

Islamic tradition in *Ulu* inscription and manuscript at Pasemah, South Sumatra, Indonesia

Tradisi Islam dalam prasasti dan naskah *Ulu* di wilayah Pasemah, Sumatera Selatan, Indonesia

Wahyu Rizky Andhifani^{1*} and Nor Huda Ali²

Regional Agency for Archaeological Research in South Sumatra Province¹,

Faculty of Adab and Humanities UIN Raden Fatah Palembang²

*wrandhifani.1981@gmail.com

ABSTRAK

Kata Kunci:
Aksara Ulu;
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Aksara *Ulu* merupakan aksara yang berkembang di daerah Sumatra Bagian Selatan. Asal kata *ulu* berarti hulu sungai atau dataran tinggi. Aksara Ulu sudah tidak digunakan lagi pada masa sekarang. Meski demikian, tulisan ini mengkaji tradisi Islam di wilayah Pasemah berdasarkan isi prasasti dan naskah beraksara *Ulu*. Tujuan penelitian yakni mengetahui tradisi Islam di dalam isi prasasti dan naskah. Sasaran penelitian yakni mengidentifikasi seberapa besar peranan tradisi Islam dalam mempengaruhi isi dari prasasti dan naskah. Metode penelitian meliputi pengolahan data (penelusuran sumber, wawancara, studi pustaka), deskripsi ukuran, asal, pemilik, keadaan atau kondisi, bahasa, variasi aksara, transliterasi, terjemahan, penafsiran, sintesis, dan penyajian data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa isi prasasti dan naskah *Ulu* secara kuat dipengaruhi oleh tradisi Islam. Pengaruh agama Islam dalam naskah atau prasasti beraksara *Ulu* juga dapat dilihat dari pandangan masyarakat terhadap naskah dan prasasti yakni profan, semi sakral, dan sakral.

ABSTRACT

Keywords:
Ulu script;
inscriptions;
manuscripts;
Islamic
tradition

Ulu is a script developed in the southern part of Sumatra. The origin of the word *ulu* interpreted as upstream of a river or a highland. *Ulu* scripts are no longer used in the present era. Nevertheless, this paper examines the Islamic tradition in the Pasemah area based on the contents of *Ulu* manuscripts and inscriptions. The research objective is to discover the Islamic tradition in the contents, while the research purpose is to identify the influence of Islamic tradition towards the content. The research method includes data processing (source study, interview, and literature study), description of scale, origin, owner, state or condition, language, variation of characters, transliteration, translation, interpretation, synthesis, and data presentation. The result shows that the contents of *Ulu* manuscripts and inscriptions have intensely been influenced by Islamic tradition. The influence of Islam in *Ulu* manuscripts or inscriptions can also be comprehended from the public opinion towards it, categorized as profane, semi-sacred, and sacred.

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INTRODUCTION

Traditions are derived from a society that has been passed down from generation to generation with distinctive features and is still being passed on to this day. This tradition is invaluable in material terms. Traditions created by people will certainly be accepted, rejected, and changed both by the people as creators and by other people in society. This resulted in cultural changes experienced by people and gave new forms of the culture they had ([Reusen, 1992](#)).

One of the traditions that has characterized and developed in the South Sumatra region is the written tradition. The first written tradition to be present in the area is proven by the discovery of a stone inscription, known as the *Kedukan Bukit* inscription. Furthermore, other inscriptions which were found were relics from *Kedatuan Sriwijaya* (8th century CE). All the *Kedatuan Sriwijaya* inscriptions use the *Pallawa* script and Ancient Malay language. In the 10th century onwards, a variant of the *Pallawa* script in Sumatra, known as the Ancient Sumatran script, used to write inscriptions in Ancient Malay and Sanskrit. This variant differs slightly from Ancient Javanese. It has a number of characteristics found only in Sumatran inscriptions. Similar variants are found in ancient Balinese inscriptions ([Ikram, 2015](#)). In addition to using stone materials, inscriptions that use ancient Sumatran characters also use metal materials, which are gold, copper, and tin.

