
Seat of the Divine Preserver: Prabudewa Iconographies of the Hamengku Buwana Dynasty

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ABSTRACT

For more than two-and-a-half centuries, the Sultanate of Yogyakarta has been under the rule of one dynasty of sultans called the Hamengku Buwana. One of the keys to such a prolonged rulership by one dynasty is the use of narratives as well as symbolisms that support said narratives. In the case of the sultanate, the narratives relate the rulers to the concept of the sultan as a god-king, or in the Javanese term, prabudewa. In this article, I explore how the dynasty found means of identification with the Hindu deity, Lord Vishnu, to strengthen the claim that the sultan is indeed a divine sovereign. Using the symbolic framework, I argue that the Hamengku Buwana have used artistic allusions to Lord Vishnu which are incorporated in the court's iconographies to reach that goal. At the end of the day, I found that the dynasty has, in fact, been using artistic iconographies within the royal court as a means to strengthen their identification as Lord Vishnu, the divine preserver of the universe according to the Hindu pantheon. The iconographies are spread throughout the royal court and can be found in various forms as well which one can still see to this day, such as the royal coach, the sultan's throne room, and in Yogyakarta batik motifs.

Keywords: *Sultan Hamengku Buwana; Iconography; Lord Vishnu; Yogyakarta Royal Court; Prabudewa*

INTRODUCTION

Prior to the Sultanate of Yogyakarta becoming its own independent state, it was part of a larger and much older kingdom known as the Islamic Mataram Kingdom (1586-1755 AD). It is a monarchy which prides itself in the Javano-Islamic philosophy upon which it is built. The Javano-Islamic philosophy is a syncretism of Islam, Hinduism, and local Javanese mysticism, which creates a distinctive amalgam of religious teachings (Ricklefs, 2007). The history of the Islamic Mataram Kingdom (hereinafter referred to simply as Mataram) is documented in *Babad Tanah Jawi* -- or the Chronicle of Java --, a pseudo-historical chronicle which is filled with tales of heroes, magic, and myths. G. Moedjanto (1987), J.J. Ras (1987) and William Remmelink (2022) deduced that the chronicle was written not only as a historical record, but

also to serve a political purpose, which was to legitimize the rulership of Mataram sovereigns. If we were to read the content of the chronicle, the two scholars' opinions would correspond greatly with it.

The chronicle begins with a detailed genealogy, tracing back to the dawn of humanity. As an Islamic kingdom, the first human to be recorded in said genealogy is the first prophet, Adam. Peculiarities are already present in the first stanza, in which we are introduced with the 'fact' that Adam is the ancestor of the Javano-Hindu pantheon, with Sang Hyang Wenang and Sang Hyang Tunggal as his direct descendant. As we progress further into the chronicle, we are told that the rulers of Java are descended from the gods as well. However, interestingly, the fact that even though the family tree stretches so far

until the period of the gods, it prominently features a figure who is not part of royalty; Ki Ageng Sela. In fact, this particular figure is described to come from a humble background; for he was a farmer. Moedjanto (1987) highlighted this peculiarity, saying that “considering the conditions of the age, this dynasty did not emerge from a class of rulers. Ki Ageng Sela, the ancestor of the Mataram kings, was an elder of a village called Sela. He was known as a hard-working farmer, as seen as how he worked his farm in a heavy rain.¹ (p. 19)” Sela became a key figure in bridging the legacy between two kingdoms: Majapahit and Mataram. As in the content of *Babad Tanah Jawi*, he considered himself to be a descendant of the mythical Prabu Brawijaya, who was believed to be the last king of Majapahit². Moedjanto questioned how Sela, a person with a relatively low social standing, was able to raise his family name to the point of becoming monarchs of a modern Islamic kingdom. He pointed out that the success was due to Sela’s and his descendants’ ability to manipulate their social status by means of reconstructing their titles.

The Javanese are familiar with the concept of *trah*, a social organization based on blood ties. Sjafrin Sairin (1992) wrote that *trah* is a social organization consisting of people who are descendants of a shared, significant ancestor; as per the meaning of the word *trah* itself, which means *lineage* or *descent*. It consists not only of one’s nuclear family, but also of one’s extended family. According to Atik Triratnawati (2009), one’s *trah* does not only show one’s familial association, but it also determines one’s flow of inheritance. That being said, social status is one of the most important things that can be inherited through *trah*. Moedjanto (1987) mentioned that the idea of *trah* is used as a border, drawing the line which separates people who share the blood of certain figures and those who do not; thus ensuring a clear line of succession in the context of the throne. That is the reason why it is important for *Babad Tanah Jawi* to intricately elaborate familial ties, with the purpose of embellishing one’s heritage to prove one’s worthiness of the throne. In *Babad Tanah Jawi* (Remmelink, 2022), Ki Ageng Sela is shown as a magically powerful figure who was able to catch lightning (stanza 131)³, kill an angry bull with one strike (stanza 128)⁴, etc. Within the chronicle’s lines, Sela is framed in such a way that his powers were proof of his kingly qualities, making him worthy of the throne. *Babad Tanah Jawi*, at this point, consists of equal parts historical facts and mythical fiction, considering how much embellishment it was given. Ras (1987) deduced that *Babad Tanah Jawi* was written somewhere during the reign of Sultan Agung Adiprabu Hanyakrakusuma of

Mataram (r. 1613-1645 AD) by Pangeran Panjang Mas, meaning that the writer was not even alive during most of the events told within the chronicle. But then, would there be other ways for the king to legitimize his power, considering that not all his subjects were familiar with reading, let alone understanding the contents of *Babad Tanah Jawi*?

