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BETWEEN TRADITION AND ISLAMIC PIETY: NEGOTIATING THE TRANSFORMATION OF PREMARITAL RUWATAN IN A JAVANESE MUSLIM FAMILY IN SUMBERLAWANG, SRAGEN, INDONESIA

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Abstrack
This study examines the historical transformation of premarital ruwatan in a Javanese Muslim family in Sumberlawang, Sragen, focusing on the negotiation between inherited ritual practices and changing Islamic orientations. Using a qualitative historical approach and a case study design, the research draws on interviews, observation, documentation, and relevant literature. The sources were examined through heuristic collection, source criticism, interpretation, and historiographical reconstruction, supported by triangulation. The findings show that the ritual has undergone

selective changes rather than complete abandonment. Its association with sukerta, intergenerational inheritance, premarital timing, and the pursuit of safety remains, while Murwakala performances, mantras, offerings, and other ritual elements have been simplified or replaced with Qur'anic recitation, Yasin, tahlil, khataman, and Islamic prayers. Religious authority has also become more layered through the involvement of kyai alongside the family elder, who remains active as a traditional ruwatan guide. This study contributes to the historiography of Javanese Islam by showing how continuity and change unfold within a family tradition across generations, with Islamization operating through negotiation, reinterpretation, and selective adaptation rather than the wholesale disappearance of Javanese ritual heritage.

Keywords: *cultural transformation; Islamic piety; Javanese Islam; Premarital ruwatan;*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji transformasi historis ruwatan prapernikahan dalam satu keluarga Muslim Jawa di Sumberlawang, Sragen, dengan menyoroti negosiasi antara praktik ritual yang diwariskan dan perubahan orientasi keislaman. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan sejarah kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, dokumentasi, dan studi kepustakaan, kemudian dianalisis melalui tahapan heuristik, kritik sumber, interpretasi, dan historiografi yang didukung triangulasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ruwatan mengalami transformasi selektif, bukan penghapusan secara menyeluruh. Keterkaitannya dengan konsep sukerta, pewarisan antargenerasi, pelaksanaan menjelang pernikahan, dan tujuan memohon keselamatan tetap dipertahankan. Sementara itu, pertunjukan Murwakala, mantra, sesaji, dan sejumlah perangkat ritual disederhanakan atau diganti dengan pembacaan Al-Qur'an, Surah Yasin, tahlil, khataman, dan doa-doa Islam. Perubahan tersebut juga memperlihatkan hubungan otoritas keagamaan dan budaya yang semakin berlapis, karena sesepuh yang masih aktif memandu ruwatan tetap berperan di tengah keterlibatan kiai. Penelitian ini berkontribusi terhadap historiografi Islam Jawa dengan menunjukkan bahwa keberlanjutan tradisi dapat berlangsung melalui negosiasi, penafsiran ulang, dan adaptasi selektif antargenerasi.

Kata Kunci: *transformasi budaya; kesalehan Islam; Islam Jawa; Ruwatan prapernikahan*

INTRODUCTION

Ruwatan occupies an important place in the ritual history of Javanese society, particularly in relation to beliefs concerning misfortune, protection, and the preservation of social and familial well-being. In Javanese cultural traditions, *ruwatan* has historically been associated with the liberation of individuals categorized as *sukerta*, namely those who are traditionally believed to be vulnerable to certain forms of misfortune. Its conventional performance is closely connected with the *Murwakala* narrative, wayang performances, mantras, offerings, and ritual symbols rooted in Javanese cosmology. Nevertheless, *ruwatan* has not remained unchanged throughout its history. (Wijayanto et al., 2025) demonstrate that the tradition underwent transformations across different historical periods while maintaining its cultural significance. These developments raise an important historical question concerning how inherited ritual practices maintain their continuity amid changes in the religious orientations and social circumstances of Javanese society.

The encounter between Islam and Javanese traditions provides an important historical context for understanding these transformations. The development of Islam in Java involved complex interactions with established cultural practices rather than the complete elimination of local traditions. (Ricklefs, 2014) emphasizes the significance of Islam in shaping the historical development of Javanese religious and cultural life. Within the context of *ruwatan*, (Nurhidin & Badruzaman, 2022) demonstrate that Islamic teachings and Javanese ritual traditions can interact through adaptation and the reinterpretation of cultural symbols. Accordingly, the relationship between Islamization and ritual transformation should not be understood merely as the replacement of traditional practices by Islamic elements, but also as a historical process involving negotiation, accommodation, and changing interpretations of inherited traditions.

