

WRITING TRADITION AND INTELLECTUAL HERITAGE OF JAMBI ULAMA

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Abstract

Ulama are very important figures in the writing tradition, and Islamic boarding schools are institutions where ulama produce many of their written works. As educational institutions, Islamic boarding schools have a crucial role in developing and strengthening Islamic intellectual traditions. Islamic boarding schools are also recognized as one of the institutions that effectively produces book writings for ulama, because Islamic boarding schools are a comfortable place for ulama to transmit their knowledge. The writings of scholars are generally handwritten using pure Arabic letters in Arabic and Arabic letters using Malay, Javanese or other regional languages, and studies in the broad Islamic studies section. This research uses historical methods through in-depth study and analysis of ulama books in Jambi. The findings in this research are, First, that Islamic boarding school ulama books are made in various types ranging from original books, translations, texts, summaries, adaptations and excerpts. Second, in general books written by ulama are used by the general public and used as teaching materials in Islamic boarding schools. Third, the work of the ulama and Islamic boarding school administrators is still used today with various uses, ranging from national, regional and local scopes.

Keywords: Writing traditions; Intellectual heritage; Pesantren; Contemporary work.

INTRODUCTION

The long history of the spread of Islam from the Middle East to the Malay Archipelago has given rise to various theories. Over centuries, the process of "Islamization" has been ongoing and is undeniably factual. The extensive journey of Islamic dissemination eventually reached the Malay Archipelago. Evidence of Islam's acceptance includes the establishment of Islamic Sultanates such as Perlak, followed by Samudera Pasai, Malacca, and numerous Islamic states or Sultanates across the region.

According to Azra (2004), the spread and development of Islam were heavily influenced by scholars (especially Sufi scholars), as they were the primary figures in the dissemination and expansion of Islam in the Malay Archipelago. Similarly, Laffan (2015) explained that the process of Islamization cannot be separated from the influence and role of these scholars, who adeptly identified opportunities for proselytization. However, over time, disputes occasionally arose among scholars, particularly between bureaucratic scholars and populist scholars. Based on Nor Huda's writings (2014), despite the friction between these two groups, scholars generally held significant roles and a special position within the Muslim community in the archipelago. The contribution of Islam to developing a distinctive culture in Malay-Indonesian society cannot be separated from the role of scholars. Both groups played distinct roles in the Islamization process: bureaucratic scholars influenced the ruling elite, while populist scholars focused on rural and marginalized communities (Qomar, 2015).

Scholars, or ulama, are individuals proficient in Islamic sciences, religious knowledge, and general sciences related to community issues. They hold a charismatic position within society due to their knowledge, encompassing jurisprudence, religion, worldly matters, politics, and

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governance (Burhanudin, 2012). Scholars are also regarded as inheritors of the Prophets, granting them high legitimacy.

The statement that scholars are the “inheritors of the Prophets” (*al-ulama warathat al-anbiya*) indirectly elevates their position and status in Muslim society, making them highly influential and significant. In the Malay Archipelago, particularly Indonesia, scholars have historically held an esteemed status within social life due to the historical and cultural factors underpinning the spread of Islam in the region. Their reputation has remained untarnished, even during periods of both strong and weak political supremacy of Islamic Sultanates. This situation strengthened scholars' roles within ordinary communities, particularly through the establishment of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) (Huda, 2021). Moreover, scholars' works have consistently been used in religious understanding and development.

Islamic development in Indonesia is marked by numerous renowned scholars who produced intellectual works. As noted by Azra (2004), these scholars had established intensive networks since the 17th century. Some works by Indonesian scholars have even been recognized internationally. Their writings were produced in various languages and scripts, including Arabic, Malay, and local languages, using Arabic script, Jawi, and other local scripts. These texts were widely disseminated and used in traditional educational institutions such as *pesantren*. This demonstrates that scholars transmitted their knowledge through their writings to develop Islamic sciences. It is unsurprising that certain regions in the archipelago became Islamic centers, producing distinguished scholars (Bruinessen, 2012).

The establishment of Islamic kingdoms and Sultanates accelerated the actualization of knowledge, as scholars, both independent and politically affiliated, produced numerous written works. These scholars emphasized writing as a means of expressing ideas, thoughts, and concepts. Islamic boarding schools or similar institutions provided a conducive environment for such intellectual pursuits, leading to the creation of numerous scholarly works. *Pesantren* not only utilized texts from the Middle East but also developed and produced local texts authored by prominent scholars whose names remain esteemed to this day.

