



Islamic Acculturation and Local Tradition in the Gumbregan Ritual: The Dynamics of Islamic Expression in the Gunungkidul Community

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the Gumbregan tradition in Gunungkidul as a dynamic site of cultural acculturation between ancestral agrarian ritual practices and Islamic normative frameworks. It addresses the question of how Islamic teachings are integrated into pre-Islamic symbolic structures without erasing local cultural identity. Employing a qualitative design that combines library research with in-depth field interviews involving religious leaders, cultural custodians, and community members, the study applies an anthropological approach grounded in acculturation theory. The findings reveal that Gumbregan operates not merely as a livestock-blessing ceremony but as a negotiated religious expression in which Islamic elements—such as supplication, ritual purification, and communal kendhuren—recontextualize inherited symbols while preserving their socio-cultural significance. This adaptive integration generates a localized model of Islamic practice that reinforces gratitude to Allah, strengthens communal solidarity, and sustains agrarian cohesion. The study argues that Islamic norms are internalized through symbolic reinterpretation rather than cultural replacement, demonstrating the community's conscious strategy to maintain cultural continuity while affirming religious identity within an evolving Islamic framework.

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INTRODUCTION

Spices constituted the most profitable trade commodity during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. European nations, most of which were situated in subtropical climates, relied heavily on spices not only to warm the body during winter but also to support consumption needs and food preservation. This growing demand drove a sharp escalation in prices on international markets and triggered successive waves of maritime expeditions aimed at locating spice sources directly within tropical regions—the natural habitat of commodities such as cloves, nutmeg, pepper, and ginger. Information concerning the extraordinary economic value of spices circulated widely among European explorers, particularly those from England, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands, who then competed intensely in undertaking transoceanic voyages. These spice expeditions simultaneously marked the beginning of the discovery and exploration of new territories beyond Europe (Cahyani, [2022](#); Diwanggoro et al., [2025](#)).

The expeditionary process reached a critical juncture when explorers arrived in the Indonesian archipelago (*Nusantara*). The Dutch promptly established Batavia as a central trading hub due to its strategic position at the entrance of the Sunda Strait, which linked the western and eastern parts of the archipelago. The western region was widely known as a pepper-producing area, while the eastern region emerged as a center for clove and nutmeg production. Information regarding these newly accessed territories was initially kept confidential to avoid commercial competition; nevertheless, the struggle to control spice commodities gave rise to conflicts with the English, Prince Jayakarta, and the Sultanate of Banten. In order to consolidate their commercial interests and reinforce monopoly power, the Dutch founded the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, which functioned to organize and structure the spice trade throughout the archipelago (Batubara et al., [2022](#)).

Beyond their considerable economic value, spices carried strategic significance in shaping global power relations during the early modern era. Control over spice-producing regions did not merely determine commercial profit; it also strengthened the political position of European states within the broader arena of inter-state competition. The archipelago thus came to be perceived not only as a zone of production but as a contested sphere of influence involving diplomacy, armed conflict, and intervention in local socio-political structures (Mulya et al., [2025](#)). Colonial domination had direct consequences for local communities, including shifts in cropping patterns, distribution systems, and labor



relations resulting from monopoly policies imposed by the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*. These conditions generated social tensions and stimulated various forms of local resistance, demonstrating that the history of spices is deeply intertwined with the layered social, economic, and cultural transformations experienced by the peoples of *Nusantara* (Siregar et al., [2023](#)).

Within the context of Javanese local culture, including the Gunungkidul region, communities developed adaptive mechanisms to preserve balance amid intensifying social change. The Gumbregan tradition emerged as a cultural expression reflecting a harmonious relationship among humans, nature, and God. This ceremony instills reverence for living beings as creations of Allah and reinforces ecological awareness among communities residing in relatively dry and geographically challenging environments. From the perspective of cultural anthropology, Gumbregan represents an agrarian ritual that affirms humanity's attachment to natural cycles while simultaneously serving as a symbolic medium for maintaining equilibrium between resource utilization and conservation (Yaqqin & Pratiwi, [2025](#)).

