

## The Living QS. Saba` : 13 among Javanese Moslem Sculptors

*QS. Saba` : 13 yang 'Hidup' di Kalangan Pematung Jawa Muslim*

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### Abstract

Every depiction of living creature is forbidden in Islam, whether in the form of paintings or statues. The prohibition that originates from the hadith has become an established doctrine in Islam, even then created a unique branch of art in Islam namely aniconism. However, there is a group of Muslim sculptors in the Prumpung Magelang area who still preserve their culture as sculptors without having to confront Islamic teachings either in the philosophical or practical domains. This study aims to examine and analyze the negotiations of Muslim sculptors in Prumpung Magelang regarding the doctrine of the prohibition of sculpting in Islam. By utilizing reception theory, this field research is located in the Prumpung Magelang area, with Muslim sculptors as the research subjects, and therefore primary data is obtained based on in-depth interviews with informants consisting of key figures in Muslim sculptors and those associated with them. This study found that Muslim sculptors were aware of the existence of the doctrine that prohibits carving statues in the form of living creatures in Islamic teachings, which only applies to statues that are converted into idols (used as objects of worship). Meanwhile, the statue making industry in the Prumpung Magelang area is not at all related to religious worship and certain beliefs, therefore it is permitted. This perspective is identical (linear) with the status of the existence of statues mentioned in the Qur'an, that their existence is permitted as long as they are not used as objects of worship as in QS. Saba` :13.

**Keywords:** *Living Quran, QS. Saba` :13, Javanese, Muslim Sculptor. Doctrine*

### Abstrak:

Setiap bentuk penggambaran makhluk hidup adalah terlarang dalam Islam, baik berbentuk lukisan apalagi patung. Larangan yang bersumber dari hadis tersebut sudah menjadi doktrin yang mapan dalam Islam, bahkan kemudian melahirkan cabang seni yang khas dalam Islam yang beraliran aniconisme. Namun, terdapat sekelompok pemahat muslim di wilayah Prumpung Magelang yang masih tetap melestarikan budaya mereka sebagai pemahat patung tanpa harus berkonfrontasi vis a vis dengan ajaran Islam baik di wilayah filosofis maupun praktis. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji dan menganalisa negosiasi yang dilakukan oleh para pematung muslim di Prumpung Magelang terhadap doktrin larangan memahat dalam Islam. Dengan memanfaatkan teori resepsi, penelitian lapangan ini berlokasi di wilayah Prumpung Magelang, dengan para pematung muslim sebagai subjek penelitiannya, dan oleh karenanya data primer didapatkan berdasarkan wawancara secara mendalam dari informan yang terdiri dari tokoh kunci pematung muslim dan yang terkait dengannya. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa para pemahat muslim menyadari tentang keberadaan doktrin larangan memahat patung berbentuk makhluk hidup dalam ajaran Islam hanya berlaku bagi patung yang dialihfungsikan sebagai berhala (dijadikan sebagai objek peribadatan). Sedangkan industri



pemahatan patung di wilayah Prumpung Magelang sama sekali tidak terkait dengan peribadatan agama dan kepercayaan tertentu, oleh karenanya diperbolehkan. Cara pandang seperti ini identik (linear) dengan status keberadaan patung yang disinggung oleh al-Quran, bahwa ia diperbolehkan keberadaanya selama tidak dijadikan sebagai objek peribadatan sebagaimana dalam QS. Saba` :13.

**Kata Kunci:** *Living Quran, QS. Saba` :13, Jawa, Pematung Muslim, Doktrin*

## Introduction

Literally, prohibition on figurative<sup>1</sup> in Islamic teachings is based on the hadith of the Prophet, not from the Qur'an. Indeed, there are several verses in the Qur'an regarding the prohibition of the existence of statues which are divided into three major themes. *First*, the story of statue's destruction by prophet Ibrahim as mentioned in QS. al-Anbiyā` : 51-57. *Second*, QS. Nuh: 63 which tells story of the people of Prophet Noah who had five statues, namely *Wadda, Suwā` , Yağūš, Ya'ūq* and *Nasr*. *Third*, about the people of prophet Musa were tricked into worshipping the calf statue as stated in QS. Taha: 85-98. However, if we look at it further, the prohibition against statues contained in the verses of the Qur'an is directed at statues that have been converted into idols.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, if the existence of a statue is left as it is for the sake of art or for the purpose of a historical monument so that it does not change its function to become an idol that is worshipped, then its existence is not prohibited as explicitly stated in QS. Saba` : 13.<sup>3</sup> Although for various reasons, QS. Saba` : 13 tends to be ignored when faced with dozens of hadiths of the Prophet which explicitly forbid the existence of figurative art,<sup>4</sup> However, through this verse, the Qur'an explicitly leaves room for its readers to negotiate with the doctrine of the prohibition of figurative art.

The study of figurative art is a study that has long attracted the attention of scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim. In general, previous studies on this theme can be grouped into three major themes. *First*, study of iconophobia in Islam which is expressed in two forms of movement, namely iconoclasm and aniconism.<sup>5</sup> Research

1 The term figurative actually refers to all forms of depiction of figures in the universe such as humans, animals, plants or depictions of other objects, both in the form of paintings and statues. However, in its application, this term is more often used to refer to depictions of humans and animals that have a storyline and contain meaning and messages inserted in the form of figures.

