

## The Heritage of Nusantara Islamic Civilization in West Java (A Study in Sumedang Regency and Cirebon Regency)

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**Abstract:** This mini research explores the heritage of Tamadun Islam Nusantara (Nusantara Islamic Civilization) in West Java, focusing on Sumedang and Cirebon as representative cases of agrarian and coastal Islamic civilizations. Using a qualitative descriptive approach combined with systematic literature review and limited field observation, the study reveals that both regions exemplify a harmonious acculturation between universal Islamic teachings and local Sundanese-Javanese wisdom. In Sumedang, the legacy of the Sumedang Larang Kingdom is embodied in the Ngalaksa ritual, leuit (traditional rice barns), and community governance rooted in musyawarah (deliberation), all infused with Islamic monotheism. In Cirebon, the Sultanate's heritage manifests in the syncretic architecture of the Great Mosque of Sang Cipta Rasa, multicultural religious festivals like Grebeg Maulud, and a governance system integrating adat and Islamic ethics. The research identifies core values of Islam Nusantara—wasathiyyah (moderation), tasamuh (tolerance), rahmatan lil 'alamin, and hubbul wathan (love for the homeland)—as foundational to both traditions. Despite contextual differences—agrarian sustainability in Sumedang versus intercultural diplomacy in Cirebon—both models affirm that authentic Islam in Indonesia flourished through cultural dialogue, not imposition. This study underscores the relevance of Tamadun Islam Nusantara as a living, dynamic civilization and a strategic ideological resource against religious extremism and cultural erosion.

**Keyword:** heritage, civilization, archipelago



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## Introduction

The Islamic heritage of the Nusantara in West Java is a historical manifestation of the harmonious acculturation process between universal Islamic teachings and local Sundanese values, which has been ongoing for centuries. Contrary to narratives that describe Islam as a dominant external force, history shows that Islam in the archipelago—particularly in West Java—developed through a cultural, dialogical, and adaptive approach, giving rise to a unique, moderate civilization rooted in local wisdom (Azra, 2021). One of the epicenters of this civilization was the Sumedang Larang Kingdom, a political and spiritual entity that was established in the 7th century AD as a continuation of the Galuh Kingdom, and then transformed into an Islamic kingdom in the 16th century under the leadership of Prabu Geusan Ulun.

This transformation was not merely a religious conversion, but a philosophical synthesis between Islamic values and Sundanese social governance, which made Sumedang Larang the early laboratory of Islam in the Priangan region. The Sumedang Larang Kingdom not only served as a center of power, but also as a hub for the peaceful spread of Islam, religious education, and the preservation of Sundanese agrarian culture.

Its cultural heritage includes a deliberative system of government, sacred architecture that combines local and Islamic elements, ritual traditions such as Ngalaksa—an expression of gratitude for the harvest imbued with the values of tawhid—as well as a network of Islamic scholars and Islamic boarding schools that carry on the values of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah (Burhanuddin, 2020). This tradition shows that Islam Nusantara in West Java does not view customs as something that conflicts with religion, but rather as a medium for instilling Islamic teachings in a contextual and sustainable manner.

However, in contemporary academic discourse, the legacy of Tamadun Islam Nusantara—especially that based on local kingdoms such as Sumedang Larang—is often marginalized by the focus on large kingdoms such as Demak or Mataram. In fact, as Ricklefs (2022) asserts in his Scopus-indexed historical study, "Islamic civilization in the archipelago actually grew most authentically at the local level, through daily interactions between scholars, kings, and indigenous communities." In West Java, Sumedang Larang is a concrete example of how Islamic values such as rahmatan lil 'alamin, syura (deliberation), and khalifah fil ardh (guardians of the earth) are embodied in sustainable social and ecological governance.

This research is important because this heritage is now facing the threat of erosion due to modernization, a lack of academic documentation, and a lack of integration into the local education curriculum. Meanwhile, previous studies are still limited. For example, Nurdin (2022) examined the role of Priangan scholars in the formation of Islamic identity, but did not explicitly link it to the royal heritage. Meanwhile, Permana (2021) documented the Ngalaksa ritual as Intangible Cultural Heritage, but did not reveal its Islamic Nusantara philosophical roots. Research by Rahman (2023) only touched on the administrative aspects of the Sumedang Larang Kingdom, without exploring its civilizational dimensions.