The implementation of Gumbregan also fulfills a sociological function as a medium of social integration. Collective community participation throughout the entire sequence of ritual activities, including the *kendhuren*, strengthens solidarity and reinforces local identity amid the currents of modernization (Maulidi et al., [2025](#); Pratiwi et al., [2025](#)). The spiritual values embedded within the tradition cultivate a shared awareness of the importance of gratitude for the existence of livestock—particularly cattle—as a foundation of the community's economic livelihood. These historical, social, and spiritual dimensions are closely interconnected, endowing Gumbregan with strong cultural resilience (Yakub et al., [2023](#)).

The relationship between religion and culture within the Gumbregan tradition reveals a form of religiosity that is both inclusive and contextually grounded. Islam does not appear as a force that eradicates local customs; rather, it operates as a value system that imbues them with renewed meaning through prayers and expressions of gratitude to Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala. Ritual elements rooted in traditional belief systems undergo processes of symbolic reinterpretation without forfeiting their foundational cultural identity. This process of acculturation demonstrates the community's flexibility in internalizing religious teachings while sustaining cultural continuity (Harahap et al., [2021](#); Al-Farisi & Syaqqii, [2025](#)).

This study focuses on identifying the meanings embedded in the Gumbregan tradition and examining the dynamics of its development in Gunungkidul Regency. It formulates three principal research questions: what constitutes the historical background and ritual process of the Gumbregan tradition in Gunungkidul; what elements shape and define the tradition; and why Gumbregan exerts significant influence on the local community. The study offers scholarly novelty by positioning Gumbregan as a model of Islamic-cultural acculturation within the framework of a local agrarian ritual. Through an anthropological approach and the application of cultural acculturation theory, this research affirms that the integration of Islamic values unfolds through symbolic reinterpretation rather than cultural substitution. Gumbregan may therefore be understood as an intangible cultural heritage that remains relevant in contemporary life and illustrates how local communities continuously construct harmony among religion, culture, and social transformation.

METHOD

This research constitutes a cultural-historical inquiry employing a qualitative anthropological approach, focusing on the identification of meanings, developmental trajectories, and the dynamics of acculturation within the Gumbregan tradition in Gunungkidul Regency. The research design integrates *library research* and *field research* in order to generate data that are both comprehensive and contextually grounded (Sinta et al., [2025](#)). Documentary data were collected through archival exploration and literature review at the Library of UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Grahatama Pustaka Yogyakarta, regional cultural institution archives, and scholarly journal articles relevant to the study of tradition, cultural anthropology, and acculturation theory. These sources were selected based on thematic relevance, academic credibility, and their direct connection to the conceptual framework of Islamic and local cultural acculturation.

Fieldwork was conducted through *in-depth interviews* and limited participatory observation of the implementation of the Gumbregan tradition. Interviews were carried out in a semi-structured format to allow flexible, yet focused exploration aligned with the research objectives. Informants were selected using *purposive sampling* based on specific criteria: religious leaders who understand the integration of Islamic values within the tradition; cultural figures or elders knowledgeable about the historical background and ritual transformations; community members

directly involved in the execution of Gumbregan; and younger generations who participate as part of the process of cultural transmission. These criteria were established to ensure both diversity of perspectives and depth of information.

Field data were recorded, transcribed, and classified according to key thematic categories, including historical background, ritual structure, cultural symbols, Islamic elements, and forms of social interaction emerging during the implementation of Gumbregan. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation, achieved by comparing interview results across informants and corroborating them with documentary data and observational findings. Data analysis was conducted in stages using an interactive analytical model encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction focused on filtering information relevant to the acculturation of Islam and local culture, while data presentation involved thematic categorization to map the relationships between traditional symbols and Islamic practices. Conclusions were formulated through interpretative analysis of field findings within the framework of cultural acculturation theory.

