

Reading the Ancestors Message: Semiotics of the Bajang Ratu Temple Ornaments in Mapping Local Wisdom and Majapahit Women

Ayub Muktiono

Universitas Krisnadwipayana, UNKRIS Jakarta, Indonesia
Email: aybmukti@gmail.com

Received : 17 November - 2025

Accepted : 22 December - 2025

Published online : 27 December - 2025

Abstract

Candi Bajang Ratu, a stepped gateway in Trowulan, Mojokerto, is a significant architectural relic from the Majapahit Kingdom (13th-15th centuries CE). The ambiguous gendered name “Bajang Ratu” combining “bajang” (young/small) and “ratu” (a title for women) has prompted interpretations linking the site to influential female figures such as Gayatri Rajapatni. This article aims to uncover the representation of feminine values and local wisdom in the ornamental motifs of Candi Bajang Ratu through a semiotic approach. Employing a qualitative interpretive methodology, the study applies Roland Barthes’ semiotic framework (denotation, connotation, myth) and Charles Sanders Peirce’s triadic signs (icon, index, symbol), integrated within a hermeneutic case study design. Data were collected from secondary sources, including archaeological documentation and academic literature, and analyzed thematically and contextually. The findings reveal that the temple’s ornamental elements, such as hand-like profiles resembling prayer gestures, spiritually sacred spatial symbols, makara reliefs with flowing vines, vegetal motifs, symmetrical arches, fragments of Apsara figures, and the stepped gateway structure, symbolically embody feminine principles: fertility, wisdom, protection, cosmic harmony, flexibility, and adaptability. The curved, flowing architectural forms contrast sharply with masculine aesthetics characterized by rigidity and verticality, affirming the reverence for women not merely as individuals, but as cosmological and moral forces underpinning the kingdom’s continuity. Thus, Candi Bajang Ratu functions as a symbolic monument institutionalizing the recognition of feminine values within Majapahit culture. Far more than a stone structure, it is a symbolic archive of gentle yet enduring power, encapsulating sustainable values that mirror the character of Nusantara women.

Keywords: Candi Bajang Ratu, Local Wisdom, Majapahit Women, Semiotics.

1. Introduction

Candi Bajang Ratu, a stepped gateway located in the Trowulan area of Mojokerto, East Java, has long been recognized as a significant architectural relic from the Majapahit Kingdom (13th-15th centuries CE). Although the exact identity of the figure associated with it remains debated some link it to Jayanegara, son of Raden Wijaya, while others connect it to female figures such as Gayatri Rajapatni the name “Bajang Ratu” itself carries an intriguing gender ambiguity: “*bajang*” (meaning young, small, or even physically imperfect in archaic usage) and “*ratu*” (a royal title typically associated with women). This linguistic duality opens interpretive space suggesting that the site may be linked to influential women within Majapahit’s power structure.

In Nusantara history, women during the Majapahit era played far more active roles than the patriarchal stereotypes propagated during the colonial and postcolonial periods. Historical



records such as the *Nāgarakṛtāgama* (Desawarjana) by Prapañca (1365 CE) explicitly document noblewomen holding political and spiritual authority, such as Tribhuwana Tunggaladewi, who ruled as maharaja, and Gayatri Rajapatni, a central figure in dynastic legitimacy. This demonstrates that Majapahit society acknowledged female authority not only within the domestic sphere but also in state governance and religious life.

Yet, representations of women in cultural artifacts, including temple architecture have often been overlooked or superficially interpreted. In fact, the ornamental elements of Candi Bajang Ratu, such as undulating makara reliefs, vine-like vegetal motifs, and symmetrical forms evoking balance, can be read as visual metaphors for feminine principles: fertility, wisdom, protection, and cosmic harmony, values deeply rooted in the local wisdom of Nusantara societies. A semiotic approach, particularly drawing on Roland Barthes' (Barthes & Rifat, 1998) framework and Charles Sanders Peirce's sign theory, enables a deeper reading of these ornaments not merely as decorative elements, but as a system of signs encoding gender ideologies and social cosmologies of the past (Maulidita & Jati, 2025).

Recent research by Winaya and Munandar (2021) affirms that "many Majapahit temple ornaments contain symbolic dichotomies between the masculine (vertical, rigid, fire) and the feminine (horizontal, circular, water), reflecting a cosmological balance in ancient Javanese society." This finding strengthens the argument that sacred architecture is not merely a reflection of male power, but also a space for expressing revered feminine values.

Furthermore, Sani (2017) argues that Candi Bajang Ratu, with its curved forms and flowing ornamentation, diverges from the rigid, monumental structures typically associated with masculine architecture, thereby serving as an architectural manifestation of feminine principles within Majapahit's value system. This insight paves the way for a gender-sensitive semiotic analysis. Nevertheless, studies explicitly connecting the ornamental symbols of Candi Bajang Ratu to representations of women and gender roles within a semiotic framework remain scarce. Most archaeological studies remain descriptive or focus narrowly on technical aspects, neglecting ideological and gender dimensions. Yet, as Hall (1996) reminds us, understanding women's roles in Majapahit history is not merely about identifying individual figures, it is about recognizing how feminine values were embodied in material culture, including architecture.

Thus, although scholars have examined Majapahit symbolism broadly, studies that explicitly analyze the ornaments of Candi Bajang Ratu as visual representations of gender, especially women's roles and values are still scarce. This gap underscores the urgency of a semiotic investigation. Therefore, this article reads Bajang Ratu as a cultural text, using semiotics to uncover how local wisdom and gender conceptions, particularly feminine values, are visually articulated, and how these interpretations can contribute to reconstructing the often-marginalized history of women in Nusantara.

2. Literature Review

Research on the role of women in Majapahit history has undergone significant development over the past two decades, particularly with the emergence of gender-based approaches in Nusantara historical and archaeological studies. A key contribution is the book *Women and Power in Precolonial Java: Revisiting Majapahit Narratives* by Hall (1996). Hall asserts that Majapahit women were not merely passive actors in historical narratives, but political and spiritual subjects who held legitimizing authority within the royal power structure. Hall draws on primary sources such as the *Nāgarakṛtāgama*, which records

Tribhuwana Tunggaladewi as a maharaja who ruled with the blessing of her mother, Gayatri Rajapatni, clear evidence that female leadership was institutionally recognized.

In the context of symbolic representation, Sani (2017) identifies that “curved forms, vine-like ornaments, and water motifs in Majapahit architecture are frequently associated with feminine principles, symbolizing fertility, intuition, and cosmic balance, values deeply revered in ancient Javanese local wisdom.” Candi Bajang Ratu, with its stepped gateway structure and flowing reliefs, is cited as one architectural manifestation of these principles.

