

4-30-2011

## Manuscripts and cultural identity

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### Recommended Citation

Pudjiastuti, Titik (2011) "Manuscripts and cultural identity," *Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia*: Vol. 13: No. 1, Article 15.

DOI: 10.17510/wacana.v13i1.815

Available at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/wacana/vol13/iss1/15>

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## INAUGURAL LECTURE

# Manuscripts and cultural identity

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Inaugural Lecture, 3 November 2010  
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### 1 INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2009, a colleague of mine from the Department of Tourism and Culture and myself visited a collection of old books in Tangerang. My colleague had been asked to verify the authenticity of a handwritten manuscript in Javanese script of the *Serat Centhini* that was up for sale for two and half billion rupiah.

The vendor told us that day that the price had already gone up to three billion rupiah because this manuscript from his collection was the most complete in the world (in his view, the largest *Serat Centhini* consisted of twelve volumes whereas his copy numbered fourteen volumes). When I had finally obtained permission to see and read (quickly) this manuscript of the *Serat Centhini*, I saw in a glance that it concerned a copy. This became clear from the colophon<sup>1</sup> which stated that the manuscript was written in 1926. Based on this fact, the question arose as to what ideas people had about old manuscripts that a mere copy could be valued at such a price.

### 2 THE STUDY OF MANUSCRIPTS AND ITS RELATION TO CODICOLOGY AND PALEOGRAPHY

Each nation has a number of different sources of historical and cultural data in its possession, including hand written witnesses compiled by members of that nation during their lifetime.<sup>2</sup> From these written witnesses we are able to obtain knowledge and to learn about the ways of thinking, feeling, and the

<sup>1</sup> A colophon is usually found at the end of the manuscript, often in the form of an inverted pyramid, a square, or is integrated within the body of the text. It usually contains information on the name of the writer or scribe, the date and place of writing or copying, and the message of the writer or scribe to guard the manuscript well.

<sup>2</sup> See Harjati Soebadio (1991: 1).

culture of the people concerned. These written witnesses go under the name of old manuscripts.

In the study of literature, the sciences directly connected with old manuscripts include Philology, Codicology, and Paleography. The term Philology stems from Greek *philologia* which means 'love of words' and over time the understanding of the term turned into 'love for highly valued written works', such as literary products. The term Codicology derives from Latin *codex* meaning 'terrace of tree trunks' which after the passing of time came to denote old manuscripts.<sup>3</sup> The word Paleography originates from Greek *palaios* (= old) and *grafein* (= to write) and concerns the study of old writing systems and scripts.<sup>4</sup>

Philology puts emphasis on the study of the contents of manuscripts and what texts are about, Codicology focuses on issues connected with the physical aspects of manuscripts such as writing material, binding and illumination whereas Paleography stresses the study of the developments and changes in written characters over time.<sup>5</sup>

### 3 MANUSCRIPT CATALOGUES

Catalogues of Nusantara manuscripts provide researchers with information about manuscripts and as such, they form the gate to the forest of Nusantara manuscripts. All kinds of information about specific manuscripts can be obtained from these manuscript catalogues. The word catalogue stems from Greek *katalogon* (= according to words) which meaning changed into "list" and in general catalogues contain descriptive information on manuscripts.

If we take a close look at Nusantara manuscript catalogues, we see that the information contained in them has gone through a significant development. Catalogues printed at the end of the nineteenth century and up to the first half of the twentieth century contain information that was limited to shelf mark number, title, number of pages and small quotes from the texts. However, catalogues published since the start of the second half of the twentieth century provide much more complete and detailed information. Apart from title, shelf mark number, and number of pages, information is also provided on the number of lines per page, language, script, manuscript and text measurements, kind of paper, kind of text, quotes from each chapter of the manuscript, information on illumination up to references pertaining to the text. All this is meant to equip the scholar who wishes to know about the manuscript they want to study with useful information.

Up to the present, we have been engaged in research on Nusantara manuscripts preserved in public and private collections in Indonesia. In general, research on and the cataloguing of manuscripts preserved in institutional collections such as those of libraries and museums poses no great problems. We only need to order manuscripts from the officials, sit and

<sup>3</sup> See David Diringer (1982: 35-36).