2 Ahmad Mustofa, *Struktur Nalar Jawa Islam* (Yogyakarta: Arti Bumi Intara, 2023).

3 Abu al-Qasim Mahmud bin Umar Az-Zamakhsyari, *Tafsir Al-Kasyāf*, ed. - (Riyadh: Maktabah al-'Abikan, 1998).

4 Muhammad 'Ali Aş-Şābūnī, *Rawāi 'ul Bayān*, ed. -, III (-: Maktabah al-Ghazāli, 1981).

5 Iconoclasm and aniconism have the same attitude regarding the rejection of all kinds of images (and statues) in the form of living creatures, but they differ in how they express it. If iconoclasm is manifested in a reactionary movement through anarchic means, either through the destruction or even the destruction of icons, then the aniconism movement is more progressive through creative actions in the form of the process of creating a branch of Islamic art that does not involve objects in the form of living creatures.

on this theme is the research that is most studied by scholars, such as research conducted by Finbarr Barry Flood (Flood, 2002), GRD King (King, 1985), Christian C Sahner (Sahner, 2017), dan Dina Lutfi (Lutfi, 2024). *Second*, hermeneutic research. This research specifically explores the meaning behind the text of the hadith which is referred to as the basis for the doctrine of the prohibition of depicting living creatures in Islam, as research conducted by Joseph J Kaminski (Kaminski, 2020), Nur Handary and Najwa Al Husda (Handary & Husda, 2023), and Hassanvand MK (Hassanvand, 2004). While the *third*, such as research conducted by Kenneth M George (George, 2009), Alfian Firmanto and Ahmad Yunani (Firmanto & Yunani, 2022) is a field study to see how iconophobia practices in society have created branches of art with distinctive Islamic characteristics, such as calligraphy and architectural art. However, of the three research tendencies, none have specifically reviewed a negotiation process by a community in a social system to attempt a kind of 'compromise' regarding the doctrine of the prohibition of figurative art in Islam.

This article aims to see how the negotiation process was carried out by the Muslim Javanese sculptor community in the Prumpung Magelang area regarding the doctrine of the prohibition of figurative art, a process that philosophically reflects the reception activities of Muslim Javanese sculptors towards QS. Saba` : 13. Some of the most important things that can be used as a reference and measure for the reception activities are the momentum of the sameness of awareness of the Javanese Muslim sculptors with the actions of the Prophet Solomon when placing various large statues during the infrastructure development project of his kingdom as has been stated in the QS. Saba` : 13. Az-Zamakhsharī explains in his commentary that the placement of statues made of bronze and other expensive materials in the form of angels, prophets and pious people in the mosque<sup>6</sup> what was done by Prophet Solomon according to Islamic law is a sign of the permissibility of the existence of statues in society as long as they are not converted into idols.

On the other hand, as part of the Javanese entity with its set of monotheistic traditions and civilization, the sculptors in the Prumpung Magelang area and its surroundings believe that the prohibition on the existence of figurative art only applies to statue objects that have changed their function as idols that are worshipped and sanctified. Otherwise, statues (and other figurative arts) are not questioned as long as they are not changed their function as idols. The similarity of the situation created between the story of the Prophet Solomon in QS. Saba` : 13 with the structure of reasoning of Muslim Javanese sculptors in Prumpung Magelang is the main focus in writing this article, through the process of negotiation and compromise that occurs

6 Abu al-Qasim Muhammad bin 'Umar Az-Zamakhshari, *Al-Kasyāf 'an Haqāiq Ġawāmiḍ at-Tanzīl Wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl Fī Wujūh at-Ta`wīl* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-'Abīkān, 1998).

between Muslim Javanese sculptors and the doctrine of the prohibition of figurative art in Islamic teachings.

This article is based on the argument that the audience response which is part of the reception process has a different dimension from the interpretation activity (hermeneutic process). Even though both of them often overlap in certain situations, the activity of interpretation positions the sacred text as an object of study to reproduce the meaning of the text so that it approaches the meaning desired by the author or can also produce a new meaning that is more appropriate to the situation and conditions of the reader<sup>7</sup>, so that in this interpretation activity, readers of the text are limited to religious elites only, such as Muslim scholars, religious scholars or sheikhs, and not to the general public<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, the reception process is the reader's response to the meaning produced by the hermeneutical process that has been carried out by religious elites, whether in the form of doctrine or still in the form of text but which has undergone a process of transmission-transformation. Because of the intensity of the relationship that is built between the text and the reader and the tendency to ignore the relationship with the author<sup>9</sup>. So a reception activity has placed the reader on a very broad stage so that with his power he is 'allowed' to determine the meaning contained in a text, even (as a reader) he is given the authority to give an assessment of whether the meaning of a text is accepted or rejected<sup>10</sup>.

This study uses reception theory, both developed by Iser and Jauss, as an approach to examine the act of negotiation in the philosophical area carried out by Javanese Muslim sculptors regarding an established doctrine in Islamic teachings, namely the prohibition on figurative art. The theme raised in this article is actually a fairly sensitive issue among some Muslim circles, because this doctrine is more or less in contact with the concept of monotheism in Islam. The research location was in Prumpung Village, namely a village in the Magelang Regency area which is a center for the sculpture industry from andesite stone material. With the majority of its population being Muslims who work as sculptors, the subjects in this research are

7 F. Budi Hardiman, *Seni Memahami: Hermeneutika Dari Schleiermacher Sampai Derrida* (Yogyakarta: PT Kanisius, 2015).

8 Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, ed. Timothy Bahti (Translation from German ) (Minneapolis-USA, 2005).

9 Syafwan Rozi, Nurlizam, and M. Zubir, "The Reception of Hamka's Tafsir Al-Azhar within Social Religious Issues in the Malay World," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 25, no. 2 (August 30, 2024): 247–72, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v25i2.5406>.