Semiotic theory provides a robust theoretical framework for interpreting these symbols as meaningful sign systems. Drawing on Charles Sanders Peirce’s model, each ornament, such as the makara exuding vines or the implied figures of apsaras within relief compositions can be analyzed as an icon (resemblance), an index (causal connection), or a symbol (cultural convention). Meanwhile, Barthes and Rifat (1998) explains how cultural signs at the second level (myth) reproduce dominant ideologies, in this case, a gender ideology that upholds balance between masculine and feminine principles.

Recent research by Winaya and Munandar (2021) argues that representations of women in Majapahit temple ornamentation are not always explicit in human form; rather, they frequently emerge through natural metaphors: water, the moon, lotus flowers, and curved lines, all culturally associated with feminine qualities within Nusantara cosmology. This finding reinforces the argument that semiotic analysis is essential to uncover the hidden meanings embedded within decorative forms.

Nevertheless, most studies have focused primarily on major temples such as Candi Penataran or Candi Jawi, while Candi Bajang Ratu, whose toponymy and form invite gendered interpretations has received insufficient attention from a feminist-semiotic perspective. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by integrating gender history, semiotics, and symbolic archaeology to reread the traces of women within Majapahit’s cultural heritage.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative interpretive approach, with semiotic analysis as the primary framework to uncover the symbolic meanings of Candi Bajang Ratu’s ornamental elements in relation to representations of women and local wisdom within Majapahit society. This approach was selected because architectural ornaments are not verbal texts but visual cultural texts requiring deep interpretation of sign systems, symbols, and the ideologies embedded within them.

The study integrates two core semiotic models:

1. Barthes and Rifat (1998) model, which distinguishes three levels of meaning:
 - a. Denotation: the literal, observable form of the ornament (e.g., shape, line, composition);
 - b. Connotation: the culturally and socially embedded meanings associated with the form;
 - c. Myth: the dominant ideology or value system reproduced through the sign, often operating at an unconscious or normalized level.
2. Charles Sanders Peirce’s model, which classifies signs into three types:
 - a. Icon: a sign that resembles its object (e.g., a carving resembling a lotus flower);
 - b. Index: a sign connected to its object through causal or physical association (e.g., flowing water motifs suggesting life or continuity);
 - c. Symbol: a sign whose meaning is established through cultural convention (e.g., the curved arch as a symbol of femininity in Javanese cosmology).

The integration of these two models enables a comprehensive analysis, from the physical form of the ornament to the layered ideological meanings tied to gender and local wisdom. As Anggraeni (2018) explains, semiotic analysis of cultural artifacts allows us to read not only what is depicted, but why and for whom, including how gender identities are constructed through visual symbols.

This study is designed as a hermeneutic case study, an interpretive approach aimed at understanding cultural meaning through dialogue between the text (in this case, the temple ornaments) and its historical-social context Romdhoni (2019). Candi Bajang Ratu was selected as a singular case due to its unique architectural form, etymologically gendered name, and distinctive position within the Majapahit cultural landscape, qualities that make it particularly conducive to an in-depth exploration of gendered symbolism.

3.2. Data Sources and Analysis.

Secondary data were collected from:

- a. Archaeological descriptions and photographic documentation in official reports and the Architectural Inventory of Temples in the Trowulan Area.
 - b. Academic literature on Majapahit history, gender studies, and Javanese cosmology.
- Data analysis followed a hermeneutic-semiotic process comprising three stages:
1. Denotative description: Identification of the physical forms of the ornaments (e.g., arched roof profiles, makara reliefs, vine-like vegetal motifs).
 2. Connotative interpretation: Linking these forms to culturally recognized values, such as fertility, wisdom, harmony, and adaptability rooted in Nusantara indigenous knowledge.
 3. Mythical deconstruction: Uncovering the hidden gender ideology, particularly how women are represented not as passive objects, but as cosmological principles underpinning social and spiritual order.

The analysis of temple ornaments must transcend aesthetic appreciation to engage in ideological reading: interrogating who is represented, who is silenced, and which values are legitimized through form.

Although this study is text-based (relying on visual and documentary sources), validity was ensured through source triangulation: cross-referencing visual findings with historical records, archaeological interpretations, and gender theory. Furthermore, the study deliberately avoids anachronistic projections of contemporary values, remaining firmly grounded in the cultural and cosmological context of 14th-century Majapahit society.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of this study are organized into five main categories of architectural and ornamental elements identified during field observation at Candi Bajang Ratu: (1) the primary structural profile, (2) makara reliefs, (3) vine and vegetal motifs, (4) curved and symmetrical geometric forms, and (5) fragmentary figurative elements resembling apsaras or goddesses. These categories emerged from systematic mapping of visual features documented on-site and through archaeological records. Each category is presented descriptively in this section, focusing solely on the empirical characteristics and symbolic patterns observed in the field. To ensure clarity, the results are separated from theoretical interpretation; semiotic analysis (denotation, connotation, myth) and cultural contextualization are drawn only from what the data indicate and are elaborated further in the Discussion. This structure allows the findings

to be identifiable as discrete visual themes and prevents overlap between data presentation and interpretive argumentation.

Although Candi Bajang Ratu takes the form of a gateway rather than a main temple, its architectural ornamentation is rich in symbolic meaning. Based on archaeological documentation from the National Archaeology Research Center, several key ornamental elements amenable to semiotic-architectural analysis include:

1. The Primary Profile of the Structure
2. Makara Reliefs
3. Vine and Vegetal Motifs (Fern Shoots, Leaf Vines)
4. Geometric Ornamentation in Curved and Symmetrical Forms
5. Figurative Elements Resembling Apsaras or Goddesses (though not explicitly depicted)
6. The Stepped Gateway Structure with Flowing, Curved Rooflines

Each of these elements can be analyzed through Barthes and Rifat (1998) three semiotic levels, denotation (literal meaning), connotation (cultural meaning), and myth (ideology) and correlated with Charles Sanders Peirce's sign typology: icon, index, and symbol.

