



The origin of the Javanese Kris

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The Javanese view the keris, a weapon created by their ancestors, as more than just a tool. As a cultural item, the keris symbolises its owner's aspirations and ideals. The origin of the keris underlines this dual nature of a weapon and spiritual object. The keris symbolises protection and self-discipline needed to overcome life's obstacles, originating from "*Kekeraan*" (meaning fence, barrier, warning, or control) and "*Aris*" (signifying tranquilly, steadiness, and smoothness). The development of the keris, a dagger from Southeast Asia, can be traced back to its predecessor. This keris buda originated during the Central Javanese Hindu-Buddhist era in the 8th to 9th centuries. During this era, there was a notable Indian cultural impact in Java, as seen by the construction of gigantic structures such as the Borobudur and Prambanan temples. The keris buda, featuring a leaf-shaped blade similar to Indian swords, signified the start of the keris lineage.

In the late 10th century, as Javanese cultural and political activities moved to East Java, the keris buda experienced more modifications. The dagger transformed into a longer, slender weapon for thrusting rather than stabbing. The change in carvings from Candi Panataran illustrates the impact of political instability and the necessity for a lighter and adaptable weapon. The keris's real value is its symbolic significance throughout different areas of the Indonesian archipelago. The keris is considered to protect its wearer and emit positive energy, making it a respected emblem of safety, power, and grandeur. This symbolic significance is seen during traditional events throughout the Indonesian archipelago.

When authority was transferred to East Java, keris-making flourished. Kingdoms such as Jenggala and Singosari are renowned for crafting exceptional-quality items currently valued by collectors. The Majapahit Empire subsequently promoted the Keris way of life across Southeast Asia. In the aftermath of the Mataram split, new designs and embellishments

surfaced. As its quality peaked, the keris's utility diminished, transforming into a symbol of social standing. This shift was particularly evident in Central Java.

In Central Java, men must wear a Jawi jacket, which is part of traditional Javanese clothing, during events like weddings. The man must adhere to this responsibility by wearing Javanese-style wedding attire, including batik cloth, wedding garments, a headpiece (kuluk), and a keris at the waist. The keris represents masculinity and strength in Javanese culture. The groom exhibits these qualities and shows his preparation for marriage by wearing it. The keris is commonly thought to hold spiritual importance. It symbolises protection from evil forces and bestows good luck upon the newly married couple. Keris can be inherited over generations, evolving into cherished family treasures. Integrating it into the wedding ceremony links the couple to their ancestors and symbolises the perpetuation of the family bloodline. Sometimes, the keris is a symbolic substitute when the groom cannot attend. This highlights the significance of the groom's responsibility and dedication to the marriage, even if he is not physically there.

It is usual to pay tribute and revere the keris before opening it from its shell, although this should be done with a sense of naturalness and moderation. Islam, as stated in the Quran, promotes monotheism and prohibits assigning power to objects. Having a keris for self-defence may be viewed as being in line with the Quran's emphasis on readiness for defence, which ultimately promotes peace. The owner's motive is mainly what matters. Excessive reverence contradicts the Islamic principle of moderation, and while respecting the keris as a cultural object is important, it should be done in a balanced manner.



The Javanese Kris is displayed in
the Knives and Weaponry Room of the Folklore Museum

Citation

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Candi Prambanan (Lara Jonggrang)



Candi Panataran