



# The Quran Manuscripts in Nusantara: A Historical Review

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## ABSTRACT

Codicology, the study of written manuscripts, plays a vital role in understanding the history of human civilization, particularly in the context of the development and preservation of Quranic manuscripts. The Nusantara region, which includes Indonesia and parts of Malaysia, boasts a rich tradition of Quranic manuscript production and copying. This research seeks to explore the codicological history of Quranic manuscripts in the Nusantara, focusing on their origins, evolution, regional differences, and significance in the religious and cultural lives of Muslim communities in the area. The research methodology includes analyzing various historical sources, such as existing Quranic manuscripts, historical records, academic studies, and other primary materials. The data collected is examined to identify patterns, trends, and regional distinctions. The findings reveal that the codicological history of Quranic manuscripts in the Nusantara mirrors the region's cultural diversity and deep-rooted Islamic traditions. These manuscripts originate from various regions and showcase a wide range of writing styles, decorative elements, and materials shaped by influences such as cultural interactions, technological progress, and local preferences. Understanding this history better can contribute to preserving the cultural and religious heritage of the Nusantara and enhance knowledge of Islamic civilization in the region.

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## 1. Introduction

The development of Islam in Indonesia is the result of various methods of dissemination, including interactions through various aspects of social and cultural life. Since the early arrival of Islam in the Nusantara, this religion has been spread not only through formal missionary efforts but also through social interactions that include trade, marriage, education, politics, arts, culture, and the teachings of Sufism [1]. One of the groups that played a significant role in the spread of Islam in Indonesia is the Wali Songo. They were not only known as scholars with profound knowledge but also for their moderate attitude towards local culture at that time. The Wali Songo successfully

integrated local culture and traditions into their missionary work, making the teachings of Islam more easily accepted by the local communities. This cultural integration provided a unique characteristic to the practice of Islam in Indonesia, distinguishing it from the practice of Islam in other regions. Moreover, the arrival of Islam in Indonesia also impacted the writing of Quran manuscripts [2]. The writing of the Quran played a crucial role in helping the understanding of the people who were newly introduced to Islam. As the primary source of religious teachings, the Quran needs to be well understood so that it can be applied in daily life and become an integral part of worship. Therefore, the writing and copying of Quran manuscripts were essential parts of the efforts to preserve and spread Islam in Indonesia [3].

The Quran, as a guide for the lives of Muslims, plays a central role in guiding their behavior and beliefs. A deep understanding of the Quran is crucial so that the teachings contained within it can be correctly applied in daily life and become an inseparable part of their worship [4]. Furthermore, Quran manuscripts found in a particular region can provide valuable clues about the history of Islam's arrival in that area. Through the analysis of these manuscripts, we can trace the historical footprint of Islamic civilization in that region, including the influencing factors such as social interaction, trade, politics, and culture. The information contained in these texts or manuscripts is considered more valid and reliable than orally transmitted information, which tends to be susceptible to distortion or change over time [5].

In Indonesia, the process of writing and copying Quran manuscripts is believed to have begun in the 13th century during the era of the Samudera Pasai Kingdom. However, the oldest known manuscript today is a Quran manuscript written around the 16th century, which is now part of the William Marsden collection. The traditional effort of copying Quran manuscripts continued through the 19th and early 20th centuries in various regions of Indonesia, including Aceh, Banten, Yogyakarta, Lombok, Banjarmasin, Makassar, and Ternate [6], [7]. These manuscripts, which are now an essential part of the historical legacy of Islam, are well-preserved in museums, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), libraries, by heirs, and private collectors, with support from Islamic kings and religious scholars (kayak) of that time [8].

