

ICHONOGRAPHIC: ANALYSIS OF MERAK TEMPLE IN KARANGNONGKO KLATEN

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Abstrak

Merak Temple is one of the relics of the Mataram Kuno Kingdom located in Candi Hamlet, Karangnongko Village, Karangnongko District, Klaten Regency. Merak Temple has a variety of iconography contained in the temple building from the foot of the temple, the body of the temple, and the roof of the temple. This study aims to find out the variety of iconography in Merak Temple as a study material on the religious background and architectural characteristics of Merak Temple. The writing method used is descriptive-explanative. The results found that Merak Temple has a Hindu background with iconographic evidence that shows the characteristics of Hindu-style temples. The iconography in the Merak Temple complex shows that the temples in the complex have a Hindu background. This is evidenced by the iconography of the various ornaments attached to the temple building, namely the Ganesha statue, the Durga Mahisasura Mardini statue, the Nandi, Yoni, and the relief that tells the story of the ocean in Yoni.

Keywords: History, Merak Temple, Iconography, Architecture.

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1. Introduction

The Classical Hindu-Buddhist era in Indonesia is estimated to have lasted from the 5th century to the early 16th century (Ardhana, I. K., & Wijaya, I. N. (2017). During this period, the influence of Hindu and Buddhist cultural elements was profoundly significant in various aspects of Indonesian society, particularly in religion and architecture. This influence is still evident today, especially through temple architecture. According to Munandar (2018), temples are one of the most notable architectural legacies of the Classical Hindu-Buddhist era. However, further research has refuted the opinions of Dutch archaeologists. Temples were not places for the deification of kings but were instead places of worship or shrines dedicated to gods and goddesses. Temples were

considered temporary abodes for the gods, serving as replicas of their actual celestial dwelling on Mount Mahameru. Therefore, temples were adorned with various carvings and reliefs that emulated the natural elements of mountains (Soekmono, 1973). Based on these scholarly arguments, it can be interpreted that temples served both as places of worship and as burial sites for kings or prominent figures of that time.

Temples are architectural masterpieces with distinctive characteristics that differentiate them from other structures (Malik, et. al., 2024). They can be classified based on their religious background into Hindu and Buddhist temples (Kim, 2024; Al-Ghananeem, 2022). This classification helps to identify the religious context surrounding a temple by examining its decorative elements (Moonkham, 2022). Therefore, an in-depth identification process is necessary to avoid misinterpretations regarding a temple's religious background.

Merak Temple is a relic of the Mataram Kuno Kingdom (Medang) located in Candi Hamlet, Karangnongko Village, Karangnongko District, Klaten Regency. The Merak Temple complex consists of a main temple and three perwara (subsidiary) temples accompanying the main temple. The main temple faces east, while the perwara temples face west. Merak Temple was first studied during the Dutch colonial period in Indonesia, around 1936, when an attempt was made to reconstruct its base, body, and roof. Restoration efforts continued from the colonial era to the Indonesian Republic, with three recorded restorations conducted by the Indonesian government in 2008, 2010, and 2011. These restorations involved archaeological research, stone recovery and anastylosis, mapping and measurement, rebuilding, conservation, and finishing (Wardhani, 2011).

Merak Temple is a relic from the Classical Hindu-Buddhist era in Indonesia, specifically from the Mataram Kuno Kingdom during the Central Javanese period, around the 8th to 9th centuries CE. The temple is situated within a residential area, making it easily recognizable by the local population. However, its location is somewhat distant from the main road, necessitating the installation of directional signs to guide visitors to the site.

Merak Temple possesses unique architectural features that merit further study. These distinctive characteristics are found in various parts of the temple, including its base, body, and roof, which are adorned with unique decorative elements that set it apart from other temples. The temple features various ornaments, including statues, reliefs, and antefixes (simbar). The identification of relief styles and statues within the temple can be conducted through iconographic analysis. Iconography is the study of recognizing, describing, classifying, and interpreting symbols, themes, and subject imagery in visual art. In a religious context, iconography is associated with depictions of religious figures or scenes that contain symbols, icons, and other signs with specific meanings within a given faith (Panyadewa, 2014). Moreover, iconography was crucial for artists of that time as a reference for creating divine statues or figures to be placed in temples or shrines.

