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Islamic Spirituality and Javanese Mysticism: Cultural Analysis & Religious Leadership of *Panjangjimat* in Cirebon

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Attractions:

The Panjang Jimat Ritual in Cirebon is a tradition that blends Islamic spirituality and Javanese mysticism, passed down through generations within the Cirebon Palace. This research examines how the Panjang Jimat tradition reflects the fusion of Islamic values with local Javanese beliefs, seen in the use of heirloom objects as spiritual mediums and the role of the Sultan as the ritual leader. Through a qualitative approach and literature analysis, this study shows that the Panjang Jimat not only serves as a religious ritual but also symbolizes social cohesion and cultural identity, strengthening the community's connection with their ancestors and traditional values. Despite theological criticism regarding belief in the power of heirloom objects, the people of Cirebon view the ritual as a form of respect for their ancestors and a way to receive blessings from God. As times change, the Panjang Jimat tradition continues to adapt, addressing contemporary issues such as environmental sustainability and social inclusivity. This research demonstrates that Panjang Jimat is not just a tradition, but also a medium for dialogue between Islamic teachings and local wisdom, maintaining its relevance amid modernization and social change.

Keywords: Talisman length, syncretism, Islamic spirituality, Javanese mysticism, Cirebon Palace, cultural identity

Introduction

Panjang Talisman is one of the traditions held by the people of Cirebon to commemorate the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. This tradition has been going on for centuries and has a strong symbolic meaning in the culture, mysticism and spirituality of the local community. This ceremony is also closely related to local wisdom which is manifested in the form of rituals, beliefs and respect for ancestors. Through this research, I will explore various aspects of the long talisman, including the ethnographic, mystical and spiritual dimensions and the leadership of the Cirebon palace which is an inseparable part of Cirebon culture.

Ritual Save length is one of the most respected traditions in Cirebon, especially in the Kasepuhan, Kanoman and Kacirebonan palaces. Held every 12th of Rabiul Awal (Mawlid month) to commemorate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, this ritual is full of spiritual, cultural and mystical values. This procession involves various stages full of symbolism and meaning, and combines Islamic elements with Javanese mystical traditions. The following is a detailed description of the Panjang Jimat ritual process

based on interviews with palace sources.

The Long Amulet Ritual in Cirebon is a manifestation of the syncretism between Islamic spirituality and Javanese mystical traditions. In Javanese society, especially in Cirebon, Islam was accepted and developed through a process of acculturation with pre-existing local beliefs. For example, the teachings of Sunan Gunung Jati, one of the Wali Songo, emphasize the importance of spreading Islam through an approach that is in harmony with local culture. These teachings allow elements of local beliefs, such as respect for ancestors and the use of heirlooms, to remain present in the religious practices of Javanese society, ultimately creating harmony between Islam and Javanese culture (Geertz, 2010).

Syncretism in this context can be explained through Ibn Arabi's thoughts about *Wahdatul Wujud* or the unity of existence, which states that everything is a manifestation of God. This concept allows the understanding that material objects, such as amulets and heirlooms, can contain spiritual energy which is believed to come from God. These objects were later integrated into the Panjang Talisman ritual, where they were not only considered cultural artifacts but also as spiritual mediums that connected the people to God and their ancestors. This concept of syncretism is the basis for the Panjang Jimat tradition, in which Islam and Javanese mysticism are intertwined in harmony (Chittick, 1989).

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The formulation of the problem of this study are: (1) How is the syncretism between Islamic spirituality and Javanese mysticism reflected in the Panjang Jimat ritual? (2) What is the role of the leadership of the Cirebon Palace in maintaining and leading the Panjang Jimat tradition? (3) What is the religious and social meaning of the Panjang Jimat ritual for the people of Cirebon? In the other hand, the research purposes of this research are: (1) Studying the relationship of syncretism in the Panjang Jimat ritual. (2) Explain the role of the Cirebon Palace as a cultural and spiritual leader in this tradition. (3) Analyze the influence of this ritual in the religious life of the Cirebon people

Research methodology

Based on above objectives, so the steps of method of this study is: Qualitative approach using ethnographic methods and document analysis. Interviews with palace figures, courtiers and the public; direct observation; and review of related literature. A qualitative study that combines ethnographic methods and cultural analysis.