10 Clara Srouji Shajrawi, "A Model For Applying Jauss's Reception Theory: The Role OF Rumors In The Reception Of 'Memory In The Flesh,'" *Institut For Multi-Cultural Research. The Original and Complete Version Include in "The Horizon Of Reception Studies: Literatur And Beyond" at Ben-Gurion University on 12th June.* no. (2012).

none other than the Muslim sculptors in the village. Meanwhile, primary data was obtained from sources in the field consisting of senior sculptors through in-depth interviews, field observations and documentation. After the data from the field has been systematized properly through data coding, it is continued with data analysis using the inductive method and closed by carrying out a generalization process in the form of research conclusions.

### **Sculpture, Statues and Idols**

The terms sculpture and statue tend to be considered by the common people to be the same thing, namely artifacts in the form of human, animal or god figures which are usually made of wood, stone, terracotta or bronze. However, there is a difference between both of them in the modern sense, that sculpture refers to a three-dimensional art medium with all its forms, whether animal, human or even the most abstract form<sup>11</sup>. Meanwhile, statues are used to refer to a result of cultural art that is made for a specific purpose related to elements of beauty, religion and a reflection of human technical activity itself<sup>12</sup>. The materials used to make statues usually consist of andesite, tuff, limestone, *padas*, baked clay, ceramics, bronze, wood and others. While the forms can vary from statues of gods, statues of embodiments, or statues of animals. Therefore, the word sculpture includes a broader meaning compared to the term statue.

The existence of sculptures or statues when connected with ritual worship activities where their existence is converted into an entity that is worshipped and adored, then they are called idols<sup>13</sup>. Meanwhile, in Arabic, several terms that are operationally used to refer to the word sculpture are the words *timšāl* (or the word *tamāšīl* in plural), *ṣanam* (plural = *aṣnām*) and the word *waṣān* (plural = *awṣān*). If the first word, namely the word *timšāl* (and the word *ṣūrah*) is usually used to refer to the existence of two-dimensional or three-dimensional figurative art in general that is not converted into an idol, then the last two words, namely *ṣanam* and *waṣān*, are more often used to refer to statues that have been converted into idols<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, based on this understanding, the word *tamāšīl* found in QS. Saba` : 13 should be interpreted as a statue made for the purpose of beauty and monumentality and never

11 Anusapati, "Patung Dalam Senirupa Kontemporer Indonesia," *Kalam* 27/15 (2012).

12 I Wayan Suantika, "Tinggalan Arkeologi Di Pura Puseh Kiadan, Kecamatan Petang, Kabupaten Badung:Kajian Bentuk Dan Fungsi," *Jurnal Forum Arkeologi* 28, no. 2 (2015).

13 Scagliarini Florella, "The Word Ṣlm/Ṣnm and Some Words for 'Statue, Idol' in Arabian and Other Semiticlanguages," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 37 (2007).

14 Hisyām Ibn Muhammad ibn as-Sāib al- Kalbī, *Kitāb Al- Aṣnām* (Kairo-Mesir: Darul Kutub al-Misriyyah, 1995).

converted into an idol.

### QS. Saba': 13 and Hadith Prohibiting Figurative Art

Discussion regarding the existence of statues during the time of Prophet Solomon in the studies of interpretation, both classical and contemporary, it is relatively neglected. By limiting it merely as a study of stories in the Qur'an (*qasas al-Qur'an*) and only focuses on explaining the miracles of Prophet Solomon as explained by az-Zamakhsyari<sup>15</sup>, ar-Razi<sup>16</sup> or Izzah Darwazah<sup>17</sup>, so the making of the statue in the story of the Prophet Solomon as recorded in QS. Saba': 13 seems to be only for museum purposes so that it is no longer used and functions as it should, instead it is only to be seen and remembered. Even if there is a discussion related to the Islamic law of statues in the law of the Prophet Solomon, as in the interpretation of as-Shabuni<sup>18</sup> or Abu Hayyan<sup>19</sup> then the existence of figurative art in the verse will be directly narrated as the law of the previous people (*syar'u man qablanā*) and has been prescribed by the law of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) which absolutely prohibits the existence of figurative art. A legal concept that is anticipatory in nature (*syaddu az-ẓarī'ah*) against the fear of associating partners with God<sup>20</sup>. From this search, eventually we have not found a systematic effort to polemicize the permissibility of the existence of figurative art in QS. Saba': 13 in the academic realm.

The fear of falling (again) into pagan practices gave rise to the idea of law which removes the permission for the existence of figurative art in the law of the Prophet Solomon is the main motive for the prohibition of statues in the law of the Prophet Muhammad. This motif has a very strong reason when presented with the fact that Arab society was once an extreme adherent of paganism by making statues into idols that were worshipped and sanctified. This fact in turn gives rise to a kind of historical burden that is very acute and inherited by every element of Arab Muslim society, especially early generation Arab Muslims, as far as a condition that triggers a kind of allergy to the existence of figurative art. The acute allergy to the existence

15 Az-Zamakhsyari, *Al-Kasyāf 'an Haqāiq Ġawāmiḍ at-Tanzīl Wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl Fī Wujūh at-Ta'wīl*.

16 Muhammad ar-Razi, *Bahr Al-Muhit*, vol. XXV (Beirut-Lebanon: Dar al-Fikr, 1981).

17 Muhammad Izzah Darwazah, *At-Tafsīr al-Hadīṣ* (-: Dār Ihyā al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1963).

18 Muhammad Ali as-Shabuni, *Shafwatut Tafasir*, 1st ed., vol. 2 (Kairo-Mesir: Dar ash-Shabuni, 2009).

19 al-Andalusi Abu Hayyan, *Tafsir Al-Bahr al-Muhit*, vol. VII (Beirut-Lebanon: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1993).