After the Ancient Sumatran script gradually disappeared, in the 16th century, almost simultaneously with the appearance of the *Jawi* script (Arabic Malay) brought by Islam in the eastern coast of Sumatra, local characters emerged in the interior of South Sumatra. The area is known as the *ka-ga-nga* script or known as the *Ulu* script or the *Ulu* letter. This script is used by ethnic Malays in general such as, Tapanuli, Padang, Jambi, Bengkulu, Lampung, Sulawesi, Kalimantan, and West Nusa Tenggara ([Supiyah et al., 2018](#)). These characters have different names in each region, for example in the Bengkulu area (*Redjang* script, *Ulu* script and *Serawai* script), in the Kerinci Jambi area (*Incung* script), in the South Sumatra area (*Ulu* script) and in the Lampung area (Lampung script or *Had Lampung*).

These local characters use Malay with a dialect adapted to the origin of the inscription or the written script. The script is written in various media such as horns, bark/*kaghas*, bamboo logs, bamboo slits or *gelumpai*, rattan logs, rattan slits, *dluwang* (paper made from sheets of bark), stone, and paper. In these media, they are grouped into two media. First is the inscription group consisting of horns, bamboo, rattan, stone and tin metal. Second is a group of manuscripts consisting of bark (*kaghas*), *dluwang*, and paper. This grouping is useful for distinguishing which ones are included in the inscription category and which are included in the manuscript category. It is known that the inscription is a work written on hard media and most of the inscriptions are not repetitive. Meanwhile, manuscripts are works written on softer media and most of the contents of the script are repetitions.

The contents contained in the *Ulu* inscriptions and manuscripts vary, ranging from incantations, medicines, to those related to Islam. For example, related to Islamic astrology, Islamic teachings strat from *aqidah*, *sharia*, to morals. This script was used by our ancestors as a means of communication. Several areas in South Sumatra still used the script until the 20th century CE. This is evidenced by the discovery of characters written in books using paper. Currently, the *Ulu* script looks like it will slowly become extinct, and even already is. This is due to several things, such as the absence of regeneration (no one has passed it down to

the children and grandchildren), as well as several *Ulu* inscriptions and texts that were burned, thrown away, and lost. In several areas in South Sumatra these characters disappeared when Islam with its *Yellow Holy Book* entered the inlands ([Andhifani, 2018](#)).

Ulu script is a type of letter or script that has been developed by the people of South Sumatra. *Ulu* areas are the one that are far from the center of trade and government ([Alam, 1994](#)). The *Ulu* script in each area of South Sumatra is named after the river flows. For example, in the area where the Komering River passes it is known as the Komering script, in the area where the Ogan River passes it is called the Ogan script. Meanwhile, in the Pasemah area, people are more familiar with the Pasemah script. Even though the area is not crossed by large river flows, the naming system uses a well-known culture, which is the Pasemah culture ([Andhifani, 2018](#)).

Pasemah culture is the name given to the distribution of megalithic remains in the Pasemah plateau. Pasemah culture is in a context with the distribution of megalithic statues. Pasemah has an area of 80 km² covering Bukit Barisan and at the mountain foot of Gumai. The word "*Pasemah*" is a name from the Dutch who pronounced the word *Besemah* as *Passumah*. The Dutch people found it difficult to pronounce the word *Besemah* so that the word *Pasemah* is what they used everyday. *Besemah* comes from the name of *semah* fish that live in rivers in the Pagaralam and Lahat areas. *Be+Semah* is defined as an area that contains lots of fish (*semah*) ([Triwujani, 2015](#)).

According to Collins' study and quoted by Sakai (2017), the Besemah tribe is one of three sibling tribes, which are Diwe Gumay, Dewe Semidang, and Diwe Atung Bungsu, who descended from the sky to Bukit Seguntang, Palembang. They are the ancestors of three tribes, which are Gumay, Semidang, and Besemah who inhabit most of the highlands of South Sumatra ([Arios, 2019](#)). Therefore, they have a distinctive identity that is different from the culture of *Wong Palembang*, as they lived in the center of the Palembang Sultanate in the past ([Jumhari & Hariadi, 2014](#)).

