Pegan Scripts: Tangible Identity of Islamic-Javanese

I. Introduction

15th-16th centuries were determining periods in Javanese political history as considered as the transitional period from Majapahit era with its Buddhism to a new Islamic Mataram era (Moertono, 1983: xii). During this period, the political realm in various Javanese central authorities stretched out from Banten to Blambangan has advanced. There was a shift in religious outlook as well, the Hindu-Buddha adherent have converted to become Moslem after Islam was introduced at that time.

As a new religion, Islam did not only cover the religious concepts but also its culture product which was Arabic scripts. The penetration of Islam had brought another impact and produced a new civilization which is by de Graaf and Pigeaud (1974: 3) called as Islamic-Javanese civilization. It is in the beginning of the growth of this new civilization that mosque in Islamic community appeared as the symbol of congregation’s unity (de Graaf, 1989: 6-27). Besides, Islamic center such as ‘pondok’ and ‘pesantren’ were given birth and functioned as Islamic teaching spots1 which later on became the birthplace for Islamic texts and Islamic-Javanese literature, also known as ‘sastra Pesantren’ in Poerbatjaraka terminology (Poerbatjaraka, 1959: 75).

From tales of holy man such as the nine wali’s who spread Islam in Java and Javanese manuscripts we could find that the important group who played significant role in spreading Islam was the Moslem-middle

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1 In “Java in the 14th Century” Pigeaud (1963:484) suspected that ‘pondok’ and ‘pesantren’ were originally dormitories and arena used for religion teaching during period before Islam came to Java.
class people. According to de Graaf (198: 26), this group was those Javanese who were merchants and workers in cities and not those who were peasants or noblemen.

When Islam as a religion had become a vital element in Javanese civilization, ‘santri’ in pesantren did not only acquire knowledge of Islam but also Arabic scripts. In the beginning Arabic scripts were only taught for the sake of teaching and understanding Islam but later on the habit of using this script had become common sense among ‘santri’ in writing Islamic texts. ‘Santri’ modified the already acquired Arabic scripts and adapted with Javanese as a mean to write Javanese literature. This modified Arabic-Javanese script known as Pegon (Behrend, 1996: 162). The original purpose of creating Pegon script was related to the mission of spreading Islam so that Javanese who could not understand Arabic were able to comprehend about Islam teaching. Meanwhile, Pegon script had often been utilized for various purposes.

How were these modified Arabic-Javanese scripts like so that they were applicable in writing non-Islamic texts as well? Here is a brief explanation about Pegon script and its benefits in Javanese society.

II. Pegon Script

According to Kromoprawirto (1876:1) Pegon comes from Javanese word ‘pego’ which means ora lumrah anggone ngucapake ‘unusual in pronouncing.’ This is because physically pegan scripts are Arabic but the pronunciation indeed followed the system of Javanese script, ‘hanacaraka’. The number of Pegon letters in the alphabet of Pegon scripts are not 28 as in Arabic scripts but 20 in total. This is similar to
Javanese alphabet ‘hanacaraka’. Therefore the order is similar to Javanese dentawyanjana\(^2\).

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<th>No.</th>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>ga</td>
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<td>18.</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>tha</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>nga</td>
<td>f</td>
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</table>

Only seven of twenty pegon scripts are unrecognizable in Arabic scripts which are ‘ca, pa, dha, nya, ga, tha and nga.’ However five in seven (ca, pa, nya, ga, nga) are present in Jawi scripts (Arabic scripts for Malay’s texts). Hence only two remaining are Pegon authentic scripts which are ‘dha’ and ‘tha’.


\(^3\) In Pegon scripts, ‘alif’ and ‘ha’ letters are considered as identical vowel variant since both do not differentiate the meaning. It’s only functions to ease when writing, for example ‘ha’ letter in the beginning of a word will be written by ‘alif’, ‘hapa’ will be written as ‘apa’ (Nitisastro, 1935: 4)
Besides twenty scripts there are also six vowels: a, i, u, e, and o. Both twenty invented Arabic scripts and six vowels are instruments utilized in writing Javanese texts in Arabic scripts. Nevertheless when applying Pegon scripts, there were disorder due to the ignorance of Arabic scripts writing system. For example ‘wau’ and ‘ra’ scripts could be followed by other script from the left side. Therefore Pigeaud (1967: 26) concluded that Javanese texts written in Arabic scripts had a disorder like impression.