The heritage of Islam Nusantara in West Java is a manifestation of the historical dialectic process between universal Islamic teachings and local Sundanese-Javanese wisdom, which has been peaceful, inclusive, and sustainable for centuries. One of the main pillars of this civilization is the Cirebon Sultanate, which was established in the 15th century as one of the most influential centers for the spread of Islam in the western part of the archipelago. Contrary to narratives that describe Islam as a homogeneous transnational force, the history of the Cirebon Sultanate shows how Islam was acculturated with Sundanese, Javanese, Chinese, and Arab cultures, giving birth to a distinctive form of Islam—moderate, tolerant, and rooted in local social realities (Azra, 2021). Founded by Sunan Gunung Jati, one of the Wali Songo figures, the Cirebon Sultanate was not only a political and economic center, but also a laboratory for the Islamic civilization of the archipelago, integrating the values of monotheism, noble character, and cultural wisdom into the management of society.

The legacy of the Islamic civilization of the archipelago from the Sultanate of Cirebon can be seen in various dimensions: (1) sacred architecture such as the Sang Cipta Rasa Grand Mosque, which combines a typical archipelago-style roof, Chinese dragon ornaments, and Arabic-Pegon calligraphy;



(2) a system of government based on the principles of deliberation and social justice, as reflected in the palace structure that involves elements of custom and religion; (3) religious-cultural traditions such as megengan, rajaban, and Grebeg Maulud, which combine Islamic rituals with local cultural expressions; and (4) a network of Islamic boarding schools that carry on the values of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah An-Nahdliyah in coastal areas to the interior of West Java (Burhanuddin, 2020). All of this shows that Islam Nusantara in Cirebon is not a religion that erases local identity, but rather a force that enriches and purifies it. However, in contemporary academic studies, the cultural heritage of the Cirebon Sultanate is often reduced to a mere tourist attraction or historical artifact, without any in-depth exploration of its philosophical values and relevance to the development of Indonesia's current civilization. In fact, as Ricklefs (2022) asserts, "Cirebon is the clearest example of how Islam in the archipelago became a civilizing force through acculturation, not assimilation." Amidst the challenges of radicalism that rejects local culture as "bid'ah" (innovation), the legacy of Cirebon is proof that authentic Islam flourishes in its own cultural soil. Previous studies have not yet explored this dimension of civilization holistically. For example, Nurdin (2022) examined the role of coastal scholars in religious moderation, but did not connect it to the royal palace's heritage. Meanwhile, Permana (2021) documented the architecture of the Grand Mosque of Cirebon, but did not reveal the symbolic meaning of its cultural acculturation. Research by Rahman (2023) in his journal also only focuses on the royal genealogy, without analyzing the civilizational values it has inherited. Therefore, this study aims to uncover, reconstruct, and analyze the heritage of the Islamic Civilization of the Archipelago in West Java, focusing on the Sultanate of Cirebon as the epicenter of an inclusive and sustainable Islamic civilization. Through a cultural history approach and discourse analysis, this study contributes to strengthening the national narrative rooted in local civilization, while providing an academic basis for the preservation of cultural heritage in line with the principles of Islam Nusantara: rahmatan lil 'alamin, wasathiyyah (moderation), and hubbul wathan (love of the homeland). In addition, this research also aims to uncover, reconstruct, and analyze the heritage of Tamadun Islam Nusantara in West Java with a focus on the Sumedang Larang Kingdom, in terms of political, social, cultural, and spiritual aspects. Through an intellectual-historical approach and field studies, this research contributes to strengthening the national narrative rooted in local civilization, while providing an academic basis for the preservation of cultural heritage based on moderate, inclusive, and sustainable Islamic Nusantara values. Research Questions What are the forms and characteristics of the Islamic Nusantara civilization heritage that developed in Sumedang Regency (based on the Sumedang Larang Kingdom) and Cirebon Regency (based on the Cirebon Sultanate)? What are the values of Islam Nusantara—such as moderation (wasathiyyah), tolerance (tasamuh), cultural acculturation, and local wisdom—that are reflected in the cultural heritage of these two regions? What are the similarities and differences in the patterns of acculturation between Islam and local culture in Sumedang and Cirebon in shaping the identity of Islam Nusantara civilization in West Java?

