

Brunei And Aceh: A Manuscript-Based Study of Cultural And Historical Relationship

Brunei dan Aceh: Hubungan Historis dan Kebudayaan Berbasis Manuskrip

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Abstrak

Dari sisi letak geografis, Brunei dan Aceh adalah dua suku bangsa yang berada di posisi berjauhan, pulau Kalimantan dan Sumatera. Namun, keduanya memiliki banyak kemiripan antara satu sama lainnya. Keduanya berada dalam satu rumpun Melayu, budaya, dan karakter yang mirip. Dari sisi sejarah, kedua suku ini memiliki hubungan baik, baik pada tatanan kesultanan maupun pada level rakyatnya. A. Hasyimi mengatakan bahwa qanun yang dipakai di Brunei adalah hasil adopsi dari qanun yang ada di Aceh. Selain itu kemiripan dari sisi budaya adalah, seperti permainan rakyat, cara masuk rumah baru, dan tepung tawari. Kemiripan-kemiripan ini menjadi menarik dikaji lebih jauh tentang hubungan sejarah Brunei dan Aceh. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk menggali hubungan sejarah antara kesultanan Brunei dan Aceh, termasuk hubungan yang baik antara ulama dalam menyebarkan ajaran Islam. Penelitian ini didasarkan pada temuan-temuan terutama yang terdapat dalam manuskrip Aceh dan Brunei. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan filologis dan antropologis untuk mengungkap informasi relasi antar kedua etnis ini. Diharapkan hasil kajian ini dapat menjadi pendukung pelestarian warisan yang dimiliki kedua suku bangsa Brunei dan Aceh, terutama terkait manuskrip dan bukti sejarah tentang hubungan kedua suku bangsa tersebut.

Kata Kunci: Aceh, Brunei, manuskrip, sejarah, budaya, dan Melayu

Abstract

Geographically, Brunei and Aceh are separated by the ocean. One is located on the island of Kalimantan and the other on the island of Sumatra. Despite the distance, these two entities possess many similarities. Their people are of Malay origin, alike in culture and character. Historically, the relationship between them, be it at the level of sultans or subjects, is as well as it can be. For example, A. Hasyimi stated that Brunei adopted *qanun* (law) from Aceh. Other similarities can be found in their culture, such as folk games, housewarming celebration, and flour ritual. These similarities invite a deeper examination into the relationship between Brunei and Aceh. This study aimed to investigate the connection between the Brunei and Aceh sultanates, as well as the relationship between their ulama in spreading Islam. Using historical manuscripts from both places as primary sources, this study employed philological and anthropological approaches to achieve its objectives. It is hoped that the result of this study could be used to support the heritage preservation of Brunei and Aceh, especially in terms of historical manuscripts which have successfully proved their close relationship.

Keywords: Aceh, Brunei, Malay, manuscript, history, culture

Introduction

Aceh and Brunei are two regions with the same root, Malay, even though they are located far away from each other. One is in the north part of the island of Kalimantan and the other is in the west part of the Sumatra island. In terms of political structure, Brunei has its own state while Aceh is located in a province under the state of Indonesia.

Both the people of Aceh and Brunei are faithful adherents of Islam. The Acehnesse sultanate had existed since 12th century and reached its momentum in the 17th century, while the Brunei sultanate has existed since the 15th century. Both sultanates had a strong Islamic foundation, which Brunei has maintained till today, albeit in the form of modern nation-state. Aceh has shown its tolerance by submitting itself under another state, Indonesia, while maintaining its strong Islamic foundation.

As regions with the same root, Brunei and Aceh have many similarities in culture, tradition, and attitude. On the surface, their relationship is even closer than other Malay polities, judging by the same suffix of their names, Darussalam, which means ‘region

of prosperity'. This close relationship deserves to be examined further, which is the purpose of this paper. One method to examine it is through ancient manuscript as historical proof.