In Indonesia, there are several regions that possess collections of ancient Quran manuscripts. This is supported by numerous studies conducted on Quran manuscripts, one of which is the research by Qona'ah Dwi Hastuti and Moh. Abdul Kholiq Hasan in 2020 at IAIN Surakarta, titled *Manuskrip Mushaf Al-Qur'an Daun Lontar Koleksi Kiai Abdurrochim (Kajian Pemakaian Rasm dan Qira'at)* [9]. This research provides detailed explanations about the use of rasm and qira'at in the manuscript, accompanied by easily comprehensible tables. Additionally, the study compares the rasm in the manuscript with the Uthmani rasm.

Another study was conducted by Tri Febriandi Amrulloh, titled *Studi Kodikologi Manuskrip Mushaf Al-Qur'an Ibrahim Ghozali* [10]. The results of this research reveal inconsistencies in the application of rasm rules in the Ibrahim Ghozali Quran manuscript, including variations between the use of Uthmani rasm and imlā'i rasm. The scholia found in this manuscript were also categorized into three distinct types. Moreover, the research uncovered that the manuscript used European paper with the watermark *Pro Patria Eendraght Maakt Maght* and evidence was found indicating that the Quran transcription process involved memorization. These findings provide important insights into the understanding of the history and characteristics of Quran manuscripts in Indonesia.

Examining the various studies mentioned above, there are several noteworthy similarities. Both studies analyze Quran manuscripts using a codicological approach, aiming to understand not only the text but also its physical and historical aspects. However, there are significant differences in the focus of each study. The research conducted by Qona'ah Dwi Hastuti and Moh. Abdul Kholiq Hasan emphasizes the analysis of the application of *rasm* and *qira'at* rules in the Kiai Abdurrochim Lontar Leaf Quran Manuscript and compares them with the Uthmani rasm. Meanwhile, the study by Tri Febriandi Amrulloh delves deeper into the inconsistencies in the application of rasm rules in the Ibrahim Ghozali Quran Manuscript, highlighting the characteristics of scholia and the paper used. These differences in focus result in varied insights, but overall, both studies contribute significantly to enriching our understanding of the history and characteristics of Quran manuscripts in Indonesia.

## 2. Method

Research on Quran manuscripts typically employ various methods, including textual criticism, paleography, philology, historical and contextual studies, source criticism, and others. This study, in particular, uses the historical and contextual approach to analyze the circumstances in which these manuscripts were written and circulated, taking into account the political, social, and cultural conditions of the time. By examining historical records and related documents, the research aims to understand the societal role of the Quran and how its text was perceived and utilized. The Quran manuscripts in the Nusantara region were selected based on their authenticity and completeness, reflecting the local cultural influences through their decorative elements and materials [11]. These manuscripts offer insight into historical and regional contexts, showcasing variations in writing styles, such as the Usmani and Imla'i scripts adapted to local preferences. Analyzing these texts not only reveals patterns, trends, and regional distinctions but also highlights their aesthetic and spiritual value, underscoring the richness of Islamic culture and the deep spiritual connection communities have with the Quran in the Nusantara.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Variations in Writing Techniques and Style

Etymologically, the term *Mushaf Al-Qur'an Standard Usmani* or MASU can be interpreted from the meaning of "standard" in the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), which refers to a benchmark or established standard. Terminologically, MASU refers to a Quran manuscript that adheres to the established guidelines for writing, punctuation, diacritics, and waqf marks that were determined and agreed upon during the *Musyawahar Kerja* (Working Conference) of Quranic Scholars between 1974-1983 CE, in the ninth meeting. This standard was then used as a reference for the publication of the Quran in Indonesia. In the Arabic-English translated document from the conference, MASU is referred to as *Mushaf al-Mi'yari al-Indunisi* or The Indonesian Standardized Quran [12].