The significant number of local texts authored by earlier scholars has piqued researchers' interest in further exploration. Early investigations were conducted by M. Leydecker and C. Mutter (Fathurahman, 2022). Subsequently, one of the researchers dedicated to classical texts was I.W.C. van den Berg in 1886. As cited by Ahmad Rahman (2011), van den Berg observed that these intellectual works by scholars were still used in Javanese and Madurese *pesantren*. His research concluded that approximately 900 texts were actively utilized as learning materials and were continuously reprinted for educational purposes.

Another researcher focusing on classical texts was Martin van Bruinessen (1999). Unlike van den Berg, Bruinessen categorized classical works into typologies of knowledge, such as jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and its principles (*usul al-fiqh*), theology (*aqidah*) and ethics (*akhlak*), Quranic exegesis (*tafsir*), Hadith and its sciences (*ulum al-hadith*), Sufism (*taṣawwuf*), and the biography of Prophet Muhammad (*sīrah*). Bruinessen also classified these texts by their fields of study and levels of usage.

Research on classical texts was conducted intensively by the Religious Literature Research and Development Center between 2004 and 2005. The 2004 study, focused on Java, identified changes in literature usage in terms of content, types of knowledge, and presentation, influenced by various factors. The 2005 study found no changes in literature usage, except in teaching methods, which incorporated classical approaches without eliminating traditional methods such as *wetonan*, *bandongan*, *sorogan*, and *lalaran* (Tim Puslitbang, 2004).

In 2009, Puslitbang Lektur Keagamaan conducted follow-up research, identifying 239 classical texts authored by 31 *pesantren* scholars. These works covered disciplines such as jurisprudence, exegesis, linguistics, Sufism, theology, history, Hadith, and ethics. The texts utilized Malay, Arabic, and local languages, employing scripts such as Arabic, Jawi, Pegon, and Latin (Tim Keagamaan, 2009).

This study aims to explore classical texts in Jambi City, particularly in Seberang Kota Jambi. The location was chosen due to the historical background of its Islamic educational institution, established in 1915. The initial assumption is that such an institution, existing since 1915, possesses numerous intellectual works authored by earlier scholars, still in use today.

The problem identified in this study stems from reports that numerous classical texts are housed in pesantren in Jambi. These texts remain primary references for prominent scholars even today. Hence, the researcher seeks to uncover these texts in the pesantren.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research to be conducted is field research employing historical research methods (Kartodirdjo, 1993). The initial step in data collection involves observation, interviews, and documentation. Several data sources will also be obtained from articles, books, journals, and studies related to the research theme (Madjid & Wahyudhi, 2014). The researcher will explore the works of Jambi scholars, which are scattered across various Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Jambi City. Once the data is collected, the next step is data processing, which involves verifying the data to ensure its credibility (Abdurahman, 2011). After obtaining valid data, the researcher will proceed with data analysis. The data will be analyzed using the theoretical framework applied as an explanatory tool. Ultimately, factual conclusions will be drawn and presented in a research report (Kuntowijoyo, 2003).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Writing Tradition and Jawi Script

Before the arrival of colonial powers, Jambi had already established itself as an Islamic state under the Sultanate of Jambi, one of the influential sultanates on the eastern coast of Sumatra. The Sultanate of Jambi adopted Islam as the state religion, becoming a center for religious learning where numerous manuscripts circulated, utilizing Jawi script to articulate the scholars' knowledge. According to Ali Muzakir (Muzakir, 2011), many writings and works by Jambi scholars during the 19th and 20th centuries used Jawi script as a writing medium. Even earlier, in the 17th century, the Sultanate of Jambi designated Jawi script as the official state writing system.

The adaptation of Arabic script into Jawi script reflects the development of writing practices during that era, which persisted as a medium for scholars to transmit knowledge until the 20th century. Writing Malay language in Arabic script has been practiced since the introduction and widespread dissemination of Islam across the archipelago. Consequently, Arabic-Malay writing became the official script of Islamic communities and kingdoms at that time. Over a long period, Arabic-Malay script has left a legacy of various literature and manuscripts (Hermansyah, 2014). Some of these manuscripts, known as *kitab kuning* ("yellow books"), evolved into *kitab putih* ("white books") authored by scholars with dual qualifications—high intellectual and moral integrity—whose works were written by hand (Bustamam, 2016).

