

Sunan Gresik in Picture

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Sunan Gresik in Picture-Story: The Construction of a Myth

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Abstract

In the media of picture-story, with limited historical facts, the myth of Malik Ibrahim as Sunan Gresik creates in a way that would reveal the situation of Islamic culture in Java. Supported by historical backgrounds as the politic turmoil of Majapahit, the establishment of Gresik as an important port-city, and the contemporary pilgrimage tradition which originated from ancient beliefs, the picture-story represents the ideological struggles: while the ancient beliefs could only live in the domination of Islam, the existence of Islam in Java could established only in the pre-Islam way. These two sides became many, as in the real politic the wave of “purification” of Islam take the opportunity of the situation.

Keywords: myth, connotations, negotiation, ideological struggle.

1. Background: The Myth in Picture-Story.

In the Nine Saints (Wali Sanga) stories, the figure Sunan Gresik always mentioned as the first one, or the oldest. It is based on a fact, that there is an old grave in Gerbang Wetan (East Gate), in the city of Gresik, in the name of Malik Ibrahim, that dated 822 Hijriah, the Islamic calendar, which is the year 1419 in the dominant Christian calendar. Actually, there is no single historical evidence, that Malik Ibrahim in that grave is really one of the legendary Nine Saints whom were credited to spread Islamic teaching across the island of Java. Scientific research by scholars as far as 1913, even not focused on Malik Ibrahim, but on the nature of Javanese history writings, concluded that the story of Malik Ibrahim is forced to be connected with the pioneering of the Islamization of Java (Djajadiningrat, 1985 : 278).

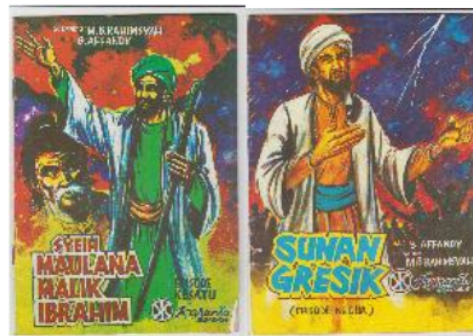
Another statement, from a research about old Islamic graves in Tralaya, East Java, mentioned that if Malik Ibrahim regarded as the main figure of the proselytization of Islam in Java is ought to be doubtful, because it is happen far more earlier in East Java. It is possible that Malik Ibrahim maybe charismatic enough to invite people to convert to Islam, but the still very good condition of Arabic inscription on the gravestone only writes “Malik ‘Ibrāhim” without the origin. In the legend Malik Ibrahim also called Mawlāna Maghribi or ‘the teacher from the West’.

It is possible that he is a foreigner, and it also a fact the gravestone where the inscription written it's a marble from a foreign country (Damais, 1995: 173, 231, 298). However, there is no source from any research that put Malik Ibrahim in the representative history of the so called Nine Saints in Java.

About the Nine Saints itself, while legend said the nine saints have a regular meeting, it is concluded impossible to be really happen, with the case that between the historical Sunan Ngampel Denta and Sunan Kudus there is a long time distance that covered some generations, from the middle of 15th century to the firsts decades of 16th century (De Graaf and Pigeaud, 1985: 55).

In brief, despite the popularity of Nine Saints among the Javanese people until today, proven with the facts that their graves still make money as the flow of the pilgrimage seems like never end, it doesn't matter if the question of history never have a satisfying scientific answer. Instead, the unhistorical stories about Nine Saints looked like substitute the history really well. This stories, possibly started as an oral literature, from the 20th century can be found in the form of story book, picture-story book, and moving picture as well.

Among the medias that mentioned above, the picture-story book chosen by the surveyor not only as the least media surveyed, but as the form's possibility to examine closely. While a story book will give a subjective imagination offering for the readers from the written story, so that the interpretation will be very wide; a film will give some difficulties to examined in different media without a moving picture facility in the media itself. In picture-story book, the stand still picture and word will give the surveyor better opportunity in examining the discourse compare to literature and moving picture.



Two continuous picture-story of the “first” Nine Saints.

In this brief survey the myth of Malik Ibrahim as Sunan Gresik will be investigate from the picture-story that created by B. Affandy (illustration) and M. B. Rahimsyah (script) titled *Syeih Maulana Malik Ibrahim* (first episode) and *Sunan Gresik* (second episode). The specification of these two title is the fact of the regular distribution at the grave sites of Nine Saints, that often taken for granted as “history”. There is no date as the credit of the production, except that the publisher written as CV Karunia Surabaya. In a way still can be regarded as part of the pilgrimage tradition in Java today.

