

The Traditional Sekaten Ceremony at the Kasunanan Palace in Surakarta: A Reflection of Islamic Culture

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Abstract

Purpose - This study examines the Sekaten ceremony at the Kasunanan Palace in Surakarta and Yogyakarta as a reflection of Javanese-Islamic civilization. It aims to analyze the religious significance of this tradition in commemorating the birthday of Prophet Muhammad SAW and the Islamic New Year.

Design/Methodology/Approach - A qualitative approach was used, combining traditional methods like observation, interviews, and documentation with modern digital ethnography, including the analysis of videos and TikTok content.

Findings - The research shows that Sekaten bridges 16th-century Javanese roots with deep Islamic values. While aesthetic elements like Gamelan Guntur Madu and Guntur Sari remain central, the use of agricultural products, such as tumpeng and jodhang to symbolizes communal gratitude for a prosperous life. These rituals function as a reflection of faith, allowing the Javanese community to unite in a religious and cultural celebration.

Originality/Value - This article highlights the resilience of ancient traditions in the digital age. By integrating modern social media platforms like TikTok into the study of a centuries-old ritual, it provides a unique perspective on how Islamic civilization maintains its meaning amidst globalization.

Keywords: Sekaten, Islamic Civilization, Javanese Tradition, Prophet Muhammad Saw., Cultural Reflection.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Culture is the entire way of life that develops and is shared by a group of people, consisting of systems of knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, customary law, and behaviors passed down from generation to generation (Koentjaraningrat, 1982). As part of this cultural heritage, traditional ceremonies serve as rituals performed to mark important events such as births, marriages, or deaths (Hikmah, 2013). In Indonesia, these ceremonies are incredibly diverse, ranging from *Ngaben* in Bali to *Tedak Siten* and *Siraman* in Java. Today, these cultures continue to evolve as they enter the era of globalization (Irfani, 2025).

In Java, where the majority of the population is Muslim, religious and cultural lives are deeply intertwined. The palaces of Surakarta and Yogyakarta provide a vital platform for preserving this harmony, contributing significantly to the protection of dances, cultural artifacts, and historical manuscripts (Zahrah, 2025). The most prominent tradition is Sekaten, a series of annual events held to commemorate the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad SAW and the Islamic New Year. Etymologically, "Sekaten" originates from the word *syahadatain* (the two sentences of the shahada), reflecting a method of peaceful dawah that combines religious teachings with Javanese culture (Utami, 2011).

The celebration is characterized by vibrant processions featuring various agricultural products. These include *tumpeng* (rice cones) served with *urap*, as well as crops such as peanuts, eggplant, cucumber, mustard greens, tomatoes, chilies, and chayote. Traditional snacks like *jadah*, *wajik*, and other Javanese dishes are placed on a *jodang* (traditional platform). The central symbol, the *Gunungan*, represents the King's gratitude and a feast held to entertain his subjects. This

ceremony, beginning with the playing of heirloom gamelan and ending with the *Grebeg Mulud*, provides a peaceful view of life where a "comfortable heart" is obtained from faith and a clean soul.

Despite the many descriptions of Sekaten as a festival, there is a significant **research gap** regarding how this ancient ritual remains a primary reflection of Islamic civilization in the modern, digital era. Most studies focus solely on the historical or tourist aspects of the event. The **novelty** of this research lies in its analysis of Sekaten through the lens of modern social media documentation, such as TikTok and video archives, to see how the original "gentle dawah" of Sunan Kalijaga persists today. By examining the shift from traditional ritual to digital expression, this study reveals how Islamic identity and Javanese tradition maintain their unity and cooperation in a globalized world.

II. METHOD

The method used in this study of the Sekaten tradition reflects Islamic culture. A descriptive qualitative method was used to gather data from field observations and in-depth interviews, as well as documents obtained from photographs, books, YouTube, videos, TikTok, and other sources. Data were obtained through data triangulation and source triangulation. In-depth interview methods can be used to obtain data by grouping and selecting data that is relevant to the research. Data sources can include primary and secondary data, as well as tertiary data, which can be both primary and secondary. The data obtained must be consistent with the fieldwork and valid to provide a classification that truly exists and is truly real. (Sugiyono, 2020)

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Culture represents the entire way of life shared by a group, encompassing systems of knowledge, beliefs, arts, and behaviors passed down through generations (Koentjaraningrat, 1982). In Indonesia, this is manifested through diverse traditional ceremonies that mark pivotal life events or religious milestones (Hikmah, 2013). One of the most significant Islamic-Javanese traditions is the Sekaten ceremony, an annual event held by the Surakarta and Yogyakarta palaces to commemorate the birthday of Prophet Muhammad SAW.