4.1. The Primary Profile of the Structure: Resembling Two Palms in Prayer

One of the most distinctive features of Candi Bajang Ratu, beyond its roofline and decorative motifs is its overall silhouette. When viewed frontally, the structure presents two symmetrical arches that converge at the apex, forming a shape strikingly reminiscent of two cupped palms pressed together in the gesture of *sembah* or *sembah sungkem*. In Nusantara cultures particularly in Java, Bali, and Sundanese traditions this gesture is far more than a mere greeting; it embodies profound reverence, humility, and the acknowledgment of spiritual and social hierarchy (Paramita, 2024) (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Overall Silhouette of Bajang Ratu Temple

The posture signifies surrender to a higher order, whether divine or ancestral, and conveys an ethos of harmony, submission, and sacred reciprocity. By structuring the entire edifice in this form, the architects of Candi Bajang Ratu encoded not just an aesthetic choice, but a cosmological statement: the temple itself becomes a monumental embodiment of devotional humility, a physical manifestation of the feminine principle of yielding strength, quiet authority, and spiritual receptivity (Ramawangsa & Prihatiningrum, 2024).

This denotative form, two converging arches resembling palms functions as an icon (Peirce) due to its direct visual resemblance to the human gesture. Its connotation extends

into cultural codes of reverence, femininity, and non-aggressive power, which in Javanese thought are often associated with the maternal, the nurturing, and the sustaining. At the level of myth (Barthes), this form subtly reproduces an ideology that legitimizes feminine cosmological roles, not as subordinate, but as foundational. The temple does not merely honor a woman; it enshrines the feminine principle as the very architecture of sacred order.

a. Architectural Form as a Symbol of Sacred Bodily Gesture

Visually, the profile of Candi Bajang Ratu reflects bilateral symmetry, with two curved sides rising from left and right and converging at the summit in a crown-like or amalaka-like form. This shape is distinct from other Majapahit gateways, such as Gapura Wringin Lawang, which exhibit more rigid, geometric lines. This divergence suggests a deliberate symbolic intent in the design of Candi Bajang Ratu. According to Davison (2014), Majapahit architecture frequently emulated human bodily gestures as acts of reverence toward the divine. The temple's silhouette, resembling cupped palms in prayer, is not an aesthetic coincidence but an architectural manifestation of *sembah*, a sacred act that bridges the human and the ancestral/spiritual realms (Patt, 1979).

Within Peirce's semiotic framework, this form functions as an icon: it visually resembles the widely recognized *sembah* gesture of ancient Javanese society. Yet, because this gesture carries profound cultural significance, it also operates as a symbol, its meaning rooted not in physical resemblance alone, but in the shared social and spiritual conventions of Majapahit culture.

b. *Sembah* as an Expression of Local Wisdom and Feminine Values

The *sembah* gesture in Nusantara culture is not merely religious; it embodies core principles of local wisdom respect, compassion, harmony, and *manunggaling kawula lan Gusti* (the unity of servant and Divine). Notably, in many Javanese oral and visual traditions, women are consistently depicted as the primary performers of this gesture, whether in sacred rituals, ceremonial dances, or familial rites (Ries, 2024). Hall (1996) observes that in Majapahit visual narratives, women are often portrayed performing *sembah* not as acts of subordination, but as expressions of their vital role as guardians of harmony between the human and spirit worlds (Lestari et al., 2025).

Candi Bajang Ratu, with its form evoking hands in prayer, can thus be interpreted as a monument to this spiritual role of women. Therefore, the temple's profile does not merely signify general reverence; it specifically reflects the feminine role as spiritual mediator, a concept aligned with historical figures such as Gayatri Rajapatni, who was revered not for political authority, but for her profound spiritual depth and moral centrality. The architecture, in this sense, does not memorialize a person, it sanctifies a principle: the feminine as the quiet, sustaining force that holds cosmic and social order in balance.

c. Symmetry and Convergence: A Metaphor of Unified Duality

The two arches converging at the summit also symbolize the unity of cosmic dualities:

- 1) Heaven and earth
- 2) Masculine and feminine
- 3) Physical and spiritual

In ancient Javanese cosmology, the balance between these opposing forces is a fundamental condition for the continuity of the universe. Candi Bajang Ratu, through its form that unites two opposing sides, becomes an architectural metaphor for this principle of equilibrium. Winaya and Munandar (2021) asserts that the symmetrical profile of Candi Bajang Ratu, resembling cupped hands in prayer reflects the Javanese philosophical concept

of *dwitunggal*: two becoming one. This is not the dominance of one principle over the other, but a harmonious dialogue between complementary forces.

When applied to gender, this duality can be interpreted as the ideal relationship between men and women in Majapahit society: the king rules, yet the queen or royal mother provides moral direction, both are indispensable, and both are revered.

d. Functional Context: The Temple as a Space of Reverence

Although Candi Bajang Ratu takes the form of a gateway, several scholars hypothesize that the structure may have served as a *chandrasangkala* (a calendrical memorial) or a meditative space for noblewomen. Within this context, the “cupped hands” form is not merely symbolic, it is an architectural invitation for visitors to perform *sembah*, to honor the spiritual legacy of the figure commemorated.

Thus, the profile of Candi Bajang Ratu, resembling two cupped palms in prayer, is an architecturally rich symbol. It is not merely an aesthetic choice, but a visual manifestation of Nusantara local wisdom: reverence, humility, cosmic balance, and the central role of women as guardians of spiritual harmony. Through a semiotic lens, this form functions simultaneously as an icon (visual resemblance), an index (causal link to ritual practice), and a symbol (culturally encoded meaning), bridging physical form with profound cultural significance.

In terms of gender, this profile reinforces the argument that Candi Bajang Ratu is a symbolic monument not to a single individual, but to the enduring presence and revered status of Majapahit women as foundational forces within the kingdom’s spiritual and moral order.

4.2. Makara Reliefs: Symbol of Protection and Feminine Power

The makara is a mythological creature with the head of a crocodile and the body of a fish or serpent, commonly found at temple thresholds as a guardian figure. However, in the context of Candi Bajang Ratu, the makara is not depicted as aggressive or menacing; instead, it gracefully exhales flowing vegetal vines from its mouth, evoking an atmosphere of harmony, abundance, and life-giving energy.

From a semiotic perspective, this form functions as both an icon due to its visual resemblance to the mythical creature, and a symbol, as it draws upon culturally established conventions associating the makara with protection and fertility. Sani (2017) notes that in Majapahit architecture, makara emitting vines are frequently linked to feminine principles: it is not merely a guardian, but a source of life a metaphor for the female womb that gives birth and nurtures.