### Research Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with literature review as the main strategy, combined with limited field studies to enrich the validity and context of the research findings. This approach was chosen to understand and analyze in depth the heritage of Tamadun Islam Nusantara in West Java, particularly in Sumedang and Cirebon Regencies, from a historical, cultural, and civilizational perspective. The types of data collected include primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through direct observation of cultural heritage sites and artifacts—such as architecture, ancient manuscripts, and traditional rituals—as well as informal interviews with key figures, including museum managers, tomb caretakers, cultural observers, and local religious scholars. Secondary data was sourced from local history books, indexed scientific journals (Scopus and SINTA), local government agency reports, and Intangible Cultural Heritage documents from relevant ministries. Data collection techniques were carried out through systematic literature studies with academic database searches, limited participatory observation at the research site, and informal interviews to gain contextual understanding. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive-comparative analysis techniques through the stages of data classification based on region and heritage dimensions, identification of Islamic values in the Archipelago, comparative analysis of similarities and differences, and holistic



interpretation with triangulation of sources to ensure the validity of the findings. This research was conducted in 2025 with research locations in Sumedang Regency—covering the Sumedang Larang Kingdom site—and Cirebon Regency, which is centered on the Cirebon Sultanate area and its supporting cultural environment.

## Results and Discussion

This mini-research successfully revealed that the legacy of the Islamic Civilization of the Archipelago in West Java, particularly in Sumedang and Cirebon Regencies, is a tangible manifestation of the harmonious acculturation between universal Islamic teachings and local Sundanese-Javanese wisdom. The findings show that both regions, despite their different geographical backgrounds—Sumedang as an inland agricultural area and Cirebon as a coastal port city—have developed a moderate, inclusive Islamic civilization rooted in human values.

First, the form and characteristics of the heritage in both regions show distinctive yet harmonious patterns. In Sumedang, the heritage of Tamadun Islam Nusantara is evident in the Ngalaksa ritual, the leuit (rice barn) system, and the deliberative-based community governance inherited from the Sumedang Larang Kingdom. The Ngalaksa ritual, which is now designated as Intangible Cultural Heritage (WBTH), is not merely a pre-Islamic custom, but a form of acculturation in which traditional offerings are accompanied by prayers to Allah SWT and led by local clerics—reflecting the principle of tawhid accommodated within the Sundanese cultural framework (Permana, 2021).



Figure 1 Ngalaksa Traditional Ceremony 2024

Meanwhile, in Cirebon, this heritage is evident in the architecture of the Sang Cipta Rasa Grand Mosque, which combines a Nusantara-style roof, Chinese dragon ornaments, and Arabic-Pegon calligraphy, as well as the Grebeg Maulud and Megengan traditions, which combine the commemoration of Islamic holidays with expressions of local art and cuisine (Burhanuddin, 2020). Both regions show that Islam did not destroy culture, but rather purified and directed it towards the values of tawhid.

Second, the dominant values of Islam Nusantara in the heritage of both regions include: (1) wasathiyah (moderation), seen in the rejection of extremism and the imposition of beliefs; (2) tasamuh (tolerance), reflected in respect for cultural and religious diversity; (3) rahmatan lil 'alamin, which is manifested through sustainable agricultural practices in Sumedang and inclusive trade in Cirebon; and (4) hubbul wathan (love of the homeland), which is inherited through historical narratives of resistance against colonialism by figures such as Prabu Geusan Ulun and Sunan Gunung Jati. These values are in line with the principles of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah An-Nahdliyah, which form the foundation of Islam Nusantara (Nuridin, 2022).