This historical relationship becomes particularly relevant in examining premarital *ruwatan* in Sumberlawang, Sragen. As a ritual associated with an important transition in family life, premarital *ruwatan* brings together cultural inheritance, religious understandings, and relationships between generations. The practice provides a specific context for investigating how families maintain inherited traditions while responding to changing Islamic orientations. Rather than examining the ritual solely through its ceremonial procedures, a historical investigation must also consider how knowledge of *ruwatan* is transmitted, how its practices are interpreted across generations, and how cultural and religious authorities participate in shaping its continuity. These questions are central to understanding the transformation of premarital *ruwatan* within the social and religious life of a Javanese Muslim family in Sumberlawang.

Previous studies have examined the transformation of *ruwatan* from several perspectives. Historical research has traced changes in its ritual forms, narratives, and symbolic foundations across different periods (Wijayanto et al., 2025). Meanwhile, studies of cultural and religious acculturation have explored how Islamic practices interact with inherited Javanese rituals. (Nurhidin & Badruzaman, 2022) examine *ruwat Islami* as an expression of the relationship between Islam and local culture, while (Hardiansyah et al., 2022) investigate the incorporation of Islamic elements into house *ruwatan* in Banten. Similarly, (Jamal Ghofir & Daffa Yulia Pratama, 2023) discuss the interaction between ancestral ritual practices and Islamic teachings in the *ruwatan* of an only child in Tuban. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that ritual transformation may involve the adaptation of traditional practices without necessarily eliminating their cultural significance.

Other studies have explored the relationship between ritual traditions, marriage, religious identity, and cultural preservation. (Musonnif, 2024) examines the integration of Javanese mythology and Islamic religious practices in marriage-related *ruwatan* in Jombang. (Iswanto, 2026), through a study of Javanese-Pegon manuscripts used in *ruwatan* rituals in Jember, demonstrates how

inherited cultural knowledge can remain meaningful through negotiation with Islamic piety. In a related discussion of intergenerational religious change, (Hudayana, 2022) identifies a shift toward more sharia-centered religious orientations within Javanese kinship groups while highlighting the continuing significance of cultural identity. These studies provide important perspectives on the relationship between religious change and cultural continuity, although they approach this relationship through different communities, ritual contexts, and forms of evidence.

Despite these contributions, the relationship between the intergenerational inheritance of premarital *ruwatan* and the historical transformation of its ritual practices remains insufficiently explored within the studies reviewed here. Existing research has offered valuable explanations of ritual symbolism, religious acculturation, and the preservation of cultural traditions. However, less attention has been directed toward reconstructing how changes in ritual procedures, religious authority, and interpretations of inherited practices develop within a particular family across generations. This distinction is important because the persistence of a ritual does not necessarily imply the preservation of all its original elements. Conversely, changes in ritual performance do not automatically indicate the disappearance of its inherited cultural significance. Examining these processes within a specific family therefore provides an opportunity to connect broader discussions of Islamization and cultural adaptation with the historical experiences through which ritual traditions are transmitted and transformed.

This study approaches premarital *ruwatan* as a historical tradition whose continuity and transformation need to be understood together. Its central argument is that changes in ritual practices should be examined not only through the incorporation of Islamic elements but also through the interaction of cultural inheritance, religious authority, generational differences, and changing social circumstances. By focusing on a Javanese Muslim family in Sumberlawang, the study seeks to explain how inherited ritual practices are selectively maintained, modified, and reinterpreted

rather than assuming that Islamization necessarily produces a complete break with the past. This perspective allows the transformation of *ruwatan* to be investigated as part of the broader historical relationship between Javanese cultural traditions and Islamic religious life.

Accordingly, this study aims to reconstruct the historical transformation of premarital *ruwatan* in a Javanese Muslim family in Sumberlawang, Sragen. Specifically, it examines how the tradition has been transmitted and transformed across generations, how Javanese cultural elements and Islamic religious expressions are negotiated within the ritual, and how social, cultural, religious, and generational factors shape its continuity and transformation. Through this investigation, the study seeks to contribute to the historiography of Javanese Islam by providing a family-level historical account of the negotiation between inherited cultural practices and changing Islamic orientations. Its contribution lies in examining cultural continuity and ritual transformation as interconnected historical processes rather than as mutually exclusive developments.