In ancient Javanese mythology, the water associated with the makara symbolizes intuition, emotion, and wisdom qualities culturally aligned with femininity. This interpretation resonates deeply with the historical role of women such as Gayatri Rajapatni, who was revered not for military prowess or political dominance, but for her profound spiritual wisdom and moral authority. The makara at Candi Bajang Ratu, therefore, transcends its function as decorative ornamentation; it becomes a visual testament to the feminine as a generative, protective, and wise force sustaining the cosmic and social order not through force, but through flow, nourishment, and quiet resilience (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. The Makara at Candi Bajang Ratu

The makara relief is an iconic motif in Nusantara temple architecture, including Candi Bajang Ratu. Yet, at Candi Bajang Ratu, the makara is not depicted as fearsome or destructive, but as an entity gently releasing vegetal vines, flowers, and motifs of life from its mouth. This visual treatment signals a profound transformation of meaning: from a symbol of masculine, destructive power to one of feminine, creative force.

a. Makara as Threshold Guardian: Traditional Function and Semantic Transformation

In Hindu-Buddhist architectural traditions across Southeast Asia, the makara is typically positioned at gateways or thresholds as a *dvarapala* (guardian), embodying protective power that wards off malevolent forces. However, as Soekmono (1973) observes, in East Java particularly during the Majapahit era, the makara underwent a process of “softening”: its jaws no longer gape aggressively, its tail curves gently, and from its mouth flow vines and blossoms, as if it were not repelling intruders, but bestowing life. At Candi Bajang Ratu, this transformation is unmistakable. The makara reliefs on either side of the gateway do not display sharp fangs or glaring eyes; instead, their forms are curved, symmetrical, and harmonious as though the creature is “birthing” nature itself from its mouth.

b. The Makara That Gives Life: Metaphor of the Womb and Fertility

From a semiotic perspective, the makara at Candi Bajang Ratu functions as a symbol (Peirce) pointing to cosmic feminine principles. Its mouth, from which vegetal vines emerge, can be interpreted as a metaphor for the female womb the source of life, fertility, and regeneration. This aligns with the Hindu philosophical concept of *prakṛti*, the feminine principle as the primordial matrix that gives form and substance to *puruṣa* (masculine consciousness).

Sani (2017) further emphasizes that the makara at Candi Bajang Ratu is not an intimidating guardian, but a maternal figure, both protector and nurturer. The vines flowing from its mouth symbolize birth, growth, and the continuity of values culturally associated with women’s roles in Majapahit society.

In this context, the makara is more than ornamentation, it is a personification of active feminine power. It does not merely defend sacred space; it animates it. It protects and creates. It does not exclude through fear, but invites through abundance. Thus, the makara becomes a visual embodiment of the feminine as a generative, sustaining, and sacred force redefining the very notion of guardianship not as domination, but as compassionate creation.

c. Connection to the Role of Majapahit Women: Spiritual Protection and Dynastic Legitimation

This transformation of the makara reflects the tangible historical role of women in Majapahit society. Figures such as Gayatri Rajapatni did not rule directly, yet safeguarded the continuity of the dynasty through spiritual legitimation and the political education of her daughter, Tribhuwana Tunggaladewi. She was the makara that did not destroy, but preserved and gave birth to a new order. Wijayanti (2023), in the journal *Sejarah Citra Lekha*, notes that the visual depiction of makara releasing life-giving vines on Majapahit temples mirrors the society's perception of noblewomen: not as sovereign rulers, but as guardians of harmony and the very source of the kingdom's sustainability.

Thus, the makara relief at Candi Bajang Ratu is not merely decorative symbolism, it is a visual narrative of women as protectors and life-givers, two inseparable dimensions of Majapahit feminine power.

d. Nusantara Cultural Context: Water, Intuition, and Wisdom

In Nusantara cosmology, the makara is deeply associated with the element of water a symbol of intuition, emotion, and wisdom. Water does not attack; it flows, adapts, and unites. These qualities resonate with core Javanese local wisdom values such as *welas asih* (compassion), *sabar* (patience), and *nrimo* (acceptance), which are culturally idealized as feminine virtues.

As Winaya and Munandar (2021) further explains, the makara carved at Candi Bajang Ratu personifies the power of water: calm yet unstoppable, gentle yet eternal. This is a perfect metaphor for the role of Majapahit women in maintaining royal stability, not through force, but through wisdom. The makara relief at Candi Bajang Ratu represents a revolutionary symbolic transformation: from a fearsome threshold guardian to a nurturing source of life. Its flowing vines, softly curved body, and position as a guardian of the gateway embody the dual faces of feminine power protection and creation.

Historically, this makara becomes a mirror of Majapahit women like Gayatri Rajapatni: not standing at the forefront of political authority, but serving as the spiritual and moral root that sustains the kingdom's endurance. Through the lens of semiotics, the makara is not mere ornament, it is a visual text encoding feminine wisdom within the cultural fabric of Nusantara.

4.3. Vine and Vegetal Motifs: Metaphors of Fertility and Continuity

Vine-like patterns, fern shoots, and creeping plant motifs dominate the upper sections and flanks of the gateway. Denotatively, these are naturalistic decorative elements. Yet connotatively, they signify fertility, growth, and continuity values deeply associated with the feminine role as the giver of life.

Winaya and Munandar (2021) asserts that vegetal motifs in Majapahit architecture, particularly those with circular or flowing forms are not mere ornamentation, but symbols of *prakṛti* (the feminine principle of nature) within the Hindu-Buddhist cosmology, locally reinterpreted and embedded in Javanese worldview. These motifs reflect a cultural reverence for women as guardians of familial and royal harmony.

At the level of myth (Barthes), these vegetal patterns reproduce an ideology central to Nusantara local wisdom: the survival of the kingdom depends on the balanced interplay between masculine power (the king) and feminine wisdom (the queen or royal mother). This principle where authority is not monopolized by one gender, but co-constituted through complementary forces is a defining cultural value of Nusantara society.

Thus, the vegetal ornamentation at Candi Bajang Ratu transcends aesthetic function; it encodes a cosmological and social philosophy in which life, order, and legitimacy are sustained

not by domination, but by nurturing flow, echoing the quiet, enduring power of women as the unseen roots of the realm (See Figure 3).



