

Canthik: A Figurehead on Javanese Maritime Culture

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ABSTRACT

Canthik, the Javanese figurehead, is one of maritime's archaeological data that is seldom discussed. Less than five of them have been recorded in the archaeological record, and all are kept in the museums. One of these is currently stored in Museum Sonobudoyo, Yogyakarta. To date, the description of the object is limited to a decorated object that is placed on the stern of a boat. The canthik can, arguably, be removed from one boat's extremity to the other, depends on which one serves as the bow. It has a form of a mythological creature and is believed to bring protection to navigation. This paper aims to discuss the function of the figurehead, as well as the symbol it represents since Canthik has always been regarded as a sacred object in the Javanese community. This paper will further discuss what type of boat the figurehead is associated with and the kind of activities that these boats participated in. A comparison to figureheads from other regions, such as Europe, China, and Polynesia will be presented to explore possible answers to the aforementioned questions.

Key words: Chantik, Javanese archaeology, Boat iconography

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INTRODUCTION

The maritime traditions in Nusantara archipelago have been going on for a long time, at least since the prehistoric era. Nusantara is the old name to call Indonesia before the birth of this state. This name referred to a group of islands that lie in the Far East Asia continent. Nusantara consists of a thousand islands with a variety of their size and presents the multiple colors geographic landscape. There are five larger islands along with a group of small islands inhabited by many ethnic groups.

The densest population lives on Java Island for a long time ago. The archaeological evidence record the oldest man in Java date around 1.8 million years ago. The location between the main route in the east and south region of the Asia continent pushes the development of maritime culture in Nusantara

(Vlekken, 2008:7). It was origins by Austronesian speakers who migrated from the north (Luzon Island in Taiwan) and spread to Indonesia and the Pacific. The evidence of the existence of this tradition is depicted in cave paintings in Eastern Indonesia, particularly Kei, Seram, and Irian Jaya. Besides, the boat is the inspiration for several forms of stone tombs found in Bali (Sukendar, 2002: 12 and 14).

The shape of a traditional boat that developed in the Nusantara is not too different from the boat in the past. The vessel is in the form of a vessel and jukung equipped with sails, made from timber, long and narrow in shape, and some of them have *cadik* (to balance the boat). The important part of traditional boats, especially in Javanese and Maduranese culture, is *linggi* because it gives the character identity for the vessel. *Linggi* is the elevated part of the bow and stern in the boat. It is very usual that *linggi* the bow part always higher rather than in the stern. In making traditional boats, *linggi* are often decorated (Mahirta & Pradnyawan, 2008:31) One of them is the existence of decorations found in the bow and stern of the boat or called figurehead. A variety of boat remains found in several places in the Nusantara indicate that some boats have figurehead decorations. In the remains of cave paintings on the Sumpang Bitu and Bulu Sipong sites in South Sulawesi, it can be seen those boat paintings have figurehead decorations of horned animals (Sukendar, 2002: 44 and 49). Besides, the existence of a stone tomb in the Batak area which has a shape like a boat has a human head ornament on the front (Sukendar, 2002: 58). The presence of decoration is also found on the stern as found on a boat from Madura.

In general, the figurehead decoration in Nusantara traditional boat can be divided into three patterns, such as vine, animal, and human. The vine is estimated to appear and spread around 500 AD and is usually found in sacred objects. This ornament is often associated with fertility and abundance. Decorative patterns in animal form are often associated with ceremonies of death. The animals depicted are creatures that are considered to have power or are considered pure and sacred. Meanwhile, the human ornamental pattern on the boat of the Nusantara seems inspired by a belief that parts of the human body have supernatural powers. Likewise, the human form is also considered a great magical power (Sukendar, 2002: 161-165).

The existence of the figurehead decoration shows that the people who support maritime culture already have a concept for boats. The concept is often associated with a belief that rises in the community. Some researchers from Indonesia said that the decoration found on the stern of the boat was related to the religious aspect. This aspect is a form of hope by the community towards, safety, security, protection, and death.

In general, these assumptions have similarities with the function of boat stern decoration in the European region and beyond. Some researchers mention that the existence of the figurehead decoration serves as a means for sailing boats to safely cross the sea. Besides, the decoration also functions as the identity of the boat that will lean to the harbor considering the name of the boat can be taken from the name of the decoration. Another function is that the decoration is the "soul" of a ship that shows the meaning of the ship, such as horse decoration means speed and dragon decoration as a medium for giving fear to its enemies (Stammers, 2017: 323-328).

