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## Sign on 'Ki Dukun' kris in the era of the Sumedang Larang Kingdom (1500s AD), West Java, Indonesia

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#### Abstract

The kris is a dagger with a decorated blade and an ornamentally carved pistol-grip handle. It is peculiar to Indonesia (Frankel, 1963). This study aims to identify important and valuable meanings in the kris made during the Sumedang Larang kingdom era in Indonesia. This study used qualitative research methods with an ethnographic design and a semiotic approach to interpreting codes, signs, and forms. The data were obtained from interviews, observation, documentation, and artifacts. The interview data were obtained from historians who researched the Sumedang Larang kingdom, Prabu Geusan Ulun museum staff, Sumedang royal heirs, royal heirloom experts, ustad (Islamic religious teacher), calligraphers, and philologists. The documentation data were obtained from ancient manuscripts and literature discussing the history of Sumedang Larang. The visual data were obtained from a kris artifact left by Prabu Gajah Agung named "Ki Dukun". The results of the research show that signs on Ki Dukun's kris have become important markers regarding royal identity, cultural signs (syncretism), and models for the spread of Islam in the Sumedang region in the past.

**Keywords:** calligraphy, fine arts, Islam, kris, signs, Sumedang



### Public Interest Statement

This research investigates the meaning of symbols contained in the Kris 'Ki Dukun' kept in the Prabu Geusan Ulun museum, Sumedang district, West Java province, Indonesia. Based on the research, which collaborated semiotic and social studies approaches, three main topics were found to understand the values of the Kris: the history of the Kris, the meaning of Arabic letters on the Kris sarong, and the personal and social functions of the Kris. These findings also provide an overview of the influence of Islam in the Sumedang Larang kingdom in 1500 AD.

## 1. Introduction

Sumedang Larang Kingdom is one of the kingdoms established in West Java Province, Indonesia, in the 1500s AD. Sumedang Larang Kingdom was led by one of the kings, Prabu Gajah Agung. This kingdom turned into a regency in 1620 AD and is now led by a regent. Artifacts from ancient sites regarding Sumedang Larang are not thoroughly available. In addition, not too many historical objects are kept in the Prabu Geusan Ulun Museum, Sumedang Regency, West Java Province, Indonesia, and most have not been studied. This is one of the reasons why much of the history of the Sumedang Larang Kingdom has not been revealed. On top of that, information circulating in society today is still dominated by traditional chronicles or verbal information that is passed down from generation to generation as a speech culture. These stories are often mixed with myths, fairy tales, or legends. To enrich references about Sumedang, this art science study with a semiotic approach is conducted on the kris artifact "Ki Dukun" as the only heirloom of Prabu Gajah Agung, king of Sumedang Larang, decorated with Arabic calligraphy. A weapon that could be given the name of "kris"; in the Archipelago on the other hand and especially in Java, it is one of the most characteristic elements of culture. (Rassers, 1940).

Research on kris is not widely available even though these objects have spread not only in Java but also Sumatra and even Singapore and Malaysia. The available research is mostly focused on the *pamor* (nickel pattern) part of the kris blade. For example, Salvemini et al. (2020) focus on researching the character of ancient kris materials using neutron imaging and time-of-flight neutron diffraction analysis methods. In addition to research on kris blades, research on kris sheaths is also available, such as that conducted by Sutrisno (2018), which focuses on the process of making sheaths without discussing the aesthetics of the ornamentation. Sutrisno explains that kris makers are divided into several types, namely *pánda* (ironworker), *kemásan* (goldsmith), *m'ráng'gi* (sheath maker), *anyáara-wedi Retna* (jewelry maker), and *anyádur-rasa* (silversmith). The word *m'ráng'gi* comes from *kawi*, which is an ancient Javanese language that was used in the Hindu-Buddhist era as a family that made hilts, kris sheaths, and decorated *pendhok* (Sutrisno, 2018). The difference between this study and the two studies mentioned above is that no researcher has examined the Ki Dukun kris, especially the sheath.

The available data on the Ki Dukun kris is still being debated. This study attempts to reveal, corroborate, or refute the history of the kris. The study focuses on the aesthetics of the kris sheath regardless of when, where, and by whom the kris was made. This study with a semiotic approach is the first to discuss visual signs in artifacts so it is expected to be able to reveal the important meanings of the kris sheath ornaments. With that in mind, the research questions are as follows:

- Q1. Is a visual approach able to reveal the signs and codes left by the creator of kris?
- Q2. Does a kris artifact have an important message that is beneficial to human life?

## 2. Identifying Meaning in Signs

Semiotics is used to explore everything that has sign elements, including signs on physical artifacts

(Soleymani Ardejani & Askarizad, 2018). Several studies have been carried out using semiotics to identify signs in works of art. One of them is research on works of Islamic architecture by Askarizad et al. (2022). Further, a more specific study on architectural ornamentation has been carried out by Zahra and Shahir (2022). Meanwhile, semiotic science has been used as a tool to research South Scandinavian Bronze Age rock drawings by Rédei et al. (2020).