The data collected through the steps: (1) In-depth interviews with palace figures, religious figures and the people of Cirebon who follow Panjang Jimat. (2) Participatory observation during ritual implementation. (3) Analysis of documents (literature, journals, blogs and media) related to Talisman Length.

The data analysis of this research are: (1) Thematic analysis to identify elements of syncretism, leadership and religious meaning in Panjang Jimat. (2) An interpretive approach to understanding the symbolic meaning in rituals and the role of the palace in this tradition

Results and Discussion

The syncretism between Islamic spirituality, Leadership and Javanese mysticism reflected in the Panjang Jimat ritual

The heirloom objects and the Talisman Rice were brought to the main room of the palace for the peak ritual. In this room, the Sultan or his representative will lead a joint prayer and dhikr ceremony, which will be attended by all those present. At this moment, reading is carried out *Barzanji* or praises to the Prophet Muhammad, which adds to the service of the atmosphere.

This prayer ritual together is the essence of Panjang Jimat, where all participants ask for blessings and safety. Reading *Barzanji* and the remembrance led by the Sultan is considered a form of liaison between the community and the Prophet Muhammad SAW, thus strengthening the Sultan's role as the spiritual leader of the Cirebon community. After the prayers and remembrance are finished, Nasi Jimat and other dishes will be distributed to the participants as a symbol of blessing.

In research conducted by Wahid (2022), the Panjang Jimat ritual in Cirebon is seen as a symbol of the combination of local traditions and Islamic teachings which has undergone transformation since the Wali Songo era, especially under the influence of Sultan Syarif Hidayatullah or Sunan Gunung Jati. Wahid explained that Panjang Jimat is not just a commemoration of the Prophet's birthday, but also a means of preserving ancestral heritage which is respected by the people of Cirebon. Sunan Gunung Jati is considered an important figure who combined Islamic teachings with existing Javanese culture, creating a religious tradition that was accepted by the wider community.

According to Wahid (2022), this tradition shows the syncretism of local culture with Islam, where local symbols such as heirloom objects and amulets are included in rituals that lead to spiritual celebrations. The Long Procession of Talismans involves the display of sacred objects, including amulets, which are believed to have protective powers. This tradition illustrates how Islamic teachings were adapted to fit into the local context of Javanese society, especially in Cirebon, while maintaining the original Islamic values taught by the Wali Songo.

Overall, washing or bathing heirloom objects in the Javanese mystical tradition is a ritual filled with symbolic and spiritual meaning. This ritual does not just clean objects physically, but also aims to cleanse and refresh the spiritual energy that is believed to reside in that thing. In addition, this ritual strengthens the relationship between humans and ancestors or supernatural entities who are believed to be related to these objects.

Bathing an amulet also implies that human spiritual life requires continuous care and maintenance, just like heirloom objects that need to be cared for so that they continue to function as a source of strength and protection. Therefore, this ritual reflects the Javanese spiritual view of the importance of maintaining balance between the physical and supernatural worlds, as well as respecting ancestors and supernatural forces that are considered to protect and give blessings.

While in the Javanese mystical tradition, objects such as amulets or heirlooms are often thought to contain the "soul" or spiritual energy of ancestors, this view is not in line with Al Jauziyah's understanding. He emphasized that all spiritual relationships must be centered on God, and that no power is given to physical or material objects after a person dies. According to him, asking for help or expecting protection from objects such as amulets is a form of deviation from a Muslim's beliefs.

Those things, in Al-Jauziyah's view, are just dead things that do not have any power except what God allows. Practices like this, in Al-Jauziyah's view, can lead the people to practices that deviate from the pure path of Islam, especially because it involves belief in things other than God that can influence human life.

In the Javanese mystical tradition, amulets and heirloom objects are seen as spiritually pregnant mediums *luck, blessing*, or ancestral energy. These objects were not only considered physical artifacts but also as a means of connecting the physical world with the unseen world. Bathing or washing amulets is part of the spiritual purification process which is believed to be able to renew mystical powers or spiritual energy of the object. This view is in line with the teachings of Sunan Kalijaga, who sees the importance of integration between Islamic teachings and local traditions, so that these objects are treated with respect and become part of everyday spirituality.