2. The Myth as the Case

With those kind of background, this preliminary survey is going to investigate (1) how the textual construction of a myth happened, and in doing so at the same time, (2) how the myth indirectly reflected the history, and (3) the discourse of the socio-political situation that reproduce the myth today. In this case, the limited data of Malik Ibrahim give ways to the constitution of a narrative, to accommodate the identity politics as the interest of Islamic proselytizing. The narrative outside the data will be examine as the construction of the myth.

3. Myth in Word and Pictures: Concepts

3.1. Myth and Semiotic.

There are three main uses of the term called myth – the ritual/anthropological, the literary and the semiotic (Fiske in O'Sullivan et al, 1994: 192). The surveyor will use all of the three interchangeably as the tools in the investigation, regarding that the two picture-story as a corpus of the survey step over through the three concepts.

3.1.1. The Ritual/Anthropological.

The ritual/anthropological takes the form of an anonymously composed narrative that offers explanations of why the world is as appears, and why people act as they do. It is specific to its own culture, though it presents its explanation as universal, or natural. It is a crucial means of turning nature into culture, and thus works also reciprocally as a naturalizing agency (*ibid.*, 192).

3.1.2. The Literary.

In literary theory, myth becomes a story about, or image of, what are seen as eternal, permanent human truths, usually of a spiritual, moral or aesthetic kind. It is closely associated with the cultural, if not universal, meaning, and belongs to a school that religion and literature. Use of the term is usually the sign of an idealistic, vague and ultimately unsound approach to literature (*ibid.*, 192).

3.1.3. The Semiotic.

The semiotic meaning differs markedly from these two. It refers to an unarticulated chain of associated concepts by which members of a culture understand certain topics. It operates consciously and inter-subjectively. It is associative, not narrative; it is culture-specific, not transcultural or universal; it changes over time, rather than being eternal; and it is unarticulated rather than being textually expressed. Its prime function is to make the cultural natural, and it thus shares with other usages the function

of naturalization. The semiotic usage, as proposed by Barthes, which is discussed in the concept of signification (*ibid.*, 192-3), will be explained briefly if really needed by the context in the investigation.

3.2. Words and Picture in Picture-Story

Picture-story systematically combines words and pictures. The elements of the representational code which picture-story employs—including both images and texts, and also such specialized features as world balloons, zip ribbons, and even the panel frames which enclose scenes or segments of a narrative—can be manipulated with great sophistication (Varnum & Gibbons, 2001: ix-x).

Picture-story is a site where words and images intersect. The complex semiotic process embodied in the picture-story page. Pictures can illustrate a text which is largely complete on its own. Alternatively, words can provide a soundtrack to a sequence composed visually. Words and pictures can replicate one another. Words can clarify or amplify pictures, and vice versa. Words can function as elements in a picture. Words and picture can operate on separate, parallel tracts, each conveying an independent message. Words and pictures can work together to convey an idea that neither could convey alone (McCloud, 1993: 153-5).

Words and pictures can also stand in ironic juxtaposition to one another. Pictures can belie words. They provide context for words. They also provide subtext, thereby complicating verbal messages. They can suggest what a narrator or a group of characters is not saying. Even in those cases where pictures are said “merely” to illustrate a text, they always add a layer of meaning and shape the way reader responds. Words, conversely, can shape the way we look at pictures.

There is a synergy between words and pictures in picture-story such that their combined effect is greater than or different from what might have been predicted (Varnum & Gibbons, *op.cit.*, xiv).

4. Myths in The Shadow of Historical Facts: Method.

Before going to the investigation of the narrative, the surveyor will (1) introduce some historical facts which is related as a backgrounder for the theme and the plot to give a comparison to examine the text. Only after, then (2) the investigation is to read the text in search of discourses, whether there is the constitution of the myth, and at the same time on the contrary give the opportunity for the reader to be critical of the narrative. The comparison will be (3) evaluated with the conceptual tools of the myth and picture-story that already mentioned above, until arrive to (4) the conclusion of the meaning, as it happened that the picture-story books with the myth in itself is a contemporary historical fact.

5. Some Factors as a Backgrounder of the Narrative

5.1. Gresik in History.

In the 15th century, the time written in Malik Ibrahim's gravestone, Gresik is already mentioned as one of the centers of commerce in South East Asia, where in the month of October the east-wind made ships from Maluku can sail to Makassar, Gresik, Demak, Banten, Melaka and other cities in the west part of Nusantara. The sailing to the east part would happen from June to August with the west-wind, so that ships from Nusantara could sail to Ayutthaya, Campa, China, and kingdoms in the north part, until the wind change direction to the opposite again from September to Desember. This kind of wind directions made the Nusantara ports important as a destination from ships of all over the world (Djaenuderadjat, 2013: 49-50), it is just possible that one of the ships bring Malik Ibrahim that in the end stayed in Gresik. These natural facts also support the historical findings, that there is a Campa-East Java axis with Gresik as the port-city in the 14th-16th century (Lombard in EFEO, 1981: 289).

