Study of Illustrated Javanese Manuscripts – Challenge and Mastering in the Digital and Covid era Serat Panji Jayakusuma Manuscripts

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Abstract—In search of a means of coping with conducting research during Covid-19 pandemic, the paper raises the question to what extent digitized material allows easier access compared to field research. The paper focuses on a concrete topic - a comparative study of illustrations in three manuscripts of the *Panji Jayakusuma* story - and discusses the variety of approaches. The three manuscripts are kept in the following archives: *Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia* (The National Library of Indonesia) in Jakarta; British Library in London; Staatsbibliothek Berlin. The comparative study of the illustrations of the *Panji Jayakusuma* tales shows the pluses and lacks of using digitized materials as research objects. The comparison of the illustrations covers iconography, style and the selection of depicted scenes by focusing on certain motives covering ships, fighters, and lovers. Digital access allows a detailed and easy comparison which goes beyond the research in the libraries *in situ* and opens new potentials, while at the same time there is a loss in experiencing materiality.

Keywords—PanjiJayakusuma manuscript,digitized material

INTRODUCTION

The background of this paper is that the development of the internet has been rapidly growing worldwide. There has been an increase of digitization since the millennium which imparts an enormous potential for public access and for research in times of Covid-19 and during ongoing restrictions. The access to digital materials in the case of this study covers books, manuscripts, and photography.

There are pluses and lacks in the use of digital materials for conducting research. A major plus is the quantity, since there is an increase of digitized material available for research and studies. A major lack is a loss in the materiality and sensual approach.

The display of the digitized material allows a better look at details i.e. zoom-in photographs. On the other side, the display on the screen is only in two-dimensionality, or in some cases in three-dimensional animation. The data about the objects are in a way abstract: measures (height, width etc), material of paper, material of colors. There is no tactile impression. People cannot experience the "aura".

Other pluses are: the easy access independent of the location - no travel to get from one archive to another; the

opportunities of worldwide networking between experts and multi-disciplinary cooperation, easy and quick communication. On the other side, the researchers do not meet in person, but only per email or in video conference, Skype etc. They cannot experience the "complete" personality, having coffee together, and the researcher sits lonely in front of the screen.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The *Panji Jayakusuma* manuscripts make part of a large corpus of Panji tales manuscripts which have been inscribed in the UNESCO list of Memory of the World in 2017 including the manuscripts in Jakarta, Leiden, Malaysia, and Cambodia.

A. Story of Prince Panji

The story on Panji is an old Javanese myth, relating about Prince Panji from the Kingdom of Jenggala in East Java and his betrothed Princess Sekartaji from the Kingdom of Kediri in East Java. Before getting married, the two lovers are separated from each other by some circumstances. They walk and travel about the country, experience adventures, have amorous episodes and keep searching for one another. After having passed a number of obstacles and challenges, eventually they meet again and happily marry.

There exist many variations of Panji stories, all having the same plot, with a broad range of differing episodes and storylines. The earliest evidence of Panji stories is given in temple reliefs from the Majapahit time; mask dance, gedhog shadow play, wayang beber are other artistic forms developed over the centuries. It is not possible to determine an "oldest" Panji story.

B. Comparative Study of Illustrations in Three Manuscripts of the *Panji Jayakusuma* Tales

The three manuscripts under discussion are:

- MSS KBG 139, *Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia* (The National Library of Indonesia), ca. 1840 CE, 734 pages with 171 illustrations

- MSS Jav 68, *British Library* (BL) in London, ca. 1809 CE, 208 pages and 174 illustrations.

- MSS Schoemann 5IIa, *DeutscheStaatsbibliothek* (German National Library) in Berlin, 1787 CE, 452 pages and 41 illustrations.

The Indonesian National Library (PerpusNas) Jakarta has 76 Panji manuscripts, some containing illustrations. The British Library London and the German National Library (Staatsbibliothek) in Berlin have a small number of Panji stories manuscripts, most of them with illustrations. Leiden University Library (UB Leiden) has 252 Panji manuscripts but it has not been known so far if and how many of them have illustrations.

In the olden days, researchers had to travel far and take a plane to Berlin, London and Jakarta. In 2016 the author visited *Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia* in Jakarta to take looks at the manuscripts since at that time they were not digitized yet (recently a large digitization project has been conducted). Another visit to London was required for the same reason (BL is in the process of digitizing). Only the Berlin manuscript was already available in digital access.

The comparative study presented here, is limited on a specific selection of scenes: ships, fighters, and lovers. These are typical and frequent narrative episodes and depicted motives. The following scene depicted in BLMSS Jav 68, ff. 11v-12r tells of Dewakusuma - the future father of Panji - and his retinue sailing to the Island of the King of Keling to fight an epidemy (*wabah*).

[BL: MSS Jav 68, ff. 11v-12r]

Later in the storyline, Panji and Sekartaji are confronted with obstacles and challenges. Panji is attacked by King Jayalalana and is successfully fighting him.

[BL: MSS Jav 68, ff. 100v-101r]

After having passed many adventures, Panji and Sekartaji are eventually reunited and live happily ever after.

