



**THE DIMENSION OF THE DIVINITY IN
THE NARRATIVE OF LA GALIGO:
A Theological Hermeneutic Analysis**

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Abstract: This article examines the dimension of divinity in the narrative of La Galigo through a phenomenologically oriented theological-hermeneutic analysis. This study is motivated by the fact that most studies on La Galigo have thus far emphasized the philological, structural, and cultural aspects of it, while the meaning of religious experience and divine consciousness contained in it is still relatively limited. This research aims to understand how La Galigo represents the collective religious experience of the pre-Islamic Bugis people and how the meaning of divinity underwent historical transformation in the context of Islamization. Qualitative in nature, the primary data consist of selected episodes and cosmological narratives from La Galigo manuscripts and published translations, particularly those representing divine figures, cosmological structures, and human-divine relationships. These texts were interpreted through the hermeneutic frameworks of Wilhelm Dilthey, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur. Analysis was conducted through iterative interpretation involving textual description, contextual interpretation, and theological reflection. Through this approach, La Galigo is understood as an objectification of religious experience that is symbolic and open to reinterpretation, while its cosmological symbols, supernatural figures, and world structures are examined as expressions of divine meaning rather than merely mythological narratives. The main findings of the study shed light that the concept of Dewata Seuwae occupies a central position as the supreme divine principle in the Bugis cosmos, reflecting a hierarchical and symbolic pattern of theocentric consciousness. The religious experience depicted in La Galigo affirms the ethical relationship between man, nature, and transcendent forces. The implications of this study show that La Galigo functions as a cultural foundation for Bugis-Islamic theology through a dialogical vernacularization process. This study concludes that the

divine dimension in La Galigo is dynamic and remains relevant in changing theological and historical horizons.

Keywords: La Galigo, Divinity, Theological Hermeneutics, Religious Experience, Bugis Cosmology

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Introduction

LA GALIGO literature, known in Bugis as Sureq La Galigo, is one of the greatest epic literary legacies in the oral and written traditions of the Bugis-Makassar people. This epic not only presents a story of heroism, adventure, and royal intrigue, but also implies a cosmological system and profound theological values. However, existing studies have paid limited attention have not paid much attention to the meaning of the story in La Galigo 's literature with Islamic theology. Monotheistic interpretations of the work emerged through the application of Islamic theological perspectives.

As a work born before the massive entry of Islam into South Sulawesi, La Galigo reflects the Bugis worldview concerning divinity, the universe, and human relations with transcendent power through symbolism and legendary figures that dominate the narrative. The study of the divine dimension in La Galigo is not only an attempt to trace myths or legends, but also to provide insight into of the religious thought structure of pre-Islamic societies, as well as to highlight the transformation of spiritual values that took place when Islam began to interact with the local culture.

The view of the community, which is a value that lives in the beliefs of the Bugis people, then undergoes a transformation towards an understanding of Islam because there are harmonious values. The absence of significant contradictions between pre-Islamic beliefs and Islamic teachings in La Galigo facilitated the acceptance of Islam among the Bugis people.

In the beliefs of the Bugis people before Islam, they viewed the universe as a structured cosmos, in which transcendent beings were in control of various aspects of human life. The concept of divinity in La Galigo presents Dewata Seuwae as the supreme entity that acts as the creator and regulator of the cosmic order.

Dewata Seuwae, often translated as 'the Almighty God', shows the existence of monotheistic consciousness in its initial form, although it remains framed in a mythological structure involving many divine beings.

In Islamic theology, Allah is understood as the One God possessing ninety-nine divine attributes. The Highest Most as God for whom there is no ally. This understanding of monotheism is in harmony with the entity of Dewata Seuwae. Therefore, Islam does not require a very hard effort to harmonize the concept of divinity for the Bugis people from pre-Islam to Islam.¹

In addition, there is the figure of Patotoqé, who is believed to determine the fate of man, indicating that human life is seen as the result of an interaction between the divine will and certain cosmic mechanisms. The existence of Patotoqé reflects a belief in the existence of moral and spiritual rules that govern the world and human life, although its influence has not been synchronized with the formal doctrine of Islamic monotheism.² The concept of faith in Taqdir, qodrat and iradat of Allah SWT. in Islam has a trace of belief in the figure of Patotoqé. This reflects the interaction between human effort (ikhtiar) and divine destiny (taqdir).³

La Galigo is hermeneutically rich, contextually grounded, and highly relevant because the text uses symbolic and allegorical language to convey theological meaning. The characters, events, and settings in the narrative not only serve as entertainment or epic stories, but also as a medium of transmission of religious and cosmological values. The protagonist's adventures are often colored by the intervention of supernatural forces, moral challenges, and ethical tests that reflect the human relationship with divine forces. With a hermeneutic approach, researchers can interpret these layers of meaning, uncover the moral and spiritual messages hidden behind heroic narratives, and understand how

¹ Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001).

² Sirtjo Koolhof, "The 'La Galigo': A Bugis Encyclopedia and Its Growth," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 155, no. 3 (1999): 362–87; Christian Pelras, *The Bugis* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

³ Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*.

pre-Islamic societies shaped views of God, the universe, and human responsibility to the cosmic order.⁴

La Galigo is also an important document to understand the process of spiritual transition of the Bugis-Makassar people when Islam began to enter. The shift from monotheistic values that were originally wrapped up in a system of gods and cosmic entities to more explicit monotheistic beliefs shows continuity and adaptation. The figure of Dewata Seuwae represents an early form of divine consciousness of the Almighty God, then experiences deepening and enrichment of meaning by Islamic teachings through the teachings of monotheism, the faith that is the main basis of Islamic beliefs that grow and develop in the Sulawesi region.

