# Character Design of Mahapatih Gajah Mada Based on Visual References from Bima and Brajanata/Kertala Statues

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## ABSTRACT

Mahapatih Gajah Mada was a great figure who united the archipelago in his time, but no statues have been found that depict the figure. Archaeologists disagree on the accuracy of the human head statue artifact referenced by Mr. Muhammad Yamin, as it does not have any markers that indicate it is a statue of Mahapatih Gajah Mada. To design an accurate visualization of the character design of Mahapatih Gajah Mada, this design is divided into 2 stages: data mining and character design. Data mining involves a data search related to Mahapatih Gajah Mada and culture during the Majapahit Kingdom Era. Character design involves designing the character design of Gajah Mada using data from the references that have been obtained. Data searches have revealed that Mahapatih Gajah Mada is likely to be the Brajanata/ Kertala character in the Panji story and the Bima character in the Mahabarata story. The character has a large, tall body, strapping, crossed mustache, and wavy curls, using a headdress in the form of a foreheadband with carvings, upper arm bands made with snake motifs, a belt with a Kala head patterned buckle, and an upawita (caste rope) that crosses from the left shoulder to the right waist depicting Gajah Mada's caste. For weapons, Gajah Mada carries a keris with a cundrik type (not notched) and an oval mace, which means that Gajah Mada is one of Lord Vishnu's attendants who has a guardian nature. The design of the oval mace takes reference from door guard statues.

Keywords: Character Design, Gajah Mada, Majapahit kingdom

**INTRODUCTION**

Mahapatih Gajah Mada is one of the famous figures from Indonesia who was recorded in history during the Hindu-Buddhist kingdom of the Pre-Independence period (Widyawati & Andalas, 2020; Rofiqoh et al., 2021). The term mahapatih at this time was probably equivalent to prime minister. Mahapatih Gajah Mada came from the Majapahit kingdom on Java Island which is believed to be located in Trowulan Mojokerto (Dendi et al., 2018; Sulaksono et al., 2023). Mahapatih Gajah Mada was a great figure who succeeded in uniting the archipelago (Indonesia) in his time. Quoted from an interview with Mr. Sumarwoto, a culturalist who once served as Chairman of the Majapahit Lovers Community, stated "Indeed Gajah Mada is not among those who have been named Indonesian Heroes, because he did not live in the present era. But the heroism of the "deceased" in uniting the "archipelago" is a very extraordinary effort. Which deserves and must be appreciated by all Indonesians today and in the future." (Budi, personal communication, December 09, 2022).

The heroism of Gajah Mada is still told orally by the Indonesian people, seen from various stories and folk legends from various regions in Indonesia that raise this figure showing that he is one of the great figures in history (Widihastuti, 2020). Several legends about the figure of Mahapatih Gajah Mada are spread in various regions, especially Java and Bali (Alpiyah & Purnengsih, 2019; Hal, 2019). According to Mr. Gunawan Sambodo, an archaeologist and cultural scientist, there are various stories and legends that tell the origin of Mahapatih Gajah Mada such as Gajah Mada came from Bali Island, some say he came from Lamongan, and so on. Many legends have developed about the birth of Gajah Mada, for example he was born from a coconut. There is also a legend that states that Gajah Mada's father is Lord Brahma, and his birth process is accompanied by natural signs that indicate the child will become a great figure. (Budi, personal communication, February 11, 2023).