In these two regions, manuscripts are found in many aspects, such as the extent of Islamic culture and penetration in both regions. The history of these regions and its relationship like the linkage among the Sultanates and the relationship between Brunei and Acehese ulama in spreading Islam are also existed in the manuscripts. Many lessons can be learnt from understanding the information found in the manuscripts. The generation of both regions can thus be assured of maintaining their heritage in the future. Therefore, the main question that should be answer in this research is to what extent these both cultural similarities appeared? Some detail questions will be as follows: to what extent Acehese and Brunei sultanate has the relationship? And how did Acehese ulama dan Brunei create the connection for spreading their doctrine?

To uncover the information contained in the historical manuscripts, this study used a philological and anthropological approaches. The philological approach is used for analyzing and examining manuscripts having the information on Brunei and Acehese culture. There are two steps used in this research; 1). Reading releated manuscripts and comparing it to both cultures, Brunei and Aceh; 2). Finding the differences and similarites of that both cultures. In this case, the paper will focus only for its similarity.

Antropological approach used in this research is to understand some cultural aspects existed in these two countries, and to obtain current and historical information from people of both regions. The focus case used in this paper is about marriage ceremony carried out in both cultural group, Acehese and Brunei.

Looking at some preievous literatures, this specific topic could not be discussed yet, especially those which use manuscripts as a focus on the connection and relationship between the Malays of Aceh and Brunei. However, such topic has been discussed in general. One example is Endang Nurhayati's paper published in 2012 titled *Mencari Benang Merah Pemikiran Melayu-Jawa melalui Pengajian Manuskrip Kuna* (Finding Common Themes between Javanese and Malay Thought through Ancient Manu-

script Study). The paper was a result of a research based in Yogyakarta State University (UNY). The current study used the paper as a reference in the context of Brunei-Aceh cultural and historical relation. Another example is the paper by Amirul Hadi (2012) titled *Menguak Beberapa Dimensi Kebudayaan Aceh* (Uncovering Several Dimensions of Aceh Culture), published in 2008 by the *Miqot* journal of State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU). The paper focused on Aceh's culture and history in terms of concepts, politics, attitudes, ceremonies, and education, especially during the 17th century. This study used the paper to obtain an in-depth look into Aceh's culture and its relationship with Brunei's culture. Last but not least, Zusneli Zubir's paper (2013) titled *Hubungan Kerajaan Melayu Minangkabau dengan Brunei: Sebuah Tinjauan Sejarah dan Budaya* (The Relationship between Minangkabau Malay Sultanate with the Brunei Sultanate: A Historical and Cultural Review) was also useful for this study. As fellow neighbour of Brunei with similar Malay root, both regions have been in contact with each other for a long time, resulting in many has cultural similarities, including clothing and food. Similarities can also be found with other Malay regions, such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Kalimantan. However, this paper has particularly discussed the unique relationship between Brunei and Aceh.

Aceh and Brunei in History

1. The Relationship between Sultanates

In the seventeenth century, Brunei and Aceh dominated the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*). Despite their distance, both regions were named *Darussalam* (region of prosperity), and Brunei considered Aceh as its 'older sibling'. Both regions supported and learnt from each other, in knowledge or politics, to maintain their strong position among their neighbours.

They were respected by other polities and visited by many traders, who no longer considered Malacca as the main destination for business. Their strategic location further strengthened their standing in the region.

The success of Sultan Iskandar Muda (*Mahkota Alam*) and Sultan Hasan was comparable, complementing each other. It was stated in a manuscript that:

... dan gagah beraninya ialah berbanding dengan Seri Sultan Mahkota 'Alam dinegri Aceh, tiada membilang samanya raja2 didalam Berunai, dan mashorlah gagah beraninya itu kemana2 negeri, dan sekalian ta'lok rantau pesisirnya takut kepadanya".¹

Translation:

... and his bravery was comparable to the Seri Sultan Mahkota 'Alam of the Aceh sultanate, and other Brunei kings were similarly brave too, and this bravery was renowned everywhere, and all were fearful of it".

