

Mythical Feline Figures in Java's Early Islamisation Period (Fifteenth to the Early Seventeenth Centuries): Sinitic and Vietnamese Imprints in Pasisir Art

This essay investigates foreign imprints in Java in the early Islamic period through a motif primarily found on the island's north coast (ca. fifteenth–early seventeenth centuries): the mythical feline-like figure. This motif knew a brief success in the mausolea decor of significant Muslim rulers, some of whom are known as Java's early proselytisers of Islam. I argue that these Javanese feline figures are reminiscent of a Sinitic and Vietnamese iconography illustrating the syncretic nature of early Javanese Muslim elite's material culture. Furthermore, this essay demonstrates how the Javanese stylisation of these mythical feline figures seems to be manifest of this period's double paradigm: while the Javanese slowly converted to Islam, Muslim foreigners adopted their culture.

Keywords: Islamic art; Java; Muslim elites; Vietnamese art; funerary art.