

Herbaceous Plant as Malay Carver's Motif Inspiration

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ABSTRACT

This article discussed on type of plants of herb origin that has become motif inspiration for Malay carver. This research gave special attention on motif of teratai, bakawali and bayam peraksi highlighted on decorations of gunungan (cosmic mountain) mihrab (niche) and mimbar (pulpit) in Tanah Melayu (Malaya). The subject of the research focused on gunungan mihrab of Masjid Jamek Batu Uban (1734) and Masjid Kampung Tuan (1830) as well as gunungan mimbar Masjid Kampung Laut (circa 1700), Masjid Tengker (1728) and Masjid Kampung Bukit Bayas (1827/1828). Diversity of identified stylized motif has not only highlight the exquisite decoration but indirectly uncover the secret of herbaceous plant in Malay World which possessed certain benefits. Aforementioned reflects the intimacy between Malay carver and nature and their wisdom in exemplify the motif that has becomes their sources of inspiration. In identifying the type of herbaceous plant, decoration on studied gunungan panel on mihrab and mimbar has been interpreted into digital painting by using Adobe Illustrator software application. The exploration on the research subject's motif that highlighted in this paper hopefully will lead to new discovery that able to contribute to acquisition in the context of medical study parallel with the effort to build national education across various discipline of study.

Keywords: Herbs; Malay Carver; Teratai; Bakawali; Bayam Peraksi; Gunungan; Mihrab; Mimbar

INTRODUCTION

There are abundance of beautiful plants with variety of shape and colours in the Malay World. Plants element becomes sources of inspiration in interpreting ideas. Such was because, motifs that has been interpreted by old Malay carver was the results of an observation towards real plants in real world. Plants such as petal or flower bud, fruit and real leaf was exemplified and help the emergence of various kind of stylized motif in accordance to the carver's vision.

Malay classical text has expressed the abundance of plant in Malay world. For example, numbers of flower's name in Malay world was documented in the text of Bustanus-Salatin Chapter II, Clause 13 (1966: 51-52) as follows:

Ada pun bumi taman itu ditambaknya daripada tanah kawi, dan ditanami sarwa bagai jenis bunga-bunga, [daripada bunga-bunga]. daripada bunga ayer mawar putih, dan bunga chempaka, dan bunga kenanga, dan bunga melor, dan bunga pekan, dan bunga seberat, dan bunga kembang sa-tahun dan bunga serenggini, dan bunga delima wanta, dan bunga panchawarna, dan bunga seri gading, dan bunga metia tabor, dan lawa-lawa, dan bunga sembewarna, dan bunga pachar galoh, dan bunga angrek bulan, dan bunga angrek sembewarna, dan bunga tanjong merah, dan bunga tanjong putih, dan bunga tanjong biru, dan bunga kepadih, dan bunga jengkelenir, dan bunga asad, dan bunga chempaka, dan bunga China, dan bunga perkula, dan bunga gandasuli, dan bunga seganda, dan bunga kelapa, dan bunga serunai, dan bunga raya merah, dan bunga raya putih, dan bunga pandan, dan bunga warsiki, dan bunga kemuning, dan bunga sena, dan bunga telang putih, dan bunga telang biru, dan bunga buloh gading, dan bunga kesumba, dan bunga Maderas pada Jeram Tangisan Naga.

HERBACEOUS PLANT AS MOTIF INSPIRATION

Nature are sources of inspiration for the Malay carver. Various type of plants was stylized in interpreting design on decorations. Interestingly, the chosen motif was from group of herbaceous plant that carries benefit in the field of Malay medicine. Such reflects the intimacy between the carver and the nature as well as their wisdom in identifying type of plants in their surroundings. This is inconformity with the opinion of Zakaria Ali (1989) that is: "*Pertalian yang wujud antara seniman dengan alam ini telah melatih seniman menjadi pemerhati yang tajam. Dia menghormati pembentukan daun, bunga dan ranting. Ukiran itu adalah semacam satu pernyataan tampakan untuk menyuarakan rasa terima kasih, hormat dan kagum.*"

