CHAPTER 5

The Contents: Texts and Images

In terms of content, Malay magic and divination manuscripts contain texts and images that cover a broad mixture of magical and divinatory techniques. Much has been made about the role of copyists in the Malay literary tradition, who not only copied works but also often made additions and changes to the original text.¹ In the case of manuscripts on magic and divination, this is taken to another level, whereby the copyist appears to have actively selected and compiled texts from a variety of different sources to create a unique work. As a result the manuscripts are idiosyncratic and no two copies are the same, indicating their use as notebooks and aide memoire for a magician. They are therefore highly personalised to their owners, and “would be almost useless, and probably dangerous, for anyone not inducted into its mysteries.”² Thus as noted in Chapter One, it is very difficult to define a ‘typical’ example of a manuscript as they often vary in the focus of their contents. Furthermore there is no set rule for what a manuscript will contain, and thus it may include a variety of topics including those that do not relate to magic and divination.

Nevertheless there are certain topics that occur more often than others, and this chapter will briefly describe those that are the most prominent, though not necessarily the most common, together with a short description of how they function (meanwhile the artistic aspects of the illustrations and diagrams such as iconography, style and illumination will be covered in Chapter Six). Before going into the specific methods and techniques however, this chapter will commence by explaining the relationship between text and image within the manuscripts, as well as discussing some of the issues regarding their sources.

Relationship between Text and Image

In his essay entitled *Tupu lüe 圖譜略* (‘A Brief Account of Illustrated Registers’), the Chinese Song scholar Zheng Qiao 鄭樵 (1104–62) likens the relationship between technical images (*tu* 圖) and text to that of the warp and weft.³ This description is equally appropriate for Malay magic and divination manuscripts where the relationship between text and image is an intimate and complex one. As such it is hard to discuss one without reference to the other, and therefore in this chapter they will be described jointly. Indeed, art historical scholarship in other areas has now moved towards a study of both text and image together in order to look at “the manuscript as a whole”.⁴ This approach gives a more nuanced and balanced analysis of the manuscripts, providing context to the images and texts contained and to their interrelationships, and helping to shed light on the circumstances behind the production of the books.

In the magic and divination manuscripts the images help to enlighten the text, and at the same time the texts also function to inform and explain the illustrations and diagrams. For example, drawings of talismans and effigies are preceded by instructions on how these images should be made and used. Similarly, texts on divination give instructions on how to operate the diagrams and illustrations in order to carry out the divinatory procedures, as well as providing the various prognostications that will result.

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¹ Voorhoeve 1964, pp. 261–266; Proudfoot 1984; Braginsky 2004, pp. 23–24.
² Proudfoot 2002, p. 120.
³ As cited in Bray 2007, p. 2.
⁴ Contadini 2010.
In addition, the images offer a way to summarise textual data. Many Malay divinatory techniques involve multiple elements such as time and space, and therefore the text may be arranged in the form of tables and charts to enable the querent (the person who is asking the question) to locate the relevant prognostication quickly and accurately. This is especially pertinent to certain forms of diagrams such as the compass rose where the pool of information and relationships between the various elements are quite complex. Additionally, drawings of figural beings also often contain textual elements such as letters, numbers and words, usually functioning either to label parts of an illustration (such as in the case of the Rotating Nāga) or for esoteric purposes (like the magical texts used to bind an effigy).

The pictorial fālnāma, which is a form of bibliomancy involving an illustrated book, provides a very clear relationship between text and image. For instance in one version of this divinatory technique known as Faal Nursi (‘Divination of Nursi’), the text of one of the auguries says, “Maka adalah orang seperti ini iaitu gambar perahu (karam) di tengah lautan” (“The querent will be like this, i.e. the picture of a boat (that is sinking) in the middle of the sea”), and accordingly the image on the opposite page depicts a boat (Figure 53).

The connection between text and image may also be shown graphically. Occasionally an image is linked to the text via a line of dots, such as in the Nik Mohamed manuscript (Kelantan or Patani, between 1838–87; cat. 23; Figure 54), which in Bali is known as semut sadulur (‘a row of ants’). Another method is to label both the image and text with a specific symbol. For example in PNM MS 2920 (Malay peninsula, early twentieth century; cat. 72), the text and image on the making of a human effigy are actually on two separate pages, but they are linked by the Arabic numeral which is written at the end of the text as well as above the image (Figure 55). The numeral is also

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5 PNM MS 1596 (Patani or Kelantan, 1871–72; cat. 38), fol. 3v. Note that the text for this augury in IAMM 1998.1.548 (Malay peninsula, second half of the nineteenth century; cat. 17), p. 18 does not refer to its accompanying illustration.