Data gathered from the field indicates that the term "Sekaten" is etymologically linked to *Syahadatain* (the two sentences of the Islamic creed), serving as a historical dawah method to spread Islam by integrating religious teachings into Javanese cultural frameworks (Utami, 2011). The ceremony begins with the playing of heirloom gamelan sets (*Guntur Madu* and *Guntur Sari*) and concludes with the *Grebeg Mulud*. This tradition demonstrates a peaceful integration of Islamic values, such as tolerance, mutual cooperation, and kinship into Javanese society, strengthening the palace's identity as a guardian of Islamic culture (Subqi et al., 2015). For the community, Sekaten is a reflection of a "clean soul" and persistent faith, providing a sense of spiritual comfort and peace (Hikmah, 2013).

Discussion

The traditional Sekaten ceremony is a prominent example of an Islam-based culture that bridges religious teachings and Javanese tradition. Derived from the word *syahadatain*, Sekaten historically served as an invitation for the community to embrace Islam. The guardians of Islam (*Wali Songo*) utilized culture to invite people toward the faith without violence, creating a sense of comfort and cultural familiarity (Subqi et al., 2015). As a unique celebration, Sekaten is particularly important for Muslims in Java as it commemorates the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, blending spiritual devotion with local identity (Zahrah, 2025).

The celebration typically features various religious and artistic events, including the recitation of blessings (*shalawat*), *dhikr* (remembrance of God), and communal prayers, alongside traditional performances like shadow puppetry and gamelan. This richness is further enhanced by a night market selling traditional crafts and foods, demonstrating how Islam interacts with local Javanese culture to create engaging celebrations (Irfani, 2025). This interaction reflects the cultural

dimensions of globalization, where local traditions maintain their essence while articulating broader religious values (Cvetkovich & Kellner, 1997).

Witnessing Sekaten offers an experience deeply linked to the historical arrival of Islam in Java during the 15th century. The term "Sekaten" itself is widely believed to come from *syahadat*—the recitation of the two sentences of the shahada which forms the foundation of the Islamic faith. During the reign of the *Wali Songo*, these cultural festivities were used to attract the Javanese people, who were predominantly Hindu and Buddhist, by promoting Islamic teachings through familiar artistic expressions like music and dance (Subqi et al., 2015). This strategy highlights the importance of cultural context in religious propagation, as seen in the resilience of these rituals through the centuries (Hikmah, 2013).

Historically, the roots of Sekaten can be traced back to 1437 AD during the reign of Sultan Raden Patah of Demak, and it was further established in Surakarta in 1478 AD under Sultan Hadiningrat, Pakubuwono I. This long history confirms that Sekaten has become a vital tradition in Surakarta, intended to strengthen the faith of Muslims while preserving the history of the *Dumadosing Gendhing Sekaten* at the palace (Fimansyah et al., 2025). The continuity of this ceremony symbolizes the emerging world order where local transitions maintain historical significance (Prasad & Prasad, 2006).

Preserving Javanese culture with Islamic roots is essential for several reasons: respecting ancestors, recognizing identity, and developing tolerance. By maintaining this legacy, the community strengthens its cultural identity and promotes values of peace, compassion, and simplicity (Purwati, 2017). Approaching the Creator through such ceremonies makes life more comfortable and fosters unity among the people. This cooperation and sense of togetherness ensure that cultural preservation remains active in a plural society (Purwati, 2017).

Ultimately, the foundation of Islam in Javanese culture is expected to integrate Islamic values into daily life, revive noble morals such as honesty and justice, and promote harmony between religious communities (Black, 2006). Following the example of Sunan Kalijaga, the goal is to invite people toward goodness in a gentle and cultured manner without violence. This harmony between religion and culture provides a clear direction for a healthy, prosperous, and peaceful life (Robertson, 1992). The result is a cultural life that is in complete harmony with humans who love religion and seek spiritual peace (Taylor, 1987).

IV. CONCLUSION

One of the cultures based on Islam is the sekaten culture. The sekaten ceremony is one of Sunan Kalijaga's ways of inviting people to convert to Islam in a comfortable and peaceful way. The sekaten ceremony procession has Javanese gamelan on the right and left sides with the gamelan lanang and gamelan putri, Nyi guntur sari and Ki guntur madu being played alternately. There are various processions of food, mountains of secondary crops, mountains of fruit, even nasi Gudangan and various agricultural products which are owned by the King as a form of thanksgiving for the abundant agricultural products. Celebration of the Prophet's Birthday or Islamic New Year. The welfare of the community is guaranteed and life is gemah ripah loh jinawi. A form of Islamic culture with the aim of providing a feeling of being able to embrace Islam comfortably and calmly. Establishing an attitude of mutual respect, respect, mutual help, unity, establishing friendship between religions and Islam. The development of Javanese culture based on Islam continues to exist and is sustainable.

V. REFERENCES

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