

The Aesthetic Design of Malela Kris

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to internalize the aesthetic value found in the Malela kris blade. The methodology used in this study is a qualitative method of art form analysis using Herbet's approach to assessing the aesthetics of the Malela kris. Through physical observation of the art forms of objects that include the use of elements and principles of art. In addition, information through library studies is also done through the reading of books, articles, and journals from internet sources. However, this study is limited to the aesthetic value of Malela kris blades and excludes the hilt and scabbard. The aesthetic value of the Malela kris is found in numerous sections, including the shape of the lok, akut, bone, canyon, groove, and cliff, which are not found in other kris blades. The study also found that the malela kris has a high aesthetic value because of the artificial subtlety of its smithy, and this dagger is easily identified due to its unique appearance identity.

Keywords: *Aesthetic, Malela kris, Blade, Design, Weapon.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Kris is a traditional weapon of the Malay community that cannot be separated from the customs and culture of the Malays, although it is no longer used the way it was before. It is made with the function of stabbing and even slicing. The kris is the main weapon in a martial art, called "silat". However, the original function of the kris is now more of a symbol of the Malay civilization. According to Helmi (2019), the kris is a heritage that symbolises the civilization of the Malay people, which is a testament to the Malay science and technology that were ahead of their time.

In several Malay traditional rituals, weapons that are now regarded as antiques serve simply as a symbol. It was elevated above all other Malays weaponry to the utmost degree. Because kris is a person's identity, the Malays used to never leave the house without it. Going out without a kris was akin to going out without a shirt. Although its use has altered, its aesthetic worth still makes it a desirable item for enthusiasts.

Kris is an artefact of the culture and cultural heritage of the archipelago as well as for the Malays. It is usually worn by people in the Riau Islands, Bugis, Java, and Bali as a fashion complement (Al-Mudra 2004). According to Woolley (1998), kris then spread to the Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Southern Thailand, Brunei, and the Southern Philippines, where the populations were Malays.

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According to Mohamad et al. (2012) kris is one of the various armaments of the Malays besides sword, spear, badik, sewar, kelewang, kerambit and others. However, the kris has been considered as an artefact that represents the status of the Malays. The Malay community regards kris as a talisman, while the Javanese community regards kris as a 'tosan aji' weapon that has supernatural powers. The Bugis community, on the other hand, regards the kris as a 'polo besi', which means a noble and valuable weapon of inheritance.

In this article, the author elaborates on the aesthetics of the appearance of the Malela's kris, its history, and the materials of blade making. There are many types of kris depending on their location and society. Malela kris is part of the peninsula Kris, originating from the provinces of Pattani, Kelantan, and Terengganu. It has a unique and attractive appearance to the blades. The blades are beautifully crafted and fashioned with great delicacy. Malela's kris is always in demand among kris lovers due to the distinctiveness of the blade.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this article is descriptive through library studies and visual observations of art forms. According to McMahon (2022), aesthetic value is an assessment based on the appearance of an object and the emotional response it provokes. Although it is difficult to evaluate objectively, it is often a determining factor in the overall value. Assessing the value of art is a complex process. Culturally, constant debate revolves around aesthetics in many regions of the world, and perceptions of beauty tend to be influenced by the culture in which a person grew up in. People in the West, for example, may appreciate the classic design inspired by Ancient Greece and Rome, while people in the East may not find this style aesthetically viable. Artworks are valued based on their aesthetic value and can have radically different price tags based on appearance and creator, even if the materials are the same.

According to Stecker (2019), the aesthetic value of artworks should be valued in two ways: first, for its own sake, and second, to allow the artwork to perform other valuable functions. Meanwhile, to Gaut (2007), it is the primary value of owning artworks. Zangwill (2002), asserts that aesthetic value is possessed exclusively by objects of sensory perception based on their sensory properties.

Thus, in this article, the research data will be collected from the research and reading of academic sources from the library as well as from a reliable website. The process of obtaining information is focused on reading and referencing books, journals, papers, and related articles on a kris, whereas the observation on the aesthetic design of the Malela's kris is explained based on the elements and the principles of art. Herbert's (2017) approach will be used to assess the aesthetic value of Malela kris, such as the observation of physical aspects and observation of form related to the usage of elements and principles of art.