THEORY AND RESEARCH METHODS

The relationship between Islam and Javanese cultural traditions provides the theoretical perspective for examining the historical transformation of premarital *ruwatan* in Sumberlawang, Sragen. This study draws on the perspective of Javanese Islam, particularly the works of (Woodward, 1989) and (Beatty, 1999), to understand how inherited ritual practices interact with changing religious orientations. Woodward (1989), in *Islam in Java: Normative Piety and Mysticism in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta*, emphasizes the significance of Islam in shaping Javanese religious life, including ritual practices, cultural traditions, and understandings of spirituality. His perspective challenges the assumption that the presence of Javanese cultural elements necessarily indicates the absence of Islamic religious influence. Accordingly, the interaction between Islam and local traditions can be examined through the ways Islamic meanings and practices become embedded within existing cultural expressions.

Beatly, in *Varieties of Javanese Religion: An Anthropological Account*, provides a complementary perspective by examining religious diversity, coexistence, and negotiation within Javanese society (Beatty, 1999). His study demonstrates that different religious orientations may interact within shared cultural practices without necessarily producing uniform interpretations. This perspective is relevant to understanding how ritual traditions are maintained, contested, or reinterpreted according to changing religious understandings and social circumstances. Taken together, Woodward's emphasis on the relationship between Islam and Javanese ritual life and Beatty's attention to religious diversity and negotiation provide an analytical basis for examining the continuity and transformation of premarital *ruwatan*.

In this research, the Javanese Islam perspective is operationalized through three interconnected dimensions. The first is cultural continuity, which concerns the preservation of inherited ritual knowledge, the concept of *sukerta*, the premarital context of the ritual, and its association with the pursuit of safety. The second is ritual transformation, which examines changes in ritual procedures, performances, mantras, offerings, religious recitations, and symbolic interpretations. The third is the negotiation of authority and religious meaning, which considers the roles of traditional ritual guides, *kyai*, and family members in maintaining or modifying inherited practices. These dimensions guide the comparison of ritual practices across generations and provide a framework for interpreting how cultural inheritance and Islamic religious orientations interact within the family.

This research employs a qualitative case study design with a historical approach supported by socio-cultural analysis. The case study focuses on the practice of premarital *ruwatan* within one Javanese Muslim family in Sumberlawang District, Sragen Regency. This design enables an in-depth examination of the transmission and transformation of ritual practices within their specific familial and social context. As (Mtisi, 2022) explains, a case study allows researchers to investigate a particular phenomenon by drawing on multiple sources of evidence. The historical approach is employed to

reconstruct continuity and change across generations, while the socio-cultural perspective helps explain how religious understandings, family relationships, and changing social circumstances relate to ritual transformation.

The historical investigation follows four stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The heuristic stage involves identifying and collecting sources relevant to the history and transformation of premarital *ruwatan*. Primary sources include interviews with a family elder who also serves as a traditional *ruwatan* guide, family members who participated in the ritual, and representatives of the Office of Religious Affairs (*Kantor Urusan Agama*, KUA) as supporting informants. Additional sources include observations and available documentation, such as photographs, videos, ritual objects, and family records. Secondary sources consist of academic books, journal articles, and previous studies concerning *ruwatan*, Javanese Islam, cultural transmission, and the historical relationship between Islamic practices and local traditions. The collection of these sources provides the basis for reconstructing the development of the ritual within the family (Sayono, 2021).

The oral sources used in this study are distinguished according to the informants' positions, their relationships to the ritual, and the nature of their testimonies. The interview documented as (Alfaruq, 2026b) was conducted on September 2, 2026, with a family elder who continues to actively serve as a traditional *ruwatan* guide. His dual role provides valuable information concerning the intergenerational transmission of ritual knowledge, traditional ceremonial procedures, and changes in *ruwatan* practices over time. Meanwhile, the interview with a contemporary *ruwatan* participant (Alfaruq, 2026a) provides insights into current ritual experiences and interpretations. In evaluating these oral sources, the study distinguishes recollections of earlier ritual practices from accounts of direct participation in contemporary rituals. The information obtained is compared with other available testimonies and ritual documentation to assess consistency, historical context, and differences in perspective. This process enables oral testimony to be critically examined in

reconstructing the historical continuity and transformation of premarital *ruwatan* within the family.

The second stage, source criticism, examines the credibility and relevance of the collected evidence through external and internal criticism. External criticism considers the origin, identity, chronological context, and authenticity of the sources, while internal criticism assesses the consistency and credibility of their contents. In this study, oral accounts of earlier *ruwatan* practices are compared with accounts from other informants, available ritual documentation, and relevant written sources. Particular attention is given to the distinction between directly observed practices and recollections of previous generations. This procedure is important because the reconstruction of cultural history frequently relies on oral testimony and family memory, which require careful examination of the circumstances in which historical information is transmitted (Backerra, 2024).