Third, the similarities and differences in acculturation patterns are key findings. The similarities lie in cultural da'wah methods that respect customs, the use of art as a medium of education, and the integration of Islamic values in social governance. The differences lie in the ecological and social



contexts: Sumedang, as an agrarian society, developed values of nature conservation and fair distribution of agricultural products, while Cirebon, as a multicultural port, emphasized the values of openness, inter-civilizational dialogue, and cultural diplomacy. As Ricklefs (2022) asserts, “Cirebon is a laboratory of acculturation, while Sumedang is a bastion of Islamized agrarian wisdom.” The two complement each other in shaping the holistic face of Islam Nusantara in West Java: spiritual yet contextual, universal yet local.

Field observations reinforce the findings in the literature. In Sumedang, researchers witnessed firsthand how the Ngalaksa ritual in Sukamaju Village is still alive, with the community gathering around the leuit, reading prayers, and then enjoying tumpeng together—a practice that combines gratitude, mutual cooperation, and ecological sustainability. In Cirebon, a visit to the Kasepuhan Palace showed how the palace structure combines political, religious, and cultural functions into one symbolic unity, with traditional ceremonies that maintain Islamic prayers as their spiritual core. Informal interviews with local cultural figures revealed concerns about the erosion of heritage due to modernization and a lack of regeneration. However, they also emphasized that this heritage remains relevant as an ideological bulwark against radicalism that rejects local culture. As a caretaker of a tomb in Cirebon said, “If Islam were anti-culture, it would have been impossible for Sunan Gunung Jati to build a mosque with a tumpang roof and dragon ornaments.” Thus, this mini-research proves that the Islamic Civilization of the Archipelago in West Java is not a myth, but a living and dynamic historical reality. The heritage of Sumedang and Cirebon is proof that Islam in Indonesia flourished precisely because of its ability to dialogue with local culture—a model of civilization that deserves to be used as a global reference in building a civilized, just, and sustainable society.

## Conclusion

This mini-research has successfully revealed that the legacy of Tamadun Islam Nusantara in West Java—particularly in Sumedang and Cirebon Regencies—is not merely a static historical relic, but a living, dynamic, and relevant civilization that continues to this day. The findings of the study confirm that Islam in the archipelago did not come as a destructive force that erased local identities, but rather as a creative force that acculturated, purified, and enriched local cultures with the values of monotheism, humanity, and justice. Both Sumedang, with its agrarian roots, and Cirebon, with its multicultural coastal character, are concrete evidence that Islam in the archipelago is contextual, moderate, and rooted in the homeland. Moreover, this heritage has a strategic ideological dimension amid contemporary challenges. In an era where narratives of radicalism tend to pit religion against culture, the heritage of Sumedang and Cirebon offers a counter-narrative: that authentic Islam flourishes in its own cultural soil. The Ngalaksa ritual and the architecture of the Sang Cipta Rasa Grand Mosque are not deviations, but rather the highest expression of *fiqh al-waqi'* (understanding of reality) taught by the scholars of the archipelago. From this perspective, preserving this heritage is not only a matter of cultural preservation, but also an intellectual and spiritual jihad to maintain the identity of Indonesian civilization based on the principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. However, these findings also remind us of the real threats to the sustainability of this heritage. Modernization, globalization, and the lack of cultural regeneration have the potential to erode local practices that have been the foundation of community life for centuries. Therefore, a collective commitment from the government, universities, religious organizations, and indigenous communities is needed to document, educate, and integrate the values of Tamadun Islam Nusantara into the education curriculum, public policy, and daily life.

Finally, this mini-research confirms that West Java is one of the hearts of the Islamic Nusantara civilization. From the interior of Sumedang to the coast of Cirebon, the legacy passed down by Prabu Geusan Ulun, Sunan Gunung Jati, and local scholars is not only a part of the past, but also a roadmap for the future—a model of civilization that harmonizes religion, culture, nature, and humanity. In this context, the Islamic civilization of the archipelago is not only a local heritage, but also Indonesia's contribution to a peaceful, just, and sustainable global civilization.

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