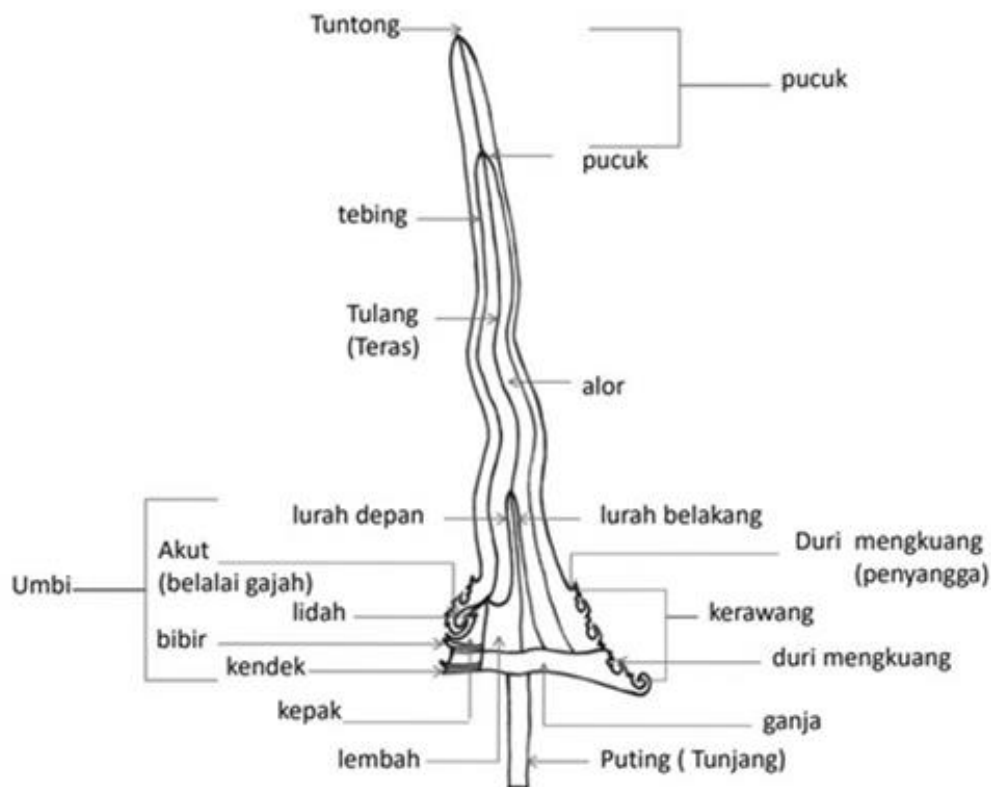
3. WHAT IS KRIS?

According to Shahrum Yub (1991), kris is a sharp weapon used as a means of self-defence in the Malay community in ancient times. Next, Arman (2014) claims that kris are both weapons and high-value masterpieces of art, which means that their functions frequently change. Al-Mudra (2009) asserts that kris is an excellent piece of art. Its value lies in the beauty of its forms, materials, and production processes that take a long time with the perseverance and skill of the maker.

Ibrahim (2017) states that the kris of his nature must be curved. The curves of the dagger come in odd numbers, such as curves three, five, nine, eleven, thirteen, and above. A

straight blade is also considered curved. Each curve design symbolises a different meaning and philosophy. According to the fourth edition of the Kamus Dewan, the dagger is defined as a sharp double-edged weapon with a straight or curving blade. In addition, Harsrinuksmo (2004) points out that kris must meet the following criteria: -

- i. Kris is divided into two main parts, which are the kris blades, including pesi and ganja.
- ii. The kris blade is tilted and not perpendicular. The design must be oblique. It symbolises the submissiveness and respect of the archipelago community.
- iii. The length of the kris blade usually ranges from 33 cm to 38 cm. Nonetheless, there are other krises outside of Java that measure up to 58 cm long. A Southern Philippine-made kris called sundang can reach a size of 64 cm. Small and short-sized krises are not categorised as kris. It is a talisman with the shape similar to that of a kris.
- iv. A good kris is made from three different metals. The minimum is made with two types of metal, steel and pamor (pattern) material.