20 as-Shabuni, *Shafwatut Tafasir*.

of figurative art for early generation Arab Muslims is very reasonable when we look at history, that various societies that adhere to pagan belief systems (including Arab societies), it started with their habit of collecting and admiring various paintings and statues<sup>21</sup>. As exemplified in QS. Nuh: 23 concerning five pious figures, namely *Wadd*, *Suwāg*, *Yagūš*, *Ya'ūq* and *Nasr*, who died in succession in the same month, then the community immortalized them in the form of five statues as monuments to remember their goodness and piety. However, according to Ibn Kalbi's explanation, after three generations, precisely during the time of the Prophet Noah, the five statues of pious people were converted into idols that were revered and worshipped by the people at that time, and this was the first idol that was revered and worshipped by humans<sup>22</sup>.

The history of paganism experienced by Arab society is also not much different from the chronology of the idolatry of *Wadd*, *Suwāg*, *Yagūš*, *Ya'ūq* and *Nasr*. Ibn Kalbi relates that a prominent figure in Mecca, namely Amr bin Luhay, was considered the person most responsible for the emergence of pagan beliefs in Arabia. One time he was seriously ill, then he was advised by several of his colleagues to seek treatment at a hot spring in the Balqa` area, and not long after his illness was cured. After his recovery, he had a habit of visiting the Balqa` region until one of his visits he learned that the local people had a habit of including statues made of stone in every worship ritual. The statue was eventually brought to Mecca by Amr bin Luhay and placed around the Kaaba. From then on, the worship of the statue that was converted into an idol officially became an inseparable tradition in the worship system of the people of Mecca and its surroundings<sup>23</sup>.

Therefore, the concern about the existence of statues as a cause of the emergence of pagan beliefs is confirmed through the many wordings of the hadith which are literally understood as sources of prohibitions against all forms of figurative art in Islam. There are no less than four situations in which the existence of figurative art is absolutely forbidden by the Prophet Muhammad. *First* prohibition on keeping images or statues in the house, *second* threat of torture for figurative painters, *third* the prohibition of all kinds of figurative art during the conquest of Mecca, *fourth* Prophet Muhammad's order to Ali to remove paintings and destroy figurative statues. Each of these four situations is represented by the following hadiths:

*Angels do not like to enter a house in which there are pictures (and statues)*

21 Abu Abdillah Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Abu Bakr Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Ahkām al-Qur'an* (Beirut-Lebanon: Ar-Risalah Publisher, 2006).

22 al- Kalbī, *Kitāb Al- Aṣnām*.

23 Mustofa, *Struktur Nalar Jawa Islam*.

*and dogs (hadith narrated by Imam Ahmad)*

*Whoever, while still alive in this world, draws (living creatures) then on the Day of Judgment he will be burdened with giving spirit (life) to his painting, even though he will not be able to (bring it to life) (hadith narrated by Imam Bukhari)*

*In fact, the Prophet Muhammad ordered Umar during the conquest of the city of Makkah to enter the Kaaba and remove all the images in it. The Prophet Muhammad was pleased to enter the Kaaba after various images in the Kaaba had been removed (hadith narrated by Imam Baihaqi)*

*Prophet Muhammad's order to Ali to level the shape of the grave (which had too high a mound) and remove the images (living creatures) in the house (hadith narrated by Imam Nasa'i)*

Starting from here, we realize that there are two different narratives regarding the existence of figurative art. These two narratives are each presented by QS. Saba` : 13 on one side and several hadith editorials on the other side. In QS. Saba` : 13 figurative art conveyed in the form of informative sentences (*kalām khabār*) is permitted to exist through the story of the Prophet Solomon. So the prohibition against the existence of figurative art in several versions of the hadith above is conveyed in the form of a prohibition (*kalām nahī*) and in an absolute situation. Two narratives that are literally (*ẓāhir an-naṣṣ*) in a position facing each other, because each of them refers to a meaning that is literally opposite (*ta'arruḍ*), ultimately giving rise to legal problems that require a solution. In the study of ushul fiqh, there are three models for resolving texts (*dalīl*) which literally have opposing meanings, namely the compromise method (*al-jam'u wa at-tawfiq*), prioritizing the stronger text (*at-tarjih*) and *naskh* or eliminating one of the texts (*dalīl*). If the two conflicting arguments are deemed to be incapable of compromise or *tarjih*, then the last option is to apply the concept of *naskh*. This concept of *naskh* is what seems to be chosen by the majority of scholars in formulating the existence of figurative art in Islam, where the absolute prohibition against the existence of figurative art which originates from the wording of the Prophet's hadith is positioned as *nāsikh* (removing the law) against the law of Prophet Solomon which permits the existence of statues as long as they are not converted into idols, as the message conveyed by QS. Saba` : 13.

However, there are some parties who choose to compromise the two opposing narratives regarding the existence of figurative art as described above. This party argues that the narrative about the permissibility of the existence of statues as long



as they are not used as idols is universally represented by all societies that have a monotheistic civilization, as conveyed in Surat Saba` : 13. Psychologically, society that has a monotheistic civilization does not have theological problems with the existence of figurative art, because they do not have the historical burden as experienced by a society that is a former idol worshipper. On the other hand, several hadiths which literally forbid the existence of figurative art absolutely actually represent the local perspective of the early generation of Arab Muslims who still bear the psychological burden of being a society that once made the existence of statues into idols that were worshipped and sanctified. Therefore, according to this party, the two narratives which literally appear to be contradictory actually have similarities in the *mağzā* area but in different situations and conditions. The different milieu in the placement of these two narratives is often misunderstood as two opposing situations that must be resolved using the concept of *naskh* as chosen by the majority of scholars. The message contained in QS. Saba` : 13, according to Iser's view, is like an empty space which was then creatively responded to by the Javanese Muslim sculptors in Prumpung Magelang who institutionally played the role of implicit readers<sup>24</sup> in the process of negotiating the doctrine of the prohibition of figurative art in Islam.

