

The Adaptation and Implementation of *Singa Batak* Carving into Latin Letter Typeface

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ABSTRACT

Every region in Indonesia has strong art with its characteristics, one of which is wood carving. Local wisdom in each region saves the uniqueness of its patterns and forms so that carving art in Indonesia becomes rich in identity and valuable cultural expressions. Of the many carving arts, the Batak region is famous for its carving art in the form of a lion, which is often found in the traditional houses of the Batak Toba. The lion carving symbolizes the figure of a generous king. In addition, lion ornaments in the Batak community are also believed to be bad luck repellents, which are thick with magical symbolic values inherited from the ancestors. Unfortunately, along with the times and technology, the art of *Singa Batak* carving is now starting to be forgotten and less recognized, especially by the younger generation. So, this research and design was carried out, as an effort to make local cultural artifacts closer to the current generation, especially in the Batak community and North Sumatra region. The research generally used a qualitative approach, namely visual adaptation. The result is a Latin typeface “*Gorga*”, inspired by the *Singa Batak* carving with the concept of “firm and dynamic”, which has been tested, then implemented on several regional tourism promotional media to preserve Batak culture through modern visual expression. This typeface is expected to be a bridge that perpetuates and preserves the noble values of Batak culture to the current and future generations.

KEYWORDS

Adaptation
Singa Batak Carving
Typeface

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INTRODUCTION

Ornament is an art form that has developed since before people knew writing. Ornaments serve to beautify the surface of certain objects, as well as contain symbolic messages such as moral values, advice, hopes, or ideals of parents for their children. In addition, traditional ornaments often function as symbols for their owners, so they have a significant cultural impact, in addition to their aesthetic aspects (Adeline et al., 2022). Such is the case with the *Singa Batak* carving ornament, which is one of the most important cultural symbols in the tradition of the Batak people, especially the Batak Toba, North Sumatra province. The lion in Batak culture does not refer to a lion as we know it, but a mythological creature believed to have magical and protective powers. *Singa Bataks* are usually carved in the form of wood carvings and can be found on the architectural elements of traditional Batak houses, especially on the roof and columns of the house (Purba et al., 2023).



Figure 1. Some Examples of *Singa Batak* Carvings.

The symbolic meaning of the *Singa Batak* is closely related to the Batak belief system mixed with elements of animism and dynamism, which is depicted with an authoritative human face, signifying the strength and authority of the ancestors who protect the Batak people. In traditional carvings, the Lion is also often associated with ancestral spirits that guard the house or village so that it is protected from danger (Pasaribu & Siahaan, 2014). As seen in Figure 1 above, the following are some of the characteristics of the *Singa Batak* carving ornaments: (1) horns emerging from the head that symbolize the tree of life, with a curved horn motif at the end and then straight on the next side; (2) has a round eye shape (as if glaring) in each carving; (3) the main motifs are abstract, geometric and curved; (4) the body shape is a combination of half-animal and half-human; and (5) symmetrical composition between the right-left part when drawn from the vertical axis line (Saleh, 1980).

The traditional ornament of Batak Toba, known as *Gorga*, in the Batak Toba language refers to the art of carving on wood, especially on the walls of the Batak Toba traditional house or *Jabu Batak*. One of the main characteristics of Batak Toba *Gorga* is the use of three main colors, namely red (*sirara*), black (*silintong*), and white (*sihapas*). Red symbolizes courage and physical strength, black symbolizes mystery and magical power, while white symbolizes purity and spiritual balance. *Gorga* often depicts mythological animal motifs in the form of the *Singa Batak*, which is believed to symbolize protective power (Purnomo et al., 2023). This protective function shows that *Gorga* is not just a fine art product, but an integral part of the belief system of the Batak Toba people (Sianipar et al., 2015)

Quoting from Kompasiana, Anggarani Siallagan, who devoted his life to productively producing Batak carving art, regretted that there were almost no successors to preserve Batak carving art, especially in the current generation (Einstein, 2016). Since he migrated until now, the art workers are still the same and no one has introduced them to teenagers. This phenomenon is further strengthened based on the results of the researcher's interview with Manguji Nababan (phone call), who is a lecturer and expert on Batak culture in Medan. According to him, the fading of knowledge about *Singa Batak* ornaments among Batak people, especially the younger generation, is a condition that is quite alarming (Nababan, 2018). So it is necessary to make special efforts to preserve the cultural values of the Batak ancestral heritage while preventing it from extinction. One of the things that causes cultural fading is the lack of opportunities for people to create and appreciate their own culture (Rosidi, 2011). Therefore, efforts are needed to make culture more grounded and closer to people's lives to maintain local wisdom, especially in the scope of North Sumatra society.