The China sources said that Gresik established in the 14th century with sailors and merchants from China as the first settlers. While even in 1387 this port-city already written as part of the Majapahit kingdom, in the year of 1411 a Chinese decent authority in Gresik send a messenger with letters and tributes to the emperor palace in mainland China (De Graaf & Pigeaud, *op.cit.*, 174). In the 15th and 16th century, Gresik then not only exist as one of the commerce center, but also a place of cultural industry as the export of Javanese ritual gongs made in Gresik, as also happened in Cambodia and Tonkin as well (Reid, 1992: 136).

The issues with Islam begin in the 10th century as Arabic texts proofed as witness to the relation of Campa and some places in Nusantara (Lombard, *op.cit.*; 287-8), and the figure Cempa Princess or Cempa Queen always mentioned in the Nine Saints legend as part of the spreading of Islam in Java. The similarities of the calendar systems, legends, and some temples of Campa and Java also became a better prove of the close relation (Cabaton in EFEO, 1981: 249).

What happen in Cempa is the occupation of Campa by Annam in 1471 that makes a waves of exodus as detected by *Hikayat Hasanuddin and Sejarah Melayu (ibid., 290)*. It is only logical that the Moslems from Campa saw Gresik as one of the safe haven, regarding the long time north-south relationship across the ocean. While the story of how Raden Rahmat becomes Sunan Ngampel Denta in the middle of 15th century closely related to Campa's history (*ibid.*, 289; De Graaf & Pigeaud, *op.cit.*, 19-24) the date 1419 in the gravestone of Malik Ibrahim make it reasonable as an evidence that a Muslim community already exist in Gresik, and the creation of Malik Ibrahim as Sunan Gresik, the oldest and first Nine Saints seems just logical.

After 586 years, as noted by a researcher, the Malik Ibrahim gravestone hosted 1.556.651 visitors in 2005, up from 128.905 in 1988, a more than 10-fold increase (Armstrong in Quinn, 2019: 385). Pilgrimage tourism has attracted government attention and for local government it can be a source of revenue, the district government of Gresik has poured money into celebrating the birthday (sic!) of Malik Ibrahim. The Birthday Funfair (Gebyar Maulid) highlights the traditional Islamic arts of Gresik—especially the drumming known as *beduk tètèr*—and promote the sale of local goods (Quinn, *ibid.*, 390).

5.2. The Pilgrimage on Gravestones in Java.

The pilgrimage to the gravestones in Java is not part of Islamic teaching, but from the pre-Islamic time—actually a local system of beliefs before the big religion like Hindu and Buddha came to Java too—where people worships at the sacred sites as big trees, big stones, scary places or graves on top of a hill from person—historical or fictional—who believed to have some extraordinary or supra-natural power.

This tradition can not be wiped from the surface of the earth in Java, but negotiated and assimilated so far that still practiced today according to the Islamic calendar—some blended with Javanese calendar, as an act of representation from a tradition of the people who feel repressed to embrace Islam but can not openly opposed, try to make the façade looked like an Islamic worshipping practice, like the use of Arabic prayer, while it is not.

The historical background in the context of the Nine Saints, and many other saints across the island, is that after the port-cities alongside the north shore of Java become part of a powerful Islamic kingdom like Demak in the beginning of the 16th century meet the tough political and cultural challenge from the old Hindu kingdom of Majapahit in the hinterland. While in the end Majapahit conquered by military expeditions, it is only to be taken back by the agrarian society decades after with the rise of Mataram kingdom.

After that, even Islam became the official religion, actually living together with a cultural environment where the old beliefs still powerfully settled. The Islamization of the agrarian hinterland go on very indolent, and should compromise with the older ancient beliefs called *kejawen* (“essential Javanese”). This is what gives the identity of Javanese Moslem.

In contemporary situation, the latest wave of the “purification” of Islam from modernist or reformist which regards the gravestones pilgrimage without exception is a taboo, still have to face the traditionalist Islamic teacher (ulama) which permitted the pilgrimage of “authentic” saints like Sunan Kudus, and Sunan Ampel. For these orthodox-traditionalist teachers too, the worships of too many fictional saints also regarded as a taboo (Chambert-Loir & Guillot, 2007: 333-60).

6. *Sheih Maulana Malik Ibrahim and Sunan Gresik:* The Myth in Words and Pictures.

6.1. The Plot

6.1.1. *Sheih Maulana Malik Ibrahim* (first episode).

After Gajah Mada passed away in the year 1364. Majapahit in chaos after many small kingdoms separate itself. In the year 1389 King Hayam Wuruk passed away too, and the turmoil continues in the time of Diah Kusuma Wardani Tribuana Tungga Dewi, after Wuruk's younger step-brother, Bhre Wirabumi from Blambangan, feel that he is as a male is the legitimate heir of the throne. The civil war lasted after five years and make the people suffer while natural disaster happened everywhere.

