember area as a mardikan area, such as Pakis in Panti District, Jember; Pakis Hamlet in Patemon Village, Bondowoso; and Pakisan, Pakesan in Bondowoso.

The Blambangan heirloom was created based on the mythology of (a) the Raksasa (Giant) God or Matahari (Sun) God, envisioned as sovereigns reigning over lands abundant in sunlight, (b) Naga Basuki, the deity symbolizing a sovereign ruler, represents dominion over a realm abundant in maritime and aquatic resources, (c) King Kera Putih as a king dominating a land inhabited by monkeys with a white (pure) heart, (d) King Garuda as a symbol of dominion of a realm inhabited by eagles, (e) King Jago as a king reigning over land inhabited by roosters, (f) King Ganesha as a symbol of a king dominating a land inhabited by elephants, (g) King Singa symbolizes a ruler of land abundant with lions, or sima, (h) King Mahesa represents a sovereign whose territory is rich in buffaloes, (i) King Kijang signifies a ruler governing a land teeming with deer. These details are captured in Banyuwangi barongan.



Figure 5. Banyuwangi Barongan has the image of a lion's head (*sima*), a dragon's body, an eagle's wings, and a rooster. This mythology is related to the story of Panji-Laras and Rama-Sinta.

The symbols in keris resonate with the coronation equipment of the king in the Yogyakarta Palace in the form of keris Kiai Joko Piturun or Kiai Ageng Kopek; Luwuk, Gandhewa and Jemparing swords; and nine heirlooms. The nine heirlooms are (1) a golden peacock (*galing*) statue, (2) a golden deer (*dhalang*) statue, (3) a golden rooster statue (*sawung* statue), (4) a golden goose (*banyak emas*) statue, (5) a golden nagaraja (*hardha walika*) statue, (6) a golden money box called *kutuk*, (7) a golden handkerchief (*kacu emas*), (8) a candle called *kandil*, and (9) a place for all kinds of customs called *tabut* or *jodhang*.

The analysis demonstrated that several keris symbolize the rulers or kings of Java. For example, Keris Joko Piturun represents descendants of Rojo Soko (Joko Piturun) or Aji Saka of the Medang Kamulan era. Keris Kiai Kopek symbolise the kings of Mataram as the descendant of King Macan Kopek or Queen Sima of the Medang-Mataram era (ancient Mataram). Keris Kiai Macan Kopek once belonged to Sunan Kalijaga. Gandewa and Jemparing are called arrows (*pandhega manah*), representing the intellectual prowess and acuity of the Javanese king. Pedhang Luwuk is a symbol that the king of Java was an enlightening master (Empu Padhang) abbreviated as *pedhang* and a leader of mantras or *penghulu suwuk* abbreviated as *luwuk*.

The golden Jago statue is a symbol of the noble King Jago

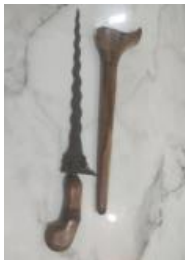
associated with King Hayam Wuruk from the Majapahit era. The statue of Galing (golden peacock) as a symbol of the Kalingga pandhega (abbreviated as galing) is the sima eagle rakai (abbreviated as merak), highly glorified during the Kalinga kingdom era of ancient Mataram. This symbol is related to the Dadak Merak in Reog Ponorogo art. The golden deer statue represents the noble king as a sage expert in making woven palm leaves (kajang) known as wiku kujang (abbreviated as kujang). Many golden statues serve as a symbol of the King Goose or Rishi David in the year of Sura. The statue of the Golden Dragon King (hardha walika) is a symbol of King Hyang Naga Basuki in the Light Years. Kutuk Emas symbolises the Majesty Wiku Tuk (abbreviated as kutuk) or Resi Hyang Taya alias Hyang Wenang. Hyang Wenang is the basic name of King Hyang Naga Basuki. Kacu Emas is a symbol of Raka Cula (abbreviated as kacu) or King Warak (purwa raya kala) namely King Kala who was the name of the Sun King in the year of Light. Kandhil is a symbol of the King of Light,

King of Fire, or King of the Sun. Tabut is an acronym for nata buta or King of Giants, which is a symbol of a king who possessed a wide range of customs. King of Giants is the dasanama of the King of the Sun. Since he has ten faces, he is called King Dasamuka. The King of Light was initially called raya purwa nata (abbreviated as rawana), the power of whom was documented in the Ramayana or Anoman Duta story.

3. Dapur of Blambangan Keris

The shape of Blambangan Keris called Dapur [10]. The data from observation, interview, and documentation showed the properties of Blambangan keris. The following data have been confirmed in an interview with mythology experts and the Chairman of the Jember-Banyuwangi Keris Association, namely the Gelar Association, Pataji Sapu Jagad, namely Mr. Lukmanul Hakim (45 years old).

