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Visualizing Sacred Identity: An Ethno-Linguistic and Semiotic Analysis of the Single Pillar Ornament of the Saka Tunggal Mosque in Banyumas

Sigied Himawan Yudhanto^{1*} , *Faizal Risdianto*² , *Jauhari*¹ , *I Gusti Ngurah Tri Marutama*¹ ,
*Aphief Tri Artanto*³ 

¹ Undergraduate Applied Digital Media Design, Vocational School, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Jl Kol Sutarto No 150K, Jebres, Surakarta, Central Java 57126, Indonesia

² English Education, Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Universitas Islam Negeri Salatiga, Jl.Lingkar Salatiga Km. 2, Pulutan, Sidorejo, Salatiga, Central Java 50716, Indonesia

³ Visual Communication Design Study Program, Faculty of Architecture and Design, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran, Jl. Raya Rungkut Madya, Gunung Anyar, Surabaya, East Java 60294, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study examines the construction of sacred identity through ethnolinguistic and semiotic analysis of ornamental elements on the pillars of the 736-year-old Saka Tunggal Mosque in Cikakak, Banyumas. Using qualitative descriptive narrative methods, this study combines participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, linguistic text analysis, and visual semiotics to interpret the symbolic elements embedded in the decorative motifs found on the pillars of the Saka Tunggal Mosque. The results of the study indicate that mosque ornaments are not merely decorative elements, but rather visual representations of theological and cosmological concepts that reflect ethnic identity and past cultural myths spanning various eras. The results of the study indicate the relationship and influence of the Hindu-Buddhist kingdom on the ornaments of the pillars of the Saka Tunggal Mosque so that the creation of local and religious-cultural cohesion

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Sigied Himawan Yudhanto, Undergraduate Applied Digital Media Design, Vocational School, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Jl Kol Sutarto No 150K, Jebres, Surakarta City, Central Java 57126, Indonesia; Email: sigiedhy@staff.uns.ac.id

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is reflected in the form of symbolic structures that reflect the integration of local cultural linguistic expressions and religious narratives semiotically and contribute to symbolic forms so that cultural and historical heritage preservation arises in the sacred identity of the mosque. The results of this study contribute to cross-disciplinary studies in cultural science, religious architecture, and visual semiotics, while emphasizing the importance of maintaining cultural and linguistic diversity in the heritage of historical cultural buildings.

Keywords: Architectural Symbolism; Cultural Heritage; Ethnolinguistics; Semiotics; Saka Tunggal Mosque; Sacred Identity

1. Introduction

The Saka Tunggal Baitussalam Mosque in Cikakak, Banyumas Regency, is one of the oldest mosques in Indonesia and is located in Central Java Province (**Figure 1**). The Saka Tunggal Mosque was built in 1288 AD, as inscribed on the “saka” pillar of the mosque. Even older than the Singasari-Majapahit Kingdom, which was founded in 1294 AD, the Saka Tunggal Mosque was built during the Singasari Kingdom (1222–1292) ^[1,2]. The Saka Tunggal Mosque is the oldest mosque on the island of Java ^[3]. The Saka Tunggal Mosque is a historic building of extraordinary historical and cultural significance. The specialty of the Saka Tunggal Mosque is that it only has one supporting pillar (saka); “saka” itself means pillar, while “tunggal” means one in Kromo Javanese ^[4] or is often referred to as a single-column mosque ^[5,6]. The Saka Tunggal Mosque cannot be physically separated from the previous Islamic culture, especially in the practice of Islamic rituals related to dhikr, or praying to God, which is often combined with Javanese hymns or songs and can usually be heard on Fridays ^[7]. The Saka Tunggal Mosque embodies traditional wisdom, making it an integral part of the cultural heritage of the Aboge Islamic community in the Banyumas area, especially in the village of Cikakak ^[8], which plays a crucial role in preserving the uniqueness of its cultural heritage identity ^[9]. The Saka Tunggal Mosque has a distinctive building structure and architectural values ^[10]. Therefore, the construction of the mosque and its style, along with the area where it stands, are part of the cultural heritage area that must be preserved ^[11]. In addition, as an old building, the Saka Tunggal Mosque holds symbolic wealth that is rich in religious and cultural significance.



Figure 1. Saka Tunggal Banyumas Mosque seen from the side.

The Saka Tunggal Mosque has its uniqueness, especially in the elements of its interior ornamentation. According to the results of an interview with the mosque’s Imam Sopani, the interior of the mosque is the original part, and the mosque’s single pillar is an object of cultural heritage because it is 736 years old. During the 19th-century revitalization process, the single pillar in the mosque was repainted (**Figure 2**), previously made of plain teak wood, to strengthen the structure and enhance the mosque’s aesthetics. Then, it underwent repairs in 1994 (according to the mosque caretaker); for example, the roof of the mosque which has used zinc iron where, according to the imam’s statement, it initially used *ijuk* (a natural fiber from the sugar palm tree) ^[12], the repairs were intended to beautify the appearance of the mosque, especially in the interior so that the Saka Tunggal Mosque can appear as a religious and cultural tourism object. However, the original form of the ornaments and carvings on the pillars is still clearly visible, indicating that preservation was carried out to maintain its visual and historical integrity. These ornaments serve not only as decoration but also as a medium for expressing the spiritual values and local wisdom embedded in traditional Javanese architecture. Moreover, as mentioned earlier,

the ornaments attached to the pillars of the mosque are artifacts from the original part of the mosque. The ornaments inside the mosque, upon observation, exhibit the form of typical ancient Javanese carvings, influenced by the ancient Javanese Hindu-Buddhist Kingdoms, such as Singasari-Majapahit ^[13], with a combination of classical Arabic script or writing, a typical feature of Islamic manuscripts in ancient Java ^[14]. These ornaments not only serve as aesthetic elements but also as markers of the local community's sacred identity. These ornaments contain traces of past signs and literature, including myths and local symbols that form a narrative with functional dimensions ^[15,16], within the context of Javanese culture in Cikakak village. To understand the meaning contained in these ornaments, an interdisciplinary approach that combines ethno-linguistics and semiotics is needed ^[17]. Where ethnolinguistics studies the relationship between writing and language, as well as historical and cultural context of the community, and semiotics analyzes the meaning and signs as visual symbols used to convey sacred messages.