The preservation of a cultural artifact can be poured into various media as long as it maintains the value content, meaning, and philosophy of the culture, one of which is through typography. In graphic design, typography is one of the media for expression (Sihombing, 2017). Letters have functional and aesthetic values that convey messages both from the meaning of the words they form and also from the impressions given by their visual form. When examined more deeply, the most

important element of a letter is an ornamental element or decorative ornament that represents a certain culture, so the letter itself also acts as a cultural artifact. Typography is an expression of culture (Haswanto, 2009).

According to Gumpita Rahayu, a type designer from Bandung and founder of “Tokotype” studio, we can utilize Indonesia's rich culture as a source of inspiration in typeface design, by adapting the aesthetic elements of each region (Ivan & Alfian, 2018). Typefaces have become a 'bridge' of cultural preservation, by combining letters and decorative ornaments (Hamdi, 2021). The beauty and visual uniqueness of the archipelago's traditional letters and ornaments provide a creative impetus that can be adapted into new latin letter designs. This opens opportunities to integrate local cultural values into modern typographic design works (Rohiman et al., 2022). Based on this phenomenon, this design was carried out, by adapting the ornamental carving of the *Singa Batak* into a new latin letter design. The goal is to expand the regional nature of the Singa Batak carving so that it can penetrate the national and global scale.

METHOD

In general, this research and design applies a qualitative approach, starting from collecting archives of *Singa Batak* ornaments, and interviewing sources, to literature studies in the form of several related literatures. The Latin letters designed and applied not only function as phonetic symbols, but also play a role in conveying visual messages. Typography, derived from the words “typo” (letter) and “graph” (image), means drawing with letters. The essence of typography is to convert spoken language into printed form so that the verbal aspect becomes visual. Good letterforms must ensure readability and legibility, as Latin letters are designed to be read. Each character in the Latin alphabet represents a certain sound and emotion in typographic form (Haswanto, 2013).

Through the archives of images of the Singa Batak carving that had been collected previously, the designer then conducted a simple adaptation method in the form of visual construction, letter anatomy, and geometric elements contained in the carving. This construction process is an important foundation for pouring the visual ideas adapted from the Singa Batak carving into the basic pattern of Latin letter design. Then in the final stage, the design of functional computer fonts aimed at the wider community, who are familiar with various kinds of media both digital and conventional (Rustan, 2023). The Latin typeface is implemented into several promotional media that will be laid out in such ways for the target audience of the current generation because letters will contain expression when applied to a medium (Rustan, 2020). The following tables show the process of borrowing the *Singa Batak* carving ornaments into uppercase letters that refer to the basic forms of letter design (squares, circles, and triangles). Meanwhile, the lowercase letters are designed based on the similarity between the shape of the ornaments and the lowercase letters.








Bentuk Dasar Huruf	Penggunaan Huruf	Huruf Latin	Huruf Gorga
△		A	A
○		C	C
□		IJ	IJ
○△		OX YZ	OXYZ
□○		BRP GDS	BRPGDS
□		HTE FLZ	HTEFLZ
□△		VW MN	VW MN

Figure 2. The Adaptation Stage of *Singa Batak* Carving Ornament into Uppercase Letter Forms

Penggunaan Huruf	Huruf Latin	Huruf Gorga
	a	aspqbd
	hnmr	hnmr
	oceg	oceg
	kz	kz
	uvw xy	uvwxy
	tf	tf
	ijl	ijl

. **Figure 3.** The Adaptation Stage of *Singa Batak* Carving Ornament into Lowercase Letter Forms

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To maintain the existence and preservation of the noble values of Batak culture and the people of North Sumatra, the designer calls the typeface “*Gorga*”, so that current and future generations are always moved to recognize and remember the cultural heritage of their ancestors. These are the several concepts until the final result of the *Gorga* Latin letters, which are adapted from the *Singa Batak* carving ornament.

1. Tone and Manner: “Firm and Dynamic”

The colors used in *Gorga* letters are dominated by red, white, brown, and black. These are typical Batak colors and can be found in all lion carvings. The typeface design by the character of the *Singa Batak* carving has a geometric and curved shape. It is inspired by the characteristics of the Batak and North Sumatra people who are always active, passionate, and adaptive in all conditions.