Iconography is recognized across many religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, and traditional Chinese beliefs. The use of iconography is essential

for identifying religious figures or deities that serve as the focus of worship. Each deity or religious figure has distinctive attributes that differentiate them from others. These distinguishing elements can be observed in their depictions and the attributes associated with them.

For example, the iconography of Lord Ganesha is easily recognizable due to his elephant head and seated posture. His four hands hold specific attributes: the upper right hand carries an akshata (prayer beads), the upper left hand holds a parashu (battle axe), the lower right hand carries a danta (broken tusk), and the lower left hand holds a modaka (sweetmeat). His attire and ornaments include a jatamakuta (crown made of coiled hair) adorned with ardha-chandra-kapala, a prabhavali (halo) behind his head, and sometimes earrings (kundala), necklaces (mala), armlets (keyura), bracelets, anklets, a sacred thread (upavita) in the form of a snake, a belt, an unci, and a cloth. The base of the statue is usually a lotus (padma), but sometimes Ganesha is depicted seated or standing on a skull base known as kapalasana (Budiarto, 2021).

The iconographic analysis of Merak Temple is particularly intriguing, as this temple has been recently restored, making it a fascinating subject for further study. The profile of Candi Merak, consisting of one main temple and three perwara temples, also reveals that the complex was once enclosed by a surrounding wall, as evidenced by the remaining structure made of andesite stone. Merak Temple has unique architectural features and decorative elements, ranging from its base, body, and roof to its garbhagriha (inner sanctum). Therefore, this study focuses on the iconographic aspects of Merak Temple to provide a clearer picture of the temple, especially considering that many of its decorative elements have experienced erosion, affecting the interpretation of its iconography.

2. Method

This study uses an iconographic analysis method that begins with morphological analysis. Morphological analysis is the stage of depicting icons consisting of descriptions of both origin, location, shape, and size complemented by photos and images. The results of the description are used as data to be ready to be processed in further analysis according to the purpose of the research. Then the results are interpreted or interpreted. The results of the conclusions obtained are answers or solutions and problems formulated in the research. The stages in data collection for this study are by location surveys or direct field observations, documentation, literature studies, data analysis and final results.

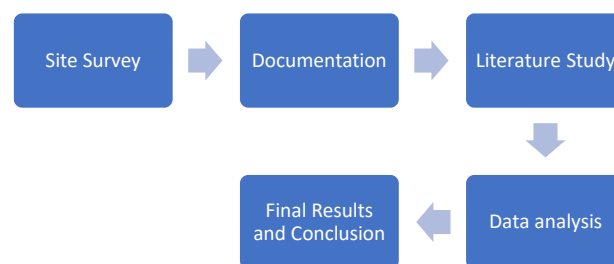


Figure 1. Flow of Research Stages.

Source: Author.

a. Site Survey

At the location survey stage, the aim is to obtain an initial picture of the condition of the Merak Temple complex. The location survey is useful for researchers to determine the method that is suitable for use as an analysis knife for the Merak Temple complex.

b. Documentation

The documentation is carried out to make it easier for researchers to analyze the condition of the Merak Temple complex and in anticipation if something happens in the Merak Temple complex that results in data distortion in the Merak Temple building. Documentation is necessary as supporting data in the analysis process.

c. Literature Study

Literature studies are conducted to obtain information from related literature. Such as journals, books, and archaeological reports in the form of the history of the discovery and restoration of Merak Temple.

