

## Architecture, Devotion, and Power: The Kalasan Temple and Buddhist Legitimation under the Śailendra Dynasty

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**ABSTRACT** This study analyzes Kalasan Temple as a religious and political entity that articulated and mobilized Mahayana Buddhist ideology to bolster dynastic legitimacy during the Śailendra dynasty in eighth-century Java. The study utilizes a historical-archaeological approach, systematically applying heuristics, critical source evaluation, interpretation, and historiography to both primary data, specifically the Kalasan Inscription (778 CE) and the temple's architectural and ornamental characteristics, as well as secondary scholarship in history, archaeology, and Buddhist studies. This research reinterprets epigraphic and architectural data by contextualizing Kalasan within the broader framework of contemporary Buddhist monuments in Central Java, such as Sari, Plaosan, and the Borobudur complex, to evaluate common ideological patterns and institutional strategies, rather than regarding existing literature as a descriptive authority. The analysis reveals that Kalasan's establishment as a Bhavanam, bolstered by royal patronage and simā land grants, signifies a purposeful incorporation of Mahayana devotional practices into the political framework of Ancient Mataram. The study demonstrates, through comparative architectural and contextual analysis, that Mahayana Buddhism functioned as both elite religiosity and a legitimizing framework connecting rulers, monastic communities, and society. This article emphasizes methodological rigor and inter-site comparison, offering critical insights into the interplay between religious ideology and political authority, demonstrating how sacred architecture actively influenced the development of early Javanese civilization.

**KEYWORDS** *Kalasan Temple; Mahayana Buddhism; Śailendra Dynasty; Religious Legitimation; Buddhist Architecture*

### INTRODUCTION

Temples from the Hindu-Buddhist period in Indonesia function as both religious structures and complex historical records that convey political authority, spiritual convictions, and cultural exchanges. In early Javanese society, monumental religious architecture embodied abstract concepts of power, devotion, and cosmological order. Archaeological artifacts, such as temples,

inscriptions, and sculptural programs, provide crucial evidence for understanding how ruling elites established legitimacy and communicated ideological messages to religious communities and the general public. Temples operated as dynamic entities within broader socio-political and religious contexts, rather than merely serving as static artifacts of artistic achievement (Hati & Roziqin, 2023; Ridwan, 2015).



Central Java emerged in the eighth century as a significant hub of political and religious transformation within the Indonesian archipelago. During this time, the region became a locus of engagement and intermittent competition among ruling elites promoting divergent religious ideologies, particularly Hindu Shaivism and Mahayana Buddhism. The Ancient Mataram polity, backed by the Śailendra dynasty, played a crucial role in the expansion of Mahayana Buddhism through extensive temple construction projects. These projects exemplified personal commitment and strategic efforts that incorporated religious institutions into the framework of political authority. Monumental Buddhist temples such as Borobudur, Sari, and Kalasan exemplify the use of architecture to reinforce ideological supremacy and consolidate dynastic power within a multifaceted religious framework (Dewi et al., 2024; Rosalinda et al., 2024).

Kalasan Temple occupies a significant position among these monuments. Located in the Sleman region of modern Yogyakarta, Kalasan is part of a significant sacred landscape that includes the Prambanan and Sari temples, indicating that this area functioned as an important religious and political corridor in the eighth century. The historical importance of Kalasan Temple is unequivocally affirmed in the Kalasan Inscription from 778 CE, which records the establishment of a *Tārā Bhavanam*, a sanctuary dedicated to the goddess *Tārā*, commissioned by Rakai Panangkaran at the request of Buddhist religious leaders (Mitra, 2011; Pradoko et al., 2021). This

epigraphic evidence establishes Kalasan as not only a Buddhist shrine but also as an institutionalized religious center supported by royal patronage, which includes the provision of *simā* lands for monastic maintenance (Maziyah, 2012).

Despite its importance, scholarly discussion surrounding Kalasan Temple has primarily concentrated on architectural typology, stylistic classification, and chronological placement within the context of Central Javanese temples. While these studies have significantly contributed to documenting the monument's physical characteristics and spatial configuration, they often perceive architecture merely as an aesthetic or technical achievement rather than as a medium for ideological expression. The broader symbolic and political implications of Kalasan Temple, particularly its role in conveying religious legitimacy during the Śailendra dynasty, are insufficiently analyzed. Classical temples such as Kalasan were constructed not solely for ritualistic purposes but also as visual and spatial embodiments of authority, incorporating Mahayana Buddhist principles into the political structure (Kempers, 1933; Santiko, 1997).