<sup>4</sup> See S.O. Robson 1988.

<sup>5</sup> See W. van der Molen (1985: 4).

wait, and they will appear in front of us for our perusal. However, compiling a catalogue of manuscripts from private collections is not quite as simple. We need patience, flexibility, and a special approach in order to guarantee owners that their “heirlooms” will remain safe after we have collected our data from them.

Efforts to approach manuscript owners to prepare them to open up their collections are time consuming but can be speeded up by soliciting the help of local informants. We are fortunate if a manuscript owner is convinced that we have come to protect their “heirlooms” from destruction.<sup>6</sup> If this is the case, not only manuscripts are produced, but also delicious traditional food.

Our research on manuscripts conducted for the compilation of Nusantara manuscript catalogues was indeed not only in the interest of scholarship but also for much more important objectives: safeguarding and the preservation of cultural information, especially from privately owned manuscripts.

Apart from making as comprehensive notes as possible, we also made digital photographs of each manuscript page and provided basic information to the owners on manuscript maintenance.<sup>7</sup> In this way, if at some moment in time something might happen to their manuscripts, for instance that they change hands because they are sold or given to people, lost, or damaged by insects or natural disasters (floods or fire), at least the data will be available. Recording manuscripts on camera was usually known under the term “microfilming” but after digital cameras have become available, we now refer to this process as digitalization.

From the study of traditional manuscripts from various regions, we know that the tradition of Nusantara manuscript copying is continued up to this day for various reasons. In Bali and Lombok, for instance, palm leaf (*lontar*) manuscripts are actively produced, as is the copying of Javanese manuscripts in the palace of Yogyakarta.

We conducted research with our colleagues from the Faculty of Cultural Studies and we have published catalogues of Nusantara manuscripts, including the *Katalog naskah Fakultas Sastra Universitas Indonesia* (T.E. Behrend and Titik Pudjiastuti 1997), *Katalog naskah Buton koleksi Abdul Mulku Zahari* (Achadiati Ikram, Tjiptaningrum F. Hassan, and Dewaki Kramadibrata 2001), and *Katalog naskah Palembang* (Achadiati Ikram 2004). Currently, we are also in the process of publishing catalogues on private manuscript collections in Kalimantan and Ambon (Illustrations 1a-c).

<sup>6</sup> Privately owned manuscripts are usually kept in bamboo attics, under the bed, or in other hidden places. Manuscripts are also often encountered wrapped in layers of white cloth because the owners revere them as heirlooms from the ancestors. The number of layers of cloth provides the number of generations the present owner is removed from the original owner.

<sup>7</sup> This information included suggestions to the owners to air their manuscripts to avoid moisture stains, to clean them from dust with a soft brush, to spread cloves around the manuscripts to prevent insect damage and to place chalk next to the manuscripts to decrease the humidity of the surrounding air.



Illustration 1a. *Katalog induk naskah-naskah Nusantara* Volume 3-A.



Illustration 1b. *Katalog induk naskah-naskah Nusantara* Volume 3-B.

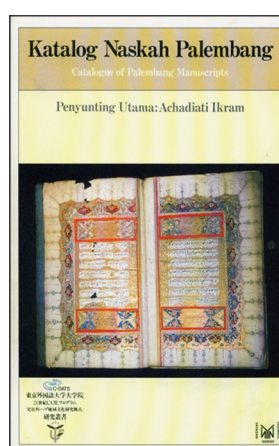


Illustration 1c. *Katalog naskah Palembang*.

#### 4 MANUSCRIPT MATERIALS

During the compilation of catalogues and the digitalization of Nusantara manuscripts, we learned that there are many different manuscripts. One traditional material still in use is palm leaf (*lontar*). The word *lontar* stems from the metathesis of the Javanese words *ron tal* (tal leaf),<sup>8</sup> or the leaves of the Palmyra palm. However, this was wrongly understood and the word *lontar* came in use for one of the materials used for Nusantara manuscripts.