Figure 3. Vegetal ornamentation at Candi Bajang Ratu

4.3.1. Vine and Vegetal Motifs at Candi Bajang Ratu: Metaphors of Fertility, Continuity, and the Role of Women in Majapahit Culture

Vine patterns, fern shoots, circular leaves, and other vegetal elements dominate the ornamentation of Candi Bajang Ratu particularly along the upper lintel, surrounding the makara reliefs, and framing the gateway entrance. Unlike rigid geometric motifs often associated with masculine principles, these forms flow, curl, and interweave without clear beginning or end, producing a dynamic yet harmonious visual rhythm. In the cultural context of Majapahit, these motifs are not mere decorative embellishments; they are visual symbols encoding cosmological values especially fertility, regeneration, and continuity concepts intrinsically linked to the feminine role.

a. Vines as Symbols of Unbroken Life

In Nusantara visual art, vine motifs frequently represent the eternal cycle of life: growing, blooming, fruiting, decaying, and rebirthing. Their endless, looping lines embody the continuity of dynasty, family, and cosmic order. In ancient Javanese thought, this concept is known as '*sangkan paraning dumadi*,' the origin and ultimate destination of existence, preserved by feminine power. Sani (2017) emphasizes that vegetal motifs in Majapahit architecture, particularly unbroken, flowing vines are direct metaphors for women's function as guardians of life's continuity: through childbirth, education, and the transmission of cultural values. At Candi Bajang Ratu, the vines that emerge from the makara's mouth visually articulate women not as passive objects, but as the very source of life itself.

Within Barthes and Rifat (1998)' semiotic framework, this motif operates at the level of myth: it reproduces the ideology that the survival of the kingdom hinges on lineage continuity, a principle in Majapahit society profoundly shaped by maternal descent. This is exemplified in the case of Gayatri Rajapatni, whose spiritual and dynastic authority served as the foundational root legitimizing three successive generations of kings. The vine, then, becomes a silent but potent narrative of maternal lineage as the true pillar of sovereignty.

b. Connection to Dewi Sri and Nusantara Agricultural Cosmology

The vegetal motifs at Candi Bajang Ratu also cannot be separated from the veneration of Dewi Sri, the indigenous Nusantara goddess of rice and fertility, later syncretized within the

Hindu- Buddhist framework. Dewi Sri is traditionally depicted with attributes of rice stalks, lotus blossoms, and vines all of which appear in stylized form across Majapahit temple ornamentation. Wijayanti (2019) further notes that these vegetal patterns on Majapahit temples, including Candi Bajang Ratu, represent a localized adaptation of Hindu-Buddhist iconography. The vines and leaves are not merely naturalistic symbols; they are visual manifestations of Dewi Sri, the mother of all life in agrarian Javanese society.

Thus, the vegetal ornamentation transcends aesthetic function; it is an act of reverence toward the feminine principle that nourishes, protects, and sustains roles historically fulfilled by noblewomen in maintaining the social and spiritual stability of the kingdom. Through these motifs, Candi Bajang Ratu does not merely depict nature, it sanctifies the feminine as the living, breathing foundation of civilization itself.

c. Vines as Metaphors of Social and Spiritual Networks

Beyond biological fertility, the vines also symbolize the intricate web of relationships between humans and nature, ancestors and descendants, rulers and subjects. In Majapahit's collectivist society, women often served as the vital connectors within these networks: as mothers, wives, spiritual advisors, and custodians of familial rituals. Winaya and Munandar (2021) further observes that the interlacing vine patterns on Candi Bajang Ratu reflect the Javanese ideals of *rukun* (harmony) and *guyub* (mutual solidarity), values traditionally upheld and nurtured by women. In this context, vegetal ornamentation is not merely a representation of nature, but a visual articulation of a harmonious social order, sustained through feminine relational labor.

d. Gender Context: Fertility as Power, Not Limitation

It is crucial to recognize that in Majapahit culture, fertility was not perceived as a confinement of women to the domestic sphere, but as a source of cosmic and political power. The ability to bear heirs to the throne was a strategic asset critical to dynastic legitimacy. Consequently, symbols of fertility did not diminish women's status, they elevated it. In Majapahit visual narratives, female fertility is never connoted as passivity; rather, it is framed as an active, generative force ensuring the state's continuity. The vegetal motifs adorning sacred architecture constitute an explicit acknowledgment of this role.

The vine and vegetal ornamentation at Candi Bajang Ratu are the multilayered symbol representing fertility, continuity, and harmonious interconnectedness, all values culturally ascribed to women's roles in Majapahit society. Through a semiotic lens, these motifs function as signifiers pointing to signified concepts: the feminine principle as the source of life, the guardian of dynasty, and the cosmic mediator. Far from being mere decoration, these twisting vines constitute a visual narrative of invisible yet foundational feminine power the unseen architecture that upholds the entire kingdom.

4.4. Curved Forms and Symmetry: The Feminine Aesthetic in Architecture

In contrast to masculinely styled temples, such as Candi Brahu, with their rigid, vertical, and sharply defined profiles, Candi Bajang Ratu exhibits curved, symmetrical, and horizontally oriented forms. Its architectural lines flow gently, creating a serene and rhythmic visual harmony. Majapahit architecture frequently encoded gender through form: vertical, angular shapes were associated with Shiva (the masculine principle), while circular, flowing contours were linked to Dewi Sri or Lakshmi (the feminine principle).

Within Peirce's semiotic framework, the curved forms of Candi Bajang Ratu function as an index: they causally point to culturally entrenched associations between softness, fluidity, and femininity. The very name "Bajang Ratu" linguistically ambiguous, combining "*bajang*"

(young, small) with “ratu” (queen or royal woman), further reinforces the interpretation that this structure may have been dedicated to a noblewoman, perhaps serving as a memorial or spiritual meditation space.

This architectural language does not merely reflect aesthetic preference; it encodes a cosmological and ideological statement. The absence of rigid monumentality, the preference for gentle curvature, and the emphasis on balance all signal a deliberate honoring of feminine values not as subordinate, but as foundational. The structure, in its quiet elegance, becomes a spatial invocation of the feminine principle: not commanding through dominance, but sustaining through harmony (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. Curved Forms of Candi Bajang Ratu

4.4.1. Curved and Symmetrical Geometric Ornamentation at Candi Bajang Ratu: The Feminine Aesthetic in Majapahit Architecture

Candi Bajang Ratu is not only rich in figurative and vegetal ornamentation but also distinguished by unique geometric patterns: softly curved lines, bilateral symmetry, and a flowing visual rhythm, contrasting sharply with the rigid, angular geometries typical of masculinely styled structures such as Candi Brahu or Majapahit defensive fortifications. These patterns are not mere aesthetic choices; they are symbolic expressions of feminine principles embedded in Majapahit cosmology and cultural values.

a. Curves as Counterpoint to Sharp Lines: A Gendered Aesthetic Dichotomy

In Nusantara visual tradition, straight, sharp, and vertical lines are commonly associated with masculine power stability, authority, and dominance evident in the towering spires of Shiva temples or battle reliefs. In contrast, curved, horizontal, and circular lines are linked to feminine qualities: flexibility, intuition, patience, and the capacity to unify.