An artifact must have visual sign elements such as shape, color, and material. All of that is related to rules or principles that are combined as a structure that forms meaning or symbol. Signs in artifacts are a medium of universal expression of human experience. Therefore, semiotics can also be concluded as a science that examines the life of signs in society. As an object found in the past, the Ki Dukun kris can be said to be an archaeological object. Semiotics has been used for the purpose of tracing archaeological objects (Swenson & Cipolla, 2020). This is not only for historical purposes but also to interpret the material remains as signs of past activities or phenomena (Swenson, 2018), or marks on artifacts that are not merely images of social reality but also to create them and affect changes in that reality. The Ki Dukun kris as archaeological objects must carry certain messages through signs in the form of calligraphy. This is because, fundamentally, objects or works of art are instruments for conveying spiritual and semantic messages (Ghouchani & Taji, 2021), which help us to understand their opinions as well as possible. The nature of semiotics itself is the study of signs and sign processes (semiosis) as indications, analogies, metaphors, symbolism, meanings, and cultural phenomena that have an anthropological dimension. Thus, this study on the Ki Dukun kris does not attempt to reveal historical aspects related to actors, events, space, and time of occurrence, but focuses on all visual aspects of the artifacts concerning politics, social, and culture. Politics relates to matters of power policies concerning identity or legitimacy of power, social relates to the reality of life in society, and culture relates to the cultural model that existed at that time in Sumedang in which it could benefit society at large should its deepest meaning is found.

Kris is synonymous with pre-Islamic cultural heritage objects, namely Hinduism or Buddhism, and is often considered to have “spiritual power”. Therefore, what makes the Ki Dukun kris unique is that it combines two religious elements, namely Islamic calligraphy and local artifacts from Hindu-Buddhist culture. This is what has stimulated the human mind and senses to penetrate the veil/hijab to reveal the reality of the meta-cosmic realm. The combination of Hindu, Buddhist, Chinese, Javanese, and Arabic cultures, such as in the “Sang Cipta Rasa” Great Mosque in Cirebon, Indonesia, has become a special interest for art researchers so that such artifacts are referred to as hybrid cultural identities (Kartika et al., 2020).

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Design

The method used in this study is a qualitative method with an ethnographic design and semiotics approach. Ethnographic design is appropriate for exploring various beliefs, languages, behaviors, and problems faced by certain cultural groups (Creswell, 2012). Meanwhile, a semiotic approach is used to interpret one of the cultural artifacts, namely the Ki Dukun kris, and from signs to describe a socio-cultural and political phenomenon in the past. Semiotics as a science has been widely used by researchers from various disciplines. The term semiology itself was first influenced by the works of scholars such as Charles Sanders Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure (Parsaee et al., 2015). Peirce describes a sophisticated sign system that rests on the assumption that humans use signs to understand the world (Yakin & Totu, 2014). Included in this study are signs on kris artifacts that can be used as knowledge to understand important things in the past.

### 3.2. Participants

Six participants were willing to provide information and were seen as having in-depth knowledge of history, archeology, philology, heritage experts, royal heirs of Sumedang Larang, and Islamic calligraphers. Table 1 below presents the list of participants.

Table 1: Participant Data

Participant	Gender	Age	Expertise	Educational Background
Participant 1	Female	40-50 years	Historian	Doctor
Participant 2	Female	40-55 years	Archaeologist	Doctor
Participant 3	Male	40-50 years	Philologist	Doctor
Participant 4	Male	50-55 years	<i>Tosan aji</i> (heirloom) expert	Masters
Participant 5	Male	40-50 years	Heir	Bachelor
Participant 6	Male	40-50 years	Islamic calligrapher	Bachelor

### 3.3. Research Site

Several researchers from universities have tried to trace historical evidence through archaeological sites located around Sumedang district, West Java Province, Indonesia. However, historical sites like that can be said to be very few. What they have found are only tombs, which sometimes have no information other than piles of stones. Collections that are considered the most representative and in mostly good condition are objects kept in museums, especially the Prabu Geusan Ulun museum in Sumedang district, West Java Province, Indonesia. The museum has collections from the Padjadjaran kingdom which have patterns from the Hindu-Buddhist era to the colonial era.

Based on this fact, this study was conducted at the Prabu Geusan Ulun Museum in Sumedang Regency, West Java Province, Indonesia. This museum is 50 meters away from Sumedang square. It has six buildings, namely Bumi Kaler, Srimanganti Building, Gendeng Building, Gamelan Building, Pusaka Building, and Kereta Building. The Prabu Geusan Ulun Museum was chosen because it is the only museum that has complete Sumedang Larang royal artifacts. The location of the Prabu Geusan Ulun Museum is shown in Figure 1.