This article aims to analyze how the ornaments on the single pillars of the Saka Tunggal Mosque serve as markers of communication, conveying a relationship between language and visual symbols. By tracing the ethnolinguistic and semiotic dimensions of the ornaments on the single pillars, this article wants to reveal that the old mosque is a place of worship, and at the same time, also a cultural space where the Saka Tunggal Mosque becomes a place for the negotiation process and visualization of the sacred identity contained therein. The main focus is to visualize sacred identity with ethnolinguistic and semiotic analysis of the ornaments on the single pillars of the Banyumas Saka Tunggal Mosque.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Mosque Ornaments and Cultural Representation

Research by Dhini Dewiyanti and Iwan Sudrajat ^[18] in The Effects of Ornaments in the Interior Space of Mosque on the Level of Concentration of Its Congregations also in research conducted by Haifa Ebrahim Al Khalifa and May Walid Lafi ^[15] entitled: Ornamentation and Islamic Identity in Contemporary European Mosques: An Analysis of Cultural, Aesthetic, and Functional Dimensions and Modern Influences emphasizes that the form and ornaments in mosques represent local cultural characteristics as well as cultural and aesthetic dimensions, which other cultures may still influence, but the functional design of the mosque is maintained to maintain Islamic identity, strong local culture often displays traditional symbols that are integrated with religious functions. For example, Syahbani et al. ^[19], Prayogi et al. ^[20], and Sholikhah et al. ^[21] noted that old traditional mosques in Java and Sumatra show Hindu-Buddhist architectural influences in the form of overlapping roofs, wood carvings, and flora-fauna ornaments that are adapted to Islamic values, including ornaments in the case study of the Saka Tunggal mosque.

2.2. Ethno-Linguistic Perspectives on Mosque Single Pillar Ornaments

Ethno-linguistic studies in the context of ornaments in old architecture emphasize the importance of searching for lexical and cultural meanings, as in the research conducted by Rizkia et al. ^[22] and Shalika et al. ^[23]. Then, in the science of Anthropological Linguistics, there is cultural linguistics, which can explain local terms that often imply the value system and structure of people's thinking. ^[24] A study of ornaments found in the traditional Surakarta palace, conducted by Ulhaq et al. ^[25], reveals how the names of palace parts (such as saka guru, sen thong, and panda) reflect the social and religious structure of Javanese society. This also applies to traditional mosques such as the Saka Tunggal Mosque, where the term "saka" is used as a marker for a single pillar that contains deep symbolic and spiritual dimensions. Additionally, research conducted by Ana Nugrahaini Izzati and Mulyana ^[26] on the symbolic

meaning of wooden ornaments in keris carvings employed an ethnolinguistic approach in a cultural semantic manner.

2.3. Visual Semiotics and Sacred Meaning

The semiotic approach allows the interpretation of meaning in ornaments that contain symbols or visual elements. Joseph Fischer, in a book entitled “The Folk Art of Java” (1994), concluded that there are three important aspects to studying Javanese art and culture in the past, namely myth, ritual, and symbol^[27]. The study entitled: *Metamorphosis of mosque semiotics: From sacred to secular power metaphorism - the case of state mosques* written by Abeer Allahham^[28] discusses collective cultural codes that are deeply rooted in the sacred meaning of ornaments and the form of the mosque building itself with Peirce’s triadic semiotic theory (icon-index-symbol) allowing for layered reading of the visual signs of floral ornaments in mosques and their symbolization. An article entitled “Reading the Examples of Modern Mosques in Turkey Through Semiotics Mythologies” by Peker et al.^[29] discusses how to read messages conveyed through mosque buildings within the framework of semiotic theory. With the contextual analysis approach of style, symbolic form. Muhammad Rusdi Adiputra and Purnama Salura^[30] examined how Arabic and geometric script ornaments on mosque pillars have a main orientation in the form of the direction of the Qibla. Additionally, research conducted by Aisyah et al.^[31] on the function and meaning of mosque calligraphy art reveals that its function and meaning change fundamentally because mosque calligraphy is applied in line with the religious and cultural conditions of its people. Therefore, this study was conducted to examine the anatomy of these mosques using the semiotic theory of several signs and markers of sacred orientation.

2.4. A study of the Saka Tunggal Mosque

The Saka Tunggal Banyumas Mosque has been studied from a historical and architectural perspective by several local researchers. However, in-depth studies on semiotic and ethno-linguistic aspects are still limited. Research conducted by Sholikhah et al.^[21], Arif Sarwo Wibowo and Shiro Sasano^[6], Gustiara Rizkiananda Putri^[13], Difa et al.^[32], highlights the history of the mosque’s founding by

Kyai Mustolih and the uniqueness of its interior ornaments and structure, which only has one central pillar as a symbol of the oneness of God, which is studied using an iconological approach from a local wisdom perspective. However, the meaning of the carvings, symbols, and local narratives that accompany the ornaments on the Tunggal Mosque pillars specifically has not been critically studied through a language and sign approach. This literature review highlights a research gap, namely the need for an integrative approach between ethnolinguistics and semiotics to understand how the ornaments of the Saka Tunggal Mosque function not only as decoration but also as a means of visualizing the sacred identity of the mosque within the community in the village of Cikakak, Banyumas.

2.5. Research Questions

How do ethnolinguistic and semiotic elements of mosque ornaments contribute to the visualization and communication of sacred identity in the pillars of the Saka Tunggal Mosque?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Approach and Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with an ethnolinguistic and semiotic study design. The purpose of this approach is to understand the symbolic meaning and sacred identity embodied in the ornaments of the single-pillar mosque as a cultural heritage from the perspective of the local community, language, and the inherent sign system^[33]. The combination of ethnolinguistics and semiotics allows researchers to capture, document, and interpret cultural expressions displayed in the form of visual ornaments^[17]. The semiotic approach is used to examine the sign system (icons, indexes, symbols) contained in the ornaments on the single pillar, and how these signs form the meaning of sacred identity in the linguistic and cultural context and the overall research design cannot be separated from the number of participants involved in the interview while in the field^[34].