Moertono, in his book from 1968, *State and Statecraft in Old Java: A Study of the Later Mataram Period, 16th to 19th Century*, coined the term *cult of glory* as a way to explain the means by which Javanese kings displayed their power. The cult of glory consists of two modes of exposing one’s power: *material wealth* and *spiritual wealth*. Material wealth is displayed through the grandiosity by which the king displays himself, perhaps through his attire and palatial architecture. Spiritual wealth, on the other hand, is less tangible than the former. Spiritual wealth refers to the king’s asceticism, including his ties to divine figures. However, it does not strike off the possibility that spiritual wealth can also be displayed by means of more tangible media. Soeratno, et al. (2002) highlighted the use of the term *pusaka* (lit. heirloom) to refer to both material objects (e.g., weaponry, architectural structures, *gamelan*, *wayang* puppet, etc.), as well as abstract ones (e.g., performing arts), which are considered to wield magical and spiritual forces or have a significant role in the kingdom’s historical events. From Selo Soemardjan’s (1986) interpretation, a *pusaka* is believed to possess supernatural power to aid the sultan in performing his kingly duties. To instate the status of *pusaka*, the sultan bestows honorary titles upon the items as a sign of respect, such as: *Kanjeng Kyai/Nyai*, *Kanjeng Kyai Ageng*, and *Kagungan Dalem*. As an example of its usage, the kris believed to be an inheritance from one of the Javanese saints, Sunan Kalijaga, is called *Kanjeng Kyai Ageng Kopek*. The concept of *pusaka* is used as a manifestation of the cult of glory, considering that *pusaka* are oftentimes created from lavish materials and decorated with intricate details, all the while wielding magical and spiritual forces relating to the sultan. Why then, throughout history, does the sultan feel the need for him to prove his spiritual superiority to his subjects?

Robert Heine-Geldern’s (1956) paper entitled *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia* managed to explain the basic idea of sovereign legitimacy around the region of Southeast Asia, which extends up to Yogyakarta. From his perspective, kingship in Southeast Asia is highly influenced by Hindu and Buddhist philosophies, such as the relationship between the macrocosm and microcosmos. Said relationship is immortalized in the Javanese proverb, ‘*manunggaling*

kawula gusti’ which literally translates into ‘the unification between man and his lord’. The proverb can be interpreted in various different ways, such as the union between a king and his subjects, as well as the union between human beings and the Divine Being. The king is therefore considered to be in the intersection between human beings and the Divine; bridging the macrocosm and the microcosmos. For that reason, the king is thought to possess a divine gift, making him a leader whose authority is granted only by the Divine. Therefore, the king is referred to, in the Sanskrit term, as *devaraja* (Heine-Geldern, 1956) or god-king, and *prabudewa* in Javanese.

The claim of *prabudewa* needs to be accompanied by a certain designation, especially one that is considered to be a sign from the gods or the Divine. Moertono (1968:81) calls it *wahyu kedhaton*, meaning ‘kingly revelation’. One very peculiar instance of the *wahyu kedhaton* can be found in *Babad Tanah Jawi*, where Pangeran Puger sucked a tiny light that had emerged from his deceased brother’s (King Amangkurat II) penis. It was written in the chronicle, that “The light was the sign that it had been predestined *by the will of God* that Pangéran Puger would succeed as king. (Italics added by author)” The *wahyu kedhaton* is apparently a highly valued revelation that legitimizes one’s claim to the throne, because it emphasizes the divine nature of a king: chosen directly by God.

The concept of *prabudewa* is used repeatedly in the Javanese world, and one of its prominent usages is in the *wayang* shadow puppet play, where the sovereignty of a *prabudewa* is described as ‘*gung binathara, bau dhendha nyakrawati*’, meaning that a king is ‘in possession of god-like authority, upholder of the law, and sovereign ruler of the universe’ (G. Moedjanto, 1987). The concept is also used in Yogyakarta *wayang wong* dance drama as the name of the *gamelan* orchestra accompaniment for scenes that involve audiences in throne rooms. The accompaniment, called *Gendhing Prabudewa*, is usually played in scenes that depict the meeting between two kings, namely Puntadewa and Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna himself is the eighth avatar of Lord Vishnu in the Hindu belief, and he is quite literally *prabudewa*: a king who is in fact a god in human form. As an example of the use of *Gendhing Prabudewa* in the audience scene, here is a quote from the 2021 *wayang wong* production of the ‘Dasalengkara Lena’ story by Yayasan Siswa Among Beksa:

“*Yen sinawang saking mandrawa, Prabu Sri Bathara Kresna lir prabudewa tejanira.*”

(As seen from the heavens above, Prabu Sri Bathara Kresna gleams like the god-king he is.)