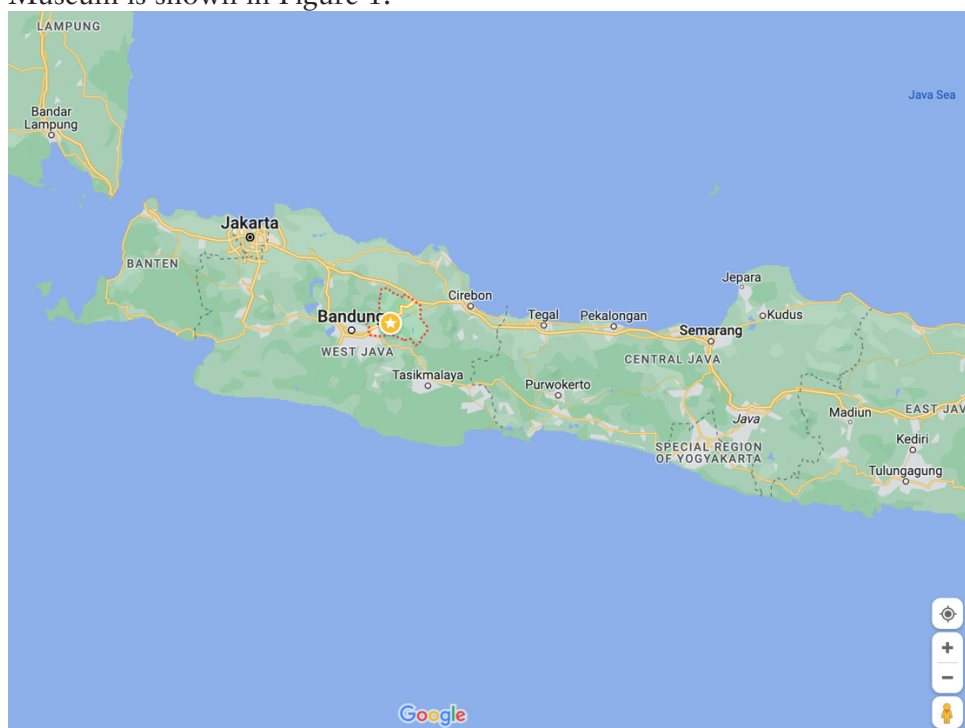


Figure 1. Location of Sumedang Regency (Google Maps)

### **3.4. Data Collection**

Data collection was carried out using several techniques, namely documentation, observation, and interviews.

#### **3.4.1. Documentation**

Data collection can be challenging because there are still many artifacts that have not been explored or researched. However, there is one ancient manuscript that helps open the door for information about Sumedang called Waruga Jagat, a 12-page manuscript written in Arabic ‘*pegon*’ (Javanese Sundanese) made from a bark material of a type of mulberry paper called “sach leather”. A small part of the manuscript is kept in the Yayasan Pangeran Sumedang (YPS) Museum.

The YPS Museum also has two manuscripts with *pegon* letters, but one of them is made of plain paper written by the name Raden Adipati Suryalaga II, Regent of Bogor, Karawang, and Sukapura, contemporary of Prince Kornel, 18-19 century AD. The manuscript tells the genealogy of Sumedang regents.

The other manuscript also uses Javanese-Sundanese language and letters with sach leather material but is in a much damaged condition making it difficult to read. The manuscript contains a series of genealogies of rulers in the country who are related by family to one another, as well as having relations with rulers who once played a role in the spread of Islam in the world. Even though the text only mentions a little about the history of power in Sumedang, it does not specifically mention the year when Islam entered Sumedang.

Apart from ancient manuscript sources, literature studies from journals, books, articles on the internet, dissertations, theses, etc. are in place.

#### **3.4.2. Observation**

The initial study was carried out throughout the building to inventory artifacts that match the study theme. Furthermore, the study was focused on the Pusaka Building because it has a very strong historical value and is the most valuable compared to other buildings. Among them are the Binokasih crown made of pure gold and the heirloom weapons of the kings, most of which are made of gold encrusted with jewels, including the third Sumedang Larang king’s heirloom, namely Ki Dukun. None of the other artifacts stored in the Prabu Geusan Ulun Sumedang Museum as a legacy of the Sumedang Larang kingdom show signs of Islam apart from the Ki Dukun kris.

#### **3.4.3. Interview**

To identify the meaning of the calligraphy decoration of the Ki Dukun kris, interviews and consultations were first carried out with the Sumedang royal administrators and heirs. Then, to obtain scientific and accurate information, interviews were conducted with experts in history, archeology, philology, heirlooms, and calligraphy.

To read the letters, interviews were conducted with calligraphers, masters of philology, and alumni of the Calligraphy Islamic Boarding School (*Lembaga Kaligrafi Alquran/LEMKA*), Sukabumi, West Java, Indonesia. To further strengthen the information, a direct interview was also conducted with one of the administrators who was also an *ustad* (Islamic religious teacher) at the LEMKA Calligraphy Islamic Boarding School. The results of the interview can determine the type of letters and the purpose of the inscription. Most of the letters were legible and only a small number were unknown. The interview was very helpful in not only conveying the meaning of the calligraphy inscription, but also the intent and meaning of the Ki Dukun kris calligraphy inscription. From all participants, statements related to

knowledge and information about the history of Sumedang Larang were obtained.

### 3.5. Material

The artifact being analyzed is the Ki Dukun kris (see Figure 2). This kris consists of three parts, namely: (1) the kris blade, which was made of special metal material with complicated techniques and selected materials such as meteorites, irons, and nickels. The blade of the Ki Dukun kris was made by forging it until it is thin with hundreds of folds forming a *pamor* (nickel pattern); (2) the kris hilt, which was made of the finest wood and inlaid with gold lining; and (3) the kris sheath, which was made of wood covered with gold decorated with floral ornaments and Islamic calligraphy. The upper part of the sheath is called an *angkup* and is decorated with floral ornaments and calligraphy, while the lower part is called *pendhok* and is only decorated with Arabic calligraphy. According to experts, the kris does not belong to the category of weapons, working tools, or ordinary tools, but belongs to the category of *tosan aji* or *wesi aji* or the king's heirlooms.