The third stage, interpretation, involves analyzing the relationship between continuity and transformation in the ritual practices documented across generations. The comparison examines the categories of individuals associated with *ruwatan*, the purposes of the ritual, its sequence and ceremonial elements, the use of *Murwakala* performances, mantras, offerings, religious recitations, and the individuals who exercise ritual authority. The Javanese Islam perspective guides this analysis by directing attention to the interaction between inherited cultural practices and Islamic religious expressions. (Woodward, 1989) perspective is used to examine the position of Islamic practices and religious meanings within the ritual, while (Beatty, 1999) perspective helps interpret differences and negotiations surrounding ritual practices and their acceptance within the family. Through this approach, ritual change is examined not only as a modification of ceremonial procedures but also in relation to the reinterpretation of meaning, cultural transmission, and religious authority.

The fourth stage, historiography, organizes the findings into a historical narrative concerning the inheritance and transformation of premarital *ruwatan*. The reconstruction compares accounts of earlier

ritual practices with evidence of contemporary practices to identify the elements that have been maintained, modified, reduced, or replaced. This process is intended to explain the development of the tradition within the family while considering the historical relationship between ritual inheritance, Islamic religious orientations, and changing social circumstances. The historical narrative is therefore structured around the relationship between continuity and change rather than treating traditional and contemporary practices as entirely separate ritual categories.

To strengthen the credibility of the findings, this study employs source and method triangulation. Source triangulation involves comparing information obtained from family elders, ritual guides, family members, and supporting informants. Method triangulation involves examining the relationship between interview accounts, observations, and available documentation. These procedures help identify consistencies and differences among the sources and reduce reliance on a single account of the ritual's development ((Vivek et al., 2023); (Chitwattanakorn et al., 2024)). The combination of historical methods and the Javanese Islam perspective enables the study to reconstruct changes in premarital *ruwatan* while interpreting their relationship to cultural continuity, religious negotiation, and the transmission of inherited traditions across generations..

DISCUSSION

Historical Inheritance and the Murwakala Ritual

The historical development of *ruwatan* in Javanese society demonstrates the relationship between cultural continuity and changes in ritual practices. Traditionally, *ruwatan* has been associated with the concept of *sukerta*, referring to individuals who, according to Javanese beliefs, are considered vulnerable to particular forms of misfortune. The ritual is intended to provide protection and liberation from these conditions through symbolic and ceremonial practices. (Wijayanto et al., 2025) demonstrate that *ruwatan* has undergone transformations across different historical periods while maintaining its significance within Javanese cultural life. Similarly,

(Kumaidi, 2023) explain that the ritual's symbolic meanings are closely related to traditional beliefs concerning protection and the prevention of misfortune. These studies provide a broader historical context for understanding how *ruwatan* has been transmitted and transformed within the family examined in Sumberlawang.

The oral accounts collected in this study indicate that premarital *ruwatan* was known and practiced within the family across previous generations. According to the family elder's testimony, knowledge of the ritual was transmitted through family relationships, participation in ceremonial activities, and the guidance of older family members (Alfaruq, 2026b). This process suggests that the continuity of *ruwatan* depended not only on the preservation of formal ritual procedures but also on the transmission of cultural knowledge and family memories. The participation of successive generations allowed inherited understandings of *ruwatan* to remain relevant within the family's social and cultural life.

Accounts of earlier ritual practices describe a form of *ruwatan* closely associated with the *Murwakala* wayang tradition. The procession reportedly involved performances of the *Murwakala* narrative, *gending* (Javanese musical compositions), traditional mantras, the giving of advice, ritual bathing or sprinkling with flower-infused water, the use of *jarik* with particular motifs, and various offerings (Alfaruq, 2026b). These elements formed part of a symbolic system through which the ritual's purpose was communicated and understood. The *Murwakala* narrative provided a cultural explanation of the condition of *sukerta* and the process of liberation from misfortune. Research by (Maulana & Ngazizah, 2024) on *ruwatan Murwokolo* in Rembang similarly demonstrates the relationship between inherited ritual beliefs, ceremonial practices, and Islamic values.

Within this earlier ritual framework, traditional practitioners occupied an important position because of their knowledge of ceremonial sequences, mantras, symbolic objects, and the *Murwakala* narrative. Their authority was associated with the transmission and preservation of ritual knowledge. However, the

historical reconstruction of these practices in Sumberlawang relies substantially on oral recollections of earlier generations. Such accounts provide evidence of how the family remembers and understands its ritual inheritance, although they must be distinguished from direct documentation of the ceremonies described. This distinction is important for examining the transmission of tradition without treating every recollection as independently verified evidence of past events.

