



Aridharma relief: Religious communication of East Java people in the 13th century AD

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Abstract. The function of reliefs on religious buildings in Java is not merely decorative or ornamental; rather, they serve a more profound purpose. The research has yielded evidence indicating that reliefs serve as conduits for public communication. The application of historical-archaeological methods in this research has demonstrated that East Javanese people utilized Aridharma reliefs as a conduit for the dissemination of information, norms, values, and religious teachings. The Aridharma Jago Temple relief represents a specific form of visual language that was utilized as a medium for religious communication, particularly among the people of East Java during the mid-13th century A.D. This research employs a semiotic approach to analyze Aridharma reliefs as objects, with the aim of elucidating the processes of their production and utilization in the past. The semiotic approach allows for the identification of three key messages conveyed by the Aridharma reliefs: firstly, the importance of avoiding sin; secondly, the necessity of avoiding the display of virtuous actions and arrogance; and thirdly, the necessity of acknowledging the consequences of one's actions. In addition to these religious messages, the reliefs also convey moral messages, such as the importance of gratitude for kindness, loyalty, and honesty.

Keywords: Aridharma relief, Jago Temple, religious communication, Śiwa-Buddha.

1 First Section

The classical period of Indonesia, which lasted around the 4th to 14th centuries A.D., can be identified with cultural heritage in the form of temple buildings. Based on the context of its era, the temple comes from the Sanskrit *candikagrha*, which means the house of Candika (a goddess of death or the spreader of death in Hindu conception) (1). Temples from the Hindu-Buddhist period are sacred and closely related to the conception of the people's religious life, namely, Hinduism and Buddhism (2), where the temple functions as a place of worship or worship of the gods. In addition to temples, reliefs on temples also play an essential role as a physical means of ancient religious institutions, not only as a pure decoration that adorns the temple walls but also as a symbolic decoration that contains specific meanings based on customary norms, social systems, and (3). This is in line with the tendency of the classical period to focus on the beauty

of sculpture as part of the means of communication between the ruler (king) and the supporting community (4).

This function is also seen in the depiction of one of the reliefs of Jago Temple, namely the Aridharma relief, which contains many moral and religious messages. Especially the symbolic meaning related to the teachings of Śiwa-Buddha that developed during the Singhasari period in the 13th century A.D. Jago or Jajaghu Temple is a Majapahit building located in Tumpang, Malang. Based on textual information on the inscription of the Manjusri statue, this temple is dated 1265 Saka or 1343 AD and was built as a place of worship as well as a shrine to Wisnuwarddhana or Ranggawuni (king of the Singhasari Kingdom) (5). The Aridharma relief is one of the story reliefs in Jago Temple that contains the good behaviour of a Malwapati king named Aridharma or in community stories (kidung) that developed in Java and Bali, also known as Angling Dharma.

There are several studies, one of which is Kinney (2003), which discusses temples in East Java and alludes to the legend of Angling Dharma (6). Another study written by Creese (2004) tells the Angling Dharma relief in Jago Temple (7). In addition, Wahyudi and Jati (2015) also examined the utilisation of the Ari Darma story in Jago Temple in education (8). Several studies on temples have mentioned the existence of Aridharma reliefs in Jago Temple, but only a few studies have focused on an in-depth study of these reliefs. Due to the research gap, this research was conducted by departing from the need to examine in depth the meaning and purpose of Aridharma reliefs. The primary objective was to ascertain the actual function of the relief and to identify the values and norms that the relief maker sought to convey to the Javanese public in the 13th century A.D.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Jago Templa

Jajaghu, later known as Jago Temple, is a typical Majapahit building in Tumpang, Malang. According to the inscription of the Manjusri statue, the temple is dated 1265 Saka or 1343 AD. Jago Temple is also one of the *sudharmma* of 25 temples managed by the Majapahit government. Jago Temple has a Hindu-Buddhist pattern with evidence that the statues are Buddhist and the reliefs are Hindu (9). According to Nagarakrtagama pupuh 41(4) which reads:

*sakabdha kanawawa niksithi Bhatara Wisnu mulih in suralaya pejah
dhinarmma ta sire waleri Śiwawimbha len sugatawimbha mungw i jajaghu*

