

Kutika as a System of Signs: A Barthesian Semiotic Study in Bugis Culture from an Islamic Communication Perspective

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Abstract

This study examines Kutika Ugi' Sakke Rupa as a system of signs within Bugis culture by applying Roland Barthes' semiotic framework of denotation, connotation, and myth. Using a qualitative method, this research is conducted as cultural text analysis based on library research, with the kutika manuscript written in Lontara script as the primary data. The findings show that, at the denotative level, kutika functions as a practical guide for determining auspicious and inauspicious times; at the connotative level, it reflects Bugis cosmological values emphasizing prudence and harmony with nature; and at the level of myth, it reinforces Bugis spiritual identity. This study contributes to existing scholarship by demonstrating that kutika operates not merely as a traditional calendar but as a cultural sign system that can be understood from the perspective of Islamic communication as a form of 'urf ṣaḥīḥ, as long as it is not believed to determine destiny absolutely.

Keywords: *Kutika; Barthesian Semiotics; Bugis Culture; Myth; Islamic Communication.*

INTRODUCTION

Kutika is one of the traditional knowledge systems of the Buginese people that has been passed down through generations through manuscripts written in Lontara script. Historically, kutika has been used as a cultural guide to determine auspicious and inauspicious times for major life activities such as marriage, house construction, farming, and sailing (Syahrawati, 2022). The kutika system contains distinctive tables and symbolic signs, including + (tuwo, life), ♀ (uju', death), = (tiang bola, balance), O (lobbang, emptiness), and ■ (mallise', blessing). These symbols function not merely as practical indicators of time but also reflect Buginese cultural values and philosophical principles, particularly the emphasis on caution, balance, and harmony with nature (Rahmatia & Christomy, 2020).

This research uses primary data in the form of a traditional manuscript, Kutika Ugi' Sakke Rupa, which represents the practice of kutika within Buginese culture. The manuscript is analyzed as a cultural text through Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, which interprets meaning at three interconnected levels: denotation, connotation, and myth (Mulyazir and Fadhillah, 2023). At the denotative level, kutika appears as a practical table used to determine favorable and unfavorable times. At the connotative level, it reflects the Buginese worldview concerning cosmic order and

the importance of living in harmony with natural and social environments. At the mythic level, kutika reinforces Buginese cultural identity and contains mystical or Sufi elements that shape collective beliefs and spiritual understanding (Rahmatia & Christomy, 2020).

When examined from an Islamic perspective, belief in the absolute power of certain times or symbols to determine fortune or misfortune is classified as tathayyur (superstitious omen). Such beliefs are criticized in Islamic teachings, as stated in the Qur'an (QS. Al-A'raf [7]:131; QS. An-Naml [27]:47; QS. Yasin [36]:18–19) and in the Hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari, which states: "There is no transmission of disease without the permission of Allah, no tathayyur (feeling unlucky because of a sign), no hammah (pre-Islamic belief in reincarnation), and no belief that the month of Shafar brings bad luck. However, avoid those afflicted with leprosy as you would avoid a lion" (Al-Bukhari, 2012, vol. 7). These sources emphasize the centrality of tawḥīd and reject fatalistic interpretations that attribute destiny to symbols or temporal signs.

Nevertheless, Islam also recognizes 'urf (custom) as a legitimate form of local tradition, provided that it does not contradict Sharia principles or lead to fatalistic beliefs. Within this framework, kutika may be understood as 'urf ṣaḥīḥ (sound custom), as long as it is not believed to determine destiny absolutely but functions as cultural guidance rooted in communal experience (Harisudin, 2016). In this sense, kutika can be interpreted not as a form of superstition, but as a communicative cultural system that negotiates meaning between tradition and religious values.

Based on this background, this study aims to examine kutika as a system of signs within Buginese culture and to situate its meanings within the framework of Islamic communication. Specifically, this research seeks to analyze how the denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings of kutika operate as a form of cultural communication, enabling the preservation of local cultural values without compromising the fundamental principles of tawḥīd.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis to examine Kutika Ugi' Sakke Rupa as a cultural text of the Buginese community. This approach is chosen because the research is interpretive in nature and focuses on uncovering meanings embedded within kutika symbols rather than measuring numerical data. The aim of this method is to explore the multiple layers of meaning contained in the symbols and to understand how kutika represents the worldview, cosmology, and spiritual values of the Buginese people within the framework of Islamic communication.