Visual 1: Parts of kris.

Source: Ab. Hamid (2019)

Even though there are additional criteria that are thought of as complementing the kris, such as the hilt, the sheath, and the blade's design, the four criteria are enough to describe the physicality and nature of the kris. Harsrinuksmo (2004) asserts that objects which resemble a kris but are constructed from different materials, such as copper, silver, or gold, are not recognised to be a kris. Similarly, a kris is made by the metal but not through the process of forging. It is also not recognised as a kris but is described as a 'kris kodi' or imitation kris.

4. THE HISTORY OF KRIS AND THE ORIGIN OF THE MALELA'S KRIS

According to Miksic and Tranchini (1990), the kris originated in the Javanese Islands and has spread throughout the archipelago. It has been known since the 9th century and is evidenced by the carved imagery found in the Borobudur Temple. Kempers (1976) takes note of the fact that the emergence of the tradition of kris-making in the archipelago was influenced by the bronze culture that flourished in Dongson, Vietnam around the 3rd century AD. Kempers surmised that the kris was an advanced development of the type of stab or punching weapon in the bronze age. The stabbing weapon of that era was shaped like a human standing on its handle, which blended it with its blades (Harsrinuksmo 2004).

As stated by Al-Mudra (2009), the carvings in the temples of the Java Islands prove that the kris have been known to the Javanese since the 5th century AD. On the stone carvings found in Dakuwu Village, Grabag, Magelang, Central Java, remains were found, depicting iron equipment. The engraving was made about 500 years ago as written in Pallawa letters using Sanskrit. The engraving clearly states that there is a clean and clear spring, and there are also several pictures of what appear to be weapons such as tridents, axes, scythes, and daggers that are similar in shape to kris.

Around the 5th century when the influence of Indian culture began to enter the archipelago, it brought with it the technology of forging metal. This picture can be seen on the remains of the temples in the Java Islands, especially at the Borobudur temple and the Prambanan temple. On the remain, a stab weapon that resembled a sheet of leaves was found. It was said to be the model of a stab weapon that was invented earlier in India known as Kris Buda and is considered the prototype of the kris (Al-Mudra 2009). The proof can be seen in Visual 2 below in a red circle which clearly shows the appearance of the kris shape on the remain discovered in the Prambanan temple.



Visual 2: A remain of a figure holding kris buda, at the Prambanan temple.

Source: Moertjipto (1991)

According to Gardner (1936), the kris came from prehistoric weapons made from animal bones. Next, Griffith Wilkens in the National Cultural Encyclopedia: Kris and other traditional Indonesian weapons (Harsrinuksmo 1988) states that the kris is a new culture from the mid-14th or 15th century AD, and it is a continuation of the spear-shaped weapon used by primitive humans in the Australian archipelago if viewed from its physical form, similar to the original form of the proto dagger.

Raffles, in his book, *The History of Java* (2008), states that no less than 30 types of weapons were used by the Majapahit army, but the kris occupied the highest place among them. To support the claim that the kris originated in Java and was over a thousand years old, Van Der Lith states in *Harsrinuksmo* (2004) that an old kris weapon was discovered during the operation aiming to find and dismantle artefacts in the Borobudur Temple, but it was not similar to the kris found in the carving of the statue in the temple. The kris blade was merged with the handle, and it is now kept at the Ethnographic Museum in Leiden, Netherlands.

Archipelago historian, Suwarsono Lumintu in *Harsrinuksmo* (2004) disagrees and refutes the claims and theories of the Western scholars who state that kris does not originate from Majapahit. According to him, many books by Western scholars mention kris as one of the stab weapons such as daggers, knives, and so on. This theory is inaccurate owing to the fact that kris are not the same as dagger, which original purpose was to hurt and kill. The kris is produced not only as a sharp weapon but as an inheritance that is believed to protect and provide well-being to the owner.