Using a hermeneutic approach, researchers can identify narrative patterns in the La Galigo manuscript as a reflection of society's understanding of universal moral laws that originate from divinity, as well as map how these values shape the social and cultural structure of the Bugis society. The symbolic language embedded in La Galigo's literary work is translated and interpreted with an Islamic perspective so as to find a harmonious equivalent meaning.

Theological analysis of La Galigo entails the incorporation of cross-disciplinary approaches: literary studies, anthropology, history, and theology. The text is characterized by rich symbolism, so a literal reading is not enough to understand the depth of meaning. Mythological locations, sacred objects, and names of divine figures have ritual and spiritual significance that require contextual interpretation. Using theological hermeneutics, researchers interpret these symbols, examine the relationships between narratives, belief practices, and cosmology, and uncover moral messages intended to guide people's lives.

La Galigo does not emphasize formal religious doctrine, but rather emphasizes religious experience, cosmic order, and human responsibility to the order of the universe. This makes the epic relevant to study as an ethnoreligious document that records local

⁴ Roger Tol, "A Royal Collection of Bugis Manuscripts," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 149, no. 3 (1993): 612–29.

spiritual worldviews. In addition, La Galigo also reflects universal values that transcend ethnic boundaries and time, such as the principles of justice, courage, loyalty, and respect for transcendent powers, which can be compared to moral and theological concepts in other religious traditions.

Through the study of the divine dimension in La Galigo through a theological hermeneutic approach, this article aims to contribute to the understanding of the religious history of the Bugis-Makassar community, as well as reveal how traditional literature functions as a means of theological and ethical reflection.

Overall, the understanding of the divine dimension in La Galigo is not only important for historical and religious studies, but it also has philosophical and pedagogical implications. This epic teaches that man's relationship with transcendent forces is ethical, moral, and cosmic, emphasizing the importance of living in harmony with the higher order of nature and moral laws. La Galigo, through its symbolism and narrative, becomes a mirror of complex religious thought, uniting the concepts of creation, fate, cosmology, and ethics in a single narrative unit. Therefore, theological hermeneutic analysis is a very appropriate tool to uncover this layer of meaning, providing a deep understanding of how the Bugis-Makassar people constructed concepts of divinity, morality, and cosmic order before Islam broadly became a part of their lives.

This study employed a qualitative textual research design using a theological hermeneutic approach to examine the dimension of divinity in La Galigo. Primary data were obtained from La Galigo manuscripts and published translations, while secondary data comprised scholarly works on Bugis cosmology, theology, hermeneutics, and related previous studies.

Textual excerpts were purposively selected based on their explicit representation of cosmology, divine figures, and human-divine relationships. Data were selected according to their relevance to the study's focus on divinity, religious experience, and cosmological symbolism.

The analysis was conducted in three stages. First, relevant textual passages were identified and described to reveal major cosmological and theological themes. Second, these passages were

interpreted contextually within the historical and cultural framework of pre-Islamic Bugis society. Third, theological hermeneutic interpretation was undertaken using the perspectives of Wilhelm Dilthey, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur to uncover deeper meanings concerning divine consciousness and religious experience.

Interpretive validity was strengthened through theoretical triangulation by comparing interpretations derived from Dilthey, Gadamer, and Ricoeur. This triangulation was employed to ensure interpretive consistency, analytical rigor, and the trustworthiness of findings.

La Galigo as a Cosmological Text in the Bugis Tradition

The study of *La Galigo* in the treasures of modern scholarship has consistently placed it not merely as a work of traditional epic literature, but as a cosmological text loaded with sacred and religious content. It not only serves as a long story about Bugis characters, but also as a collective medium that records the Bugis people's perspective on the origin of life, the structure of the universe, and the relationship of humans with supernatural forces.

This work contains various aspects of Bugis culture, so Koolhof calls *La Galigo* a "Bugis encyclopedia" to emphasize the breadth and depth of the themes it contains. This term is not an exaggerated metaphor, because *La Galigo* contains a narrative about the creation of the cosmos, the lineage of semi-divine beings, moral value systems, social norms, and the legitimacy of political power.⁵

In Pelras's view, this cosmological structure is the foundation for the way the Bugis understand power, morality, and social order. The king or ideal leader in the Bugis tradition is often positioned as a figure who has a symbolic relationship with the upper world, so that his power acquires sacred legitimacy. Myths do not only function as fictitious fairy tales, but as ideological and theological devices that organize social reality. Power, ethics, and the cosmos are understood as an inseparable whole.⁶

⁵ Koolhof, "The 'La Galigo'," 362–87.

⁶ Pelras, *The Bugis*.

Pancana added⁷ that the Bugis cosmological myth has a consistent hierarchical pattern, which reflects the vertical relationship between humans and supernatural forces. This relationship is not egalitarian, but rather places man as a creature subject to a higher cosmic order. However, this submission is not interpreted passively, but rather as a call to maintain harmony between humans, nature, and the supernatural world. The religious dimension of *La Galigo* speaks not only of who God or the gods are, but also of how man should live in the order of the cosmos.

Tol also emphasized that the tradition of Bugis manuscripts is in the intermediate area between literature, religion, and ritual practices. Manuscripts are not only seen as textual documents, but also as objects that have symbolic and spiritual value. The copying, storage, and reading of manuscripts is often associated with specific ritual practices, so that the text becomes part of the religious experience of the community. *La Galigo* cannot be separated from the spiritual life of the Bugis people.⁸

Although *La Galigo* was born in a pre-Islamic context, various studies agree that this text contains an implicit divine dimension. The concepts of supreme power, the order of the cosmos, and the moral law indicate a deep theological consciousness, although they are not formulated in formal monotheistic theological terminology. This dimension of divinity is present in the form of symbols, myths, and cosmological structures that organize human life as a whole.