In the early days of independence, Indonesia needed a figure who could be an inspiration for the Indonesian people who could foster a sense of nationalism and

love for the country (Agus et al., 2021; Santoso et al., 2023). Starting from this and the existence of historical records about the figure of Mahapatih Gajah Mada, one of the Indonesian independence figures who also served as a Minister in the early cabinet, namely Mr. Muhammad Yamin, made a description of the figure of Mahapatih Gajah Mada based on human head artifacts found in the Trowulan area. The facial description based on the artifact findings from Mr. Muhammad Yamin is then widely used as a source of reference and inspiration to depict the figure of Mahapatih Gajah Mada until now.
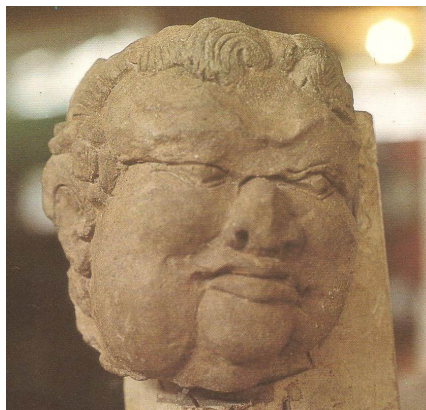


Figure 1. Human head artifact found in Trowulan Mojokerto and attributed to Gajah
Mada by Muhammad Yamin.
Source: petilasan-majapahit.blogspot.com

Various works depicting the visualization of Mahapatih Gajah Mada ranging from paintings, sculptures, to illustrations in Indonesian history textbooks take many references from the visualization of Mahapatih Gajah Mada version of Mr. Muhammad Yamin.
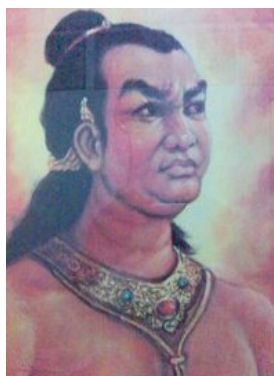


Figure 2. An image of Gajah Mada that takes reference from a human head artifact
mentioned as Gajah Mada by Muhammad Yamin.
Source: historyandlegacy-kebumen.blogspot.com

Although the visualization of Mahapatih Gajah Mada referenced by Mr. Muhammad Yamin has been widely used, archaeologists do not agree that the human head statue artifact reference is an accurate visualization of the Mahapatih Gajah Mada character. Through the interview process, it is known that archaeologists such as  Ms. Rizki archaeologist from BPK (Cultural Preservation Center), Mr. Gunawan Sambodo and Prof. Agus Aris Munandar archaeologist and chairman of the Association of Professors of the Faculty of Archaeology from the University of Indonesia, agree that the artifact found does not necessarily represent the face of Gajah Mada, (Budi, personal communication, February 11, 2023).  This is because the human head statue does not have any markers that indicate that it is a statue of Mahapatih Gajah Mada (Pageh, 2020). The human head statue was only found from a location believed to be the residence of Mahapatih Gajah Mada in the Trowulan Mojokerto area. As time went by, and various other excavations were carried out in the surrounding area, various other relics in the form of statues depicting human heads with various forms were also found. The following is a comparison of human head artifacts found in the Trowulan Mojokerto area near the finding of a human head assumed to be Gajah Mada (the leftmost human head artifact with the darkest color) by Mr. Muhammad Yamin (Fig.3).


Figure 3. Artifact of a human head
Source: Author's documentation

Until now, artifacts stating that the statue is Mahapatih Gajah Mada have not been found. This makes the reference to the visualization of Mahapatih Gajah Mada's appearance from the finding of a human head artifact that is stated to be the face of Mahapatih Gajah Mada still not necessarily correct. This opens up opportunities

to find new references as a source of inspiration and reference for the visualization of the Mahapatih Gajah Mada figure with findings and or hypotheses from further findings based on archaeological science.

Currently, there are modern works that raise the figure of Mahapatih Gajah Mada such as in the game Civilization V. In this game, the figure of Mahapatih Gajah Mada is shown as one of the characters from Indonesia. When examined in terms of design, the work still takes reference from the artifact of a human head statue from Mojokerto Trowulan which was mentioned as Mahapatih Gajah Mada by Mr. Muhammad Yamin.