The primary data of this study consist of the traditional Buginese manuscript Kutika Ugi' Sakke Rupa, written in Lontara script, which includes tables and symbols used to determine auspicious and inauspicious times for various important activities such as marriage, farming, and

house construction. The secondary data are drawn from relevant scholarly works, such as those by Rahmatia and Christomy (2020), Syahrawati (2022), and Harisudin (2016), which discuss semiotics, Buginese culture, and Islamic law. Data were collected through documentation and library research by reading, taking notes, and selecting essential parts from both the manuscript and supporting literature related to kutika symbols and meanings.

The data were analyzed through Roland Barthes' three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. The denotative level identifies the literal meanings of kutika symbols as guides for time calculation; the connotative level explores the cultural meanings associated with caution, harmony with nature, and Buginese cosmology; while the mythic level reveals the ideological dimension that makes these cultural values appear natural and collectively accepted (Rahmatia and Maulani, 2021). The results of this semiotic analysis were then interpreted from the perspective of Islamic communication, particularly concerning the concepts of 'urf (custom) and tathayyur (superstitious belief), to assess the extent to which kutika aligns with the principles of Islamic law (Harisudin, 2016). Through this process, the study aims to demonstrate that kutika represents a form of local wisdom that can be understood proportionally as a cultural tradition consistent with the values of tawhīd.

To ensure data validity, this study applies methodological rigor appropriate to qualitative semiotic analysis. Data validity is maintained through consistent application of Roland Barthes' semiotic framework across all stages of analysis, ensuring coherence between denotative, connotative, and mythological interpretations. In addition, all interpretations are grounded directly in the textual structure and symbolic elements of the Kutika Ugi' Sakke Rupa manuscript and supported by relevant scholarly literature to ensure interpretive consistency and theoretical accountability. Through this approach, the validity of the analysis is ensured by transparency, logical coherence, and interpretive reliability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Description of Kutika as Primary Data

Kutika Ugi' Sakke Rupa is one of the traditional Buginese manuscripts written in Lontara script and passed down through generations as a guide for determining auspicious and inauspicious days (Syahrawati, 2022). Kutika functions not only as a practical calendrical system but also as a representation of the Buginese philosophy of caution, respect for nature, and the desire to align human activity with cosmic balance. As a cultural text, kutika remains an important heritage still practiced by some communities today, particularly in traditional ceremonies and major social events.

The term kutika originates from the Sanskrit word *krittika*, which entered the Malay language as *ketika* or *kutika*, meaning "knowledge or divination that does not rely on the zodiac"

(Shaharir, 2016). In the Bugis language, the term has several variants: the Makassarese call it *pitika*, and the Bone Buginese call it *putika*, though in general, it refers to determining good and bad times. The Lontara Kutika is usually compiled based on repeated observations over 50 to 100 years and used dynamically, especially in determining agricultural cycles, war expeditions, and trading voyages (Rahmatia and Maulani, 2021).

Similar to the Buginese, the Malay communities also believe in the concepts of auspicious and inauspicious days and mystical power in forming symbols, rituals, and talismans. This indicates that the concept of kutika is not exclusive to the Buginese but also extends to other regions influenced by Malay and Sanskrit culture, although the application varies according to local social and geographical contexts (Rahmatia and Maulani, 2021).

When Islam entered South Sulawesi in the 17th century, kutika underwent significant transformation. The counting system, which initially relied on day quality, later followed the Islamic Hijri calendar (29–30 days per month), while still retaining the Bugis phonetic system. Even the numbering, which was originally without Arabic numerals, later adopted them. This transformation reflects the integration of Islamic law (*Sara'*) into Bugis life, as expressed in the traditional maxim *pura taro maranang, tepura taro sara'* "a people's decision may change, but not the decision of the Sharia" (Rahmatia and Maulani, 2021).