It is this awareness that opens up space for a theological hermeneutic approach in reading *La Galigo*. This approach allows the texts in *La Galigo* to be understood not only as products of the cultural past, but as symbolic discourses that contain transcendent meanings. Through hermeneutics, the concepts of divinity, cosmology, and the meaning of divinity in *La Galigo* can be interpreted reflectively and dialogically, without stripping away

⁷ Rétna Kencana Colliq Pujié Arung Pancana Toa, *La Galigo Menurut Naskah NBG 188 Jilid 1*, ed. Fachruddin Ambo Enre, trans. Muhammad Samlim (Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2017).

⁸ Tol, "A Royal Collection of Bugis Manuscripts," 612–29.

their historical and cultural context. La Galigo can be positioned as a text that bridges literature, religion, and philosophy of life, as well as enriching the discourse on the local theology of the archipelago.

Hermeneutics as an Approach in the Study of Sacred Texts and Traditional Literature

Methodologically, hermeneutics has a long history and an established position in the study of religious and literary texts that are loaded with symbols, myths, and transcendent meanings. This method is necessary to analyze more deeply the La Galigo text that cannot be fully categorized as canonical.⁹ Since its early development, hermeneutics has not only been understood as a technique of language interpretation, but as a philosophical attempt to understand the meaning of life embodied in the expression of human culture. In studying the traditional texts contained in La Galigo, hermeneutics is a relevant approach because this kind of text does not just tell a story, but contains a worldview, religious values, and the existential experience of the society that gave birth to it.¹⁰

Wilhelm Dilthey emphasized that the main goal of hermeneutics is to understand lived experience or life experience internalized in texts. Therefore, the La Galigo text is an objectification of human inner experience born from the historical and cultural context of Bugis. Thus, understanding the text means trying to enter the world of meaning that shapes the collective experience of a society. La Galigo can be understood as the crystallization of the religious and cosmological experiences of the Bugis people, embodied in mythological narratives, cosmic symbols, and supernatural figures. Hermeneutics allows researchers not to stop at the surface narrative layers, but to explore the structure of meaning that reflects the way the Bugis

⁹ Syaifuddin, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Interdisipliner Ekonomi dan Hukum Islam* (Ternate: IAIN Ternate Press, 2019).

¹⁰ Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, "Hermeneutics," dalam *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2021), 314–23.

people understood the relationship between humans, nature, and divine forces.¹¹

Hans-Georg Gadamer's understanding of La Galigo emphasizes that understanding is always historical and dialogical. The concept of fusion of horizons that he developed shows that the meaning of text is born from the encounter between the historical horizon of the text and the horizon of today's readers. From the perspective of Hans-Georg Gadamer, the reading of La Galigo by modern readers cannot completely return to the horizon of the author or the community of origin of the text, but it also cannot escape from the contemporary context. It is precisely in the meeting of these two horizons that a new understanding is formed. This approach is particularly relevant for the theological study of La Galigo, as it allows for a reading that respects the pre-Islamic context of the text while also opening up space for theological reflection in the context of a modern society that has undergone religious and cultural transformation.

Paul Ricoeur adds an important dimension to hermeneutics by affirming the autonomy of the text from the author's intentions. According to Ricoeur, once a text is written and released into the public sphere, it acquires a life of its own meaning that is no longer completely tied to the author's original intentions. Text becomes a symbolic field that is open to various possibilities of interpretation. Reading La Galigo from a Ricoeurian perspective allows for a reflective theological reading without having to get stuck in the question of whether the ancient Bugis people "intended" to formulate a particular concept of divinity systematically. The focus is on how the symbols, narrative structures, and cosmology in the text can be interpreted as expressions of the human search for the Divine. The symbols of divinity in La Galigo are thus understood as invitations to theological reflection that continues across the ages.¹²

¹¹Wilhelm Dilthey dan Frederic Jameson, "The Rise of Hermeneutics," *New Literary History* 3, no. 2 (1972): 229–44.

¹²Paul Ricoeur, "History and Hermeneutics," dalam *Philosophy of History and Action: Papers Presented at the First Jerusalem Philosophical Encounter December 1974* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1978), 3–20.

In the study of religion, Ingvild Sælid Gilhus specifically places hermeneutics as the key method for understanding non-canonical texts and local religious traditions. He emphasized that the study of religion should not be limited to formal scriptures, but should also include mythological narratives, rituals, and cultural texts that contain religious meaning. From this perspective, La Galigo can be treated as a cultural religious text that contains symbols of divinity and a sacred view of the cosmos. Hermeneutics allows researchers to read the text seriously as a source of religious understanding, without having to place it in an inferior hierarchy compared to canonical texts.¹³

In the study of Bugis culture, a hermeneutic approach has been applied by a number of researchers to study traditional texts. Dema and Hajrah show that hermeneutics is effectively used to interpret religious and ethical values in the Pappaseng of the Bugis Bone community. Through hermeneutic interpretation, values such as warani and getteng are understood not just as social norms, but as expressions of religious ethics rooted in cosmology and the Bugis people's view of life.¹⁴

Kinsella, in his study of critical hermeneutics, emphasizes that interpretation always involves dimensions of reflection and ethical responsibility. Hermeneutics not only aims to understand the meaning of texts, but also considers the implications of that understanding for human life. In studies of La Galigo, this approach opens up space to interpret the divine dimension of the text not only as a cosmological construction of the past, but as a source of ethical and spiritual inspiration for contemporary society. The values of cosmic harmony, human responsibility to nature, and awareness of the divine order can be reread as theological discourses relevant to the challenges of modern times.¹⁵

¹³ Gilhus, "Hermeneutics," 314–23.