The Brunei and Aceh sultanates interacted to maintain their standings. Their zenith was in the 16th and 17th centuries. Aceh was, at first, led by Sultan Ali Riayat Syah, then his power was successfully preserved till the times of Sultan Iskandar Muda, while Brunei was led by Sultan Hasan. They successfully conquered many regions in their surroundings.²

In accordance with its position, many regions in the western part of Sumatra became part of Aceh. Similarly, Brunei managed to extend its influence all the way to the Philippines. Faraway polities in the Middle Eastern and Western regions came to know and respect both sultanates, especially Turkey (the Ottomans), which supported both materially and spiritually. The term *lada sicupak* for the Acehnese, for instance, was replaced with *meuriam* (cannon), which was very popular in wars against Western colonial powers.

Sultan Iskandar Muda's leadership was well known in Brunei. There were many similarities between Aceh tradition (*Adat*

¹Amin Sweneey, "Silsilah Raja-raja Brunei" *JMBRAS*, Vol. 41. 1968, h. 56; Haji Pengiran Mohammad dan Pengiran Haji Abdurahman, *Islam di Burnei Darussalam*, (Bandar Sri Begawan: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei, 2005), h. 130-133.

²Haji Asbol bin Mail, *Kesultanan Melayu Brunei abad ke-19: Politik dan Struktur Pentadbiran*, (Bandar Sri Begawan: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei, 2011), h. 3-6; Snouck Hurgronje, *The Acehnese*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1906); Amirul Hadi, *Aceh: Sejarah, Budaya, dan Tradisi*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2010); Zainuddin, *Tarich Atjeh dan Nusantara*, (Medan: Pustaka Iskandar Muda, 1961).

Meukuta Alam) and Brunei tradition as found in *Kitab Risalat al-Marhum fi Adat al-Marhum* (Sultan Muhammad Hasan's Tradition). Several topics and sentences were alike.

The governance style of Aceh from Sultan Ali Riayat Syah (1537-1568 M) to Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636M) was adopted by Brunei, such as building relationship with foreign powers such as Turkey, and governing with wisdom, strength, and decisiveness. Religion and tradition were upheld firmly. *Adat al-Marhum* stated that Sultan Hasan (1582-1598M) was a leader who adopted the laws (*qanun*) of Sultan Mahkota Alam. It was also stated that the government of Sultan Hasan was not much different from Sultan Mahkota Alam³.

2. The Malay Language

Eventhough Aceh has many other languages beside Malay, the people of both regions (Aceh and Brunei) are considered Malay in ethnicity. Acehnesse ulamas used Jawi (Malay) language and script to spread their knowledge, so as to gain a wider audience in the Malay Archipelago.⁴ Hamzah Fansuri's works are the first work written in Malay. One of his statement related to what extent he paid attention to the people in understanding his works is mentioned in *Syarab Al-'Asyiqin* (the Drink of All Desiring People),

*Ketahui bahwa faqir dan dha'if Hamzah Fansuri hendak menyatakan jalan kepada Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala dan ma'rifat Allah dengan bahasa Jawi dalam kitab ini—insyaAllah—supaya segala hamba Allah yang tiada tahu akan bahasa Arab dan bahasa Farisi supaya dapat memicarakan dia. Adapun kitab ini dinamakan Syarab Al-'Asyiqin yakni Minuman Segala Orang yang Berahi.*⁵

³Teuku Iskandar, "Aceh as a Crucible of Muslim-Malay Literature" in *Mapping the Acehnesse Past*, ed by R. Michael Feener, Patrick Daly, and Anthony Reid Iskandar, 2011), h. 56; Amirul Hadi, *Aceh: Sejarah, Budaya, dan Tradisi*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2010), h. 147-149; Zainuddin, *Tarich Atjeh dan Nusantara*, (Medan: Pustaka Iskandar Muda, 1961), h. 272.

⁴The Aceh people are not composed only of Aceh ethnicity, but also Malay, Minang, Gayo, and Tamiang ethnicities, among others. In general, they use Malay to communicate.

⁵<http://www.mapesaaceh.com/2015/11/malaysia-brunei-darussalam-dan.html>; Liaw Yok Fang, *A History of Classical Malay Literature*, (Singapore: ISEAS, 2013), h. 303-305.

