



THE DESCRIPTION OF QILINS AT MASJID GEDHE MATARAM IN KOTAGEDE: AN ART ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY

Penggambaran Qilin pada Mimbar Masjid Gedhe Mataram Kotagede: Kajian Arkeologi Seni

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Abstrak

Interaksi antarbudaya dalam kajian arkeologi seni memungkinkan corak budaya tertentu muncul di artefak budaya lain. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah mengetahui latar belakang kemunculan ornamen figur qilin pada mimbar Masjid Gedhe Mataram Kotagede, beserta teknik penggambaran dan prinsip-prinsip seni yang melekat padanya. Metode penelitian yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini ialah kualitatif deskriptif dengan pendekatan arkeologi seni dan ikonografi. Dari hasil wawancara diketahui bahwa ornamen qilin merupakan pemberian dari Sultan Palembang. Ornamen ini menjadi bukti adanya pengaruh Tiongkok di Nusantara. Qilin pada mimbar Masjid Gedhe Mataram Kotagede digambarkan dengan teknik denaturalistis atau stilasi. Penggambaran qilin memperhatikan prinsip-prinsip seni rupa. Prinsip-prinsip tersebut antara lain kesatuan, keseimbangan, irama, dan kesebandingan simbol.

Kata Kunci: Qilin, mimbar, Mataram Islam, arkeologi seni.

Abstract

Intercultural interactions, in relation to the study of art archeology, have allowed certain cultural features to appear in other cultural artefacts. The aim of this study was to put forward the reasons behind the appearance of the qilins on the pulpit of the Masjid Gedhe Mataram in Kotagede, along with the depiction techniques and art principles attached to it. The research method used in this study was descriptive qualitative with an art archaeological and iconographical approach. The study indicated that the pulpit was a gift from Sultan of Palembang, demonstrating Chinese influence in this archipelagic nation (Nusantara). The qilins were portrayed using denaturalization or stylized techniques, highlighting the principles of fine art such as unity, balance, rhythm, and proportionality of symbol.

Keywords: Qilin, pulpit, Islamic Mataram, Art Archaeology.

INTRODUCTION

In Islam some products of arts such as calligraphy, mosaic, and *Arabesque* are identified. Thanks to the expertise of the Indonesian artists, the three artistic products have their own unique features, setting

them apart from those in other countries, in general, giving birth to Indonesian Islamic Art (Ambariyanto, 2008, p. 197). The art is not only limited to creating local products and ornaments, but it has reached out to the level

where other cultures are integrated into the archipelagic nation's richness. One of the well-growing art is sculpturing, clearly observed in mosques and tombs, both being in two and three-dimensional setting. The pictures drawn vary, using such media as woods, metal, and stones.

The advance of Islam and its arts does not wipe away the previous artistic heritage. Islamic Mataram, for example, has some heritage before it visible in the gate (Paduraksa) from Hindu-Buddhist Period and qilin – an ornamental part in Chinese culture – found in the pulpit of Masjid Gedhe Mataram. Regardless of the divided opinions on the introduction and the advances of Islam (Chalid, 2018, p. 136), a few points are worth highlighting. The first and foremost is that the early-day Indonesians are open to other cultures, the use of gates originating from India and qilin from China are, with adjustment, just two examples, only shedding light on the local genius aspect on our predecessors' part.

Local genius is defined as an identity or character of a nation helping it to absorb

or filter cultural influence to gain its own line of culture. In a bigger scale, it contributes to national resilience, allowing a nation to survive other nations' cultural influence (Soebadio, 1986, p. 19). Religious values and arts are two important components in setting up the so-called local genius.

Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, famously referred to as Jogjakarta, is one of the places with a rich cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, suggesting its vital role in the past. The current study aims to discuss Islamic Mataram Kingdom's heritage in the pulpit of Masjid Gedhe Mataram Kotagede, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta. Some sacred cultural object in possession of Yogyakarta include the palace, the guest house, tombs, and the mosque (Atmosudiro, 2013, p. 10).

Masjid Gedhe Mataram Kotagede has a pulpit on which a qilins are placed. A qilin itself is a mythological creature in Chinese culture, described to have have a deer body with scales, tail similar to that of an ox, single-toed, dragon-headed and horned (Figure 1) (Kustedja et al., 2013, p.