Table 1. *Clasification Keris.*

No.	Keris Tangguh Blambangan	The Description and Interpretation of Keris
1		Spear: Laler meneng Rings: 3 Length: 39.5 cm Base: screw Symbol: crocodile mouth (ocean lion) this symbol is also found in the Padas Bajul, Ketingan, Jember (Ginting, 2024); shark mouth symbol. The spear Laler meneng means being surrounded by flies and the smell of corpses (?) to kill/execute (?) Three stacked pendak characteristics of a keraton (Javanese palace). Pamor: Manggar Sinebit (pamor referring to a bright pattern or line on a keris) Tangguh (estimated time of manufacture): Blade length: 51 cm Luk (curve): 23 curves Deder: goose Gonjo: straight Gandik: Macan Putih (white tiger) Symbol: Macan Putih Warangka: Gayaman (Yogya) Grenengan /wagidang Keris: Singobarong (primitive) Luk: 19 curves Pamor: Tirta tumetes Blade length: 36.5 cm Warangka: sandang walikat Gonjo: straight Symbol: lion (gandik) 481 Saka; shark (grenengan) 559 AD Lion king and shark in Samudra Agung (Blambangan Mythology) or ocean Gandik bunder from Medang (age) >1000 years old characterized by the shape of a sirah cekak
2		
3		

No.	Keris Tangguh Blambangan	The Description and Interpretation of Keris
4	 Keris D	Keris: Mpu Pitrang Luk: 11 curves (diamond belt) Pamor: uphold the degree, uphold the mountain Gandik: elephant trunk/bean flower Grenengan exists Gonjo: straight Tangguh (estimated time of manufacture): - Medang era Gandik bunder; sirah cecak shows the Blambangan during Mataram era crafted by Mpu Joko Suro in the 19th century
5	 Keris E	Keris: straight Pamor: Sodo lanang Gonjo: straight Tangguh: Blambangan Majapahit era Blade length: cm Gandik: plain Dapur: brojol Symbol: steadfastness in carrying out the rules of Keris Mpu Supo
6	 Keris F	Dapur: Setan kober Pamor: Manggar sinebit Tangguh (estimated period of manufacture): Blambangan era of Hamengkubuwono and Paku-buwono (Mataram) Grenengan: peanut flower, elephant lambe, jalen Luk: 41 19th century

4. The Function of Keris as the Symbol of Power of Blambangan Dynasty

Myth as a tool to maintain social structure [11]. The best heirloom is worn by the best person (Senopati, King). There are several rules in Javanese cultural character. Javanese rules symbol luk 1 (sengkol) symbol of bravery, and calmness. Numeration three is symbolized by fire (spirit), which signifies bravery; conquer or die. Symbol 5 usually refers to heirlooms held by ambassadors or envoys (as communication experts), usually owned by Brahmana (thinkers, dynamic-diplomatic, or wind symbol). Keris luk 7 (seven curves) shows the symbol of karesian, helper, and spiritual advisor. Keris luk 9 is signifies nobility, the realm of kade-watan/nirvana/heaven, which means death. Keris luk 11 is held by the King, namely the diamond (inten) belt. Keris luk 11 is called the diamond belt, a symbol of the king's power; if

it is upright it is usually owned by the central King, if the keris luk 11 melts and leans it means it is owned by a subordinate king. Keris luk 13 means tegu welas (sengkelat: sengkel atine) used by hermits to criticize a king's policy which was tegu (callous), without welas (compassion). Luk 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, etc. are called Luk Kolowijan. Kolowijan means the light (wijan) of time (kolo). In the modern world, keris are created by order, which accounts for the prevalence of new keris despite old Dapur.

The value and philosophy of keris centered on political hegemony is internalized in the social aspects of Javanese society, including all policies. Mataram palace as a cultural center has traditionalized certain social rules in the use of the keris. After Mataram was divided into two following the Giyanti agreement, the Yogyakarta and Surakarta palaces continued to preserve keris tradition. Sudrajat and Wibowo [12] point out that in the past Javanese people mourned the dead by wearing traditional Javanese clothing complete with a keris whose sheath and motif adorned with colors specific

to its origin. When attending official events, the keris must wear a ladrang warangka (Surakarta version) or branggah (Yogyakarta regional version). By contrast, at non-official events, the keris must wear a gayaman warangka. Likewise, there are differences in the way it is worn in Yogyakarta and Surakarta. Notwithstanding, modernization has redefined the function of the keris, shifting its significance from the mythical and sacred towards a profane and economic context.

