



TO WRITE HIDDEN MESSAGES: MANUSCRIPTS AS SOURCE OF INSPIRATION OF PAKUALAMAN YOGYAKARTA BATIK

GKBRAA Paku Alam

Since 1813, the Kadipaten Pakualaman has been an integral part of the Javanese Principalities. Located in Yogyakarta, the current ruler, Paku Alam X, is dedicated to advancing public welfare. A prominent cultural achievement of Pakualaman is the revival of court batik, led by GKBRAA Paku Alam. She draws bold inspiration from the striking golden hues found in ancient court manuscripts. As the spouse of KGPAK Paku Alam X, GKBRAA Paku Alam has skillfully transformed these illustrations into unique batik patterns in the Pakualaman style. Each motif imparts valuable wisdom and life lessons from revered poets and thinkers of the past. Through her efforts, GKBRAA Paku Alam has made a significant and lasting contribution to the Indonesian Batik legacy.

Key words: Pakualaman, batik, court manuscripts, textile art

Introduction

One of my fondest childhood memories is the weekend trips to my grandmother's house. From our home in Semarang, we would drive about 30 kilometers west along the north coast of Java to Kendal village. Although her house was in a bustling residential area, the spacious garden was a great playground for us children. I was especially fascinated by the back of the house, where women were busy making batik. Some drew patterns, others applied motifs with liquid wax using a canting pen, and some immersed the cloths in colorful dye vats.

Memories of batik, created with a deep love for the art are firmly etched in my heart. The scent of hot, fragrant beeswax and the sight of beautifully crafted batik cloth bring me joy. Growing up, I developed a love and admiration for batik as a treasured Indonesian heritage. Wearing batik as traditional attire, as well as for daily clothing, became a priority for me when attending special ceremonies. This practice continued when I became a university student in Yogyakarta and later when I married the current ruler of Kadipaten Pakualaman, KGPAK Paku Alam X.

In the Pakualaman palace, I regularly wore batik kains, the traditional wrap-around skirts, due to customary laws. However, passing through the 'batikan' area—the site of batik production—filled me with sadness. The lively chanting of Javanese poems by the abdi dalem was absent, leaving only old batik tools behind. I could no longer endure this decline, so I approached my husband with a bold plan to establish a batik studio. With his support, I was determined to make this vision a reality. Creating batik patterns that signify Pakualaman presented a challenge that I was fully prepared to tackle. I took the initiative to collaborate with the Pakualaman

librarians, who oversee a remarkable collection of ancient royal manuscripts. Through this partnership, I conducted in-depth research and handpicked illuminated manuscripts to serve as my inspiration. Immersing myself in the manuscripts and their stunning illustrations instilled in me a deep pride for the Pakualaman writers and poets. They expertly fused wisdom with artistry, and their calligraphic writings and graphic drawings—often embellished in royal golden hues—clearly demonstrate that complex ideas can be conveyed with elegance.

Inspired by this beauty, I began creating my art. With help from a translator skilled in batik, I used a canting pen to produce fabric pieces featuring Pakualaman patterns. I showcased this small collection at various events, including the 14th International Symposium on Nusantara Manuscripts in 2012, Kartini Day in 2014 at the ASEAN Traditional Textiles Symposium in Chiangmai, Thailand in 2015, and at various National Batik Exhibitions. The positive feedback from enthusiasts motivated me to continue creating Pakualaman-style batik.

Batik *Wilaya Kusumajana* Motif

The motif is firmly rooted in the manuscripts *Sestradisuhul* and *Babar Palupyan*. Its name derives from "rerengan," the decorative elements that frame *Wilaya Kusumajana*—where "wilaya" signifies intertwined, "kusuma" signifies flower, and "jana" represents insults and praise. This text unequivocally asserts that individuals must emulate the example set by King Paku Alam I. He exemplified "sestradi," which embodies the essential teachings of ethics and morality for Javanese kings. These principles are indispensable for rulers, as they must embody authentic leadership in both physical and spiritual realms.



The motif *Wilaya Kusumajana* prominently showcases a background of *beras utah*, or scattered rice. This design powerfully conveys that those who possess the strength to withstand insults and remain humble in the face of praise will inevitably thrive, blossoming into a fragrant flower—symbolizing success—surrounded by prosperity and abundant blessings. Furthermore, this motif is enhanced with a *parang* background, characterized by slanting bands featuring stylized daggers, adding to its significance and impact.