3.2. Location and Object of Research

The research location is at the Saka Tunggal Baitus-

salam Mosque, Cikakak Hamlet, Wangon District, Banyumas Regency. The selection of the Saka Tunggal Mosque as a research object is based on its cultural value as the oldest mosque on the island of Java and number 2 in all of Indonesia, also because of the uniqueness of the interior, especially on the central supporting part of the mosque (pillars) with ornaments that reflect the richness of local ethnolinguistics and religiosity. Because the research is conducted in a place of worship, it is necessary to uphold ethical principles, including obtaining permission from the mosque management prior to documentation, as well as respecting local religious and customary values during the data collection process.

3.3. Data Collection Technique

Data were collected through three main techniques:

- **Observation and Visual Documentation**

The researcher conducted direct observation of the ornaments on the mosque pillars and documented them through photography, sketches, and visual recording. The primary focus was on the motifs of writing or calligraphy, geometry, flora and fauna, and local symbols found on the pillars.

- **In-depth Interviews**

This study utilized five interview sessions with key informants, considered sufficient based on purposive sampling and the achievement of data saturation, which are fundamental in qualitative research. The participants were carefully selected individuals with deep cultural, historical, and religious insights related to the Saka Tunggal Cikakak Banyumas Mosque, including religious leaders, cultural guardians, local historians, and community elders.

The decision to limit the number of interviews was based on the mosque's unique and localized cultural setting. The Saka Tunggal Mosque is maintained by a small, tightly knit community, where only a few individuals possess the specialized knowledge required for this study. During the five interviews, consistent themes and repeated patterns emerged, particularly regarding the interpretation of symbolic ornaments and the preservation of cultural myths, indicating that data saturation had been achieved.

Furthermore, the interviews were supplemented by additional data collection methods, such as participatory observation, linguistic text analysis, and visual semiotics.

This triangulation ensured that the information gathered was reliable and comprehensive. Considering the sacred nature of the site and the limited number of credible informants, five interviews provided sufficient depth and validity to support the study's analysis of the sacred identity embodied in the mosque.

The interviews were semi-structured to allow for narrative and interpretative exploration.

- **Archive and Literature Review**

The researcher reviewed historical documents, ancient manuscripts, and literature related to Islamic architectural traditions, local languages, and religious symbolism. This was used to strengthen the field findings and provide a historical and cultural context.

3.4. Data Analysis Technique

The data was analyzed through two stages:

- **Ethnolinguistic Analysis**

This analysis highlights how local language elements and meanings (including terms, calligraphy, and symbolic narratives) represent ethnic and religious identities. The ethnolinguistic study employed in this research focuses on the lexical and cultural meanings of ornaments ^[22]. In addition, studying ethnolinguistics is also carried out to study cultural identity and understand how a language can reflect the cultural identity of a community group ^[23]. The relationship between the choice of ornamental forms and dialects or linguistic symbols typical of the region is also considered. Data Validity To ensure the validity of the findings, the researcher used source triangulation techniques (visual, verbal, and written), member checking with local sources, and peer debriefing with academics in the fields of visual anthropology and linguistics.

- **Semiotic Analysis**

The study uses Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. According to Barthes, semiology aims to study how humanity gives meaning to things ^[34]. Making meaning, in this case, cannot be equated with communicating. This means that the object seen not only carries information but also wants to communicate, and it also constitutes the structure of the sign. Barthes, thus, sees signification as a total process with a structured arrangement. Signification is not limited to language but also to other things outside of language. Barthes considers social life, whatever its form, to be a

system of signs in itself. Using Roland Barthes' theory, ornaments are analyzed based on the classification of signs (reality, sign, culture), denotation (signifier/signified), connotation, and cultural myths contained therein ^[35]. This approach examines the relationship between visual forms and the religious and cultural messages conveyed ^[29,36]. Semiotically, these ornaments are iconic and symbolic signs:

- Iconic because their forms resemble Hindu-Buddhist symbols known to the local community.
- Symbolic because they have a new meaning in the context of Islam and are used to convey Islamic spiritual

values in a local form.

4. Results

Direct observation in the field, carried out for two days after visual documentation, followed by an interview process with a total of five interview discussion sessions. The coding of the interview used R for respondent and numbers as follows: the interview with community leaders (R1), government institutions (R2), and managers of the Saka Tunggal Mosque (R3) in Cikakak Village, Banyumas, obtained several important findings as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Summary of interviews during the observation process.

Coding of Respondent	Respondent	Description
R1	K. and I.S Residents around the mosque	The last interview was then conducted on March 4, 2025. In this interview, the author inquired about the social life of the Cikakak community and their knowledge of the ornaments found on the poles.
R2	staff of the Cultural Heritage Conservation Center, Purwokerto Cultural Service	In this interview, the author asked about the history of the Saka Tunggal Baitussalam Mosque. The author also participated in a Zoom meeting on March 3, 2025, which was a continuation of the initial interview. For confirmation of additional information
R2	Mr. A. as Staff of Bumdes (A village-owned enterprise) Desa Wisata Cikakak	The second interview was conducted on March 3, 2025. In this interview, the author asked about the social life of the Cikakak village community and the history of the Saka Tunggal Baitussalam Mosque.
R3	Mr. S. as the caretaker of the Saka Tunggal Baitussalam Mosque as well as the former head of Cikakak village	The interview was conducted at the house of the caretaker of the Saka Tunggal Baitussalam Mosque, located in Cikakak Village. Moreover, it was conducted on March 3, 2025, and March 11, 2025. In this interview, the author asked about the history of the mosque, the spread of Islam in Cikakak village, and the ornaments on the mosque pillars.
R3	Mr. Sp as a traditional leader, mosque priest and caretaker of the SakaTunggal Baitussalam Mosque.	The fourth interview was conducted on March 4, 2025, with the author asking about the History of the Saka Tunggal Baitussalam Mosque, the Spread of Islam in Cikakak Village, and the current condition of the Saka Tunggal Mosque Building.

The interview results presented in **Table 1** are an important component for conducting studies and interpreting data to complement and process primary data collected during observations.

4.1. Local and Symbolic Ornament Forms

The ornaments that adorn the mosque, especially on the single pillar (central pillar), pulpit, and entrance, show

floral motif carving patterns, as well as local cosmological symbols. Motifs such as lotus vines, the sun, and wing stylization represent the Javanese-Hindu cultural heritage combined with Islamic values. The presence of these symbols does not mean mixing religious teachings but rather visual syncretism or aesthetic acculturation. Hindu-Buddhist symbols were borrowed as a form of respect for previously existing local culture, then reinterpreted in the context of Islamic spirituality. This is what is called cultural and reli-

gious cohesion, namely the process of harmoniously unifying new belief values with old cultural forms of expression.