d. Literature Study

Data analysis can be done after all data is collected with the existing iconographic analysis method in the Merak Temple complex starting from the foot of the temple, the body of the temple, and the roof of the temple. This analysis aims to find out the identity of the statue, namely providing the iconographic characteristics of the statue related to the attributes that mark the identity of the statue as a depiction of certain figures, including objects held in the hands, the shape of the crown, the completeness of clothing, the completeness of jewelry, the attitude (body, hands, feet), the ride, and the companions (pariwara), if present next to the main statue (Sukendar, 1999). Data analysis can be supported by various supporting literature such as religious books, Samhita, and books that have been translated.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Temples of Typical Buildings of the Hindu and Buddhist Classical Era in Indonesia

The development of architecture in Java in the classical era of Hinduism and Buddhism has undergone various changes ranging from the Mataram Kuno period to Majapahit. Typical architectural buildings of the classical Hindu and Buddhist era that we can still find are temple buildings. In the sense of a temple, it refers to a religious building that is a place of worship of ancient relics that originated from the Hindu-Buddhist civilization. This building is used as a place to worship gods and goddesses or to glorify Buddhas (Eni, 2017). However, the term temple is not only used by ordinary people to refer to worship buildings, sometimes ancient sites outside of religious activities in the Hindu and Buddhist times such as pathirtaan, gates, palaces or kedatons (palaces) and so on are also referred to as temples. This further strengthens the identity position of ancient relics in the Hindu and Buddhist periods.

One of the relics of the classical era of Hinduism and Buddhism that we can learn about is Merak Temple. This temple is suspected to be a relic of the Mataram Kuno kingdom which was once established in Central Java around the 8th century AD. This can be evidenced by the shape of the temple and the variety of ornaments that accompany it as a marker or characteristic of the profile of the temple building from a

certain royal era. The introduction of temple profile architecture is very important as one way to recognize temple buildings that are stylish or have a Hindu or Buddhist background. Especially during the Mataram Kuno kingdom, there were so many temple building relics that we can still see.

3.2. Iconographic Analysis on the Merak Temple Karangnongko Klaten at the Foot of the Main Temple

The condition of the Merak Temple complex has one main temple and three perwara temples or companions with the orientation of the main temple facing east and the perwara temple facing west. The Merak Temple complex is surrounded by a perimeter fence as evidenced by the rest of the fence structure made of andesite stone. The condition of the main temple after being reconstructed can be seen the profile of the temple starting from the foot of the temple, the body of the temple and the roof of the temple. Meanwhile, the condition of Perwara Temple has not been fully reconstructed. Temple reconstruction can be carried out if indeed some of the stone components that make up the temple building are found to be approximately 70%.

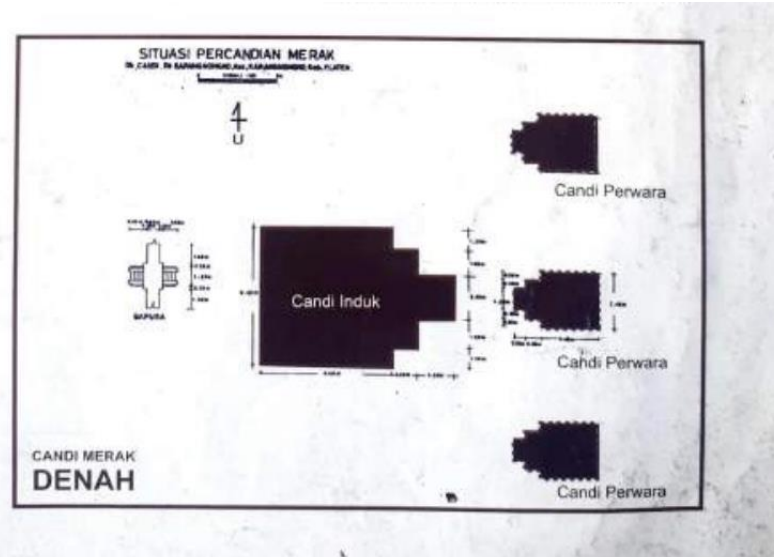


Figure 2. Map of Merak Temple.