From the literary world of the *wayang*, we can see that Lord Krishna is a king who is blessed by the gods, with him being a personification of Lord Vishnu himself. This idea extends to the Yogyakarta conception of the sultan as a *prabudewa* whose power and responsibilities mirror that of Lord Vishnu. Thus, we can see that in particular, the Yogyakarta monarchy also follows the concept of *prabudewa* to legitimize the sultan’s rulership. From the previous exposition as well, we know that Lord Vishnu is considered to be the god that is associated with the status of *prabudewa*.

Given the fact that spiritual wealth is oftentimes projected through material wealth, there is a great opportunity in which we are able to analyze material artefacts in the royal court that serve that exact purpose. It is in fact a common practice in Southeast Asian kingdoms to materialize a king’s spiritual capacities in the form of artistic renditions. One prominent example is the late Khmer king, Suryavarman II (r. 1113-1150 AD), also identified himself as the incarnation of Vishnu. The name Suryavarman translates to *the sun, the protector*; a similar trope to the title of Hamengku Buwana. He built the great temple of Angkor Wat and dedicated it to Lord Vishnu, and in it, he commissioned statues which contains iconographies portraying himself as Vishnu in the flesh (Park, 2021). Not only was it meant to highlight his divine relations to the Great Protector, but also as a means of displaying political power (Hong, 2010). After his death, he became known as Paramavishnuloka, *He Who has Ascended to the Highest Realm of Vishnu*.

Possibly, we are able to find a similar association between artistic pieces in the royal court and its ties with the portrayal of the Hamengku Buwana dynasty as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Second of all, we can find objects that are related to the claim of the Hamengku Buwana dynasty as *prabudewa* in the Yogyakarta royal court. The Javanese people’s habit of philosophizing artistic products and elements provides a basis for speculating that those products have not been detached from the discourse of the sultan being an incarnation of Vishnu. There must be some sort of entanglement between the discourse and the artistic details that are sometimes considered to be meaningless or minor. Most probably, those products would be iconographies which act as a semiotic representation of the sultan’s identification with Vishnu. The aim of this research would then be to identify and symbolically analyze objects and elements in the Yogyakarta royal court that are used to

emphasize the legitimization of the Hamengku Buwana dynasty as a *prabudewa*, strengthening their claim to the Yogyakarta throne.

METHODS

This research is based upon the symbolic framework, where cultural elements are considered to be symbols which can be interpreted to find meanings that are concealed within them. I deem this framework to be the most proper, considering that the Javanese place a great emphasis on semiotics as a way of communicating ideas. The second reason takes account of the cult of glory; considering the fact that spiritual wealth can also be displayed by means of material wealth. And for those two reasons, I see that the cultural elements that exist within the Yogyakarta royal court can be read as symbols that discreetly legitimize the Hamengku Buwana dynasty's claim to the throne.

The main method of data collection in this research is literature review. Various literary sources are utilized to comprehensively understand how the Hamengku Buwana dynasty attempts to prove their sovereignty as sultans by reiterating their claim as *prabudewa*. It can be seen that the Javanese culture is a syncretism of Islam, Hinduism, and local Javanese mysticism. Thus making it important to widen one's horizon to explore Hindu iconographies in order to interpret the current Yogyakarta court iconographies. The second method is observation, considering that the iconographies are present in tangible form around the court, it only becomes logical that I observe the iconographies in person to provide documentations that can serve to enrich the readers' knowledge of the things that I highlight in this article.

To analyze the acquired data, I then situate the iconographies in a context, so that the semiotic qualities can be read in its entirety as opposed to standalone objects that exist within the sphere of the Yogyakarta royal court. By the end, the analysis results should be comprehensive enough for us to draw conclusions about what the icons stand for in the legitimation of the sultan's *prabudewa* status.

However, it is also important to note that current interpretations that I offer may contain biases. First, in interpreting each symbol, the results are still very fluid and open for further discussion should there be any different, or perhaps more extensive, interpretations from scholars from other disciplines. Second of all, historical records that I use as supporting documents for the interpretations such as *Babad Tanah Jawi* are heavily

biased and were written with certain agenda in mind, which for some may render the documents unreliable as background information for further analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The full title of the Yogyakarta sultan is “*Ngarsa Dalem Sampeyan Dalem Inggang Sinuwun Kanjeng Sultan Hamengku Buwana Senapati ing Ngalaga Ngabdurrahman Sayyidin Panatagama Khalifatullah ingkang Jumeneng Kaping* (ordinal number of rulership) *ing Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat*.” When translated loosely, it would be “His Royal Highness, He Who is Upheld as Sultan Hamengku Buwana, Supreme Commander of the Battlefield, Noble Servant of the Lord, God's Right-hand, the (ordinal number of rulership) of Yogyakarta.” When read in its entirety, the title is rather filled with Islamic honorifics (i.e., *Abdurrahman*, *Sayyid*, and *Khalif*). However, the Hindu influence can still be identified, first and foremost, in the name Hamengku Buwana. On its own, the name Hamengku Buwana can literally be translated as ‘he who cradles the world on his lap’; or in other words, ‘he who preserves the universe’. The name reflects the function of Lord Vishnu in the Hindu trinity (*Trimurti*), as the preserver of the universe (Soedarsono, 1984; Zimmer, 1972). The identification of the Hamengku Buwana dynasty with Lord Vishnu dates back until the time before Sultan Hamengku Buwana I ascended to the throne. Merle Ricklefs (1974:81-82) reported that in *Babad Mangkubumi*, there had already been a reading that claimed Prince Mangkubumi (the young Sultan Hamengku Buwana I) is identical to Lord Vishnu. Another manuscript, called *Babad Mentawis Ngayogyakarta*, explicitly proclaimed that the first sultan is likened to Lord Vishnu incarnate.