One of the clearest Islamic influences is the *Kutika Pakkita Ezzo* system, introduced by Syekh Abdul Wahhab al-Bugisi. In this system, a day is divided into five time segments: *élé* (morning), *abbuéng* (mid-morning), *tangngasso* (midday), *loro* (noon), and *assara'* (afternoon) (Hadrawi, 2017).

Table 1.
Kutika Pakkita Ezzo

Time	06.00-08.00	08.00-11.00	11.00-12.00	12.00-15.00	15.00-18.00
Day					
Ahad	=	+	♀	■	○
Itsnaini	○	♀	■	=	+
Tsulatsa	=	○	+	♀	■
Arba'a	+	♀	■	○	=
Khamis	=	○	+	♀	■
Jum'at	○	♀	+	=	■
Sabtu	■	○	=	+	♀

Source: *Sartika* (2023)

Each time segment is assigned symbolic values such as + (*tuwo*, life and prosperity), ♀ (*uju'*, death or misfortune), = (*tiang bola*, balance), O (*lobbang*, emptiness), and ■ (*mallise'*, blessing and social virtue) (Sartika, 2023). These symbols serve as daily guides for determining the most appropriate time to start activities, work, travel, or hold traditional ceremonies.

Figure 1.
Kutika Lima

	Mangolo maniyang alau baca dowa <i>Innā Allāha wa malāikatihī ya salu 'ala nabī</i>	Mangolo u[n]rai maniyang baca dowa Qunud	Mangolo alau manorang baca dowa <i>Qulhuwallāhu aḥad</i>	Mangolo u[n]rai maniyang baca dowa <i>Naṣrun min Allāhi wa fathun qarīb</i>	Manolo manurengi baca dowa <i>Innā a 'ṭaynāka al-kauthar</i>
	Seweni	Duwa[m]peni	Tellu[m]peni	Pata[m]peni	Lima[m]peni
Iyéle	Masuwara	Kala	Siri	Barhama	Bese'nu
Tengessotira	Bese'nu	Masuwara	Kala	Siri	Berhama
Tengesso	Berhama	Bese'nu	Masuwara	Kala	Siri
Loroi	Siri	Barhama	Bese'nu	Masuwara	Kala
Asarai	Kala	Siri	Barhama	Bese'nu	Masuwara
	Raja	Sajata	Laki-laki	Parampuang	Ana'na

Source: Rahmatia and Maulani (2021)

Another variation, known as *Kutika Lima*, integrates Buginese, Sanskrit, and Islamic elements. The Buginese division of time *élé*, *abbuéng*, *tangngasso*, *loro*, and *assara'* is combined with Sanskrit-based quality names that have been localized, such as *Masu wara*, *Kala*, *Sri*, *Brahmana*, and *Bese'nu*. Meanwhile, the Islamic influence appears in the inclusion of prayers and directions to face during travel, which differ across the five days (Rahmatia and Maulani, 2021).

Table 3.
Comparison of month and day names according to the Hijri and Bugis calendars

Name of the Month		Name of the Day	
Islam	Bugis	Islam	Bugis
Muharram	Muharrang	Isnaini	Asénéng
Şafar	Sappara'	Şulāśā	Salasa'
Rabī'ul awwal	Rabbele' awwala'	Arba'ā	Rebba'a
Rabī'ul ākhir	Rabbele' ahéré	Khamis	Kammisi
Jumādal ūlā	Jumadele' awwala'	Jumu'ah	Juma'
Jumādal ākhir	Jumadele' ahéré	Sabtu	Sattu
Rajab	Rajja'	Ahad	Aha'
Sya'bān	Sabang		
Ramadan	Rumallang		
Syawwal	Sawwala'		
Żulqa'idah	Julukaedda		
Żulhijjah	Juluhijja		

Source: Rahmatia and Maulani (2021)

The kutika text also mentions the Hijri months, such as Muharram, Safar, and Rabiul Awal, and classifies them into good (*makessing*) and bad (*nakkase'*) months. There are also time cycles referred to as *nahase tabbékka pitué nasiuleng*, which indicate periods of misfortune, often associated with Muharram believed to have a "hot" element (*esso mapella*) (Sartika, 2023; Hadrawi, 2017). These developments illustrate the process of "Bugisization of Islam", where Islamic principles were absorbed into Buginese culture without eliminating local values. This synthesis produced a unique fusion of Islamic, local, and Sanskrit influences (Rahmatia and Maulani, 2021).