It can generally be concluded that the kris is not merely a killing weapon like other weapons, but it has been elevated to a high degree in the life values of the archipelago community. The actual fact is that the daggers indeed originated in Javanese land around the 5th or 6th century AD, but in a different form than their current form. The kris reached its shape as it is today in the 12th or 13th century AD, and it has become a culture that reached its peak of glory during the Majapahit period, as reported by the Chinese traveller, Ma Huan.

According to Ahmad (2015), the early history of kris in the Malay world began from the 13th to 15th century AD, which is during the Majapahit period. The appearance of a straight or curved design is due to the evolutionary process in tandem with the passage of time from the land of Java to all the regions of the archipelago. Hence, the appearance of the Malay Peninsular's kris also changed slightly depending on the local community's variety and changing trends and desires. However, the functions and uses of kris are still maintained as a weapon, a tool of greatness, as a complement of fashion, as a shamanic tool, a means of punishment, a symbol of dignity, and as a symbol of power and authority in the Malay community. It can be concluded that the kris is valuable not only for its aesthetic value but also for its functionality.



Visual 3: A three-curved Malela Kris

Source: melayudankris.blogspot.com

According to Ab Hamid (2019), the Malela kris comes from Pattani and Kelantan provinces. It is forged from a dark steel, with the appearance of its strong and powerful forging grounds. The shape of the blades is curved, and on each side of the blade there is a boned and sloping elephant trunk (*belalai gajah*). The blade had a filigree pattern of pandanus artocapus thorns in the shape of the three numbers, was corrugated, and was insulated at the bottom.

As stated by Ahmad (2020) the Malela kris also comes from Terengganu because of its grooved blades called Malela or Gelugur. This Malela dagger has grooves to the left and right of its bones up to the end of the blade. There are two types of bones on the Malela blade which are round and sharp.

5. THE AESTHETIC DESIGN OF 'KRIS MALELA' BLADE

The term aesthetics etymologically comes from the Latin 'aestheticus', and in Greek it means tastes or things that can be absorbed by the senses. Aesthetics is also considered a branch of philosophical science that talks about the beauty in which art and the universe exist. From the etymology of the word, aesthetics is something that highlights the beauty of an object form or impulse and the aesthetic experience of its creation and observation.

Aesthetics is a study of the relevance of a process and rules in the creation of an object of art. This study is expected to create positive feelings for a person when they come to appreciate the artistic object (Allsopp, 1952). Read (1966) thinks the aesthetic is a union and a relationship between the absorption form of human senses and the work itself. One usually thinks that aesthetics is an art that will always have the value of social beauty. That assumption makes it difficult for one to appreciate the art itself because the art does not always have to contain the value of beauty.

According to Seeley (2018) aesthetic theory defines a work of art as an artifact deliberately designed to trigger an aesthetic experience in an art appreciator. Aesthetic experience is the experience of the aesthetic qualities of art work. Sikana (2021) mentions that aesthetic is beauty reflected in a sense of pleasure, joy and satisfaction, referring to the valuable and beneficial as well as the enchanting contemplation or mesmerizing vision, that quickly captivates the heart and is engraved in thought.

From Aristotle to the 18th century, the question of aesthetic was widely discussed and philosophized around the concept of beauty in literature. The term aesthetics that originated in Greek word 'aestheticos' which means 'feeling' was first introduced by Alexander Baumgarten (1714-1762). This German philosopher who used this term for the study of beauty explained that the aesthetic is the entire art field in which any beauty is part of it, named an aesthetic field coordinated with logic and ethics. However, Baumgarten did little to contribute his opinion on the aesthetics. The philosopher who shaped and streamlined the aesthetic sense was George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). Hegel, is a philosopher who often uses aesthetic terms in his writings about art.

Read (2017) defined three levels for evaluating aesthetics in a work of art. The levels include physical aspects (artistic components) as well as materials (media) utilised. The second is to observe characteristics of the pattern form (artistic principles), and the third is to observe expression, which is the application of artistic components and principles related to the artist's emotions and sentiments.