Pasemah residents who live in the area have a very strong culture. They have cultural heritage ranging from the remains of megalithic to written culture in the form of *Ulu* inscriptions and manuscripts. The written culture was once used by the community long after the megalithic culture existed. The legacy of the megalithic culture which is a means of supporting the worship of the ceremony can provide a way of life idea at that time. This can shed a light to the progress of human civilization based on agricultural systems (farming) ([Indriastuti et al., 2016](#)).

Based on description above, a problem is raised, that is, how the Islamic tradition in the Pasemah seen from the contents of the *Ulu* inscription and manuscript is. These problems can be answered by asking the following questions. First, what are the contents of the *Ulu* manuscripts and inscriptions in Pasemah? Second, how is the continuity between the contents of the inscriptions and manuscripts with the Islamic culture that exists today in Pasemah? The research objective is to find out the Islamic culture in the Pasemah area and its contents. The research purposes are to identify languages, analyze the contents of inscriptions and manuscripts, and identify how big the role of Islam was in the written culture of the Besemah area.

METHODS

This research applied a series of methods or steps. These steps are data collection, data processing, data analysis, synthesis formation, and data presentation. First is the data collection stage. Data collection is an initial stage in a research. This data collection stage was carried out in the following ways.

1. Tracing the existence of inscriptions and manuscripts.

The existence of inscriptions and manuscripts was found by gathering several sources. Inscriptions and manuscripts were traced to the village where they were found and to collectors. The inscriptions and manuscripts were recorded completely and in detail, so as to facilitate the grouping process.

2. Interview

Interviews were conducted to find history, both the history of inscriptions and manuscripts as well as the history of the village. That include the history of who the original owner was, the origin, and the story behind the creation process. The respondents interviewed were the owners of inscriptions and manuscripts, both the community and collectors.

3. Library research

Collecting all books, journals, articles, papers related to inscriptions, and *ka-ga-nga/ulu* manuscripts. The recording of library sources was done completely in accordance with the needs of scientific writing, aiming to make it easier to carry out the next work stages ([Andhifani, 2017](#)).

Second is the data processing and analysis stage. Primary data and secondary data that had been found were then processed and analyzed. The techniques used in data processing are as follows. The inscription and manuscript data were inventoried, described (size, origin, owner, state/condition, language, variations of characters), transliterated, translated, and then analyzed by the contents of the inscription. Subsequently, the data were interpreted in detail, both textually and contextually, including reviewing opinions and concepts put forward by previous scholars ([Andhifani, 2017](#)).

Third are the synthesis stage and the presentation of data result analysis. At this stage, the preparation or synthesis of the data processing result and analysis was carried out. Data synthesis was presented according to scientific writing procedures by using a variety of scientific language, which is a variety of languages that have objective, reproductive, effective, non-emotive, and unambiguous characteristics. In the sense that the contents contained in the *Ulu* inscriptions and manuscripts had been processed, interpreted and analyzed, then linked to the Islamic culture that developed in the Pasemah region.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Based on the results of the research conducted, several *Ulu* script inscriptions and manuscripts were found or recorded in areas that are still within the Pasemah area (there are three manuscripts and one inscription). The manuscripts and inscription are as follows.

The M. Yumansyah Collection of Ulu Bark Manuscript

The manuscript is kept by M. Yumansyah (55 years old) who lives in Pagar Agung Village, Tanjung Agung Sub-district, South Dempo District, Pagaralam City, South Sumatra Province. M. Yumansyah is the owner of the manuscript as well as the holder or person who was given the mandate to safeguarding the manuscript. The manuscript is written on bark (*kaghas*) measuring 13 cm long, 10 cm wide and 2 cm thick. The manuscript consists of 26 pages including 4 blank pages and 22 pages containing text (Figure 1). The first page begins with the sentence "*bismilahirii*", which is written in Arabic script, while the rest of the page is blank. On the next page, the manuscript is written using the *Ulu* script and begins with a ☼ sign. One page consists of 3-10 lines of sentences with a letter height between 0.6-1 cm. The distance between sentences (spaces) is 1 cm. There are two characters, which are the *Ulu* script and the Arabic script. The 23-page *Ulu* script is faded, making it difficult to identify the script. The last page is written using Arabic script with 7 lines, but the condition of the script has faded so that the sentence is unidentified (Andhifani, 2017).