The adaptation of Jawi script subsequently fostered the writing tradition. According to some opinions, the oldest known existence of Jawi script is evidenced by the Terengganu Inscription Stone from the 14th century CE. This script is a modified form of Arabic adapted to the Malay language used across the archipelago. In his article titled *Perihal Aksara Arab-Melayu* (Regarding Arabic-Malay Script), Ahmad Darmawi explains that the emergence of Arabic-Malay script was a result of cultural acculturation in Islamic writing traditions. Jajat Burhanudin also notes that this writing tradition began in the Samudera Pasai Sultanate, concurrent with the development of the Malay language and subsequent use of Jawi script. The oldest evidence of Jawi script, the Terengganu Inscription Stone, signifies its expansion throughout the archipelago.

The importance of the Malay language, as noted by (Jajat Burhanudin, 2012), lies in its role as an essential element in the dissemination of Islam, serving as the *lingua franca* of the region. Its development paralleled the modification of Jawi script, which became a vital writing and

communication tool in social, political, and diplomatic interactions within Islamic sultanates and for spreading Islam. Language and script are inseparable elements in this context.

According to Hermansyah (Hermansyah, 2014) the Sultanate of Pasai pioneered Jawi script as the official writing system for sultanates in the Malay Peninsula and the archipelago without altering the language's phonetics. Arabic script modified by Malays to write their language represents the ingenuity of past Malay communities. Also known as Arabic-Malay script, this writing system is more widely recognized as Jawi script (Steenbrink, 1984).

Elya Roza (2017) mentions that the individual who modified Arabic-Malay script into Jawi script or taught it remains unknown. However, the Terengganu Inscription Stone, dated 702 AH (1303 CE) from the Malacca Peninsula in Malaysia, is evidence of Jawi script's use in the Malay region. This script continued to develop from the 17th to the 20th century (Roza, 2017).

The term "Jawi" itself carries various meanings. In Malaysia, "Jawi" refers to a type of rice with a glutinous texture. In regions such as Minangkabau, Riau, and Sumatra in general, "Jawi" means "buffalo" or "cow." These meanings bear no connection to the reference to Jawi script. Furthermore, the notion that "Jawi" derives from the Arabic adjective for "Jawa" (Java) to denote its association with the people or island of Java is considered illogical. However, according to Azra (Azra, 2013), it is logical to associate "Jawi" with Javanese people or the archipelago, as numerous pilgrims from the region were referred to as *Ashhab al-Jawiyyin* (the Javanese companions) in Arab sources from the 14th century.

Regardless, Jawi script laid the foundation for writing and fostered a tradition of authorship, reflecting intellectual progress. Royal scribes and court intellectuals were among the first to utilize it, as evidenced by the Terengganu Inscription Stone, which contains laws. This tradition continued in writing legal codes, royal decrees, literature, science, religion, and high-value works (Ramala, 2020).

Jawi script's vocabulary is richer and more varied compared to Arabic script itself. Ancient manuscripts and books written in Malay script are abundant and preserved in 28 countries. The role of Jawi script in advancing the writing tradition highlights its significance. Specifically, its use in transmitting and disseminating knowledge represents an invaluable intellectual legacy of the archipelago. Scholars of the past conveyed their knowledge through Jawi writings, and their works remain studied today.

The Tradition of Writing Manuscripts

The writing of manuscripts by scholars reflects an instinct to preserve and disseminate their intellectual contributions on a broader scale (Bahrul Ulum, 2020). The emergence of such works enables the personal identity and intellectual character of the authors to be recognized through their writings. The tradition of writing should be appreciated universally, fostering a generation of high-quality successors supported by policies or regulations such as reward systems that sustain the consistency of scholars in maintaining this tradition.

Historically, the writing tradition among earlier scholars aimed to ensure the continuity and development of knowledge. Writing served as a medium for conveying ideas and thoughts in written form (Khairiyah, 2020). This tradition was motivated by a message from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who encouraged knowledge preservation through writing, as reflected in the hadith: "*Tie knowledge with writing*".

