The oral tradition of **Syahadat Kures**: Core and initial foundations of Surakarta Kasunanan palace rule, Central Java Indonesia

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**Abstract** *Syahadat Kures* is an oral tradition of Surakarta Kasunanan palace, typically practiced in rituals as a means of communication with perceived supernatural powers. This oral tradition adheres to the customs and patterns of life within palace community. This article aims to describe the content, meaning, and role of *Syahadat Kures* in the lives of the people residing in Surakarta Kasunanan palace. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach with an ethnographic methodology. Data collection involves observation and literature review. The research employed purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques. The research results encompass two aspects: (1) a description of the content, meaning, and direct role of *Syahadat Kures* in the lives of the people residing in Surakarta Kasunanan palace, and (2) the implementation of Islamic values in the domains of government, art, and culture at Surakarta Kasunanan palace. The effect of practicing *Syahadat Kures* is to obey God's commands and avoid God's prohibitions. This influence affects many parts of life in Surakarta Kasunanan palace, notably governance, arts, and culture. All these elements have meanings and purposes that are directly tied to Islamic beliefs. Thus, *Syahadat Kures* plays an essential role in the growth of Islamic preaching, particularly to the population of Surakarta Kasunanan palace. This study is intended to aid other researchers, particularly those working in culture, history, and religion.

**Keywords:** *Syahadat Kures*, shahada, meaning, role, Surakarta Kasunanan palace

1. Introduction

Oral traditions are passed down from generation to generation without any physical reminder, making them exclusively oral folklore (Danandjaja, 2019; Sudikana, 2013). According to Abrams (2016), oral tradition comprises any oral discourse adhering to particular traditions or procedures structured throughout society. Oral traditions are also represented in a nation’s identity in Australia, where Aboriginal tribes, as the original residents, continue to uphold their oral traditions (Gernet, 2022; Stoor, 2021; Wilkie et al., 2020). Similarly, in India, gods are depicted as god worshipers, as these gods are indigenous to Indian culture (Gan-Choudhury, 2015; Sharma, 2020; Sondhi, 2021). Furthermore, Greece (Frankfurter, 2019; Lanza, 2022) displays its national identity as a knowledge-rich nation through oral traditions, particularly in the realm of philosophy.

Oral traditions are spoken to attain specific results (Sommer & Quinlan, 2018). These traditions are frequently used in ceremonies to communicate with supernatural powers, particularly for healing, strength, and safety (Lilomaiva-Doktor, 2020). In the scientific realm, oral traditions represent the expression of belief systems by employing alpha and beta brain waves (Fauble, 2016). Oral tradition in Greece is viewed as speech with supernatural powers, frequently related to the worship of gods. Furthermore, oral traditions in Greece are expressed to achieve success in life by adhering to cultural principles (Frankfurter, 2019). Beyond Greece, an enormous number of oral traditions are found in Indonesia.

These oral traditions include the *Cenning Rara* oral tradition in Sulawesi (Muhyanur, 2020), the *Batalah* oral tradition in West Kalimantan (Herlina, 2022; Suparman et al., 2021), the *Sirompak* in Sumatra (Ediwar et al., 2020; Ikhwana, 2020), and the *Trisandhya* prayers in Bali (Agustian et al., 2020; Hynson, 2021). Other islands, particularly Java, also have oral traditions. Several oral traditions are associated with *Santet* (black magic) in Banyuwangi, a city in East Java. *Sabuk Mangir* (the Mangir Belt) is a well-known example, with the power to tie two individuals closer or push them apart (Dhani et al., 2019; Saputra, 2007). In Central Java, there is an oral tradition of rain prayers in *Cowongan* tradition from Banyumas (Fatmawaty et al., 2017; Irawan et al., 2022). In West Java, an oral tradition called *Jampi or Jajampe* is believed to have the power to solve challenging problems (Agustiningsih & Rostiyati, 2018; Wardani et al., 2021).

The oral tradition explored in the present research is a shahada from the Surakarta Kasunanan palace. Basically, a palace or kingdom represents the continuation of a society's history and culture and displays the spiritual principles underlying daily life (M’bwangi, 2020; Tanhidy et al., 2023). Similarly, Surakarta Kasunanan palace, a royal palace that has
stood firmly in the palace community for generations, cannot be denied its role in establishing the palace identity and arrangement with the shahada as the foundation of Islamic religious teachings (Asni, 2017).