Sunan Kalijaga introduced a syncretic approach in which local traditions and culture were accommodated in Islamic practice, and amulets or heirlooms became part of a spiritual system that was considered valid by the local community. Syekh Siti Jenar also provides an esoteric understanding of the relationship between the physical and spiritual realms, where material objects such as talismans can be a means of representing *join me, my lord* (human unity with God).

In Ibn Arabi's teachings, concept *Wahdatul Wujud* (unity of existence) provides the basis that everything in the universe, including physical objects, is a manifestation of God. From this perspective, objects such as amulets or heirlooms can be considered part of God's *tajalli* (appearance), so that their ritual purification can be interpreted as an act of respect for the Divine existence hidden in the material world.

The process of washing amulets, in the context of Sufism teachings, can be seen as an effort to renew and cleanse the spiritual manifestations that exist in these objects, even though essentially all power comes from God. This ritual, even though it involves material objects, is part of spiritual awareness to maintain a connection with the Divine.

On the other hand, the view of Abdul Qoyim Al-Jauziyah, as presented in *Kitab Ar-Ruh*, emphasizing that the spirit has no connection with physical objects after death. The human spirit after death is in the *barzakh* realm and does not interact with the material world. In this perspective, the belief that physical objects such as amulets can store the power of the spirit or spiritual energy of ancestors is contrary to the pure teachings of Islam. The ritual of washing or caring for an amulet, if understood as a way to renew the spiritual power of the object, is considered contrary to monotheism, because it can lead to *shirk* (associating partners with God with things other than Him).

Al-Jauziyah emphasized that blessings, protection, and strength only come from Allah, and that no material object has inherently supernatural powers. Rituals involving physical objects with the intention of obtaining protection or blessings can be seen as practices that deviate from the monotheistic teachings of Islam.

Thus, the tradition of washing or bathing amulets in Javanese mysticism reflects a blend of local beliefs and Islamic teachings that are more flexible in cultural contexts, while from the perspective of orthodox Islamic theology, this practice is seen as a deviation from pure monotheistic teachings. From the analysis of several points of view, it can be analyzed in more depth about the long tradition of amulets in Cirebon as follows:

The Long Amulet Ritual in Cirebon is a clear reflection of the syncretism between Islamic teachings and Javanese mysticism. This tradition combines Islamic spiritual elements, such as reciting blessings and prayers to the Prophet Muhammad SAW, with the use of heirloom objects which are treated as spiritual mediums in Javanese beliefs. Geertz (2010) notes that one of the factors of Islam's success in Java is its ability to adapt to local beliefs. In the context of Panjang Jimat, the palace leads the community in directing the belief that heirloom objects can function as intermediaries between humans and God, an idea that is also influenced by Javanese mystical teachings which consider physical objects to have *luck* or supernatural powers inherited from ancestors (Geertz, 2010).

Ibn Arabi, through concepts *Wahdatul Wujud*, also provides a theological basis for this belief, in which all creation is a manifestation of God, and physical objects can be considered reflections of Divine power (Chittick, 1989). In Panjang Jimat, heirloom objects such as *keris*, amulets, and spears are considered to contain spiritual energy that helps connect the people of Cirebon with their ancestors and God. This reflects the syncretism between Islam and local traditions that continue to live in Cirebon society, showing the flexibility of Islam in absorbing local elements without losing the core of its teachings.

The role of the leadership of the Cirebon Palace in maintaining and leading the Panjang Jimat tradition

The leadership of the Cirebon Palace plays a very important role in maintaining and leading the Panjang Jimat ritual. The Sultan of Cirebon plays a dual role as a political and spiritual leader who maintains the continuity of Islamic teachings which have been harmonized with Javanese mystical traditions. Mulder (1998) emphasizes that the palaces in Java, including the Cirebon Palace, are not only centers of

government but also spiritual centers that preserve local customs and beliefs. The Sultan is considered the heir to blessings (*barakah*) from his ancestors, especially Sunan Gunung Jati, who is believed to have spiritual powers passed down through generations (*Mulder, 1998*).