The exquisite decoration based on plants can be found in every aspect of Malay culture. Its presence can be seen among other on textile's design, jewelries, weaponry and architecture. In this context, Syed Ahmad Jamal (1992) emphasize that, "*Kebudayaan Melayu tradisi tidak menegaskan perbezaan di antara barang seni dan barang gunaan. Hasil manifestasi seni terdapat di mana-mana termasuk pada barang-barang kegunaan harian, bahagian bangunan atau senjata.*" Infact, the decoration aspect was also discovered in writing tradition of Malay World. For example in the text of Bustanus Salatin by Nuruddin ar-Raniri, it illustrated about the exquisiteness of decoration in *mimbar* making during the reign of Sultan Iskandar Thani in Aceh as follows:

Dan ada dalam taman itu sa-buah masjid terlalu elok perbuatan-nya, bergelar 'Ishki Mushahadah, dan kemunchak-nya daripada mulamma' emas. Dan ada-lah dalam masjid itu suatu mimbar batu berukir lagi berchat sangga rupa dan runгкаu pancha warna, terlalu indah perbuatan-nya

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This research was aimed to:

1. Highlight the types of herbaceous plants as Malay carver's motif inspiration.
2. Illustrate the motifs of *teratai*, *bakawali*, and *bayam peraksi* that are picked out in old *mihrab* and *mimbar*.
3. Relate the sources of motif for Malay carvers with the herbaceous plants research that reflects local wisdom.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is hard to require the specific references for carving motif based on herbaceous plants. Besides, previous literature focused on the function and design of *mihrab* and *mimbar*. The book entitled *Spirit of Wood: The Art of Malay Woodcarving* by Farish A. Noor and Eddin Khoo (2003) presents the design sketches of old *mimbar*. Syamsiyah and Nur Rahmawati (2007) in a paper entitled *Transformasi Fungsi Mihrab dalam Arsitektur Masjid (Studi Kasus: Masjid-Masjid Jami' di Surakarta)* studied the extent of conflict and transformation of the function of *mihrab* in mosques so that the appropriateness towards Islamic laws could be identified. Also, a study of *Bentuk-Bentuk Mimbar dan Mihrab yang Terdapat di dalam Rekabentuk Masjid di Selangor dan Kuala Lumpur* by Abdul Aziz Burok (1991) and a study by Azizul Azli Ahmad, Nurajwani Abd Halim and Muhammad Suhaimi (2007) entitled *Pengaruh Budaya dalam Rekabentuk Mimbar Masjid Melaka yang Dibangunkan Sebelum Kemerdekaan* highlighted the *mimbar* of Masjid Kampung Hulu, Masjid Kampung Kling and Masjid Tengker.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study was field-work oriented. The samples consisted of the carving panel on the *gunungan mihrab* of Masjid Jamek Batu Uban (1734), *gunungan mihrab* of Masjid Kampung Tuan (1830), *gunungan mimbar* of Masjid Kampung Laut (Circa 1700), *gunungan mimbar* of Masjid Tengker (1728) and *gunungan mimbar* of Masjid Kampung Bukit Bayas (1827/1828). The photos of *gunungan* panel on the *mihrab* and *mimbar* were taken using a camera Canon EOS 400D. All the images were digitally visualized using Adobe Illustrator to identify the motif.

RESEARCH FINDING

On the basis of the study on two *gunungan* panels of *mihrab* and three *gunungan* panels of *mimbar*, the motifs of *teratai*, *bakawali* and *bayam peraksi* inspired the Malay carvers. The stylization of the motifs not only highlighted its beauty, but also revealed the secret of its use. The chosen motifs were beneficial for remedies of certain diseases and illnesses. Normally, the knowledge of the function of herbaceous plants is verbally passed down from one generation to another.



