

## Mapping the Variation of Visual Character Styles in the Pawukon Illustration

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### Abstract

*The heritage of old Indonesian manuscript artefacts is evidence of the development of literary and written culture. However, accessing these manuscripts is no longer comfortable because there are more storage and documentation abroad than at home. At present, expanding access to further study, there have been efforts to digitize several manuscripts. One of the manuscripts contained the cultural values of ancient Javanese people is the pawukon script that equipped with illustrations. The purpose of writing this article is to exam the character style of pawukon visualization. This article intends to elaborate illustrations and visual elements that visualize the contents of the text in the manuscript. The conclusion shows that the illustrations in the ancient pawukon manuscript present several types of character styles. Each character and style is the result of the influence of cultural changes that developed during this period.*

**Keywords:** pawukon, manuscripts, illustration

### Abstrak

Peninggalan artefak manuskrip tua Indonesia menjadi bukti perkembangan sastra dan budaya tulis pada masa tersebut, namun saat ini keberadaan naskah-naskah tersebut tidak lagi mudah diakses, dan banyak di antaranya justru tersimpan di luar negeri. Saat ini sebagian naskah-naskah tersebut telah digitalisasi sehingga memperluas kemungkinan untuk diakses dan dikaji lebih lanjut. Salah satu naskah yang menyimpan nilai-nilai budaya masyarakat Jawa kuno adalah naskah *pawukon* yang dilengkapi dengan ilustrasi. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji penggambaran visualisasi tokoh pada ilustrasi *pawukon* serta penggunaan elemen yang menunjang visualisasi dari isi teks dalam naskah. Simpulan dari artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa ilustrasi dalam naskah kuno *pawukon* digambarkan dalam beberapa jenis penggambaran karakter, di mana masing-masing karakter dan gayanya dapat dipengaruhi oleh perubahan budaya yang berkembang pada masa tersebut.

**Kata kunci:** *pawukon, manuskrip, ilustrasi*

## INTRODUCTION

As a nation with diverse cultural backgrounds, Indonesia has historical records summarized in ancient manuscripts, included the manuscripts of Javanese culture. As stated by Adisasmito (2010) that ancient manuscripts are artefacts that record the achievements of a cultural civilization and become a source of information about past cultures. The diversity of the Indonesian manuscripts shows that the people at the previous time could express ideas in written culture. Besides the text elements, some manuscripts are equipped with illuminations, ornaments, and illustrations to express the ideas in it. The illustrations in these old Indonesian manuscripts have a

distinctive style adapted to the function of the manuscript and the cultural background of the creator community.

This article studied the illustration of Javanese *pawukon* scripts. According to Endraswara, *pawukon* is the form of words that contain meaning or *sanepa*. *Pawukon* is used as a calculation to examine the character of a person and calculate the advantages and disadvantages of human life (Dhamastuty 2018). *Pawukon* is a Javanese prediction or calculation based on Hindu mythology about time and related to the predictions of human life based on their *wuku* (time) characteristics (Widayat & Studyanto 2018). *Wuku* is part of a cycle of Javanese and Balinese dates that is seven days (one week) old. The cycle of *wuku* is 30 weeks old (210 days). Each *wuku* has its typical name.

The *pawukon* manuscript comprises text describing the characters of 30 *wuku*, which the description of each character is equipped with illustrations. This article will examine the visual character style in the *Pawukon* manuscript illustration, as a heritage and a work of art produced by the previous Javanese artist. The *pawukon* manuscript is categorized as *primbon* that explained as a manuscript that contains various predictions, astrology and astronomy or calendar systems to determine the good days, bad days of humans when they will do something based on the traditional knowledge.

*Pawukon* is rarely used in modern culture, including by the Javanese. One that affects the increasingly limited use of this text related to the changes in culture, especially that people are no longer believe in the mythical culture. The other matters causing the lack of knowledge and public awareness of the *pawukon* manuscript are the existence of the physical script challenging to find and the limited number of people who have proper knowledge and expertise to explain the contents of the manuscript. Explanation of the manuscripts is needed because most of the ancient manuscripts, including *pawukon*, were delivered in Javanese and written in Javanese script.