In the Long Jimat procession, the Sultan leads prayers and leads the procession of carrying heirlooms, which shows the spiritual legitimacy of the palace as a link between the human world and the unseen world. Wahid (2022) notes that the Panjang Jimat ritual is one of the tools used by the Cirebon Palace to strengthen its position as a spiritual leader and maintain social cohesion among the people of Cirebon. Through Panjang Jimat, the Sultan of Cirebon shows the role of the palace as guardian *blessing* ancestors, who are believed to be able to protect people from danger and bring blessings (*Wahid, 2022*).

The process of washing or bathing heirloom objects or amulets in the Javanese mystical tradition is related to various Sufism teachings, especially those from important figures such as Ibnu Arabi, Sunan Kalijaga, and Sheikh Siti Jenar. These three figures played a big role in the development of spirituality in the archipelago, especially in terms of combining Islamic teachings and local traditions, including mystical practices and the use of sacred objects such as amulets. The following is an explanation of how the concepts of the three figures are related to this spiritual procession:

Ibn Arabi was a great Sufi from the 13th century who introduced the concept *Wahdatul Wujud* (unity of existence), which teaches that everything in the universe is a manifestation of God. According to Ibn Arabi, God is the source of everything, and everything in the world is a reflection or *tajalli* (appearance) of God. This teaching provides the understanding that God is present in all aspects of life, including material objects.

In the context of the ritual of washing or bathing heirlooms, teachings *Wahdatul Wujud* relevant because in this perspective, these objects are not just physical objects, but also become a medium for getting closer to God. Heirlooms or talismans are considered to be containers of divine energy or *blessing* which is bestowed by God through the intermediary of the saints or ancestors. The process of cleaning this object can be seen as an effort to refresh the spiritual energy within the object, which is basically a manifestation of God's power. This ritual also shows that material objects have a deeper spiritual dimension, as they reflect the presence of God in the physical world. (*Chittick, 1989*).

Sunan Kalijaga, one of the Wali Songo, is known for his unique approach to spreading Islam in Java. He uses a syncretic approach, namely combining Islamic teachings with local culture, including the use of traditional Javanese symbols such as wayang, gamelan and heirloom objects. Sunan Kalijaga's teachings emphasize the importance of maintaining harmony between religious teachings and local traditions, so that people can easily accept and integrate Islam in everyday life.

In the process of washing or bathing the amulet, the influence of Sunan Kalijaga is clearly visible. This practice was not eliminated in the Islamization of Java, but was instead integrated as part of the community's religious expression. Heirloom objects such as keris or amulets are considered not just cultural artifacts, but have deep spiritual meaning, because they are believed to carry energy or *blessing* from the guardians and ancestors. For Sunan Kalijaga, these objects can be a means of *da'wah* and a medium for connecting people with Islamic values, without having to ignore local wisdom. Thus, the heirloom washing ritual is a manifestation of Sunan Kalijaga's teachings which encourage cultural and religious syncretism as a way to maintain spiritual and social harmony. (*Mulder, 1998*).

Sheikh Siti Jenar was a controversial figure in Javanese mystical history, known for his radical views on the concepts of death and the soul. His teachings touch on ideas about *join me, my lord* (unity between servant and God), which is similar to teachings *Wahdatul Wujud* from Ibn Arabi. However, Sheikh Siti Jenar places greater emphasis on the understanding that the human soul, after death, reunites with God and loses its individual identity.

In relation to the procession of bathing amulets, Sheikh Siti Jenar's teachings contain the understanding that sacred objects, including amulets, can be symbols of the unity between the physical and spiritual worlds. In his view, these objects may have no power in the physical sense, but they become focal points where the spiritual and material worlds meet. Bathing or washing amulets can be seen as an attempt to maintain a "connection" between the human world and the supernatural, where such objects are considered intermediaries or manifestations of supernatural powers originating from God.

Sheikh Siti Jenar also emphasized that life and death are an inseparable cycle. Objects such as amulets, which are often passed down from generation to generation, reflect this view, as they are thought to store the energy of ancestors who have united with God. Bathing an amulet in this context can be seen as a ritual that revitalizes the spiritual connection with ancestors who have achieved unity with God. (Ricklefs, 2007).