At the time being, in Loron or Leran today, live Malik Ibrahim, the good merchants that like to help people, as the son of Syeih Jamaluddin Hussein, the 20th descendant of Fatimah Azzarah the prophet's daughter. It is Malik Ibrahim that established the first boarding school of Islam, and taught it when the learnings still unknown for the people. The egalitarian doctrines make Islam popular compare to the Hindu caste system in the society—some who still loyal to Hindu then moved to Bali Island and Tengger Mountain.

One day Malik Ibrahim and his pupils go through a nearby village and saw how the people suffer in famine because of the civil war and natural disaster. Besides helping them with food, Malik Ibrahim showed them how to behave as a good Moslem and introduced some Islamic concept, so that the people interested with the teachings.

6.1.2. Sunan Gresik (second episode):

Malik Ibrahim and his pupils continue their journey and arrive to a better village with one rich family. They saw how the rich man treat the poor people that ask for rice, when he answer don't have any except sands. So Malik Ibrahim show his magic. The rich man rice became sands, and only after the rich man promise to help the poor with his rice than the sands changed to rice again. Then the rich man convert to Islam.

The next stop is a village where the people perform a prayer to the god of the sky asking for rain with a woman to sacrifice. Malik Ibrahim and his pupils arrive at the rituals with a magic speed just in time when the shaman would sway his sword to the woman. He changed the sword to a snake, changed it back to a sword, and after that ask for rain by himself to Allah. However, about the drought, Malik Ibrahim gives a sermon that it caused by themselves which is not aware with the eco-system.

As the result of the success all the people in the village convert to Islam, one of his pupils stay to teach them, and Malik Ibrahim going back to Loron. Until the year of 1419 AD, that written in Islamic calendar as 822 Hijriah on his gravestone, it is said that he devoted all his life and wealth to Islam.

6.2. The Physicality of the Corpus.

These two picture-story books each have the width of 14,5 x 21,5 cm, with the thickness of 32 pages, so in all the narrative been told in 64 pages. Except the splash (the first page or the title page), each page contains two panels, that also means 114 panels. Each panel contain one unified unit of ideas that could be examine as part of the two panels in one page and the four panels in two spread pages. Consequently, each panel and whatever the elements that contained inside is part of the totality of 114 panels plus 2 splash pages.

6.3. The Textuality of the Corpus: Constructing the Myth.

6.3.1. The Game on the Cover



In the dark background of red sky and black mountains, maybe the symbol of chaos, there is Malik Ibrahim raise his right hand as a code of delivering the good news of the new religion, pass over the old one that represented by a different outfit. The cane in his left hand is not the tools for old man, but symbol of legitimation as an Islamic saint or *wali*. The green color of the clothe and the turban clearly intended as Islamic color. The white moustache contrast to the all black beard, not just to pointed an age, but the weakened old contrast to the powerful new one.

6.3.2. The Face and the Turban

On the first page, the reader will look at a face, that intended to be Malik Ibrahim's face. Why this kind of face? Maybe because taken as a foreigner, landed in Gresik from one of the ships that came from Gujarat, Calicut, Bengalen, Thailand, China, and Liu-Kiu (De Graaf & Pigeaud, *op.cit.*, 174) – so definitely not from the latest three, and turban could be interpreted as a Muslim outfit.



Rijksmuseum Londen/4195/35

**Possibly Indian face
from Majapahit terracotta**



Rijksmuseum Leiden-4195/25 - Museum Nasional Jakarta-8656A - 6703

Three Muslims wear a turban from Majapahit terracotta

The nine silhouette figure could be intended as the Nine Saints, while the mountain as a sacred place related to Hindu religion which call it *meru* (mountain) and the big tree represent ancient beliefs. The comparison with the terracotta from Majapahit shows that how Malik Ibrahim's face pictured in the picture-story is not without a reason.

6.3.3. The Wardrobe, The Iconography



The people in the Majapahit palace, coded by the accessories, hair style, and clothes they wear, unfortunately doesn't have a proper comparison from the richness of ceramic findings in Trowulan, the former capital, except for the royal lady. A further observation of the pillars, gate, house, curtain, wall, incense burner, porcelain, plants, ear stud, etc., can function to reveal the distance between myth and the historical terracotta representations of the same objects.



Soedarmadji Collection/AD 0044 - Rijksmuseum-419518

Royal lady on the throne and another with a crown.



Rijksmuseum Leiden - 41959

Two princess

6.3.4. It's the Other's conflict



The wise man in the palace presented as unjust, and the conflict between Majapahit royals, from the dress code, was the conflict between the Hindus.