The tradition of writing in the Nusantara, influenced by Islamic teachings, is estimated to have begun in the 14th century, marking the transition of Malay literature towards Islam. During this period, Malay literary works adapted narratives from Arabic and Persian literature by replacing characters' names with local ones (Burhanudin, 2017). The continuous transmission of scientific and Islamic knowledge from the Middle East eventually became a strong tradition, manifested through translations and adaptations.

Simultaneously, the Malay script emerged as a prominent written language across the sultanates of Melaka, Brunei, Johor, Sulu, Aceh, Patani, and Ternate by the early 15th century. It was used extensively in royal correspondence, administrative orders, and as a medium for merchant interactions at Malacca's ports, written in Arabic-Malay script (Roza, 2017).

By the 16th and 17th centuries, scholars like Hamzah Fansuri, Syamsuddin Sumatrani, Ar-Raniri, Al-Maqassari, and Abd Rauf Al-Sinkili began producing literary and scholarly works on Sufism, tafsir, theology, jurisprudence, and history. In the 18th century, the intellectual focus shifted to Neo-Sufism with scholars like Abdussamad Al-Palimbani, Muhammad Arsyad Al-Banjari, and Daud bin Abdullah Al-Fattani, whose works gained international recognition.

In the 19th century, the writing tradition faced challenges due to difficult socio-political conditions and the colonization of most of the Nusantara. Nevertheless, the writing tradition persisted, supported by royal patronage, such as Sultan Ali's initiatives to invite scholars for intellectual development (Burhanudin, 2017). This era also marked the beginning of the term *kitab kuning* (yellow manuscripts), referring to classical Islamic texts.

Prominent scholars in the late 19th and early 20th centuries include Nawawi Al-Bantani (d. 1887), who authored over 100 works across nine fields, and Mahfudz Al-Tirmisi (d. 1919), known for *As-Siqayah al-Mardiyah fi 'Asma al-Kutub al-Fiqhiyah as-Syafi'iyah*. Others like Khalil Bangkalan (d. 1925) and KH Hasyim Asy'ari (d. 1974) produced monumental works, such as *Adab al-'Alim wa al-Muta'allim*, first published in 1415 H (Bahrul Ulum, 2020).

The writing tradition not only served to transfer knowledge but also provided insights into the intellectual dynamics of their time. As noted by Wellek and Warren (1995), ancient writings reflect the intellectual climate and societal dialogues of the era. These works, ranging from manuscripts on paper to inscriptions on stone and metal, form the legacy of scholarly endeavors.

In Jambi, the writing tradition was prominently preserved in pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), which functioned as centers for learning and manuscript production. However, the circulation of these manuscripts often remained confined to internal communities, making them difficult to trace for broader public access. Despite this, the intellectual heritage of Jambi scholars continues to be used in pesantren education.

Historical records highlight notable Jambi scholars such as Sheikh Abdul Majid bin H. Yusuf, who resisted colonial rule and later established Islamic educational institutions in Jambi. By 1912, his students, returning from Mecca, initiated Islamic education through the establishment of *kuttub* (elementary Islamic schools) and *madrrasah* (secondary Islamic schools), creating a foundational framework for Islamic intellectualism in the region.

The classification of manuscripts by Jambi scholars has been further explored, building upon earlier efforts by (Rosadi, 2014), who identified 35 manuscripts. Despite these initial efforts, much remains undocumented, underscoring the need for comprehensive inventory and study. The preservation and recognition of Jambi's intellectual legacy are critical for understanding its historical and cultural significance.

The Legacy of Jambi Ulama Books

Most of the books of scholars in Jambi belong to Islamic Boarding Schools and the community. These books of scholars are hereditary and in general the owners of these books are still lay in maintaining them so that their existence can be threatened, although some boarding schools have tried to reprint the books which are then known as white books. The existence of these books of scholars is still worrying, this is because first the manuscripts have been destroyed due to old age and are not well maintained. Second, these books are lost, abandoned by their owners, especially in the hands of the community and burned as happened at the Nurul Iman Islamic Boarding School.