Abdul Qoyim Al-Jauziyah, a great scholar of the 14th century in Islam, is known for his extensive work on various aspects of faith and spirituality, including his views on *soul* (soul). In his book *Kitab Ar-Ruh*, Al-Jauziyah outlines a deep understanding of the spirit, death, and life after death, with an emphasis on the concept that the spirit has an independent existence that is not directly related to physical objects after death. Therefore, if Al-Jauziyah's views are applied in the context of the tradition of washing or bathing amulets in Java, there are several things that can be considered:

Al-Jauziyah believes that *soul* has an independent existence from the physical body. After death, the soul will be in a different realm, namely the barzakh realm, and has no direct interaction with the physical world. In this view, the spirit will not reside or reside in physical objects such as talismans or heirlooms. The soul of a deceased human will journey to the afterlife and will not return or be bound to material objects in this world.

If connected to the process of washing or bathing heirlooms or talismans in the Javanese tradition, Al-Jauziyah's view will criticize the belief that these objects contain the spirit or spiritual power of the ancestors. According to Al-Jauziyah, the soul cannot be present or reside in physical objects after a person's death. Therefore, cleaning talismans with the intention of refreshing the spiritual power of ancestors or certain spiritual entities will be contrary to the understanding of the faith held by Al-Jauziyah.

In Al-Jauziyah's view, the soul is a creation of God that serves to connect man with his God during his life in the world. However, after death, the soul returns to its Creator and waits in the realm of barzakh before the day of resurrection. Al-Jauziyah asserted that the soul is completely under the authority of God and does not have the ability to interact with the physical world after death except with God's permission.

Javanese spiritual processions, which believe that objects such as amulets or heirlooms can store spiritual power or energy from ancestors, would be difficult to accept from Al-Jauziyah's perspective. According to him, assuming that physical objects have a connection with the spirit or can be a spiritual medium is contrary to the pure teachings of Islam. Al-Jauziyah will emphasize that all power, blessings, or protection only come from Allah, not from material objects.

Al-Jauziyah is a strong defender of the teachings of tawhid (the oneness of Allah), which emphasizes that there is no power other than the power of Allah, and that everything related to blessing, protection and safety must be returned to His will and power. In this context, the ritual of bathing or caring for heirloom objects in the belief that they have supernatural powers can be seen as a form of *polytheism* (associating partners with Allah) for attributing supernatural powers to other than Allah.

Al-Jauziyah would see this ritual as a deviation from the teachings of monotheism, especially if these objects were considered to have powers that could provide benefits or ward off harm. In his view,

Muslims must always depend completely on Allah for protection and blessings, not on material objects which are believed to have spiritual or mystical powers. (*Al-Jauziyah, 1999*).

The religious and social meaning of the Panjang Jimat ritual for the people of Cirebon

The heirloom objects used in Panjang Jimat, such as keris, talismans, and spears, are considered to have mystical powers that can protect people and bring blessings. Ricklefs (2007) notes that in the Javanese mystical tradition, heirloom objects have a very important role because they are believed to contain magical energy inherited from ancestors. People believe that these objects can absorb and emit spiritual energy that helps protect their owners and brings blessings to those who use them properly (*Ricklefs, 2007*).

In Panjang Jimat, these objects are paraded around the palace and then cleaned in a solemn ceremony, reflecting the belief that heirloom objects are not only cultural artifacts but also mediums that carry *luck* or spiritual power. According to Sutarto (2015), mystical concepts in the Javanese tradition, including the use of heirloom objects, allow for a connection between the physical and spiritual worlds through these objects. This ritual functions as spiritual refreshment for heirloom objects, which is believed to renew the spiritual power within them (*Sutarto, 2015*).

The Long Talisman is not just a spiritual ritual, but also has an important social role for the people of Cirebon. Hidayat (2021) explains that this ritual is a moment where people gather to strengthen their social and religious relationships. In this procession, people from various social strata participate, showing how Panjang Jimat strengthens social cohesion among them. The distribution of Jimat Rice after the procession is finished is a symbol of sharing blessings that strengthens the bond of solidarity between the palace and the general public (*Hidayat, 2021*).