The primary theoretical framework draws upon John W. Berry's acculturation theory, which conceptualizes acculturation as a process of cultural and psychological change resulting from contact between cultural groups. This framework was applied to analyze the integration of Islamic elements into the ritual structure of Gumbregan without erasing local symbols. Koentjaraningrat's perspective on the dynamics of cultural reception was also employed to identify ritual elements that readily adapt, elements that are consciously preserved, and potential social tensions arising during the integration process. Through these analytical stages, the study does not merely describe the Gumbregan procession; it explicates the symbolic and social mechanisms that enable harmonious acculturation within the Gunungkidul community.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Gumbregan as an Agrarian Ritual within the Framework of Javanese Cosmology

Etymologically, the term *Gumbregan* derives from the Javanese *wuku* "Gumbreg," to which the suffix *-an* is added, indicating a ritual practice embedded within the traditional cyclical conception of time. Its close association with the *pawukon* system demonstrates that Gumbregan is deeply rooted in Javanese cosmology, which integrates calendrical calculation, natural rhythms, and social practice into a unified symbolic order. From the perspective of cultural anthropology, this embeddedness reflects what may be described as *ritual agrarian temporality*—a ritual practice that regulates the relationship between human beings, agrarian production cycles, and the continuity of life (Nurhidayah et al., [2025](#)). Gumbregan, therefore, should not be understood merely as a ceremonial event; rather, it constitutes a cultural mechanism that integrates temporal, ecological, and spiritual dimensions within the lived experience of the community.

Local narratives connect the origin of Gumbregan to the figure of Prophet Dzur, who in oral tradition is portrayed as a guardian of animals during the era of Prophet Sulaiman. Prophet Dzur is believed to have possessed profound knowledge of animals and to have vowed that the community's livestock should continually be prayed for to ensure shared prosperity and sustenance. Following the death of Prophet Dzur, this vow was said to have been continued by Prophet Sulaiman, who in local accounts is depicted as embodying care for all creatures. This narrative underscores the understanding that the stewardship of livestock constitutes both a moral and spiritual responsibility of human beings, while simultaneously serving as a pathway toward communal well-being (Susanto et al., [2021](#); Sutrisno & Dharmawan, [2024](#)).

The people of Gunungkidul maintain that conducting a *selamatan* for livestock, particularly cattle, represents a moral obligation that must not be neglected. This conviction arises from the belief that disregarding the ritual may invite misfortune, even if such consequences do not manifest immediately. The tradition also embodies an expression of gratitude for the blessings bestowed by Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala through livestock, which sustain agricultural productivity and household economies. The preservation of this ritual is thus regarded as both an act of reverence toward ancestors and a deliberate effort to maintain cultural continuity within the community.

The Gumbregan procession unfolds through several principal stages. The first stage is *taharah*, which in Islamic terminology refers to ritual purification from impurity. Within this ritual context, *taharah* is expressed through bathing the cattle and applying specific herbal mixtures to their bodies as symbols of outward cleansing and protection from disturbances believed to affect their health. The second stage involves the preparation of *sesaji kupat*, comprising

livestock feed such as *jadah woran*, four types of *kupat*, *pulo*, and *katul*, as well as *boreh* made from *kemuning* leaves, sliced pandan leaves, rose petals, and slaked lime. The next stage is *ngalungi sapi*, the act of placing a pair of *kupat luwar* around the cow's neck as a symbol of affection and metaphysical protection. This is followed by the ritual of *makani sapi*, the offering of *sesaji*—including *jadah woran*, *kupat*, *pulo*, *katul*, *sekar boreh*, *enjet*, and *toya tawa*—preceded by prayers to Allah seeking safety and blessing for the livestock. The subsequent stage entails attaching *kupat* to the cattle shed—namely *kupat cepuk*, *lepet*, and *bojo lima*—as an expression of gratitude toward those who safeguard the animals. The ritual sequence concludes with *kendhuren*, a communal gathering in which residents exchange dishes such as *kupat*, *tumpang*, and *gudangan*, followed by collective prayer led by a religious figure to invoke health and blessings for the livestock (Birran et al., 2025; Maharani, 2019; Triyono et al., 2024).

The ecological dimension of Gumbregan is clearly evident in the practice of *taharah* and in the community's attentive concern for livestock health. The tradition reflects a collective awareness that human well-being depends upon environmental sustainability and the health of animals that form part of the agrarian production system. Gumbregan may therefore be understood as an agrarian ritual that affirms the reciprocal relationship between humans and the environment within a framework of religious ethics. Islam functions as a normative framework that reinforces these values through prayer, the concept of gratitude (*syukur*), and the teaching of *silaturahmi*. The presence of Islam within this tradition does not dismantle local cultural structures; rather, it provides an ethical orientation that deepens and enriches the meaning of the ritual, transforming it into a contextualized form of religious practice firmly rooted in the social experience of the Gunungkidul community.