Aside from being a cult, the temple was also built to honour Wisnuwarddhana or Ranggawuni, king of the Singhasari Kingdom (5), as Buddha (in Pararaton) (10), and simultaneously to honour the soul of Śiwa in Weleri (Nagarakrtagama, Pupuh 41). The Majapahit style can be seen on the foot of the temple with a stepped terrace model, a flat and upright frame decorated with various reliefs, and a rectangular plan instead of a square like the temples of the old classical period (11). The collapsed roof of the

collapsed temple is also thought to be meru-shaped and made with more easily destroyed materials, such as wood or palm fibre (12). This is proven by the relief on the temple's foot wall depicting a temple building with a nine-pitched Meru roof.

The walls of Jago Temple are decorated with several reliefs, both non-story and story reliefs. Reliefs are carvings on the temple walls containing specific messages and emotions. Not only that, reliefs usually describe people's lives and offer insight into their beliefs. The story reliefs on the walls of Jago Temple are Hinduised, such as Tantri Kamandaka, Aridharma, Pathayajna (Arjunawiwaha), and Krsnayana. Only one relief is Buddhist, namely Kunjarakarna (13). Other studies also mention that Aridharma's depiction shows Buddhist elements (14). The Aridharma relief is also unique compared to some other story reliefs because, among Hindu-Buddhist temples, this relief is only carved in Jago Temple.

2.2 Aridharma Reliev

Aridharma is one of the carvings on the wall (relief) of Jago Temple, accompanying several other reliefs such as Tantri Kamandaka, Pathayajna (Arjunawiwaha), Krsnayana, and Kunjarakarna. Aridharma is a unique relief among several other reliefs because it is only found in Jago Temple. The story of Aridharma or Angling Dharma has also been widely developed in the form of *kidung* in various regions—especially the eastern part of Java and Bali. Although not described in detail as in the story text or the Angling Dharma's *kidung*, the Aridharma relief scene at Jago Temple is sufficient to tell the journey of the character Aridharma or Angling Dharma and his good deeds.

The Aridharma relief consists of seven panels and is carved at the foot of the northeast side of the temple, right after the Tanti Kamandaka relief. The story opens with a border of three circles depicting flowers, medallions and libraries, and a vase of flowers forming a square pattern (8). The story in this relief begins with the scene of a male dragon who wants to do evil to a female dragon, depicted by two dragon snakes wrapped around each other. Aridharma successfully thwarts the evil intention, so he is rewarded by the dragon king (the female dragon's father) with the ability to speak with animals.

3 Methodology

With this trend, the research was carried out guided by the historical archaeological research method, which is a type of research that studies past societies through features, artefacts, and ecofacts produced by past societies during the historical period (15). Guided by the historical archaeological research method, the research procedure that aims to review the efforts to convey and instil moral and religious values through visual language in the reliefs of Aridharma Jago Temple is carried out through three stages. The first stage is field data collection, which includes collecting field data, processing field data, and reporting. Then continued with the second stage, is analysis stage. The last stage is the reconstruction stage of the culture itself.

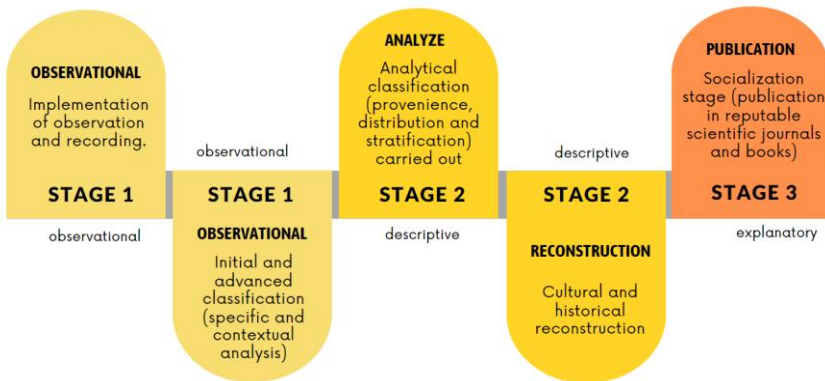


Fig. 1. Research method diagram.