Figure 1. *Ulu bark/kaghas* Jurai Penjalang manuscript.
(Source: Documentation of Regional Agency for Archaeological Research in South Sumatera Province, 2019)

The Masran Collection of Ulu Bark Manuscript

The manuscript is kept at Masran's (55 years old) house in Sumber Jaya, Candi Jaya Village, Central Dempo District, Pagaralam City, South Sumatra Province. In the house are stored two *Ulu* manuscripts written on bark. The first manuscript has a box-shaped container measuring 13.4 cm x 11.8 cm and 1.6 cm thick. The bottom part of the box container is concave and has square shape measuring 10.3 cm x 10.3 cm, with the bottom part of the container 0.5 cm depth. The container is made of wood and on the edge there is a hole that functions as a hinge, so that the box can be opened and closed.

The manuscript has a wooden container measuring 9.6 cm x 9.5 cm x 1.3 cm. The script is written on the front and back. In the *verso* section, it consists of 14 pages, which are 12 pages containing text and two blank pages. The first and last pages are blank and contain no text. At the beginning of the manuscript there is a ☼ sign located on the second page. The first page consists of 9 lines of writing, the second page consists of 10 lines of writing, and the third page consists of 12

lines of writing ([Andhifani, 2019](#)).

The second manuscript measures 8.2 cm x 8 cm x 19 cm with a black cover ([Figure 2](#)). The manuscript is written using the *Ulu* script on the front and back. The *verso* section consists of 22 pages, beginning with an * or @ symbol. The *recto* section consists of 24 pages. The manuscript consists of 1-8 lines of text and uses guidelines. There are 4 pages that are signed with geometric images and symbols. The distance between the guidelines is 1.3 cm. The text is written in the center between two guidelines ([Andhifani, 2019](#)).



Figure 2. *Ulu* bark/ *kaghhas* Jurai Semidang manuscript.
(Source: Documentation of Regional Agency for Archaeological Research in South Sumatera Province, 2019)

The Upik'ah Collection of Ulu Bark Manuscript

The manuscript is kept at the house of Upik'ah (73 years old), *apit jurai* (representative of the traditional leader) of Sumbay Besar, located at Pagaralam-Lahat Street No. 30, Guru Agung Village, Suka Merindu District, Lahat Regency. The condition of the manuscript is no longer intact because the front and back covers have been separated from the script. The cover was made using a square wood material. The cover is black ([Figure 3](#)) with the front cover measuring 10.5 cm x 12.1 cm x 1 cm. At the bottom right, there are three *Ulu* letters. In the center of the cover there is a protruding rectangular section measuring 6.5 cm x 7.2 cm. The text in the manuscript is separated into two parts, each consisting of 12 sections. Text is written on the front and back pages (both sides). The manuscript is incomplete and several parts are torn. The burned pages are located at the front, middle, and end of the manuscript ([Andhifani, 2019](#)).

The text on the manuscript is written in black ink, large, and sharp. The height of the letters is 0.5-1 cm and the distance between the rows is 0.3-0.5 cm. Each page consists of 8-9 lines of writing. The font size on the opposite page is 0.5-0.7 cm with a space of 0.5-0.8 cm. The color of the ink used for writing is black and it is lightly poured. Each page contains between 8-10 lines of writing ([Andhifani, 2019](#)).