Symbolic Structure and Constitutive Elements in the Gumbregan Tradition

The development of the Gumbregan tradition originates from the collective awareness of an agrarian community regarding the vital importance of livestock safety in sustaining agricultural activity. Livestock—particularly cattle—are not merely regarded as economic assets but as indispensable pillars of food production continuity. For this reason, the Gumbregan ritual, performed once every seven months, is understood as a symbolic effort to invoke the safety and health of cattle so that they remain capable of cultivating the land in the forthcoming planting season. In local narratives, the ritual is also associated with the figure of Prophet Sulaiman, who is believed to have exercised authority over living beings, including animals. The tradition is broadly interpreted as an expression of gratitude to Allah, although in practice some members of the community continue to frame this gratitude in relation to unseen entities perceived as intermediaries of protection and safety for livestock (Jatinurcahyo & Yulianto, 2024).

Structurally, the Gumbregan ritual comprises a series of symbolic acts transmitted across generations, the origins of which are often no longer explicitly questioned. The first element is the offering of *sesaji*, which in traditional understanding is directed toward ancestral spirits or guardians of the cattle shed. For example, *kupat* hung at the entrance of the shed serves as a marker indicating that the ritual has been completed. According to local belief, the spirit believed to inhabit the shed merely “inhales” the aroma of the food as a symbolic sign of acceptance, while the remaining offerings may be discarded or reused as supplementary feed for the cattle. With the deepening of Islamic religious understanding, the practice of *sesaji* has undergone reinterpretation and is increasingly understood as an expression of gratitude for the health and blessings of the livestock (Alim, 2021).

The second element consists of the prayers recited throughout the ritual sequence. These prayers are delivered with bodily gestures that reflect reverence and humility, such as a bowed posture accompanied by solemn concentration. In earlier practice, prayers were frequently expressed in Old Javanese or symbolic formulations not fully comprehended by the general public, including references to *serat pawukon* texts. Prayers could also be conveyed through specific chants or poetic recitations believed to possess magical efficacy. This practice reflects the belief that ritual language contains performative power capable of invoking protection. As Islam became more deeply established within the community, the prayer recitations gradually transformed into Islamic invocations and direct supplications to Allah, seeking health, safety, and blessings for the livestock (Nurhidayah et al., 2025).

The third element is *kendhuren*, a communal meal that concludes the ritual sequence. During this stage, villagers gather to pray and share food as a symbol of togetherness. *Kendhuren* affirms the communal dimension of the Gumbregan tradition by creating a space for social interaction that strengthens familiarity and solidarity among residents. For cattle keepers, the performance of this ritual represents the continuation of ancestral values believed to generate positive effects on livestock health and productivity. Healthy and well-cared-for cattle contribute directly to agricultural success and to the economic stability of households (Maharani, 2019).

The implementation of Gumbregan demonstrates significant social functions. The practice of *gotong royong* in preparing offerings and the collective participation in *kendhuren* reinforce social cohesion within the village community. From the perspective of the sociology of religion, the ritual functions as a medium for reproducing mechanical solidarity that sustains the stability of agrarian communities. Its ecological dimension is equally evident in the practice of *taharah* and in the attentive care devoted to livestock health, reflecting an awareness that human welfare is intimately linked to environmental sustainability. Gumbregan may thus be understood as an agrarian ritual that affirms the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature within a framework of religious ethics. Islam operates as a value system that provides normative orientation through the concepts of prayer, gratitude (*syukur*), and *silaturahmi*, without negating the underlying local cultural structure. This integration demonstrates that Islamic teachings are internalized through processes of symbolic adaptation that enrich the meaning of the ritual while preserving the continuity of tradition.

Transformation and Integration of Islamic Values within the Gumbregan Tradition

Islam has exerted a significant influence on the development of the Gumbregan ritual within the Gunungkidul community. Its presence has not only strengthened the spiritual dimension of the ritual but has also played a role in responding to the social challenges faced by agrarian society. The Gumbregan tradition is believed to function as a symbolic safeguard against *paceklik*—periods of scarcity or food instability—through the expression of gratitude to Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala for the blessings of livestock that sustain the village economy. This practice of gratitude is understood as an ethical foundation that preserves social harmony, reinforces communal unity, and supports the enduring ethos of *gotong royong* in rural areas. The integration of robust local traditions with Islamic values also serves as a cultural filter against external influences perceived as potentially disruptive to the social order (Jatinurcahyo & Yulianto, [2024](#)).