Young leaves of the *lontar* palm are used for manuscripts. They are still green but the tips of the leaves have already turned brown.<sup>9</sup> The process of turning *lontar* leaves into writing material starts with the removal of the leaves from their fronds, drying and boiling them and to press them until they are ready to be written upon. This process takes about three months but the best *lontar* material is obtained after a processing period of one year. If the preparation takes less time, the leaves will easily brittle and are hard to write upon (Illustrations 2a-e). *Lontar* manuscripts are still being produced actively in Karangasem, Bali. However, in the past, there were also scriptoria<sup>10</sup> on the slopes of the Merapi-Merbabu volcanoes which produced Javanese *lontar* manuscripts (see I Kuntara Wiryamartana 1993). Other areas such as Cirebon, Lombok, Kerinci, and Sulawesi also have *lontar* manuscripts. In Kerinci, *lontar* manuscripts are referred to as *kelopak betung*.<sup>11</sup> *Nipah* is another traditional palm leaf writing material similar to *lontar* (Illustration 3). The difference between *lontar* and *nipah* is that in *lontar* writing a small knife (BI. *pengutik*) is

<sup>8</sup> See Ketut Ginarsa (1976: 1).

<sup>9</sup> See "Kertas tradisional" in Titik Pudjiastuti (2006: 36).

<sup>10</sup> The term scriptorium derives from Latin *scribere* which means manuscript or writing. A scriptorium is a place for writing or copying manuscripts, or the activity of writing or copying manuscripts.

<sup>11</sup> See Sri Wulan Rujati Mulyadi (1994: 44).



used and burned candle nuts are used as dyeing agent whereas pen and ink are used in the production of *nipah* manuscripts. *Nipah*, like *janur* (coconut palm leaf), *enau* and *pandan* leaves are used in manuscripts from West Java (Atja in Ekadjati 1985).

Illustration  
2a. *Lontar*  
tree



Illustration  
2b. *Lontar*  
leaves.



Illustration 2c. Pressing  
*lontar* leaves.

Illustration  
2d. *Lontar*  
manuscripts.



Illustration  
2e. Balinese  
*lontar*.



Illustration 2f. Surek Baweng  
from Makassar.



Illustration 3. *Nipah* manuscript.



Illustration 4. *Saeh* tree.

bark for manuscript is that which is three to six months old because when older, the bark becomes hard and brittle.<sup>12</sup> *Dluwang* as writing material for manuscripts is usually found in Java and Madura. According to information provided by Noorduy (1965), Ponorogo, Purworejo, and Garut used to be centers of *dluwig* production. While Ponorogo still received orders for *dluwig* In the first quarter of the twentieth century,<sup>15</sup> at present *dluwig*, or rather *saeh*, paper is only still being produced in Garut.

Also in Sumatra, the use of tree bark for manuscript writing material is known, however, the form and the production process differ from that of *dluwig*. According to Heyne (1987: 1469) in Sumatra tree bark



Illustration 5. Folded book.

The next material used in Nusantara manuscripts is *dluwig*. The word *dluwig* (also *dlancang*) originates from Javanese and means "paper". Dutch scholars used to refer to this material as *Javaans papier* or "Javanese paper". In West Java, especially in Garut, *dluwig* is referred to as *kertas saeh* because it is made from the bark of the *saeh* tree (Illustration 4). In Thailand, this kind of paper is called *sa* and in Japan, it is known under the term *washi*. *Dluwig* is a traditional kind of paper made from the bark of a tree (Latin: *Broussonetia papyrifera vent*) which is known under various names in Indonesia like *sepukau* (Indonesian), *dlubang* (Madura), *kembala* (Sumba), and *malak* (Ceram).<sup>12</sup> The process of the production of *dluwig* starts with the removal of the bark from the tree trunk, to beat it until it has turned flattened and wide, and to ferment and dry it until it has become paper. The process takes about two weeks.<sup>13</sup> The highest quality *saeh* tree

from fragrant trees such as *gaharu* (eagle wood) or sandalwood (Latin: *Aquilaria Malaeensis* LAMK, from the order of the *Thymelaeaceae*) is used for manuscript writing material. In Indonesia, this tree is known under various names such as *alim* (Toba Batak), *halim* (Lampung), *karas* (Indonesian), *kepeng* (Belitung), and *kareh* (Minangkabau).