Shahada, which consists of two simple yet profound sentences, affirms faith in the oneness of God and Muhammad’s prophethood as His messenger (Schubel, 2023). Shahada is more than a declaration of faith within the context of Surakarta Kasunanan palace rule; it acts as a moral and ethical cornerstone that guides both palace leaders’ and residents’ actions and behaviours. The concept of Tawhid, or God’s oneness, exists in all aspects of life within the palace, affecting governmental policies, art, customs, and interactions in society.

The inculcation of Shahada values as the basis of the Surakarta Kasunanan palace arrangement is symbolic and manifests in daily practices. These Shahada values are evident in palace officials’ policies, which continuously attempt to establish an atmosphere that reflects Islamic principles. Furthermore, the development of art and culture within the palace highlights Shahada’s effect on traditional art forms, dancing, music, and architecture, all of which involve spiritual undertones (Astriandini & Kristanto, 2021; Marimin, 2016; Marlina, 2020; Sunaryo & Sejati, 2022). Despite its Islamic roots, the Surakarta Kasunanan palace arrangement successfully preserves cultural variety and fosters tolerance for religious differences. Shahada serves as a point of unity for diverse aspects of society, offering guidelines for living based on mutual respect.

This article further explores Shahada’s crucial part in constructing the Surakarta Kasunanan palace arrangement, examining its impact on various governance, art, and culture fields. Examining how the values of the Shahada influence daily life within the palace provides insights into the spiritual role that a kingdom contributes to shaping its character and identity. This article contributes to a better understanding of the interplay among religion, culture, and power in the context of the Surakarta Kasunanan palace through this exploration.

2. Research Methods

The methodology used in this research is qualitative descriptive research. Researchers choose this method to provide a systematic, factual, and accurate portrayal of the investigated facts related to Syahadat Kures and employ an ethnographic approach, that focuses on culture, which is a familiar technique in qualitative research (Skinner, 2013). The data in this research consist of observations and literature, and the sampling techniques applied include purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling involves selecting data sources based on specific considerations (Ritchie et al., 2003).

The following sampling technique is snowball sampling, which is included in nonprobability sampling (involving samples with unequal probabilities) (Vehovar et al., 2016). This sampling method is employed explicitly for data that centers around a community of subjective respondents or samples (Lyon, 2012). The data analysis in this research adopts an interactive model. In qualitative research, data are compiled through various techniques, such as interviews and excerpts from recorded documents, which show more words than numbers (Miles et al., 2014).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Syahadat Kures in the Surakarta Kasunanan Palace Community

The Surakarta Kasunanan palace traces its origins to the 1755 AD Gyi anti agreement, marking the division of power from the Islamic Mataram Kingdom into the Surakarta Kasunanan palace and the Yogyakarta Sultanate palace (Carey, 1986). In addition to Islam, the Surakarta Kasunanan palace embodies Islamic beliefs as a guiding principle for the kingdom and society. The introduction of Islam to Java, prompted by Gujarat traders, revealed rapid acceptance among coastal communities, leading to the establishment of the first Islamic Kingdom in Java (Herasuto, 1984). In contrast to the indigenous peoples’ regions, where Hindu culture prevailed, integrating Islam involved blending it with ingrained Hindu customs and traditions (Nawafil & Tiara, 2016). The presence of Islam revitalized the palace community, offering inspiration and aspirations for societal and state reformation, particularly in social relations among community members. The impact of Islam extends beyond individual worship rituals—such as the Shahada, prayer, fasting, Zakat, and Hajj—encompassing guidance for science and holistic human development (Asadzandi, 2020). This belief in the Islamic religion meant that saints and religious figures could not remain silent about the societal situations of their time.