Keris has inspired Javanese culture since ancient Mataram and was continued by the Javanese palace dynasties afterward. These days, keris experienced mythical, physical, and functional developments, cementing its popularity and recognition. Keris and Others Malay Weapons written by Gardner reports that keris is a sharp weapon because of its compact and small shape (handheld)[13]. While some studies believe that Keris is a weapon brought by Indian culture to

Indonesia, this thesis requires further inquiry because long before the Indians came to Indonesia, the Javanese had dominated some parts of the globe.

5. Keris Secularism from Myth to Profane

The cultures surrounding keris were spread to Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, the Philippines, and Cambodia during the ancient Mataram era. In the Jenggala era, keris was made of high-quality iron with sophisticated artistic properties. Therefore, collectors competed to have keris from the Jenggala era. Keris collector associations emerged according to the tastes of tangguh, dapur, and certain pamor [14].

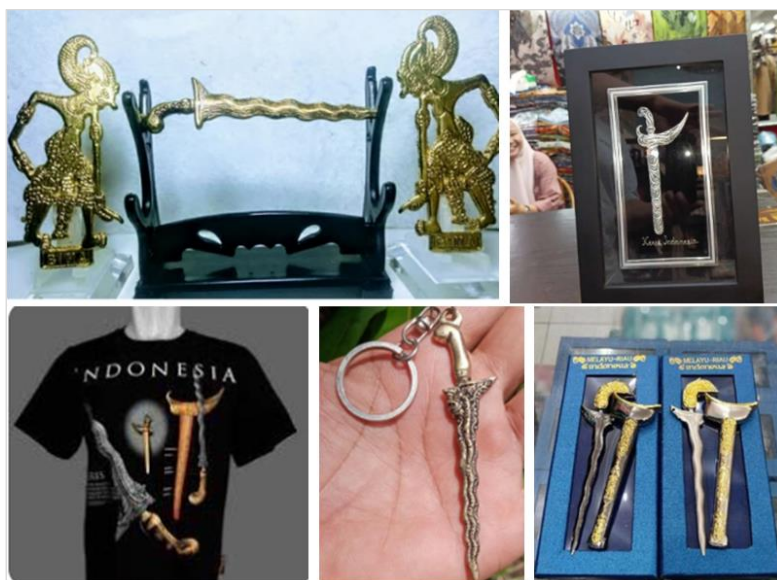


Figure 6. Creative industry on keris as decoration, replica, or merchandise supporting tourism sites.

During the split of Mataram into Surakarta and Yogyakarta, keris experienced a large-scale production. The explorations of various dapur, pamor, and knick-knacks. In addition to its larger shape than keris from previous periods, the selection of material for the recent keris also becomes increasingly meticulous, both for the blade and pamor.

Despite their ancient origins, myths continue to adapt and remain relevant in modern contexts, appearing in a variety of forms [15]. In the past, the ownership of a keris required authorization from the royal palace, but now people can possess a keris according to their wishes regardless of the past function of the keris. Old Javanese society tends to prioritize traditional authority over modern social prestige. In reality, keris has now undergone a transformation in form and use. In Madura island, many of empu (the master of keris) produced many of keris dapur Blambangan. The price of today's keris is much cheaper than that in the past. It is no longer an ancestral

identity but has experienced economic secularization. It has now been used as the symbol of elevated social status, a wedding decoration, and an accessory product for souvenirs in cultural tourism areas.



Figure 7. Keris merchants.

6. Conclusions

This study's conclusion has corroborated the previous findings documenting the symbols present on the Blambangan keris. These symbols indicate that Medang Kawulan existed and Blambangan stood in the current Jember area. This is further acknowledged by the findings gleaned from the historical records concerning the creation and function of Blambangan keris, the mythology of the Javanese kings, and oral history as well as traditions of Jember and Lumajang communities. The study further affirms that ancient keris are significantly thinner than the modern Blambangan keris as the former relies on its spiritual function. The size of the blade is medium, the tip is not too sharp. Its gandik is short and slanted, and its gonjo is characterized by sebit rontal (palm leaf shape) and a short sirah cecak. Keris has undergone noteworthy transformations in not only form but also use. Historically, it symbolised lineage and identity, demonstrating noble heritage and royal lineage. Nevertheless, it has experienced economic secularization in contemporary times and is no longer entirely related to ancestral identity. It has turned into a symbol of elevated social class and is generally used for decorative purposes in weddings. As such, it has emerged as a novel cultural accessory, developed into diverse souvenir products for tourists visiting tourist areas and cultural heritage sites. This transformation depicts the evolution of cultural artifacts as a response to modern economic and social trends.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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