Translation:

“Know that the poor and weak Hamzah Fansuri wish to declare in the path of *Allah Subhanahu wa Ta’ala* and Allah’s knowledge in Malay in this book—God willing—so that all Allah’s servant who knows no Arabic and Persian can speak about Him. This book is titled *Syarab Al-‘Asyiqin* which means the Drink of All Desiring People.”

Another Acehnese ulamas popular in the Malay Archipelago till today are Syamsuddin as-Sumatrani and Abdurrauf al-Fansuri, both of whom also used Malay for wide readership. Both stated in the books that the Malay language has root in Pasai, the northern part of Aceh coast. It was stated in the book of *Mir’atul Mu’min* by Syamsuddin as-Sumatrani:

“... *Terbanyak daripada orang yang mulia daripada saudaraku yang shalih..., karena tiada mereka itu tahu akan bahasa Arab dan Parsi, tetapi tiada diketahui mereka itu melainkan bahasa Pasai jua.*”⁶

Translation:

“... The many of noble people among my pious relatives..., they know not of Arabic and Persian, only their language of Pasai.”

Similarly, Abdurrauf stated in his book:

“*Maka bahwasanya adalah Hadarat yang Maha mulia bersabda kepadaku daripada sangat labanya akan agama Rasulullah bahwa kukarang baginya sebuah kitab dengan bahasa Jawi yang dibangsakan kepada bahasa Pasai yang muhtaj kepadanya orang yang menjabat jabatan qadhi pada pekerjaan hukumnya....*”⁷

Translation:

“That the Majesty [*Paduka Seri Sultan*an Tajul ‘Alam Shafiyatuddin Syah] has decreed to prevent ignorance of the religion of the Prophet, I have written for him a book in Jawi, which is attributed to the Pasai language, needed especially by people who hold the position of officials...”

Arabic tradition inspired Islamic intellectualism in the Malay Archipelago. It was adapted into local context, emerging into a distinct tradition. Islam here has deep roots in Arabic, and wide expression in local culture. It is common to find in Malay Islamic

⁶<http://www.mapesaaceh.com/2015/11/malaysia-brunei-darussalam-dan.html>

⁷Manuscript collected in Museum Aceh, No. 07.688.

texts references to Arabic ulama, such as found in the introduction of the book *Bidāyat al-mubtadī bi-faḍl Allāh al-muhtadī*, which stated:

“...maka kutaklifkan dan kujawikan risalah ini daripada segala kitab Arabi yang fasahah kepada bahasa Jawi yang baik-baik...”⁸

Translation:

“... hence I offer and render this book from many eloquent Arabic books into the Jawi language...”.

Such statement explicitly convey that Arabic tradition had inspired the Malay ulama. Further, Fathurahman⁹ stated in his review of Ronit Ricci’s book that to understand the indigenization of Islam in South East Asia, a useful reference is the book *Kitab Seribu Masalah* (The Book of A Thousand Problems). The author of the book stated the book remains attached to its Arabic context and maintain the superiority of Arabic language in it.

3. Cultural Similarities

There are many similarities in the culture of Brunei and Aceh. The use of the names example Syarif dan Said can be found in both regions. These names also have the same history and origin. The name Syarif is often attributed to those who are descendants of the Prophet. Brunei’s third sultan even had the name Syarif Ali, who was described to have a direct lineage to the Prophet¹⁰. The same naming convention can also be found in in Aceh till today. Some Acehnese maintained the prophetic lineage so strictly that they only marry within their group to maintain it¹¹.

Similarities can also be found in their marriage ceremony and preparation. The marriage costume styles are quite similar, even in clothing color. Red color seems favorite for both of them.

⁸http://www.manuscripts-nusantara.org/receive/HasjmyMSBook_islamhs_00000200

⁹Oman Fathurahman, “Memahami Pribumisasi Islam Melalui Kitab Seribu Masalah” in *Studia Islamika*, (Vol. 19. No. 3, 2012), h. 597-609.

¹⁰Haji Pengiran Mohammad dan Pengiran Haji Abdurahman, *Islam di Burnei Darussalam*, (Bandar Sri Begawan: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei.Mohammad, 20050, h. 98.