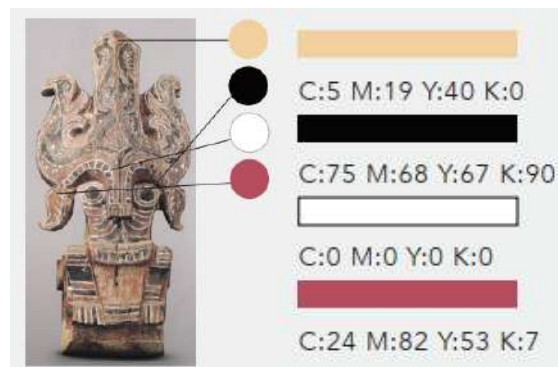


Figure 4. The Determination of Colors that Become Tone and Manner in Media Implementation of *Gorga* Letters

2. Grid dan Letter Construction

The letters b, d, p, and q are designed to have the same bowl curvature for the consistency of design in letters. In letters that have the same construction form, such as the letters H, T, E, F, and L, the anatomical design of the stem and crossbar is deliberately made consistent to maintain the harmony of the letters, as well as other letters.

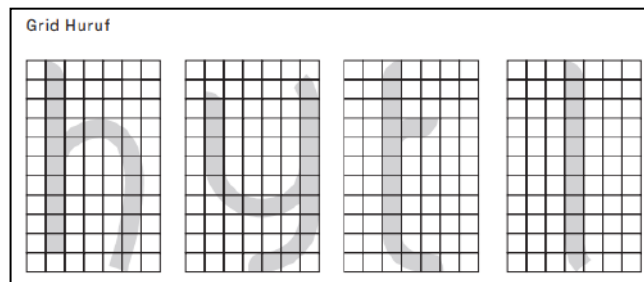


Figure 5. The Example of applying the grid to lowercase letters h, y, t, l

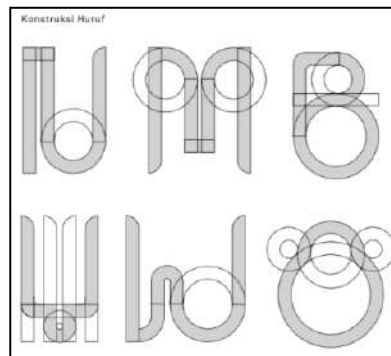


Figure 6. The Example of uppercase letter construction N, M, B, V, W, O

3. The Anatomy of Letters

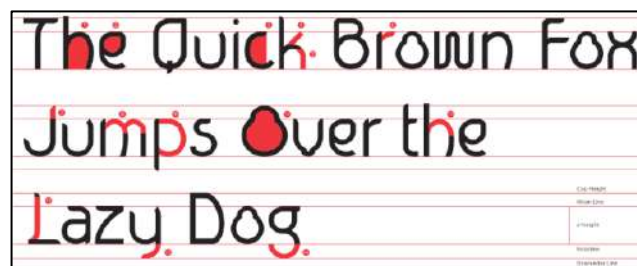


Figure 7. The Anatomy of Letters: (1) Aperture; (2) Eye; (3) Counter-open; (4) Arm; (5) Leg; (6) Terminal; (7) Ascender; (8) Arc; (9) Bowl; (10) Counter-close; (11) Shoulder; (12) Tail; and (13) Descender

4. Lettering Character Set

The letters are designed according to the character of the *Singa Batak* carving which has a firm and dynamic shape. So, the terminals on the letters are slightly curved, followed by a firm stem. Here are some results of the *Gorga* letter “family” set consisting of regular and bold types.

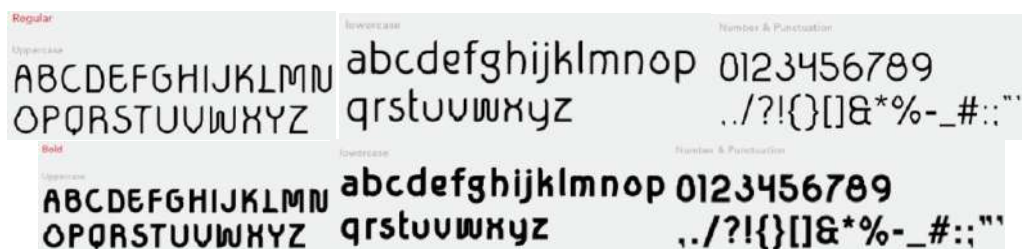


Figure 8. Regular and Bold Type of Gorga Letter Sets

5. Waterfall Test

The waterfall test aims to find out the best size in using letters so that they are still comfortable when read. For designers, this typeface is only suitable for display text (headlines, sub-headlines,

pull-quotes, and the like), not as body text, because it will feel uncomfortable when used for long reading.



Figure 9. Waterfall Test on Regular *Gorga* Letters

6. Character Test

The character test, on the other hand, aims to check the visual appearance of the letters, symbols, and numbers in a font family and ensure that they can be used optimally in various applications, both digital and print. This test is very important in the world of graphic design, typography, and web development, especially to ensure the consistency, readability, and usability of the fonts.