Figure 2: The Ki Dukun Kris

### 3.6. Procedure

In exploring the meaning of the messages in the Ki Dukun kris, the following steps were carried out: (1) tracing the visual elements; (2) describing the visual elements; (3) analyzing the main visual elements; (4) translating the Arabic calligraphy into Indonesian; (5) interpreting the data; and (6) evaluating the meaning that has been formulated.

## 4. Findings and Discussions

This study examines the signs of the Ki Dukun kris. Based on the results of the investigation, three themes were obtained as follows:

### 4.1. The History of Kris

No amount of knowledge will be sufficient to give a clear picture of Sumedang, especially since not many artifacts have been found as historical archaeological objects in Sumedang. Likewise, complete and clear ancient texts are still very difficult to find. From the existing data that has been found and written in books and journal articles that discuss Sumedang, it is still very minimal. According to experts, much evidence is still needed as a comparison to support the solidity of information about Sumedang. The

various problems found showed that Sumedang's history, art, and culture are not well known, especially among ordinary people who do not receive adequate information either formally at school or from information obtained elsewhere. Even if there is news or information circulating, it is not obtained from scientific sources, but in the form of legends or myths that are conveyed through oral traditions passed down from generation to generation, so that information bias becomes increasingly apparent. But now the social—and often political—construction of such processes as memory, speech, literacy, myth, or the control of knowledge is also increasingly appreciated, issues now moving to the centre stage in modern anthropological thinking (Finnegan, 2003).

As a kris covered in Arabic calligraphy, there is not a single text or story that tells the relationship between the Ki Dukun kris and the existence of Islam in Sumedang. Participant 5, who is also the heir to the Sumedang kingdom, stated that:

“There has been no in-depth study and strong primary sources that tell in detail about the method of spreading Islam in Sumedang. There is no source that can be used as a reference, and most of the history of Sumedang is based on traditions of speech, fairy tales and folklore passed down from generation to generation. In fact, we usually get stories like this from the custodians of sacred sites, such as the tombs of kings, who convey a lot of history in versions of certain legends or myths.”

According to the heirs, there has been no specific research on the calligraphy ornaments of the Ki Dukun kris. This information has provided an opportunity to conduct a study. From the perspective of art, tracing through visual signs is another way that can reinforce information while also revealing other valuable values, such as the philosophical value of an object which can provide important information about many things.

#### **4.1.1. The Tale of Kris Origins**

Prabu Gajah Agung (Atmadibrata), king of Tembung Agung (1492-1502 AD), died and was buried in Cicanting Darmaraja. He was a substitute for Prabu Tajimalela who had moved the royal capital from Leuwi Hideung to Ciguling (now Pasanggrahan Village, South Sumedang District). With this move, he was later known as Prabu Pagulingan. According to the story that developed in the community, the kingdom that was led by Prabu Gajah Agung was attacked by enemies from outside who almost defeated him. Prabu Gajah Agung meditated asking for guidance from the Supreme Being. In his meditation, he heard the voice of his father, Prabu Tajimalela, who ordered Prabu Gajah Agung to destroy a rock in front of him. When the rock was split, he found a kris named Ki Dukun inside. With this kris, the enemies who attacked the kingdom could be expelled. Because of its prowess, the kris was always carried around by the next king, including Prince Kornel when dealing with the Governor General of the Dutch East Indies, even though Prince Kornel had his own kris, namely the Nagasasra II kris. The event is enshrined through a sculptural monument at the start of Jalan Cadas Pangeran.

The name kris comes from the word ‘*keris*’ which in Sanskrit means *menghunus* (to pull out, usually a weapon, from its sheath). This word is identical to short-range war weapons. Kris is made by a master or a great kris maker belonging to the kingdom. In the process of making it, it is often accompanied by *laku tirakat* (spiritual practice) while reciting prayers or mantras as a form of request to the Almighty. The word ‘*Ki*’ in Sundanese or Javanese has a respectful meaning and is said to respect someone who is usually older. Then, since there were no doctors or scientists like today, a ‘*Dukun*’ (shaman) was seen by the people of ancient times as having a high position as well as a positive connotation. With their

'magic', the shaman had many roles, starting from healing illnesses to being a place to ask questions. However, shamans are not regarded as highly today, so the number of shamans is drastically decreasing over time.

The kris that belonged to Prabu Gajah Agung was named Ki Dukun in relation to the beliefs of the people at that time. The Ki Dukun kris was an heirloom that has the highest rank as well as having the power to drive away bad luck (disaster) that comes to Sumedang. This is still going on today because some people, including cultural and community leaders, "respect and treat it excessively" to a point that it is celebrated in a special ritual without understanding the philosophical message (noble values) entrusted to the kris by the makers.

Participant 1 spoke about this as something that was very unfortunate because "myths are much stronger than research findings or expert opinions." Participant 1 believed that "no documents, no history". This means that a historical fact must be supported by many findings in various "documents" as primary data.