Source: Balai Pelestarian Cagar Budaya Jawa Tengah (BPK Wilayah X).

The discussion about iconography at the Merak Temple began at the foot of the temple. The legs of Merak Temple referred to here are the main temple in the shape of a square, with a size of 8.38 x 8.38 meters with a temple foot display measuring 155 cm long, 160 cm wide, and on the cheeks of the stairs it measures 230 cm, 252 cm wide. The temple foot profile is a classic Central Javanese profile consisting of a flat frame (seam or list), half round or half round, and the side of the bell ojief, the height of the temple leg is 215 cm.

First, an analysis of the molding profile of the Main Temple in the Merak Temple complex. Molding on the temple is the bottom of the temple or the foot of the temple which is in the form of flat seams which is also known as the lower kumai.



Figure 3. Molding Profile of the Merak Temple Complex.

Source: Author.

Based on data in the field, the lower molding profile of the main temple in the Merak Temple complex is characterized by the style of the old classical era temple. It is based on the typical shape of the molding of a twisted semicircle. There is a similarity in appearance in each era of the temple. The Old Classic Era has a more plain profile shape such as flat planes, seams, minimal decorative variety on the profile, and the proportions of the profile are slightly curved but rigid (Rahadhian & Emmy, 2018). Then in terms of the variety of ornaments at the foot of the main temple in the Merak Temple complex, there are various decorative ornaments in the form of pilasters and decorative art of tendril patterns and tendrils like in the temple antephytic decoration. At the foot of the temple, there are usually also climbing stairs that have the cheeks of the stairs in the form of weak curls or right angles, there are also those in the form of the end of the makara, the end of the ikalan and the base of the head of the kala (Sukendar, 1999). In the main temple in the Merak Temple complex, there is also a staircase with both sides of the stairs having makara.



Figure 4. Makara at the main temple in the Merak Temple complex.

Source: Author.

The decoration on the cheeks of the stairs is in the form of ladder curls. A combination of birds and makara (birds whose position is standing in the open mouth

of the makara). Makara is a sea monster or the ruler of the sea. In Sanskrit terms, it can be identified as two animals combined; In the front it is in the form of an animal such as an elephant or crocodile, while in the back it is depicted as an aquatic animal, in the tail, such as a fish or dragon (Rahadhian & Emmy, 2018). Makara is structural because it is part of the temple steps and the temple entrance structure. Makara ornamental motifs can be found in temples of the Old Classic and Middle Classic eras.



Figure 5. Makara on the main temple in the Merak Temple complex from the side.

Source: Author.

Furthermore, the variety of ornaments at the foot of the main temple is the presence of pilasters or motifs shaped like pillars or columns. This pilaster means a structural impression on the temple, holding the weight or refuting another ornament on it. Pilasters are usually found at the foot of temples and are associated with other ornaments. This pilaster motif can be found in the Old Classic, Middle Classic, and Young Classic eras (Rahadhian & Emmy, 2018).



Figure 6. Pilasters at the foot of the main temple in the Merak Temple complex.

Source: Author.

It turns out that the pilaster motif is also found at the foot of the main temple in the Merak Temple complex. There are several pilaster motifs that can still be seen and

identified, most of which have been worn and damaged, due to natural factors and human actions. However, with the existence of several pilaster motifs that are still in relatively good condition, it has become authentic evidence of the variety of ornaments at the foot of the main temple.