Not all of the old Indonesian manuscripts are equipped with illustrations. Adisasmito stated that only a few of the old Indonesian manuscripts equipped with illustrations and illuminations that signify the unique and fascinating culture of the Indonesian ancestors (Adisasmito, 2012). The illustrations in the *pawukon* manuscripts have a communication function that should be able to assist the observer in interpreting the contents of the manuscript. Amin stated that most of the illustration in old Indonesian manuscripts are using the stylization of *wayang kulit* (puppet), showed that *wayang* was highly appreciated by the public in that past. It also shows that the paradigm of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam is rooted in Javanese society (Adisasmito, 2016).

## METHOD

The research applied a descriptive qualitative method to study the aspects of visual character style in the illustration of *pawukon* manuscripts, in particular, are the digitalized *Pawukon* manuscripts from the collection of the British Library. The analysis is based on how the character of each *wuku* is depicted. The results can explain the development and variation of character styling in the *Pawukon* manuscript illustrations to support the communication function, not only in delivering the textual message but also the value of the cultural meaning.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tabrani in Adisasmito (2016) stated that images in the illustration context are not abstract images that are difficult to interpret, but are iconographic works because they

represent a visualization of reality. An illustration is a medium for delivering messages that have a specific purpose. Aesthetic is not interpreted based on the perfection of the physical form but can be achieved through the communicative visual conception. From this statement, it can be concluded that illustration of an old manuscript is not only concerned with the beauty aspects of the illustrative form but also have an accordance with its purpose to convey the meaning of the message.

At present, the old *pawukon* manuscripts that equipped with illustrations are not easily found in the physical form. Some manuscripts can be found in the form of digitalized manuscripts, but most of them are located abroad, and only a few manuscripts are documented in Indonesian libraries. The *pawukon* manuscript has a high cultural value related to the function as a guideline for the Javanese people in living their lives. It is believed that *pawukon* manuscript contains predictive elements that provide clues in order to find salvation in their lives. The guide is reflected in the contents of the manuscript, through the elements that become symbols of each *wuku* characters. One of the purposes of *pawukon* is to convey certain values, as stated by Damayanti & Suadi (2007) that one of the social functions of illustrations in the old Indonesian manuscripts is to communicate the social and cultural value of the community in their time and could still use as a guideline of the present community.

British Library has a collection of digitized copies of manuscripts that contain *pawukon* illustrations in their digitalized collection. The manuscripts are:

1. "Mataram and Babad ing Sangkala" (1738), which consist of 2 volumes. The first few pages of this manuscript have been lost, and the illustrations in this manuscript are incomplete.
2. "A Pawukon" (1807), containing 30 illustrations of each *wuku*.
3. "Papakem Pawukon" (1814), containing 30 characters of each *wuku*.



Figure 1. Illustrations in "*Babad ing Sengkala*" manuscript  
("The British Library MS Viewer," n.d.)

The “Babad ing Sengkala” manuscript depicted the characters of the gods of each *wuku* in the form of puppet figures that different from the shape of the puppet we know today. The god figures in the form of puppets are depicted in a standing or sitting position. The appearance of *wayang* (puppet) style shown in some of these illustrations reminisced to the *wayang beber* shape—the proportion of the depicted illustration drawn in proportionally puppet character. The clothing elements worn by these figures are depicted in various shape and pattern that is repeated and reused by some characters in it. The colouring style in these manuscript illustrations gives a thematic impression where there is consistency in the colour selection for each *wuku* illustrations. The position of the deity is more dominantly displayed on the right and facing left.