Figure 4. Gajah Mada character in Civilization V game
source: Youtube.com

From the various data sources previously described, it is known that so far the visualization of Gajah Mada displayed in various media has not been supported by data or hypotheses with a strong basis. This is because no artifacts/statues have been found that are said to depict the figure of Mahapatih Gajah Mada from the Majapahit Kingdom. Although the face of Mahapatih Gajah Mada cannot be depicted accurately because the statue/artifact has not been found, the appearance of humans from the Majapahit Kingdom era (commoners, officials, and royal families) can be depicted accurately.

Figure 5. King Statue from Majapahit in Trowulan Museum-Mojokerto, Indonesia
Source: Dreamstime.com

The archaeologists who were the resource persons, Prof. Agus Aris Munandar, Mrs. Rizki, and Mr. Gunawan Sambodo stated that the depiction of the human appearance of the Majapahit Kingdom Period can be done with good accuracy because there are many references from relics in the form of statues, sculptures, and artifacts that describe human appearance at that time, (Budi, personal communication, February, 2023). When the data on human appearance during the Majapahit Kingdom Period was used to analyze the work depicting the figure of Mahapatih Gajah Mada, several things were found that did not match the human appearance at that time. There are many inaccurate details displayed in works that should provide knowledge about the figure of Mahapatih Gajah Mada and about the Majapahit Kingdom (Sulaiman, 2019). This can mislead and confuse learning about history and cultural development. From this explanation, a design is needed to visualize the more accurate figure of Mahapatih Gajah Mada based on findings that can be accounted for. The results of this design can be used as a reference for creators to depict the character of Mahapatih Gajah Mada more accurately.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

In order to portray the character of Mahapatih Gajah Mada more accurately, appropriate and reliable related data is needed. Therefore, this design is divided into 2 stages. The first stage is the data mining stage. At this stage, a search for data related to Mahapatih Gajah Mada and culture during the Majapahit Kingdom Era
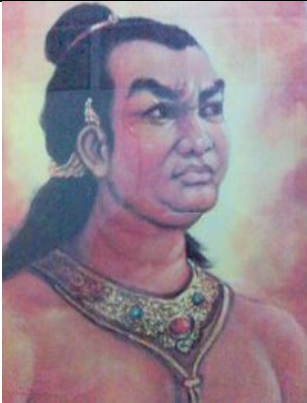
was carried out. After the data is collected, the design enters the second stage, namely character design based on the collected data (Davidson et al., 2019).

The data search stage related to Mahapatih Gajah Mada and the culture of the Majapahit Kingdom Era was initially carried out using literature studies. Literature related to the story of Mahapatih Gajah Mada and the culture of the Majapahit Period was collected and used as a reference. In addition to literature studies, to strengthen the data, research was conducted using qualitative methods using purposive procedures by interviewing resource persons as research informants. The informants selected have the criteria of having expertise and in-depth knowledge in the field of Majapahit period culture and archaeology. In this method, the theory of saturation (the point in data collection when new data no longer brings additional insights to research questions) is used with key informants/key persons (Alam, 2021).

After the data from the results of the literature study and interviews were collected, the next step was to design the character design of Mahapatih Gajah Mada using the data from the references that had been obtained (Chauvette et al., 2019). In the character design process, communication with key informants is maintained to ask for opinions and to provide input related to the character design that has been made. This was done to improve the accuracy of the character design of Mahapatih Gajah Mada from the Majapahit Kingdom Era.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Before the design process begins, benchmarking of the visualization of the Mahapatih Gajah Mada character that has been raised in various types of popular works is carried out. Benchmarking against existing works is needed to assess what elements are appropriate, and improve those that are still not in accordance with historical data so that they can become notes and improve the next work that raises the figure of Mahapatih Gajah Mada. The following are the results of the analysis of the visualization of several works that raise the figure of Mahapatih Gajah Mada.