¹¹Fakhriati, *Indians and Arabs as Hybrid Communities in Aceh: Identity and Assimilation*, (Paper presented at Seasrep Workshop in Manilla, 9-10 March 2017), not published yet.

Nevertheless, blue is used dominantly in Brunei, and yellow and green are in Aceh.



Photo adopted from
<https://i0.wp.com/aceh.kotamini.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2015/06/Pakaian-Pengantin-Aceh.jpg?resize=533%2C800>



Photo adopted from Awang Haji Md. Yussop bin Bakar's book, 2015, page 52.

Besides, during the marriage ceremony, a tradition in Brunei is to read a spell (*mantera*) when the bride and groom are about to ascend to their chairs (*naik berseri*)¹². The spell goes as follows:

*Hee cintaku Aceh
Arung rindu didendangkan sari manis
Temanku nang sedang manis
Pandang orang sedang manis
Manis lagi cahaya mukaku....*

¹²Awang Haji Hashim, Haji Abd Hamid, "Adat Perkahwinan Melayu Brunei: Antara Tradisi dan Nilai", in *Perkahwinan Etnik Melayu di Brunei Darussalam*, (Negara Brunei Darussalam: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2015), h. 1.

Translation:

O Aceh my love
My longing carried by the sweet sound
Of my lovely friend
Even if others shine
Brighter is the shine on my face

In the first line, the word Aceh might have been mentioned in spontaneity, as the subsequent lines do not elaborate on it. However, the usage of the word can be attributed to at least two factors. *First*, the lengthy relationship between Brunei and Aceh such that the latter become internalized into the former's literature and expression. Second, such was their closeness that the word Aceh become the property of both regions.

4. Similarities in Doctrine and Relation between Ulama

The understanding and implementation of Islam in both regions are very similar. For example, both used to ban the depiction of humans in pictures. In Aceh, there are no manuscript which depicts human. In Brunei, when Vasco Luorenco visited in 1526, he gave the Brunei sultan a gift of tapestry depicting the marriage of the English King Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon. The sultan refused, stating that he could not receive any art which depicts human, and the given tapestry may interferen with his life and the region's peace.¹³

The ulama of both regions also had a good relationship, built by scholarly knowledge and network. This relationship is evident in their writings, which presently have become historical manuscripts.

Islamic knowledge was usually obtained by the Malay scholars by visiting in the Arab world. Two purposes were usually intended by these visits, one was the performance of the pilgrimage (*hajj*), and the other was the obtainment of knowledge from Arab scholars. For the second purpose, these ulama could reside in Mecca for a long a time, sometimes between ten to twenty years.

¹³ James Bennet, 'Crescents Moon: Afterword' in *Crescent Moon: Islamic Art & Islamization in Southeast Asia*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2005, h. 251.

During their studies, some time they were tasked by their teachers to teach and lead other students. Staying and living in Mecca and Medina for a long time Abdurauf al-Fansuri of Aceh (d. 1603 M), for example, was entrusted by his teacher as teacher for Nusantara students and *imam* (leader). Another example was Teungku Haji Abdurrazak of Meunasah Ara, Pidie, Aceh (d. 1979 M). He stayed in Mecca for seven years and being a preacher. He taught his relatives who visited Mecca for the purpose of knowledge.¹⁴

In Mecca, ulamas from Aceh and Brunei learnt from many of the same teachers. They had time to discuss among themselves about their respective home regions and people. This relationship could be seen from the books used by the people of Brunei, who are Sunni in creed and Shafi'i in school of thought (*mazhab*). From the 17th to the 20th century, the Brunei sultanates used Sunni and Shafi'i books for Islamic education, such as *Sabilul Muhtadin* by Daud Fatani, *al-Mukhtasar* and *Siratal Mustaqim* by ar-Raniry, and *Gayatut Taqrib fil Irthi wat-Ta'shib*¹⁵.

Aceh too subscribed to the Sunni creed and Shafi'i school of thought. Classical texts still used today are such as *Gayatut Taqrib*, *Bidayatul Hidayah*, and *Kitab Lapan* (The Book of Eight). The latter is a compilation of books written by ulamas of the 17th to the 19th century¹⁶.