4.2. Ethno-Linguistic Analysis of Ornaments

The height of the pillars at the Saka Tunggal Mosque is 5 meters, and the results of an interview with the Purwokerto City Cultural Service showed that they are 736 years old. Its distinctive feature is the single saka (one

central supporting pillar), which has four sides facing east, south, north, and west (Table 2). Uniquely, on the east, south, and north sides, there are carvings of Arabic script, specifically the Arabic script used to write Javanese. On the side of the pillar facing west, the circle is empty. An ethnolinguistic analysis is necessary to interpret the meaning of language, symbols, and local identity inherent in the structure of the pillar.

Table 2. Results of ethnolinguistic analysis on the pillars of the Saka Tunggal Mosque.


Picture on the Right Side of the Pillar	Front View of the Pillar
	
<p>Arabic writing “النِّية رأس العمل” (Read: <i>al-niyyah ra's al-'amal</i>)</p>	<p>Lexical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top: displays the writing “هَجْرَةٌ” (read: “<i>hijratun</i>”) • Middle: displays the Arabic numeral “١٢٨٨” (read: 1288 <i>Hijri</i>), referring to the year the single saka mosque was built. The year 1288 AD (Gregorian) is approximately equivalent to the year 687 Hijri • Bottom: Arabic writing “النِّيَّةُ” (read <i>al-niyyatu</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • النِّية (<i>al-niyyah</i>): intention, inner purpose before doing an action. • رأس (<i>ra's</i>): head, core, leader of something. • العمل (<i>al-'amal</i>): deeds, deeds, actions. • This indicates that Arabic writing serves an aesthetic function, culturally, as it is not only liturgical but also integrated with local values in the village of Cikakak, and is used as a means to influence social behavior. 	<p>Grammatical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all hijrah is physical. In this context, hijrah is a reorientation of intention: from the worldly to the hereafter, from egocentric to theocentric. • The Banyumas community—as with Javanese society in general—values intention as a determinant of the quality of deeds (in line with the hadith: “<i>Innamal a'malu bin niyyat...</i>”). • The use of the Arabic term “<i>Hijratu an-Niyyah</i>” in the traditional Javanese mosque environment reflects cultural syncretism: Islam is adopted and translated into local consciousness, not only ritually, but also in terms of values and philosophy. • This phrase has become part of the community's symbolic language to emphasize the importance of a sincere shift in spiritual orientation.

Table 2. Cont.

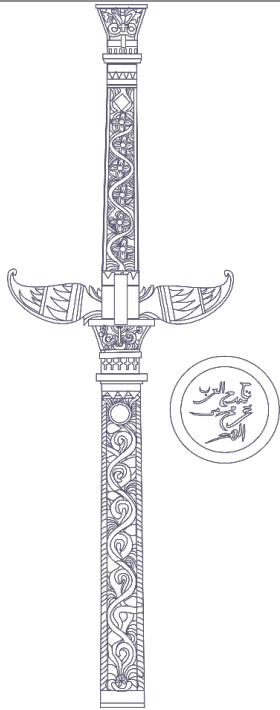
The Arabic writing on the north side of the Saka Tunggal Mosque's pillar conveys important **Islamic doctrines** through Arabic, combined with local awareness of the Banyumas community. It is part of the ethnolinguistic heritage—namely, the meeting between the Arabic language system and the local cultural values of the Javanese community, which are conveyed through architectural and spiritual media. In classical Arabic, the structure of this sentence contains a strong metaphorical meaning: intention not only initiates actions but also determines the direction, quality, and spiritual value of the action itself. This writing is not just decoration; it carries the central theological doctrine in Islam, namely that all human actions are judged based on the intentions in the heart.

Contextual
Meaning
Analysis

In the context of philology, the interpretation of the analysis into “Hijrah orientation in Arabic: *Hijratu an-Niyyah*” at the Saka Tunggal Banyumas Mosque is a powerful ethnolinguistic statement. It connects:

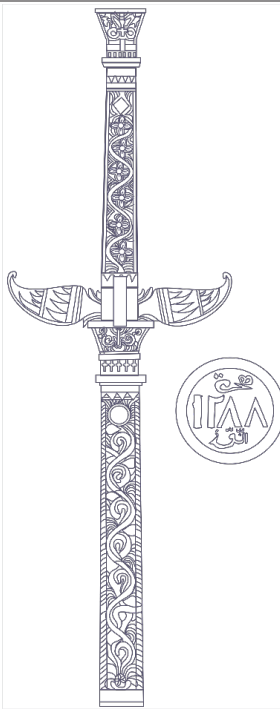
- Universal Islamic teachings on the importance of intention,
- Arabic as the language of revelation,
- And meaningful local cultural expressions in the structure of the traditional Javanese worship space.

This phrase encourages every Muslim not only to move physically but also to transform spiritually, making intention the axis of change and framing every deed with a straight intention, starting with everything, including ritual worship, namely Prayer.



Facing North

Picture on the left side of the pole



Facing East

Picture of the back side of the pole



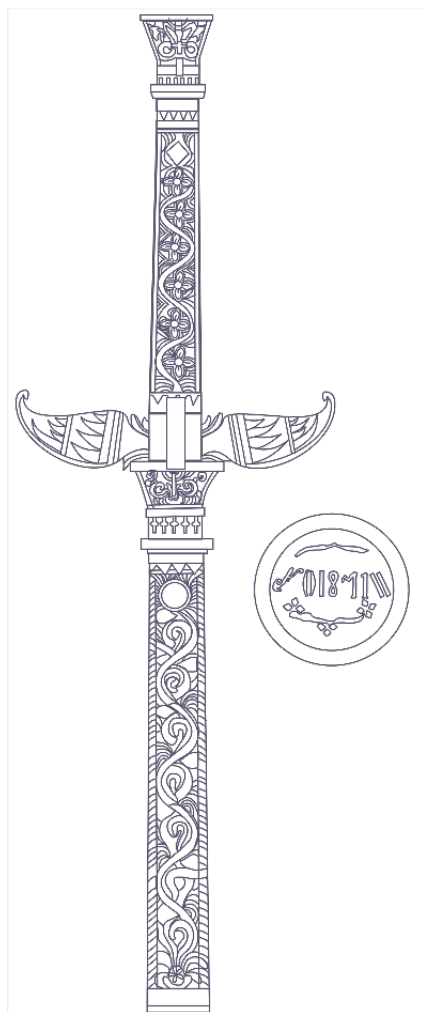
Table 2. Cont.