The diffusion of Islam, adjusting to the existing religion and culture of Hinduism, continued for a prolonged duration until Sultan Agung’s rule. According to the interviews conducted with cultural experts affiliated with the Surakarta Kasunanan palace, Sultan Agung is recognized as a pioneer and advocate of Syahadat Kures. This is attributed to the historical presence of Syahadat Kures, originating from the era of Wali Songo, who propagated Islam in Java by employing a Hindu practice (interview, 25 March 2023). Syahadat Kures is categorized as Javanese music or style due to its rhythmic pronunciation, aligning with the environmental background of that period. The palace community preferred narratives with rhythm rather than discourses employing ordinary diction (Benamou, 2010). Furthermore, saints were recognized for utilizing Javanese poetry to propagate Islam, producing notable works such as lir-lilir and several poems by Sunan Kalijaga (Wardani, 2023; Wibowo et al., 2018). As the advocate of Syahadat Kures, Sultan Agung, distinguished for his prolific literary contributions, has encountered information bias suggesting that he was the originator of Syahadat Kures (Hardyanto et al., 2019).
Essentially, Syahadat Kures shares commonalities with the general Shahada, encompassing the expressions of belief in the Oneness of God and apostolatity. However, it incorporates additional forms and meanings in the Javanese context. This represents a functional aspect of Syahadat Kures, particularly in educating people of that era who were unfamiliar with Islam (interview, 6 September 2023). The recitation of Syahadat Kures commences with the Shahadat, followed by an introduction to God and the prophet. It concludes with greetings of salvation as a recluse. The textual content of Syahadat Kures is presented below, accompanied by its connected meaning and interpretation.

(1) Bismillahirrahmanirrahim

(2) Nawauit an uqiro bikalimati Syahadatinali wujuu ban fil ‘umuri marroton wakhidatan fardhulillahita’ala
Niay Ingsun angucapaken ing kalimat syahadat loro, khale wajib ing ndalem Saumur Ingsun, khale sepisan fardhu karana Allah.

(3) Wa Asy hadu an laa ilaha illallah wa asy hadu anna Muhammador Rasulullah.
Lan ngaweruhu insun satuhune ora ana Pangeran anging Allah, lan anekesi insun satuhune Kangjeng Nabi Muhammad iku utusane Allah.

In section (1), Syahadat Kures begins with a sentence traditionally called by Muslims before engaging in any action. The word ‘Bismillahirrahmanirrahim’ can be divided into three components: ‘Bismillah,’ ‘Arrahman,’ and ‘Arrahim.’ ‘Bismillah’ consists of three words—‘bi,’ signifying ‘with,’ ‘ismi’ or ‘asma,’ denoting ‘name,’ and ‘Allah,’ yielding the meaning ‘with the name of Allah’ or translated as ‘In the name of Allah.’ The following terms, ‘arrahman’ and ‘arrahim,’ convey Allah’s essence as Most Gracious and Most Merciful. The complete translation of ‘Bismillahirrahmanirrahim’ is to mention the name of Allah, who is Most Gracious and Most Merciful (Temiz, 2021).

In stanza (2), the focus is on intention and awareness during the recitation in both Arabic and Javanese. This verse states, “I intend to recite the two sentences of the shahada, which are obligatory throughout my life and obligatory because of Allah.” It underscores that the recitation of the Shahada should be performed with full awareness and without doubt, complementing the prior sentence, ‘Bismillahirrahmanirrahim’. In contrast, verse (3) comprises the actual Shahada, the declaration that Muslims articulate during their worship of Allah. This stanza contains the servant’s solemn affidavit affirming the existence of the god known as Allah and acknowledging the prophethood of Muhammad. It serves as the core of the Shahada.

(4) Mangka makhnane laa ilaahallallah iku amuknawi kolawan isbat, mangka kang den nawwaken iku sakehing Pangeran, kang liyan saking Pangeran kita.


(6) Mangka tegese aran Allah Ta’ala iku anuduhaken ing ndalem dzat kang Maha Luhur, ora warna, ora rupa, ora aran, ora anggon, wajib, wajib anane makol yen ora (ana)-ne.

(7) Sing sapa angucap satuhune Allah Ta’ala iku warna, rupa, aran, anggon, mangka wong iku dadi Kufur.

In verse (4), an explanation of the meaning of ‘laa ilaahallallah’ is provided. The following sentence specifies that ‘laa ilaahallallah’ is uttered as an affirmation of adopting Islam, and the grantor of this affirmation is our God—Allah. In verse (5), the conviction and evidence presented reaffirm the Oneness of Allah, the Uncreated Creator of the universe, distinguished by His greatness and utmost glory. In verse (6), the term ‘Allah’ is directed toward the transcendent spirit, devoid of color, form, name, or place, necessitating belief in the unseen. Verse (7) highlights that attributing color, appearance, name, or place to Allah leads to disbelief.