Figure 1. The qilin seen at the entrance gate of Rumah Karuhun 100, Bandung. (Source: Kustedja et al., 2013)

536). In general, it is an ornament frequently seen in the pagoda, thus its being put in a mosque makes it even an interesting topic to consider deeply. Historically speaking, it is mostly contained in the old mosques.

There have some studies investigating the architectural aspects of Masjid Gedhe, Apriyanto, 2015; Setyowati et al., 2017; Silviana, 2017, just to name a few. A conservation approach was carried out by Taufiq, 2016 and etnomathematical one by Bakhrodin et al., 2019. This study, on the other hand, seeks to approach one aspect of the ornaments at Masjid Gedhe from art archeology perspective.

Described in this study are the background of qilin at Masjid Gedhe, the analysis of the qilin using art archeology approach, and its history. It is expected that this research contributes new data to the development of art, archeology, and history.

METHOD

The study relies on the descriptive qualitative approach using art archeology analysis. By definition, a qualitative study is intended to get a deeper meaning on something being researched; meaning is viewed as the real data, those hidden behind the observed ones (Sugiyono, 2019, p. 25). The object presented here is described as true to the data gathered as possible.

The chosen approach, art archeology, is projected to provide an analysis on the artefacts and features to come up with the understanding on the technological aspects (materials used); style and the periodization, and the aesthetical values contained (Tjandrasasmita, 2009, p. 3).

The data were collected through observation, documentation, and literature review. The qilins at the pulpit of Masjid Gedhe were examined to really get the hold of them: shape, techniques employed, and sculpturing principles applied. The objects researched on were also photographed. The

literature review was carried out to situate the object in the right cultural context.

The collected data were then analyzed based on the principles of iconography, a branch of art history in interpreting the products of arts or artefacts. The first aspect is identification or description of an icon, designed to find out possible changes in a certain product of art or a described style (artistic style) (Panofsky, 1972, p. 3). Iconography studies the identification, characteristics and interpretation of the content of Figures in a work of art or an artefact. Iconographical analysis aims to reveal the materials, form, and identity of an icon (Sukendar et al., 1999, p. 101). The data gathered from qilin identification were coupled with historical resources collected from literature search to holistically interpret the meaning of the qilins placed at the pulpit of Masjid Gedhe Mataram Kotagede.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Data Description

a. The Location

The qilin ornament is an aspect found on the pulpit (Figure 2) of Masjid Gedhe Mataram Kotagede, located in the main room of the building. The mosque is located in Desa Jagalan, Kecamatan Banguntapan, Kabupaten Bantul, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta.

b. The Ornament

The ornaments are precisely located on the ladder of the pulpit, on the right and left part. The tails of the qilin are connected to the pulpit (Figure 3). The horns are also joint to the pulpit. They can vary in numbers, ranging from one to two; the ones at Masjid Gedhe have two horns each. Also available are tendrils.

c. The Technique

The qilins at Masjid Gedhe Mataram Kotagede were sculptured, with carving patterns being observed.



Figure 2. The old pulpit on which a qilin (black) is placed at Masjid Gedhe Mataram Kotagede (Source: Naufal Raffi Arrazaq).



Figure 3. One of the qilins seen on the pulpit (front view) at Masjid Gedhe Mataram Kotagede (Source: Muhammad Faiz).

d. The Materials

The qilins (Figure 3) are sculptured ornaments from wooden materials. The

specific name of the tree from which the materials are procured still goes unknown, owing to the absence of the related sources.

2. Qilin: Terminology, History, and Characteristics

a. Terminology

Qilin in the Chinese language is written 麒麟, at time being spelled *Qilin* or *Ch'i-lin*; the characters きりん or キリン (read: *Kirin*) are how it is spelled in Japanese; the Korean equivalent for the word is 기린 (read: *Girin*); in the English language, it is referred to as Dragon-horse or Chinese-Unicorn. It is a character in the Chinese mythology (Wicaksana, 2017, p. 5). Considering the information being laid out above, it is safe to conclude that the term qilin is known in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean cultures.