In examining the aesthetic value of Malela kris blade, Herbert's (2017) approach such as the observation of physical aspects and observation of aspects of form related to the use of elements and principles of art can be used in appreciating the beauty of this weapon's blacksmithing. As the result, this study will only focus on the observation of physical characteristics and the application of the elements and principles of art. The aesthetic value of kris, according to Ahmad (2017), is found in the artwork present in the hilt,

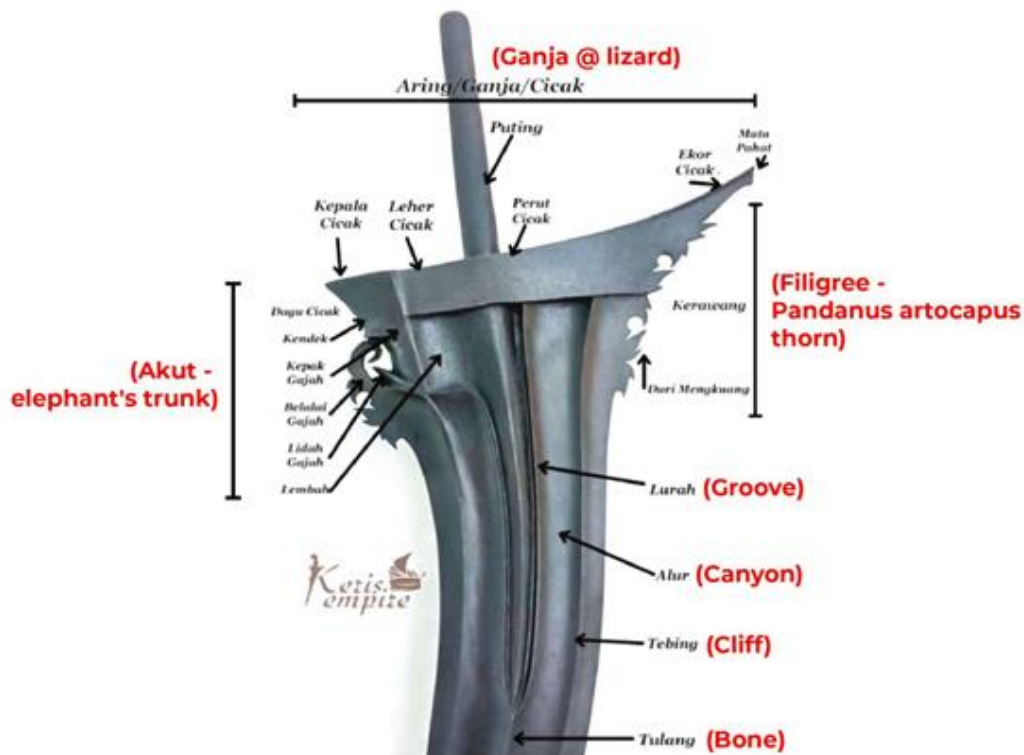
pendokok, blade, and scabbard. However, this article only focuses on the aesthetic value of the Malela kris's blade.

According to Ahmad (2017) this Malela kris comes from the east coast of the Peninsula, particularly Terengganu. One prominent characteristic on this blade is its channel, depth, hollowness and the big bone in the center of the blade. This kris is produced using a metal rod. Thus, most blades of this kris are dark-coloured. This kris also has its pamor. The metal rod is also frequently used as this kris tends to be used in battles. Ab Hamid (2019) opines that the Malela kris is forged by an expert known as Pandai Zainal. Pandai Zainal forged two kris known as Kris Malela and Kris Cerita. The forms of both kris are differentiated by the lok, where Malela kris has a lok, whereas Cerita kris is straight but still has the same characteristics like Malela kris.



Visual 4: The blade of Malela Kris

Source: Ahmad (2020).