These books are uniquely still used in the learning system at Islamic boarding schools until now. The books of Islamic boarding school scholars consist of various types ranging from original

books, translations, sarah, summaries, adaptations and excerpts. These books are in Arabic and Jawi Arabic script while the language uses Malay and Arabic. The books found by the author in several areas spread across Jambi Province, however, there are still many books that have not been identified. The books that the author obtained from across Jambi City are; *Kitab Ratib Samman*, *Ta'limus Shiblyan*, *Sholawat al-Qur'aniyah*, *Tajhizul Mayyit*, *Al 'Aqid al Khamsina*, *At Tashorif Fi Tashil Af'al wa Isti'maliha wa Wadh'I Dhomairiha*, encyclopedia of al Aziz, *Tuhfatul Mardiyah fi Ahwalil Arba'iniyah*, *'iddatu Ilhaqil Farid fi Ilmil Faroidh Ilhaqil Fathin*, *Qowaidun Nahwiyah*, *Tamrinus Shobiyyah fi As'alatis Sholah*, *Masalakus Sa'adah fi Adzkari wa Aurodin Nabawiyah*, *Majami'ul Abror wal Adzkar wa Ad'iyyah*, *Majami'ul Abror fil Maqolat al Masyhuroh wal Mustafadah*, Than Arabic Language Lessons for People Who Only Know Jambi Language (Malay Arabic/Jawi), *Mughnil Layman*, *Wirid Sembahyang Fardhu 5 Ba'da Prayer Times and Prayers*, *Manaqib al Alim Ala'lamah Sheikh Abdul Qodir Bin Sheikh Ibrohim Al Jambi*, and *Majmuat as Sholawat wa Fadhoiliha*.

The books obtained from West Tanjung Jabung Regency are; *Fathul Mubin*, *Asyrotus Sa'ah Guidance Thoriqoh Qodiriyah wa Naqsbadiyah*, *Tajhizul Mayyit*, Translation of the Book of *Syifaul Fuad Advantages of Rotibil Haddad*, *Ad Durrul al Munif*, *Luqthohutut Takmil*, *Luqthohutut Masail*, *Ghosyatul Mayyit Walkafan* Copy of the work of Syekh Mukhtar at Tharid al Bogori al Makki, *Qaidah Faroid*, *Manhajut Thullab fi Tholabil Ilmi wa Fil Adab*, *Aljauharus Tsamin Fima 'Alal Ibad lilmu'in*, *Sullamul Muftadi'in*, *Al Fawaidun Nahwiyyah*, Copy of the Book of *Nuhdzah Min Karomati Assayyidah Khodijatul al Kubro* The work of Syekh Muhammad Abdullah Bin Muhammad Husein as Sindi quoted by KH M. Syukri bin Unus bin Ali Amuntai, *Ad Da'wat al Mu'tabarot*, *Guidance on the Practice of Istighotsah Bihadroti Robbal Bariyyah*, and *Bulughul Murod*.

The books found in East Tanjung Jabung Regency are; *Risalah al Manasik Bil Bugisiyah Fill Hajj wal Umroh wa Ziaroh*, *Aqoidul Imam*, Collection of prayers, and Copies of books. Meanwhile, the books found in Tebo Regency are *Maslakus Salihin*, and in Sarolangun Regency are the books *Dilalah al 'Ama*.

CONCLUSION

The works of Jambi scholars' books are the object of the author's study, because the works of scholars in Jambi are included in the productive category and have not been properly inventoried. The works of these scholars' books were inventoried by the author as many as 47 books, seeing the number above is quite a lot indicating the productivity of Jambi scholars in producing written works. The works of these scholars' books are mostly in Islamic boarding schools. The works of scholars recorded based on their work include original works, summaries, translations, sura, adaptations and excerpts. Based on the study, it consists of various types such as studies of fiqh, hadith, tauhid/aqidah, morals, education and psychology, tasawuf, language, the Qur'an and related sciences, health/medicine and culture. Based on the language, it uses Malay and Arabic, while the script used is Jawi script and Arabic script. The books of these scholars are made and distributed by various publishers, and circulated internally in Islamic boarding schools. The writings of scholars also have varying qualities and have varying scopes of prestige, ranging from national, regional, and local levels. Seeing the wide variety of books distributed by Islamic boarding school scholars, it can be concluded that these works have a wide impact because society still uses, studies and refers to them.

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