### **Prumpung; The Structure of reason for Muslim Javanese Sculptor**

Prumpung is the name for an area of several villages which are administratively located in Tamanagung Village, Muntilan District, Magelang Regency. Tamanagung Village, with a population of more than 97.40% Muslim (including Prumpung), is known as a center for the statue industry made from andesite stone, therefore most of the people in this area work as sculptors. Sociologically, the social structure in the sculpture industry area is divided into two parts, namely the businessman group (*juragan*) and the worker group (*buruh*). The businessman (*juragan*) group socially identified with ownership of *sanggar* (a place / studio for carving statues from andesite stone) with a number of sculptors (as laborers) who work with him. In this area there are no less than 42 studios with no less than 5,000 sculptors. However, it should be noted that the data on the number of workers cannot be counted and calculated with certainty, considering that this employment sector is informal work, so the number cannot be ascertained statistically<sup>25</sup>. In addition to human and animal-shaped statues with classic and contemporary models, this stone carving industrial area also produces *kijing* (tombstones), *munthu*, *cobek*, *trap* floors, *lesung* (stone tools for pounding rice), and also various ornaments for interior and exterior decoration

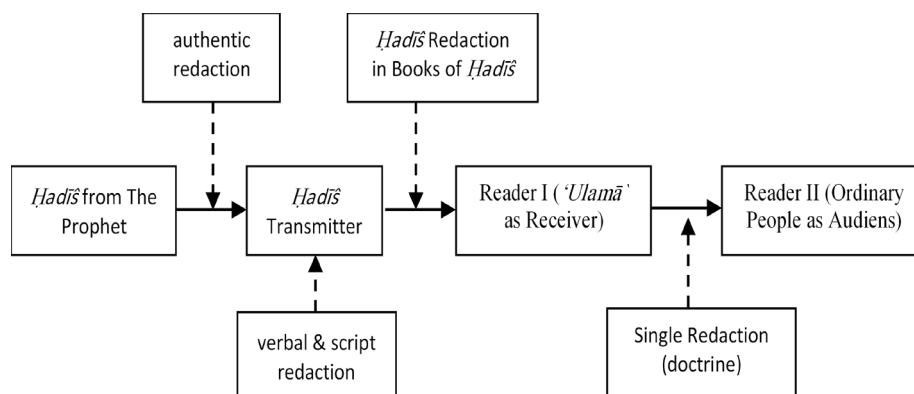
24 Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory Of Aesthetic Response*, ed. - (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

25 Mustofa, *Struktur Nalar Jawa Islam*.

purposes. Various stone carving craft products produced by Muslim Javanese sculptors in the Prumpung Magelang area are not only ordered to meet domestic needs but also exported abroad<sup>26</sup>.

As Muslims, these sculptors whom almost all of whom are ethnic Javanese, basically know that in Islamic teachings it is forbidden to sculpt statues in the form of living creatures, whether humans or animals. However, because the source of the prohibition on the existence of figurative art in Islam comes from the text of the hadith in Arabic, not all levels of society in a social system are able to access it (read and understand it). Only the first readers (religious elites consisting of *Kyai*, *Ustad* or *Santri*) are able to access various hadith texts that prohibit the existence of figurative art through the process of hermeneuticization. While the second readers consisting of the general public (including Muslim Javanese sculptors of Prumpung Magelang) only get information about the prohibition from the reading of the first readers which is already in the form of doctrine, either through *pengajian* (traditionally Islamic studies) or general knowledge that is passed on by oral tradition. As oral information, the doctrine has a very loose nature when it reaches the realm of Javanese Muslim sculptors (as the second reader), and therefore the state of the doctrine of the prohibition of figurative art seems 'reductive' if compared to the literal meaning contained in the text of the hadith. This impression of 'reduction' is systematically depicted by the structure of reasoning of Javanese Muslim sculptors in the Prumpung Magelang area in the form of a collective awareness that the prohibition of Islamic teachings on the existence of statues is actually intended for statues that have changed their function as idols that are worshipped and adored. However, as long as the statue is not converted into an idol, the prohibition no longer applies. Schematically, the reasoning structure of the Javanese Muslim sculptor is illustrated as in figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Transmission and Transformation of Hadith



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However, in further investigation, a sculptor's response was found which was slightly different from the previous sculptor's response as depicted in figure 1 above. This different knowledge was possessed by Muslim Javanese sculptors who had the ability to access texts directly. The Arabic hadith text that prohibits the existence of figurative art in Islam can be read and understood by Javanese Muslim sculptors who have an adequate religious educational background (*santri*). Therefore, his ability and knowledge of this text (hadith) no longer positions this Javanese Muslim sculptor with a *santri* background in the position of reader II (as shown in figure 1), but rather in the position of reader I. They no longer just respond to a doctrine, but they are the ones who carry out the hermeneuticization process until it is actualized in the form of carved statues that *santri* background. If the negotiation process carried out by the first group of sculptors consisting of lay people took place in the philosophical realm, then the negotiation process did not appear and manifest in the carvings of the statue models that were made. Otherwise, the process of negotiation and dialectics in the practical area carried out by the second group of sculptors, namely Javanese sculptors with a *santri* background, will show distinctive characteristics and uniqueness in their sculptures, thus reminding us of a similar process carried out by previous Islamic Javanese scholars when compromising between the needs of *da'wah* and various forms of sharia rules in the form of *wayang kulit*.