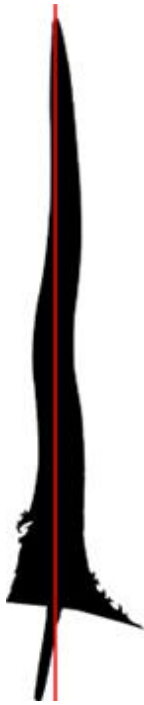
Visual 5: The aesthetic beauty of the blade of Malela Kris

Source: krisempire.com

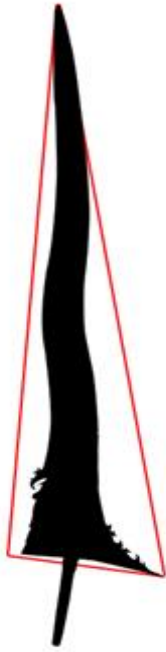
Visual 4 shows the form of blade of Malela kris as a whole. While visual 5 shows the parts of the Malela kris clearly. The following is the beauty of the blade analysed in the list below:

The form of the blade with lok

Looking at the shape of the blade as a whole, Malela kris has a lok or curve. On Visual 6 there is a shape of lok three found on the blade of the kris. The aesthetics found on this blade comes from the design of the lok that is reasonably stable and intact. In general, the blade appears like a triangle and elongates upwards (refer to Visual 7). In terms of the principle of balance, the shape of the blade has an asymmetrical balance. This can be referred to in Visual 6 below, where the asymmetrical imbalance takes place when the shapes both on the left and right are not equal in weight. This is a universal feature for all kris and it does not depend on whether the kris is straight or curved. The shape on the right-hand side will be heavier as there is a filigree there, and there is the elephant trunk on the left side. A perfect blade of a kris is able to stand on its own although physically it does not have a symmetrical balance.



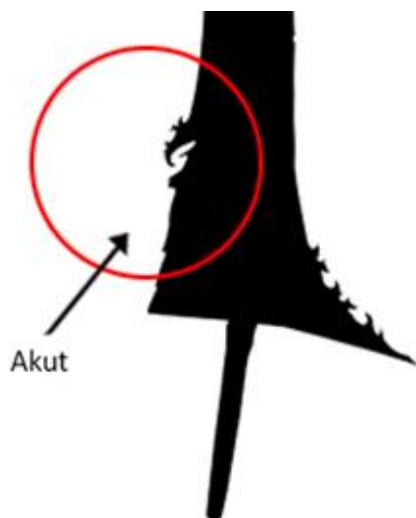
Visual 6 (adaption from visual 4): A curvy (lok) blade with red centre line



Visual 7 (adaption from visual 4) : A triangle shape

Has an akut

Akut is the left side of the blade positioned under the Kepala Cicak (literally, ‘head of the lizard’). Akut has many variations. They are akut belalai gajah (elephant trunk), akut bisu (mute), akut kuku garuda (phoenix’s nails) and akut paruh burung (bird’s beak). Normally, the blade of the Malela kris Pandai Saras, Semenanjung and Bugis has the elephant trunk akut. Visual 8 shows the located of akut and visual 9 show the close up shape of akut (elephant trunk) for Malela, which resembles the elephant trunk very closely. Hence, the name elephant trunk. The trunk also has a thorn and its position is higher than the other Malela krises. Normally, the position of this trunk will be lower, and near the chin of the lizard. The balance is asymmetrical as there is no balance on the left-hand side where it only latches on the side of the blade.



Visual 8 (adaption from visual 4) : Where it is akut located at the left side.



Visual 9 (adaption from visual 4): Close up the elephant trunk akut on the Malela blade.

Blade with bone

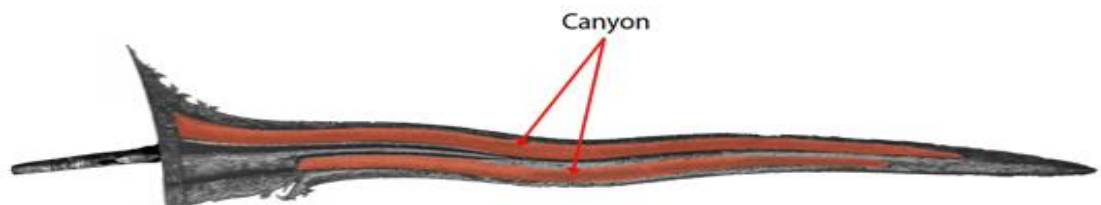
The main characteristics for the blade of the Malela kris is that it has a bone in the middle of the blade. The bone can be found on the front side and the back of the blade, and it is protruding next to the groove on both the left and right sides. As we examine the bone closely, it follows the shape of the lok on the blade. This shows the strength and beauty of the blade. Visual 10 illustrates the position of the bone on the Malela Kris's blade.