[PerpusNas: MSS KBG 139, p. 730-731]

Through digital access and through photographies, easy comparison of motives could be carried out, by putting them next to each other on the computer screen.

1. Sailing ships:

[BL: MSS Jav 68, ff. 11v-12r]

[PerpusNas: MSS KBG 139, p. 503-504

A detailed look at the illustrations shows the Dutch flags. The BL illustration has an indigenous boat on the left and a Dutch ship on the right side, while the PerpusNas illustration has the vice versa arrangement.

2. Fighting scenes:

[BL: MSS Jav 68, ff. 100v-101r]

Panji successfully fights King Jayalalana who wishes to marry Sekartaji: on the left side Jayalalana is still alive, on the right side he has been killed.

[Berlin: Schoemann 5IIa -99r]

Panji (right) is fighting King Jayalengkara (left) from Bali, who in fact is Sekartaji in disguise.

Both illustrations have a lot in common: The vehicles of the heroes - elephant of the king, horse of the prince; spears; iconographic details of the figures;

the *wayang* style of the figures; the dramatic situation.

3. Lovers:

[Berlin: Schoemann 5IIa -6v] [PerpusNas: MSS KBG 139, p. 730-731]

The illustrations show Panji and Surengrono (his second wife) to the left, and Panji and Condrokirono to the right, in embrace. Again, the style of the figures is the wayang shape; however, the environment is rather naturalistic with realistic architectural forms.

All of the three motives have in common: The illustrators combined both, the wayang style of the figures and the naturalistic features such as ships, animals, architecture. The artists had the opportunity to apply their own creativity. It seems that there was even an influence of European paintings, such as the sailing ships which are common in 17th century Dutch paintings. The figures are, however, not completely depicted in wayang style: in some cases the upper body has the typical wayang iconography, but the lower

part has a natural posture, such as in MSS KBG 139, p. 730-731.

Material access versus digital access:

At British library in London, the researcher can touch the manuscript and feel the materiality of the paper and see the lines of the writings and the drawings and the complexity of colors. In this way, he/she may have a sensual and emotional experience of the "aura" of the object.

British Library London, Manuscript of *Panji Angreni* MSS 17

In former times, photographs were also available in print publications. To look at details, you had to make use of a magnifier. Today it is very easy to zoom into the digitized photos on the screen.

Print publications: *Serat Panji Jayakusuma*, Schoemann 5 II, Staatsbibliothek Berlin

[Wieringa, Edwin & Thoralf Hanstein (eds.) (2015): *Schrift Sprache – Aksara dan bahasa. Ausstellungskatalog: Indonesische Handschriften der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Katalog: Pameran naskah Indonesia di Perpustakaan Nasional Jerman.* Berlin: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin / Jakarta: Museum Nasional Indonesia.]

In addition, comparison can also be conducted between depictions of Panji stories in other media, such as *wayang gedhog* and temple reliefs, referring to iconographic and stylistic features and distinctive motives.

Digitized publication: *Serat Panji Jayakusuma*, Schoemann 5 II, Staatsbibliothek Berlin. (zoom in) *http://orient-digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/search_form_islamhs_simple.xed*

Panji figure: Wayang Gedhog, Ki Supono, Bantul

(photograph by the author)

Using more than only one computer screen, enables multi-detailed simultaneous research in a good quality and quantity.

[BL: MSS Jav 68, ff. 23v-24r]

The comparison of the iconographic details such as the hairdo, the slender body, the long arms, the legs, the kris and others clearly mark the wayang style.

The motive of a loving couple longing for each other is a favorite topic in both illustrations and narrative temple reliefs. In particular, the body of Sekartaji/Candrakirana in a bent posture indicates her sad and longing mood, as seen in the following pictures from MSS Jav 68 and from the temple reliefs at Candi Panataran.

[BL: MSS Jav 68, 37v / 40r]

Candi Panataran, East Java, 14th to 15th centuries, scene of a relief depicting a Panji story (photo by the author)

Also, the motive of the union of the couple has striking similarities in the different media of manuscript illustrations and narrative relief depictions. Panji takes his beloved on his lap, as shown below.

[PerpusNas: MSS KBG 139, p. 731]   Candi Panataran 14th to 15th centuries

In both ways of approaches - the digital as well as the synchronous way - the person who looks at the images may experience the beauty as it was intended by the illustrators/painters/carvers. While the direct approach - seeing, touching, feeling - would certainly enhance the sensual and emotional experience, it is important to notice that digital media make it possible to conduct research and - to some extent - also may experience beauty and rapture.

CONCLUSION

Increase of digitization since the millennium makes people able to conduct research and share ideas in times of Covid-19 and during ongoing restrictions. Digitized materials allow easier access to enjoy the beauty of objects on screens instead of going somewhere.

The comparative study of three manuscripts of the *Panji Jayakusuma* tale and a selection of their illustrations gives an example of the pluses and lacks of using digitized materials as objects of research. The research findings indicate that digitized materials provided by libraries and archives, allow easy comparison, in this case of selected favorite motives in the illustrations covering ships, fighters, and lovers. A broader and more comprehensive comparative study can be easily conducted in the future. The access to digital media is crucial for research during covid-19 pandemic era and furtheron.

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