This segment of Syahadat Kures delves into the concept of monotheism or divinity. With profound awareness and knowledge, Islam prohibits its adherents from worshipping God. Uttering Shahada signifies a commitment to adhering to God’s commands and abstaining from prohibitions (Asni, 2017). This commitment is recognized in Islam as ‘Taqwa’ or ‘obedience’, as articulated in Surah An-Nur, verse 52.

And whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger and fears Allah and is devoted to Him, those are the people who will be victorious.

In Islam, obedience and Taqwa are universally esteemed, regardless of an individual’s background (Lyngsøe & Stjernholm, 2022). This verse expounds that people who adhere to Allah’s commands and abstain from His prohibitions, motivated by the conviction that such obedience results in happiness in both this world and the afterlife, distance themselves from peril and calamity. They become recipients of God’s grace through unwavering devotion to Allah, engaging in benevolent acts towards fellow human beings, and striving to earn His approval. They are spared from torment in the afterlife.

(8) Utawi Kandjeng Nabi Muhammad iku monungsa kang lanang, kang mardika, ingkang okil, ingkang baligh, ingkang bagus warnane, kang mencorang cahyane.

(9) Kadja pumomani angkang wulan, utawa kaya srengenge, ingkang keturunan wahyu, ingkang wajib handuweni, sifat sidiq, amanat, tabligh.
(10) Sadiq bener, amanat kang pinercaya, tabligh kaping anekakaken, mokal ina, mokal cidra, mokal angumpetaken. (11) Ingkang wenang [aran] basyariyah, kang ora cinacadaken, ing ndalem martabate bangsa Arab, bangsa Hasyim, bangsa Kures, bangsa Muntolilb.

The following elucidation pertains to the apostolate of Prophet Muhammad. In contrast, Prophet Muhammad was a free, intelligent man who had reached maturity, possessed a handsome appearance, and radiated an aura as bright as light. (9) Similar to the full moon and sunlight during the day, he was endowed with revelation (the word of God) and characterized by Sadiq (honesty), Amanah (trustworthiness), and Tabligh (conveyance). (10) Sadiq represents truthfulness, Amanah signifies trustworthiness, Tabligh pertains to one who conveys the message, and he is beyond reproach, free from illness, and conceals nothing. (11) Deserving the appellation ‘basaryah’ (a personality shared with messengers and humans), he is beyond criticism and belongs to the dignified Arab, Hashim, Quraiys, and Muttalib nations.

The excerpt from Syahadat Kures above conveys meaning and information about Prophet Muhammad regarding his physical attributes, character, and lineage. The prophet’s personalities serve as a guide for the lifestyle of Muslims. Being honest, trustworthy, and transparent forms the foundation for treating others with kindness (Taufik, 2023). These characteristics of the prophet can also serve as a model for ordinary people (Muslims) to aspire to leadership, as it is not an impossible goal for Muslims to impersonate (Ismaya et al., 2020).

(12) Kang Rama Sayyid Abdullah, kang ibu Siti Aminah, kang pinutrackaken ing Mekah, ing wulan rabining awal, ing tanggal kaping rolas, ing malem Isen, ing tahun Dal, wektu salah. (13) Sawiiji khoal antarane Maghib kalawan Isya, ing tanggal kaping wolu, utawi yuswane kandjeng Nabi Muhammad iku savekgawan dasa tahun, ngalih maring Madinah, yuswa tigalikur tahun.

(14) Utawi yuswane kandjeng Nabi Muhammad iku suwidak tigang tahun.

The following passage chronicled the birth and demise of Prophet Muhammad. In verse (12), it is specified that his father was Abdullah, and his mother was Siti Aminah. He was born in Mecca in the month of Rabi’ul Awal on the 12th, a Monday, Dol year, at dawn (13). He passed away between Maghib and Isya on the eighth, at 40, when the Prophet resettled to Medina, and he died 23 years later (14) or when Prophet Muhammad was sixty-three. (15) He died in Medina and was buried there; anyone who claims that the Prophet Muhammad is hiding something.