An important finding concerns the relationship between the traditional concept of *ruwatan sukerta* and the contemporary expression "family *ruwatan*." The family elder's account indicates that the use of the latter expression does not necessarily represent the emergence of an entirely different ritual category. Instead, it emphasizes the involvement of family members in the ceremonial practice, while the association with *sukerta* and the pursuit of protection from misfortune remains recognizable (Alfaruq, 2026b). This suggests that changes in ritual terminology should not automatically be interpreted as changes in the fundamental purpose of the tradition. In the Sumberlawang case, the distinction between *ruwatan sukerta* and "family *ruwatan*" reflects continuity in inherited cultural meaning alongside changes in the ways the ritual is identified and organized.

Islamization and the Transformation of Ritual Practices

The comparison between accounts of earlier *ruwatan* and contemporary practices reveals changes in ritual procedures and religious expressions. Whereas earlier practices were associated with *Murwakala* performances, traditional mantras, and a wider range of ceremonial objects, contemporary *ruwatan* within the family has incorporated Qur'anic recitation, the reading of Surah Yasin, *tahlil*, *khataman*, and Islamic prayers. Some elements associated with *Murwakala* have been reduced or are no longer performed, while certain offerings have been simplified or abandoned (Alfaruq, 2026b). These changes indicate that the transformation of *ruwatan* occurs

primarily in the organization and expression of ritual practices rather than through the complete disappearance of the tradition.

The incorporation of Islamic practices can be understood as part of the historical interaction between Javanese cultural inheritance and Islamic religious orientations. (Nurhidin & Badruzaman, 2022) demonstrate that *ruwat Islami* represents a form of interaction between Islamic teachings and Javanese cultural practices, in which inherited ritual elements may acquire meanings associated with Islamic values. Similarly, (Anam et al., 2025) examine the transformation of Javanese ritual practices through the incorporation of Qur'anic recitation while maintaining elements of cultural continuity. In the Sumberlawang case, the inclusion of Islamic readings and prayers provides a means through which the family can continue an inherited tradition while expressing its contemporary religious understanding.

The transformation also concerns the meaning attributed to ritual objects and ceremonial practices. In earlier accounts, offerings and other ritual objects formed part of a symbolic framework associated with Javanese cosmology. Their reduction or modification in contemporary practices does not necessarily indicate the disappearance of the cultural meanings attached to *ruwatan*. Rather, the family's understanding of protection and safety increasingly finds expression through prayers addressed to Allah. (Musonnif, 2024), in his study of marriage-related *ruwatan* in Jombang, demonstrates that ritual objects may continue to represent hopes and requests for divine protection within ceremonies that incorporate Islamic religious practices. This comparison suggests that ritual transformation can involve both the modification of ceremonial objects and the reinterpretation of their meanings.

From the perspective of Javanese Islam, these changes should not be reduced to a simple opposition between Islamic teachings and Javanese traditions. (Woodward, 1989) emphasizes the importance of examining Islamic religious expressions within Javanese cultural life, while (Beatty, 1999) highlights the diversity and negotiation of religious meanings within shared cultural practices. Applied to the

Sumberlawang case, these perspectives help explain why the incorporation of Qur'anic recitation and Islamic prayers does not necessarily eliminate the inherited identity of *ruwatan*. Instead, the family maintains the ritual's association with premarital protection while adjusting its practices to religious understandings regarded as appropriate in the contemporary context.

This transformation can therefore be interpreted as a process of selective adaptation and reinterpretation. Some inherited elements continue to be recognized, others are reduced or replaced, and the religious meanings attached to the ritual are reformulated. (Hardiansyah et al., 2022) identify comparable processes of acculturation in house *ruwatan* in Banten, where local ritual traditions interact with Islamic practices. The significance of the Sumberlawang findings lies not merely in confirming that such adaptation occurs, but in locating these changes within the transmission of an inherited family ritual. In this context, Islamization emerges as one dimension of ritual transformation rather than evidence that the tradition has been completely replaced.

Religious Authority, Generational Change, and Social Conditions

Changes in ritual practices are closely related to the roles of individuals who preserve and legitimize *ruwatan*. In accounts of earlier practices, traditional ritual guides occupied a central position because of their knowledge of the *Murwakala* narrative, mantras, ceremonial sequences, and symbolic objects. In contemporary practices, the involvement of *kyai* has become an important element in the performance of Islamic prayers and religious recitations. However, the participation of *kyai* does not necessarily eliminate the role of traditional ritual guides. The accounts recorded in this study indicate that inherited ceremonial knowledge and Islamic religious leadership may coexist within the organization of contemporary *ruwatan* (Alfaruq, 2026b).

