

BANTEN'S INDIGENOUS VISUAL STYLE IN THE ILLUSTRATIONS OF *SAJARAH BANTEN* MANUSCRIPT

Savitri Putri Ramadina¹; Yasraf Amir Piliang²; Nuning Yanti Damayanti³

¹ Faculty of Arts and Design, Bandung Institute of Technology, Indonesia

¹ sp.ramadina@gmail.com, ² yasraf2000@yahoo.com, ³ nuning@fsrd.itb.ac.id

Abstract: *Sajarah Banten* is a manuscript presumed to be made in 18th century and associated with the Sultanate of Banten. The Islamic influence was prevalent in the sultanate, such as the way the manuscript was written in Javanese-Arabic letters. This paper aims to research whether there were traces of indigenous Banten or Baduy people's worldview and culture in the visual style of *Sajarah Banten*'s illustrations along with the Islamic influence. The research is conducted by applying art critic method to analyse and evaluate the visual style. Result shows that the illustrations contain both Islamic and indigenous Banten visual styles through the application of aniconism principle.

Keywords: *Banten, illustration, Islamic style, Sajarah Banten, visual style.*

INTRODUCTION

The Sultanate of Banten was established in the 15th century in the western part of Java island by Syarif Hidayatullah or commonly known as Sunan Gunung Jati, one of the prominent Islamic preachers in Java island collectively known as Wali Sanga. The sultanate was known for its international harbor and trading hub; and as consequences, they were influenced by some cultures such as Javanese from their relationship with Sultanate of Cirebon and Sultanate of Demak in Central Java, Arabic, European, and Chinese traders (Guillot, 2011).

The history of sultanate is mostly gleaned from *Sajarah Banten* manuscripts. Pudjiastuti (2015) divided the collection into *Sajarah Banten Besar* ("Big" History of Banten), about the general history of the sultanate from its founding to its decline; and *Sajarah Banten Kecil* ("Little" History of Banten) which usually centered on specific events. One of the *Sajarah Banten Kecil* manuscript, coded KBG 183 in the National Library of Indonesia, is unusual among the collection since it is the only one with illustrations. The manuscript told the founding of Banten, the royal lineage traced all the way to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and especially the event of succession war between Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, one of the sultanate most illustrious leader, and his son Sultan Haji. Based on the papers used, the manuscript was made in the 18th century, the time when the sultanate was on its decline.

Even though the sultanate held a considerable influence in the Banten region during the 15th-18th century, the indigenous people of Banten, commonly called Baduy, is still holding on their own faith (named Sunda Wiwitan) until present time alongside the Islamic influence of the sultanate (Garna, 2008). As a result, there is possibility that the aesthetic style applied in *Sajarah Banten* illustrations did not only consisted of Islamic aesthetic principle, but also of the indigenous Banten people. This paper thus aimed to analyze the trace of indigenous Banten's worldview and culture along with the Islamic influence in *Sajarah Banten* illustrations.

METHOD

Jakob Soemardjo(2010) described indigenous Banten's worldview as a marriage between opposing forces resulting in a tripartite pattern. This pattern is prevalent in a community based on dry field agriculture, such as the Baduy people of Banten and Sundanese people in West Java. The pattern is based on three dry-field agricultural concepts: to plant, to grow, and to take care. As such, number three holds significance in their Sunda Wiwitan faith, usually defined as the 'upper world', 'middle

world', and 'underworld'; or in their politics through the division of leaders called *Tritangtu*: religious leader, village leader, and the king.

Beside the tripartite pattern, the concept of 'full-empty' paradox is also prevalent. For example, the existence of empty graves in Baduy village to symbolize a paradoxical space which harmonized the living human world and the ancestral spirit realm. The need for an empty grave is related to the psychological needs of the spiritual tranquility that results in a transcendent world of harmony with an immanent 'underworld', which is then related to their worldview. Thus, their culture reflects the concept through simplification and abstraction to show the tripartite and 'full-empty' paradox, like the Baduy's Kanekes village layout (Figure 1).

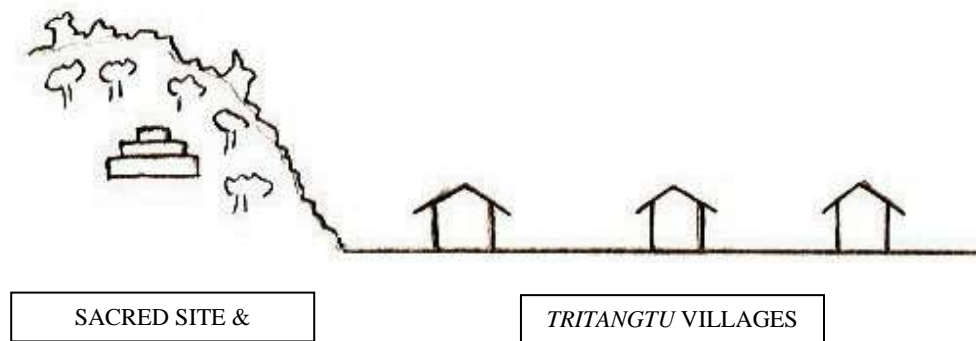


Figure 1. Kanekes Village Layout

Sunda Wiwitan faith of Baduy people is monotheistic. They believe in *Batara Tunggal* (means "The One/Only God") which comprised of paradoxes of opposed yet harmonized concepts or *completion oppositorum*. This characteristic is close to Islamic monotheism, which allowed the Baduy people to live in harmony with Islamic influence (Garna, 2008).