III. The Usage of Pegon Script

It has been said before that the original motive of Pegon scripts creation is for spreading Islam. Nevertheless it had become a tool for ‘santri’ in expressing the emotion so that the scripts were applied in various texts such as religious texts, literature, private and formal letters and other texts such as magic spells and medicines in Primbon texts. Below are the functions of Pegon scripts for writing various texts.

1. Media of writing the religious text

Pegon scripts used for spreading Islam applied diacritical symbols and numbers as in Arabic scripts writing system such as ‘tasdid’ and ‘tanwin’, for example “Allah” would be written as “___”.

There are also Islamic texts written by using Pegon gundhul or gundhil scripts (literally means written without vowel symbols, Arabic: harakat) as often found in Banten texts. According to Pigeaud (1967: 226) though written with Pegon gundhul scripts, Banten people had mastered Islamic idioms thus faced no hardships in writing Pegon gundhul scripts. Some examples of Islamic texts are prayers lessons, Al-
Qur’an translation, praying, Islamic teaching, etc. Below is the example of Islamic teaching, titled *Syair Darmanita*

Bismillahirrahmanirrahiim

*Bismillahi iku kawitan gunem*
*Arab lan Jawa mula ya jinim*
*Dadi panawar maring jahannam*
*Oleh barkate sayyidilanam*

bismillah (in the name of Allah) that is begin of speech
Arabic and Javanese in that’s why to be calm

can also disappear of the curse
(and) got blessing of Sayyidilanam
2. Media of writing the literature text

In writing literature texts the twenty Pegon scripts altogether with six diacritical symbols were wholly utilized whereas diacritical symbols as commonly applied in Islamic texts were only used when referred to Arabic texts. In literature texts Arabic scripts writing disorder is not unusual phenomena.

In various Islamic nuance texts such as Serat Ahmad Muhammad, Serat Anbiya and Serat Yusup as well as historical texts such as Babad Banten and Babad Demak or adventurous story such as Serat Centini and Serat Candrakirana, they were written in ‘tembang macapat’ (Javanese classical poem) or gancaran (prose). Below is the example taken from Serat Jaka Tarub
Pupuh asmarandana
Bismillahirrahmanirrahiiim
Ingsun amiwiti anulis
Ing dina jumuah punika
Anuju pahing mangkin pasarane
Ing wulan sapar punika
Tanggal ping nem belas
Tahun je kang lumaku ba’da ngisa wayahe miwiti nurat

In the name of Allah the most Merciful and Gracious
I started writing
On the day of Friday
On the week of pahing
In Sapar month
The sixteenth
In the year of Je. After Isya, that’s the time I begin to write
3. Media of letters writing

Pegon scripts could also be utilized as communication means such as letters both personal and formal documents. Here is an example
of a personal letter written with Pegon scripts (attachment 3). The letter written by Bagus Ngarpatem on 23rd Ramadhan 1770M.

Sanat hing dinten jumuah pahing kaping tiga likur wulan siyam tahun jimakhir ongko: sewu pitung atus pitung dasa._

I, Bagus Ngarpatem begged to the residence of district chief.

I, as I ask, included a person who had to pay house rent and others in the next Mulud month. In this time, I have not been able to do. So, it is up to you, Sir, I am not going to reject. I signed with seal below.

The date of this letter was Friday pahing, 23th Siyam, year of Jimakir, 1770M.
IV. Closing

Figure 3: The letter of Bagus Ngarpatem
The penetration of Islam in Java has created a new civilization in Javanese culture. Physically similar to Arabic scripts but pronounced as in Javanese, Pegon scripts have not only been a mere mean in Javanese literature treasure but what more important is as the identity of the Islamic-Javanese society.

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