This development suggests a more layered relationship between cultural and religious authority. Traditional practitioners remain associated with the preservation of ritual knowledge, while *kyai*

contribute to the religious legitimacy of contemporary ceremonial practices. The relationship between these roles can be understood as a form of negotiation rather than a complete transfer of authority from one group to another. (Nisa'u, F. I., & Widianto, 2024), in their study of the *ngumbah keris* tradition, examine the involvement of Islamic religious figures in negotiating the relationship between local ritual practices and religious principles. Although the ritual context differs from *ruwatan*, their findings provide a relevant comparison for understanding how religious authority interacts with inherited cultural practices.

The transformation of *ruwatan* is also reflected in differences between generations. According to the account of a contemporary ritual participant, members of the younger generation may continue to participate in *ruwatan* as an expression of respect for their parents and as a form of prayer before marriage, even when they do not interpret every traditional ritual element in the same manner as earlier generations (Alfaruq, 2026a). This finding suggests that the transmission of tradition does not necessarily require the preservation of identical beliefs or ceremonial procedures. The younger generation may maintain its participation in an inherited ritual while giving greater emphasis to family relationships and Islamic religious expressions.

Such differences illustrate the relationship between cultural inheritance and changing religious orientations. (Hudayana, 2022), in his study of religious identity within Javanese kinship groups, demonstrates that stronger sharia-centered orientations can develop alongside the continuing significance of family relationships and Javanese cultural identity. In the Sumberlawang case, the continuing participation of younger family members can similarly be interpreted as a negotiation between respect for inherited customs and contemporary understandings of Islamic practice. The persistence of the ritual therefore depends not only on the transmission of ceremonial knowledge but also on the willingness of successive generations to reinterpret its significance.

Social and economic circumstances provide another context for understanding changes in ritual performance. A relatively elaborate

Murwakala ceremony requires specialized practitioners, performance arrangements, ceremonial equipment, and sufficient time for its implementation. By comparison, a simplified ritual incorporating Islamic recitations may require fewer ceremonial arrangements. (Hardiansyah et al., 2022) identify changing social conditions as an important context for adaptation in local ritual practices. Nevertheless, the available evidence from the Sumberlawang case does not establish the precise extent to which financial considerations, educational experiences, or changes in family schedules independently determined the transformation of the ritual. These circumstances are therefore considered possible contributing contexts rather than individually demonstrated causes.

Taken together, changes in ritual authority, generational interpretation, and social circumstances indicate that the transformation of *ruwatan* cannot be attributed to Islamization alone. The interaction between inherited cultural knowledge, Islamic religious leadership, family expectations, and contemporary social life provides a broader framework for understanding why certain practices are maintained while others are modified. The historical significance of this process lies in the family's ability to negotiate changes in the ritual without necessarily abandoning its inherited cultural purpose.

1. Continuity, Change, and Historiographical Contributions

The findings from Sumberlawang demonstrate that the historical transformation of premarital *ruwatan* involves continuity and change operating within the same tradition. Continuity is evident in the transmission of ritual knowledge within the family, the association with *sukerta*, the performance of the ritual in connection with marriage, and its continuing purpose of seeking safety and protection. Change is evident in the reduction of certain *Murwakala* elements, the modification or abandonment of offerings and traditional mantras, the incorporation of Islamic recitations and prayers, and the increasing involvement of Islamic religious figures. These developments indicate that the continuity of *ruwatan* should not be measured solely through the preservation of its earlier ceremonial forms.

The relationship between continuity and transformation also demonstrates that ritual practices may acquire new religious expressions without losing their inherited cultural identity. From the perspective of (Woodward, 1989) and (Beatty, 1999), the interaction between Javanese cultural traditions and Islamic orientations can be understood through adaptation, coexistence, and the negotiation of religious meanings. In Sumberlawang, this process is reflected in the family's continuing recognition of *ruwatan* as an inherited practice while adjusting its implementation to contemporary religious understandings. Cultural continuity is therefore maintained through selective transformation rather than the unchanged reproduction of every ritual element.