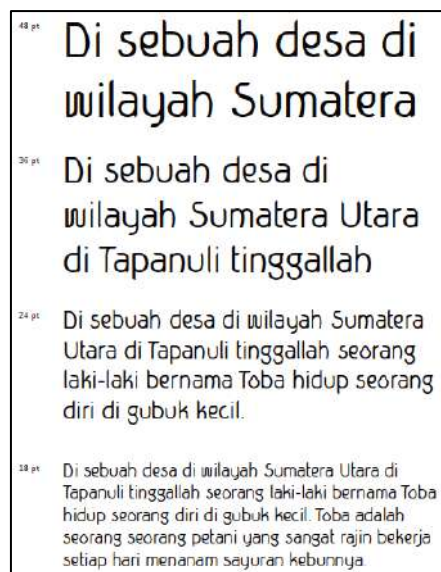


Figure 10. Character Test on Regular *Gorga* Letters

7. Implementation of *Gorga* Typeface

A good font design can be tested on various media, so that it is not limited to concepts alone, but also has applicative function that can be utilized by wider society, especially the younger generation in the North Sumatra region. The following are some media that implement *Gorga* latin letters into their information content, which the designer tries to integrate with the local tourism development program.

a. Tourism Poster

Lake Toba is considered the birthplace of the Batak people. To preserve indigenous traditions and culture, the local government often organizes big festivals. To further emphasize the impression

of local culture, the *Gorga* typeface is implemented on the festival poster as shown below.



Figure 11. *Gorga* Typeface Implementation on Tourism Posters

b. Tote Bag

The development of a simple and practical tote bag design has been accepted by the public, especially the younger generation, as a practical and classy fashion complement to accompany daily activities. Therefore, *Gorga* letters are considered relevant enough to appear on tote bags as an attribute of the contemporary lifestyle that is still inspired by local culture.



Figure 12. *Gorga* Typeface Implementation on Tote Bag

c. Business Card

The application of the *Gorga* typeface on the identity business card of staff/officials of the Medan City Tourism Office is in line with the mission of the Medan City Tourism Office, which is to provide freedom of expression in local cultural arts.



Figure 13. *Gorga* Typeface Implementation on Business Card

d. Sign System at the Batak Museum

Museum Batak is a cultural museum in Silalahi Village, Balige District, Toba Samosir Regency, North Sumatra Province. The designer tries to apply the *Gorga* typeface to several sign systems in the museum to strengthen the visual identity of Batak culture.

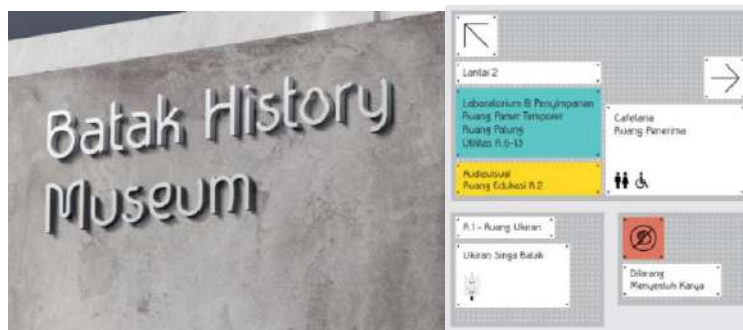


Figure 14. The Implementation of *Gorga* Typeface on Sign System in Batak Museum

CONCLUSIONS

Gorga often takes the form of mythological animals, such as the *Singa Batak* as a symbol of protective power placed in traditional houses to protect the occupants from bad things, calamities, and bring prosperity to the family. One of the innovations to keep the *Singa Batak* carving alive and recognized by the current (and future) generations is designing a Latin font/typeface that adapts the forms of *Gorga* carving motifs. The *Singa Batak* carvings have been adapted into a set of letters (regular and bold) whose anatomy is based on the concept of tone and manner “firm and dynamic”, with geometric-shaped letter construction that has been tested in 'waterfall' and character tests, resulting in the *Gorga* typeface that represents the Batak people who are active, passionate, and adaptive in all conditions. Until then, the *Gorga* typeface has also been implemented in regional tourism promotion media, both digital and conventional, as a form of local culture preservation with a modern and contemporary visual expression.

We realize that this *Gorga* typeface design can still be developed and applied to various other types of media (beyond those designed before). So here are some suggestions that can be utilized by future designers or researchers: 1) *Gorga* Typeface can be used in local branding to strengthen Batak's cultural identity. Logos, product packaging, or signage of MSME businesses such as restaurants, cafes, or souvenir centers can use this font; 2) Implementation in fashion design and accessories such as t-shirts, jackets, or bags, with a target market of the younger generation; 3) User interface design on the official website of the local government office or related applications, which focus on promoting Batak culture and tourism in North Sumatra.

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