Terminology wise, the word qilin is derived from the two characters *qi* “male,” and *lin*, “female.” The body of qilin resembles a horse, but looks more like a giraffe. A qilin installed in pagoda used to have yellow fur under the belly, multicolored back, being up to five colors of

round pattern, and has the tail of an ox. In Chinese Mythology, qilin is said to be environment-friendly, becoming humans friend and not attacking livestock (Kustedja et al., 2013, p. 536).

b. History

A qilin has the body of a deer with tendrils, the tail of an ox, dragon-headed and the horns. Being multicolored in the back, it has yellow fur on the belly part. The Chinese folklore has it that qilin is an animal only appearing in the country (China) when it is prosperous and is ruled by a wise emperor or king. It is told that a qilin appeared when Confucius was born then coughed up an inscribed jade tablet that foretold the future greatness of the child. Qilin is a symbol of luck and peace, never walking on verdant grass or eating living vegetation. What is more, it also points to a wise and true judge (Kustedja et al., 2013, p. 536).

c. Characteristics

Generally speaking, a qilin has a single horn or two heads on its forehead, and it is the liberty of the artist to have one or two. The shape of a qilin is chimeric, having some animals' trait in one body or better said hybrid (Coleman in Wicaksana 2017, p. 5). It has the body of a deer and the tail of the fox and a horn on its head. At times, it is also considered to be a fused body of a horse and a dragon (*Long/Lung*) with fire emitting from its legs.

Another interesting topic to discuss when it comes to qilin is the number and shape of the horns (Wicaksana 2020, p. 137). A one-horned qilin is common in Chinese-dragon or *long*. In the later stage, to get a two-horned qilin, a single horn put in the central part is made into two branches, like that of a deer. With the new model, it seems to have multiple horns, despite originating from single one.

3. Qilin and Its Development in Indonesia (Nusantara)

Qilins are widely found in pagodas across the country; they pose deep

philosophical meaning. To have one seen in an Islamic religious place, however, is something interesting, one of which is in Masjid Gedhe. Furthermore, having an ornament of human or animal form in the mosque is nothing Islamic at all.

That the installment of a statue is forbidden in Islam is one thing, and it is quite another to have ornaments come into the holy place. The most important thing to meet in building a mosque is that it faces Mecca.

In his analysis entitled *The Archaeology of Islam*, Timothy Insoll writes the following, pertaining to the cultural richness in Islam.

Islam is a religion which is in many ways easier to assess in terms of archaeological visibility than some of the other world religions examined at this volume, such as, for example, Christianity or Hinduism. These are issues which have been considered both and is essentially due to the fact that Islam is composed of a uniform superstructure composed of the fundamentals of belief, what can be termed, "structuring principles", with below this a diverse substructure of practices, cultures and their material manifestation, what can be termed "regional diversity". Thus, it can be suggested, the presence of a Muslim should generate certain types of material culture, specific to the reflecting its doctrines and requirements upon the believer (Insoll, 1999, p. 121).

The pulpit of Masjid Gedhe Mataram Kotagede, discussed here, is a gift from Sultan Palembang to Sultan Agung Hanyokrokusumo. Palembang, based on some official account, is visited by the Chinese people in many occasions. Some of them settle and have kids (Adiyanto, 2006, p. 13).

The settled Chinese eventually create a community, some of whom are traders and some others become ulemas. Palembang has some great ulemas of Chinese descent: Kyai



Figure 4. The description of qilin (lateral aspect) on the pulpit of Masjid Gedhe Mataram Kotagede (Source: Naufal Raffi Arrazaq).

Demang Jayalaksana bin Demang Jayalaksana, Babah Abdullah (Ce" Ola) bin Demang Wiralaksana, Haji Balkiya (Ce" Nang Ya), H. M. Najib (Ce" Bacik), H.M. Arif (Ce" Koci), H.M. Amin (Ce" Aming), H. Baba Munir (Ce" Munir), and Abdul Azim Amin (Ce" Ajim) (Ali & Yanto, 2020, p. 71). Clear now it is on why some of the Chinese cultural features are visible in the Islamic life of Palembang, later reaching other parts of Indonesia.

4. Qilin Description Technique

The way a qilin is described depends a lot on the creativity of the artist. The ones at Masjid Gedhe are described differently from the original objects, called stylization or stylized technique (Nasution, 2008, p. 282).

The qilins at Masjid Gedhe only differ from the common in terms of number and shape of the horns, with the horns being attached to the pulpit (Figure 4). It is understood as a way of mediating the fact that statues of living things is forbidden in Islam.