The historiographical significance of these findings becomes clearer when compared with previous studies. (Wijayanto et al., 2025) reconstruct the broader historical transformation of *ruwatan* in Java through archaeological and textual evidence across several centuries. Other studies, including (Hardiansyah et al., 2022), (Nurhidin & Badruzaman, 2022), and (Musonnif, 2024), examine the interaction between Islamic practices and local ritual traditions in different communities and ceremonial contexts. These studies establish the importance of adaptation and cultural-religious interaction in understanding the persistence of *ruwatan*. The present study contributes a more focused account by examining how ritual inheritance and transformation are remembered, interpreted, and negotiated within a particular Javanese Muslim family.

The novelty of the Sumberlawang case lies not merely in demonstrating that Javanese *ruwatan* can incorporate Islamic elements, as previous studies have established, but in explaining how ritual transformation is negotiated within the intergenerational history of a particular family. While (Wijayanto et al., 2025) trace broader historical transformations through archaeological and textual evidence, (Hardiansyah et al., 2022), (Nurhidin & Badruzaman, 2022), and (Musonnif, 2024) examine various forms of interaction between Islamic practices and inherited ritual traditions. In contrast, this study focuses on the interconnected processes of family inheritance,

changes in ritual terminology, generational interpretations, and the coexistence of cultural and religious authority. The continued involvement of the family elder as an active *ruwatan* guide, alongside the participation of *kyai*, demonstrates that the incorporation of Islamic religious expressions does not necessarily eliminate traditional ritual authority. Similarly, the continuing relationship between *ruwatan sukerta* and the contemporary expression "family *ruwatan*" indicates that changes in terminology and ritual procedures do not automatically signify the emergence of an entirely new tradition. These findings contribute to the historiography of Javanese Islam by demonstrating how cultural continuity is maintained through selective transformation, reinterpretation, and the negotiation of religious authority within family life.

At the same time, the historical interpretation must remain consistent with the character of the available evidence. The reconstruction is based on oral accounts, observations, and available documentation concerning one family, while the precise chronological sequence of every ritual modification cannot be established from the information presented. Consequently, the findings are best understood as a historically informed reconstruction of intergenerational continuity and transformation within the Sumberlawang case, rather than a comprehensive chronology of *ruwatan* practices across the district. This distinction reinforces the contribution of the study by clarifying the relationship between its empirical evidence and its historiographical interpretation.

Overall, premarital *ruwatan* in the family examined can be understood as a living cultural tradition whose continuity depends partly on its capacity for reinterpretation. The transformation from more elaborate *Murwakala*-associated practices toward ceremonies incorporating Islamic prayers and recitations illustrates a process in which inherited cultural purposes remain recognizable despite changes in ritual procedures and religious authority. The Sumberlawang case therefore contributes to the understanding of Javanese Islamic history by demonstrating that the relationship between cultural inheritance and religious transformation is not

necessarily characterized by a complete break with the past, but may develop through selective adaptation, negotiation, and continuity across generations.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the tradition of premarital *ruwatan* within a Javanese Muslim family in Sumberlawang District, Sragen, has not been entirely abandoned but has undergone selective transformation in its ritual procedures, ceremonial elements, religious authority, and religious expressions. Historically, earlier forms of *ruwatan*, as described in the oral accounts, involved relatively elaborate *Murwakala* rituals, including wayang performances featuring the *Murwakala* narrative, *gending*, *Kejawen* prayers or mantras, ritual cleansing, the use of *jarik* with particular motifs, and various offerings. Over time, these practices have undergone adjustments and simplification. Certain ritual stages and offerings have been reduced or abandoned, while Qur'anic recitation, the reading of Surah Yasin, *tahlil*, *khataman*, and Islamic prayers have become increasingly prominent. These developments indicate that the transformation of *ruwatan* primarily concerns its ritual procedures and religious expressions rather than the complete disappearance of the inherited tradition.

These findings also clarify the relationship between the terms *ruwatan sukerta* and "family *ruwatan*." The study does not identify a fundamental transformation of *ruwatan sukerta* into an entirely new ritual category known as "family *ruwatan*." Instead, the distinction primarily concerns the terminology used and the involvement of family members in the performance of the ritual. Conceptually, contemporary *ruwatan* continues to maintain its connection with the traditional understanding of *sukerta* and its principal purpose of seeking safety and protection before entering an important stage of life, particularly marriage. Although the terminology and certain aspects of ritual performance have changed, the underlying cultural purpose remains recognizable. Therefore, changes in ritual nomenclature should not automatically be interpreted as changes in the fundamental meaning or cultural identity of the tradition.