According to Sani (2017), Majapahit architecture encoded gender through form. Candi Bajang Ratu, with its curved and symmetrical geometric motifs, embodies a feminine aesthetic: it does not assault the gaze, but invites contemplation; it does not dominate space, but harmonizes with it. Within Charles Sanders Peirce’s semiotic framework, this curvature functions simultaneously as an icon, visually resembling natural forms such as waves or eyelashes and as a symbol, since its meaning is determined by culturally established conventions of femininity.

b. Symmetry as a Mirror of Cosmic Harmony

The bilateral symmetry of Candi Bajang Ratu’s ornamentation, where left and right sides mirror one another is not merely a design principle, but a metaphysical metaphor for cosmic balance. In ancient Javanese philosophy, the universe is perceived as stable only when two

complementary forces are in equilibrium: *puruṣa* (masculine consciousness) and *prakṛti* (feminine nature), heaven and earth, fire and water.

The symmetry of Majapahit temple ornamentation, particularly the flowing curves seen at Candi Bajang Ratu reflects this ideal of gender harmony in social order. Women are not adversaries to men, but their essential counterparts. This architecture does not elevate one over the other; it celebrates their interdependence.

Thus, these geometric ornaments are not merely beautiful, they carry a profound philosophical message: the ideal relationship between men and women in Majapahit society is one of balanced unity, where power is not hierarchical, but reciprocal. The architecture, in its quiet symmetry, becomes a sacred testament to the feminine not as complement, but as co-constitutive force in the sustaining of cosmic and social order.

c. Flowing Visual Rhythm: An Aesthetic of Calm and Invitation

Unlike rigid, repetitive ornamentation, the geometric patterns at Candi Bajang Ratu exhibit an organic rhythm its curves are not uniform, but variegated, like the undulations of music or the meandering flow of a river. This visual effect evokes a sense of tranquility, meditateness, and quiet invitation, perfectly suited to the temple's function as a sacred, contemplative space.

According to Winaya and Munandar (2021), the Majapahit architectural aesthetic rooted in curvature and symmetry reflects the cultural values of *welas asih* (compassion) and *nrimo* (acceptance with grace) qualities traditionally associated with noblewomen. Candi Bajang Ratu, through its geometric ornamentation, is not a monument to power, but an invitation to stillness, reflection, and reverence.

d. Cultural Context: Aesthetics as Expression of Social Values

It is essential to recognize that in Majapahit society, aesthetics were inseparable from ethics. Architectural beauty was never merely decorative, it was a moral and spiritual statement. Therefore, the choice of curved and symmetrical forms at Candi Bajang Ratu was not a matter of taste alone, but a deliberate affirmation of the values embodied by women: humility, wisdom, and the capacity to nurture harmony.

In Majapahit culture, a woman's beauty was not measured by physical form, but by her ability to cultivate balance, within the family, the court, and the cosmos. The curved, symmetrical architecture of Candi Bajang Ratu is thus a visual eulogy to these qualities: a silent ode to the feminine as the quiet architect of social and spiritual equilibrium.

Thus, the curved and symmetrical geometric ornamentation of Candi Bajang Ratu constitutes a profound aesthetic manifestation of the feminine in Majapahit architecture. Through flowing lines, balanced compositions, and a calming visual rhythm, these motifs communicate core tenets of Nusantara local wisdom, harmony, flexibility, and wisdom all historically associated with the roles of women in Majapahit society.

From a semiotic perspective, these forms are not merely beautiful they speak. They are visual texts that articulate reverence for the feminine principle as the guardian of cosmic and social balance. Far from passive decoration, they are enduring monuments to a worldview in which power is not asserted through force, but sustained through grace.

4.5. Figurative Elements Resembling Apsaras or Goddesses

Interestingly, Candi Bajang Ratu lacks explicit figurative representations of women unlike those found at Candi Jawi or Candi Penataran. Yet it is precisely in this absence that its symbolic power resides. In semiotics, absence is itself a sign. The deliberate non-depiction of female figures signals that feminine representation need not be literal; it can be expressed

through the metaphors of nature and form, an approach deeply aligned with Javanese local wisdom, which values simplicity, subtlety, and profound meaning over overt display.

The Majapahit society understood feminine power not through visual dominance, but through an invisible, unifying presence like water, which has no fixed shape yet flows everywhere, sustaining all life. This conceptualization elevates the feminine from the visible to the essential: not as an image to be seen, but as a force to be felt (see Figure 5).



Figure 5. Image as Representation of Feminine Power

4.5.1. Figurative Motifs Resembling Apsaras or Goddesses at Candi Bajang Ratu: Feminine Symbolism in Majapahit Cosmology.

Although Candi Bajang Ratu lacks full, explicit figurative reliefs such as those found at Candi Penataran or Candi Jawi, certain decorative panels, particularly around the upper lintel and gateway pillars reveal partial silhouettes or fragmented figures that unmistakably echo the graceful postures of apsaras (celestial nymphs) or goddesses. These fragments display softly curved bodies, flowing hair, and suggestive motifs of flowers or flowing scarves. Though incomplete, these elements are stylistically distinct enough to be recognized as representations of divine feminine beings within the visual tradition of 14th-century Majapahit art.

a. Apsaras and Goddesses: Embodiments of Divine Feminine Principles.

In the Hindu-Buddhist artistic tradition of Nusantara, apsaras are celestial beings symbolizing beauty, grace, and cosmic harmony. Meanwhile, goddesses such as Lakshmi, Tara, or Dewi Sri embody wisdom, prosperity, and fertility. Their presence in temple architecture is never merely ornamental, is a visual manifestation of the feminine as sacred power.

Soekmono (1973) notes that in Majapahit art, apsaras are consistently rendered in the tribhanga pose, where the body bends gracefully in three places: head, torso, and hips, reflecting a dynamic equilibrium between movement and stillness, a posture culturally aligned with the ideal of the ancient Javanese noblewoman. At Candi Bajang Ratu, though the figures are incomplete, the residual curves of the body, the fluid lines of the hair, and the drapery of the scarves are sufficient to identify the unmistakable stylistic hallmarks of 14th-century Majapahit feminine representation.

b. The Symbolism of the Body: Curvature as a Gendered Aesthetic Language

Within a semiotic framework, the apsara's form functions as both an icon visually resembling the human female form and a symbol, representing culturally encoded feminine values such as gentleness, intuition, and purity. The tribhanga posture with its tilted head, forward-thrust chest, and backward-arched hips, is not a gesture of sensuality, but a metaphysical metaphor for cosmic balance: the harmonious alignment of heaven, humanity, and earth.