In an attempt to analyse the variety of symbols on the Aridharma reliefs, the researcher used the historical archaeology method by utilizing the semiotic approach as an instrument of analysis of the historical sources being examined. In simple terms, semiotics can be explained as the science of understanding meaning and signs. Peirce explained that semiotics is a sign that aims to convey meaning so that communication occurs (16). Where the existence of a sign is always related to other signs because of the conventional bond between the two so that it allows the conveyance of meaning through the sign. Through the use of this method, an appropriate perspective can be obtained to understand the background of an observed object so as to help provide information about the history of life in a period through the analysis of the meaning stored in the Aridharma relief.

4 Result and Discussion

4.1 Depiction and Symbolic Elements of Aridharma Reliefs

Aridharma, commonly called Angling Dharma, is the story of a king from Malwapati Palace who was endowed with the ability to speak with animals (8). The Aridharma story in Jago Temple comes from the Pancasara story in India, which contains messages and advice (8). The story is told in textual form or oral traditions, depicting characters with their respective roles and characteristics. The depiction of a man on the relief identifies that the relief adopts the story (kidung) of Aridharma as a dragon king who meets a knight. This is undoubtedly evidence of the interaction between literature and sculpture during the classical period, especially in the 13th century A.D. in Java.

The Aridharma carvers, known as Taksaka, chose the main scenes from the Aridharma story and arranged them in separate panels (17). The position of this relief is at the foot of the temple to the northeast after the carved relief of Tantri Kamandaka. The Aridharma relief was carved in the *prasawiya* way (8), which is the reading of the relief

counterclockwise (18). Based on this rule, the story of Aridharma in Jago Temple will be understood by reading it from the southwest corner. The reliefs' form and content connect or make it easier for readers to see the story. The story opens with a plant monument boundary marker in the form of three circles depicting flowers, medals and libraries, and a flower vase forming a square pattern. This first panel presents an atmosphere depicting a forest, a dog, and some stations around it.



Fig. 2. Aridharma relief border at Jago Temple. Source: (Wahyudi & Jati, 2015).

The second panel has a sculpture of a man carrying a weapon in the form of a sword and shield and also depicts two dragons (male and female dragons) wrapped around each other. Symbolically, the male dragon is a symbol of the evil desires (intentions) of humans (14). The depiction of the male dragon wrapped around the female dragon is understood as a perverted act against the female dragon, thus clarifying the form of lousy lust that has mastered humans. In this scene, Aridharma is described as a saviour, symbolised by the weapon he carries. The dog's position is not far from the depiction of Aridharma, also a symbol of dharma. It is closely related to Tantri Kamandaka's story, which tells animal tales.



Fig. 3. The second pane of Aridharma in Jago Temple. Source: (Wahyudi & Jati, 2015).

The third panel depicts a female dragon who seems to be walking towards a dragon in a seated position with its head up. The dragon is the dragon king or the father of the female dragon. In the story, the female dragon, whom Aridharma has saved, walks back to Malwapati Palace. The female dragon then met her father and told him about the events that had happened to her. The female dragon also talks about the kindness of Aridharma, who saved her.



Fig. 4. The third pane of Aridharma in Jago Temple. Source: (Wahyudi & Jati, 2015)

The fourth panel depicts the atmosphere of Malwapati's palace with a pendapa. A man and a man are wearing a rsi turban and facing each other. The rsi turban in this scene symbolises a Brahmin. So it can be understood that this scene contains the story of the dragon king disguised as a Brahmin to meet Aridharma at Malwapati palace to thank him directly for saving the female dragon (his daughter) from the evil deeds of the male dragon.



Fig. 5. The fourth pane of Aridharma in Jago Temple. Source: (Wahyudi & Jati, 2015)

The fifth panel shows the two people in the fourth panel entering the building through a gate (shaped like a paduraksa gate) with the image of walking hand in hand or not facing each other as before. This scene tells the story of the dragon king and Aridharma, who have finished their conversation heading to Malwapati's palace. As a token of gratitude, the dragon king grants Aridharma the ability to speak with animals.