Figure 3. Ulu bark/Kaghas Jurai Sumbay Besar manuscript.
 (Source: Documentation of Regional Agency for Archaeological Research in South Sumatera Province, 2019)

The Indawan Collection of Gelumpai Bamboo Inscription

This inscription is a collection of Indawan (65 years) located in Tanjung Raman Village, Kota Agung District, Lahat Regency, South Sumatera Province. The inscriptions are written on slips of bamboo which are commonly referred to as *gelumpai* (Figure 4). Based on the shape of the bamboo slips, it can be seen that the 10 *gelumpais* which are tied together using a wire, consist of two different texts. One text consists of 7 *gelumpais* and 3 other *gelumpais* derived from another text (Andhifani, 2019).



Figure 4. Mr. Indawan's bamboo *gelumpai* inscription.
 (Source: Documentation of Regional Agency for Archaeological Research in South Sumatera Province, 2019)

DISCUSSION

Islam in Ulu Inscriptions and Manuscripts in the Pasemah Region

The Pasemah tribe is culturally different from the Palembang tribe. They are also different politically, where Palembang as the center of government has its own power, so does Pasemah. When Palembang was ruled by Prince Sida ing Kenayan (ruled in 1622-1650 CE), who had the title Ratu Jamaluddin Mangkurat IV, cooperation had been made with the ruler of Pasemah. At that time, the ruler in Pasemah was Ratu Singe Bekurung (the 10th Ruler of *Jagat Besemah*). The two rulers have established bilateral relations, which were mutual recognition and determination of the borderlines between Pasemah and Palembang. Thus, the term *Jagat Besemah* has both political and socio-cultural meanings. However, this ethnic unity does not have clear borderlines (Yani, 2017).

It should be explained here that in numbers the people of Pasemah are not entirely Muslim. The early development of Islam in this society is not known for certain. There are many opinions on this. One opinion state that Islam entered Pasemah around the 15th or 16th CE. Shaykh Baharuddin Nurqadim is believed to be a religious figure originally brings Islam in Pasemah. Shaykh Nurqadim carried out activities to spread Islam in 1650 AD or 1072 H (Irpinsyah et al., 2019). Shaykh Baharuddin Nurqadim is known as *Puyang Awak* who lived in Perdipe, Pagaralam. In fact, Perdipe was later known as "Mekah Kecil" (Small Makkah) (Suan et al., 2007).

Evidence of Islamic relations with the Pasemah region is also contained in a copper charter issued during the reign of Sultan Abdurahman (1662-1706 AD). The charter was given to Prince Purba Buwana in Tanjung Kurung Village, Pasemah (Suhadi, 1998). The arrival of Islam to Pasemah happened naturally. It occurred due to their interaction with other ethnic groups in the archipelago or those who were already Muslims, such as India, China and Arabia. This was based on the discovery of several Muslims tomb recognized as significant figure in Islam diaspora. For example, the tomb of Syekh Ibrahim Papa (Syekh Angkase or Rama Tuan) in Tanjung Raman Village, Ujanmas District, Muaraenim Regency. He is believed to be an *ulama* who came from Aceh (the descendant of Sultan Malik al-Salih), while his wife, Rabi'ah, came from Tuban, East Java. Other *ulama* of Islam is Bang Bengok whose tomb is in the Ujanmas Village. Bang Bengok and his wife were also from East Java (Madura). Shaykh Jalaluddin is another example; he was a scholar who came from the Middle East and major *ulama* of Islam around Lematang, Muaraenim.

It appears that the interaction of the Pasemah tribe with other ethnic groups in the archipelago, especially Java, was very intense and had been around for a long time. The relationship continued and was influential in the development of Islam in Pasemah. In the oral tradition, it is told that many important religious figures of the Pasemah community roamed and studied Islam in Java. These religious figures are often associated with *Walisanga*, who are believed to be the founders of Islam in Java. Likewise, Shaykh Baharuddin Nurqadim is believed has experience to live with Sunan Kalijaga, a *Walisanga* in Java. Even Atung Bungsu (one of the rulers of Pasemah), who in the local community's tradition is believed to had been a *puyang* (the figure who descended the Pasemah people who inhabited Mount Dempo), had a special relationship with the Majapahit Kingdom in East Java.