¹⁴ Ana Suka Dema dan Suarni Syam Saguni Hajrah, "Hermeneutics Study in Pappaseng Tau Ugi of the Bugis Bone Community on the Interpretation of Warani Values and Getteng Values," *INSIGHT* 1, no. 1 (2021): 1–10.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Anne Kinsella, "Hermeneutics and Critical Hermeneutics: Exploring Possibilities within the Art of Interpretation," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 7, no. 3 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-7.3.145>.

Myths, Symbols, and Divinity: La Galigo in the Modern Hermeneutic Horizon

La Galigo must be understood as an open and dynamic symbolic text, not as a cultural artifact whose meaning stops at the pre-Islamic context. This approach rejects the ahistorical reading that freezes texts at a given period, while avoiding normative claims that impose modern theological categories directly into the religious consciousness of the Bugis people of the past. By following the hermeneutic framework developed by Dilthey, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, La Galigo can be positioned as a living text, producing new meanings through a dialogue between the horizon of the past and the horizon of the present reader.

In the framework of Wilhelm Dilthey, La Galigo can be read as the objectification of the life experience (*Erlebnis*) of the pre-Islamic Bugis people. Cosmogonic myths, supernatural figures, and cosmological structures contained in them are not just imaginative stories, but symbolic expressions of the way society understand the world, divinity, and the position of humans in the cosmos. However, Dilthey also asserts that the understanding of the text does not stop at the reconstruction of the author's intentions or the context of its origin. Texts as cultural expressions have an objective power that allows them to be re-understood by different generations and contexts. Thus, the divine dimension in La Galigo does not have to be locked into pre-Islamic religious consciousness, but can be read as an initial horizon open to the transformation of meaning.¹⁶

Through Gadamer's concept of the fusion of horizons, comprehension is always understood as an encounter between the historical horizon of the text and the horizon of the reader. There is no reading that is completely neutral or purely objective; Instead, each interpretation is always influenced by the interpreter's pre-understanding, tradition, and existential context. In the context of La Galigo, this means that theological readings by the Muslim Bugis community or by contemporary researchers are a legitimate part of the process of interpreting the text. The meaning of divinity that emerges from this reading is not a distortion, but rather the

¹⁶ Dilthey dan Jameson, "The Rise of Hermeneutics," 229–44.

result of a hermeneutic dialogue between La Galigo's cosmological symbols and newer theological horizons, including Islamic monotheism.¹⁷

For Ricoeur, once a text is detached from its original context, it acquires semantic autonomy. The text is no longer entirely tied to the author's intent or initial collective consciousness, but rather opens up a new "world" for its reader. Symbols in texts have a surplus of meaning, which is the ability to continue to be reinterpreted beyond their original historical situation. La Galigo's cosmological symbols—such as the Dewata Seuwae, the three-world structure, and the intervention of transcendent forces—can be interpreted theologically without having to claim that pre-Islamic Bugis societies had an explicit monotheistic consciousness.¹⁸

This interpretation helps to avoid the two extremes of interpretation. On the one hand, he prevented the reduction of La Galigo to mere mythological documents that were considered theologically irrelevant. On the other hand, he also prevented theological annexation that imposed formal monotheistic consciousness into pre-Islamic societies. Rather, La Galigo is positioned as a symbolic space that allows for a cross-epochal dialogue between local cosmology, religious experience, and ever-evolving theological reflection.

Through this perspective, La Galigo appears as an unfinished text whose meanings remain open to reinterpretation. The text continues to generate new meanings for readers across different historical and cultural contexts, presenting understandings of divinity that are dynamic, contextual, and reflective. This is the strength of hermeneutics: not to close meaning, but to keep it open to continuous interpretation within changing historical, cultural, and religious horizons.

¹⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

¹⁸ Ricoeur, "History and Hermeneutics," 3–20.

Theological Hermeneutics of Narratives and Symbols: Texts as a Space for Dialogue Across Ages

The theological hermeneutic approach to La Galigo places it as a space for dialogue across the ages, rather than as a cultural artifact whose meaning is confined to its original historical context. Following Hans-Georg Gadamer's idea of the fusion of horizons¹⁹ and Paul Ricoeur's thinking about symbols and meanings,²⁰ La Galigo is understood as a symbolic entity that continues to produce new meanings as the reader's horizon changes. The text of Dewata has a more substantive meaning in the new belief of the Bugis Islamic community, as Allah SWT., God Almighty.

This hermeneutic framework becomes essential for reading the divine dimension of La Galigo reflectively and contextually. The theological dimension of the text is not treated as a frozen doctrine that must be reconstructed literally, but rather as a field of meaning that is open to reinterpretation in accordance with the development of religious and intellectual consciousness. In this way, La Galigo can continue to speak to readers across generations without losing its historical and cultural character.

The main symbols in La Galigo, such as the cosmic journeys of the characters, the birth of a semi-divine figure, as well as the intervention of supernatural forces in human life, can be read as theological metaphors that reveal fundamental existential questions. The cosmic journey represents the search for meaning and relationship of man with the divine order, the birth of a semi-divine figure illustrates the connection between the transcendent and the immanent, while the intervention of supernatural forces confirms that human life remains embedded within the cosmic order and laws. Hermeneutics allows this kind of symbolic reading without reducing symbols to simple allegories or turning them into rigid religious dogmas.

In Ricoeur's framework, these symbols "invite to think further" (the symbol gives rise to thought), that is, opening a layer of meaning that is never completely interpreted. Therefore, the divine dimension in La Galigo is not understood as a formal

¹⁹ Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*.