A Note on the Relations between Brunei and Acehese Manuscripts

Both regions preserve valuable heritage from their ancestors. A number of Acehese manuscripts can be found in Brunei.¹⁷

¹⁴Interviewed with his son, Muhammad Thahir living in Teupin Raya, Pidie, Aceh on July 2017.

¹⁵Abd. Ghofur, "Islam dan Politik di Brunei Darussalam: Suatu Tinjauan Sosio-Historis" in *Toleransi*, (Vol. 7, No. 1, January-June 2015), h. 53-69.

¹⁶Fakhriati, *Menelusuri Tarekat Syattariyah di Aceh: Studi atas Naskah Aceh*, (Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, 2008); Fakhriati, 2014, "Tradisi Intelektual Aceh di Dayah Tanoh Abee dan Dayah Ruhul Fata" published in *Al-Qalam*, (Vol. 20, No. 2, 2014), h. 181.

¹⁷<http://alfian-nawawi.blogspot.co.id/2010/04/ratusan-naskah-kuno-aceh-tersimpan-di.html>.

There are many similarities, in content and in form, between manuscripts from both regions. In terms of form, similarities can be in the writing script, language, illustration, and genre. In terms of content, the type of knowledge and information contained in the manuscripts are similar. Local genius and local wisdom can be gleaned from these manuscripts.

The script and language used in the manuscripts is primarily Malay, and secondarily Arabic and local language. This language factor can be one of the reasons that Acehnes manuscripts—as manuscripts of other Malay regions—are preserved in Brunei. A Brunei manuscript which can be compared with Aceh's is *Syair Rajang*. Preserved in *Pusat Sejarah Brunei* (Brunei History Centre), this manuscript contains poetic lines predicting auspicious and inauspicious days. Written in two columns format, this manuscript is beautified with the drawing of *sulur* flower on every page¹⁸. Such drawing can be found in many Acehnes manuscripts.¹⁹

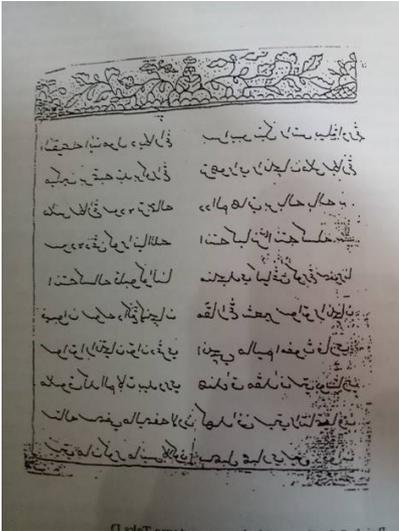


Photo adopted from Ampuan Haji Brahim Ampuan Haji Tengah's book, 2008 page 59.

¹⁸Ampuan Haji Brahim Ampuan Haji Tengah, *Syair Rajang: Penyelenggaraan dan Analisis Teks*, (Bandar Sri Begawan: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei, 2008), h. 59-66.

¹⁹<http://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2014/03/an-illuminated-quran-manuscript-from-aceh.html>

This manuscript is a part of *Syair Rajang*. On the top of this page, it is shown on how the *sulur* flower is decorated. This decoration is quite similar with Acehese manuscript as copied below. This Acehese manuscript entitled *Sarakata* is collected privately by family of Teuku Hasballah Teupin Raya Pidie, Aceh.



Photo is taken by Fakhriati in 2011.

Similar daily predictive content can also be found in Acehese manuscripts, such as *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai* and *Hikayat Aceh*. In the latter, it was predicted that a courageous person would be born and later lead the kingdom. The prediction was made in the form of a dream by the *Raja Indra Bungsu*'s daughter (the mother of Iskandar Muda) during her pregnancy. The princess dreamt of *sanggulkan bulan cahaya amat cemerlang, dan bersandangkan bintang karang* (“moon coiffure, brightly shining, against gleaming stars”)²⁰.