6.3.5. Majapahit Royals



The stillness of the panels resembled the reliefs in the temples. The narrative patiently told the historical background that would bring the relevance of the role of Malik Ibrahim—if he passed away in 1419, this is happen before the death of Bhre Wirabumi and Wikramawardhana became the king in 1389.

Compare the buildings with the terracotta findings, seems like it would not be that high—but the old wise man looks quite similar.



Princesho f Museum Leeuwarden-27 GMP 1981/88 – Soedarmadj/AD 0063 – Museum Nasional Jakarta / 8653

**A great number of ascetics is noted
by the Portuguese Tome Pirés in the 16th century; religious man; priest with
a cap**

6.3.6. People suffer in the Hindu kingdom



The story happened in the time of *parēgrēg* or conflicts between the Majapahit royals, started in 1401 following the death of Hayam Wuruk in 1389, that didn't finish after Bhre Wirabumi dies, but at the end of Suhita's reign in 1447--around 46 years. More than enough to weaken the Hindu kingdom, while the small kingdoms in the north shore of Java heavily influenced by the spread of Islam. The starvation combined with an epidemic depicted in the last picture represent the devastation of hope. Compare the depiction of ordinary people with the same intention by Majapahit ceramic artists.



Soedarmadji / AD 0051- Museum Keramik Jakarta / M 26 - BPG Trowulan 46/TR/SGR/24/BPG

Possibly Farmer, Female, Common Man



BPG Trovulan /SEI Soemarti File - 47/TR/TRW/24/BPG NR.262 - Rijksmuseum Leiden 4195/16

Servant, Male, Male with curly hair and flower in his ear

6.3.7. The Myth of Contrast.



Words and pictures showed the contrast between Majapahit as the Hindu kingdom in political turmoil and dry climate disaster, besides the peaceful and fertile Islamic village of Loron.

6.3.8. A Space of His Own.



Now with the fixed gesture of charisma, Malik Ibrahim take over the space in the universe of the picture-story.

6.3.9. The Function of the Clothing



The coconut tree resembled the coast where the ships that bring Moslem merchants landed, but the boarding school (pesantren) in Java is a 16th century phenomenon (Dhofier, 1983: 34). The clothing used as a way to differentiate the Moslem and the Hindu.

6.3.10. Taking Advantage of the Caste Problem.



The problem with caste system, in this story, is the social prestige for the high-rank only, so that the low-rank easily convert to Islam because of the egalitarian standing.

6.3.11. The Exodus to Bali



An exodus to Bali and Tenger of Majapahit people happened, and will related in the future story that Bhre Kertabhumi, or Brawijaya in the legend, run to Bali after Majapahit defeated by Demak kingdom—there were already a Majapahit society. What really happened is Kertabhumi defeated and killed in the palace on the attack by Girindrawardhana in 1478, it is Majapahit under this king that defeated by Pati Unus from Demak in 1519. While in the picture-story it happened in the time of *parāgrēg*, after Wirabhumi beheaded in 1406, in the reign of

Wikramawardhana in 1389-1429 (Djafar, 2009: 64, 69, 149). There is the contrast in how to depict the old Hindu wise man compare to the young Moslem teacher.

6.3.12. To Make Light of the Suffering.



Continue the good myth. The Islamic concept about death introduced to the Hindu people who suffer because of the endemic.

6.3.13. Blame the Losers.



The war between the Hindu royals cause the disaster in the village, after the rest of Blambangan soldiers became robbers. The narrator take side.

6.3.14. Gold and Goods



The healing brought them closer to the right time to introduce the concept of Allah—but the concept of ecology is a modern knowledge.

6.3.17. Another Strategy



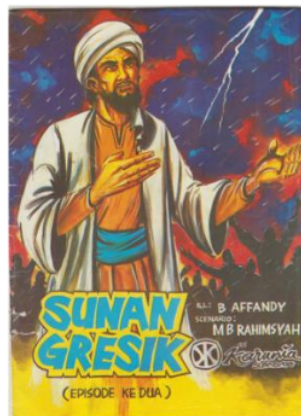
The reasonable cause in the ecosystem contradict with the old animism beliefs that doesn't really seems like a Hindu one. It is also written that the personal appeal of Malik Ibrahim as a Muslim make them unconsciously little by little study Islam as a religion.

6.3.18. Example First, then the Teaching



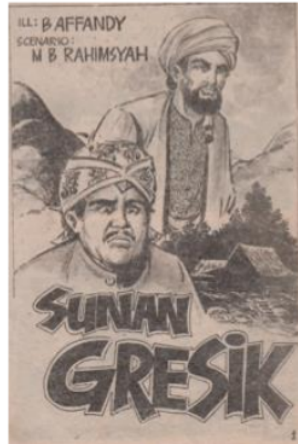
This kind of strategy written down in the end of the first episode, that the way of to spread Islam is to make an actual example first, and only after people have the interest, then teach them with Islamic requirements.