This passage aimed to educate the people of the Mataram and Surakarta Kasunanan palaces at that time. In this context, it highlights the value of acquiring knowledge about monothemism and apostolating before adopting the Islamic religion. Islam provides two religious guidelines, first from God’s revelation (Al-Quran) and second from the sunnah and hadith of the Prophet. It is imperative to learn the personality of a prophet, a human who conveys God’s revelations and serves as a role model through his sunnah, before comprehending and implementing commands and prohibitions (Khan & Hussain, 2020).

(16) Shalallahu ‘alaihi wa salam, shalallahu ‘alaihi wa salam, shallah ‘alaa Muhammad, Allahumma shali ‘ala Muhammad, Allahumma shali ‘ala Muhammad, wa’ala aliihi,wa’ala aliihi wasohibi ajma’in.

The stanza above denotes the conclusion of Syahadat Kures. This stanza contains prayers and supplications for safety, which are (16) May Allah bestow peace and blessings upon him, may Allah shower His mercy upon Muhammad, O Allah, grant Your mercy to Muhammad, his family, and all his family and associates. The recitation of this stanza has philosophical value. The intonation and rhythm in the articulation symbolize human breath and life, gradually slowing down until it ends (interview, 25 March 2023).

Syahadat Kures is observed in both formal and informal situations. First, in formal situations, Shahada is recited during traditional religious ceremonies such as death commemorations. In Javanese-Islamic culture, the death of an individual commits on the 3rd, 7th, 40th, 100th, and 1000th days after death, with annual commemorations after that on the anniversary of the death (Warisno & Tabrani, 2018). The selection of these specific days is intended, in part, to provide solace to bereaved families.

This is evident through the congregation’s presence, which offers prayers for the deceased alongside mourning families. On the third and seventh days, grieving continues among the families left behind. Afterward, on the 40th, 100th, and 1000th days, the Tahlilan served as a reminder and a connection between the prayer and the friendship bond between the bereaved and the deceased (Setyawan et al., 2022).

Second, in nonformal situations, the Shahada is recited during routine Tahlil ceremonies at Surakarta Kasunanan palace and religious classes. These routine Tahlil ceremonies occur every Friday, a tradition upheld from ancient times to the present day, commencing at 21:00 and ending at Surakarta Kasunanan palace. Initially, the religious class involved memorizing Syahadat Kures and reading the Quran. However, these traditional religious class activities have stopped with the proliferation of online resources for learning Syahadat Kures (interview, 6 September 2023).

Syahadat Kures in the Surakarta Kasunanan palace exhibits a multifaceted form and function based on the above explanation. Historically, this Shahada has been an oral tradition shared across generations. Theologically, it serves as self-reflection on the creator and fosters a sense of connection to the prophet and Java’s traditional heritage. From the
perspective of character education, the Shahada symbolizes four-character types rooted in religious values, culture, environment, and personal potential (Hayati & Susatya, 2020).

3.2. The Impact of Islamic Values on Government, Arts, and Culture

Syahadat Kures, akin to the general Islamic Shahada, is an initial prerequisite for individuals to enter and embrace the Islamic faith. Islamic values become ingrained in a person upon conversion (Setiyani & Muktafi, 2020). The Surakarta Kasunanan palace actively integrates Islamic values into people’s lives, perceiving Islam as a religion and a comprehensive system containing government, art, and culture. Islamic values are pivotal in shaping societal and state attributes, establishing a robust foundation for just and harmonious coexistence. This article explores the impact of Islamic values on government, art, and culture.

3.2.1. Government

3.2.1.1. The Concept of Islam in the Bureaucracy of Surakarta Kasunanan Palace

The Gyi anti Agreement of February 13, 1755, divided the government of the Mataram kingdom into the Surakarta Kasunanan palace under Sunan Paku Buwana III and the Yogyakarta Sultanate under Sultan Hamengkubuwono I (Prince Mangkubumi). Hence, the Surakarta Kasunanan palace became the royal capital or Surakarta Kasunanan, exercising control over half of the territory of the Islamic Mataram kingdom (Sutarwinarmo et al., 2017). The Surakarta Kasunanan palace has endured from the reigns of Sunan Paku Buwana III to the current Sunan Paku Buwana XIII. The Surakarta Kasunanan palace is formally an Islamic kingdom (Nurjaya nti, 2022).

