

# Cultural Environment and Natural Environment as Inspiration for Making Batik Motifs

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**Abstract.** Demak was the former capital of the first Islamic Kingdom in Java in the 16th century. Nevertheless, the development of Demak Batik is very dark, because Demak is not a city of batik producers for trade. The last information related to Demak Batik was found at the end of the 20th century in Wedung Village. Demak Batik experienced suspended animation and only reappeared around the beginning of the 21st century. At this time several batik artisans emerged who made batik products based on the motifs of the cultural environment and the natural environment. The motifs applied to batik products that use cultural and natural motifs show that the craftsmen have concern for the cultural and natural conditions of Demak. Users of these natural and cultural motifs symbolically show the craftsman's concern for the preservation of the land, sea, and cultural environment found in Demak.

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## 1 Introduction

Demak is not an area that is the main center of batik-making in Java [1]. Historically, the existence of Demak batik was influenced by the palace culture, because Demak was once the capital of the first Islamic Kingdom in Java and later became part of the Islamic Mataram Kingdom [2]. However, traces of Demak Batik's relics are difficult to trace. Some information related to Demak Batik that is known is Peranakan Chinese batik production in Wedung Village [3,4]. After the last batik in Wedung Village died, Demak Batik experienced suspended animation and began to develop at the beginning of the 21st century marked by the emergence of several batik craftsmen in Demak [4].

In making batik products, the artisans have an awareness of the environment [4]. From the aspect of motives, craftsmen's concern for the environment is reflected through the application of various motifs derived from the cultural environment and the natural environment. Batik products related to the cultural environment reflect the knowledge of batik makers about the history and culture of Demak. The Demak Batik motifs related to the natural environment reflect nature on land and in the sea in accordance with the geographical location of Demak as a coastal area and agricultural area [5]. Thus, batik motifs that take the cultural environment and natural environment as inspiration are a reflection of the craftsmen's concern for the preservation of the natural environment and cultural environment in Demak.

## 2 Method

The writing data used in this study were observations, interviews, and literature reviews both online and library visits [6]. Information related to batik motifs that apply cultural elements and natural elements is carried out through direct observation of the field to see the object of the batik product under study [7]. Observation aims to obtain a more complete picture of batik motifs, their philosophical foundations, and the conditions underlying the emergence of these motifs [8]. In this process, in-depth interviews were also conducted with batik artisans to find out the philosophy of each batik motif with natural and cultural elements [9]. This process of collecting sources combines primary and secondary sources [10]. Primary sources are obtained from observations, searches of government or individual archives, and interviews with batik artisans. The results of the interview showed that the motifs applied to batik products have philosophical meanings. Secondary sources are obtained from relevant writings such as books, journal articles, and other literature. Secondary sources are obtained from libraries, private collections, and the

Internet. The available sources are then criticized and interpreted. The results of the above analysis are then connected and reconstructed into an article about "Cultural environment and Natural environment as inspiration for making batik motifs"

### 3 Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Tracing the Footsteps of Demak Batik

Information related to Demak Batik is very vague. This can be understood because Demak was once the center of government in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, then in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, its position shifted to become a vassal area of the Islamic Mataram Kingdom [13]. Because it is not the center of batik making [1], this situation causes the habit of making batik to decline. Demak Batik is traced based on information stating that Demak Batik was produced by Peranakan Chinese [3, 11, 12] in Wedung Village until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century [4, 11]. The motif of Demak Batik produced by Peranakan Chinese is very complicated. Most of the motifs are flowers with a full background. Birds, butterflies, and small animals are also found in the Peranakan batik. Although it is a coastal batik, Demak Batik is different from Pekalongan Batik. The colors used in Demak Batik tend to be soft [11]. The following examples of Peranakan Demak Batik motifs illustrate flora and fauna obtained from several sources [11, 12].



**Figure 1.** Batik Demak Peranakan Motif Flora (a,b) and Fauna (c,d)  
(Source: 10)

The typical motif of Demak Batik told by the descendants of the last batik in Wedung is the scale motif [4]. This motif is a distinctive motif that reminds us that Demak is a coastal area [5]. The following is an example of the Demak Batik scale motif reproduced by Mrs. Dwi Marfiana.