<sup>12</sup> See Heyne (1987: 660).

<sup>13</sup> The production process is described in Pudjiastuti 1994/1995.

<sup>14</sup> See Pudjiastuti (2006: 38).

<sup>15</sup> See R.T.A. Soetikna (1939: 194).

Only the bark of young trees can be used for writing manuscripts because the fibers are long and flexible (can be folded), the paper is shining white, and it is strong and durable. Tree bark manuscripts in Sumatra resemble accordions and consist of folded tree bark pages and for this reason, they are called *buku lipat* (folded books) in Lampung (Illustration 5). The production process of these folded books starts with the removal of the bark from the tree. Subsequently the bark is folded and the folded paper is pressed with a heavy object. The surface of the paper is smoothened with rice water (water of rice that is being boiled) until it is ready to be written upon. This process takes about one month.<sup>16</sup>

In North Sumatra, especially in Toba Batak, tree bark manuscripts are referred to as *pustaka* whereas folded books are also encountered in Lampung and North Sumatra, and in Kerinci. Bamboo (Latin: *Dendrocalamus asper* Backer) is another traditional manuscript writing material often used in North Sumatra, Kerinci, Lampung, and the Philippines. Bamboo is used for tubular manuscripts (one up to five sections in length), half-round manuscripts, or those written on bamboo fragments. In Lampung, manuscripts on bamboo fragments are called *gelumpai*. Apart from bamboo, rattan, animal bones, and buffalo horns are also used to write on (Illustration 6a-b).



Illustration 6a. *Gelumpai* (bamboo fragments).



Illustration 6b. Animal bone manuscript.

Next to these traditional writing materials, European paper has also been used for Nusantara manuscripts. It is called European paper because it is imported from Europe. Often this paper has a watermark<sup>17</sup> in the form of a picture, a letter, numeral and/or vertical chain and horizontal laid lines.<sup>18</sup> These watermarks can be used to date the Nusantara manuscript written on this paper.

<sup>16</sup> A description of the production process can be found in Teygeler (1993) and Pudjiastuti (1995: 84-86).

<sup>17</sup> Two following two books containing watermarks are very relevant to the study of Nusantara manuscripts: W.A. Churchill 1935 and Edward Heawood 1950.

<sup>18</sup> See Mulyadi (1994: 12-13).



## 5 SCRIPTS AND LANGUAGES USED IN MANUSCRIPTS

As in the case with manuscript writing materials, also a variety of scripts and languages are used in Nusantara manuscripts. The non-Latin scripts originate from Indian and Arabic writing systems. The Pallawa script from India turned into the following groups of scripts in Nusantara:

1. Javanese-Balinese script called *ha na ca ra ka* and its variants;
2. Batak-Rejang-Old Sundanese scripts called *ka ga nga* and its variants;
3. Bugis-Makassar scripts that also gave birth to the *ka ga nga* script and its variants.

These scripts are named after the first letters of the alphabets.<sup>19</sup>

Over time, Arabic script spawned the following scripts:

1. *Jawi* for Arabic script used in Malay;
2. *Pegon* for Arabic script used for Javanese, Sundanese and Madurese;
3. *Serang* for Arabic script used for Bugis-Makassarese;
4. *Buri wolio* for Arabic script used for Wolio (Buton);
5. *Arab Jawo* for Arabic script used for Acehese; and
6. *Teluti* for Arabic script used for Ambonese.