**Figure 2. Ilustrasi of Pawukon in “A Pawukon” manuscript**  
(“The British Library MS Viewer,” n.d.)

The illustration of the “A Pawukon” manuscript depicted in *wayang* (puppets) characters that styled differently from the shape of the puppets we know today. The god figure in the *Pawukon* manuscript illustration is represented in a standing or sitting position. The depiction of clothes worn by god figures shows various shape and pattern. The colouring style in this manuscript illustration looks more varied and diverse in each *wuku*. The god figures are depicted in varying sizes, forming a dissimilar proportion of each *wuku* illustrations. In these manuscript illustrations, all the gods are displayed on the right side of the image.

In the “Papakem Pawukon” manuscript, the character of the gods displayed in human form. Overall, the style and layout of the illustrations in this manuscript appear to have different characteristics from the previously described manuscripts. The visualization of human form and attributes in this illustration does not represent the Javanese cultural identity. The illustration gives a more realistic impression, especially as seen in the way the elements are pictured. The god figures are placed in the loft space of the image. The style of clothing and attributes of the character are not reflected in the *wayang* style, with a variety of colours and clothing pattern.



**Figure 3. The illustration in “Papakem Pawukon”**  
 (“The British Library MS Viewer,” n.d.)

The visual form and style of illustrated old Javanese manuscripts of the period 1800-1920 can be classified into 3 main characters: (1) *Wayang Kulit* (the shadow puppet) stylization style (2) combination style of *Wayang Beber* stylization and *Wayang Kulit* (3) Naturalist Style-stylization-Realist-Limited Perspective (Adisasmito, 2008). The results of this study show that in the earlier years, the form of *wayang* was still used but later on evolved into a more realistic shape. The styling of Javanese old manuscripts illustration seems to have a recognizable, distinctive style that related to an understanding of how aesthetic values developed and applied by the artists at a particular time. The early studies of the *pawukon* manuscripts illustration show different drawing styles. The difference in stylization shows that the changes and developments of artistry could influence the detailed depiction of the characters.

The illustration of the gods in the *Pawukon* is depicted in two different visual character style, which is *wayang* and human figure style. The application of *wayang* style shows some differences in the aspects of proportion, style and pattern of the clothing, and colouring. In the *A Pawukon* manuscript, it seen that the size of the elements used in the manuscript illustrations show a less proportional impression, both in the size of the elements and the size ratio of the gods depiction of each illustration. The variation is also seen in the description of clothing elements worn by the gods, both in terms of the shape and pattern of the fabric. The character's colouring style is seen to have different characteristics in the three manuscripts, where the colouring scheme in the illustration of the “Babad ing Sangkala” gives an impression of uniformity of the colour scheme in each illustration. In the “*A Pawukon*” script, the colouring style is more diverse with vivid colours application, while the “*Papakem Pawukon*” manuscript shows the use of tint in bright colours and a more realistic colour application according to the object it represents.

The differences are also found in the placement of an object within the images. In the first two manuscripts, it is seen that the visualization of god character is placed on the right. Meanwhile, in the last manuscript, the depiction of the god figure is placed on the left. These placements can be explained based on the Javanese aesthetic concept as suggested by Sumardjo (2006) about the example of mythic thought related to the existence of different meanings about the position, where the right is believed to be more valuable than the left. Thus, the third manuscripts did not relay the same aesthetic values based on Javanese culture compared to the previous two.

## CONCLUSION

The illustrations in the old manuscript are required to have the ability to convey the meaning of the manuscripts content through the visualization. The illustrations in the *pawukon* manuscript convey narrative and symbolic messages with the support of artistic style. The conclusion of this study is the discovery of differences in visual character styles that show differences in the application of the artistic and symbolic aspects as part of aesthetic thinking. The visual character styles in the *pawukon* manuscript illustrations depicted in the puppet characters adhere to the aesthetic style that developed in Javanese society at the time, as opposed to that, the human figure depiction does not reflect the Javanese aesthetic style. The symbolic value in the placement of the god characters in the third manuscripts is applicated differently. These show that the aesthetic decision of the artist can influence the illustration of *Pawukon* manuscripts.

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