6.3.19. The Second Cover: The Game Continued



The dominant green color on the clothe from the first episode cover now changed to a white one, although the white robe put on both of the covers. The back ground, related to the story inside, showed the rain coming with the thundering sound, after Malik Ibrahim pray to Allah. Under the dark sky, although happened at noon, silhouette of people praised for the rain coming in a dry climate, showed the purpose that is more symbolic than iconic. The lightning showed not for naturalistic reason, but—combined with Malik Ibrahim gesture as praying—for Allah greatness who granted the prayer. While Allah couldn't be seen, the feel of greatness fell on who could be seen on the cover, that is Malik Ibrahim who is now become Sunan Gresik.

6.3.20. The Game of Faces



In this splash, first page of a picture-story narrative, the figure of Sunan Gresik depicted as dominant compare to the earth and the sky, but another figure with looked bigger in size is also on the page. What make this figure less dominant is the commoner's expression on the face that don't have the charismatic looks like of Sunan Gresik. The bigger size of the body and the face precisely make him inferior compare to Malik Ibrahim as Sunan Gresik, which aimed to be superior than anything on the page.

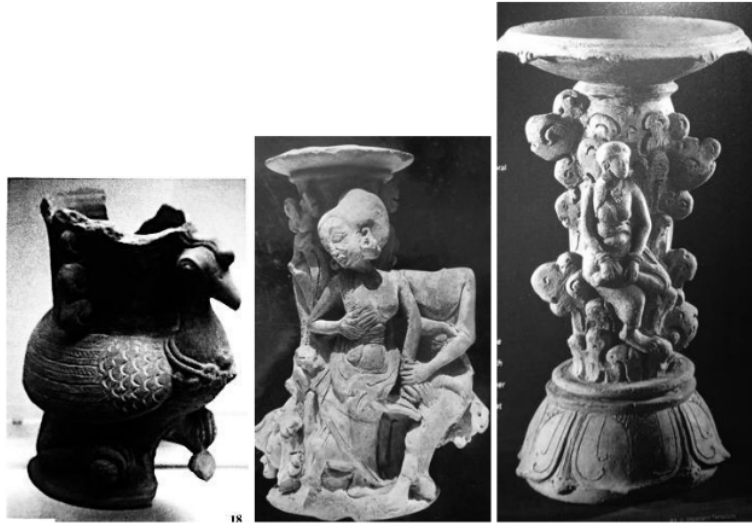
6.3.21. Who Really Came from Arabia?



It is mentioned that Malik Ibrahim came from “Arabia”, which is without evidence, except that the word would have some impact. Depiction of the

The other houses and people resembled poverty. Malik Ibrahim realize the gap between the haves and have not.

In the big house the rich man saw Malik Ibrahim and his pupils as foreigners. There were no pillar covers, or pillar base covers, in the rich man house like the findings in Trowulan, the former Majapahit capital city, and the rich man clothes seems like the outfit from 20th century in Central Java. The rich man offered them delicious food as an act kindness.



Pillar covers from Trowulan

6.3.22. Stereotype of the Bad Rich Man

DI PERILK RUMAH MENCAMAIN-DENDAMER, APA
SAYA MENYAMBAL SEKERASAN PERASA SAKSI TELAH MEN-
DAPAT JADI CRISER.

PERILK RUMAH ITU MENYANGS MENDERAUD-ERAND
SASAI ANAK KECIL MELUNYAT KENYATAAN /

PERILK RUMAH ITU MENYANGS MENDERAUD-ERAND
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ORANG ITU BAKI MENYANDI BERKORBANNA,
MENDONDA JALAN AGAR PENDEMG ITU TERDAMA ME-
WONDIS TAPI TERBENTEN TEROSI BERKORBANNA
MENDI KESAMPALAN KESAMPALAN KESAMPALAN.

MALALANA MALIK IBRAHIM MENDONDAKANNYA
KE SALAM PAKUNU TERKUNU ITU ?

PERILK RUMAH ITU MENYANGS MENDERAUD-ERAND
SASAI ANAK KECIL MELUNYAT KENYATAAN /

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DI TELAN PERASA MALIK KE BERANG-BERANG MENGAPRI
PERILK RUMAH YANO SELAMA SU MEMILITIKKAN DRI
BERANG.

PERILK RUMAH ITU MENYANGS MENDERAUD-ERAND
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Majapahit terracotta's rich man from the same period

In this scene, Malik Ibrahim showed the typical magic from the saints, which is the power to change rice to sands, and only after the rich man promised to live as a better man, then the sands change back to rice. After this, the rich man convert to Islam. It is still a question if he converted because enlightened about his ethics or only because his rice back, as could be happen as one possibility with the real politics at the time, which the people convert to Islam just for survival.