The development of Islam in Pasemah was through trade and Sufism. Such a route was common in the Islamization process in the archipelago. What is interesting about the Islamization process in Pasemah is that the Sultanate of

Palembang Darussalam did not interfere. The Palembang Sultanate was more focused on domestic political affairs and maintaining the political stability of the sultanate. Therefore, Islamization in the *Ulu* area, the foreign term used in the Palembang Sultanate including the Pasemah area, was mostly carried out by independent *ulamas* rather than the bureaucratic ones.

The contact between Islam and Pasemah is also recorded in the *Ulu* inscription or manuscripts as found in this archaeological research. In general, the *Ulu* manuscripts that have been identified told about farming, medicine, and mantras (prayers). For example, related to farming, Islamic astrology was used as a guide in cultivating certain types of plants.

Islamic astrology as in Java mentioned in *Ulu* manuscripts, was also used for community activities. Certain complex calculations in Islamic astrology were used to predict a person's fate, determine good or bad days of activity, and matchmaking. This calculation is used by the Pasemah community to organize traditional and religious rituals or ceremonies. This calculation is also used by community groups to arrange their family events. The *Ulu* manuscripts are included in the *Jaye Tal* category (Rauf, 1989).

Some *Ulu* manuscripts called *petunak bulan bintang* (Rauf, 1989) also tells about healing and incantations. These two things are closely related. Treatment was done traditionally using natural ingredients, which in today's concept are called herbal medicine. But, in contrast to the current concept of herbal medicine, this traditional medicine was also accompanied by certain mantras. Uniquely, these mantras have several readings which are quoted from the verses of the Alqur'an. For example, verses such as Basmalah and Kursi (verse 255 from Surah al-Baqarah). Other Islamic elements in the *Ulu* script are the recitations of *assalamu'alaikum*, *tahmid* (*alhamdulillah rabbil'aalamiin*), and *shalawat* to the Prophet Muhammad SAW.

The *Ulu* manuscripts in the Pasemah area, seen from their contents, consist of five kinds. The five kinds are: [1] *Jaye Tal*, [2] *petunak bulan bintang*, [3] *tokoh tuah* (sacred/magical), [4] *julat junjang*, and [5] *agame book* (Rauf, 1989). The explanation is as follows. First, *Jaye Tal* is an *Ulu* manuscript which contains predictions or guidance from a person, army, tribe or nation. Accordingly, within a certain time, the direction or a certain place will experience glory or disaster. Second, *petunak bulan bintang* is an *Ulu* manuscript which contains guidance for health, physicians, medicine, agriculture and stockbreeding. Third, *tokoh tuah* (sacred/magical) is an *Ulu* manuscript which contains guidance for recognizing the signs of a potential champion (winner) and one who loses (loser), both for people and animals. This manuscript also contains the science of immunity and its abstinence. Fourth, *julat junjang* is a text that contains the genealogy of a person, ethnicity or nation, and important notes about the figures, as well as the strengths or glory of that ethnic group. Fifth, *agame book* is an *Ulu* manuscript which contains notes, information, and descriptions of general religious teachings about Islam, written in Jawi script.

The connection between the Arabic script and the *Ulu* manuscripts can be seen in the writing style of the Kursi verse. The Arabic text was written on *Kaghas* in the *Ulu* script style. The writing of the Kursi verse did not meet the correct standards for Arabic writing. In other words, the Kursi verse that was written on *Kaghas* deviated from what was stated in the Alqur'an. Perhaps, this is an example of acculturation between Besemah culture and Islam. The acculturation leads to a process of cultural fusion or what is known as assimilation.

Pasemah has a strong cultural foundation, which is indicated by historical

evidence of the Pasemah civilization legacy in the past, as previously mentioned. Likewise with Islamic culture, one of which is manifested in Arabic. Therefore, when an established culture meets an equally established culture, the assimilation process becomes difficult to happen. In other words, cultural assimilation will occur only when two cultures meet in an unequal position. Thus, cultural encounters were limited to acculturation rather than assimilation.