Furthermore, to the north and south of the entrance stairs to the main temple, there are very unique relief panels, namely giant figures and kalpataru trees. However, this giant figure needs to be identified more carefully so that the relief can be identified to depict who in Hindu mythology. Relief is the art of sculpture and 3-dimensional carvings are usually made on stone. The form of carving is usually on temple buildings, temples, monuments, and ancient historical sites. These reliefs can be stand-alone carvings, or as part of a panel of other reliefs, forming a series of stories or teachings (Eni, 2017). The relief iconography on the north side of the entrance stairs to the main temple is that there is a figurine of a statue figure who is standing with a mace using his right hand with the position of the mace placed below to support his body, the figure has a physical characteristic of long hair that is curly or curly, ears using earrings, mustache, wearing shoulder scars and bracelets, canines that appear to come out of his mouth, wearing a necklace and a cloth that dangled down as pants that were tied under her belly. I assume this figure is a relief of the figure of Mahakala.

The variety of ornaments on the north side of the main temple staircase of the Merak Temple complex is the relief of the kalpataru tree which is classified as a floral motif. Kalpataru or Kalpawrksha is the tree of all-time kahyangan, where all hope hangs (Rahadhian & Emmy, 2018). In the relief on the north side of the main temple, a kalpataru or kalpawrksha tree is carved without being guarded by the creatures of the Kinara and Kinari. The Kalpataru tree has symbolic value regarding the upper world (heavenly) and in the lower world (human world). In addition, a purnakalasa motif was found on the north side of the stairs up the temple. However, this purnakalasa is only visible and a few flowers come out of the jar.



Figure 7. Kalpataru, Purnakalasa, and Mahakala Giant Figurines.

Source: Author.

Another variety of ornaments at the foot of the main temple of the Merak Temple complex is simbar or known as antefix. Usually this antefix is located in the corner of the temple. However, this is not patent, it could be that the antefix is a different position. Antefix is a building element that functions as an exterior decoration. It is often found on temple buildings in the form of a tapered triangle. Because it is part of the structure, the antefix cannot be separated from the building in question (Permana, 2016).



Figure 8. Antefix at the foot of the main temple.

Source: Author.

A variety of geometric patterned was also found at the foot of the main temple of the Merak Temple complex. The motif consists of two shapes, namely the square shape and the circle shape. These forms have an important meaning in the belief system that characterizes the religious background of the temple building was established. In Satapatha Brahmin (Hindu) states that the square shape symbolizes the heavenly and the circle symbolizes the earthly. Squares are static, stable, immovable and changeable. It symbolizes eternal or eternal heaven. However, in Buddhism, life is a process of the wheel of dharma that continues to rotate. Thus, a circle symbolizes something that has no beginning and no end, a process that runs continuously, transcendental and abstract (Rahadhian & Emmy, 2018).

There is a form of ornamental motif in this parent temple, namely the motif of a blooming flower with the shape of a circle and square flower petals. This is even more interesting when this ornamental motif is sculpted on a very narrow medium, but the expertise of Silpin, the maker of this temple ornamental variety, does need to be appreciated. Of course, there is a purpose behind the creation of these ornamental varieties. The arrangement of flowering flowers carved on the temple wall or the string of flowers that decorate the narrow frame can be referred to the heavenly garden whose flowers always bloom in the world of kahyangan. In various ancient Javanese literary works that describe the state of the gods' hyangan, it is always described that the garden where the angels and gods chatted was always filled with colorful merkar flowers of various types (Munandar, 2018).



Figure 9. A variety of decorative geometric motifs of squares and circles on the legs of the main temple.

Source: Author.

3.3. Iconographic Analysis on the Temple Body

In the body of the main temple there are various ornaments that can be found and statues that are placed on the body of the temple. There are niches in which there are usually statues of gods or figures according to the religious background of the temple was erected. In the main temple in the Merak Temple complex, there are 3 niches. The northern niche has a statue of Durga Mahisasuramardini, the west side niche has a statue of Lord Ganesha and the niche on the south side is empty. Based on the pattern of arranging the statue on the niche, it can be ascertained that the south side niche is an Agastya or Shiva Mahaguru statue. The three statues are statues of the Hindu pantheon.



Figure 10. Statue of Durga Mahisasuramardini in the north side niche.

Source: Author.