6.3.24. The Same Magic for the Same Politics?



When the journey continued, Malik Ibrahim and his pupils met the ritual of sacrificing human life to the god of the sky asking for rain. They nearly missed the ritual, if Malik Ibrahim doesn't have the power to suddenly increase their speed, to catch the act on the site, after noticed the happening from far away. This is one classical way to show the superiority of the saints.



Human sacrifice written on traditional sources (Subagya, 1981: 170), but the question if this kind of ritual really happened, whether by the Hindus or by the ancient beliefs before, the only archeological finding that related to human sacrifice it's still a probability (Jordaan, 2009: 19; Ijzerman in Jordaan: 176).



This two panels clearly showed the superiority of Malik Ibrahim as a saint compare to the shaman. Pay attention on the comparison of expression, and the lower placement of the shaman, which could be regarded as a way to construct Malik Ibrahim's figure as a myth.







The same tricks repeated by Malik Ibrahim, even with more magic, which not only changed the sword to a snake and back to sword again, but also give them the rain they ask for, by praying to Allah—that make them convert to Islam. Mentioned in the written text that this is not the first woman being sacrificed, but already tens without any results. Malik Ibrahim then discredited their sky god and make them realise the logic that there is no relation between the sacrifice act and the rain. After challenged by those people than Malik Ibrahim and his pupils perform their official praying. After their pray answered than mentioned again, that this kind of praying could only performed if they convert to Islam. This situation showed the same problem, whether people convert with a logical

consideration of the religion, or just because they think that they already met the more powerful god.

6.3.25. The End is the Start of Legitimation



Like the first episode, the next step is to put another one of his pupils to stay in the village, to guide these newly converts to Islam, that looked like a method. It is told that Malik Ibrahim then went back to Loron and devoted his life for the interest of Islam. In the last panel noted that he was the first of the Nine Saints to established the first Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) which doesn't supported precisely by historical evidence. What intended to be important here, the picture of Malik Ibrahim is believable as charismatic as it should. That's why his picture occupied this last page, with the expectation that the myth goes on.

7. How to Construct a Myth: Evaluation.

Between fact and myth there is a space of the construction, but this construction doesn't came from nowhere. Even a myth constructed by determinant factors. In the start of this survey the factors already described, those are the historical factors of Gresik and the existence of pilgrimage on gravestones as part of the ancient beliefs before the Hindu-Budhist time. The (1) narrative of the picture-story related to Gresik and the picture-story book as (2) commodity related to the pilgrimage. The evaluation of these two division try to detect the specifications of the discourses, as could be revealed the meaning by the concepts as the instrument of the investigation.

7.1. The Narrative

It could be said that the story splits in two, the first episode contain the impact of conflicts between Majapahit royals to the people, and the second showed the miracles performed by Malik Ibrahim to help people from their suffer. The miracles made the people convert to Islam. At least three topics could be discussed briefly, (1) the chaos, (2) the suffer, and (3) the miracles.

7.1.1. The Chaos

The chaos happened in two meanings, the conflict of Majapahit royals that doesn't end with the defeat of Wirabhumi, and that the political turmoil blended with the dry season that made people suffer. This two meaning directed to the old orde as the cause, connotated—as the second order of signification in Barthes semiotics—as the Hindu, which the codes like sacrificing young women to god of the sky just doesn't match, which doesn't seem match with the pre-Hindu beliefs either.

This time of chaos needed for the story as a contrasting tools the show the opposite, that a saint come with a new orde with an egalitarian belief that already proven could perform miracles.

7.1.2. The Suffer

The kind that caused suffering is poverty, endemic and natural disasters like the dry season, when the royals in power busy with their conflicts, and the loser side became robbers. This situation became complexed with the sub-plot of the stingy rich man. It is connotated that the position of the rich man to help not functioned because the old orde doesn't provide the ethical system needed.

The suffering doesn't really have to be happen, or could be overcome, if the order of the contemporary power have the ideological capability to survive. In short, the chaos and the suffer codes combined hand-in-hand to discredited the old order as the paradigm of the Hinduist Majapahit kingdom.

7.1.3. The Miracles

The magic as the miracles in this narrative came as a solution provided by Allah, if people have the beliefs of Islam. As old as the story of Moses, actually this is not an Islamic solution for any of the troubles. What happened to be much better is the strategy and the solutions in the first episode, that besides offer a reasonable knowledge of ecosystem, the actual examples of the good personality in everyday life is going to useful any time.

Whatever, as a whole, this more logical point clouded by the attraction of miracles that is importance is to contribute mostly to the construction of Sunan Gresik's myth. As entertaining as part of the story, also as potential to misguide the understanding of Islamic real teaching.

7.2. The Pilgrims as the Market

While these two episodes of the picture-story aimed to a market, the kind of market became one of the determinant factors that constructed the narrative. Everything depicted on the narrative pointed to the culture of the readers as the market, that in this case are the gravestones pilgrims.