The Surakarta Kasunanan palace exhibits Islamic characteristics, including positions such as chief councilor and Abdi Dalem Ngulama (councillors and religious servants) in the royal bureaucracy. The judicial system adheres to Surambi law, which is based on Islamic law, the use of the title “Sayidin Panatagama” by the Sunan, and the existence of the Great Mosque in the palace (interview, 13 September 2023). There are ceremonial events within the palace that promote Islamic values, as they are grounded in the observance of Islamic holidays or religious occasions, with calculations derived from the Javanese Islamic calendar (interview, 28 September 2023). Like Grebeg such as Grebeg Pasa, Islamic ceremonies celebrate the end of the Ramadan fast and welcome the Eid al-Fitr. The grand Grebeg, linked to the celebration of the Eid al-Qurban day, and the Grebeg Mulud, associated with the commemoration of the birth anniversary of Prophet Muhammad SAW, serve as manifestations of Islamic traditions within the Surakarta Kasunanan palace (Sholehuddin et al., 2021).

3.2.1.2. Justice and Balance in the Surakarta Kasunanan Palace

Islamic governance underscores principles of justice and balance, ensuring fair treatment regardless of ethnicity, religion, or social status (Arabi, 2021; Auda, 2022). It advocates for responsible and transparent leadership (Bahzar, 2019). The Surakarta Kasunanan Palace government is organized with Javanese social groups—Sentono Ndalem (royal family), Abdi Ndalem (royal employees/officials), and Kawula Ndalem (people) (Yuri stiadihi & Purwanto, 2016). As the heir to the Islamic Mataram kingdom, the Surakarta Kasunanan palace inherently possesses Islamic lineage or familial connections (Sentono Ndalem). However, it has become evident that several family members have not adhered to Islam over time (interview, 16 October 2023). Despite familial ties, the Surakarta Kasunanan palace tolerates officials and employees with diverse backgrounds and beliefs. This tolerant attitude is a crucial characteristic of Islamic values in government, aligning with Al-Baqarah/2, 256 (Verkuyten & Kollar, 2021).

3.2.1.3. There is no compulsion in (adhering to) religion (Islam)

There is no justification for coercion in embracing Islam. A Muslim’s sole obligation is to convey Allah’s instructions to humanity well and wisely, offering reasoned advice. The goal is for individuals to embrace Islam through their awareness and will. If a Muslim conveys the message in this manner and the person chooses not to believe, it becomes a matter between the individual and Allah. It is not within the Muslim’s purview to force someone to convert to Islam. This principle is further emphasized in another verse (Yunus/10:99), where Allah states:

مُؤُمِّنِينَ يَكُونُواْ حَتَّىٰ الْأَيَامِ نَكُونُواْ أُفُوَّاتَا جَمِيعًا كَثَّةَمْ أَذْهَبْ إِلَىَّ أَرْضَيْنَ فِي مَنْ لَأْنَ مَعَكُ شَيْءٌ وَلَوْ

And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed - all of them entirely. Then, [Muhammad], would you compel the people in order that they become believers?

The arrival of Islam as the true path is visible and can be distinguished from the heretical path. Therefore, there should be no coercion to believe because faith resides in the heart, and one cannot force someone’s heart to believe in something if the person is unwilling.
3.2.2. Art

3.2.2.1. The Emphasis on Islamic Philosophy of Life in Palace Architecture

The orientation of the Surakarta Kasunan palace aligns with the typical architectural pattern of palaces in Java, which face north–south. The palace layout commences from the North Square and moves towards Kedhaton, which holds profound philosophical significance concerning the journey of human life. This journey ultimately culminates in a spiritual encounter with Allah, the Most Glorified and Exalted. In contrast, proceeding from Kedhaton towards the South Square symbolized human life, leading to eternal existence in the afterlife (interview, 8 August 2023).

The image above is a map detailing the Surakarta Kasunan palace area, annotated with information numbers 1, 2, and 3. The entrance, commonly referred to as ‘Kori’, holds significant meaning in the lives of the residents of the Surakarta Kasunan palace. Extending from the north to the south, the corridor encompasses Gapura Gladhag, Kori Wijil, Kori Renteng, Kori Mangu, Kori Brajanala, Kori Kamandungan, Kori Srimanganti, Kori Gadhung Melati, Kori Saleko, and Kori Gadhing/Gapurendra. These corridors metaphorically represent the ribs of the Surakarta Kasunan palace. They convey a philosophical perspective on human life, extending from earthly existence to the afterlife. Additionally, the corridor imparts valuable advice and ethical values applicable to real life, facilitating spiritual readiness to face God (interview, 13 September 2023).