Recent studies have begun to suggest this interpretive trajectory. Pattipawae and Pattipawae & Tumimomor (2020) underscored the importance of visual representation and digital media in conveying the cultural significance of Kalasan Temple, while Gumulya et al. (2023) demonstrated that its architectural design encapsulated symbolic meanings linked to dynastic legitimation. Herwindo et al. (2018), present a comparative

analysis that situates Kalasan within a broader context of Buddhist monuments shaped by elite patronage. Nevertheless, these studies frequently neglect to systematically analyze how specific religious concepts, particularly Mahayana devotional practices centered on *Tārā*, were incorporated into architectural design and institutional patronage as instruments for political legitimization.

This article examines the Kalasan Temple as a religious and symbolic space where architecture, devotion, and power converge, interpreting the temple not solely as a static artifact but as a religious institution employed by the Śailendra Dynasty to assert Mahayana Buddhist legitimacy. This study shows that looking at history, archaeological findings, and religious symbols together helps us understand how support from kings, written records, and building designs worked together to strengthen both religious and political power in the 8th century CE. Consequently, the Kalasan Temple actively influenced the ideological dynamics among rulers, religious elites, and society, showcasing how sacred architecture served as a means of legitimacy and power negotiation within ancient Javanese history.

## Method

This study utilizes a historical-archaeological methodology to analyze Kalasan Temple as a religious edifice that operated within the context of political and religious legitimization during the Śailendra dynasty in the eighth century CE. The historical method is employed not only to reconstruct past events but also to examine how material artifacts, specifically

inscriptions and temple architecture, function as primary historical sources that encapsulate ideological significances. This research combines historical inquiry with archaeological interpretation, treating architectural form, spatial organization, and epigraphic evidence as critical data for analyzing the connection between Mahayana Buddhist devotion and dynastic authority in early Java (Irwanto & Sair, 2014).

This method is implemented through a scientific protocol comprising four primary stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Herlina, 2020). This study gathered data from multiple primary and secondary sources during the heuristic phase. Primary sources encompass the Kalasan Inscription as the principal epigraphic reference, archaeological evidence represented by the architectural framework of the Kalasan Temple, iconographic embellishments and reliefs, as well as pertinent artifacts (including statue fragments, construction materials, and temple design) that illustrate Mahayana Buddhist religious practices. This study employs classical religious texts, such as doctrinal concepts of Mahayana Buddhism from Indian and Southeast Asian traditions, as primary sources to reconstruct the temple's religious and symbolic functions. Secondary sources were acquired via an examination of scientific literature, encompassing journal articles, archaeological excavation reports, and historical analyses pertaining to the political and religious dynamics of Ancient Mataram and the Śailendra Dynasty in Central Java. The phase of source criticism was executed via external and internal

scrutiny. External criticism seeks to verify the authenticity and physical context of sources, including chronology, materials, inscription techniques, and the properties of architectural materials. Internal criticism is performed to assess the reliability of the source material and to discern the political and religious agendas suggested in the official narratives and symbolic representations of the content.

The third stage, interpretation, seeks to elucidate the implicit and explicit meanings of historical sources validated through source criticism. This integrates an analysis of the Kalasan Inscription as the principal epigraphic source, archaeological evidence encompassing architectural design, ornamental characteristics, and relief iconography, alongside religious texts that embody Mahayana Buddhist doctrine and tradition, serving as an interpretive framework for reconstructing the religious and symbolic roles of Kalasan Temple. This analysis links architectural expression to the political legitimacy strategies of the Śailendra Dynasty and elucidates how the temple's construction conveyed political, religious, and cosmological narratives for the society of that era. The final part, historiography, focuses on creating a clear and detailed historical story to understand the importance of Kalasan Temple as a Buddhist center, a symbol of power, a part of cultural identity, and the ideas used by the Śailendra Dynasty in classical Central Java.

## DISCUSSION

### Historical Context and Background of Kalasan Temple Construction

Kalasan Temple is a significant monument from the classical period in the Sleman region of the Special Region of Yogyakarta, in proximity to other temple complexes, including Prambanan Temple and Sari Temple (Savitri, 2022). The strategic location signifies that this region was historically a significant religious and political hub during the Śailendra dynasty. The existence of Kalasan Temple is intrinsically linked to the construction of other nearby temples, which exhibit functional and ideological interconnections (Bosch, 1961). The historical significance of the Kalasan Temple is further substantiated by the discovery of the Kalasan Inscription, dated 778 CE, which employs the Sanskrit language and script. This inscription indicates that King Rakai Panangkaran constructed the temple at the behest of Buddhist priests to venerate the goddess Tara, a significant figure in Mahayana Buddhism (Damai, 2019).