Batik *Sestra Lukita* Motif

The motif comes from the manuscript "Serat Rama," particularly "Arjunawijaya," "Kempalan Dongeng," "Babar Palupyan," "Babad Betawi Tome III," and "Sestra Ageng Adidarma." It aligns with the decorations of "Lukita Papaning Sestra," which highlights twenty-one key virtues: patience, gratitude, acceptance, bravery, sacredness, memory, a heraldic attitude, and sharpness of mind. It also outlines twenty-one negative traits to avoid, including degrading others, impolite speech, anger, uncontrollable behavior, hatred, cruelty, vengeance, laziness, stubbornness, and carelessness. We must strive to embody these virtues and eliminate these flaws.



The interpretation of *Sestra Lukita* underscores the vital importance of human attitude. Wearing batik with *Sestra Lukita* motifs serves as a powerful reminder of the essential sestradi teachings, which lead to glory and honor, as outlined in Pakualaman's primary manuscripts. The strength of one's character is rooted in the commitment to apply these teachings in daily life, making it crucial to instill them from childhood through adulthood.

The bird motif symbolizes the ideal of navigating life freely and respectfully with polite language. The Pakualaman emblem on this batik reinforces K.G.P.A.A. Paku Alam X's directive to his successor: the new ruler must actively implement and uphold sestradi teachings in their daily life.

Batik *Astabrata* (Eight Leadership Teachings of Rama) Series

The Source of this motif is derived from the *Sestra Ageng Adidarma* and *Sestradisuhul* manuscripts.

Lord Indra

The main illustration in the manuscript prominently shows geese feathers embedded in a globe, crowned to represent Lord Indra, the king of poets. He relentlessly imparts his wisdom to all who seek to learn.



Visualization of the batik motif is as follows:

- Geese feathers implanted into a world globe, decorated with a crown on top
- A book
- Two nagas facing each other

The pattern depicting the above motifs is called *Indra Widagda* (*widagda*=intellect) or Lord Indra passing his teachings onto others. Lord Indra's primary attention is education for mankind; therefore a good leader should focus on the education of his followers.

Lord Yama

The main motif involves a traditional stove with tongues of fire appearing, depicting Lord Yama as the law-enforcer and the destroyer of evil.



Visualization in the batik motif:

- A burning stove with tongues of fire
- A chain with lock
- *Sawat* (a pair of bird wings) supporting a flower

This batik motif is named *Yama Linapsuh* (=destroying), meaning Yama as destroyer of evil. A leader is expected to act fair, but should also enforce the law.

Lord Surya

The principal decoration in this motif is the sunflower with a yellow-golden heart. At the same time this motif represents the “gold coin”, Lord Surya’s favorite coin as was explained in the text of the manuscript. Through this motif, men are reminded to work hard and manage the results of their work well.



Visualization of the motif in the batik cloth is the sunflower, while the name of this batik motif is *Surya Mulyarja* (*mulya*=noble, *arja*=prosperity): Surya the administrator of nobility and prosperity. A leader is expected to be able to find financial resources but should also be generous and charitable. He should be able to manage his money, and not be wasteful and spent thrifty.

Lord Chandra

The main element of this motif is the Soma flower, which symbolizes Lord Chandra, the God of love and care. It highlights the importance of nurturing and loving one another.

This batik motif, called *Chandra Kinasih* (meaning "loving"), features Soma flowers and a garland of leaves. It represents how a leader should spread love and compassion, which will earn him the affection of his subjects.



Visualization in the motif is depicted through *soma* flowers and a garland of leaves. This batik motif is called *Chandra Kinasih* (*kinasih*= loving), Chandra as disperser of love and care. A leader

is expected to spread love and care around him, especially to his subjects, and he will be loved in return.

Lord Bayu

The central decoration in the manuscript is Lord Bayu, represented by the "Lukitasari" motif along with elements such as "*kelat bahu Chandrakirana*," "*sumping pudhak sategal*," and "*sisik porong naga*." The cloth features a poleng motif and a black and white check pattern, symbolizing strength and stability.