#### 4.1.2. *Kris Restoration*

As a royal heir and caretaker of all royal inheritances, Participant 5 said: "some parts of the kris are made of wood, which is likely to be damaged more easily than other materials made of metal. So, it is possible that some of them have been restored by the next leaders. This was especially during the reign of Prabu Geusan Ulun. In line with what was conveyed by the royal heir, According to Participant 3: "surely, the best kris is made of steel with meteorite material because this material is the most difficult to engrave. Sheaths are usually made of less durable wood, so they may have been replaced several times because they were worn out or damaged. Parts made of gold are also easier to engrave because gold is softer. This kris could have been made sometime between the 18th and 20th centuries. Maybe around the 70s or a few months before being handed over to the museum, the sheath was replaced or repaired first."

Participant 3 also mentioned the relationship between the *Binokasih* crown and the Ki Dukun kris, including the time of making the kris. Participant 3 stated:

"in Carita Parahyangan, it is stated that, before Wastu Kancana was crowned, his uncle named Bunisora made a crown to crown Wastu Kancana as the king of Pajajaran. When Pajajaran *runtag* (collapsed), the crown was brought to Sumedang and handed over to Prabu Geusan Ulun. However, there is no record that states whether this is true or not. The most valid source states that the crown was made in the era of Prince Sugih to marry off his daughter before the 1890s. Because he was rich, Prince Sugih made a crown out of gold called the *Binokasih* to marry off his son. The golden Ki Dukun kris may have also been made in this era because the crown, *siger* (accessories), and kris had to be all gold".

Related to this, if the Ki Dukun kris is an artifact of the past, it is certain that the kris became an early marker of the shift in cultural forms or beliefs in Sumedang at that time. Moreover, history has proven that the Hindu-Buddhist tradition has slowly disappeared from Sumedang to replace it with a new belief that still exists today, namely Islamic culture. The combination of the two elements in the Ki Dukun kris reflects Hindu-Buddhist culture or before that. This situation has indicated that the old culture accepts the new culture so kris automatically become a new cultural expression that seeks conformity, harmony, and balance.

In other words, if the next king restores or revises the Ki Dukun kris by adding a special sign in



the form of Islamic calligraphy, it is certain that the king consciously wants to “preach” Islam which has started to exist in Sumedang. However, for certainty regarding the actual event, a more in-depth research is needed.

#### 4.2. Meaning of Arabic Calligraphy on *Warangka Kris* (the Kris Sheath)

The aesthetics of a kris can be classified into *dhapur*, *pamor*, and *tanggub* (Setyadi et al., 2020). *Dhapur* refers to the style or shape of a kris and *pamor* refers to the decorative patterns on the blade as a result of different metal combinations and forging-folding techniques. Meanwhile, *tanggub* refers to the process of interpretation regarding the origin and approximate age of a kris. This study does not discuss the aesthetics of the kris blade but focuses on the visual signs or messages on the sheath part of the kris called *pendhok*, which is made of gold and decorated with Arabic calligraphy. With calligraphy inscription, it is certain that it contains important messages or signs. Noor (2000) believes that the evolution of the kris in the context of social-cultural and political change in the Malay occurred in the 14th century. Thus, this study can show important matters in the past that are still relevant today and in the future by tracing back the essential domains that are believed to contain noble values about virtue (Sudrajat et al., 2017).

Calligraphy is a manifestation of obedience or solution to the rules (hadith) in Islamic teachings regarding the prohibition of animate creatures that belong to God’s domain and may not be replicated in any way, including in arts (Akkach, 2012). According to Al-Faruqi (2000), ornamentation in works of art provides an additional dimension of beauty for Muslims, because figures or objects, phrases or movements, and verses or anecdotes express monotheism or are expressions of truth and goodness for adherents of Islam.

Calligraphy is a beautiful writing art that is known in various nations that already know and practice writing. Arabic calligraphy is well known and practiced in a disciplined manner so that it becomes a tradition as well as the most valuable form of art in Islamic culture. Its influence and primacy are found in every aesthetic medium of Islamic art. Arabic calligraphy is the art of arranging dots and lines to form rhythm and composition. George (2017), describes Arabic calligraphy as an artistic form of handwriting that is based on the Arabic alphabet. The word “Tat” (Arabic: خط) is derived from the word ‘line’, ‘plan’, or ‘building’. It is common to associate calligraphy with a variety of fields within the Arab culture, including religion, sculpture, architecture, education, and handicraft, all of which played a big part in its development. Various forms of religious and secular structures are decorated with calligraphy, such as pottery, glass, carpets, gems, woodcarving, and metalwork. The content of the text, the shape of the surfaces, and the intended use all influence the calligraphy style. Because of this, each script has different forms and materials according to its setting.

Since Arabic calligraphy is closely related to religion, much of calligraphic art is sourced from al-Quran as the main source of Islamic religious teachings. Many calligraphy applications are written on sacred objects or buildings such as mosques (Daryadi et al. (2022). According to Fajariyah (2021), calligraphy is considered as a mosque ornament that has Quranic values. Furthermore, Kamarudin et al. (2020) also discuss Islamic calligraphy as an architectural decoration of mosques in Peninsular Malaysia. It is evident that the use of calligraphy to decorate sacred buildings such as mosques is common and can be found in various parts of the world. However, calligraphy on kris is unique and rare.