²⁰ Ricoeur, "History and Hermeneutics," 3–20.

theological system, but rather as a network of symbols that lead the reader to a deep reflection on the origins of man, the meaning of suffering, and moral responsibility in the cosmos. This approach allows for both a critical and appreciative theological reading of the symbolic richness of the text.²¹

La Galigo can be positioned as a cultural theological text that opens up space for reflection on God, the cosmos, and humans in a symbolic frame typical of the archipelago. This position does not demand the equating of La Galigo with the formal theology of Islam, nor does it place it in rigid opposition. Rather, La Galigo is understood as a forum for dialogue that allows for creative encounters between local traditions, theological reflection, and contemporary hermeneutics, thus enriching the understanding of the diversity of religious expressions in the context of Indonesian history and culture.

The Cosmology of the Three Worlds and the Ethics of the Divine: The Relationship of Transcendence, Nature, and Man

The cosmological structure of the three worlds—Boting Langi' (the upper world), Ale Lino (the middle world), and Buri' Liu (the lower world)—constitutes a very fundamental theological framework in La Galigo. This cosmic division cannot be understood geographically or spatially alone, but must be read as an ontological and ethical construct that governs the way the Bugis people understand reality. Each layer of the cosmos has a specific theological function, while at the same time forming a normative framework for human behavior in the world.

Boting Langi' is positioned as the divine space and locus of cosmic law, the place of the transcendent forces that govern the order of the universe. This world is a source of moral and cosmological legitimacy for the order of life in its lower layers. Ale Lino, as a middle-earth, is a space of human existence that is full of ethical responsibility. This is where man goes about his daily life, makes moral choices, and interacts with nature and his fellow human beings within the framework of a predetermined cosmic order. Meanwhile, Buri' Liu represents the latent dimension of the

²¹ Ibid.

cosmos, the basic forces that sustain the balance of the world, often perceived as ambivalent regions that can be a source of order or chaos, depending on how they relate to the human world and the upper world.

In the theological hermeneutic reading, the cosmology of the three worlds conveys the message that human life is always in the interconnectedness and supervision of the divine order. Human beings are not understood as fully autonomous beings and detached from the cosmos, but neither are they reduced to passive entities that are completely determined by transcendent will. On the contrary, La Galigo places humans as moral agents who have an active role in maintaining cosmic harmony through obedience to cosmic norms, customs, and laws sourced from the upper world.

The ethical relationship between man and nature in La Galigo shows that nature is not positioned as an object of exploitation, but rather as an integral part of the sacred cosmos. Fitriansal's findings²² regarding cosmological and environmental ethics reinforce this reading by showing that human-nature relations are rooted in a deep divine consciousness. Nature is understood as a space for the manifestation of the divine order, so man's treatment of nature has theological implications, not just ecological or social consequences.

Through this cosmological framework, La Galigo combines theology, ethics, and ecology in one complete and coherent system of meaning. The three do not stand as separate domains, but are intertwined in shaping the life view of the Bugis people. This theological hermeneutic reading of the cosmology of the three worlds shows that La Galigo offers a holistic model of religious understanding, in which human moral responsibility, the sustainability of nature, and divine consciousness are intertwined in a single sacred and meaningful cosmic order.

²² Fitriansal, "Nilai Pembimbingan dalam Epik I La Galigo: Kajian Hermeneutika," *Gurindam: Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra* 3, no. 1 (2023): 22–39.

La Galigo as a Pre-Islamic Theological Horizon: Sacredness, Myth, and Early Divine Consciousness

A theological reading of La Galigo shows that this epic cannot be understood solely as a mythological or literary heroic narrative that records stories of heroism and the supernatural world. More than that, La Galigo serves as the early theological horizon of the Bugis people, which is a symbolic space where collective religious consciousness is formed, expressed, and inherited across generations. This text records a structured worldview, in which reality is understood as a sacred cosmos that is under the arrangement of transcendent forces. In this framework, the world is not perceived as a neutral profane space, but rather as a meaningful order full of religious and ethical values.

The sacredness of La Galigo lies not in the existence of a systematic or normative theological doctrine, as found in the religions of the book, but in the way in which this text articulates the relationship between man, nature, and the divine. These relationships are manifested through cosmological symbols, creation myths, multi-layered world structures, and supernatural figures that play a role in maintaining the balance of the cosmos. Thus, the sacredness in La Galigo is narrative and symbolic, but precisely because it is able to accommodate complex and contextual religious experiences.

In Wilhelm Dilthey's hermeneutic perspective, La Galigo can be read as a form of objectification of the religious experience (lived religious experience) of the pre-Islamic Bugis people. This text does not merely reflect the collective imagination, but rather represents the way in which early Bugis humans understood their existence in the universe. Divine figures, cosmogonist events, and cascading world orders cannot be reduced to mere narrative fiction, but must be understood as symbolic expressions of man's efforts to answer fundamental existential questions: where life comes from, how the order of the cosmos is maintained, and what is man's position in the whole order.²³

One of the most significant findings of the theological-hermeneutic reading of La Galigo is the recognition of the central

²³ Dilthey dan Jameson, "The Rise of Hermeneutics Mercedes," 229–44.

position of the concept of the Seuwae Gods in the structure of Bugis cosmology. These findings challenge the long-held assumption that the pre-Islamic Bugis belief system was purely polytheistic, namely a religious system that relied on the existence of many gods with relatively equal authority. Recent studies, especially those put forward by Mahesa and Suparta, show that the Dewata Seuwae occupy the highest ontological position in the hierarchy of the cosmos, surpassing other divine figures both functionally and symbolically.

The Dewata Seuwae in La Galigo are not depicted solely as the oldest or most powerful god among other supernatural entities, but rather as the primary source of cosmic order. It is a unifying principle that guarantees the continuity and balance of the universe. In this structure, the other divine forces do not stand as rivals or separate autonomous entities, but are in hierarchical relationships that depend on those supreme divine principles. Thus, the divine structure in La Galigo exhibits an implicit pattern of oneness, although expressed through mythological language.