Islam exerted its influence on *Ulu* manuscripts. In fact, it is presumed that some Pasemah vocabularies have adopted Arabic. One example is the term *juray*, which means children or descendants or grandchildren. It can be presumed that the term *juray* comes from the word *duzriyyat*, which means genealogy, child or descent as well.

In the Pasemah tradition, there is a traditional ritual called *nyeram* (scary or dreadful?). In this tradition, the ritual is led by a *jurai tuwe* (traditional leader) with a medium called *mesigit*. *Mesigit* is a kind of tower as high as the wall of a house, which has no walls, but has a roof. In the *nyeram* ritual, the text pronounced by the ritual leader (*jurai tuwe*) among them is "*seramekalaikum...*" Likewise is in the marriage greeting *saradudun* which originated from the marriage procession between *Atung Bungsu* and *Beteri Kenantan Buwih*. The beginning of the marriage greeting is "*seramelaikum langit, seramelaikum bumi....sigat langit aram temaram aruskah tuwan (a)kan dameku, sigat bumi aram temaram arus melikat (a)kan dameku.*"

Based on the sentences, it can be interpreted that the words "*seram*" and "*seramekalaikum*" come from the words 'salam' and 'assalamu'alaikum'. "*seramelaikum langit, seramelaikum bumi...*" is defined as 'assalamu'alaikum ruler of the sky, assalamu'alaikum ruler of the earth'. "...*langit aram temaram aruskah tuwan (a)kan dameku...*" is defined as 'the sky (which is unclear) should thy introduce my name'. "...*sigat bumi aram temaram arus melikat (a)kan dameku...*" is defined as 'ready or fast the earth (which is unclear) must see or the angels know my name...'

Analysis and Interpretation

The Islamic tradition in *Ulu* manuscripts or inscriptions can also be seen in the attitudes or responses of the community towards the legacy of ancestral manuscripts or inscriptions. In this case, there are three groups of people's views on *Ulu* manuscripts or inscriptions, which are profane, semi-sacred, and sacred. The first group sees cultural relics or heritage as something common. If an object is considered as antique or of historical value, it is treated fairly in the sense that there are no certain rituals. The second group views that objects have sacred values even though they are in a lower category. Therefore, they treat these objects with great care and if necessary, with certain rituals of a simple nature. For example, the manuscript storage must be in a high place and must not be stepped across. The opening of the script is only with simple *ubarampe*, such as roses and jasmines, and is accompanied by a "prayer" as a form of asking permission from the "keepers" of the script.

Meanwhile, the third group sees the manuscripts or inscriptions as having sacred values, so they must be respected. Therefore, certain rituals that are complex in nature are needed to maintain or just know their contents, and Islamic elements are included in rituals like these. For example, to open a script a feast must be held, and a buffalo must be slaughtered. In this event they also need to invite *jurai tuwes* who are now scattered in various places. Because it is considered sacred, a *kaghas* itself or the like is not easy to be read or stored carelessly. All

activities that have to do with the manuscript often have to go through a certain ritual procession. Generally, in Pasemah, *kaghas* is seen as a *pesake puyang* (puyang heirloom) and not just anyone has it. Those who can own and have the right as keeper are usually *jurai tuwes* and their descendants.

There are not many *Ulu* inscriptions or manuscripts. The data shows that there are 5 inscriptions and 10 *Ulu* manuscripts, because in ancient times people who could write were very limited. Therefore, to command writing on *kaghas*, only the rulers and the rich could do it. Initially, the purpose of owning *kaghas* was not primarily to read its contents, but rather as a *pesake* (heirloom) which was considered powerful and fortunate. If it is to be read, then it only happened occasionally during ceremonies (the ceremony of descending a *pesake*). The ceremonies are not held at any time. In the ceremony, there are certain conditions and requirements that must be met. The ritual of opening the *Ulu* script requires *ubarampe* or other certain conditions. If one of the conditions is not fulfilled, the ritual tradition could be canceled. This is because *ubarampe* contains certain symbols or meanings.