The Ki Dukun kris is the only one inscribed with calligraphy, which makes its aesthetic value not only lie in the material and manufacturing technique but in the calligraphy inscriptions. To read the letters, interviews were conducted with calligraphers, masters of philology and one of the administrators who was also an ustad (Islamic religious teacher) at the LEMKA Calligraphy Islamic Boarding School



### 4.2.3. The Names of Angels

Afterwards, the names of the angels Gabriel, Michael, Israfil, and Izrail were written. These four angels were the first beings Allah created and the last ones Allah ordered to perish. They are the main angels in charge of overseeing major events in our universe. Gabriel is the angel who sends important messages to humans, especially to the Prophet Muhammad, Michael is the angel who brings good fortune from Allah, Israfil is the angel who blows the trumpet on the Day of Judgment, and Izrail is the angel who takes lives (Burge, 2010).

### 4.2.4. Letters Specialty

Some parts of the kris are only written in Arabic letters (see Figure 4) such as the inscriptions on the left and right that line downward are just letters with the letters *hā'* and *mīm* the most. Apart from the letters *hā' wa mīm*, there These two letters may be considered to have deep meanings because, in al-Quran, these letters are often written as the opening letters of a verse. There is not a single verse and surah in al-Quran that is without special features, especially those surahs that start with the initials (*Fawatih al-Suwar*) (Boullata, 2013). There are 29 surahs in al-Quran that start with the initials (30 verses), and they start with the same letters, namely the letters *hā' mīm*, *'alif lām mīm*, and *'alif lām rā'*. There are even seven surahs that are arranged sequentially in the al-Quran, and they begin with the letters *hā' mīm* and are known as surah *hā' wa mīm*. These surahs are Al-Mu'minun, Fussilat, Ash-Shura, Az-Zukhruf, Ad-Dukhaan, Al-Jaathiyah, and Al-Ahqaaf. This *hā' wa mīm* surah group was revealed in Makkah and is called the Makkiyah group.

Apart from the letters *hā' wa mīm*, there are other letters, namely *'alif, lām + alif, lām, rā', wāw, yā', tā' bā' rā', dhāl*, and *jīm*. The letters *nūn* and others are also found in the Ki Dukun kris which is listed because they are considered to have special features. The specialty of these letters can reveal their deepest secret meanings if explored with adequate knowledge and reason.

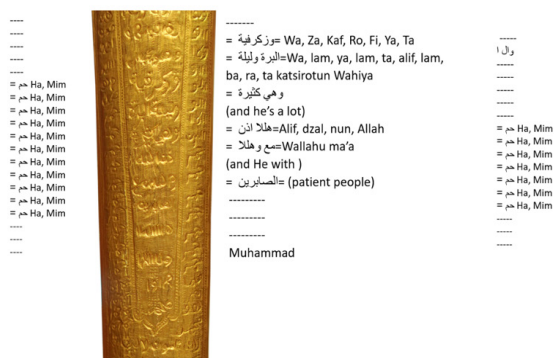


Figure 4. Letters Specialty

### 4.2.5. Holy Verse Quotes

Figures 3 and 5 contain quotes from several chapters of al-Quran. In Figure 3, it was written that several sentences in which the meaning is quite clear, and they are quotations from al-Quran, such as: “*you and everyone are on the earth ... and Allah with patient people*” (al-Baqarah: 153). This line serves as a reminder to everyone on earth who is going through various tests and tribulations to be patient since Allah is always with them.

At the bottom of the kris is a quote from Surah Ya-Sin that is repeated three times (see Figure 5) “*...then they cannot see, then they cannot see, then they cannot see*” (QS Ya-Sin: 9). According to Participant 6, the quote “*then they cannot see Allah*” can be connected to the following quotes, namely,

“O Allah... You are no god but You, Allah, Allah for the sake of Allah there is no god except Allah O... Dzat the Most-Living Most-True, and there is no god but Thee. For us our charity for you your charity”. Surah Yasin: 9 addresses Allah’s power and confession or prayer, which will soothe everyone who reads it because they will be protected by the powerful.



Figure 5. Prayer

#### 4.2.6. The Names of Allah (Asmaul Husna)

At the bottom, the attributes of Allah are listed, namely the Almighty, the All-Forcing, and the Most Compassionate (see Figure 6). This name reflects God’s nature and greatness, which might raise awareness of God’s existence. *Asmaul Husna* is one way to know God is by understanding the names of Allah (Asmaul Husna). *Asmaul Husna* is the mediator of communication used by Allah Almighty so that humans can confer to Him (Bahri & Nidal, 2019). The conclusions that can be drawn from the discussion of the understanding of Asmaul Husna in Islamic theology. Asmaul Husna are the names of Allah that have been attributed by Allah to Himself,



Figure 6. The Names of Allah

#### 4.3. Function of the Kris

It is certain that every kingdom in Indonesia had heirlooms in ancient times. Similarly, the Sumedang Larang kingdom possessed an heirloom known as the Ki Dukun kris. These heirlooms provide evidences,

as follows:

#### 4.3.1. *Artifacts as Royal Identity*

A country or kingdom is required to have a special identity that will distinguish it from the others. For example, in the form of a coat of arms, crown flag, or heirloom weapon. In this case, the Ki Dukun kris is the main heirloom of Prabu Gajah Agung (Rahman & Masunah, 2019). Regarding this, Participant 4 stated:

“In terms of form and material, cultural works in the form of kris are not only found in West Java (Sumedang), but in almost the entire island of Java. In the Sundanese language, there is a principle of “forms follow functions”. For example, *cangkul* (hoe) is used for *nyangkul* (dig using a hoe), *arit* (sickle) is used for *ngarit* (cutting grass using a sickle). When an object has a function as *parabot* (tools), the object has more than one function. For example, a knife can be used to split, cut, slash, etc. Objects are also made to have ergonomic elements. Since kris are made for humans, there are rational proportions to them”.

To show regality as an heirloom, the Ki Dukun kris is not made from cheap materials and in easy ways. Selected materials such as gold, meteorite, iron, and the best wood are used to make the kris. Moreover, the manufacturing technique is complex and laborious to ensure that the kris is made not just as an ordinary tool but for specific purposes related to the identity, image, and dignity of a power (kingdom). For this purpose, kris must be made with the best techniques and materials. According to participant 4, a kris does not belong to the category of ordinary weapons and tools but belongs to the category of *tosan aji* or *wesi aji* or heirlooms, which contain issues of the intrinsic function of symbolism. So, if a kris is covered with gold, it is not a weapon, it is a collection.”

The Ki Dukun kris is made not as a functional object, weapon, or work tool. In the process of making it, Participant 4 added that “the Ki Dukun kris is made by forging it many times until it is this thin because it may be forged up to tens to hundreds of times to form *pamor* (nickel patterns) like hair fibers”. Through the visuals and the quality of the material, the Ki Dukun kris has philosophical, historical, cultural, ethical, aesthetic, and moral values of the Sumedang kingdom. Regarding this, Participant 3 believed that “the kris was usually a *sasaputan* that is deliberately covered in gold, which means it was not an actual weapon, but only for heirlooms”.

In the last interview, participant 4 opined that:

“to understand a cultural object today. We need to reconstruct cultural values so that they are not lost. This is more visible in cultural works in the form of objects. If there are no guardians or preservation of these traditional works, there will be a danger of extinction for future generations. Our children will not know their ancestral heritage. Kris is a cultural heritage object that we must study and protect as a wealth that is useful for the future.”

#### 4.3.2. *Legitimacy of Power*

The splendor and elegance of The Ki Dukun kris can be seen in the design and materials. Kris is a weapon with a unique shape from the Land of Java, which is different from heirloom weapons elsewhere. The Ki Dukun kris is made by an *mpu* in a complicated and complex way. The materials used are not ordinary. Likewise, the handle and sheath of the Ki Dukun kris are made of gold. Islam also does not separate between beauty and usability. With magnificent materials and decorations, the Ki Dukun kris has a

grand image as an image of power and extension, rather than as a weapon. Filomena Salvemini says that kris is a weapon (Salvemini, 2017).

The Ki Dukun kris was made with complicated designs and techniques and selected materials, so it is called *Tosan Aji* or precious iron. Its sheath was made of the finest wood and plated with gold. The sheath was inscribed in Arabic calligraphy, some of which are quoted from al-Quran. With such material, it can be ascertained that the Ki Dukun kris is a very valuable heirloom. Rassers (1982) Said, the individual object which the Javanese still prizes as one of his most valuable possessions. Other kingdoms, both domestically and abroad, usually use crowns as a symbol of honor. However, all the artifacts in the Sumedang Larang Museum show that the symbol of the power of the six kings who once ruled in Sumedang were krises made with the best and most valuable materials, such as gold and gems. According to participant 5: A symbol of power, one of which is the heirloom kris, is of particular concern to maintain its existence properly.”

With Arabic inscriptions on the sheath, it was a political strategy to mark a form of power. It was especially important because, at that time, there were still many threats from outside the kingdom in the form of wars that ended in conquest between kingdoms. Therefore, the symbol or identity of power needs to be upheld so that the people could trust the leader at that time.

#### 4.3.3. Tools for Spreading Islamic Teachings

One of the artifacts in the museum is the Waruga Djagat manuscript made by Raden Adipati Suryalaga II, the Regent of Bogor, Karawang, and Sukapura, a contemporary of Prince Kornel, 18-19 century AD. The script talks about events that have Islamic nuances such as the genealogy of the founders of the empire who came from abroad or had direct Arab descent or from those who had gone directly to the Holy Land of Makkah for pilgrimage or to study Islam. None of these events or stories are supported by a definite number about the year of the entry of Islam. Regarding the sources of artifacts in the Geusan Ulun Museum, Participant 3 stated that “some traditional manuscript or historiographical sources in Sumedang have not been widely known and transliterated by philologists. It must go through studies of philologists first to find out the origins of the manuscripts and at what era the manuscripts were written”.