<p>This writing uses Latin letters/numbers, which are read as 01874. This most likely refers to 1874 AD, although there is a “0” in front of it, which is unusual in writing years at that time - this number is probably only decorative or emphasizes aesthetic form.</p>	<p>Lexical</p>	<p>1. Visual Description</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different from the other three sides of the pillar (east, south, and north), which are filled with Classical Arabic script, classical Arabic, and Latin numerals, the west side of this pillar is left empty. However, it still has a clear, circular frame, as if it is about to be filled with something. • This emptiness is not due to negligence but has a powerful symbolic and linguistic meaning from a cultural and spiritual perspective.
<p>According to the caretaker, the year 1874 AD marked the beginning of the restoration of the Saka Tunggal Mosque during the colonial era, as well as the introduction of a new script, known as the Latin script, in Wangon District, Banyumas. This is an example of a syncretic ethnolinguistic condition, where the Latin writing system is used in the Islamic religious space that remains local and traditional.</p>	<p>Grammatical</p>	<p>2. West Direction in Islamic-Javanese Tradition</p> <p>In Javanese cosmology and local Islamic spirituality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The West is often associated with the setting sun, the end of life, and the mortal world. • In Javanese culture, the West is also often considered the direction of contemplation, where the soul returns to the Creator. Thus, leaving an empty circle on the west side is a potent form of non-verbal ethnolinguistic symbolism: silence as language, emptiness as meaning, and emptiness as a spiritual message.
<p>The use of Latin numerals (not Arabic) in the traditional mosque environment demonstrates a dual adaptation of culture: on the one hand, adhering to Islamic principles, and on the other hand, being open to the influence of Western calendars and writing systems introduced through colonialism.</p>	<p>Contextual Meaning Analysis</p>	<p>3. Semiotic Analysis</p> <p>a. Emptiness as a Representation of Silent Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In ethnolinguistics, not only verbal utterances are considered “language,” but also the act of silence or emptiness can be a form of meaningful communication. • Here, the empty circle conveys a wordless message, namely: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That not everything must be expressed literally. • That silence is also part of worship. • That words cannot represent the final side of life (the West). <p>b. Javanese Culture and the Value of “<i>Suwung</i>”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The concept of “<i>suwung</i>” (empty, hollow) in Javanese philosophy is an ideal condition for someone to receive revelation, tranquility, and truth. • So, this west side can be interpreted as the <i>suwung</i> side, a place where humans only need to receive and reflect, not speak. <p>c. Symbol of Transcendence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While the east, north, and south sides speak of worldly and spiritual existence, the empty west side represents infinity, death, and awareness of the end. The empty circle on the west side of the Saka Tunggal Mosque’s pillar is not a deficiency, but a powerful symbolic statement: it is the silent language of the Javanese-Islamic ethnolinguistic tradition, conveying the meaning of <i>suwung</i> as the highest spiritual form. This emptiness serves as a reminder of the transience of life and the fact that not all meanings can, or should, be expressed in words. From an ethnolinguistic perspective, silence is language, and emptiness is a message.

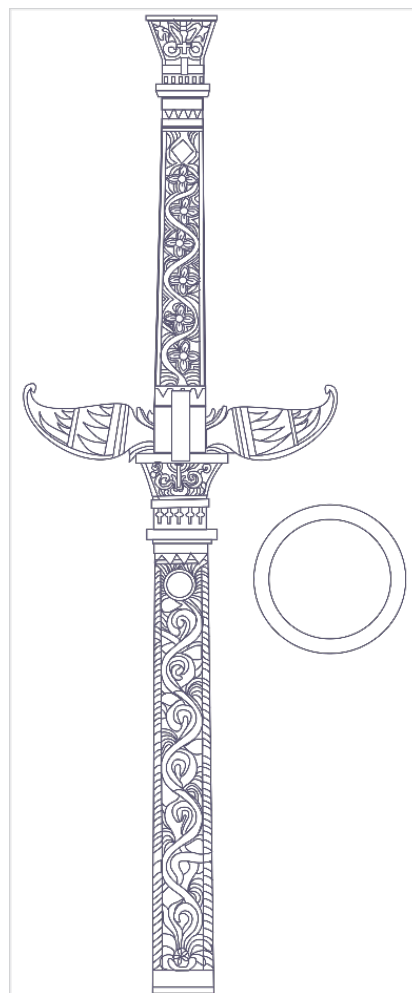
Table 2. Cont.

**Conclusion
Ethnolinguistic
Analysis**

The four sides of the pillars of the Saka Tunggal Mosque present a multi-layered linguistic narrative: from classical Arabic script as a symbol of the entry of Islam, and the use of classical Arabic script as a reference to sharia, Latin numerals as a colonial influence in the village of Cikakak so that it functions as historical documentation, to "empty ornaments" as a symbol of existential contemplation. This entire structure shows the integration of language, culture, and beliefs that are woven locally and harmoniously. The ethnolinguistic approach paves the way for understanding that language is not only used to communicate but also to form, store, and pass on spiritual and cultural values from generation to generation. Thus, each side of the pillar represents not only a physical direction but also a direction of meaning, which unites local religious, cultural, and historical values. This structure is not just an inanimate object but a living cultural medium that continues to function as a means of spiritual and cultural education for the local generation.