Thus, kutika is not merely a traditional calendar but a cultural text containing cosmological philosophy, Sufi values, and the Buginese identity that has adapted harmoniously with Islamic teachings.

Semiotic Analysis of Kutika Based on Roland Barthes' Theory

1. The Concept of Roland Barthes' Semiotics

Roland Barthes' (1915–1980) is one of the most influential figures in modern semiotics and structuralism. He expanded Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic theory, which many regard as the foundation of semiotic studies (Mulyazir and Fadhillah, 2023). One of Barthes' core ideas is the two-order signification system, which means that every sign can be interpreted on two distinct levels of meaning.

The first level is denotation, referring to the literal or explicit meaning that arises from the direct relationship between the *signifier* and the *signified* (Lustyantie, 2012). Denotation produces meanings that are clear, universal, and generally understood by most people. For example, the symbol "+" is typically recognized as "addition" or "positive" (Fatimah, 2020).

The second level is connotation, which represents the cultural and emotional meanings that emerge through shared experience and social history (Fatimah, 2020). Connotation reflects how symbols gain additional layers of meaning based on the values and beliefs of a particular community. At this level, signs are no longer universal but are interpreted according to the cultural context of a society.

Barthes' further explains that connotation can develop into myth, a system of meaning that naturalizes particular ideologies so they appear normal and unquestionable (Mulyazir and Fadhillah, 2023). Myth is not merely a traditional tale but a form of cultural discourse that hides historical constructions or ideological interests behind signs. Through this process, signs function not only as tools of communication but also as instruments for shaping collective social consciousness.

Using this framework, *Kutika Ugi' Sakke Rupa* is interpreted not merely as a practical text for determining auspicious and inauspicious times but as a cultural text that embodies myths, cosmological views, and inherited values of prudence within Buginese society.

2. Application of Barthes' Theory to the Symbols of Kutika

In the *Kutika Ugi' Sakke Rupa* manuscript, there are five main symbols that represent the qualities of time: + (*tuwo*, life; suitable for starting important tasks), ♀ (*uju'*, death; inauspicious and to be avoided), = (*tiang bola*, balance), O (*lobbang*, emptiness; producing unfruitful results), and ■ (*mallise'*, blessing; good for social activities) (Sartika, 2023). These symbols originate from the collective experiences of the Buginese people and have been transmitted across generations as guidance for everyday life decisions.

At the denotative level, the symbol "+" is universally understood as addition or positivity, while "♀" is commonly associated with the female gender symbol derived from the planet Venus. However, at the connotative level, "+" is interpreted as *tuwo*, representing a time of fortune or

prosperity, whereas "♀" is understood as *uju'*, a time associated with death and misfortune that should be avoided. These connotations arise from the collective experiences, traditions, and beliefs embedded within Buginese culture.

Barthes (Fatimah, 2020) argues that connotation can evolve into myth, a semiotic system that makes certain ideological values appear natural and unquestionable. In the case of kutika, the belief that each time period possesses good or bad qualities is not random but rather a cultural myth that naturalizes historical beliefs, allowing them to persist as an unquestioned part of collective life (Mulyazir and Fadhillah, 2023).

In addition to symbols, kutika divides the day into five parts: *élé* (morning), *abbuéng* (mid-morning), *tangngasso* (midday), *loro* (afternoon), and *assara'* (late afternoon). These divisions are arranged in tables, where the above symbols are also placed. This system, known as *Kutika Pakkita Ezzo*, regulates daily activities such as agriculture, navigation, and religious practices (Rahmatia and Christomy, 2020). The entire structure reflects the Buginese cosmological view that time is not neutral but possesses its own spiritual essence that must be respected.