The narratives which liken the sultan to Lord Vishnu have also been adopted in more recent works. In the *Bedhaya* dance genre, some numbers are used to give praise as well as provide further acknowledgment of the sultan's divinity. For example, *Bedhaya Sang Aji Dasanti* was created by Sultan Hamengku Buwana X as an homage to his father and predecessor, Sultan Hamengku Buwana IX. Within the lyrics for its accompaniment, Sultan Hamengku Buwana X is explicitly associated with Lord Vishnu, stating that, “The king resembles Vishnu incarnate, spreading peace throughout the land.”⁵ Another *Bedhaya* called *Bedhaya Harjuna Wijaya* which was created by Sultan Hamengku Buwana X, also provided a similar narrative, “It is said that the young king stands as Vishnu, a god in a mortal's body.”⁶ With the existence of these artworks, it can be understood that the narratives

of the sultan as Vishnu pertain throughout the years of the sultanate's existence.

According to the Puranic Encyclopedia (1975) by Vettam Mani, Lord Vishnu can be identified by many names, some of which include: Garudadhvaja and Hari or Harimurti (Pramutomo, 2022:8). These two names are the ones that are most widely used by the Hamengku Buwana dynasty as a means to identify themselves with the likeness of Lord Vishnu. The first name, Garudadhvaja, roughly translates into 'He whose ensign is the Garuda'. Garuda is a mythical eagle considered to be the *wahana*, or divine creation on which Lord Vishnu mounts. The significance of Garuda can be seen through the plethora of iconographies in the Yogyakarta court, some of which are in the form of a name or literary work, and some are in the form of artistic motifs. The latter, on the other hand, relates to the understanding that Vishnu is also associated with the sun according to Javanese belief. The name Harimurti in accordance to Hindu traditions means 'He who removes darkness and illusions', or 'He who removes all obstacles to spiritual progress'. The Javanese interpreted it rather literally, since in the Javanese dictionary, *Serat Bausastra: Jarwa Kawi*, Harimurti can be defined as '*padhanging srengenge*,' meaning the vibrance of sunshine. In the following paragraphs, I will explain how the two names that are intangible were made to be more tangible in the form of iconographies and traditions.

Garudadhvaja

Firstly, I take a look at how Sultan Hamengku Buwana VI (r. 1855-1877 AD) attempted to replicate the Garuda as the *wahana* of Lord Vishnu. The late Sultan commissioned a coupé coach from Hermans & Co. of Den Haag, the Netherlands in the mid-1860s, which he received in 1869 (Terwen-De Loos, 1967). The coach was decorated with European motifs and symbols, including the gilded crown and scepter on its top as well as gilded cornucopias and animals from European mythology such as the basilisk. Javanese touches were also added into it in the form of a stand meant to hold the sultan's personal gilded parasol. According to the Stichting Haags Industrieel Erfgoed (2020), the colossal and ornate coach is pulled by eight white horses. It was called *kereta kencana* in Javanese, probably inspired by the similar coach used by Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands during her coronation called *De Gouden Koets* or the golden coach in English (Terwen-De Loos, 1967), referring to its gilded detailing. The Sultan granted it the title of *pusaka* by bestowing the name Kanjeng Kyai Garudha Yaksa (lit. The Venerated Tremendous Garuda) and using it as the official coach



Figure 1. Kanjeng Kyai Garudha Yaksa, featuring the crown and scepter atop its roof, along with four basilisks on each corner and cornucopias on the back side, all gilded in gold (Matheus Raoul Supriyadi, 2023).



Figure 2. An illustration of the Tedhak Loji procession displayed in the Wahanarata Museum, Yogyakarta (Matheus Raoul Supriyadi, 2023).



Figure 3. An illustration of Kanjeng Kyai Garudha Yaksa during the Tedhak Loji procession, shown here being drawn by eight brown horses (Matheus Raoul Supriyadi, 2023).

of the monarchy, and is still used today for coronations. By riding Kanjeng Kyai Garuda Yaksa, the sultan, in a way, personifies the image of Lord Vishnu riding his Garuda (Terwen-De Loos, 1967; Widaryanto, 1993). Imagine being a commoner back in the mid-19th century and bearing witness of the royal coach as it passes before your eyes in state ceremonies. Apart from coronations, the coach, *kereta kencana*, was used in annual ceremonies during colonial rule in the 19th century. It is called the *Tedhak Loji*, an official visitation to the home of the resident of Yogyakarta every 1st of January and 31st of August. The ceremony involved hundreds if not thousands of aristocrats and dignitaries of the Yogyakarta court marching for hundreds of meters. The clapping of the hooves from eight horses, the sunlight reflecting from the gilded crown and parasol, together with a long line of dignitaries and nobles, such a marvelous and grand spectacle indeed, evoking awe from whoever had the privilege to be present before the spectacle. By riding inside the coach, the sultan succeeds in creating the image of grandiosity as a way of displaying his power and authority to any person who has the chance to witness the sight.