Facing South



Facing West

4.3. Visual Semiotic Analysis of Ornaments

The pillars of the Saka Tunggal Mosque, as the only central pillar of the mosque, not only have architectural value but are also symbolic. Semiotically, the Saka Tunggal represents the concept of monotheism in Islam: the oneness of God. The ornaments on the pillars of the mosque contain indexical symbols of local traditions, especially in 1288, which were still strongly influenced by the Singasari-Majapahit Kingdom in East Java, such as the use of spiritual symbols for guardians of holy places, which in the local context are called "guardians" or sacred (*wingit*). Based on the results of interviews with the caretaker of the Saka Tunggal Mosque, the mosque contains ornaments from the Singasari-Majapahit Kingdom. According to initial research, the Singasari-Majapahit ornaments in question are characterized by a visual form of flora, which is predominantly represented by prominent sun symbols and features Arabic and Latin script. In addition, four stylized wing ornaments are spread out. Here, the assumption is made that the Singasari-Majapahit ornament in question is shaped like a lotus flower because it features a similar pattern to that found in the Kalasan Temple. If the ornament is a lotus, it can be concluded that the lotus flower is a symbol of Hinduism^[37], while Islam itself has a different symbol^[38]. The Hindu-style lotus ornament on the pillar of the Saka Tunggal Mosque contains certain elements that have been changed and added. In addition, on the Pillar of the Saka Tunggal Mosque, there is also a stylized wing ornament, whereas the lotus vine ornament is very rarely combined with wings. The change is strongly suspected to have been made intentionally to change the meaning or significance of the original meaning. The first is the lotus vine motif. This ornament is located at the bottom and the top of the mosque pillar. In the Hindu-Buddhist religion, lotus vines symbolize spiritual knowledge and strength, and the lotus flower symbol itself considered a sacred symbol^[39]. The lotus flower is symbolized by three colors, namely, the white lotus is a blooming flower (Padma), the blue lotus is half-blooming (Utpala), and the white lotus is a budding flower (Kumuda)^[40]. The stylized ornament of the Garuda bird's wings has been known since prehistoric times in Indonesia. This is proven by the existence of Garuda bird motif decorations on bronze objects from the Bronze Age in Indonesia. However, Garuda ornaments are

rarely applied or used in conjunction with lotus vines. The choice of these two ornaments is due to their visual form being influenced by the legend of Sri Tanjung, which is closely related to the greatness of the Singasari-Majapahit Kingdom^[41] when Kyai Mustolih founded the Saka Tunggal Mosque.

In **Figure 3**, we can see three relief fragments [**Figure 3(a)–3(c)**], which feature a natural background, trees, and rivers. When Sri Tanjung was revived from death, her background underwent a change, specifically the decorative motif of "lotus vines" [**Figure 3(d)**]. Likewise, with the two reliefs in the southeast corner, when Sidapaksa said goodbye to go to heaven [**Figure 3(e)**] and when Sri Tanjung was at the gate of heaven of the god Indra, who was being escorted. Dorakala [**Figure 3(f)**], both use lotus vines as their background. Lotus vines are used as a setting for heaven and the resurrection of life after death. Lotus vines in the temples of the Singasari-Majapahit heritage in East Java, as seen in Surowono Temple, greatly influenced the decorative motifs of architecture at that time, including those in Banyumas, which is geographically located in Central Java. Symbol of a roll of lotus vines growing from a stump. It can be seen at the bottom of the pillar that continues to fill up to the middle of the large pillar. Then the concept taken from the literary work that is manifested in the relief is a transformation process^[42]. The lotus vines, the idea of which is taken from the Purana books^[27] can be seen as an 'adaptive action' on the Pillar of the Saka Tunggal Mosque because it involves re-interpretation, re-creation even though the visual form is slightly changed, as seen in the ornament of the Menara Kudus Mosque^[43]. The pillar of the Saka Tunggal mosque touches on the basic concept of visualization in its creative process.

4.4. Local Culture and Religion Cohesion

Visual ornaments on the pillars of the mosque serve not only as decorative elements in places of worship but also as symbols of sacred cultural identity, maintaining the continuity of the community's aesthetic identity. Interviews with caretakers and traditional figures reveal that these ornaments are seen as local symbols of a spiritual nature, guarded and cared for by the descendants of Kyai Mustolih, not only for their aesthetic value but also due to their cultural and historical significance. In addition to

the linguistic aspect, the Saka Tunggal pillar also contains a vibrant semiotic message. The ornaments on the pillars (which have been renovated) are painted in various colors that surround each side; colors such as red, green, yellow, and white are representations of natural elements, and the colors themselves are part of traditional Javanese symbols. The symbols of vines, the sun, and symmetrical intersecting motifs signify continuity, protection, and cosmic harmony^[5,44]. When Classical Arabic script and Latin script are presented side by side with traditional decorative motifs, a visual cohesion is formed between Islamic religious values, Eastern (Arabic script) and Western

(Latin script) civilizations, and local cultural identity. The visual semiotics on this pillar function as a bridge between heaven and earth, connecting the transcendent dimension (God and the Prophet, intention, and the after-life) with the worldly dimension (history, time, and humanity). This cohesion reflects the approach of Nusantara Islam and Apogee Islam, both of which are descendants of Kyai Mustolih and his descendants, who care for and revive the Saka Tunggal Mosque, integrating spiritual symbols with traditional visual language to produce a religious expression that is not only meaningful verbally but also aesthetically and spiritually.



Figure 3. Sri Tanjung Relief of Surowono Temple: (a) Sidapaksa meets Sri Tanjung one night and falls in love; (b) Sidapaksa sitting by the river, regretting having killed his wife; (c) Sri Tanjung's body being carried across the river by a big fish; (d) Kalika, Durga's servant, returns Sri Tanjung to life, a-d; (e) Sidapaksa saying goodbye to his wife; (f) Sri Tanjung at the gate of heaven, e-f^[41].

5. Discussion

The central pillar of the Saka Tunggal Cikakak Mosque contains a sacred identity that will be visualized. Based on direct observation and visual documentation (**Figure 4**), four ornamental elements were found arranged vertically from top to bottom, namely: (1) Lotus Vine Ornament (Top), (2) Wing Stylization Ornament, (3) Sun

Ornament in Arabic script, on the front and right side, Latin script on the left and (4) Lotus Vine Ornament with a slightly larger size (bottom). The four ornamental elements were analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, which involves two levels: level 1—reality—denotation, the signifier (connotation) / Signified (myth), and level 2—culture—cultural connotation and myth, and contextualized ethno-linguistically, especially in Arabic script.