Visualization in the batik cloth is represented by the stylized *gada* weapon or club, a *sumping* or ear ornament, and *bintulu aji* cloth.

The cloth depicting the Lord Bayu motif is called *Bayu Krastala* (firm or having supernatural powers). An ideal leader should have a firm character and sometimes be stubborn, in order not to be easily manipulated by his subjects.

Lord Wisnu

The central motif in this manuscript illustration is the *chakra* (wheel) and *trisula* (trident) weapons, along with an incense burner symbolizing the God Wisnu, the leader of hermits. The decorative frame emphasizes the significance of good character and trust in God, guarding individuals from earthly passions.

Batik Motif Visualization:

The Wayang figure of Lord Wisnu has an upturned face and slanted eyes resembling rice grains. He wears a head covering, wreath, and ear ornaments, with his hair loosely styled and a fringed scarf draped over him, seated before a smoking incense burner in a place of worship.



This batik, titled "Wisnu Mamuja" (meaning "worshipped"), illustrates Lord Wisnu as a devoted servant of God the Creator. An ideal leader should have an ascetic nature, be able to detach from worldly pleasures and focus on their service to God.

Lord Brama

The central motif in this manuscript features a sword, spear, flag, and banner, along with red tongues of fire symbolizing bravery.

Visualization in the Batik Motif:

The design shows these elements emerging from a central figure, surrounded by tongues of fire, leaves, and clouds.



Known as "Brama Sembada," which means strong, firm, and respectful, this pattern represents the qualities of Lord Brama. Leaders should emulate him to gain respect for their virtues and strength.

Lord Baruna

The main motif in the decorative frame of the text for Batara Baruna depicts strings of leaves and tendrils also called "*lung jangga milet tranggana*" which in the manuscript *Babar Palupyan* (page 86) is interpreted as a smart, intellectual and fair poet. The frame depicts fish scales symbol of Lord Baruna, God of the Ocean.



Visualization of the motif in the batik cloth shows strings of leaves, tendrils and fish scales.

This batik motif is called *Baruna Wicakswa* (=wise), the wise Lord Brama. Wisdom is another characteristic for being a good leader, as is displayed by Lord Baruna.

***Sari Makara Uneng* Batik Motifs**

The batik motif is a vital element in "*Wedana Renggan Sujalma Sari Makara Uneng*," which is derived from the *Langen Wibawa* manuscript. This motif highlights the beauty of the female dancers from the Pakualaman Palace. The manuscript emphasizes the elegance of the favorite dances performed for Kings Paku Alam I through Paku Alam IV.



The manuscript uses mountains to symbolize the female body as slim and fragile, like shrimps and butterflies. It references beautiful-bodied women who captivate men and highlights the metamorphosis women undergo, transforming from mountain dwellers into palace dancers. The focus is on their education and adaptation to palace customs, leading to their transformation into graceful and responsive dancers.

Conclusion

The transformation of illuminated classical manuscripts into Pakualaman batik cloth is crucial for preserving traditional art and infusing it with contemporary significance. These cloths firmly embody the enduring values, worldviews, and moral codes of the Pakualaman clan, upheld for over two centuries. The ethical standards of the past have decisively shaped exemplary figures within our community, underscoring their vital relevance today. The Pakualaman Region is resolutely committed to educating its people to honor and respect the ethical and moral codes passed down from our ancestors, ensuring that these traditions remain an integral part of our identity.

The Sestra Lukita motif highlights the importance of twenty-one virtues, urging people to adopt the good and avoid the bad. The Asthabrata batik motif features Hindu gods with admirable qualities, encouraging leaders to emulate these virtues.

The translation of classic manuscript illuminations onto batik cloth has powerfully inspired numerous Indonesian batik communities. Over the last two years, a dynamic new style of batik, influenced by ancient manuscripts, has emerged across Java, alongside creating manuscript illuminations on Minangkabau-West Sumatran songkets.

This trend is not just pleasing; it signifies a vital resurgence. Works from the Pakualaman palace drive artisans to explore innovative motifs, significantly enriching the Indonesian batik tradition. Additionally, as traditional batik gains traction in the fashion market, it is actively cultivating a creative cultural industry that possesses substantial economic potential for the future, showcasing the immense richness of Indonesia's diverse cultural heritage.

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