²⁰Iskandar, Teuku, “Aceh as a Crucible of Muslim-Malay Literature” in *Mapping the Acehese Past*, ed by R. Michael Feener, Patrick Daly, and Anthony Reid, (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2011), h. 116.; Ampuan Haji Brahim Ampuan Haji Tengah, *Syair Rajang: Penyelenggaraan dan Analisis Teks*, (Bandar Sri Begawan: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei, 2008), h. 31.

Another manuscript with such content can be found in Teungku Nurdin Aceh's manuscript. No title can be found for this manuscript, as it discusses many issues, such as the prediction that the heaven's door is opened in different direction every day, and hence certain activity is better done in certain days, and the prediction of earthquakes and its effects.



Photo adopted from Teungku Nurdin Aceh's collection located in Ciputat Jakarta.

Reliving Heritage: Brunei and Aceh culture

The interaction between Brunei and Aceh is well-documented. Both regions have preserved this interaction as their own heritage. Like other relationships, the interaction ebbs and flows as time goes by.

However, their relationship remains strongly till today, even though it is no longer bound by statehood. For example, seven public prosecutors from Brunei visited Aceh in October 2014 to conduct a comparative study of Islamic legal theory and implementation. The visit focused on criminal law and the punishment of lashing for sharia violators. They studied the *Qanun*²¹ and the court system of Aceh for adoption and implementation in Brunei,

²¹The concepts of *qanun* in Brunei and Aceh can be read in Aharis Mabruur et. al., 2017:19-44.

acknowledging the similarity of Aceh's legal system. They examined further the implementation of Islamic law in Aceh.²²

Individuals from both regions also collect historical manuscripts. These collectors often receive invitations for exhibitons and seminars conducted in Brunei. One such collector, an Acehnese named Tarmizi, stated that he participated in an exhibiton in Brunei and left some of his collection there. It is not mentioned whether the collection was sold or entrusted for safe keeping in Brunei.²³

The close relationship between both regions up to the level of sultanates and statehood needs to be rebuilt. The exchange of scholarly knowledge and religious teaching should be intensified. Memorandums of Understanding should be signed between individuals, organizations, and even governments. As such, past memory can be preserved and maintained. Cultural heritage, such as manuscripts rich in local wisdom, can be recontextualized and reappreciated by current generations.

Conclusion

This paper showed that there is a common theme in Brunei and Aceh history. The discovery is hoped to strengthen the bond between these two regions, so that it exists not only in the past, but also in the present among current generations. Their distance could not separate their cultural, religious, and tradition attachment. Politics and Islam played a major role in the regions' relationship, causing them to interact and complement each other, taking and giving help when necessary. Their closeness is evident from the heritage of manuscripts found in both regions. These manuscripts are accessible till today.

²²The implementation of Islamic law is not simple. Many challenge and criticism can be found, especially from internation human right activists. However, Brunei and Aceh should maintain their conviction and uphold Islamic law to increase the status of their people before God.
<https://syahuri.wordpress.com/2014/05/27/brunei-dan-aceh-darussalam/>;
<https://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/jaksa-brunei-darussalam-belajar-hukum-jinayat-di-aceh.html>

²³<http://www.antaranews.com/berita/182348/naskah-kuno-aceh-banyak-di-brunei-darussalam>

The relationship has declined in the present age, with visits between both regions occurring only in special occasions. As such, there is a need to revive the cultural and traditional relationship between them. In the past, distance had not been a problem. Current different level of political structure, Brunei a sovereign state and Aceh a province of Indonesia, should not matter. The common heritage shared between them is too great for such factors to be serious obstacles in the revival of their relationship.

An organization or institution should be formed for the purpose of this revival. Its activities should include the preservation and maintenance of cultural heritage. Cooperation in terms of ancient manuscript sharing and study is important. The manuscripts should be studied and its content relived and recontextualized according to the present time. Cultural performance and competition could also be held to attract the the attention of ordinary people. Scientifically, research using these manuscripts and other relevant methods should be conducted by scholars from both regions.

All the above efforts cannot be undertaken without the support of the governments in both region. The support and advice of religious scholars is also paramount for their success. It is hoped that Brunei and Aceh can exemplify that beautiful Malay proverb, *jauh di mata dekat di hati* (out of sight, but not out of mind).

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