Through Barthes' framework, *Kutika Ugi' Sakke Rupa* serves not only as a practical manual for time calculation but also as a cultural text containing multiple layers of meaning from literal (denotative), cultural (connotative), to mythical (ideological) that reinforce the Buginese worldview of caution, cosmic order, and harmony with divine law.

Islamic Communication Perspective on Kutika

Kutika is a form of local knowledge system inherited across generations by the Buginese people, originating from practical needs in everyday life such as determining auspicious and inauspicious days for farming, building houses, or sailing. In *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence), traditions of this kind are classified as *'urf*, meaning customs or practices that are widely known and accepted by a community (Rijal, 2011). Linguistically, *'urf* derives from *'arafa*, meaning "something well-known", and refers to good, rational customs that bring social comfort and are accepted by sound reasoning (Fitra, 2019; Al-Hasyimy, 2008).

Within Islamic law, *'urf* is generally divided into *'urf ṣaḥīḥ* (valid custom) and *'urf fāsid* (invalid custom). *'urf ṣaḥīḥ* refers to customs that do not contradict Islamic teachings, do not legalize what is prohibited, and do not negate obligations. On the other hand, *'urf fāsid* includes customs that violate the *sharī'ah*, such as drinking alcohol during festivities (Fitra, 2019). Kutika is considered a form of *'urf ṣaḥīḥ*, because even though it is believed to serve as a guide for choosing favorable times, it is not regarded as an absolute determinant of destiny. The Buginese view kutika as a means of making thoughtful decisions (*ikhtiar*), while ultimate outcomes remain subject to God's will.

Islam explicitly prohibits *tathayyur* the superstitious belief that certain signs, animals, days, or numbers inherently bring bad luck or fortune. This is based on the Prophet's saying:

وَقَالَ عَفَّانُ: حَدَّثَنَا سَلِيمُ بْنُ حَيَّانَ، حَدَّثَنَا سَعِيدُ بْنُ مِينَاءَ، قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ أَبَا هُرَيْرَةَ، يَقُولُ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «لَا عَدْوَى وَلَا طَيْرَةَ، وَلَا هَامَةَ وَلَا صَفَرَ، وَفِرَّ مِنَ الْمَجْدُومِ كَمَا تَفِرُّ مِنَ الْأَسَدِ»

Meaning: "Affan said: Salim bin Hayyan told us, he said: Sa'id bin Mina' told us, he said: I heard Abu Hurairah say that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said: "There is no transmission of disease without the permission of Allah, no *tathayyur* (feeling unlucky because of a sign), no *hammad* (pre-Islamic belief in reincarnation), and no belief that the month of Shafar brings bad luck. However, avoid those afflicted with leprosy as you would avoid a lion." (Hadith reported by al-Bukhari, no. 5707, in al-Bukhari, 2012, Vol. 7)

In this context, *kutika* cannot be categorized as *tathayyur*, since Buginese people do not believe it can absolutely determine fate. Instead, *kutika* functions as a traditional method for selecting appropriate times, while still recognizing that all outcomes depend on Allah's decree.

The Qur'an also emphasizes this principle in Surah al-A'rāf [7]: 131, which recounts Pharaoh's people blaming Moses and his followers for their misfortunes. The verse states:

فَإِذَا جَاءَتْهُمْ الْحَسَنَةُ قَالُوا لَنَا هَذِهِ وَإِنْ تُصِيبُهُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ يَطَّيَّرُوا بِمُوسَى وَمَنْ مَعَهُ أَلَا إِنَّمَا طَّيَّرَهُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

Meaning: "But when good (prosperity) came to them, they said, "This is due to us." And when adversity befell them, they blamed the evil omen on Moses and those with him. Indeed, their fortune is only with Allah, but most of them do not know." (QuranWeb, 2025)

According to Ibn Kathīr, this verse clarifies that calamities are not caused by others such as Prophet Moses but by Allah's divine will (Al-Sheikh, 2003, Vol. 3). Hence, while humans may plan and strive, the final decision belongs solely to Allah. To attribute causality to anything besides God constitutes a deviation from *tawhīd* (monotheism).