| No | Visualization of Gajah Mada | Source | Analysis |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 |  | Game *Civilization V* | The face design takes reference from the artifact mentioned as Mahapatih Gajah Mada by Mr. Muhammad Yamin.  |
|  |  | Gajah Mada statue at National Museum Monas |  |
|  |  | The picture of Gajah Mada that is usually found in Indonesian History books |  |
| 2 |  | Game *Civilization V* | The kris is a distinctive weapon in Javanese Indonesia, but the reference to the type of kris brought over is not from the Majapahit period, but from the Islamic Kingdom period. |

| | | Gajah Mada statue at National Museum Monas | This is characterized by the design of the grooves on the kris. In the Majapahit period, the krises used were straight and not notched (Cundrik kris type) |
|---|---|---|---|

Table 1. Analysis of works that raise the figure of
Mahapatih Gajah Mada.
Source: Author's documentation

From the analysis of several works that raise the figure of Mahapatih Gajah Mada, it can be concluded that there are several things that are not accurate. This can be caused by the fact that during the making of the work, references and data accuracy were not considered. The results of the data search through literature studies, obtained data if Mahapatih Gajah Mada is very likely to be the character Brajanata and Kertala who appear in the Panji story (Munandar, 2010) .

In the qualitative data collection stage, several informants were selected as sources. From the informants, data collection will be carried out using the interview method. The following is a table of informant data and the focus of the questions asked.

| No | Source | Background | Focus of Question |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Ms. Rizki | - Archaeologist<br>- Member of BPK - Balai Pelestarian Kebudayaan (Culture Preservation Center) Mojokerto | - The Story of Gajah Mada<br>- Visualization of Gajah Mada<br>- Relics about Gajah Mada<br>- Relics from the Majapahit Kingdom Period<br>- Source Reference |
| 2 | Mr. Gunawan Sambodo | - Archaeologist | - The Story of Gajah Mada<br>- Visualization of Gajah Mada<br>- Relics about Gajah Mada |

| | | | - Relics from the Majapahit Kingdom Period<br>- Source Reference |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | Mr. Sumarwoto | - Culture enthusiast<br>- Komunitas Pecinta Majapahit (Majapahit Lovers Community) | - The Story of Gajah Mada<br>- Visualization of Gajah Mada<br>- Relics about Gajah Mada<br>- Relics from the Majapahit Kingdom Period<br>- Source Reference |
| 4 | Mr. Yohanes Somawiharja | - Culture enthusiast<br>- The Rector of Universitas Ciputra Surabaya | - Types of krises<br>- Kris relics from the Majapahit Kingdom Period<br>- Source Reference |
| 5 | Prof Agus Aris Munandar | - Professor of the Faculty of Archaeology, Universitas Indonesia<br>- Archaeologist<br>- Culture enthusiast | - The Story of Gajah Mada<br>- Visualization of Gajah Mada<br>- Relics about Gajah Mada<br>- Relics from the Majapahit Kingdom Period<br>- Culture of Majapahit Kingdom Period |

Table 2. Research informant data and question focus.
Source: Author's documentation

Data from the interviews with the initial sources, namely Mrs. Rizki, Mr. Gunawan Sambodo, and Mr. Sumarwoto regarding the visualization of Mahapatih Gajah Mada, concluded that until now the face of Gajah Mada is not known for certain because no statue has been found that is given a description that the statue depicts Mahapatih Gajah Mada.

When the initial sources were asked to provide references regarding informants who have competence regarding Majapahit and Gajah Mada, the results narrowed down to Prof. Agus Aris Munandar. In this design, it was decided to choose Prof.

Agus Aris Munandar as the key informant/key person. The selection of Prof. Agus Aris Munandar as a key informant is based on his background as an archaeologist who has researched, written books and scientific works on the topic of culture during the Majapahit Kingdom and Mahapatih Gajah Mada.

**Character Design of Mahapatih Gajah Mada**

From the results of data processing of literature studies and interviews from key informants Prof. Agus Aris Munandar, it was found that the visualization of Mahapatih Gajah Mada is very likely to be the Brajanata/Kertala character who appears in the Panji story, and the Bima character in the Mahabarata story.