Recognized as a sovereign who endorsed Mahayana Buddhism, Rakai Panangkaran utilized the erection of religious edifices to manifest his authority. Kalasan Temple functioned as a visual and symbolic medium representing temporal and spiritual power amalgamation (Klokke, 2008). The construction of the temple complex signifies that this site served as a place of worship and as a center for education and the dissemination of religious teachings, including establishing a monastery for monks, as noted in the inscription. The inscription emphasizes the strategic value

of religious architecture in the kingdom's ideological agenda, extending beyond mere religious functions to encompass cultural and administrative dimensions of the Śailendra Dynasty's governance (Khotami et al., 2021).

The Kalasan Inscription documents the allocation of *simā* land by the king to facilitate religious activities in the monastery, exemplifying the royal patronage system directed towards religious institutions. The inscription indicates the integration of Buddhism into the state framework, wherein backing for religious communities was coupled with the distribution of economic resources and the governance of territorial areas. This inscription encompasses administrative data and rich symbolic and ideological significance, illustrating the manifestation and exhibition of power through religious channels. The construction of the Kalasan Temple, dedicated to the goddess *Tārā*, exemplifies the Śailendra Dynasty's commitment to institutionalizing Mahayana Buddhism while consolidating spiritual and political hegemony in Central Java during the 8th century CE (Mochtar, 2015).

The Kalasan Inscription documents the temple's construction and functions as an ideological text illustrating the interdependent relationship between political authority and religious institutions in the ancient Mataram state. The inscription acts as a political and religious artifact, showing how the Śailendra Dynasty used support for Mahayana Buddhism, including building monasteries and temples and helping the sangha community, to strengthen their power and influence in Central Java.

Additionally, the text of the inscription acted as a way for the ruling leaders to communicate important ideas to the people, creating a story about the dynasty's devotion, the king's responsibility to uphold the dharma, and the kingdom's role in maintaining both cosmic and social order—concepts that fit with the traditional beliefs about kingship in pre-modern Southeast Asia.

### **Kalasan Temple as an Emblem of the ancient Mataram Authority**

Kalasan Temple exemplifies the amalgamation of political power and religious expression of the Śailendra Dynasty in the 8th century CE, especially under the rule of Rakai Panangkaran. Located in a pivotal area between Buddhist and Hindu power centers in the Kedu-Prambanan plain, the construction of Kalasan Temple exemplifies the Śailendra's political ambition to establish the ideological dominance of Mahayana Buddhism in the face of religious rivalry with Hindu elites linked to the Sanjaya Dynasty (Surpi, 2020; Santiko, 2013). This site selection exemplifies a spatial-political strategy in the creation of both a sacred landscape and a landscape of power, wherein the erection of monumental structures acts as symbolic assertions of significant cosmological and territorial domains, consistent with the political notions of space and the “sacred landscape” in pre-modern Southeast Asian kingdoms.

Kalasan Temple represents intricate aesthetic and ideological symbolism evident in its physical form and architectural embellishments. The structure's design, featuring a stupa atop its main body, embodies the cosmological framework of Mahayana

Buddhism, wherein the stupa represents Mount Meru as the cosmic center and the divine realm, a notion similarly represented in Indian and Southeast Asian Buddhist literary traditions (Soekmono, 1973; Jordaan & Colless, 2009). The reliefs of devata figures, lotus motifs, and cloud decorations illustrate cosmological and religious symbolism that merges spiritual and political roles, positioning the king as the guardian of dharma and intermediary between the mundane and transcendent realms, as suggested by the religious legitimacy narrative in the Kalasan Inscription (Widyasanti, 2015).



**Figure 1. Restoration of Kalasan Temple in progress**

Source: Property of Tomy Wijaya, 2025

The intricate decoration and construction techniques signify direct royal patronage, as the extensive mobilization of economic resources and labor was feasible solely by the ruling elite, reflecting a consistent pattern of patronage for religious monuments in pre-modern Southeast Asia. The architecture of Kalasan Temple serves both as an artistic expression and a tangible representation

of power, facilitating visual communication between the ruler and the populace, as well as between the kingdom and the cosmological order (Gumulya et al., 2023).