Fig. 6. The fifth pane of Aridharma in Jago Temple. Source: (Wahyudi & Jati, 2015)

The sixth panel shows a man and woman in Malwapati's palace, identified as Aridharma and his wife. Aridharma talks to his wife about the events that have happened to him during his travels. He also tells her about his rescue of the female dragon until he was visited by the dragon king (who disguised himself as a Brahmin) and given the boon of being able to speak with animals.



Fig. 7. The sixth pane of Aridharma in Jago Temple. Source: (Wahyudi & Jati, 2015)

The seventh panel shows a scene like a panel six, with the presence of two punakawan (emban). This scene tells the story of Aridharma's wife, who persuades him to show the gift of magic that he has received from the dragon king, but Aridharma refuses.

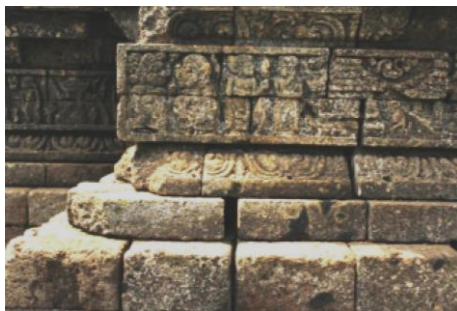


Fig. 8. The seventh pane of Aridharma in Jago Temple. Source: (Wahyudi & Jati, 2015)

4.2 Aridharma Relief as Religious Communication

As part of a cult building and a building that functions as a shrine, the Aridharma relief presumably also carries the same religious breath as the building (Jago Temple). Jago Temple is a Hindu and Buddhist (Śiwa-Buddha) cult building. We are seeing that the two religions (Śiwa and Buddhism) became official religions that were followed side by side and often mixed closely (19), especially since the Singhasasi period (13th century A.D.), not as parallelism, syncretism, fusion, or coalition, but as a transformation in simplification (10).

In line with Munandar's (2024) explanation, Jago Temple is a Hindu-Buddhist temple with evidence that the statues are Buddhist (such as Amogaphasa) and the reliefs are Hindu (9). Munandar (2024) added several reliefs identified as Hindu (Śiwa) reliefs, including Tantri Kamandaka, Aridharma, Pathayajna (Arjunawiwaha), and Krsnayana. There is only one Buddhist relief: the relief depiction of Kunjarakarna (19). From this description, Aridharma relief is positioned as a relief with Śiwa or Hindu character. In contrast to Wardaya's explanation (2024) in the study of the visual language of Aridharma reliefs, the panels containing the story of Aridharma or Angling dharma are identified as Buddhist reliefs because the depiction of this relief is also sourced from the story of Tantri Kamandaka (8). The story of Tantri Kamandaka, which has Buddhist motifs, also features the character Angling Dharma, who is told to be close to animals and nature (20).

However, this research focuses on something other than the difference in identifying the religious style of Aridharma reliefs. Instead, it uses the reliefs as a means of religious communication (simultaneously and side by side with Hindu-Buddhist). The use of reliefs as part of religious communication is in line with the function of reliefs that are not only used to decorate cult buildings (temples) (3), but also as a means of communication with nonverbal language (visual language) by the supporting community (21). For example, the Karmawibangga relief was a visual communication tool during the Mataram period (22). Similarly, Aridharma reliefs were used as religious communication (Śiwa-Buddha) by Java's people (especially the rulers) during the 13th century A.D.

Apart from the fact that relief making is very identical to the life of the people in the 8th-14th century A.D., where the beauty of sculpture received considerable attention from the community, especially the royal environment (4), reliefs were also chosen as a means of communication because they were considered not easily damaged and lost (3) and in contrast to other means, such as inscriptions (especially lontar) and manuscripts, classified as moving objects prone to damage. Therefore, communicating various information (social and religious) through reliefs will be more lasting.