According to Prof. Agus Aris Munandar, the story in the Panji story is about the events that happened in Majapahit Kingdom. In Panji stories, Panji and Brajanata are the two most dominant characters in some of the earliest Panji stories. The characters that appear in Panji stories are analyzed as historical figures in the glory days of the Majapahit Kingdom (Darmojo, 2019). Figures that appear in Panji stories such as Raden Panji could be Hayam Wuruk. Panji's father, the King of Keling or Jenggala or Koripan is Kertawardhana aka Raden Cakradhara. Panji's mother, the queen of Keling was Tribhuwana Wijayatunggadewi. Hayam Wuruk's mother was titled Bhre Kahuripan.

This analysis was taken by Prof. Agus Aris Munandar because of the various similarities in the background of the characters that appear in the Panji story have similarities with the figures of the Majapahit glory era such as King Daha who is Panji's uncle with King Daha who is also the uncle of Hayam Wuruk. King Daha's consort, Hayam Wuruk's aunt was titled Bhre Daha. Dewi Sekar Taji, the daughter of the king of Daha was Raden Panji's consort.

In Majapahit history, Hayam Wuruk's consort was his own cousin, the daughter of Bhre Daha who in the book of Pararaton was called Paduka Sori. Panji's lover, Dewi Anggraeni can be compared to the dead Sundanese princess, Putri Dyah Pitaloka. From the similarities in characterization, there is one very interesting character,

Raden Brajanata, who is described as the older brother of Raden Panji. This Brajanata character has the task of guarding and escorting Raden Panji like Gajah Mada who always escorted Hayam Wuruk. The story of Gajah Mada itself is very similar to the story of Brajanata/Kertala.

This is the basis of the hypothesis of Prof. Agus Aris Munandar who made Brajanata as a reference to describe the figure of Mahapatih Gajah Mada. Brajanata himself is described as having a large tall body, well-built, crossed mustache, wavy curls, at the top of the head there are hair ties with ribbons forming a tekes hat, wearing clothes, bracelets and upper arm bands in the form of snakes. The phallus or pubic part is carved prominently.

The Brajanata and Bima statues are depictions of Gajah Mada. This interpretation is concluded on the basis of Gajah Mada's great role in the glory days of Majapahit. It is not enough for the figure of Gajah Mada to be made into a relief, but also to be carved for his services.  Despite his death, Gajah Mada is still remembered by the Majapahit community and is considered a great figure who is seen as a god who can be asked for help for people who are suffering from war.

Over time, people's views changed. Gajah Mada was then depicted more as Bima. In the late Majapahit period, mid-15th century, many statues of Bima were made that were similar to the statue of Brajanata. Based on these findings, it was decided to use the Bima and Brajanata statues kept in the National Museum of Indonesia as a reference to create the character design of Mahapatih Gajah Mada, (Budi, personal communication, February, 2023).

Figure 6. Bima statue (left), and Brajanata statue (right) from the Majapahit kingdom collection of the National Museum of Indonesia.
Source: researchgate.net, historia.id

After analyzing the statue references, the character design process began. In this character design process, communication with the key informant, Prof. Agus Aris Munandar, was maintained to get input and improve the design so that the visualization of the character of Mahapatih Gajah Mada could be accurate. This accuracy is important so that this design work can be a reference for other works that raise the figure of Mahapatih Gajah Mada from the Majapahit Kingdom of Indonesia.

**The Character Design Process of Gajah Mada**

At first, the images of the statues were analyzed first to determine the design elements that would be displayed when designing the character design. After analyzing the images of Bima and Brajanata/Kertala statues, the visual elements that will be displayed are determined.

| No | Statue | Part | Analysis |
|----|--------|------|----------|
| 1  |        |  | On the head, there is hair with large curls and a mustache. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| |  |  | The sleeves are wearing arm bands |
| | |  | There is a belt around the waist<br>The wrist is wearing a bracelet |
| | |  | Ankles wearing anklets |
| 2 |  |  | The head features hair with large curls, a moustache, and a plait (jamang). |
| | |  | The chest is seen wearing a necklace<br>The waist is visible with a belt<br>The arms and wrists are wearing arm bands. |
| | |  | Legs with no visible bracelets |