The acceptance of Islam among the Buginese did not abolish *kutika*; instead, it reinterpreted and infused it with Islamic spirituality a process known as the "Buginization of Islam" (Rahmatia and Maulani, 2021). Through this process, *kutika* adopted the Hijri calendar, integrated prayer recitations, and introduced pious intentions (*niyyah*) for key activities such as traveling or beginning new work. These practices reflect a conscious acknowledgment that humans may plan, but success ultimately depends on Allah's will.

Beyond the legal dimension, *kutika* also contains a deeper *Sufi philosophical layer*. The text not only lists auspicious and inauspicious days but also includes symbols such as + (*tuwo*,

life, good for major undertakings), ♀ (*uju'*, death or misfortune), and ■ (*mallise'*, blessing and social virtue) (Sartika, 2023). These symbols do not represent luck in a literal sense but indicate the presence or absence of divine blessing in time.

Some scholars relate this symbolic worldview to the Sufi concept of *wahdat al-wujūd* by Ibn 'Arabī the belief that all realities, including time and daily events, are manifestations of the Divine will (Rahmatia and Maulani, 2021). In this understanding, times marked with + or ■ symbolize moments filled with divine presence and blessing (*barakah*), whereas ♀ represents periods "veiled" from such grace. Thus, kutika does not imply that time possesses independent power, but rather expresses a spiritual awareness that all occurrences unfold under Allah's will. The use of these symbols helps individuals align themselves with the divine rhythm while recognizing that final outcomes rest solely with Him.

Furthermore, Syekh Abdul Wahhab al-Bugisi divided the day into five segments *élé*, *abbuég*, *tangngasso*, *loro*, and *assara'* as reflected in the *Kutika Pakkita Ezzo*. These divisions correspond to the five daily prayers, integrating local tradition with Islamic remembrance of God (Hadrawi, 2017). This synthesis confirms that kutika is not a fatalistic belief contrary to *tawhīd*, but a form of *'urf ṣaḥīḥ* a legitimate cultural practice that aligns local wisdom with Islamic faith and devotion to the Creator.

Thus, kutika can be accepted as a form of *'urf ṣaḥīḥ* within the framework of *sharī'ah*. It remains an integral part of Buginese identity not as superstition, but as a symbol of submission to Allah's will. Islam, in this regard, does not erase local culture; rather, it sanctifies it, guiding it toward harmony with *tawhīd*.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study concludes that *Kutika Ugi' Sakke* Rupa represents a distinctive form of Buginese local wisdom that integrates cosmological beliefs, symbolic traditions, and Islamic spiritual values. Through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, kutika can be understood as a system of multilayered meanings denotative, connotative, and mythological that reflects the Buginese worldview regarding time, harmony, and divine order. At the denotative level, kutika functions as a practical guide for determining auspicious and inauspicious times; at the connotative level, it conveys cultural values of prudence, balance, and harmony with nature; while at the mythological level, it naturalizes the belief that human actions must align with divine will.

From the perspective of Islamic communication, kutika can be classified as *'urf ṣaḥīḥ* (valid custom) because it does not contradict *sharī'ah* principles nor lead to superstition (*tathayyur*). Instead, it represents a form of cultural adaptation in which Islamic values are integrated into

Buginese cosmology. The Islamization process in South Sulawesi did not eliminate kutika but redefined it through Islamic ethics, prayer recitations, and the use of the Hijri calendar. This study contributes to communication studies by demonstrating that traditional cultural symbols function as media of meaning-making in both Islamic communication and cultural communication, showing how religious values are communicated through local cultural sign systems without undermining the principle of *tawhīd*.

Suggestion

The findings of this study suggest that *Kutika Ugi' Sakke Rupa* should not be understood merely as a traditional calendar or divinatory practice, but as a cultural communication system that reflects harmony between human effort, natural order, and divine decree. Therefore, the preservation of kutika as part of Buginese cultural heritage should be encouraged through education, documentation, and digital archiving, while maintaining consistency with Islamic values of *tawhīd* and moderation. Furthermore, integrating local wisdom such as kutika into Islamic education and da'wah may strengthen the understanding that culture and religion can coexist harmoniously, and may inspire further research on other local traditions that enrich the fields of Islamic communication and cultural communication.

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