The Garuda is also stylized into a classical Yogyakarta batik motif called *gurdha*. The *gurdha* motif is also evidence for the amalgamation of Islamic and Hindu influences. Garuda, being a living creature, is stylized according to Islamic rules, in which living creatures such as animals and human beings, should not be illustrated in a realistic manner. And for that reason, the Garuda is illustrated in a most simple form, showing only its wings, backside, and tail feathers, as seen in Figure 4. However, the basic idea of the *gurdha* is derived once again from Lord Vishnu's *wahana*, and therefore the symbolisms that are associated with the motif are also attributed to Lord Vishnu's divinity. In the Yogyakarta court etiquette, the use of batik motifs is not independent of one's social status. Certain motifs are reserved only for royalty, and are considered to be *awisan*, meaning forbidden. The *gurdha* is categorized as an *awisan* motif, considering that it inherently holds the values that are related to Vishnu. Only the sultan and high-ranking members of the court are permitted to wear motifs that contain the *gurdha*, even up to this day (Karaton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat, 2022). In the Yogyakarta belief, Vishnu is associated with the sun, and thus the *gurdha*, as his mount, is also used to symbolize the sun (Septianti, 2020; Sutiayati, 2016). And thus, the *gurdha* motif represents values that the sultan must possess in order to properly rule his kingdom. Additionally, from the information gained through



Figure 4. Four variations of the *gurdha* motif on hand-drawn batik textiles from Matheus Raoul's private collection (Matheus Raoul Supriyadi, 2023).

personal contact with one of the classical Yogyakarta batik artisans, the *gurdha* represents neither authority nor status, but a responsibility. This semiotic is in line with Moedjanto's (1987) opinion that a good king is one who is able to complement his authority with an equal sense of responsibility. At its core, the *gurdha* motif serves an artistic value, as a motif which directly symbolizes the sultan's affiliation with Vishnu's divinity; as well as a philosophical value, containing leadership virtues and charisma of a great sovereign.

One more significant use of the Garuda as a symbol of the sultan is in the form of a chronogram that was once assumed to be located atop Bangsal Mandalasana, which is the court's European bandstand. The Javanese chronogram, also called *sengkalan*, is used to indicate the year in which a certain event occurred. There are two forms of *sengkalan*, which is a sentence (*sengkalan lamba*) and a sculpture or a relief (*sengkalan memet*). Every aspect of a *sengkalan* can be interpreted according to the 'characteristic' which certain words possess (Bratakesawa, 1980). For example, the word 'surya' or sun has the same characteristic as the number 'one' due to the fact that our world only has one sun, and therefore the word can be interpreted as the number one. Another example is that words associated with death stand for the number 'zero', considering that death insinuates the absence of life. Returning to the main topic, the *sengkalan lamba* chronogram was in the form of a

small statue depicting a crowned Garuda with its wings spread and clutching a trumpet (Surtihadi, 2023). The statue can be read as a *sengkalan memet*, which reads: ‘*Swara Garuda Sabdaning Ratu*’ (lit. the voice of the Garuda is the word of the king). The Garuda’s voice is considered to be equal to the King’s own words, meaning that the Garuda represents the king himself; such is the meaning of Garudadhvaja: to have the Garuda as one’s insignia. The statue refers to the year 1727 in the Javanese calendar (Sri Suwito, 2020), or 1794 AD, and is assumed to refer to the year this building was erected (Surtihadi, 2023). Even though the interpretation of the chronogram will not be explored extensively in this article, it is worth noting to know the meaning behind them.

Harimurti

The association of the Yogyakarta monarchs and Lord Vishnu as Harimurti has been explicitly documented in several manuscripts of the Yogyakarta court, dating back even before Sultan Hamengku Buwana I ascended to throne (Soedarsono, 1984). Merle Ricklefs (1974) reported that in the chronicle called Babad Mangkubumi, there had already been a reading that claimed Prince Mangkubumi (the young Sultan Hamengku Buwana I) is identical to Lord Vishnu. Another chronicle, called Babad Mentawis Ngayogyakarta, explicitly proclaimed that the first sultan is likened to Vishnu incarnate. Yogyakarta *wayang* scripts (*pakem pedhalangan*) also strengthened this claim, referring to Harimurti as a way to refer to the sultan as well (Pramutomo, 2022). The association between Vishnu as a sun god and the Hamengku Buwana dynasty is also expressed through a performative manner. To understand this claim in its entirety, it is imperative



Figure 5. Wayang wong performance during the reign of Sultan Hamengku Buwana VIII, shown photographed from the northeastern side of Bangsal Kencana. The sultan would be sitting facing the east, across the gamelan players shown on the left (KITLV, 1937).

that we perceive the court dance as a royal performing art, as well as the architectural layout of the court.

Back in the days prior to the reign of Sultan Hamengku Buwana IX (r. 1940-1988 AD), court dance drama performances called *wayang wong*, were held as a ceremonial ritual of the state (Soedarsono, 1990). The *wayang wong* performances were performed on the veranda of Bangsal Kencana (throne hall) and witnessed by the sultan himself. From our perspective, there were two performances happening at the same time on those occasions. Let us start by elaborating the technicalities of a *wayang wong* performance back then.