The establishment of monasteries and the allocation of land (*simā*) to the monastic community, as documented in the Kalasan Inscription, exemplify the deliberate endeavors of the Śailendra Dynasty to create a religious network intertwined with the framework of state authority. This evidence substantiates that the Kalasan Temple is not a solitary edifice but the nucleus of structured religious activities, providing a foundation for political endorsement for the rulers. The conferment of *simā* illustrates that power was consolidated not solely through military or bureaucratic means but also via religious institutions that expanded the kingdom's influence into society's spiritual and social realms. Consequently, Kalasan Temple epitomizes state authority manifested through religious structures, illustrating the Śailendra Dynasty's approach to consolidating power via the appropriation of sacred sites, the creation of inscriptions, and the erection of monumental buildings (Santiko, 2013; Sundberg, 2006).

Kalasan Temple illustrates the interdependent relationship between political authority and religious expression in 8th-century Java, wherein the ruling elite employed religious patronage as a means of political legitimacy. Epigraphic and archaeological research suggests that the construction of Kalasan Temple during the Śailendra Dynasty, specifically under Rakai Panangkaran, was a political maneuver aimed at consolidating power in the Ancient

Mataram region through the establishment of Mahayana Buddhism (Soekmono, 1979). The incorporation of religious symbolism in the temple's architecture and iconography facilitated the creation of a dominant narrative that surpassed social and geographical limitations, aligning with the notion of "cosmological kingship" in pre-modern Southeast Asian political structures. Consequently, Kalasan Temple serves as both an archaeological artifact and a tangible manifestation of a multifaceted political and ideological process, wherein monumental architecture emerged as the principal medium for consolidating power and expressing royal identity.

### **Impacts of Buddhist Culture and Religion**

The impact of Buddhist culture and religion, particularly from the Mahayana tradition, is evident not only in the decorations and architecture of Kalasan Temple but also fundamentally embedded in the ideology and cosmology that underpin the temple's existence. This structure exemplifies one of the earliest and most significant forms of religious architecture from the Ancient Mataram period, illustrating the interplay between spiritual and political authority during the Śailendra Dynasty (de Casparis, 1950). The architecture of Kalasan Temple functions not only as a site for worship but also as a tangible embodiment of the Mahayana perspective, wherein the material realm is perceived as a reflection of elevated spiritual frameworks. Each aspect of the edifice, encompassing the floor plan, the multi-story design, and the intricate reliefs, embodies fundamental principles of Mahayana Buddhism, including emptiness,

compassion, and the communal pursuit of enlightenment (Herwindo et al., 2018).

In Mahayana Buddhism, sacred figures like the Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, and Bodhisattvas, enlightened beings who defer nirvana to assist others, particularly the goddess Tara, the female Bodhisattva of compassion, are pivotal in the iconography of the Kalasan Temple (Bhattacharyya, 1958). *Tārā* is commonly represented as a crowned female figure making the varadamudrā gesture, symbolizing bestowal, and is encircled by lotus motifs that signify purity and enlightenment, which are also evident in the reliefs and decorative elements of the Kalasan Temple. The Śailendra dynasty esteemed *Tārā* as an emblem of spiritual authority, linking the patronage of the temple to the king's proximity to transcendent power (Jordaan, 1998). The reference to *Tārā*'s veneration in the Kalasan Inscription indicates that the temple's establishment was a strategic ideological maneuver to reinforce the kingdom's political and religious dominance. The architecture and iconography of Kalasan Temple serve as a visual medium to establish the dominant narrative of the Śailendra Dynasty during the political and religious power struggles in 8th-century AD Java (Hatmono, 2019).

The architectural characteristics of Kalasan Temple affirm the significant impact of Mahayana fine arts through its intricate decorative and symbolic components (Wirasanti, 2023). Ornamental features, including miniature stupas, statue niches, and intricate carvings on the exterior walls, exhibit a high level of artistry and a deep comprehension of Buddhist aesthetic

principles. A significant aspect of Mahayana architecture is the employment of visual symbols to express religious doctrine, including the mudra positions of statues' hands, the crowns adorned by Bodhisattvas, and the depiction of mythological beings such as Makara (guardian of water) and Kala (guardian of time) on doors and niches, which represent protection and transcendence (Hunter, 2019). The lotus flower motif throughout the temple symbolizes spiritual enlightenment that ascends from the earthly realm to the divine. The building's imposing structure embodies the vertical aesthetics characteristic of Mahayana while also suggesting a cosmological hierarchy among the underworld, the human realm, and the domain of the Buddhas (Rosalinda et al., 2024).