Visual 10 (adaption from visual 4): the bone found on the blade of Malela

Blade with a canyon

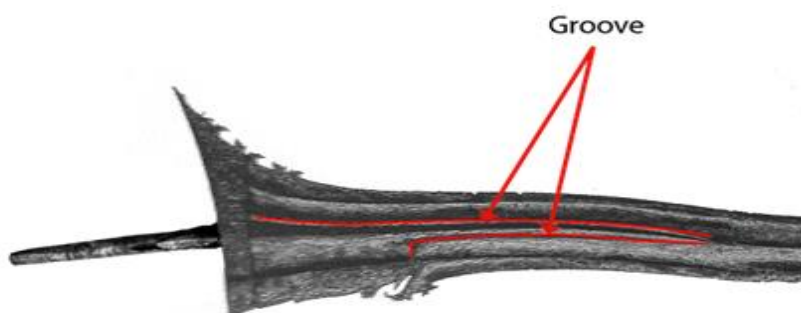
Malela Kris has a canyon on both left and right sides, and it presses the bone in the middle. This canyon starts from the base of the blade after the ganjar or lizard up to the end of the blade (tuntong). The canyon on both sides of the blade complements the beauty of the kris other than the fact that canyon functions to ensure a better blood flow when the kris is stabbed. The physical form of this canyon also follows the shape of the number of the lok. Visual 11 shows the canyon found on the blade of Malela kris. This canyon can also be seen clearly on Visual 5 above.



Visual 11 (adaption from visual 4): Canyon on the left and right sides of the Malela blade.

Blade with groove.

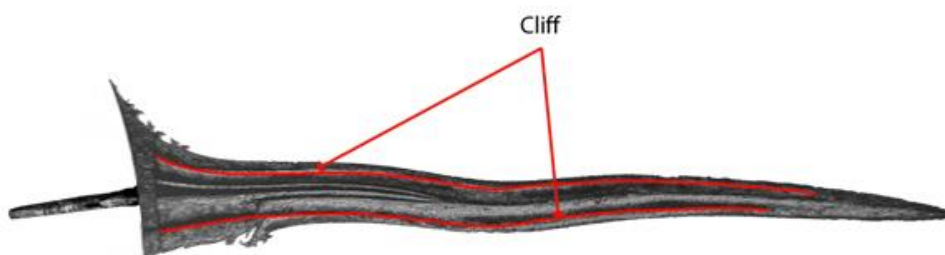
Other than the canyon on both sides of the blade, malela kris also has a groove. The groove of the Malela blade supports the tip of the blade starting from ganja or cicak right to the middle of the blade tip. The groove on the blade then meets the bone of the kris. If we look closely into the groove of the kris, it seems to have a fine curve where the top side has an asymmetrical shape with the shape underneath it. This groove resembling the fine lines is longer than the side of the blade with filigree, whereas the shorter groove is found on the side of the akut of the elephant trunk. Physically, the blade of the Malela is seen as a very thin line and is sharp in the middle of the blade that presses on the blade of the bone. The shape of the groove follows the curve accentuating the beauty of the kris. Visual 12 below shows the shape of the groove found on the blade of the kris. It is characteristically curved but the shape is smaller than the valley and as fine as a line. This groove can be seen clearly in Visual 5 above.



Visual 12 (adaption from visual 4): The form and position of the groove found on the blade of Malela

A blade with cliff.