One example is the ritual of opening the *gelumpai* inscription in Tanjung Raman Village, Petago District, Lahat Regency. This opening ritual is intended to ask permission from the "spirits" within the *gelumpai*. This ritual is led by an expert who is called the "caretaker (juru kunci)". On that occasion, a ritual was carried out by "Juru Kunci Tapak Tilas Jagat", Arifin Yusuf (67 years old). As in general, a ritual procession requires several "medium" or what is called *ubarampe* (the term in Javanese). Such medium are only symbols in which they have a special meaning and purpose. Among the *ubarampe* that can be seen are:

- Lime, as incantation or "medicine", as a washing agent; symbol of blood, flesh, life or spirit, human nature and skeleton.
- Nine betel leaves smeared with chalk, symbolizing the nine wali's wives.
- Gambir leaves,
- Nipah cigarettes, which are tobacco rolled in small nipah leaves, symbolizes the Batanghari Sembilan which descends nine guardians.
- Three glasses of water of different types (plain water, tea water, and coffee water), which symbolize the three important elements in life, which are air (water), sea (tea water), and land (coffee water).
- Juice of sticky rice,
- Juice of wet sticky rice,
- Turmeric rice.

The ritual of opening the *gelumpai* inscription contains elements of Islamic teachings. In further understanding, rituals like this are prayers for mutual salvation, both for the living and the deceased. In other words, elements of Islamic teachings are very dominant in the ritual opening of the script. This also shows that there is an acculturation of Islamic culture with the Pasemah tradition which is familiar with the *ucap* tradition (mantra for conquering) and *jampi* (mantra for healing). In *ucap* and *jampi* are found words or pronunciations that come from Arabic which are often found in Islamic teachings, although sometimes the pronunciations are different from the original or adapted to the Malay pronunciation of the Pasemah dialect.

CONCLUSION

Some conclusions that can be drawn are as follows. The Pasemah community has a view of life that is influenced by Islamic culture. This can be seen from the analysis of the *Ulu* inscriptions and manuscripts that exist in the community. The inscriptions and manuscripts show activities of daily life based on Islamic views, such as farming, traditional medicine, and prayers which are often referred to as mantras. In other words, the influence of Islam can be seen from the contents of the manuscripts or inscriptions found.

The influence of Islam can also be seen from the external aspects of the *Ulu* script itself, such as writing. Among the *Ulu* texts there has been a cultural acculturation in which Alqur'an verses are reserved in the *Ulu* texts. The reservation of Arabic characters was adapted to the Malay writing culture, so that each culture still shows its own character.

Furthermore, the Islamic tradition in relation to the *Ulu* script can be seen from the perspective of the community. There are people who have a sacred view of the Besemah cultural heritage. Therefore, *Ulu* inscriptions and manuscripts must be treated specifically with certain rituals. The rituals cannot be separated from Islamic elements.

As a final note, it needs to be emphasized that this research is not yet perfect, as there were still some difficulties during fieldwork in terms of finding inscriptions and manuscripts. There were some societies that were closed, while some were open. Their exclusiveness when dealing with the government is due to the fact that their *Ulu* inscriptions and texts are to be taken. Hopes are that the community will understand and pay attention, allowing the team to collect data in the future.

SUGGESTION/RECOMMENDATION

The role of the local government seems to be indifferent yet underestimated. They show an attitude towards the cultural heritage of *Ulu* inscriptions and manuscripts as if considered to be unimportant. If they could learn from other regions, such as Yogyakarta, which uses the *Honocoroko* script as part of the local subjects in schools, of course this would not have happened. The point is, knowing and loving the *Ulu* script first, and then we can hope for the better.

AUTHOR DECLARATION

All Authors contributed to the creation of this manuscript, Wahyu Rizky Andhifani dan Nor Huda Ali, served equally as as primary contributors. The manuscript has been read and approved by all authors. The order of authors listed in the manuscript has been approved by all named authors. All authors did not receive funding for the creation of this manuscript. All authors confirm that there are no known conflicts of interest associated with this publication and there has been no significant financial support for this work that could have influenced its outcome. All authors adhered to the Copyright Notice set by Berkala Arkeologi.

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