In Paul Ricoeur's perspective, the Dewata Seuwae can be understood as a symbol of divinity that "transcends its literality". Symbols, according to Ricoeur, always point to a deeper meaning than a representation of their surface. In this context, the Dewata Seuwae cannot be directly equated with the concept of God in formal Islamic theology, but it serves as a symbol of the principle of oneness, the source of the order of the cosmos, and the foundation of morality. This symbol allows the religious experience of the Bugis people to be articulated without having to go through abstract theological language.²⁴

The existence of other divine beings in La Galigo does not negate the principle of oneness, but rather functions as cosmic mediators who carry out the will and order of the Dewata Seuwae. This relationship can be compared, analogously, to the role of angels or the laws of creation in the monotheistic tradition, which do not diminish the oneness of God, but rather affirm the order of His creation. This analogy is not intended to normatively equate two different theological systems, but rather to show structural

²⁴ Ricoeur, "History and Hermeneutics," 3–20.

equality in the way the oneness of the divinity is symbolically expressed. In Islamic belief, Allah SWT. God Almighty commands the Angels to carry out the functions of God's power. La Galigo in this case has conceptual harmony with Islam.

Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics provides a conceptual tool to understand Dewata Seuwae as a fusion of horizons between pre-Islamic Bugis cosmology and the concept of monotheism in Islam. This reading does not aim to impose a normative identification between Dewata Seuwae and Allah in Islamic theology, but rather emphasizes the continuity of meaning in the divine experience of the Bugis people. In this way, Dewata Seuwae can be understood as a symbolic bridge that allows the process of theological reinterpretation during the period of Islamization, without having to break the roots of local cosmology that have been firmly rooted in the collective consciousness.²⁵

Divine Order in Cosmic Order

Cosmologically, La Galigo presents a worldview that positions the universe as a multi-storey structure full of sacred meaning. The division of the cosmos into three main layers—Boting Langi' (the upper world), Ale Lino (the middle world), and Buri' Liu (the underworld)—is not merely a mythological imagination, but a conceptual representation of the divine order that governs the whole of reality. These three worlds form a hierarchical and interdependent cosmic unit, where each layer has its own function and role in maintaining the balance of the universe.

Boting Langi' is understood as a divine space, a place of transcendent power that is the source of cosmic law and divine legitimacy. It is from this world that the order of the universe comes from, including the moral provisions and principles of justice that man should be executing. Ale Lino, as a middle world, is the space of human life, an arena in which the divine will is embodied in concrete actions, social relations, and cultural practices. Man is not placed as autonomous beings detached from the cosmos, but rather as an integral part of a sacred order that

²⁵ Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*.

demands ethical responsibility. Meanwhile, Buri' Liu symbolizes the underworld that holds latent powers, energy that sustains the cosmic balance, as well as the potential for chaos if it is not maintained in harmony.

In addition, La Galigo's cosmology also contains a strong ecological dimension. Nature is seen as part of the sacred cosmos, so the over exploitation or destruction of the environment is understood as a violation of the divine order. Social, moral, and ecological violations are not considered merely practical errors, but rather serious disturbances of cosmic harmony. In this way, La Galigo affirms that ethics, politics and ecology are rooted in a single cosmological vision that is intact and sacred.

The divine consciousness in La Galigo is thus theocentric and hierarchical. The world, man, and other supernatural forces are understood to be in the orbit of the one and highest divine will. Humans are not only related to many supernatural forces separately, but are placed in a cosmic structure that culminates in a single divine source. This shows that pre-Islamic Bugis religiosity already had a complex and reflective theological foundation, although it has not yet been codified in the language of formal monotheistic theology.

With this reading, La Galigo can be positioned as a text that records an important phase in the development of the divine consciousness of the Bugis people. He shows how the ideas of divine oneness, cosmic order, and moral legitimacy have been implicitly present, becoming the cultural foundation that would later facilitate dialogue and theological transformation in the era of Islamization.

Syncretism, Islamization, and Transformation of Bugis Theology

The Islamization of the Bugis community has consistently shown that the process of encounter between Islam and local cosmology does not take place in a confrontational or destructive manner, but rather through a complex dialogical mechanism. Anis and Mursalim & Abbas affirm that Islamization in South Sulawesi took place through what is called vernacularization, which is the process of translating Islamic concepts into local language, symbols, and conceptual frameworks. This vernacularization is

not just a pragmatic da'wah strategy, but a cultural mechanism that allows Islam to be meaningfully accepted by the Bugis community. Key concepts in Islam such as divinity, prophethood, and social ethics are articulated through familiar local idioms, so that Islam is understood not as a foreign religion, but as a continuation of a pre-existing spiritual quest.²⁶

Alimuddin underlined that the phenomenon of syncretism that emerged in the process of Bugis Islamization cannot be simplistic as a theological deviation. Syncretism, in this context, is more appropriately read as a cultural strategy to maintain the continuity of meaning in the midst of religious change. The Bugis people did not make a sharp distinction between the "old religion" and the "new religion", but rather integrated the new elements into the existing symbolic structure. This approach allows for social and cultural stability, while opening up space for gradual theological transformation.²⁷

Pelras and Ahmadin show that one of the key concepts in Bugis cosmology, namely the Dewata Seuwae, underwent a significant reinterpretation process within the framework of Islamic monotheism. Dewata Seuwae, which literally means "One God", provides a conceptual bridge that facilitates the internalization of monotheism. Instead of being seen as a god in a polytheistic sense, Dewata Seuwae is reinterpreted as a local representation of the concept of Allah in Islam. This process suggests that Islamization does not necessarily require the replacement of terms, but often involves filling in new meanings into old terms.²⁸

²⁶ Muh. Anis, "Islamisasi di Sinjai (Suatu Tinjauan Sejarah)" (Skripsi, UIN Alauddin Makassar, 2013); Mursalim dan Abbas Abbas, "Vernakularisasi Al-Qur'an di Tanah Bugis: Tinjauan Metodologis Terjemahan Al-Qur'an Karya Anregurutta Muh. Yunus Maratan," *Al-Izzah: Jurnal Hasil-Hasil Penelitian* 15, no. 2 (2020): 129–42.