The awareness of Javanese Muslim sculptors regarding the doctrine of the prohibition of figurative art, as has been explained in the previous discussion, does not actually stand alone. The structure of reason of these Javanese Muslim sculptors is closely related to the existence of Java as a civilization with a monotheistic belief system. The concept of *sangkan paraning dumadi* (form of a statement regarding the origins of humans and where they will be returned or summarized in the phrase *innā lillāhi wa innā ilaihi rāji'ūn*) is just one of the many ancient beliefs of the Javanese people which is philosophically affiliated with universal monotheistic beliefs<sup>27</sup>. From here we understand that the terms with negative connotations that are often attributed to the beliefs of Javanese society, such as the animist and dynamism belief systems which are always associated with *klenik* (supernatural things), are actually a form of limited knowledge possessed by Western anthropologists when defining the objective reality of the belief systems of ancient Javanese society. One of them is the fact regarding a general belief of Javanese society in the existence of a supernatural power that regulates the universe, although in a 'simple' form, it is expressed with high

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27 Mustofa.

levels of submission and resignation<sup>28</sup>.

In contrast to Arab civilization which once adhered to paganism, Javanese civilization, supported by a monotheistic belief system, created a strong reasoning structure so that Javanese society was never interested in converting the existence of statues brought by Hindu and Buddhist culture in various temples into idols, even though these statues were scattered throughout almost all areas of Java. In this phase, although statues and sculptures had become part of Javanese culture, historical documents on Javanese civilization never mention the discovery of pagan practices in Java<sup>29</sup>. Therefore, the existence of statues in the structure of Javanese society's reasoning has never caused theological disturbance, and their existence has never given rise to a kind of psychological allergy as experienced by the early generation of Arab Muslims. So that in the course of its history, the existence of statues in the system and order of Javanese civilization was solely presented for aesthetic purposes or at the very least used for historical monumental purposes, exactly as documented in QS. Saba` : 13 regarding the policy of the Prophet Solomon when making various statues of people known as pious people and placing them in the mosque for monumental purposes and as a reminder of their services.

### **Negotiation and Compromise of the Sculptor *Vis a Vis* Doctrine**

According to Iser's perspective, the negotiation process of Muslim Javanese sculptors regarding the doctrine of the prohibition of figurative art in Islamic teachings is a dialectic involving the structure of the text and the structure of the reader's action (experience) which gives rise to empty spaces or *leerstellen*<sup>30</sup>. Or in Jauss' version, the negotiation is a tug of war between two horizons, namely the horizon of reader expectations and the horizon of text expectations, which then gives rise to a fusion between the horizons<sup>31</sup> in the form of a Javanese Muslim sculptor's logic structure in responding to the existence of figurative art, especially statues. The negotiation model developed by these Muslim Javanese sculptors is indirectly a compromise model between the sculptor's milieu on one side facing a religious doctrine on the other side without having to go through direct confrontation with the text (as in the hermeneutic model offered by some Muslim scholars who tend to think liberally). Departing from the structure of thought offered by both Iser and Jauss, the position

28 Abdul Dr. H., M. Ag. Munip, *Merekonstruksi Teori Pendidikan Dalam Budaya Jawa* (Yogyakarta: Pascasarjana FITK UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2018).

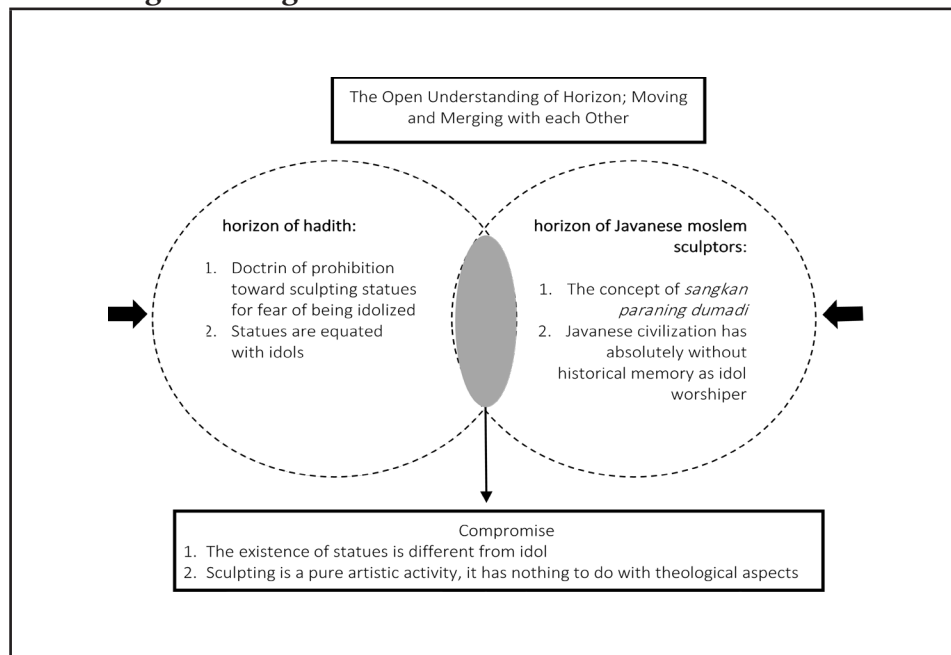
29 Mustofa, *Struktur Nalar Jawa Islam*.

30 Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory Of Aesthetic Response*.

31 Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*.

of doctrine in Islamic teachings that prohibits the existence of figurative art is an area covered by the structure of the text, while sculptor's reasoning structure which is formed from culture, civilization and spiritual experience as a Javanese Muslim is an area covered in the structure of action or the horizon of the reader's expectations.