Some of the remains of the stern decoration are stored in museums as one of the cultural heritages. One of the museums that stores the remains is the Sonobudoyo Museum. The museum has two figurehead decorations (in Javanese called *canthik*) that drew as *naga* (dragon) and *makara* figures. Both *canthik* represent of wayang-style that is very popular in Java. The wayang style is one of the art styles that developed since the Majapahit era (14th century) and lasted long enough to influence Javanese art even to the Islamic period despite the prohibition on drawing anthropomorphic figures.

The *canthik* also can be found at the Radyapustaka Museum in Solo region with the name Rajamala which is a boat stern decoration made by KGPA Hamengkunagaran III during the reign of Pakubuwana V (Hernawati, 2008: 8). This boat is used as a tourist vehicle on the Bengawan Solo river which is often used by the King of the Surakarta Palace. Based on the information above, the question asked on this occasion is what is the cultural background that influences the form *canthik*? What kind of technology is found in *canthik*? What is the comparison of beauty in Javanese culture with other cultures? The three questions were asked to know the characteristics of each *canthik* based on the culture that influenced it, knowing the technical aspects of a *canthik*, and knowing the various forms of boat decoration in Indonesia.

RESULTS

THE DESCRIPTION OF FIGUREHEAD FROM SONOBUDOYO MUSEUM

GARUDA-NAGA FIGUREHEAD

This *canthik* presumably comes from Cirebon, has two separate parts, the head, and tail. At the head, it is 69 cm long, 20 cm wide, and 87 cm high. The tail has a height of 115 cm, a length of 17 cm, and a width of 9 cm. The length of the head and tail is 118 cm. *Canthik* is made from wood and made by carving.



Figure 1: Canthik with Garuda figure. Source: catalog book of Sonobudoyo Museum exhibition 2018

Canthik has the shape of a magical animal with a distinctive style of ornamental art that is often found in Javanese and Madura culture. Its head is shaped like a serpent but has a long beak of a bird. His head is depicted wearing crown called *jamang* (jewelry worn on the forehead) and as if depicted with *jatamakuta* in Javanese iconography. Parts of the body have scales like a snake. Meanwhile, the tail is depicted as a fishtail splitting in half. The body part of the tail has a transverse decoration all over his body. It turned out that the fins were on the tail. This canthik has an eagle figure.

MAKARA FIGUREHEAD

This canthik came from Cirebon and only consisted of one part namely the head figure. This canthik has a length of 55 cm, width, 24 cm, and height of 62 cm. This canthik is in the form of a mystical animal figure with a proboscis on the muzzle, two fangs sticking out. There are ornamental *jamang* and her hair looks curled up like *jatamakuta* in Javanese iconography. Canthik is made from wood and made by carving. On the snout, there is an elongated scratch that is expected to crack.



Figure 2: Canthik with Makara figure. Source: catalog book of Sonobudoyo Museum exhibition 2018

RAJAMALA FIGUREHEAD

This canthik from the Kraton Surakarta has a length of 198 cm, a width of 53 cm, and a height of 99 cm made of teak wood. Visually, canthik Rajamala has the face of a puppet character named Rajamala with a large, long, and prominent nose, bulging eyes, large ears, a thick and long mustache that covers the mouth, beard, and long hair. This Canthik is also described as having noble decorations such as *jamang*, earrings, and earring called *sumping* which are quite long.



Figure 3: Canthik with puppet shadow figure. Source: sarklewer.com

DISCUSSION

RIVER CRUISE AND ITS TECHNOLOGY

The river is a transportation route that connects the outer area with the interior. The river, which is one of the transportation routes, is wide enough and deep enough for the boat to sail inland. With these two characteristics, the boat can sail quite far into the interior.

The geographical condition of the river also affects the type of ship that sails. The bigger the river, the bigger the ship that can sail it. In addition to the size of the river, shipping vessels in the river are also based on whether or not the mud deposit is high in each river. And in its history, some rivers that are no longer navigable are caused by the high silt deposits. One area that can be used as an example is river shipping in Sumatra. There are several major rivers, among others, Musi River, Batanghari, Indragiri (Kuantan), and Siak. The big ships sailed to the largest city in the river. For the Musi River, the voyage is carried out to the city of Palembang, the Batanghari River to Jambi, the Indragiri River to Rengat, the Siak River to the Pekanbaru. From each of these cities, the upstream voyage was carried out by medium-sized ships. Ships by ships in this medium size carried out to the largest cities in the upper reaches. And from the largest cities upstream to the region (upstream countries) served by smaller ships/boats (Asnan, 2018: 11-12).