Several names are used to refer to MASU, including the Usmani Standard Mushaf, the Usmani Standard Quran Mushaf, the Standard Quran Mushaf, the Standard Quran, and also the Standard Mushaf. Using these various names, the author has decided to use the term *Mushaf Al-Qur'an Standard Usmani* for the sake of efficiency in reference and to distinguish it from the two other standard Quranic manuscripts [13]. There are no significant differences between MASU and other Quran manuscripts available among Muslims, both in Indonesia and in other countries. In terms of writing, MASU also follows the rules of the Usmani script. Differences in the designation of the Usmani Mushaf can be found when compared to Quran manuscripts published in Saudi Arabia, but these differences are limited to the use of certain diacritics, punctuation marks, and waqf signs. Since its inception, at least two editions of MASU have been published: the first edition in 1983 and the second edition in 2002 [14].

The next step was the emergence of efforts to preserve and maintain the sanctity of the Quran from printing errors. This initiative involved a review process conducted by the Quran Verification Committee, known as the *Lajnah Pentashih Mushaf Al-Qur'an* (LPMQ), which was established on October 1, 1959. To facilitate its tasks, LPMQ published three types of standardized Quran manuscripts [15].

#### a. Quran Manuscript in Usmani Script

This manuscript was established as the standard based on the Bombay manuscript due to its popularity among the Indonesian people. This recognition led to its acknowledgment as the "official edition" by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. The manuscript measures 24 x 16 cm with a thickness of 2.5 cm and features a blue leather cover with gold lettering. At the beginning of the text, there is a foreword by the Minister of Religious Affairs, Prof. Dr. H. Said Agil Husin Al-Munawwar, MA. The verification mark on this manuscript was signed by H. Fadhal Abdurrahman Bafadal (Chairman of the Quran Verification Committee) and H. Muhammad Shohib Tahar (Secretary) on April 21, 2004. This manuscript holds significant importance in the context of

Quran dissemination in Indonesia, as it serves as the official reference used by the Muslim community and religious institutions.

#### b. Bahriyah Quran Manuscript in Imla'i Script

The design of this manuscript is clearly inspired by the Turkish manuscript model, known for its neat *imla'i* orthography and highly aesthetic calligraphy. Additionally, this manuscript adopts the corner verse format, indicated by the inscription *Mushaf Ayat Sudut Departemen Agama* on its cover. The decision to adopt this printing model was based on the high level of familiarity among the Indonesian public, especially the *huffaz*. Since its emergence in the late 16th century CE, the Turkish corner verse manuscript, also known as the *ayet berkenar* manuscript, has become a primary reference in Quranic writing across various countries, including Indonesia.

#### c. Braille Quran Manuscript for the Visually Impaired

This Quran manuscript uses Arabic Braille characters in accordance with the decision of the UNESCO International Conference in 1951 CE, referred to as *al-Kitābah al-'Arabiyyah al-Nafirah*. In 2011, the Ministry of Religious Affairs published the Guidelines for Reading and Writing the Quran in Braille. A year later, in 2012, the Ministry of Religious Affairs compiled and published the Quran manuscript with parts 1-15, and the following year, in 2013, they compiled and published parts 16-30.

Based on the history of the use of racism that has been outlined, it can be concluded that these three Quran manuscripts reflect diverse adaptations to the use of racism in the early Quran manuscripts in Indonesia. The use of racism *imla'i* is embodied in the *Mushaf Al-Qur'an Bahriyah Rasm Imla'i*, while racism Usmani is present in the *Mushaf Al-Qur'an Rasm Usmani*, also known as the Quran Kemenag and the *Mushaf Al-Qur'an Braille* specifically designed for the visually impaired. This demonstrates responsiveness to the diverse characteristics, needs, and interests of the Indonesian public. This is evident from the long process of establishing the standard manuscript, which involved a total of 9 meetings during the *Musyawahar Kerja* (1974-1983 CE), and ultimately the formation of LPMQ in 1959 CE as the highest supervisory and controlling body.