Photo 1: *Gunungan Mihrab* of Masjid Jamek Batu Uban (1734)

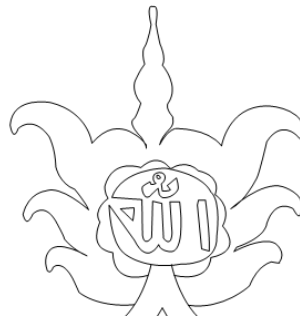


Diagram 1: Skecth of *Motif Bunga Bakawali*



Photo 2: *Gunungan Mihrab* of Masjid Kampung Tuan (1830)

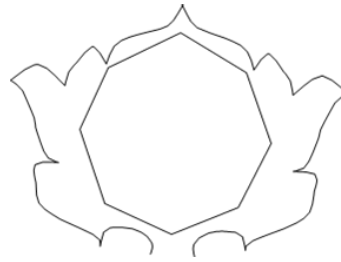


Diagram 2: Skeetch of *Motif Bunga Teratai*



Diagram 3: Skeetch of *Motif Daun Bayam Peraksi*



Photo 3: *Gunungan Mimbar* of Masjid Kampung Laut (Circa 1700)

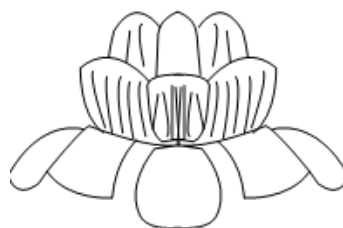


Diagram 4: Skeetch of *Motif Bunga Teratai*



Photo 4: Gunung Mimbar of Masjid Tengker (1728)



Diagram 5: Skecth of Motif Bunga Bakawali



Diagram 6: Skecth of Motif Daun Bakawali



Photo 5: *Gunungan Mimbar* of Masjid Kampung Bukit Bayas (1827)



Diagram 7: Skecth of *Motif Daun Bayam Peraksi*

DISCUSSION

This study is needed as an effort to record the findings scientifically to ensure the medical quality of the herbaceous plants in terms of safety and efficacy. This study is worthy to be documented systematically because this country is blessed with various medicinal plants that is categorized as potential herbal plants.

Table 1: **Herbaceous Plants with its Benefits**

No	Local Name	Scientific Name	Benefits
1	<i>Teratai</i>	<i>Nelumbo Nucifera</i>	Flower, seed, fruit and root have multiple benefits - it is believed to cure heart problems, high blood pressure, stop bleeding, improve stamina and refine skin texture.
2	<i>Bakawali</i>	<i>Apiphyllum Anguliger</i>	The liquid from boiled roots is believed to cure diabetes and lower the blood sugar level.
3	<i>Bayam Peraksi</i>	<i>Emilia Sonchifolia</i>	The liquid from grinding and filtering the whole plant including its root can be taken orally for it is believed to treat dengue fever and improve the blood platelet count.

SUMMARY

Based on the exploration against two *gunungan* on *mihrab* and three *gunungan* on *mimbar*, motif of *teratai*, *bakawali* and *bayam peraksi* was found on decoration of research's subject. These motif has been interpreted by old Malay carver based on their observation toward plants in their surrounding with antidote capability. In conclusion, this study is meaningful and useful as reference material for researcher who conducted research on the field of wood carving art decoration which relates to Malay medicine study. The research finding is significant to be highlighted based on the following justification:

1) Cross Disciplinary Study

Research through cross disciplinary study is hopefully will added to written text of cultural treasury that give absolute focus on herb's based plant motif. As such, research towards highlighted type of herbs can be studied scientifically to identify its sources of benefits by future researcher.

2) Evolution of Material and Content

This paper will contribute towards evolution of material and content in decoration's context by focusing on plant motif in Malay carving art. Stylized motif inspired from highlighted herbaceous plant also contribute towards acquisition of new knowledge cutting through multiple disciplinary study.

3) Preserving Decoration of Wood Carving Art of the Malay Carver

Hopefully this research will preserve the art of carving especially decoration of *gunungan* on *mihrab* and *mimbar* as part of the effort to explore and uncover the secret of cultural treasury in Malay World. Hence, this research is seen as continuous effort to preserve the decoration in wood carving art of the Malay carver.

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