In the heydays of the *wayang wong* under Sultan Hamengku Buwana VIII (r. 1921-1939 AD), performances were produced in such a grand scale that it was performed for days at a time, and around twelve to sixteen hours non-stop each day. Jennifer Lindsay (1984) reported from the archives of the court’s bureau of arts that in 1923 and 1925, *wayang wong* performances were held for a whopping four days consecutively. The performances commenced punctually at six in the morning, simultaneously along with the rising of the sun. Soedarsono (1984) highlighted the peculiarity of this schedule, saying that the start of the performance is a form of homage towards the rising sun, i.e., Harimurti. It is at this time as well that the sultan would sit on the throne, facing the east. The positioning of the throne hall itself takes the cardinal points into consideration. Bangsal Kencana was built facing the east, and thus the sultan would face in the same direction when sitting on his throne, witnessing the *wayang wong* dancers who face the west. This is highly symbolic, considering that when the performance commenced, the sultan would be supervising the start of the performance from his place of residence, together with the dawn of a new day. The presence of his throne in Bangsal Kencana is already powerful enough that it is able to constitute his presence (Soedarsono, 1984). He would then proceed to enter and take his seat upon his throne a few hours after the beginning of the performance. That is what I attempt to explain about the existence of two simultaneous performances: the first performance is the *wayang wong* itself, being a dance drama, and the second one is the more performative portrayal of the sultan as Harimurti. Bangsal Kencana, thus, can also be seen as the seat of the divine sovereign, who is none other than Sultan Hamengku Buwana.

The Hall of Heirlooms as Prabhāmaṇḍala and Śiraścakra

When observed further, the positioning of the main buildings in the inner palatial complex, called the

Kedhaton Courtyard, can also be interpreted using Hindu and Buddhist artistic features. The Javanese are known for their meticulous details relating to iconographies as well as semiotics. Almost every element of the complex was carefully considered in accordance to Javanese philosophy and wisdom, and thus the positioning of the throne hall (Bangsal Kencana) and the hall of heirlooms (Gedhong Prabayaksa) can be interpreted accordingly. From the previous interpretation, we can understand that Bangsal Kencana is the sultan's throne hall which was used for various functions, such as official visitations, audiences, and dance performances. Gedhong Prabayaksa houses the court's heirlooms, including weapons, regalia, and one interesting item which is a lantern whose flame is never allowed to die out, called Kanjeng Kyai Wiji. The eternal flame symbolizes the ever-present blessing of God (Priyono, 2015).

To start off, let us understand the meaning of each of the building's names. Bangsal Kencana literally translates into the Golden Hall, with *bangsal* being one typology of Javanese building with no walls, and *kencana* meaning gold. Gedhong Prabayaksa, on the other hand, is made up of several words. Firstly, *gedhong* is also one typology of Javanese walled-building, while *Prabayaksa* consists of two separate words: *praba* and *yaksa*. *Praba* in English is light, illumination, flame, etc (Gericke & Roorda, 1847). *Yaksa* literally means a giant or ogre (Gericke & Roorda, 1901), which can also denote gigantic in size⁷. And therefore, the name Gedhong Prabayaksa can be translated into the Hall of Great Illumination.

Next, it is important to consider the positioning of the buildings within the Kedhaton Courtyard. Bangsal Kencana is the building that is placed at the center of the courtyard, which was built facing the east. Adjacent to the west of Bangsal Kencana is Gedhong Prabayaksa, also facing the east. Thus, when seen from the east, Gedhong Prabayaksa can be seen right behind Bangsal Kencana. If the sultan were to sit on his throne, we can see Gedhong Prabayaksa as the background. I consider the positioning of Gedhong Prabayaksa in the system of symbols embedded in the court's architecture, by seeing how it is placed directly adjacent west of Bangsal Kencana. Taking into consideration the incorporation of Hindu elements in the Yogyakarta court iconographies, the association between the two buildings can also be deciphered by means of the Hindu context.

I argue that the placement of the two buildings have a resemblance with two features that are usually present in Hindu and Buddhist arts, particularly in sculptures, called the *prabhāmaṇḍala* and *śiraścakra*. From the 1985 article by Padma Sudhi, it can be found

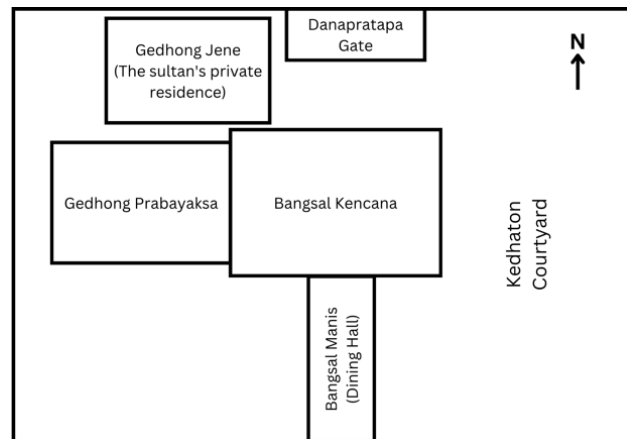


Figure 6. The layout of the Kedhaton Courtyard showing the main buildings within the courtyard including the positioning of Bangsal Kencana and Gedhong Prabayaksa (Matheus Raoul Supriyadi, 2023).



