

UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

**RELIGIOUS SYMBOLIC SIGNS IN THE SOUVENIRS OF THE
"ARAB VILLAGE" AMPEL SURABAYA**

To Fulfill Partial Requirements for Obtaining a Bachelor's Degree (S-1)



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ABSTRACT

Ampel Village in Surabaya is a religious tourism destination that has played a key role in the spread of Islam in East Java. The area's Arab cultural identity is expressed through religious souvenirs, which commonly feature visual symbols associated with Islamic culture and Ampel itself, such as illustrations of the *gapura*, mosque, becak, and Arabic-style typography. These representations merit examination as they reveal how Arab culture is constructed and presented within the commercial sphere of religious tourism.

This study adopts a qualitative approach using Roland Barthes's visual semiotics analysis. Data were gathered through field observations, visual documentation, cataloging of religious souvenirs in the Ampel commercial area, and a literature review. While the population includes all religious-themed souvenirs, the sample is limited to items that explicitly display Ampel-specific visuals, namely children's T-shirts with *gapura* imagery and pastiche typography, and Ampel-style tote bags depicting the Ampel Mosque and becaks. Units of analysis are based on design variations rather than production quantity.

This study analyzes souvenirs as a system of signs that operates through three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. An analysis of the research objects, children's T-shirts and Ampel tote bags, reveals that visual elements such as *gapura* illustrations, pastiche typography, illustrations of the Ampel Mosque dome in stamp designs, becak illustrations, and heart symbols function as a complex semiotic system with a scope broader than mere aesthetic representation. The research objects serve not only as decorative elements but also as symbolic devices that construct religious meaning and spatial identity.

The research findings indicate that at the denotative level, souvenirs represent visual objects directly associated with the Ampel area, such as religious architecture, traditional transportation, and easily recognizable graphic symbols. At the connotative level, these elements carry deeper cultural meanings, such as representations of local community life, the pilgrimage experience, and visitors' emotional attachment to the place. At the mythical level, souvenirs play a role in naturalizing the idea that Ampel is a religious space, possessing an Islamic history acculturated with Javanese and Hindu cultures, and forming part of a spiritual identity.

Keywords: Visual representation, Arab culture, religious souvenirs, religious tourism, Ampel Village, visual semiotics.

FOREWORD

Praise and gratitude are offered to Allah SWT for His boundless blessings, mercy, and strength, which have guided me through the challenging yet rewarding process of completing this undergraduate thesis, titled: “Religious Symbolic Signs in the Souvenirs of the 'Arab Village' Ampel Surabaya.”

This research holds a deeply personal significance for me. Throughout my time in this program, I observed that the vast majority of my peers possessed extraordinary talent in final project of creative concepts. However, I felt a different calling. I chose the path of a undergraduate thesis over a practical final project because I felt a profound need to look beyond the surface of what we create. I wanted to challenge myself to move away from the drafting table and into the world of rigorous analysis and critical writing. I believe that understanding the *why* and the *how*, the semiotic layers and the cultural myths embedded in our daily objects, is just as vital as the act of creation itself. By choosing this path, I hoped to contribute to a deeper academic understanding of how we, as designers and observers, construct meaning within our cultural landscape.

This journey would not have been possible without the unwavering support of those around me. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my parents; my most handsome dad in the world, and my most “scaredy cat” mom, whose sacrifices, prayers, and unconditional love have been the foundation upon which I stand today. Thank you for believing in me even when the road ahead seemed unclear.

My heartfelt thanks also go to my mentors and lecturers, especially Mr. Restu Ismoyo Aji, S.Sn., M.A., whose wisdom challenged my perspectives and shaped my critical thinking. To my fellow students, Erisa and Nadhifah, thank you for the countless discussions, the late-night encouragement, and the shared friendship that ensured this work was completed on time. Your presence made the difficult days feel much shorter.

I am fully aware that this undergraduate thesis is far from perfect and contains many shortcomings. I humbly welcome any constructive criticism and suggestions, as I see this not as an end, but as a stepping stone for future growth. It is my sincere hope that this work will broaden the reader's insight and provide meaningful value to the development of our field of knowledge.

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