Consequently, Kalasan Temple exemplifies the amalgamation of the political authority of the Śailendra Dynasty and the spiritual zeal of Mahayana Buddhism. It was constructed not solely for spiritual purposes but also as an ideological and cultural initiative that validated the kingdom's status as a legitimate spiritual center. Every element of this temple, including the reliefs, architectural forms, and interior design, contributes to a comprehensive narrative that positions Buddhism as a cohesive force and validates authority. Consequently, Kalasan Temple serves as a visual and material emblem of Mahayana spirituality, which the Śailendra rulers have adeptly integrated into the political framework, culture, and identity of the ancient Mataram kingdom in 8th-century Java.

## **Integration of Indigenous Culture and Foreign Religion**

Kalasan Temple is a significant early example of cultural acculturation in Indonesia, particularly between indigenous Javanese elements and 8th-century Indian Buddhism (Sarkar, 1972). Acculturation should not be perceived merely as a unilateral encounter between two cultures but as a dynamic interaction that yields a novel synthesis. The local culture was not entirely overwhelmed by foreign influences but assimilated, adapted, and incorporated new elements into its established cosmological and aesthetic framework. The evidence indicates that ancient Javanese society was capable of selective and innovative responses to external influences (Wintako et al., 2021).

The profound influence of Mahayana Buddhism from India is evident in the symbolic and iconographic features of Kalasan Temple (Gupte, 1972). The Bodhisattva figures sculpted on the temple walls, the stupa reliefs embellishing the panels, and the lotus motif symbolizing spiritual enlightenment constitute the Mahayana Buddhist iconography. These elements suggest that priests and merchants did not solely disseminate Buddhism but also did so visually and monumentally through significant sacred architecture. Kalasan Temple served as a transcultural conduit for conveying Indian philosophical teachings in a manner that resonated with the local populace (Eni, 2019).

Nonetheless, the Indian influence does not unequivocally prevail over the temple's artistic and architectural structure. The architectural style of Kalasan Temple

continues to embody the local Javanese cultural heritage. The distinctive use of andesite stone, the terraced roof structure resembling the shape of Meru in Javanese architecture, and the kala-makara ornaments depicting local mythological creatures at the entrance are evident. These elements function as adornments and protective and cosmological symbols within Nusantara traditions (Halim & Herwindo, 2017)temples and shrines have been known as a means of worshipping the gods and goddesses or one's ancestors, especially in the religions of Hinduism and Buddhism. Observers often regard the ornaments of these temples as mere visual art objects, as eye candy that may beautify their outward appearance. However, when examined more closely, these ornaments carry a certain meaning in each of the temples. The aim of this research study is to explore the deeper significance of these ornaments and their location. This research can be classified as qualitative, using the descriptive-analytical method. Employing the Purposive Sampling method regarding ornamentation, eleven temples have been selected that meet the research requirements. Both Hinduism and Buddhism have been known to make a division into three worlds, namely the lower, middle and upper spheres. This division has also shaped the elements of temples into their respective head, body and legs/feet. Further categorization yields six motifs, all of which can be found in temples in various shapes, consisting of several types of ornament that embellish the three elements mentioned above. Each of the motifs carries a variety of meanings. In this research study, the

relationship between the meanings and their exact location (placement. The evidence substantiates that the local community does not forfeit its identity but enhances it during acculturation.

Nonetheless, the Indian influence does not unequivocally prevail over the entirety of the temple's artistic and architectural design. The architectural style of Kalasan Temple continues to embody the local Javanese cultural heritage. The distinctive use of andesite stone, the terraced roof structure resembling the Meru shape in Javanese architecture, and the kala-makara ornaments depicting local mythological creatures at the entrance illustrate this (Tjahjono, 2003). These elements function not only as ornamentation but also as protective and cosmological symbols within the Nusantara tradition, affirming that during the process of acculturation, the local community retains its identity while simultaneously broadening it.

The acculturation evident in the architecture and symbolism of Kalasan Temple demonstrates that the Javanese populace of the 8th century were not merely passive recipients of Indian influence but actively engaged as interpreters and processors of it (Soekmono, 1979). Mahayana Buddhism, originating from India, was not adopted in its original form but rather refined, curated, and modified to align with the pre-existing local social framework and cosmology. This process exemplifies religious "localization," wherein transnational doctrines are redefined within the local cultural framework to achieve significance and broad acceptance within the community.