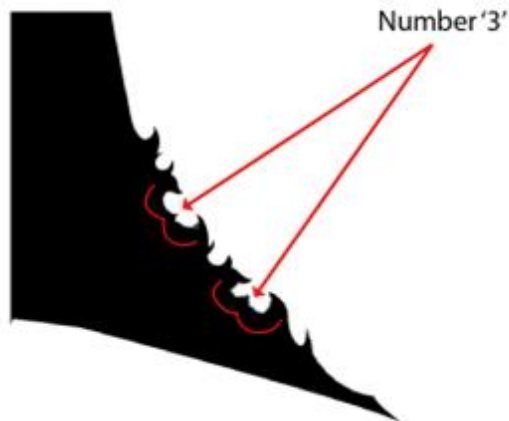
The Malela kris also has a cliff that can be seen clearly on Visual 5 above. The position of the cliff on the Malela kris is on the left and the right sides of the blade where there is a groove. The cliff is the middle part that separates the groove and the sharp point of the blade. Looking at it closely, it is also formed according to the curve of the blade. This happens when the forger forms a groove on the blade of the kris. The sunken shape that later emerges is the part of the kris called cliff which is sharp and protruding. The function is to facilitate and to enlarge the wound resulted from kris stabs. Physically, the blade of the kris looks more prominent and curved at the same time showing the beauty of the forgery of Malela kris. The position of the cliff on the Malela kris can be seen on Visual 13 below, and it can also be referred to in Visual 5 above.



Visual 13 (adaption from visual 4): The position of the cliff found on the blade of Malela

The blade of filigree (pandanus artocapus thorns) and with the number 3.

Malela Kris also has filigree on the right side of the blade. The filigree pattern on this blade is known as pandanus artocapus thorns and there is also a shape of the number '3' on it. If we closely look into the shape, it almost resembles pandanus artocapus thorns with the number '3' seen in the center. This particular shape can be seen in Visual 14 below. Physically, the shape of the filigree found on the blade of the kris is synonymous with the pattern of the thorns available around the society. This pattern is adapted into the design of Malela Kris. Other than the aesthetic factor found on this filigree, it also functions as one of the kris's point that is harmful, as the kris is stabbed and pulled.



Visual 14 (adaption from visual 4): The position of the pandanus artocapus thorn filigree with number 3 shape on the blade of Malela kris

In general, Malela kris has a number of design characteristics that determine its unique identity. Unlike other krises, Malela kris shares the same design with Cerita kris, only the difference is that the Malela kris has lok, while Cerita kris is straight without the lok. If we look at the unique blade, complete with the lok, elephant trunk, bones, grooves, canyons, cliffs and pandanus artocapus thorn filligrees with number 3, the making of Malela kris can be characterised as a very fine and neat metal forgery different from other blades of the krises that look simpler.

6. CONCLUSION

The uniqueness of Malela kris has made it very popular among kris collectors and enthusiasts. The fine forging works and the finishing work on the blade have accentuated the aesthetic value so synonymous with this kris. Every blade of the kris has its own aesthetic value depending of the skills and fine craftworks of the forger. The kris forger has the ability to translate the idea and experience on the things he sees or feels to something so artistic and built from the characteristics of the object as the identity of the kris he is working on. The design of Malela kris is very unique and has its own identity, unlike that of other krises. Through the surface observation, people will get to know this kris through its distinctive identity.

Through the discipline of artistic knowledge, the aesthetic value for this Malela kris is evidenced from various shapes prominent on its body, from the lok at the bottom, to the finest shape which is the groove appearing like a fine line in the middle of the curve. The continuity of the shapes in the Malela kris is balanced in terms of its position, albeit its asymmetrical nature. It is the relationship between these elements that have exposed the aesthetic value that it has, other than the refined quality of the Malela kris. Thus, it shows that the forging of Malela kris is done very carefully by highly skilled forgers. It reflects

on the fine, creative and beautiful nature of the local forging works of Malay weapons at the time. This beautiful artistry is translated into the shape of a weapon called kris. With accompaniments such as the lok, akut, spine, curves, grooves and pandanus artocapus-thorn latticework with the number 3 as the identity, this Malela kris has its own aesthetic value that has been much admired by kris enthusiasts.

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