Two icons in the Surakarta Kasunan palace symbolize the Shahada: the Pamendangan monument and two banyan trees in the Lor (north) square. The Pemandangan Monument represents monotheism in Islam, functioning as a focal point for Sunan to seek guidance from Allah, the Most Glorified and Exalted. In Islam, it is recommended that during prayer, humans focus and surrender only to Allah, the Most Glorified and Exalted. This monument signifies that there is more power above Sri Sunan’s authority in Surakarta Kasunan palace, namely the power of Allah, the Most Glorified and Exalted. Similarly, for the people, respect and fear for Sri Sunan must not surpass the reverence for Allah, the Most Glorified and Exalted as the Most High and Mighty Being (interview, 8 August 2023).

Next, two banyan trees are located in the Kidul (north) Square, Waringin Dewandaru, and Waringin Jayandaru. The Ringin Dewadaru tree symbolizes nobility and perfection in human life, while the Ringin Jayandaru tree represents glory and victory (Amin, 2012). These two trees are collectively known as Kalpataru. Kalpataru itself is the name of the tree of heaven and immortality originating from Hindu-Buddhist beliefs. This tree holds a philosophical meaning of salvation (Pertiwi & Winarto, 2020). The two trees symbolize the Shahada sentence due to their placement in the northern square, representing the philosophical significance of the early journey of human life. Humans are bestowed with the hope of achieving nobility (Dewandaru) and victory (Jayandaru) by adhering to the two sentences of shahada, ultimately leading to salvation (Kalpataru) (interview, 25 March 2023).

3.2.2.2. Religious Values in Batik Clothing

Batik art is among the ‘palace arts,’ along with Wayang, dance, Gamelan, and Javanese poetry. This form of palace art is an extension of a philosophy rooted in spiritual discipline; in fact, various arts share the same philosophical foundation (Kawasaki, 2012). These forms of spiritual discipline encompass self-control, ethics, and values that are highly significant for the life of the palace community (Lombaard, 2019). Hence, batik must be connected to the context of Javanese culture and Surakarta Kasunan palace, serving as the guardian of Javanese culture and a focal point of religious awareness for the palace community.
The Surakarta Kasunanan palace is the origin of various batik motifs, including those of Truntum, Sawat, Parang, Kwung, Satrio Manah, Semen Rante, Slobog, Bondet, Semen Gendhong, Pamelauto, and Ceplok Kasatrian. Each motif carries its philosophy and symbolism for the palace community. An example of a motif with a symbolic meaning in its name is the Truntum motif. The name 'Truntum' is derived from the Javanese word 'Tuntum', which means repetition. Philosophically, the concept of repetition symbolizes the affectionate relationship between a pair of humans. This motif features floral patterns on a black base colour. Symbolically, it reflects two contrasting aspects of human life: life—death, dark—light, night—day, man—woman, world—afterlife. Humans, as creatures of God, will consistently navigate between these dualities, moving through phases of darkness (Pepeteng), twinkling stars (Sakgebyaring Lintang), and enlightenment (Pepadhang). This aligns with the teachings of Allah (Adz-Dzariyat, 49).

3.2.2.3. We created everything in pairs so that you may remember (the greatness of Allah)

The Sidoluhur batik motif carries a profound philosophical meaning associated with nobility. Within the Keraton community, there is a belief that life’s journey represents a human pursuit of material and nonmaterial nobility. Material nobility entails meeting physical needs through diligent work, while nonmaterial nobility manifests in virtuous words and actions. The palace community aspires to lead lives infused with noble values. The Sidoluhur batik motif symbolizes the aspiration to attain elevated positions and serve as societal role models. Additionally, this motif holds a more profound philosophical significance, emphasizing self-improvement to become virtuous individuals who consistently pray, remember, and express gratitude to God.

Batik transcends being merely a form of artistic design; it serves a dual function as traditional Javanese attire worn throughout the life cycle of Javanese individuals, particularly within the royal court. The life cycle encompasses the stages from prenatal life to death (Gupta, 2020), with three pivotal phases: birth, marriage, and death (Gusarov & Popov, 2020). The palace community integrates batik into ceremonies associated with these life phases.