### 3.2. Historical and Cultural Heritage

From a historical perspective, Qur'anic manuscripts originating from the archipelago offer a fascinating window into the evolution of Islam in the region throughout the centuries. First of all, manuscripts that can be traced back to the 13th-century Kingdom of Samudera Pasai bear silent witness to the beginning of Islam in the archipelago [16]. The Kingdom of Samudera Pasai is considered to be one of the oldest Islamic centers in the archipelago, and manuscripts originating from there provide an early glimpse of how Islam was first introduced and adopted in the region. Furthermore, manuscripts from maritime kingdoms such as Demak, Banten, and Aceh demonstrate the importance of trade and maritime networks in the spread of Islam and the production of Qur'anic manuscripts in the archipelago [17]. As strategic trading centers, these kingdoms became meeting places for different cultures and religions, resulting in a dynamic interaction between Islam and local culture. The production of Qur'anic manuscripts in these kingdoms reflects the relationship between Islam and the economic and cultural activities of the Nusantara region in the past [18].

In *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, Donner begins his analysis of the origins of Islam by exploring and then challenging the views expressed by Wansbrough. For example, Wansbrough proposes that the Qur'anic text developed gradually and reached its final form in the late 3rd century Hijri/9th century AD, along with other sources of Islamic Arabic literature. In support of his argument, Wansbrough draws on evidence from outside the Islamic Arabic tradition of the same period, as well as variations in some Qur'anic verses which suggest that the Qur'ān was not yet fully established in its final form. Against this view, Donner argues, "However, even if one agrees with Wansbrough's specific conclusion that the development he proposes could have taken place over a period of thirty years rather than two hundred years" [19].

From a cultural point of view, the Qur'anic manuscripts in the archipelago are a rich representation of the diversity of calligraphic and decorative arts. Each manuscript has its own

distinctive calligraphic style, reflecting the influence of the diverse Islamic cultures that permeated the Nusantara's written arts. These calligraphic styles not only showcase technical expertise but also reflect spiritual perfection and devotion in copying the sacred text of the Qur'an. In addition, the artistic embellishments on the manuscripts also add tremendous aesthetic value. The ornaments that adorn the pages of the Qur'ān, such as flowers, geometric motifs, and images of nature, bear witness to the beauty of Islamic art that developed in the archipelago. These decorations are not merely decorative but also have a deep symbolic meaning, reflecting the admiration and respect for the Qur'ān as a source of knowledge and truth [20].

### 3.3. Evidence of the Arrival of Islam in the Nusantara

According to the Arab theory or Mecca theory, the efforts made by Arab traders to introduce Islam to the Indonesian region had a significant impact on the formation of Islam in Indonesia. These Arab traders were actively spreading Islam when they controlled the West-East trade routes in the early 7th and 8th centuries CE. The basis of this theory is supported by Chinese historical records, which note that in the period leading up to the 7th century, an Arab trader led a Muslim community on the western coast of Sumatra [17]. Some of them even married the local inhabitants, forming early Muslim communities in the region. This Arab theory was first proposed by Crawfurd, who asserted that Islam was introduced directly from Arabia to the Nusantara. Keyzer slightly expanded on this theory by claiming that Islam in Indonesia originated from Egypt. Similar views were also expressed by Niemann and de Hollander, who believed that Islam in Indonesia came from Hadramaut. Conversely, P. J. Veth believed that marriages between Arabs and locals were the main factor in the spread of Islam in new regions of the Nusantara [21].

A number of scholars from Indonesia and Malaysia have supported the Arab theory and its associated school of thought. In seminars on the arrival of Islam in Indonesia held in 1963 and 1978, the conclusion was drawn that Islam came directly from Arabia, not through India [22]. Hasjmy stated that the first arrival of Islam in Indonesia occurred in the first century of Hijri, approximately the 12th or 13th century CE. Meanwhile, Uka Tjandrasasmita, an expert in Islamic history and archaeology, proposed that Islam entered Indonesia in the 7th and 8th centuries CE. During this period, there may have been interactions between Muslims from Arabia, Persia, and India with communities in Southeast Asia and East Asia. The development of maritime trade at that time was likely influenced by the competition between major empires, such as the Umayyad Caliphate in West Asia, the Srivijaya Kingdom in Southeast Asia, and the Tang Dynasty in East Asia [23].