7.2.1. The Cultural Economy

In the concept of cultural economy, the discourse is not the exchange value, but the exchanges of three cultural factors: pleasure, meaning, and social identity (Fiske, 1987: 311-3). The buyers of this Nine Saints picture-story books regarded to have the pleasure of reading it not only because entertained by the sensation of the narratives, but entertained because the myth fulfill their ideology—in this way the pleasure is meaningful and vice versa. It means that as consumer the choice is a matter of representing their social identity, like “I am what I buy”. The Nine Saints picture-story books represents a sub-culture of the sub-ordinated groups with their own politics, which againts both the modern and “purified” Islam, permitted them to worship the local or localized saints from their gravestones.

7.2.2. The Politics

The practice of worshipping the gravestones of the saints, that believed to have supernatural power although they already buried, came as an ancient beliefs long time ago from the pre-Hindu—but often mentioned popularly as “Hindu”—time. It is proven that is never extinct, mostly because of the strategy of negotiating their interests with whoever in power with a process of otokhtoning the alokhton, that is to embrace the new religion as an answer for the most inner need; or possibly heterokhton, that the coming religion can’t absorb the local-original beliefs, which the reception would be superficial (Subagya, *op.cit.*, 6).

According to historical studies, written tradisional sources notes that the attack which end the reign of Majapahit in 1519 caused by a political reason, that Demak authority Raden Patah take revenge as a decendant of Bhre Kertabhumi which toppled by Girindrawarddhana Dyah Ranawijaya; but also believed from traditional sources, that the attack based on religious background, like a “holly war” as an Islamic state to the Hindu-Buddhist’s “pagan” Majapahit kingdom. The religious differences became a good reason to liberate Demak from any commitment to Majapahit (Djafar, *op.cit.*, 123-4).

What happened to politics, doesn’t take place the same way to culture. The act of negotiation it happened came from two sides, if not many sides. As many sacred places already exist at least in pre-Islam time, still functioned until today as an *abangan*—“Javanese Moslem”—pilgrimage sites, that shows how a tolerance policy come from both sides, under the recognition of the government.

Theoretically, the “purified” radical Islamist can’t tolerate this act of worships, but in the real politics it is a fact that as the same sub-ordinated groups in the society it doesn’t looked uncommon when the two stand as an ally, as it happened in Mbah Priok gravestone case (Quinn, *op.cit.*, 183-4).

However, the “purification” movement could be traced as a new phenomenon of announcements appear in gravestones sites lately, remind the pilgrims that they should avoid become heretics and should pray as permitted by the legitimate Islamic rules only (*ibid.*, 397).

7.3. The Never Ending Struggles : Conclusion.



The picture-story books that regularly distributed in the gravestone sites of Nine Saints as “history”.

The two episodes picture-story books, *Syeih Maulana Malik Ibrahim* and *Sunan Gresik* is part of the Nine Saints “history” that distributed in their gravestones where the pilgrimage happens all around the clock in the island of Java. As the scientific history only have the date on Malik Ibrahim’s grave marker, and geologically the stone considered a material from abroad, doesn’t hold the creation of Sunan Gresik’s myth as the “first” of the Nine Saints.

This genealogical pretension, however, supported by historical notes on Gresik from the 15th century, as an international hub that accommodate Islamic merchants from India and Champa, besides the other from China which also build a strong community to make Gresik one of the important port-city in Java.

As wroted by the Chinese traveler Ma Huan at the time, the port-cities population in north shores of Java divided in three groups: Moslems

from a various foreign countries, the Chinese which mostly Moslems too, and the Javanese which were pagan and primitive (sic!) (Reid, 1999: 232; 2004: 89). Ma Huan's term on Java religion of course constructed by the discourse of his time, but the fact remain acceptable that there were the local belief besides Hindu or Budha.

Backgrounded with the history of Majapahit, the local myth constructed the saint—with the title Syeih Maulana—Malik Ibrahim as an Islam answer to the chaos and disaster that couldn't be overcome by the old order, that in a way connotated as the “Hindu” paradigm. In the myth, Malik Ibrahim completed with instrumental tools like Islamic concepts and the power of magic, that in the plot create miracles which made people convert to Islam.

The oral tradition proven effective to established a flow of pilgrims to Malik Ibrahim's gravestone, written in more than one version as connected to other gravestone in Gresik like “Princess Leran”, until the picture-story created in the 20th century. This survey of the words and pictures in the panels, confirms how the market created by the sub-culture which have the pilgrimage to the gravestones as one of the rituals.

As it is also confirms that the rituals is not an Islamic rituals at all, the critical reader of the picture-story could find the ideological struggle from two sides: that the superiority of Islam in Java could established only in the pre-Islam beliefs way.

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