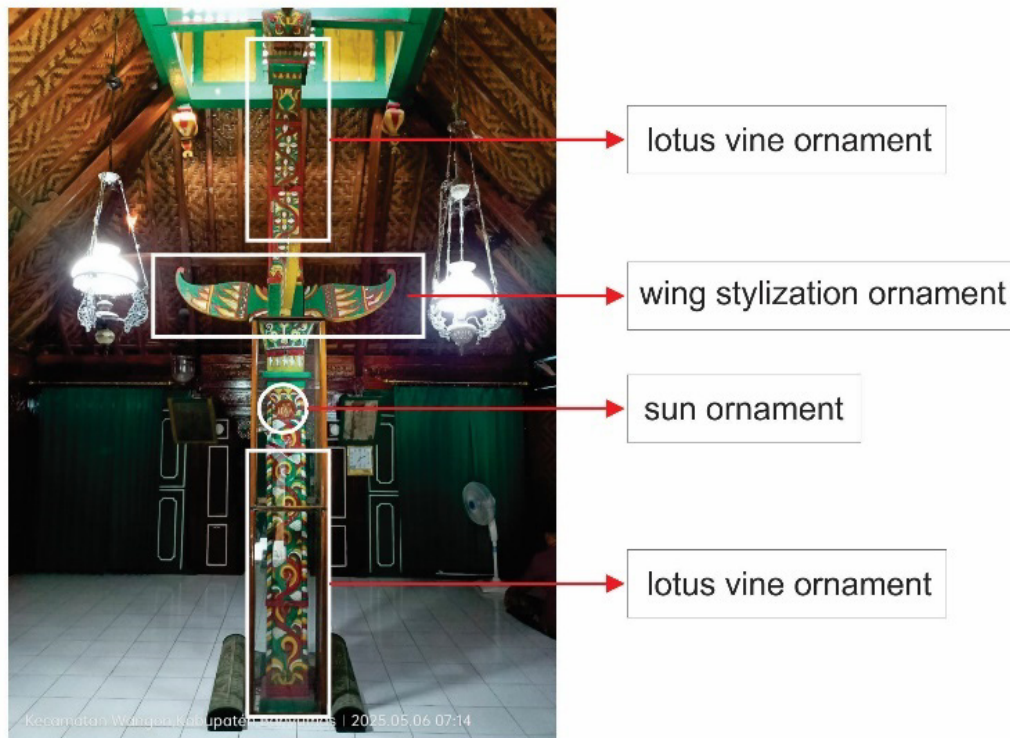


Figure 4. The main structural pillar of the saka tunggal mosque which is 736 years old.

Analysis of the main pillar ornaments of the Saka Tunggal Mosque reveals a layered structure of meaning, as stated by Roland Barthes, comprising two levels of significance: level 1, denotative (reality), and level 2, connotative-myth (cultural myth). The central pillar, as the center of support for the mosque structure, not only functions architecturally but also as a cosmological and cultural symbol in Islamic-Javanese society.

5.1. Lotus Vine Ornament (Upper Part)

• **Level 1 (Denotation):** The lotus vine is a visual representation of the lotus plant that has long, spreading petals and leaves. Carved with flowing patterns, this vine represents the natural elements and aesthetics of flora, a

typical decorative variety influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism. The Lotus vine, which dominates all the carved elements from bottom to top, is a prominent feature in the mosque pillar.

• **Level 2 (Connotation and Cultural Myth):** In Javanese and Hindu-Buddhist cultures, the Lotus symbolizes purity and spiritual enlightenment in Hindu-Buddhist teachings. The Lotus flower has roots stuck in the mud but grows and blooms beautifully. In Nusantara Islam, this symbol is adopted as a representation of purity of heart and sincere intention in worship.

• The lotus, often associated with purity, enlightenment, and purity of heart, takes on a new symbolism in the Islamic-Javanese context. It becomes a symbol of

the growth of faith. This force continues to develop and spread, much like the widespread preaching and the establishment of mosques that marked the entry of Islam and its acceptance by the local population on the island of Java. Its mythology reinforces spiritual values and the continuity between nature and God, enlightening with its profound symbolism.

5.2. Wing Stylization Ornament

• **Level 1 (Denotation):** The shape of the pillar with stylized wings resembles the flying movement of a bird, and the bird in question is the iconic bird in Hindu mythology, namely Garuda. In Hindu-Buddhist culture, Garuda is the vehicle of the god Vishnu and symbolizes strength, courage, and virtue. The stylization of the wings is symmetrical and curved upwards as if flapping its wings. In the context of the Archipelago, Garuda has undergone a process of "localization of meaning." The use of Garuda's wings in Saka Tunggal can be interpreted as a form of cultural acculturation.

• **Level 2 (Connotation and Cultural Myth):** Wings are a symbol of freedom and spiritual ascension. In Javanese cosmology, the wings of the Garuda can be associated with 'ngraga sukma' or the ascension of the soul to the spiritual realm. In the interview discussion, the locals interpreted the shape of the wings on the pillars of the mosque as angel wings or a symbol of an angel or guardian of the mosque. This connotation highlights the role of the pillars of the mosque not only as physical support but also as a symbol of support for the existence of the religion itself, or as a spiritual guardian. As explained in the results section, the use of the symbols of wings and lotus vines is not just "differentiating." However, it is a process of reinterpreting old symbols in an Islamic context. Moreover, shows that Islam in Java spread not by erasing culture but by processing it into a means of preaching. This is in accordance with the approach of the Wali Songo, especially Sunan Kalijaga, who employed various forms of wayang, gamelan, and Hindu-Buddhist symbols to introduce Islam. However, what is unique in 1288 has not entered the Kalijaga era. The use of Garuda wings and lotus vines on the single saka is not intended to match or differentiate from Hindu-Buddhist symbols, but rather as a form of cultural and spiritual transition. These symbols are

given new meanings in accordance with Islamic values, yet they still maintain a visual form familiar to Javanese society at that time.