**Figure 2. Negotiation Process: Dialectics between Text and Act**



The negotiation process that created the reason structure of the Javanese Muslim sculptor as depicted in figure 2 above was not a short process that could be engineered. This structure of reasoning requires a very long process because it involves the collective memory of Javanese society as adherents of monotheism on the one hand and the internalization of understanding of the text of the hadith which prohibits figurative art on the other hand. The horizon of hope for the Muslim sculptors in Prumpung Magelang as readers will ultimately involve their collective memory as Javanese in the process of reading the hadith texts that prohibit the existence of statues. The collective memory held by the Javanese people as a society with a monotheistic civilization is involved by the sculptor during the process of reading the horizon of the structure of the hadith text which speaks of the prohibition against the existence of figurative art. The process of tension and mutual attraction between these two horizons then necessitates the emergence of an empty space in the form of a fusion between the two horizons in the form of a compromise that is able to accommodate the 'interests' of the horizon of the Muslim Javanese sculptor and the Islamic doctrine contained in the horizon of the structure of the hadith text. The

chronology of the negotiation process involving the collective memory of sculptors as an inseparable part of the great civilization of Javanese society is indirectly able to refute accusations of pragmatic motives of Muslim Javanese sculptors in the Prumpung Magelang area in the form of economic interests.

## Two Different Response Areas

Continuing the explanation that has been outlined in Figure 1, in general there are two types of sculptors who create statues in the Prumpung Magelang area, namely sculptors who come from the Muslim community and sculptors who come from religious circles. If we refer to Geertz's division of the social classes of Javanese Islamic society, then the first group of sculptors came from the *abangan* and *priyayi* communities, while the second group of sculptors came from the *santri* community culture. These two different cultures in Javanese Islamic society in turn gave rise to two models of reception among Javanese Muslim sculptors, namely reception in the philosophical realm and reception in the practical realm. Reception in the philosophical realm is a response model carried out by the first group of sculptors, namely Muslim Javanese sculptors who were completely unable to access texts (either the Qur'an or the Hadith) directly due to limited abilities and knowledge. This first group of sculptors only relied on their knowledge of the prohibition on the existence of figurative art in Islam through verbal information in the form of doctrine which was of course reductive (loose). Meanwhile, the reception in the practical area was carried out by the second group of sculptors, namely Muslim Javanese sculptors who came from the *santri* community, a social class who had the opportunity to engage in intense dialectics with the Islamic scientific tradition so that they had the ability to read and understand texts directly.

In relation to the two reception models above, if we look at them more closely, we can see that the reception idea offered by Jauss emerged during the negotiation process carried out by the first group of sculptors who came from the common people. As seen in Figure 2, the negotiation involves two horizons, namely (1) The horizon of the text (hadith) which is manifested in a set of doctrines regarding the absolute prohibition of the existence of statues, both statues which have been converted into idols and statues which only have the status of decoration and monuments, (2) The reader's horizon comes from the community of sculptors along with civilization, culture and spiritual experience as Javanese society which has a collective memory as adherents to universal monotheism. This collective memory in turn creates a kind of psychological immunity for Javanese society in positioning and statusing statues as neutral objects that are completely unrelated to theological issues. The tension and

pulling each other that occurs between the text's horizon and the reader's horizon in turn gives rise to fusion, namely a moment where the two horizons intersect with each other to find understanding and compromise. The point of contact between the two horizons underlies the emergence of the typical reasoning structure of Javanese Islamic sculptors in the Prumpung Magelang, namely that the prohibition on the existence of statues in Islamic teachings only applies when the statue has been converted into an idol and made into a 'god'. On the other hand, as long as the existence of the statue is in its position as an object of artistic work whose beauty is enjoyed no more and no less or as a marker/monument of a certain event, then its existence is not prohibited by Islam.

Figure 3. Statue; Sculptor's Reception in the Philosophical



Because the reception process carried out by the first group of sculptors was in a very private space namely in the philosophical area, So the sculpture products produced by this group are three-dimensional sculptures in the form of realistic living creatures, both in human form, animals or mystical figures such as *dewo* (gods) and *buto* (evil figures in puppetry) as shown in figure 3. In terms of material, the sculptures produced by this group remain in the form of realistic sculptures as is common with the work of other sculptors, it's just that there are positive effects that many parties are not aware of regarding the process of negotiation and compromise in the philosophical realm carried out by the first group of sculptors. Among the most fundamental positive effects is the creation of harmony in the form of social harmony related to the acceptance of the surrounding Muslim community towards the existence of the Prumpung Magelang area as a center for the sculpture industry which was controversial at the beginning of its presence. Harmony in the form of social harmony is certainly not born instantly but requires a process of dialectic and internal communication that is consciously built by the artist-sculptors which is carried out intensively and requires a long time.

In contrast to the reception actions of the first group of sculptors as previously described, the reception held by the second group of sculptors consisting of Islamic boarding school students (*santri*), was slightly different. This difference is caused by the situation and condition of the sculptor as the party involved in the process of reading the text. If the sculptors of the first group of statues did not have access to the Arabic version of the hadith which prohibited the existence of statues due to their limited abilities, so this second group of sculptors had the ability to access the text and thus had the knowledge that there were so many details of prohibitions on the existence of statues. Among them is the knowledge that the fundamental prohibition against the existence of statues (and other figurative art) is not always associated with the change in function of statues, which were originally intended solely for artistic purposes, to then being worshipped and idolized. However, the prohibition on the existence of figurative art is more due to the absolute prohibition on duplicating living creatures, either solely for artistic purposes or even for the purpose of being idolized, whether the statue is kept in a private area or even displayed in a public area. As in the hadith narrated by Imam Bukhari:

Whoever draws (living creatures) while he is still alive in this world, then on the Day of Resurrection he will be burdened with giving a soul (life) to his painting, even though he will not be able to (bring it to life).