The term *pegon* is also known in Gorontalo in North Sulawesi but it is used for Arabic script used for Malay. The *hanacaraka* scripts are used in manuscripts from Java, Bali, Lombok, Madura, Cirebon, and new Sundanese. In West Java, *hanaraka* is called *cacarakan* while in Madura it is referred to as *carakan*, *carakan jaba*, and *carakan jaban*.<sup>20</sup> The *ka ga nga* types of script are used to write texts in Buginese, Makassarese, Lampung, Kerinci, Batak, Bengkulu, and Old Sundanese. In Lampung the script is called *had Lampung* or *Surat Lampung*,<sup>21</sup> in Bengkulu it is known as *ulu* script, in Batak as *Surat Batak* or *pustaka*, in Makassar as *lontara*, and in Kerinci it is referred to as *rencong* or *incung Kerinci*.<sup>22</sup>

Many manuscripts contain more than one script. In many instances, the main text is written in Arabic script, but notes, interpretations, and translations provided under the lines or in the margins of the main body of the text are written in *pegon*, *ulu*, *jawi*, *hanacaraka* and other scripts.<sup>23</sup> Sedyawati et al. have done research in the use of multiple scripts in Nusantara manuscripts.<sup>24</sup>

Nusantara manuscripts make use of a variety of languages and the language written depends on the region of origin. Robson (1994: 2) states that the following main languages are used in Nusantara manuscripts: Acehese, Minangkabau, Malay, Lampung, Sundanese, Javanese, Madurese, Balinese, Makassarese, Buginese, and Wolio. Not infrequently, not only one language

<sup>19</sup> The Javanese alphabet runs *ha na ca ra ka da ta sa wa la pa dha ja ya nya ma ga ba tha nga*; the Balinese *ha na ca ra ka da ta sa wa la ma ga ba nga pa ja ya nya*, whereas that of the Batak-Rejang-Sunda Lama, Bugis-Makassar scripts is *ka ga nga pa ba ma ta da na ca ja nya ya ra la sa wa ha*.

<sup>20</sup> See Abd. Rachem 1992.

<sup>21</sup> See Pudjiastuti (1997: 44).

<sup>22</sup> See Sedyawati et al. (2004: 137).

<sup>23</sup> Marginal notes in manuscripts are called *scholia* (Déroche 2005).

<sup>24</sup> See Edy Sedyawati et al. 2008.

is used in a manuscript but two or three. One example is a manuscript from Kerinci entitled *Kitab undang-undang Tanjung Tanah; Naskah Melayu yang tertua* (Uli Kozok 2006). This manuscript from the fourteenth century is written in a post-Pallawa script, but the languages used in it are Old Javanese, Old Malay, and Old Sundanese.

## 6 MANUSCRIPT CONTENTS

Manuscripts reflect local and regional characteristics. These not only concern language and script, but also content and the writing material used. Recent research we conducted, for instance, revealed that most manuscripts from Ambon take the form of a *rotulus* (vertical scroll) contained in a bamboo tube whereas their contents usually consist of sermons (Friday, Idul Fitri, marriage, and other sermons).

Apart from local varieties, the contents of the manuscripts can be divided into various genres such as religious texts, historical texts, literature, language, morals and ethics, laws, customary laws, legends, folklore, arts (dance, music, crafts, drama, vocal music, batik), technology, medicine, divinations, ancient wisdom (mantra, divination, spells), children's games, advice and prohibitions, and so forth.

## 7 CLOSING REMARKS

Experience gained with the study of privately owned manuscripts among society revealed two important points. In the first place, the owners of manuscripts have lost the emotional ties with their ancestors or with the writers of the manuscripts in their possession. The present, generation in general only preserves them but has no idea of their contents. They do know that they have to safeguard these 'heirlooms' to their best ability. On the other side are researchers of manuscripts who do not have the intention to take these people's 'heirlooms' away but rather provide the present owners with a new sense of awareness and the acknowledgement and appreciation that they are ultimately the keepers of their exalted cultural heritage.

Secondly, the lack of support from the government and national institutions with respect to funding and attention to the preservation of Nusantara manuscripts cause many researchers of manuscripts to seek funding from foreign agencies. This is a precarious situation as Nusantara manuscripts belong to the Indonesian people and they contain the wealth of the Indonesian people's morality. In fact, foreigners are more concerned with the preservation of this heritage. Something more disturbing still is that due to a lack of attention from the government, many manuscript owners are willing to sell their 'heirlooms' to foreigners. They are unaware that by so doing, they also sell their cultural identity. If we allow this situation to continue without taking immediate measures, it is clear that the roots of the culture of the Indonesian people will be lost and the younger generation of Indonesians will be deprived of their cultural identity.

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