Art in Islamic religion and civilization is defined by Isma'il R. Al-Faruqi as "[...] aesthetic expressions of the same origin and realization. [...] based on Koranic art." (Al-Faruqi, 1986). Islamic aesthetic thus influenced by the doctrine of monotheism or Islamic monotheism in the Koran which is manifested in the tendency to avoid naturalistic forms, especially the appearance of animate beings. Furthermore, Al-Faruqi describes the characteristics of Islamic aesthetic expressions as follows:

- 1) Abstraction; denaturalization and stylization processes so that visual forms no longer show real natural phenomena
- 2) Modular structure; a combination of units or modules that give birth to a larger design
- 3) Sequential combination; combination of basic modules and repetition
- 4) Repetition; done to create an unlimited impression
- 5) Dynamism; Appreciated form composition through aesthetic events related to space and time
- 6) Complexity; intended to attract attention and then increase concentration.

This research utilized art critic method to discover the visual aspects of *Sajarah Banten* illustrations based on the Islamic and the indigenous Banten's aesthetics. Art critic method is comprised of describing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating a work of art (Daracott, 1991). This research used samples based on the most common objects depicted in *Sajarah Banten* manuscript: building, ship, furniture, and tools.



The main aspect of this research is the interpretation part of art critic method, which is used to determine both Islamic and indigenous Banten's aesthetic influences in *Sajarah Banten* illustrations. During the interpretation, there are three different aspects to consider (Rose, 2001) which are:



- 1) Technological aspect; based on the tools or media used in the making of the work of art.

- 2) Compositional aspect; based on the formal arrangement of the work of art, i.e. shapes, colors, or spatial organization.
- 3) Social aspect; based on the social and cultural relations and aspects surrounding the work of art.

To find the visual aesthetic tendency, this research will emphasize on **interpreting the compositional and social aspects** of *Sajarah Banten* illustrations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

No.	Illustration	Description and Formal Analysis	Interpretation
1		<p>Pg. 19: the voyage of Sultan Haji to do Hajj pilgrimage in Mecca (Pudjiastuti, 2010). The illustration shows a ship in the bottom of the page. The ship is colored with purple/dark blue, red (or assumed to be since the ink is already faded), and yellow. The text wrapped around the image.</p>	<p>No depiction of Sultan Haji or his entourage. This alludes to Islamic aesthetic principle of no showing natural phenomena such as human beings (<i>aniconism</i>). On further notice, the ship is apparently ready to sail since it is not anchored, even though the sails are not yet risen. It shows both the ‘emptiness’ of human activity and result of human action, a paradox found in indigenous Banten’s worldview.</p>
2		<p>Pg. 29: the homecoming of Sultan Haji and his intention to meet his father Sultan Agung in the palace (Pudjiastuti, 2010). The illustration shows a building with a view to a room. The room is consisted of a table, a hanging lamp, and four chairs; each chair has different style. The text wrapped around the image.</p>	<p>Again, no depiction of both Sultan Haji and Sultan Agung even though both are main characters in this page’s narration; referring to aniconism and ‘emptiness’. The ‘meeting’ is alluded by having chairs facing each other; each pair consisted of big and small chair, presumably referring to Sultan Agung and Sultan Haji.</p>

No.	Illustration	Description and Formal Analysis	Interpretation
3		<p>Pg. 31: the meeting of Sultan Agung with the British Empire army to make alliance with him in the succession war. (Pudjiastuti, 2010).</p> <p>The illustration shows a flag in a pole, two chairs facing each other across a table, two glasses (assumed to be empty) and a bottle on the table. The text wrapped around the image.</p>	<p>No depiction of Sultan Agung and British ambassador, again alluding to aniconism and ‘emptiness’ principles. Compared to pg.29 illustration above, both chairs have similar style and the glasses’ positions are also similar, possibly to convey that Sultan Agung and the British are in similar positions as allies.</p>
4		<p>Pg. 36: the war preparation of Sultan Haji, allied with Dutch forces, to attack Sultan Agung.</p> <p>The illustration shows two shotguns, a cannon, a pistol, and three bullets. The text wrapped around the image.</p>	<p>The image avoids depiction of army (human beings) by focusing on the weaponry instead.</p>

CONCLUSIONS

The illustrations of *Sajarah Banten* manuscript show tendency to avoid depiction of living beings or aniconism which is integral in Islamic aesthetic through its abstraction or denaturalization principle, and also the concept of ‘empty-full’ paradox found in indigenous Banten’s worldview through the aniconism and allusion of human activity by certain placement of objects. It shows that even though Islam is the main influence in Banten region, the indigenous culture can still manage to show their ingenuity which resulted in Banten’s own distinct aesthetic style. Further research may delve further on how both Islamic and indigenous Banten aesthetics merge to create new visual style based on Banten’s culture.

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