Or the hadith narrated by Imam Ahmad:

Angels do not like to enter a house in which there are pictures (and statues) and dogs

The two versions of the hadith above literally refer to a legal understanding that the existence of figurative art (including statues) is absolutely prohibited in Islam. Therefore, the reception model developed by the second group of sculptors consisting of Islamic boarding school students (*santri*) no longer uses the term horizon as developed by Jauss, but utilizes the concept of empty space and the concept of concretization developed by Iser. In essence, the concept of empty space is the result of a reading that emerges from the dialectic between the structure of the text and the structured actions of an implicit reader, which in this case is represented by the second group of sculptors. Therefore, the reception model developed by the second group of sculptors is actually simpler, less complicated and relatively easy to understand because it is in the practical realm that can be captured by the senses. The improvisation and creativity of the sculptors, which are full of Islamic values, can also



be identified through the senses. For example, the model of a living creature that is prohibited in various hadith texts to be used as an object for painting or sculpture is a creature that can live, whether an animal or a human. This means that even if the object is a living creature but it is impossible for it to be alive (dead), such as a human or animal but only in the form of a head, or a body without a head or a relief form (two dimensions) and the like, then the statue object is permitted. This is evident from the various statues produced by the sculptors in this second group, as in the following figure:

Figure 4. Plant Ornaments; Sculptor's Reception in the Pragmatic Area



The approach model developed by this sculptor who comes from the santri community actually has a very close relationship with the Islamic iconism ideology, which is a term that has been debated for a millennium and even to this day. This term refers to an attitude that has been generally accepted as part of a Muslim culture that rejects all things related to figurative art but not in a violent and destructive way as has been done by adherents of iconoclasm. On the other hand, the rejection of the existence of figurative art is carried out by sponsoring and pioneering the emergence of works of art in any form other than figurative or living creatures (as shown in figure 4 and 5), or it is permitted to draw or sculpt a figure but other than sacred figures such as statues of gods, Jesus, Buddha and so on, or depictions of human and animal objects but done ideoplastically.<sup>32</sup> From this understanding, typical Islamic art such as calligraphy and ornaments which are usually packaged in decorative models, in their development were able to become a characteristic of Islamic architectural buildings.

32 Ideoplastic is a depiction of something based on what is known, not based on what is seen. Therefore, the depiction of humans in shadow puppets is attempted to be in accordance with the actual human condition according to the image captured by the idea, not the image captured by the eye.

Figure 5. Two-dimensional Human Figure Ornament



Meanwhile, the results of the carvings in the form of two-dimensional ornaments (as in figure 5 above) remind us of the process of creating puppet art (*pewayangan*) with its distinctive ideoplastic model of depicting human forms. This kind of depiction is done so that the puppets (*wayang*) continue to appear with good depictions but do not conflict with the doctrine of Islamic teachings regarding the prohibition of figurative art, so that the concept of the puppet is accepted in Islam because it is no longer a realistic depiction of humans or animals. Even though the puppets have eyes, nose, mouth and other body parts, in their depiction they are no longer the same and similar to the eyes, nose and mouth and parts of the real human body. A pointed nose, narrow and elongated eyes, a meandering mouth shape, a small neck as big as an arm, long hands that touch the feet and a depiction of a thin human body that is more identical to a plant like the depiction of the handsome character Arjuna, have become a favorite figure of those who enjoy *wayang kulit* performances.

Compared with the living studies of Anna M Gade or Ahmad Rafiq for example, the two reception models carried out by Javanese Islamic sculptors in the Prumpung Magelang area as explained above have several special characteristics. The specificity of this reception model lies in the position of the object being received, where the two previous studies positioned the holy text, namely the Qur'an, as the object being received, while in this study the object being received is not the text but rather the doctrine as a result of the hermeneuticization of the first readers consisting of religious elites (*ulama, kyai, ustadz, santri*). This difference in the position of the object being received has significant implications where criticism of living studies has so far been related to accusations of desacralization of texts, but the reception that has been carried out by the Javanese Islamic sculptors above has indirectly been able to refute these accusations where the object being received in this living study

is not the text directly but rather 'only' doctrine.

## **Conclusion**

The study of living by utilizing reception theory can be used as a middle way or compromise when there are two doctrines in Islamic teachings that are literally positioned opposite each other, without having to liberalize the meaning and understanding of the text which often gives rise to polemics and even controversy. The reason's structure of Islamic Javanese was created from the negotiation process of Muslim Javanese sculptors in the Prumpung Magelang region regarding the doctrine of the prohibition of figurative art in Islam which is sourced from the hadith, by utilizing narratives that are in line with the message conveyed by QS. Saba` : 13 regarding the existence of statues during the time of Prophet Solomon.

Academically, research into the reason's structure of Javanese Islamic developed by sculptors in the Prumpung Magelang area indirectly also refutes accusations that the study of the living Quran is another form of desacralization of the text. The reason for this is that the subject (the person who receives the message, namely the Javanese Muslim sculptor) is not the first reader who directly interacts with the text, they are the second reader so that what is actually received is the doctrine (the result of the hermeneutic process by the first reader).

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I did this research by myself, from preparing the materials, writing the paper, reviewing, and revising.

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The authors affirm that there are no conflicts of interest that could potentially influence the research outcomes or compromise its integrity.

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