As a means of communication, Aridharma reliefs originate from the Tantri Kaman-daka story (also carved on the walls of Jago Temple) taken from the Pancarasa story from India (8). Information related to morals, ethics, and religion contained in the story is then translated by relief carvers known as Taksaka, which is from verbal language

converted into visual language. As art workers, taksaka also add artistic elements intended to make the Aridharma reliefs (and other reliefs) carved have more vivid characterisation, both in terms of emotion, expression, and stature. (17). The translation then produces Aridharma relief panels, each scene of which contains messages and information.

The information or religious messages that are tried to be communicated in Aridharma reliefs are conveyed through direct depiction or can be understood through certain symbols or markers. The first message is a reminder not to commit evil deeds or sins. This message is conveyed in the second panel of the scene of Aridharma trying to thwart the male dragon's evil attempt on the female dragon and the depiction of the male dragon as a symbol of evil human lust (14), and identify the male dragon as a symbol of the sudra caste, which is part of the catur warna of Hinduism. Thus, the depiction of a male dragon wrapped around a female dragon is not only a sign of an evil act in the form of rudapaksa (sexual misconduct), but socially it can also be considered as a caste violation.

This first message is in line with the second message, where all sinful acts have their punishment and become acts that the gods dislike. This message is a representation of the concept of karma inherent in Hinduism. There is also a message that good deeds do not need to be shown (exhibited) so as not to foster pride (8). This message is conveyed through the scene of the dragon king who disguises himself as a Brahmin and tests the determination and sincerity of Aridharma, who will be given the gift of the ability to speak with animals. The disguise of the dragon king is common not only in Hinduism but also in Buddhism.

In addition to a visual language containing religious information or messages, some symbols and markers try to convey moral and ethical messages (23). For example, the depiction of the scene of the dragon king meeting Aridharma to give a gift for saving the female dragon (his son) can be understood as a reminder of the form of reciprocity for the kindness that others have done. Good deeds themselves are taught in Hinduism and Buddhism in the form of dharma. This is also what Aridharma did. Another moral message is the teaching of loyalty and honesty conveyed in the sixth-panel scene, which contains the story of Aridharma, who conveys his experience of saving a female dragon until he is given a gift by the dragon king to his wife.

The utilisation of Aridharma reliefs as a means of religious communication continues beyond there. This is in line with the tendency of relief depictions that are usually also disseminated through the inheritance of knowledge and oral traditions (3). The reliefs of Aridharma have also been narrated in the form of kidung, which is widely spread in various regions, especially the eastern part of Java. In Bali, the song about Ariharma or Angling Dharma was also written as a fibre made from palm fronds, later known as the Angling Dharma fibre (now kept at the Documentation Centre of the Bali Provincial Cultural Office). Thus, the information or religious messages contained in the Aridharma reliefs are not only conveyed through visual language but also through stories and oral traditions that continue to carry noble values such as teachings of goodness, prohibition of sin, gratitude, sincerity, loyalty, and honesty.



Fig. 8. Palm fibre from Kidung Angling dharma that developed in Bali. Source: (Documentation Centre of the Bali Provincial Cultural Office, 2020)

5 Conclusion

The Aridharma or Angling Dharma relief, which is only carved in Jago Temple, outlines the story of the good behaviour of a Malwapati king named Aridharma. This relief carries the same religious breath as the building (Jago Temple), namely the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism that have been transformed by simplifying the elements between the two as Śiwa-Buddha. As part of a cult building as good as pendharmaan, this relief seems to act as a pure variety and be used by the supporting community as a means of religious communication through symbols and markers. The messages communicated include 1) teaching not to sin, 2) teaching not to show good deeds and avoid arrogance, and 3) reminding us that every action has its reward. In addition to religious messages, this relief also conveys moral messages, such as forgetting to be grateful for someone's kindness, loyalty, and honesty.

Efforts to convey and instil religious and moral values through visual language show that reliefs as ancient cultural heritage have a central position. Likewise, the relief of Aridhrama Jago Temple is one form of visual language used as a medium of religious communication, especially for the people of East Java in the mid-13th century A.D. This relief is also closely related to the development of folklore (kidung) in East Java and Bali. As a result, the religious and moral values espoused in the teachings, including those related to goodness, sin, gratitude, sincerity, loyalty, and honesty, have not only been communicated during that period (13th century A.D.) but have also been conveyed from generation to generation.

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