The apsara's body in Majapahit temple ornamentation is thus an architectural metaphor for prakṛti the feminine principle of nature that gives form and substance to puruṣa, the masculine principle of consciousness. Its presence even in fragmented form at Candi Bajang Ratu reinforces the interpretation that this site was conceived not merely as a structural gateway, but as a sacred space dedicated to honoring the feminine principle, whether manifest in human form or as divine essence.

The absence of completeness does not diminish its meaning; rather, it deepens it. The fragments invite contemplation not of a person, but of a principle: the enduring, invisible, yet all-pervading power of the feminine as the foundation of cosmic and social order.

c. Spiritual Context: The Goddess as Mediator Between Humanity and the Divine

In Majapahit ritual and belief systems, goddesses were often regarded as spiritual intermediaries, mirroring the role of noblewomen such as Gayatri Rajapatni, who was venerated as an incarnation of the goddess Prajñāpāramitā. The presence of goddess or apsara figures in temple architecture functioned as a symbolic bridge between the human and the divine realms.

As Eni and Tsabit (2017). notes, the depiction of goddesses or apsaras in Majapahit temples, including the fragmented forms at Candi Bajang Ratu is not mere ornamentation, but a deliberate signifier of the protective and benedictory presence of feminine power. Majapahit society believed that without this feminine principle, harmony within the kingdom could not be sustained. The goddess was not a passive symbol; she was the invisible force that sanctified order, ensuring the flow of divine grace into the earthly realm.

d. Indirect Representation: A Subtle Symbolic Strategy

Remarkably, the figures at Candi Bajang Ratu are not rendered as complete, dominant forms, but as secondary, integrated elements within the broader ornamental composition. This reflects a quintessential feature of ancient Javanese cultural strategy: a preference for subtlety, restraint, and layered meaning over explicit display.

Women, whether human or divine did not need to be visually foregrounded to be acknowledged. Their presence was felt through aesthetic traces and symbolic residues. The deliberate fragmentation of these figures does not signify absence; rather, it intensifies their meaning: in Majapahit culture, women did not need to stand at the forefront of power to wield influence. Their authority was experienced through harmony, beauty, and equilibrium just as the apsaras appear not as central icons, but as gentle, flowing presences woven into the curves of Candi Bajang Ratu's ornamentation.

Thus, the figurative motifs resembling apsaras or goddesses at Candi Bajang Ratu, though fragmentary are potent symbols of the feminine principle's enduring presence within Majapahit cosmology. Through their curved postures, sacred attributes, and seamless integration into the ornamental whole, these fragments communicate core tenets of Nusantara local wisdom: grace, wisdom, and spiritual mediation all qualities historically ascribed to noblewomen and deities alike.

Within a semiotic framework, they are not merely images, they are visual texts. They speak of a profound cultural reverence for feminine power not as domination, but as the quiet, sustaining force that preserves the balance of the cosmos and the integrity of the realm.

4.6. The Stepped Gateway with Flowing Curved Roof at Candi Bajang Ratu: Symbolic Representation of Majapahit Women

The most striking architectural feature of Candi Bajang Ratu is its form as a stepped gateway (*paduraksa*) crowned with softly curved, flowing rooflines distinct from the vertical, rigid, and monumental profiles characteristic of masculinely styled temples. From a semiotic perspective, this structure is not merely a functional form, but a complex system of cultural signs that encode cosmological, gendered, and local wisdom values of Majapahit society. The stepped tiers suggest ascent not toward domination, but toward spiritual elevation (Rozaq, 2025), while the gentle, undulating roofline evokes fluidity, receptivity, and continuity, embodying feminine principles of harmony, adaptability, and nurturing strength.

Unlike the assertive verticality of male-associated temples, which project authority through height and rigidity, Candi Bajang Ratu's form embraces curvature and rhythm, inviting contemplation rather than imposing awe. This architectural language reflects a worldview in which power is not seized, but sustained; not asserted, but embodied (see Figure 6).

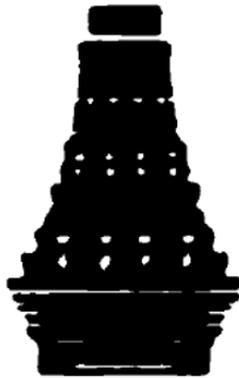


Figure 6. Paduraksa Crowned with Softly Curved, Flowing Rooflines in Bajang Ratu

4.6.1. The Stepped Gateway with Flowing Curved Roof at Candi Bajang Ratu: Symbolism of Flexibility as Majapahit Local Wisdom

In Nusantara architectural tradition, gateways (*gapura*) serve as thresholds (thresholds) between the profane and the sacred. Yet, in the context of Candi Bajang Ratu, its stepped structure does not merely mark a spatial transition, it embodies a deeper metaphysical passage: from the worldly to the spiritual, from the external to the internal, from the physical to the metaphysical.

According to Maer and Hariyanto (2025), this structure functions as an index: the presence of steps and terraces causally implies movement, upward and downward, transformation, and progression. In ancient Javanese culture, women were often positioned as mediators between the human realm and the world of ancestors or deities a role embodied by figures such as Gayatri Rajapatni, who, though not ruling directly, served as the spiritual source of legitimacy for Majapahit kings.

As Hall (1996) observes, within Majapahit cosmology, noblewomen were not merely queens or mothers of kings, they were *pangéran* spiritual (spiritual sovereigns), bridges between the will of heaven and the earth. This role is mirrored in an architecture that emphasizes transition rather than domination. Thus, the stepped gateway is not merely a physical entrance it is a metaphor for the feminine role as the link between temporal power and cosmic authority.

One of the most distinctive features of Candi Bajang Ratu is its form as a stepped gateway (*paduraksa*) crowned with softly curved, flowing rooflines, a stark contrast to other Majapahit structures, which tend toward rigid symmetry, verticality, or monumental rigidity. This form is not merely an aesthetic choice; it encodes a profound philosophical principle: *luwes* (flexibility), the capacity to adapt, to flow with change, and to preserve harmony without sacrificing identity. In ancient Javanese thought, this value is expressed through terms such as *luwes*, *nrimo* (acceptance), and *welas asih* (compassion), qualities traditionally associated with the ideal noblewoman, whose role was to sustain the social and spiritual equilibrium of the kingdom.

a. The Curved Roof as Metaphor of Water: Flexible Yet Unstoppable

In Nusantara cosmology, water is the paramount symbol of *luwes*: it does not oppose the rock, but flows around it; it does not impose a form, but adapts to the vessel, yet over time, water erodes stone and carves valleys. The curved roof of Candi Bajang Ratu, echoing the shape of waves or river currents, is a direct visual metaphor for this very quality.