The growing religious consciousness within the community reveals an increased spiritual orientation in the performance of the ritual. The prayer procession is conducted with solemn devotion, accompanied by observance of prohibitions believed to carry symbolic and spiritual implications. While certain mythological elements remain embedded in the ritual interpretation, the community simultaneously affirms that the practice strengthens faith in Allah. The process of Islamization within Gumbregan has unfolded gradually rather than instantaneously. Transformation is evident in the modification of prayer practices, which now incorporate *shalawat* and Islamic supplications; in several areas, traditional incantations have been abandoned. In more remote regions, however, some communities continue to preserve *mantra* or *jampi-jampi* as part of their cultural heritage, indicating that the integration of Islamic values proceeds in stages, contingent upon the social and religious readiness of each community (Dewi & Macaryus, [2022](#)).

The Islamic dimension of the Gumbregan tradition is further reflected in its emphasis on the concept of *taharah*. In Islamic teaching, *taharah* signifies not only physical cleanliness but also ritual purity as a prerequisite for worship. The practice of bathing cattle and cleansing them from impurity symbolizes the application of this value within an agrarian context. The act of purifying livestock carries both symbolic and practical implications: beyond its ritual meaning, it promotes animal health and prevents disease that could otherwise disrupt agricultural productivity. This awareness of cleanliness and health demonstrates the internalization of Islamic values within local cultural practice (Ariza et al., [2025](#)).

Islamic influence is likewise evident in the reinforcement of social relations through the teaching of *silaturahmi*. The sequence of Gumbregan rituals—from the preparation of offerings such as *kupat*, *lawaran*, and *gudangan* to the implementation of *kendhuren*—involves collective community participation. These interactions strengthen social cohesion and create shared spaces of encounter that deepen solidarity among residents. The tradition thus not only preserves ancestral cultural heritage but also functions as a medium for the enactment of Islamic values emphasizing togetherness and social care.

Field data indicate that the transformation of Gumbregan has not been characterized by the abrupt elimination of older elements, but rather by processes of reinterpretation and symbolic integration. Within Berry's typology of acculturation, this pattern may be categorized as an *integration strategy*—a strategy that preserves local cultural identity while embracing broader religious values. The continued presence of *mantra* in certain areas underscores that the acculturation process remains dynamic and uneven. The Gumbregan tradition therefore exemplifies a dialogical relationship between Islam and local culture in Gunungkidul. Islam does not operate as a hegemonic force that erases tradition; instead, it emerges as a source of renewed meaning that enriches and reorders cultural practice within a contextualized framework of religious ethics.

CONCLUSION

The Gumbregan tradition in Gunungkidul Regency affirms that local cultural practices do not exist in isolation from religious dynamics; rather, they function as a space of integration between ancestral heritage and Islamic values. This study demonstrates that acculturation within Gumbregan unfolds through processes of symbolic reinterpretation rather than the total elimination of earlier cultural elements. Ritual structures such as *kupat*, *sesaji*, and *kendhuren* are maintained, yet their orientation of meaning has shifted toward expressions of gratitude to Allah. This pattern reflects a model of cultural integration within acculturation typology, in which Islam operates as a value system that provides theological legitimacy while simultaneously enriching local cultural practice. Islamization at the level of rural society proceeds dialogically, contextually, and gradually, resulting in an adaptive form of religiosity that remains firmly rooted in its traditional foundations.

Future research should broaden the scope of inquiry through comparative approaches across different regions in order to identify variations in the practice of Gumbregan and related agrarian traditions elsewhere. In-depth ethnographic methods and generational change analysis are also essential to examine the trajectory of this tradition amid modernization, social mobility, and tendencies toward religious purification. Such further exploration will contribute to a more nuanced discourse on the anthropology of Islam in Indonesia and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving relationship between religion and culture within contemporary agrarian societies.

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