²⁷ Aris Alimuddin, "Sinkretisme Arsitektur Bugis Pada Towani Tolotang dan Tolotang Benteng di Kabupaten Sidrap Sulawesi Selatan" (*Doctoral Dissertation*, Universitas Hasanuddin, 2020), <https://repository.unhas.ac.id/id/eprint/1467/>.

²⁸ Pelras, *The Bugis*. See also A. Ahmadin, *Nusa Selayar: Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Masyarakat di Kawasan Timur Nusantara*, jil. 1 (Makassar: Rayhan Intermedia, 2016).

The Islamization of Bugis can be understood as an important example of how global religions such as Islam interact with local traditions in a creative and dialogical way. This process resulted in a distinctive form of religiosity, in which Islamic monotheism was articulated through a reinterpreted local cosmology. The study of the Islamization of Bugis and La Galigo not only enriches the understanding of the religious history of South Sulawesi, but also makes a theoretical contribution to the broader discourse on the relationship between religion, culture, and social change.

The Concept of Godhead, Cosmology, and Tawhid in La Galigo's Narrative

Abdi Mahesa, through his thesis, specifically reviews the aspect of monotheism in the episode Taggilinna Sinapatié. They show that the concept of the Seuwae Gods occupies a central position as the supreme divine entity that surpasses and surpasses other gods. The Seuwae God is not described as one of the gods in the cosmic order, but rather as the main source and regulator of the order of the universe. The existence of other gods is precisely in a subordinate relationship to him, serving as an intermediary or manifestation of divine power in the structure of the cosmos. This finding is important because it confirms that the belief system in La Galigo is not egalitarian between gods, but rather has a clear theological hierarchy.²⁹

Mahesa's thesis in 2021 deepened the argument by showing that La Galigo's narrative structure contains an embryonic monotheistic pattern. Although the term and concept of monotheism have not been formulated as systematically as in the heavenly religions, there is an awareness of the one supreme power that is the source of cosmic and moral legitimacy. This pattern is reflected in the way the Seuwae Gods are positioned as the determinants of the will of the cosmos, while other supernatural beings act in accordance with the established order. Thus, La Galigo can be understood as a text that records the early

²⁹ Abdi Mahesa, "Unsur Tauhid dalam La Galigo: Edisi Teks dan Kajian Isi Episode Taggilinna Sinapatié" (*Thesis Under-Graduate*, Universitas Hasanuddin, 2021), <https://repository.unhas.ac.id/id/eprint/6877/>.

stages of articulation of the idea of a single divinity within the horizon of Bugis culture.³⁰

This view is in line with Rahmatia and Maulani's research on the Bugis' scientific-sufistic thought. They show that Bugis cosmology has a theocentric tendency, in which the reality of nature and human life is understood as part of a system centered on the Divine. The cosmos is not seen as an autonomous entity that runs by mere mechanistic laws, but rather as a space full of spiritual meaning. Knowledge of nature, time, and life is associated with the divine wisdom that governs the balance of the universe.³¹

On the other hand, Fitriansal's study through a hermeneutic approach highlights the normative function of La Galigo as a source of moral guidance value. They show that the teachings in La Galigo act like "cultural revelations" that guide human behavior in daily life. The term "revelation" here is not intended in a dogmatic theological sense, but rather as a metaphor to describe the moral authority of the text in shaping society's ethical consciousness. Values such as justice, loyalty, courage, and harmony with nature are conveyed through mythological narratives that have a strong symbolic binding.³²

In this way, La Galigo establishes a normative system rooted in divine cosmology. The moral order is not understood as a mere social agreement, but as a reflection of the divine will structured in the cosmos. Humans are positioned as part of that order, with the responsibility to maintain a balance between themselves, society, and nature. This theological consciousness gives transcendent legitimacy to social norms, so that moral transgression is understood as a disturbance of cosmic order.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Rahmatia Rahmatia, Abdullah Maulani, "Pemikiran Sains-Sufistik Orang Bugis dalam Naskah Kutika Ugi'sakke Rupa." *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 19, no. 2 (2021): 481–520. <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlka.v19i2.935>.

³² Fitriansal, "Nilai Pembimbingan dalam Epik I La Galigo," 22–39.

The Transformation of the Meaning of the Divine: The Islamization, Vernacularization, and Reinterpretation of La Galigo

The divine dimension in La Galigo does not stop at the pre-Islamic context, but continues to undergo transformation along with the changing historical and religious horizons of the Bugis people. The process of Islamization in South Sulawesi, as shown by Anis³³ and Mursalim and Abbas,³⁴ did not take place through a radical disconnection from local cosmology, but through a vernacularization mechanism, namely the translation and adjustment of Islamic concepts into symbolic language and the structure of meaning that had been known to the local community. Within this framework, La Galigo is not positioned as a text to be abandoned or rejected, but as a cultural heritage that can be reinterpreted in the light of Islamic theology.