Apart from that, this ritual also becomes a strong cultural identity for the people of Cirebon, where they see Panjang Talisman as an embodiment of ancestral teachings that continue to be maintained. Blogs *The Long Tradition of Amulets in Cirebon: Exploring the Meaning and Symbolism* (2023) noted that the people of Cirebon believe that by taking part in the Long Talisman procession, they will receive blessings from God and their ancestors, which will provide protection for their lives. This shows that Panjang Talisman not only strengthens spiritual ties but also maintains social balance in the midst of an increasingly modern society (*Blog The Long Tradition of Amulets in Cirebon: Exploring the Meaning and Symbolism, 2023*).

Although respected by the people of Cirebon, the ritual of Panjang Jimat is not free from theological criticism, especially from those who hold fast to the teachings of pure monotheism. Abdul Qoyim Al-Jauziyah in *Kitab Ar Ruh* rejected the belief that physical objects, such as amulets and heirlooms, could contain spiritual powers. According to Al-Jauziyah, after death, the human spirit can no longer relate to the physical world and material objects. Therefore, assuming that heirloom objects can bring blessings or protection is contrary to the concept of tawhid which teaches that only Allah has the power to give blessings or protection (*Al-Jauziyah, 1999*).

Wahid (2022) also noted that there was criticism from the ulama who considered that the Panjang Jimat ritual had the potential to give rise to the practice of shirk, because heirloom objects were treated as if they had power equal to God. However, the people of Cirebon tend to see heirlooms as intermediaries, not as the main source of power, so for them this practice does not conflict with Islamic teachings. This reflects differences in interpretation between orthodox theological views and local community beliefs influenced by Javanese mysticism (*Wahid, 2022*).

Conclusion

This analysis shows that the Panjang Jimat ritual in Cirebon is a unique blend of Islamic spirituality and

Javanese mysticism, which is reflected in the use of heirloom objects, the leadership role of the Cirebon Palace, and the belief in ancestral blessings. This tradition has succeeded in maintaining Islamic teachings through a syncretistic approach influenced by the teachings of Wali Songo and Javanese mystical figures such as Sunan Gunung Jati, Ibnu Arabi, and Sheikh Siti Jenar. The Long Talisman Ritual, with all its symbolism and mystical elements, represents the strong connection between the people of Cirebon and their ancestors, showing that Islamic teachings can adapt and coexist with local values without losing their spiritual essence (Geertz, 2010; Chittick, 1989).

The role of the Cirebon Palace as a leader in carrying out this ritual emphasizes its position as the guardian of the community's spiritual and social values. The sultan and the royal family play the role of spiritual leaders who not only direct the community in religious matters, but also strengthen social cohesion by sharing blessings in the form of Nasi Talisman and leading rituals. Keraton has succeeded in balancing its role as preserver of traditions and spiritual leader of the people of Cirebon, which has further strengthened its position in society (Mulder, 1998; Wahid, 2022).

However, the Panjang Talisman tradition is not free from theological criticism. From an orthodox Islamic perspective, as expressed by Abdul Qoyim Al-Jauziyah, the belief that physical objects such as amulets and heirlooms have spiritual powers can be considered contrary to the principle of monotheism. This view underscores that all power must come from Allah alone, and material objects should not be believed to have the ability to provide blessings or protection. Although there are differences in interpretation, the people of Cirebon view this ritual not as a form of object worship, but as respect for their ancestors and a means to get closer to God (Al-Jauziyah, 1999; Wahid, 2022).

Overall, Panjang Jimat remains an important symbol of the cultural and religious identity of the Cirebon people, showing how Islam can absorb elements of local culture in its religious practices. This ritual not only strengthens spiritual ties, but also strengthens social cohesion among communities, reflecting the values of mutual cooperation and solidarity. For the people of Cirebon, Panjang Talisman is a tradition that contains blessing which continues to be passed down from generation to generation, maintaining traditional values amidst the challenges of modernization (Blog The Long Tradition of Amulets in Cirebon: Exploring the Meaning and Symbolism, 2023; Hidayat, 2021*).

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