Figure 7. Bangsal Kencana as photographed from the eastern side, with Gedhong Prabayaksa in its background (Matheus Raoul Supriyadi, 2023).

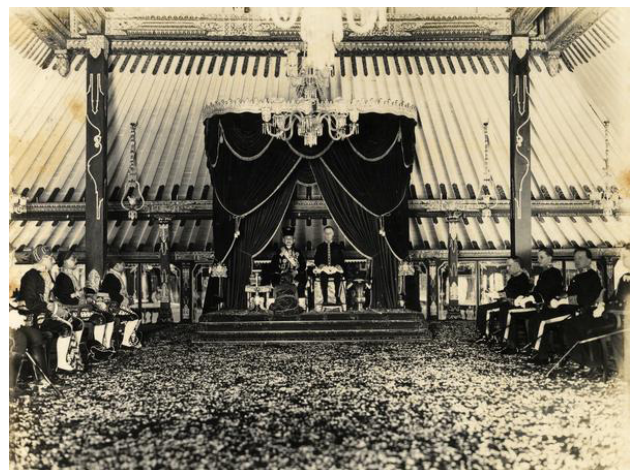


Figure 8. The interior of the Bangsal Kencana as photographed from the eastern side during an audience between Sultan Hamengku Buwana VIII and Dutch officials, with a clearer view of the doors leading inside Gedhong Prabayaksa on the background of the image (RM Kaswardja, 1933).

that the *prabhāmaṇḍala* and *śiraścakra* are reminiscent of the Western religious iconography called the halo, which is the circle of light usually depicted encircling the heads of holy figures. Gopinatha Rao (1914) wrote that the *prabhāmaṇḍala* and *śiraścakra* is a physical representation of “the glory or circle of light shining around the head of gods.” His description leans more towards the implication that figures who possess a *prabhāmaṇḍala* or *śiraścakra* are not only close to the divine, but are actually divine figures themselves. There is also the idea of a *prabhāvali*, which is a ring of light or fire surrounding the entirety of a certain figure, which people may be familiar seeing in the statue of Shiva Nataraja. In the case of Gedhong Prabayaksa, I consider it to be both a *prabhāmaṇḍala* and a *śiraścakra* considering that it is an architectural structure which stands as a background behind the sultan as opposed to a sculptural feature through which the *prabhāmaṇḍala* and *śiraścakra* are featured.

Historically speaking, the Indian-born British Sanskrit scholar, Arthur Macdonell (1897) proposed the notion that the *śiraścakra* came from the use of solar wheels typically displayed during Hindu ritualistic performances that require the presence of sacrificial fires. Along the passing of time, the solar wheels have evolved into golden discs placed behind fire altars which act as a reflector. They also serve as a symbolic purpose of representing the sun and are connected to deities of the sun and fire. In Buddhist arts, the solar discs

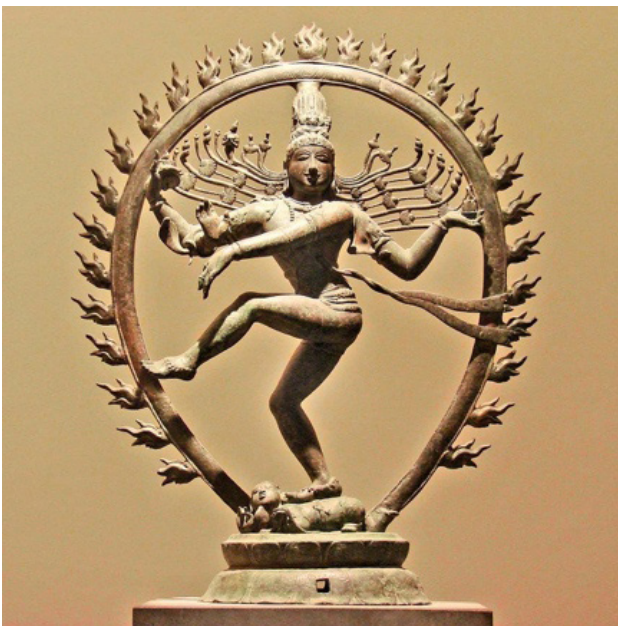


Figure 9. Statue of Shiva Nataraja encircled by a *prabhāvali* (Jean-Pierre Dalbéra, 2015).

are also presented in the same manner as the Western halo, symbolizing the rulership of a sovereign through spiritual virtues, which is similar to Moertono’s idea of spiritual wealth as a Javanese king’s cult of glory. The *prabhāmaṇḍala* on the other hand, though visualized in a different way, shares the same meaning with the *śiraścakra* (Sudhi, 1985). It is an iconography that has been identical with figures such as the Buddha, Shiva Nataraja, and Lord Vishnu. Another suggestion for the symbolism of the *prabhāmaṇḍala* came from Heinrich Zimmer (1983), in which he interpreted it as a symbol for the life cycle of the universe. Connecting it to the semiotics of the Yogyakarta court architecture, Gedhong Prabayaksa can be considered to be an adaptation of the concept of *śiraścakra* and *prabhāmaṇḍala*. It symbolizes the radiance of the divinity as well as the spiritual capacity of the sultan as the preserver of the universe as he sits on his throne in Bangsal Kencana.