The same aspect is also found in river shipping in Java. The existence of river shipping in Java has also been known for a long time due to the development of a port on the north coast of Java. River shipping is an important part of channeling commodities to the interior. This is indicated by the improvement of river trading centers during the reign of King Airlangga. In addition, the King also gave him several privileges to several trading centers to make it more crowded (Sulistiyono, 2017: 4).

THE HISTORY OF THE FIGUREHEAD IN JAVANESE MARITIME CULTURE

Canthik Sonobudoyo's collection is not known to be produced in what year, but other ethnographic data can be found as a comparison that estimated by this artifact. *Canthik* is estimated to have produce around the 18th century or earlier and used as a voyage for river waters by royal kings. It is estimated that before the archipelago was under the Dutch East Indies colonial government, transportation traffic still used makeshift roads and the river was still used as a mobility route.

One of the kingdoms that has evidence of using *canthik* on a boat used by its king is Surakarta Sunanate (established in 1744 AD) The Case of Surakarta is one of the old Islamic kingdoms which is a fraction of the Islamic Mataram Kingdom namely Paku Buwono IV to Paku Buwono IX which were recorded using a boat with *canthik* to navigate the Bengawan Solo River (Sriwigati et al, 2009: 41). Bengawan Solo is the longest river on the island of Java with two headwaters in the Sewu, Wonogiri, and Ponorogo Mountains, which then empties into the Gresik area of East Java. In 1500-1750, the city of Solo, which was part of the Surakarta Palace, was still a city on the banks of the Solo River. In 1745 under the rule of Paku Buwono II, there was a move to the palace that used to occupy Kartasura and then moved to Surakarta because of Chinatown (1742). The city of Solo, which used to be the bank of the Bengawan Solo river, is estimated to have four bustling airports at the time, namely Kabanaran Bandar in Laweyan, Chinatown Bandar in Kali Pepe, Bandar Arab in Kali Jenes, and Bandar Nusupan in Semanggi. But in the development of these tributaries experienced silting and finally, the airport was no longer functioning (Qomarun & Prayitno, 2007: 80-87).

Before the silting of the river that narrowed the width of the Solo River, coupled with the construction of roads and the construction of railroad transportation by the Dutch, the Bengawan Solo River are used as a transportation route to the East Java region. The famous boats used by Paku Buwono IV to Paku Buwono IX are used for parties, especially when the Bengawan Solo River overflows. Not just partying, the kings and relatives of the palace also pulled over on their voyages to assist the surrounding communities affected by flooding. *Canthik* was given the name Kyai Rajamala because it has the shape of the face of Kyai Rajamala's puppet character, He has the power to control water in the Mahabarata story. After the boat is no longer in use anymore, the *canthik* was donated to the Radyapustaka Museum while the boat (*Satang*) and paddle (*Welah*) were kept at the Keraton Surakarta Museum. The paddle has 20 meters length which indicated that the Bengawan Solo River is wide enough to be a cruise line (Widodo, 2011: 109-115). One of the model boats from Sonobudoyo collection pictures the Rajamala was painted on the *linggi*. The painting was meant as an amulet to avoid harm when the boat was sailing. The museum collection shows the model of Jenggolan is traditional boat produce by Madura. Jenggolan is usually a transportation boat the carries passengers or goods. It was made around the 19th century, it presumably the popularity of Rajamala deity reach the greater Java such north region like Madura.



Figure 4: Model of Perahu Janggong. Source: Catalogue Book of Sonobudoyo Museum Exhibition 2019



Figure 5: Rajamala Picture in Perahu Jenggolan. Copyright: Sonobudoyo Museum

Meanwhile, both canthik owned by the Sonobudoyo Museum is origins from Cirebon, one of the Islamic kingdoms centers in Java. Kraton Kasepuhan Cirebon features a coastal kingdom strategically located on the north coast of Java.