Vernacular allows for a dialogical encounter between monotheism and pre-Islamic Bugis cosmology. Key concepts in Islam, such as the oneness of God, the order of the cosmos, and the moral responsibility of man, are not introduced in the abstract, but are articulated through symbols and narratives that have had resonances in the collective consciousness of the Bugis. In this way, Islam does not exist as an entirely alien system of meaning, but rather as a new horizon that interacts with an already existing symbolic structure.

In this process, the concept of the *Seuwae* Gods plays a central role as a theological bridge. *Dewata Seuwae* allows the internalization of the concept of monotheism without having to break the continuity of local cosmology. It became a symbolic meeting point that facilitated a shift in meaning from pre-Islamic divine principles to an understanding of the One God in Islam. With a hermeneutic approach, this shift is not understood as a total replacement or theological distortion, but rather as a transformation of meaning, that is, a process of reinterpretation of symbols that allows new theological values to be internalized contextually.

³³ Anis, "Islamisasi di Sinjai."

³⁴ Mursalim and Abbas, "Vernakularisasi Al-Qur'an di Tanah Bugis." 129-42.

The phenomenon often referred to as syncretism in this context, as affirmed by Alimuddin and Dialectics, cannot be simply understood as a theological aberration. In contrast, syncretism serves as a cultural strategy to maintain the stability of meaning and identity in the midst of major religious changes. Through this strategy, the Bugis people are able to integrate Islamic teachings into the established cosmological framework, so that religious changes do not trigger drastic social and cultural dislocations.³⁵

Islamization in Bugis Cosmology

In the context of Bugis Islamization, various studies show that the process of religious conversion does not take place through a radical break from old traditions, but through a dialogical and adaptive vernacular mechanism. Islam does not exist as a system of meaning that completely replaces pre-Islamic Bugis cosmology, but interacts creatively with religious symbols, concepts, and structures that have lived on in the collective consciousness of society. This pattern shows that Islamization in South Sulawesi is a subtle, gradual, and rooted cultural process in an effort to maintain the continuity of meaning.

Vernacularization in this context refers to the translation of key Islamic concepts—such as the oneness of God, cosmic order, and divine morality—into the local symbolic language that has been known to the Bugis people. Instead of erasing the old cosmology, Islam actually "refills" these symbols with the horizon of monotheism. This process allows Islamic teachings to be understood and internalized without causing cognitive dislocation or sharp cultural conflicts. Thus, Islam exists not as an alien external force, but as a religious system that resonates with the structure of local meaning.

The phenomenon of syncretism that arises in this process is often misunderstood as a form of theological deviation. However, some cutting-edge studies show the opposite. Syncretism is more appropriately understood as a cultural strategy to maintain the stability of meaning, identity, and social cohesion. Syncretism

³⁵ Alimuddin, "Sinkretisme Arsitektur,".

serves as a transitional mechanism that allows society to adapt to new belief systems without losing a sense of historical and cultural continuity.

La Galigo served as an important cultural foundation for the formation and development of Bugis-Islamic theology. Although born from a pre-Islamic context, it did not experience a disconnection in the process of Islamization, but continued to live and transform in symbolic practices, social ethics, and religious awareness of the Bugis Muslim community. This sustainability suggests that the text has a hermeneutic flexibility that allows integration between local cosmology and Islamic theological horizons.

At the level of social ethics, the values embodied in La Galigo—such as cosmic harmony, moral responsibility, and human attachment to the divine order—continue to shape the behavioral orientation of the Bugis Muslim community. This ethic is not seen as a cultural heritage that is contrary to Islam, but as a local expression of Islamic moral principles articulated in the symbolic language of the Bugis tradition. This shows that Bugis-Islamic theology developed not in a vacuum, but was firmly rooted in the cultural foundations that had existed before.

The divine dimension in La Galigo is neither static nor closed in its original context. It underwent a dynamic historical transformation along with the changing religious horizon of the Bugis people. This transformation does not completely erase the old meaning, but reinterprets it in a new theological framework. Through this process, La Galigo remains relevant as a source of theological and cultural reflection, as well as evidence that local traditions can play an active role in shaping the face of Islam that is contextual, dialogical, and rooted in the history of its people.

Conclusion

This research aims to examine the divine dimension in La Galigo's narrative through a theological hermeneutic approach, by placing the text as a living and dynamic religious-cultural expression. It is that La Galigo cannot be reduced solely as a mythological epic or heroic literature, but rather serves as an early theological horizon of the Bugis people. This study contributes to a

more developed understanding of the concept of divinity that is more in line with the socio-cultural development of its people. The concept of the Dewata Seuwae occupies a central position as the supreme divine principle that governs the cosmos in harmony with the concept of monotheism, thus challenging the old assumption that the Bugis belief system is an egalitarian polytheism.

This research emphasizes the exploration of the subjective religious experience of the pre-Islamic Bugis people as objectified in the text of La Galigo. By referring to Dilthey's framework, the cosmogonist narrative, supernatural figures, and three-world structures are understood as symbolic expressions of the lived religious experience of the Bugis people in interpreting the origins, order, and purpose of life. This study enriches Islamic studies, departing from a culture that has taken root and is enshrined in the La Galigo text.

The theoretical implication is that this study provides enrichment of the study of sacred literature of the archipelago by offering an integration between the study of Bugis literature, modern hermeneutics, and theological reflection. This approach suggests that non-canonical local texts such as La Galigo can be treated as a source of serious theological thought, contributing to the breadth and diversity of Islamic and Indonesian studies.

This research confirms that the divine dimension in La Galigo is dynamic and historical, continuing to undergo a transformation of meaning. This process is a valid dialogue across the ages, not a theological distortion. La Galigo serves as a cultural foundation for Bugis-Islamic theology, which lives on in the symbolic practices, social ethics, and religious consciousness of the community to this day.

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