The curved architecture of Majapahit, exemplified by the roofline of Candi Bajang Ratu is not an accidental aesthetic preference; it is a symbolic expression of *luwes* as a core value. In agrarian Javanese society, flexibility was not weakness it was adaptive strength, the very mechanism that allowed social order to endure through change, crisis, and transformation.

Within Barthes' semiotic framework, this curvature operates on the level of connotation as a symbol of suppleness, and at the level of myth as an ideology: the survival of the kingdom depends not on rigid authority, but on the capacity to yield, adapt, and sustain harmony. The roof's gentle arc does not command; it embraces. It does not stand in opposition to change it flows with it, quietly shaping the landscape over time. Thus, the curved roof of Candi Bajang Ratu is more than architectural ornament it is a cosmological statement (Costain, 2004). It declares that true power lies not in resistance, but in resilience; not in dominance, but in depth; not in the sharp edge of the sword, but in the patient flow of water.

b. The Stepped Gateway: A Dynamic Transition, Not a Rigid Boundary

The stepped structure of Candi Bajang Ratu further reinforces the symbolism of *luwes* (flexibility). The stairs are not merely functional access points; they constitute a dynamic transitional space between the profane and the sacred. Unlike solid walls that impose division, the gateway invites entry while honoring boundaries an attitude that reflects diplomacy, wisdom, and selective openness.

As Wijayanti (2023) notes, stepped gateways in Majapahit architecture reflect a non-dualistic worldview: not "inside" versus "outside," but a sacred process of transition to be respected. This is a value meticulously upheld by noblewomen, who often served as mediators in royal family conflicts. Thus, the stepped form is not merely architectural it is a philosophy of motion: ascending and descending, arriving and departing, accepting and releasing, all held in balanced equilibrium.

c. Flexibility as Feminine Power in Majapahit History

This value of *luwes* is profoundly resonant with the historical role of Majapahit women. Figures such as Gayatri Rajapatni did not wield military force or harsh decrees; instead, they employed wisdom, patience, and adaptive strategy to preserve the continuity of the Rajasa dynasty. She gracefully relinquished power to her daughter, Tribhuwana Tunggaladewi, at the precise moment demonstrating an uncanny ability to read political currents and act with *luwes*. In Majapahit historical narratives, noblewomen often functioned as "water" within the power structure: not visibly dominant, yet flowing everywhere uniting, nourishing, stabilizing. Candi Bajang Ratu, with its flowing curves and stepped tiers, stands as a monument to this adaptive power: strength that does not crush, but sustains; authority that does not command, but harmonizes.

d. Local Wisdom Context: *Luwes* as Social Ethics

In Javanese local wisdom, *luwes* is not merely a personal trait, but a collective social ethic. Proverbs such as “*aja gumunan, aja getunan, aja aleman, aja kangen*” (“do not be easily astonished, do not regret, do not cling, do not yearn”) reflect a tranquil, adaptive inner disposition, one mirrored in architecture that does not impose form upon nature, but flows with it (Patria & Kristiana, 2017). The fluid forms of Candi Bajang Ratu embody the Javanese ideal of *manunggaling kawula lan Gusti*, the unity of servant and Divine achieved not through resistance to fate, but through harmonious alignment with it. This is the wisdom culturally ascribed to women as guardians of familial and royal harmony (Betts, 2023). Thus, the stepped gateway with its flowing curved roof at Candi Bajang Ratu is an architectural symbol of *luwes*: the capacity to adapt, to flow with change, and to preserve harmony without sacrificing integrity.

Through a semiotic lens, this form functions as a visual text encoding adaptive wisdom, the foundational ethos of Majapahit’s social order. In gendered terms, this *luwes* is not a sign of weakness, but a strategic power: the feminine strength that maintained dynastic stability through diplomacy, spiritual authority, and deep-rooted local wisdom. Candi Bajang Ratu, therefore, is not merely a monument of stone it is a symbolic archive of a quiet, enduring power: the strength that does not shout, yet holds the world together.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion presented in this article, Candi Bajang Ratu emerges not merely as an architectural gateway of the Majapahit era, but as a significant visual cultural text that materially encodes feminine principles and Nusantara local wisdom. Through the semiotic frameworks of Roland Barthes and Charles Sanders Peirce, this study identifies new interpretive findings: (1) that the temple’s fluid ornamental features, such as the makara exhaling vegetal vines, vine and floral motifs, curved symmetrical lines, and apsara, like fragments, function as a coherent symbolic system associated with feminine cosmological values; and (2) that these symbols operate not only at a decorative level, but as culturally embedded signs expressing notions of fertility, protection, adaptability (*luwes*), dynastic continuity, and cosmic harmony.

The scientific contribution of this research lies in demonstrating that feminine symbolism in Majapahit architecture is not incidental, but structurally and ideologically integrated into the design of Bajang Ratu. This challenges the dominant descriptive and technical readings of Majapahit temples and fills a critical gap in existing scholarship: the absence of gender-sensitive semiotic interpretations of its architectural ornaments. By showing that the temple’s soft, curved visual language deliberately contrasts with the rigid, vertical forms typically associated with masculine monumentalism, this study reveals that Bajang Ratu embodies an alternative aesthetic logic, one that venerates feminine principles as fundamental to cosmological balance.

The implications of this analysis are twofold. First, it reframes Majapahit material culture as an active medium for articulating gender ideologies, supporting historical evidence that women such as Gayatri Rajapatni and Tribhuwana Tunggaladewi held central roles not only politically but cosmologically. Second, it offers a methodological contribution by illustrating how semiotics can recover marginalized or non-literal representations of women in precolonial Javanese art and architecture, expanding the interpretive possibilities for future archaeological and cultural studies. Thus, this study positions Candi Bajang Ratu as a symbolic monument that materializes feminine values as foundational to Majapahit’s worldview. The semiotic approach employed here demonstrates that feminine principles (often overlooked in earlier research)

were not only present but institutionally revered, encoded into the kingdom's architectural vocabulary as the sustaining, harmonizing force within its cosmological and moral order.

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