CONCLUSION

For the Hamengku Buwana dynasty to be able to maintain their legitimacy as the true sovereign of Yogyakarta, they must be able to have a way to present themselves as so. Their ability to create, and take advantage of preexisting narratives that have already been alive within the Yogyakarta community has proven to become strategic and effective in framing their sovereignty. By presenting themselves as a god-king or *prabudewa*--the intersection between the microcosmos and macrocosmos--, the Hamengku Buwana managed to enrich their spiritual wealth and further advance their cult of glory. The strategy of the Hamengku Buwana was to incorporate familiar narratives: stories from the Hindu epics enacted through the Javanese *wayang*, and their kingly status. This resulted in the affiliation between their claim of *prabudewa* status with the Hindu god and preserver of the universe, Lord Vishnu.

For the Javanese, people who emphasize the importance of semiotics, such prestigious status need not be explicitly proclaimed, but instead incorporated implicitly through iconographies in the system of symbols contained within the sultan’s domain: the Yogyakarta royal court. Artistic works that exist within the walls of the royal court became the most potential media for the incorporation of the iconographies. Considering that the dynasty chose to associate themselves with Lord Vishnu, it only becomes logical that the iconographies are ones that stem from the identity of Vishnu himself. In this paper I found that there are three types of iconographies that were adopted, with the two most prominent ones

coming from two of Vishnu's names: Garudadhvaja, adopting the Garuda as a royal insignia, and Harimurti, constructing the image that the sultan is synonymous with the rising sun. And the third is the adoption of a feature in Hindu and Buddhist art called the *prabhamandala* and *śiraścakra*, being symbols of divinity and spiritual maturity, into the court architecture; further reiterating the sultan's claim of spiritual wealth.

From what this research has found, I have hopes that the results can aid in shedding some light upon the philosophy and meaning of the objects in the court. The objects that were highlighted in this paper are very easily encountered and common, that their symbolic functions are often easily taken for granted. My hope for the readers of this paper is for them to acknowledge the depth possessed by the court's cultural artefacts, and learn to have greater appreciation of their significant presence. The simple and seemingly unassuming artwork features that are present inside the Yogyakarta royal court may actually contain hidden meanings that serve as constant reminders of the sultan's divine status and the cultural context behind the conception of said artworks. That is why it becomes important for future researchers to become aware of small details such as names and designs that may indicate something deeper than mere decoration and aesthetics. Perhaps there may be other iconographies that can still be unearthed from the Yogyakarta royal court, providing clues that can provide even more information regarding the historical and cultural underlying of their existence. And such with the spatial placement of Bangsal Kencana and Gedhong Prabayaksa, researchers can also take account of the placement of said iconographies and interpret the reason why they are placed in certain places or areas. This would be a great opportunity for future researchers to explore more regarding this topic.

ENDNOTES

- 1) "Dilihat dari keadaan sezaman, dinasti ini tidak berasal dari kelas penguasa. Nenek moyang raja-raja Mataram yaitu Kiageng Sela adalah seorang pemuka pedukuhan atau desa Sela. Ia dikenal sebagai petani yang rajin, terbukti ia bekerja di sawah juga meskipun hari hujan."
- 2) *Ing batos sanget hanyunyuwun ing Gusti Allah, sage-da hanedhakaken para ratu ingkang mengku ing tanah Jawi, awit rumaos yen trahipun Prabu Brawijaya ing Majapahit.* (The Chronicle of Java, stanza 107)
- 3) *Hamangsuli cariyos malih, kala taksih panjenengani-pun Kangjeng Sultan ing Demak. Kyai Ageng ing Sela wanci ngajengaken asar panuju jawah deres dhateng ing sabin hambekta pacul. Sarawuhipun ing sabin, la-jeng macul saweg angsal tigang kecrokan, wonten gelap dhateng hawarni tiyang kaki-kaki. Kyai Ageng sumerep yen gelap; enggal kacepeng, mungel jumegur hananging kekah anggenipun nyepengi. Lajeng kabekta kahaturaken dhateng ing Demak.*
- 4) *Kacariyosaken Kyai Ageng ing Sela sumeja lumebet dados prajurit tamtama, kacoba kahaben kaliyan bantheng. Bantheng kataton sirahipun sapisan pecah, rahipun mancurat.*
- 5) "Cinandra sang nata lir Ywang Wisnu Murti, Mangayuhayu buwana karya tentrem gung dumadi."
- 6) "Cinandra Sang Prabu Anom, tinon lir Hyang Wisnu Murti; Jawata hangejawantah."
- 7) It is worth noting that the word *yaksa* have existed in the old Javanese. However, in this instance it is more suited when translated from the newer Javanese, considering that the older Javanese leans rather too much on the Sanskrit tradition. The Sanskrit *yaksa* refers to a class of beings and attendants of the god, Kubera. The newer Javanese does not use the word *yaksa* as a reference towards class, but rather to refer towards beings who have the form, or size, of a giant.

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