5.3. Sun Ornament with Arabic/Latin Script

• **Level 1 (Denotation):** The shape of the sun-centered (located right in the middle) on the front and with carvings that imply the shape of the surrounding Light and Arabic script writing inside, indicating the unique power of light and spirituality (picture 5). The written script is the Upper part, which displays the writing "هَجْرَةُ" (read: "*hijratun*"). Middle part: displays the Arabic numeral "١٢٨٨" (read: 1288 *Hijriyah*), referring to the year of construction of the single saka mosque. The year 1288 AD (Gregorian) is approximately equivalent to the year 687 Hijriyah. Lower part: Arabic writing is written: "النِّيَّةُ" (read *al-niyyatu*). Lower part: Arabic writing "النِّيَّةُ" (read *al-niyyatu*). On the right ornament, Arabic writing "النِّيَّةُ رَأْسُ الْعَمَلِ" (read: *al-niyyah ra'sra's al-'amal*). On the left is written Latin text, which is read as 01874, referring to the year 1874 AD, and the ornament on the back (facing the mosque's mihrab/qibla) is empty, without any writing.

• **Level 2 (Connotation and Cultural Myth):** The sun is the source of Light and life; the symbol of the sun is also the destroyer of darkness; if associated with the upper and lower lotus vine ornaments, then the symbol of the sun gives life to the lotus vine plant. The sun ornament is also on the four sides of the pillar, (Figure 5) which symbolizes Light in the four directions of the wind, where culturally, it is associated with (نور) or nur (divine Light) in Islam. The connotation strengthens the position of Allah as the source of truth and is present in all aspects of life, from right to left, front to back, top to bottom, or in other words, the existence of the Light of divinity is pervasive throughout nature.

• **EthnoLinguistics:** The Arabic and Latin scripts found on the decorative elements of the Single pillar of the mosque represent an integration of Islamic identity with the local context of the Cikakak Banyumas community. The script not only functions phonetically but also has a sacred appearance, although it does not deny that if the script is described, it is highly multi-interpretable. Ethno-linguistically, the use of Arabic and Latin scripts shows an effort at cultural transliteration, where local identity is accepted and merged with the liturgical language of Islam,

making Arabic writing a symbol of faith in Islam, not just a text. This script also plays a role as a marker of religious identity, namely Islam. However, the ornamental forms on

the pillars are Hindu-Buddhist symbols, and they distinguish between the sacred and the profane in the traditional Islamic-Javanese architectural space.



Figure 5. Sun ornament on the central pillar of the single saka mosque (The pillar is covered with glass to prevent visitors from touching the mosque pillar directly).

5.4. Lotus Vine (Bottom End)

• **Level 1 (Denotation):** The tendrils that reappear at the very bottom of the pillar show a similar visual pattern to the top.

• **Level 2 (Connotation and Cultural Myth):** The repetition of the lotus tendrils creates a vertical symmetry that shows a spiritual cycle: from the earth (roots) to the sky (top) and back to the earth. The cultural myth here shows the principle of spiritual wholeness and the continuity of faith throughout the cycle of human life, which always returns to God. The combination of the two forms a visual narrative that spans from earth to sky, from worldliness to divinity, in line with Javanese philosophy that considers buildings as miniature cosmoses (macrocosm-microcosm).

The findings reveal that the central pillar ornament of the Saka Tunggal Mosque embodies a sacred identity with aesthetic elements, rich in complex layers of meaning. These meanings reflect local Islamic values, Javanese symbolism, and cultural-linguistic integration in the traditional architecture of the Saka Tunggal Mosque. Roland Barthes' analysis allows for a two-layer reading of the meaning of the ornaments and scripts on the single pillar (denotation and myth). At the same time, the ethnolinguistic approach

strengthens the symbolic dimension of the script in the unique local context of the Cikakak tourist village. There is a significant difference between the lotus tendril ornaments at the top and bottom of the single pillar of the Saka Tunggal Mosque. The difference lies not only in the shape or location but also in the philosophical and symbolic meaning contained therein. The lower part is more down to earth and rooted (also larger), while the upper part is more spiritual and transcendent. Both form a unified narrative about the spiritual journey of humans in Javanese teachings that blend with local Islamic values.

6. Conclusion

This study reveals that the sacred identity of the single pillar ornament (Saka Tunggal) at the Saka Tunggal Mosque in Cikakak Wangon Village, Banyumas, serves not only as an architectural element but also as a symbolic manifestation of the local community's sacred identity. Through an ethnolinguistic and semiotic approach, it was found that each visual element—both motifs, shapes, and layouts—contains a deep meaning that reflects Islamic values, local wisdom, and the historical narrative of Banyumas culture, especially the influence of the entry of Islam in early Java where the influence of the Hindu-Buddhist

Kingdom (Singasari-Majapahit) was still quite strong. Ethnolinguistically, the terminology and expressions written on the Saka Tunggal Pillar are the sacred identity of the mosque related to the philosophical meaning of the oneness of God (tawhid) which according to residents living around the mosque, they see the mosque's Single Pillar like the letter *Alif* (ا), standing upright, which can support the roof of the mosque as a unity of the people, as well as the spirituality of the Javanese Islamic tradition, especially Abohe Islam.

Meanwhile, semiotically, the ornaments on the single pillar of the mosque contain visual signs that indicate the syncretism between Islamic symbols and local culture, such as floral patterns with depictions of lotus vines, stylized forms of Garuda wings, and the use of red, white, yellow, green colors that have natural and spiritual meanings. The symbolism of the single pillar as the axis mundi in the Javanese spatial cosmological tradition, such as "*Kiblat papat lima pancer*," emphasizes that this mosque is not only a place of worship but also a spiritual and social center that unites the profane and sacred worlds. The sacred identity visualized through this ornament demonstrates how the Muslim community of Cikakak village preserves its cultural heritage through traditional methods continually renewing its visual presence in a distinctive and meaningful way. Thus, the results of this study confirm that the ornaments influenced by Singasari-Majapahit on the single pillar of the Saka Tunggal Mosque represent a sacred identity that is collectively known in society, which is formed from the intersection of religion, language, culture, and belief. This reinforces the Saka Tunggal Mosque's position as a significant symbol in the religious and cultural landscape of Banyumas, given its age, which is also hundreds of years old.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, S.H.Y; methodology, S.H.Y; validation, F.R. and J.; formal analysis, S.H.Y; investigation, S.H.Y : F.R.; resources, J.; A.T.A.: data curation, J.; writing—original draft preparation, S.H.Y; writing—review and editing, F.R. and S.H.Y.; visualization, J.; A.T.A.: supervision, S.H.Y. and IGN.T.M.; project administration, J. and IGN.T.M. All authors have read and agreed to the pub-

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The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

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