Symbols like the lotus and Bodhisattva from Indian tradition are amalgamated with local elements such as kala-makara and multi-story roof structures, which possess distinct spiritual significance in Javanese culture (Fadliana et al., 2024). This procedure illustrates the ability of local communities to generate new interpretations from external symbols, integrating them into their cultural lexicon. This aesthetic and ideological adaptation incorporates new values within a familiar ethical and spiritual framework. Consequently, Kalasan Temple is historical evidence of the Javanese people's ability to transform external influences into unique, lasting cultural manifestations.

Kalasan Temple serves as a place of worship and a multifunctional center for the education and dissemination of Mahayana Buddhism (Jordaan, 1997). Temple edifices served as a significant medium for visual religious communication in an 8th-century society predominantly characterized by oral tradition and lacking widespread literacy. Ornaments like Bodhisattva reliefs, stupas, and lotus motifs serve aesthetic purposes and convey symbolic teachings regarding wisdom, compassion, and the journey to enlightenment. The grand architectural design of temples renders them a public space accessible to diverse groups, including individuals who cannot read sacred texts in Sanskrit or Old Javanese (Subandi, 2018). Kalasan Temple functions as a conduit for religious education, internalizing the principles of Mahayana Buddhism through visual experiences and sacred environments. Reliefs, Bodhisattva statues, and cosmological symbols like stupas and lotuses embody the

principles of compassion, enlightenment, and cosmic order, functioning as an educational resource for both the religious community and the general populace. The existence of monasteries and the configuration of ritual spaces suggest that this complex was intended as a hub for religious activities and doctrinal education. Kalasan Temple, through rituals, pilgrimages, and symbolic spatial representations, influenced the collective memory and spiritual identity of classical Javanese society, establishing it as both a sacred site and a hub for continuous ideological and spiritual transmission.

Kalasan Temple serves as a religious structure and a political instrument the royal elite utilizes to legitimize their power. In the 8th-century Old Mataram kingdom, temple construction was a calculated strategy to disseminate Buddhism, implemented by the ruling elite to consolidate spiritual authority with temporal power. Monarchs and aristocrats demonstrated individual devotion and bolstered their political authority by supporting Mahayana Buddhism and financing temple construction. The temple functioned as a visual representation of the unity between the king as "*cakravartin*" (universal king) and the essence of the Dharma (Kapadia, 2013). The construction of the Kalasan Temple functioned as a symbolic diplomatic effort aimed at promoting political stability, unifying social factions, and disseminating state ideology via religious expression. It manifested as a concrete representation of social, ideological, and spiritual integration strategies actualized through monumental architecture (Degroot, 2009).

Kalasan Temple exemplifies the intricate cultural interplay between India and Java. It exhibits foreign influences and demonstrates the capacity of local individuals to reinterpret the significance and purpose of new doctrines within their cultural context. The acculturation observed in Kalasan Temple exemplifies that cultural processes are neither linear nor dominant; they are the outcome of negotiation. In this context, the temple serves as a nexus between the prominent civilizations of Asia and the indigenous identity of the archipelago. This historical accomplishment enhances the wealth of Indonesian architecture, spirituality, and cultural identity.

## CONCLUSION

Kalasan Temple exemplifies that eighth-century Java's religious architecture served not merely as a sacred space but also as a strategic tool for expressing and legitimizing dynastic power. The temple, founded under the auspices of the Śailendra dynasty during Rakai Panangkaran's reign, functioned as a *Tārā Bhavanam*, institutionalizing Mahayana Buddhist devotion within the political context of Ancient Mataram. The integration of architectural design, epigraphic narrative, and religious iconography demonstrates that Kalasan Temple functioned as a tangible embodiment of power, wherein spiritual authority and political legitimacy were intentionally interwoven. Mahayana Buddhist concepts, especially the veneration of the goddess *Tārā*, were reinterpreted through cultural adaptation within local Javanese architectural traditions and symbolic systems, allowing religious ideology to

operate effectively within the wider socio-cultural context.

This study's findings enhance the comprehension of sacred architecture as an ideological and political resource in early Javanese history. This research highlights the role of temples as dynamic institutions that facilitated interactions among rulers, religious elites, and society through the integration of historical, archaeological, and religious-semiotic analyses, rather than merely as passive artistic monuments. The study underscores the necessity of contextualizing individual monuments like Kalasan within their broader religious and political networks to enhance the comprehension of Mahayana Buddhism as a legitimizing framework in premodern Southeast Asia. This viewpoint facilitates comparative research on Buddhist temple complexes in Java and elsewhere, especially in analyzing how sacred space was utilized to negotiate power, authority, and cultural identity across various regional contexts.

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