Canthik Rajamala has sailed three times between Solo - Gresik during Paku Buwono IV and was used to pick Princess Pamekasan Madura who would be a queen in the Kraton Surakarta. It shows the existence of contact between the two kingdoms using river transportation modes. Kraton Surakarta has been known as an agrarian kingdom considering its location in the central part of Java. The style of the agrarian kingdom produces a variety of cultural traditions that are stronger in

aspects of agriculture such as respect for Dewi Sri as a manifestation of the Goddess of Rice and many others. The development of shipping technology is not the main thing in the Kraton Surakarta but the emergence of canthik shows the progress of the development of a quite complex river water culture.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE FUNCTION AND TECHNOLOGY OF THE FIGUREHEAD

Canthik in Javanese society is known as the decoration of the bow of the ship. The type of ship used is a boat that sails in river waters. The boat for the bow waters is not high, and the sailing system uses paddles or bamboo poles to encourage the boat to move forward (Lelono, 2009: 28-42). In the historical context of river waters, the boats used have several functions such as for crossing between places or trading. Sukendar (1999) on Lelono (2009) said that the boat is also used by the king and his relatives for travel to another place. This is stated in the inscription records, literary books, religious books, and even temple reliefs. The voyage of a king or royal nobleman will certainly use transportation that is different from ships in general, including a boat with a great variety of decoration.

Canthik is a symbolic element that is placed on the bow. Magical animal figures are considered to have magical powers for repelling reinforcements. Canthik was used as a talisman to protect every voyage that would carry the king and his followers. Because of its magical nature, the figures carved are magical animals that are considered to have supernatural powers in Javanese culture. The choose a mythical creature such Garuda-Naga or Makara couldn't be separated from the folk belief in the community. Makara is known as the ocean guardian. And it same goes for the Garuda-Naga. Both the creatures in Hindu mythological play the important role in the part of the story in the stirring of the sea milk and the holy water of amerta (samudramanthana story). The option for the mythical creature in figurehead is based on the legend or tales that closely relate to the water element because boats use for water transportation.

According to Revianto Budi Santosa (2018), because of the width of the river which did not allow the ship to turn back (Rajamala boat have 70 meters lenght), canthik was made to be dismantled and installed according to the direction of the boat's speed. The size of canthik is also small for a figurehead when comparing European galleon ships because of the type of waters. This canthik can be disassembled, it is possible that the boat can be used interchangeably by many royal member. And also possible the canthik is installed for different member royal family according their rank including the bodyguards of the nobles who participated in the cruise.

THE COMPARISON WITH FIGUREHEAD FROM OTHER AREAS

Boat figurehead decoration also founds in several regions in Indonesia. Based on several areas, there are various types of figurehead decorations. On the Lancang Kuning (Pencalang) boat originating from Riau, the figurehead decoration of the boat is in the form of a dragon with a dragon sticking out its tongue. The dragon is drawn as having a yellow color like the color of a boat. This yellow dragon decoration is a fairly common ornament found in Malay society. Malay people believe that

this dragon animal is a creature that brings blessings (Tahrir, Rohidi, Iswidayati, 2017: 10). Meanwhile, the yellow color in Malay society is a symbol of royal status (Rehayati, 2013: 63). It also is found in the decorations at Rokan Palace in Riau Regency. The Royal Palace of Rokan has a distinctive decoration of dragon and floral carvings colored in yellow.



Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 6.
Miniature traditional boat Lancang Kuning
from Riau



Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 7. Dragon decoration and
tendrils at Rokan Palace, Riau Regency

Examples of other boats that have a figurehead decoration are karere outrigger boats originating from Papua. According to Jastro (2010: 58), this boat has a figurehead decoration in the form of a bird's head. At a glance, the bird's head which is the decoration of the boat's figurehead is similar to the endemic animal in Papua, the Cassowary Bird. The bird is very influential in the lives of Papuan

people ranging from the fulfillment of animal protein to make feathers and bones both as decoration and fulfillment of daily life.



Figure 8: Bird's headdress as a Papua boat figurehead.

CONCLUSION

The maritime traditions of the Javanese kingdoms in the interior can be seen through the remains of a pavilion decoration called canthik. The canthik is mounted on the boat stern and is made based on the characters found in certain mythologies. This canthik ornament is also decorated according to the culture of the local community group, such as crown decoration, jamang, and sumping.

The front decoration of the boat is an ornament that can be used as the source of the boat's name, such as canthik with Rajamala figures making the name of the boat Kyai Rajamala's boat. This boat is unique because with the length of the boat that reaches 70 meters, it will be a little difficult to turn the boat on the Bengawan Solo river, so this decoration is made so that it can be connected and connected.

The existence of boat bridge decorations is not only found in one area but is often found in various regions of the archipelago. Pavilion decorations in some areas have different shapes because they adapt to the cultural conditions of the local community. Some of them use external ornament elements and some use local ornament elements.

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Interview

Revianto Budi Santosa