5. Artistic principles on qilin description

a. Unity

Unity is conceived as an effort to be harmonious with other ornaments of the pulpit (Figure 3). The tendrils are carved to artistically connect the body of qilin (tail) to the pulpit, demonstrating that the two is one integral part.

b. Balance

This principle is accepted as the attempt to build a strong attraction to a certain work of art, the number and the position of qilins in this sense. Some forms of balance include symmetry, asymmetry, and the aura balance (Sunaryo, 2002, p. 40). Two qilins are placed on the right and left part respectively, to send a sense of balance on the pulpit, as opposed to only one.

c. Rhythm

Besides the two aspects explained before, the placement of qilins at the mosque sends a token of rhythm, in the forms of lines (tendrils) and shapes. The shapes are evident in two legs facing up front. The qilins always fill the lowest part.

d. Proportionality

One thing to be recognized when examining the qilins is that it holds a proper proportion to its surroundings. The qilins at the pulpit are not too small nor too big for its context, stopping it from becoming too strikingly dominant. The same is true for the color.

6. The Meaning of Qilins on the Pulpit of Masjid Gedhe Mataram, Kotagede

An ornament attached to an object signifies a certain meaning (Tinarbuko, 2020: 20). A qilin is believed to bring luck and peace. The Chinese folklore has it that it only appears in the time of prosperity and under the ruling of a wise emperor (Kustedja et al., 2013, p. 536). In the other literature, qilin is described as a symbol of *Kao-Yao*, the under world judge seeking justice. Qilin is a pet of *Kao-Yao*—a creature with determination and sparing no mercy to the wicked (Wicaksana, 2017, p. 8-9).

The Sultan of Palembang, tempted by the wide range of great values behind the character of qilin, finally decides to have it attached on the pulpit he gives away to Sultan Agung Hanyokrokusumo, a strong leader feared by both allies and enemies. The choice of having a pulpit as a gift also draws interesting discussions. A pulpit is taken as an authority on the part of the leader or ruler standing on it (Leacroft, 1976, p. 10).

A visual work of art is a representation or symbol in message delivering (Nuriarta 2019, p. 367) and (Wardani et al., 2019, p. 400). The stilation aspect indicated on the qilins in tendrils only showcases the local genius of our predecessor in meticulously integrating foreign cultures into our own, to fit with Islamic values embraced in the country, leading finally to the foundations of Islamic art of this archipelagic nation.

The qilins at Masjid Gedhe indicate that Indonesian cultures take some influence from foreign cultures, highlighting their capacity in perceiving that we reside in the world full of various cultures. Other nations

bear their own cultures, and that should be seen as a chance to enrich our culture. Judging from the archeological heritage buildings and ornaments, it is wise to conclude that Indonesia adjusts well to the times it has been with (Tjandrasasmita, 2009, p. 249).

Qilin can benefit the future generation, helping them realize the capacity (local genius) of their predecessors. The history subject should give more rooms to such a topic.

CONCLUSION

The qilins at Masjid Gedhe Mataram Kotagede is a product of stilation, a technique of having an object different from its original one. Despite the technique, the main features are kept still: the horns and the shape of the head, resembling that of a dragon with the body of a deer with scales. The fundamentals of fine arts are also paid attention to: unity, balance, rhythm and proportionality.

The pulpit in possession of qilins at Masjid Gedhe Mataram Kotagede is a gift from Sultan Palembang to Sultan Agung Hanyokrokusumo. Palembang is a place with intensive contact with the Chinese people coming to trade; some of them finally settle. A few of them become ulemas: Kyai Demang Jayalaksana bin Demang Jayalaksana, Babah Abdullah (Ce" Ola) bin Demang Wiralaksana, Haji Balkiya (Ce" Nang Ya), H. M. Najib (Ce" Bacik), H.M. Arif (Ce" Koci), H.M. Amin (Ce" Aming), H. Baba Munir (Ce" Munir), and Abdul Azim Amin (Ce" Ajim).

Qilin is a significant ornamental object, clearly indicated in the Chinese mythology. The ones at Masjid Gedhe Mataram hold the meanings of wisdom, prosperity and assertiveness. Islam forbidding the appearance of leaving creatures manifested in an object, the scope of the meaning of qilin has expanded ever since. In essence, pluralistic principle has come into touch with it.

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Appendix 1. Kotagede Islamic Mataram Mosque: Location of the pulpit with kilin figures
(Source: Naufal Raffi Arrazaq)