**Figure 2.** Demak Scales Batik Motifs (Source: Researcher Documentation, 2022)

After experiencing suspended animation, batik-making activities began to appear at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century which was pioneered by Ibu Dewi Marlina. She developed batik with various motifs and collaborated with motifs in Demak such as plants, marine life, and Demak icons based on culture. To develop a Demak batik, Mrs. Dewi Marlina helped several Demak Regency Local Government agencies to train batik craftsmen [4].

### 3.2 Current Demak Batik Products

Motifs are the foundation or principal of a pattern because after being assembled and spread repeatedly, a pattern will form. Motifs are the main element of an ornament. These main themes or ideas can be recognized through motifs that are compositions of natural designs or as representations of nature that are visible, imaginary, abstract, and others. One way to make motifs first is stylization, namely drawing motifs by styling the shape of objects. Second, distortion is the depiction of motives by exaggerating the shape of objects. Third, transformation is drawing motifs by moving other elements from an object to the object drawn. Fourth, deformation is the depiction of motifs by taking only certain elements from an object that is considered to represent character [14].

In batik, a motif is a combination of all images or paintings that adorn a piece of batik cloth. Motifs are also called patterns or patterns. Because it covers the entire decoration, the motif becomes the name of the batik cloth. For example, the *Sidomukti* motif, the *Semen Gurda* motif, and so on [15]. Batik motifs have characteristics that distinguish them from other traditional motifs by utilizing isen-isen or filling patterns [16]. Based on the influence of the environment, there is the influence of the cultural environment and the natural environment.

### Motives of Cultural Environmental Influence

The cultural environment is a form of adaptation of the community of a common residential area to its environment. Therefore, a cultural environment consists of elements of the environment as a living space where community activities are carried out; the population of a society; and

community activities and works. The cultural environment also includes past, present, and future cultures [17]. Thus the culture referred to here includes history, legends, community beliefs, community customs, and historical heritage buildings.

Demak is an old city, the former capital of the first Islamic Kingdom in Java [18]. Therefore, the cultural development of Demak City cannot be separated from the history of the Demak Kingdom. Icons associated with Demak as an old city can be shown by the existence of kuna buildings that still exist today such as the Great Mosque of Demak, Sunan Kalijaga Cemetery Complex [19], and Poo An Bio Temple [20]. Based on old buildings as Demak markers, the creation of batik motifs emerged from Demak batik makers. The following is an example of Demak Batik motifs created by batik makers inspired by the iconic old buildings of Demak City.



**Figure 3.** Cultural Environment and Creation of Demak Batik Motifs  
(Source: 19, 21, 22, 23)

### **Motives for the Influence of the Natural Environment**

Batik as an art and cultural product can be a medium of delivering messages. Through batik motifs with natural nuances, we can convey messages about the importance of preserving the environment so that nature remains sustainable. Demak batik craftsmen try to give symbolic messages about environmental conservation efforts through the design media of batik motifs. Some batik motif designs with the natural

environment can be classified as animal motifs, plant motifs, and natural motifs. Here is an example of Demak Batik inspired by animal, plant, and natural motifs.



Motif Ulam Segaran



Motif Sisik



Motif Sapit Urang



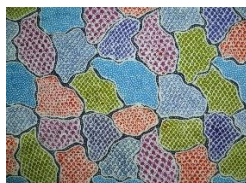
Motif Semangka Tegalan



Motif Parang Miring



Motif Belimbing Mlatiharjan



Motif Koral



Motif Karangmlati



Motif Kerang

**Figure 4.** Examples of Animal Motives, Plant Motives, and Natural Motives On Batik Demak (Source: 21, 23, 24, 25, 26)

#### 4 Conclusion

Demak Batik experiences dynamics in line with the history of the journey of Demak City. After the move of the center of government of the Islamic Kingdom to the hinterland, the existence of Demak Batik experienced a sharp decline. For some time it developed precisely Peranakan batik until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After Peranakan Batik receded, batik-making activities began to fade and only appeared at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The emergence of Demak Batik is suspected by the intervention of the Demak Regional Government which needs to revive the culture of making cloth ornamental motifs by batik making. The batik motifs that developed in Demak are motifs based on the cultural environment and the natural environment (land and sea). The use of

natural batik motifs contains symbolic meanings of artisans' concern for the preservation of the cultural environment and the natural environment. Through these natural motifs, the message conveyed is the importance of cultural and natural preservation efforts for the people of Demak.

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