The lack of information about the history of Sumedang can be caused by several things, including insufficient data, only a few researchers have conducted research on the history of Sumedang, and research that has been carried out but has not been widely published so that it is not known to many people. However, Participant 5 stated that “during the reign of King Geusan Ulun, Prince Santri Islam began to spread Islam through various means, including through culture and the arts. One of the forms of art was the ‘Gemyung Art’ that developed in the Islamic boarding school environment and became the legacy of the Cirebon trustees”. This reason is acceptable because one of the percussion instruments used in this art is similar to the percussion instruments commonly found in Central Asia (Arab Countries). In line with this, with the lyrics of songs such as *sali-salu*, *kikis kelir*, *meumpeung hurip*, and others also have Islamic elements to them. Islam grew and spread massively which, according to Islamic law, had colored the lives of the people of Sumedang.

Even though sufficient evidence is needed, it does not rule out the possibility that the same thing was also done by Prabu Gajah Agung through the Ki Dukun Kris. The Ki Dukun kris, which is inscribed with Arabic calligraphy, is the early period of *syiar* (spread of Islam). Arabic inscription on royal heirlooms has shown a new sign that Islam was accepted as the royal religion. In this case, the Ki Dukun kris became a tool for spreading Islam starting from the center of power. With such a political model, Islam was easily accepted by society, which in turn grew to become part of religious life (religious

law) in the Sumedang Larang community.

The art that is instilled in the Ki Dukun kris is born from religious awareness, a breath of supplication and contemplation about God so that its meaning cannot be reduced by any views or ideology that replaces it. In other words, the source of inspiration for the creation of the Ki Dukun kris heirloom was created with a spiritual vision that gave an Islamic view of socio-politics at that time.

Moreover, the magic of Ki Dukun is not in the mystical powers that are often infiltrated into heirlooms, which is not in line with the meaning of the monotheistic sentence on the kris. Its own strength lies precisely in the “records of the Divine intellect” which are quoted from the word of Allah and are manifested in the form of ornate calligraphy. In line with this, Nasr (1987) believes that “art cannot play a spiritual function if it is not connected with the form and content of Islamic revelation.” The Ki Dukun kris is a work of art full of spiritual wisdom or wisdom that cannot be realized by simple individual inspiration or creativity. This also does not come from rationalism or intelligent human reasoning, but from an intellectual vision that can only be achieved through exploring the soul to the Most Unseen.

Another meaning of the calligraphy on the Ki Shaman kris is an embedded prayer that does not aim for kris to have supernatural or special powers, but the real magic lies in the meaning of the inscription aimed at humans to believe in the Creator, Prophet, and caliphs. Politically, it is very clear that the kris was also created as a medium for the propagation of Islamic teachings in which holy sentences and letters are enshrined in objects that are venerated to the point of being “sacred”, namely royal heirlooms, not in objects that do not have a high value, such as ordinary furniture.

Fundamentally, kris is a local object that existed long before Islam came, whether it was a relic of civilization from the Hindu or Buddhist era or even before that. Meanwhile, Arabic calligraphy came with the arrival of Islam. Therefore, when the two cultures unite, it is certain that there will be a fusion of them, i.e., the local culture and the culture that comes. This is also reflected in the form of the Ki Dukun kris where the kris is a product characterized by local culture decorated with Arabic letters as the culture that comes after.

## 5. Conclusion

Referring to the research question “Is a visual approach able to reveal the signs and codes left by the creator of Kris?” It can be concluded that the visual approach is able to build an image of material beauty, symbolic values, forms, and all the elements that surround it, including myths or supernatural stories that are the history of the creation of the Ki Dukun kris and potentially kris in general. Arabic calligraphy, ornaments, and the origins of the Ki Dukun kris are signs of the phenomenon of mixing two cultures (syncretism). As for the research question “Does a kris artifact have an important message that is beneficial to human life?” It can be concluded that the Ki Dukun kris has a spiritual message quoted from the Qur’an and is a sign of a mission to spread Islamic teachings. Its contents are messages from the teachings of the Islamic religion regarding guidelines for life that should be understood, interpreted, and implemented in everyday life. The Ki Dukun kris is also a symbol of honor for a country (kingdom) which shows an authentic manifestation of the intellectual, philosophical, symbolic, and spiritual dimensions. With its complex making process, kris is not only seen as an ordinary weapon or craft but a work of high artistic value which is a symbol of honor, authority, and identity of power. In the Indonesian context, the Ki Dukun Kris is an early example of a juxtaposition between Islam and a culturally totemic artifact. It displays more than just a sacred script imprinted with foundational Islamic prayers on the gilt scabbard that protects the royal dagger. This can be interpreted as an effort to bestow the blessing—that is, a spiritual power born not of magic but of communication with and acceptance of divine authority

through the practice of prayer—on this material object. The inscribed scabbard creates a liminal space as an act of hope and faith. It becomes a material mystery when discussing eternal mysteries. In relation to the identity of the Sumedang kings in the form of six crises, the six heirloom weapons have distinctive and different characteristics of the shape and type of ornament. Therefore, this study on the Ki Shaman kris is an entry point that opens opportunities for research on other heirloom weapons. Along with that, all results from future research can complement data about Sumedang and add to the body of knowledge about Indonesia in particular, and the world in general.

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