Durga is a figure created by the gods, with the intention of defeating the giant Mahisasura who intends to expel the gods from their abode. The magic of Mahisasura is very extraordinary, even its magic is defeated by Indra as the leader of the gods and Kumara (Kartikeya) as the head of the kahyangan guards. Therefore, the gods agreed to harness their power to defeat the Mahisasura, in one form of a figure who had all the divine powers (Budiarto, 2021).

The identification of the figure of Durga Mahisasuramardini can be known by the iconographic analysis of the statue in question, namely Durga with a standing position on the back of Mahisa or a giant in the form of a buffalo that has been conquered by Durga. Then the hand gesture holding the weapon used to defeat Mahisasura. The condition of the statue of Durga Mahisasuramardini has lost its head and part of its hands. However, the statue can still be recognized that the statue is indeed Durga Mahisasuramardini.

Furthermore, the identification of the iconography of the statue in the western recess of the main temple, namely the Ganesha statue. This statue is very easy to identify with the iconography attached to the statue. Ganesha is one of the deities depicted in a teriomorphic form, which is a depiction of a human being who has an elephant's head (Budiarto, 2021). This depiction makes it easier if later a statue is found that has physical characteristics as mentioned above. Ganesha is an elephant-headed deity who is worshipped as the deea of knowledge and the god of removing obstacles, and kartikeya (Skanda or kumara), as a deity who is often depicted as a peacock child and who has the status of a god of war (Soekmono, 1973).

The Ganesha statue on the west side of the main temple of the Merak Temple complex is in a poor condition. There are several parts of the body that are damaged. However, it can still be recognized that the statue is indeed a statue of the god Ganesha. The condition of the statue of the god Ganesha has a broken right hand, the trunk and ivory are missing, the chakra girder on the back of the statue is worn out. The position of the statue sits cross-legged on the padma. Most of the positions of the Ganesha statues found during the Mataram Kuno kingdom were sitting on the padma. However, there is a statue of Ganesha whose body is not sitting but standing, namely the Ganesha statue in Karang Kates, Malang.



Figure 11. Statue of Lord Ganesha in the western side of the main temple.

Source: Author.

The south side of the niche on the main temple in the Merak Temple complex was not found with statues or blanks. If you refer to some of the statues found in this main temple, it can be confirmed that the statue that fills the niche on the south side is the Agastya or Shiva Mahaguru statue. Agastya statues have distinctive attributes attached to them. Agastya is a rishi (rishi), which in some sources is mentioned as one of the saptaresi groups. His task was to spread Hinduism to the South (from India), including the Malacca Peninsula and Indonesia. Because of his great service in spreading the Shiva religion, Agastya is placed as a representation of Shiva. This can be seen from the characteristics of Agastya who use the attributes of Shiva, ranging from jatamakuta, aksamala, camara, kamandalu to tridents. The characteristic of Agastya's receipt can be seen in his depiction as an old man with a mustache and a bushy beard (Budiarto, 2021).



Figure 12. The southern side niche of the main temple.

Source: Author.

Next, we will discuss the entrance gate of the temple or the door leading to the garbagraha or the inner chamber of the main temple. Above the temple gate there is a variety of typical kala headdresses without a lower jaw. The kala head or Kirtimukha is usually placed in front of the main gate of the pincu roof entrance of the temple with the purpose of guarding the gate and warding away evil creatures (Rahadhian & Emmy, 2018). The head is depicted with the condition of the canines coming out, the two eyes bulging and on the left and right sides there are kahyangan creatures. The style of the statue in the parent temple in the Merak Temple complex is classified as an old classical style.



Figure 13. The head of Kala or Kirtimukha in front of the main gate of the roof of the entrance of the main temple.

Source: Author.