The transformation is most evident in the ways the ritual is performed, interpreted, and legitimized. The incorporation of Islamic elements has reshaped ritual practices through the reduction of certain traditional Javanese mantras and offerings and the increasing use of Qur'anic recitation and Islamic prayers. At the same time, changes have occurred in the relationship between traditional and Islamic religious authority. In earlier practices, the traditional *ruwatan* guide occupied a central position as the custodian of knowledge concerning *Murwakala*, ritual procedures, and *Kejawen* customs. In contemporary practice, this traditional authority continues to exist alongside the involvement of *kyai*, who contribute Islamic religious knowledge and legitimacy to the ritual. The family elder who serves as a traditional *ruwatan* guide remains actively involved in its implementation, demonstrating that traditional authority has not been completely displaced. This coexistence suggests that Islamization operates not through a complete rupture with inherited traditions but through processes of selection, accommodation, and reinterpretation that allow traditional cultural knowledge and Islamic religious expressions to interact.

From the perspective of continuity and change, this study identifies several elements that demonstrate the persistence of the *ruwatan* tradition. These include its social and cultural functions, the intergenerational transmission of ritual knowledge, its performance before marriage, and the continuing understanding of the ritual as an effort to seek safety and protection. Meanwhile, changes are evident in the forms of performance, ritual sequences, ceremonial objects, religious recitations, the distribution of ritual authority, and the ways younger generations understand and interpret inherited practices. These developments indicate that cultural continuity does not necessarily require the preservation of every ritual element in its earlier form. Instead, the transmission of tradition may involve adjustments that enable successive generations to maintain inherited cultural values while responding to changing religious understandings and social circumstances. Thus, the continuity of *ruwatan* is closely connected to its capacity to adapt to the evolving socio-religious

environment without entirely abandoning its fundamental cultural significance.

Historiographically, these findings suggest that the history of Javanese *ruwatan* should not be understood exclusively as a narrative of cultural decline or the disappearance of local traditions resulting from Islamization. Rather, it can also be examined as a historical process characterized by negotiation, adaptation, reinterpretation, and continuity through change. The Sumberlawang case illustrates how Islamization can contribute to the internal transformation of an inherited ritual tradition. Certain ceremonial elements that are no longer considered compatible with contemporary religious orientations may be reduced or abandoned, while other elements regarded as culturally meaningful are maintained and reinterpreted within an Islamic framework. This process indicates that changes in ritual practices do not necessarily represent a loss of cultural authenticity or a complete replacement of earlier traditions. Instead, they may reflect the ways families negotiate the preservation of inherited cultural identities in response to changing historical and religious circumstances. The historical significance of this transformation therefore lies in the interaction between cultural inheritance and religious adaptation, rather than in a simple opposition between Javanese traditions and Islamic teachings.

The contribution of this research lies in demonstrating that the transformation of premarital *ruwatan* occurs through selective changes in ritual practices while maintaining continuity in its fundamental cultural purposes. By examining the transmission of the tradition within a particular Javanese Muslim family, this study extends previous discussions of the relationship between Islam and Javanese culture beyond the general description of ritual acculturation. It highlights how cultural inheritance, intergenerational interpretations, ritual authority, and changing religious orientations interact in shaping the continuity of a local tradition. The findings demonstrate that transformations in religious and cultural practices do not necessarily involve the complete replacement of traditional elements with new ones. Rather, inherited rituals may remain

meaningful through the reinterpretation of their symbols, procedures, and religious expressions. Accordingly, premarital *ruwatan* in the family examined in Sumberlawang can be understood as a historical practice that continues to be negotiated through the interaction of Javanese cultural heritage, familial relationships, and contemporary Islamic orientations. This family-level perspective contributes to the historiography of Javanese Islam by providing a more specific understanding of how broader religious and cultural transformations are experienced and interpreted across generations.

From the perspective of Javanese Islam, these findings further demonstrate that the transformation of premarital *ruwatan* reflects an ongoing negotiation between inherited Javanese cultural practices and contemporary Islamic piety. Cultural continuity is maintained not through the unchanged preservation of every ritual form but through selective adaptation, reinterpretation, and the incorporation of Islamic religious expressions into existing traditions. The continued involvement of traditional ritual practitioners alongside Islamic religious figures illustrates how different forms of cultural and religious authority may coexist within the same ritual framework. Furthermore, differences in generational perspectives and changing social circumstances contribute to the ways the tradition is understood and practiced. Premarital *ruwatan* can therefore be understood as a living tradition whose forms, meanings, and religious expressions continue to develop through interactions between cultural inheritance and Islamic religious life. The Sumberlawang case ultimately demonstrates that continuity and transformation are not mutually exclusive processes but interconnected dimensions of the historical development of Javanese Muslim traditions.

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