First, the birth ceremony includes the Mitoni celebration, which is typically celebrated when the mother is several months pregnant (Minarno et al., 2020). In the Mitoni celebration, the batik worn by Sidomuki, Sidoluhur, Sidohash, Sidomulyo, Sidodadi, Semen Rama, Wahyu Tumurun, and Babon Angrem was used during this event. Second, in Javanese wedding ceremonies, such as midodaren held the night before the wedding day, batiks such as Semen Rama, Satrio Wibowo, Wahyu Tumurun, and Truntum are commonly worn. Third, during death ceremonies, the palace community wears Kwung batik, Slobog, or other motifs favoured by the deceased in their lifetime. The palace community believes in an afterlife, considering death not as the end but as the beginning of a new, eternal existence (Gittings, 2023).

3.2.3. Culture

The Surakarta Kasunanan palace boasts a rich cultural heritage deeply rooted in the Islamic religion. One prominent cultural practice is Sekaten, which traces its origins back to the Majapahit Kingdom. It was initially referred to as 'Sekati,' indicating a unit weighing 680 kilograms to represent the weight of the gamelan instruments; the term evolved into 'Sekaten' during the Islamic Kingdom of Demak, derived from the Arabic word 'Syahadatani' (Rahayu et al., 2020). This transformation altered the meaning and brought about significant changes, marking a pivotal shift during the conversion process. The Sekaten celebration at Surakarta Kasunanan palace seamlessly integrates Hindu-Javanese palace culture with Islamic traditions (Mulyana, 2017). It represents a unique configuration that harmonizes Javanese culture and Islam, showcased through Gamelan, a product of Javanese culture infused with the principles and characteristics guided by Islamic beliefs (Khaura, 2022).

The Sekaten ceremony features special gendhing (songs), categorized into two types, Rambu and Rangkung, named after jinn glorifying Islam. Rambu and Rangkung hold symbolic meanings embodying the Javanese concept that humans, as living beings, must respect both the Agal (visible) and Alus (unseen) aspects for a balanced existence (Utami, 2011). The evolution of the Sekaten Gamelan includes new compositions following the Sekatengan pattern.

During the Sekaten celebration in Surakarta, two gamelan instruments take center stage: Kiai Guntur Madu in the south, symbolizing the 'Tawhid shahada,' and Kiai Guntur Sari in the north, representing the ‘Rosul Shahada’ (interview, 8 August 2023). This adaptation of Islam to the local cultural environment illustrates the dynamic interaction between religion and civilization. Sekaten is a medium for Islamic preaching and an economic, entertainment, and tourism facility. The palace, which holds a moral responsibility for cultural and religious development, actively promotes Islam by providing various structural and cultural facilities.

As a bastion of religion, the palace is obligated to propagate Islam, and the Sunans and Sultans consistently worked towards harmonizing the cultural environment (interview, 13 September 2023). In Sekaten, Islamic communities engage in rituals such as Quranic readings, emphasizing the importance of shahada and disseminating the philosophical and symbolic meanings of the instruments used in the event. This multidimensional technique positions Sekaten as a religious event and...
an economic, entertainment, and tourism asset. Through Sekaten, the palace contributes significantly to the spread of Islam, especially among those sensitive to Javanese traditions, fostering a better understanding of Islamic teachings.

4. Final Considerations

The Surakarta Kasunanan palace, which originated as a fragment of the Islamic Mataram Kingdom in 1755 AD, has perpetuated Islam as a religion and belief system. The presence of Islam has been a driving force for the palace community, marking a departure from the previous Hinduism and a continuous evolution that involved Syahadat Kures, introduced during the reign of Sultan Agung, as a means of preaching. Syahadat Kures, encompassing the Shahadatian (two sentences of Islamic declaration of faith), an introduction to God, an introduction to the apostle, and a closing greeting of salvation, has had a profound impact. This impact extends across all aspects of life in Surakarta Kasunanan palace, particularly in government, arts, and culture, with each aspect closely tied to Islamic beliefs. Syahadat Kures thus plays a pivotal role as the starting point for the spread of Islam, especially within the Surakarta Kasunanan Palace Community.

Ethical Consideration

The author states that consent was obtained from the informant during the interviews.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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References