3.4. Iconographic Analysis of the Temple Roof

The roof of the temple consists of three levels, each level with a square plan decorated with 12 niches. The niches are empty, only one of the niches has a sculptural relief sitting on the padmasana (Istari, 2015). If we observe that the decorations on the first, second, and third levels are constructive decorations, this can be seen in the shape of the tower, roof niches and cymbals or antefixes. It can be seen that in each antefix there are niches that contain decorations of statues of figures or half-body figures that cannot be recognized, possibly the figures in the kahyangan because the roof of the temple is a representation of the kahyangan where the gods live.

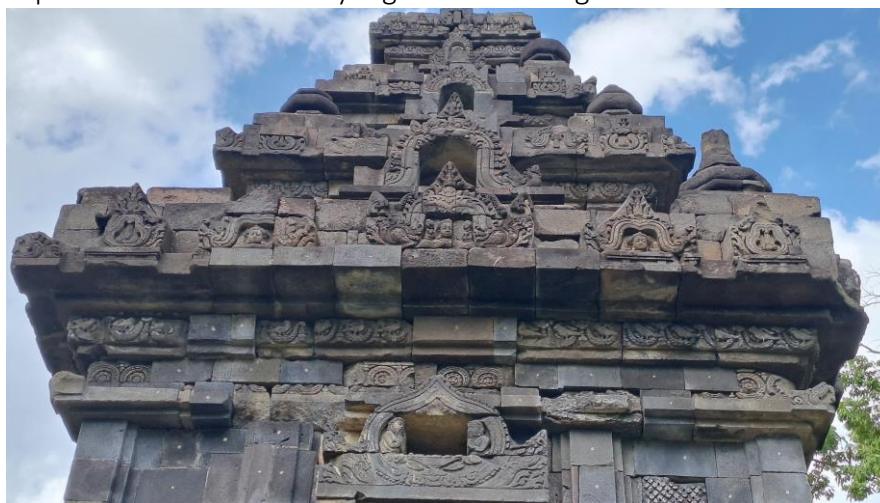


Figure 14. The roof of the main temple in the Merak Temple complex.

Source: Author.

Furthermore, an analysis of the iconography in the garbagraha room of the main temple. In the room of the main temple there is a yoni which has a variety of unique decorations. Yoni has a variety of decorative reliefs of snakes or dragons, turtles or akupa, and nandi located under the spout of the yoni. Based on this variety of ornaments, I assume that the main temple in the Merak Temple complex depicts the story of the stirring of the ocean carried out by the gods to get amerta water or water of eternity. The story of the stirring of the ocean is known as the Story of Samudramantana.



Figure 15. Reliefs of Turtles, Nandi, and Dragons under the spout of yoni.

Source: Author.



Figure 16. Yoni inside the main temple of the Merak Temple complex.

Source: Author.

3.5. Analysis of the Iconography of Perwara Temple in the Merak Temple Complex

In the Merak Temple complex, there are three perwara temples that surround the main temple. However, the condition of the Perwara temple has not been reconstructed or restored in its entirety, only the ruins remain. In one of the Perwara temples there is a statue of the god's ride. The ride is a ride from the gods. Usually in the Hindu-oriented Perwara temple, the Perwara temple contains statues of the trimurti gods such as the Nandi statue which is a ride from Lord Shiva, a swan statue from the Brahmin god, and a garuda statue is a ride from Lord Vishnu. This is in harmony with the three main gods in Hinduism or the Trimurti. However, at the Perwara temple in the Merak Temple complex, only nandi statues were found.



Figure 17. Perwara Temple Ruins.

Source: Nusantarapedia.net.

4. Conclusion

The iconography in the Merak Temple complex shows that the temples in the complex have a Hindu background. This is evidenced by the iconography of the various ornaments attached to the temple building, namely the Ganesha Statue, the Durga Mahisasura Mardini statue, the Nandi, Yoni, and the relief that tells the story of the ocean in Yoni. Then, supported by the accompanying temples or perwara in the Merak Temple complex which totals three pieces, although it has not been fully reconstructed, it has strengthened that the temples in the Merak Temple complex are temples with a Hindu background.

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