Table 2. Analysis of Bima and Brajanata / Kerala statues as a reference for the design of Gajah Mada Mahapatih character design.
Source: Author's documentation

The results of the analysis of the Bima and Brajanata/Kertala statues were then used as the basis for creating the Gajah Mada character design. The character of Gajah Mada created in this design has a characteristic physical appearance of a large tall body, strapping, crossed mustache, wavy curls. For the design of clothes and accessories to be used by the Gajah Mada character, it is compiled based on information from the key person based on references to statues and reliefs from the Majapahit era. The headdress is a foreheadband with carvings (jamang), upper

arm bands made with snake motifs, a belt with a Kala head motif buckle with the meaning of keeping away from danger. Upawita (caste rope) that crosses from the left shoulder to the right waist depicting Gajah Mada's caste.

For weapons, Gajah Mada is depicted using a kris and an oval mace. The kris carried is the cundrik type. This type of kris is a kris that does not have a curve. According to Prof. Agus Aris Munandar and Mr. Yohanes Somawiharja, the type of kris that has a curve only appeared during the Islamic kingdom era after the Majapahit kingdom era. During the Majapahit kingdom, the existing krises were modeled after the cundrik kris. This kris functioned as both a weapon and a tool for self-protection. When receiving orders from the king, the kris would be placed at the back, and when carrying out tasks, the kris would be placed in front.

The oval mace used as one of Gajah Mada's weapon choices means that Gajah Mada is one of the Vishnu gods who has a guardian nature. The design of the oval mace takes reference from the door guard statue.

| No | Reference | Description | Visualisasi |
|----|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| 1 |  | Headband decoration (Jamang) |  |
| 2 |  | Big curls with a mustache Firm Face Wearing a Necklace | |

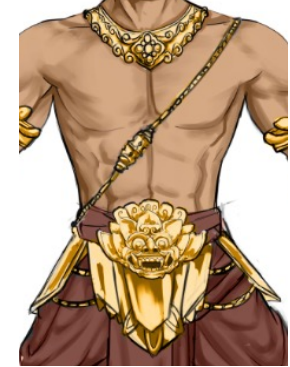| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3 |  | Snake motif arm bracelet <br><br> Hand bracelet |  |
| 4 |  | Upawita (caste rope) <br><br> East Java version of Kala's head (with chin) |  |
| 5 |  | Keris weapon with cundrik type (no grooves) |  |
| 6 |  | An oval mace |  |

Table 3. Reference and character design visualization of Mahapatih Gajah Mada.
Source: Author's documentation

The following is an illustration of the final design of the Gajah Mada Mahapatih character as a result of data collection and processing in this research.

Figure 7. Illustration of the figure of Mahapatih Gajah Mada from the Majapahit Kingdom
with references to the statues of Bima and Brajanata/Kertala
Source: Author's documentation

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion that can be drawn from the entire design process is that an in-depth research process should be carried out and involve experts who have competence and a good reputation when making a visualization of a character that really exists in history, so that the level of accuracy in depicting the character is high enough and the work can be accounted for. Inaccurate references when creating works that raise historical figures can result in disinformation and lead the audience to misleading knowledge.

Indeed, there are still various shortcomings in this design, especially the absence of a statue that states that it is a statue of Gajah Mada, but the results of the study and interpretation of key informants can be academically accounted for as a reference in designing the Mahapatih Gajah Mada character. The role of key informants in the design is very important so that important details of character visualization can be described precisely and accurately.

The research process in this design can be a reference to raise other historical figures, especially those that until now have not been known with

certainty how to visualize and embody them. In future designs, especially designs that raise historical figures, and or certain regions should involve competent experts to avoid errors and inaccurate data as a source of reference for creation.

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