Evidence of the arrival of Islam encompasses many aspects that illustrate the journey of Islam in the Nusantara, from the discovery of ancient Quran manuscripts to archaeological artifacts, each finding providing a rich depiction of the interaction between Islamic and local cultures.

#### a. Ancient Qur'anic Manuscripts

The discovery of ancient Quran manuscripts in various regions of the Nusantara serves as one of the earliest pieces of evidence of Islam's arrival in this area. These manuscripts not only originate from different historical periods but also reflect the diversity of writing styles and calligraphic techniques used at that time. From Aceh to Java, the manuscripts provide a comprehensive view of the variety of Islamic cultures that developed in the Nusantara. Research conducted on these manuscripts reveals not only linguistic and calligraphic aspects but also offers important insights into the history of Islam's arrival in the Nusantara and the development of the religion in the region. The findings serve as a window into how Islam gradually permeated local society, influencing their culture and identity over the centuries [24].

#### b. Artefak-*arkeologi*

In addition to Quran manuscripts, archaeological artifacts also provide evidence of the arrival of Islam in the Nusantara. In archaeological excavations, experts have uncovered inscriptions, ceramic fragments, and other artistic objects that depict the interactions between Muslim communities and the local population in the past. For example, these inscriptions may record historical events related to the arrival of Islam, while ceramic fragments could reflect trade between Muslim traders and indigenous

inhabitants. Artistic objects such as statues, carvings, and jewelry can also offer clues about the influence of Islamic art on local art. These archaeological findings serve as silent witnesses in reconstructing the journey of Islam in the Nusantara and understanding the role of religion in the cultural and social development of the region [25].

#### c. Religious Practices and Local Traditions

Religious practices and local traditions also bear witness to the arrival of Islam in the Nusantara. The process of acculturation between Islamic teachings and local traditions has resulted in various unique and distinctive religious practices among the people of the Nusantara. For example, in some regions, customary traditions have been adapted to align with Islamic values, such as in the conduct of weddings, funerals, or other religious ceremonies. For instance, traditional wedding ceremonies in several areas of Indonesia often incorporate Islamic elements, such as the recitation of Quranic verses or religious prayers during the wedding procession. Similarly, religious celebrations have become an integral part of local culture, such as the celebration of Eid al-Fitr or Eid al-Adha, which are celebrated with great enthusiasm and serve as unifying moments for the Indonesian people while still preserving the traditional values that existed before the arrival of Islam [23].

#### d. Historical Records and Literature

In addition to physical evidence, historical records, and literature also play a crucial role in proving the arrival of Islam in the Nusantara. Historical works such as *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai*, *Sejarah Melayu*, and *Nagarakretagama* document the journeys of Islamic scholars and missionaries in the Nusantara region. For example, *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai* describes how Arab traders who traded in the area introduced Islam to the local population. These chronicles also record the process of Islamic propagation and the interactions between Islamic scholars and the local community, often resulting in the adaptation of Islamic teachings to local customs. Furthermore, classical literature such as religious poetry, *fiqh* texts, and Sufi works also bear witness to the development of Islam in the Nusantara. For instance, religious poems like *Suluk Malela* or *Gurindam Dua Belas* reflect the religious values embraced by the people of the Nusantara who had converted to Islam [25].

### 3.4. The Role of Manuscripts in Studying Religious and Cultural Life

Manuscripts are part of our ancestral cultural heritage that has been passed down through generations over the centuries. As ancient texts, manuscripts hold great historical value, necessitating careful handling and storage. Due to their age, manuscripts are susceptible to damage and deterioration, requiring proper protection to ensure their preservation [26]. Museums serve as ideal places for preserving these manuscripts because they are institutions dedicated to safeguarding and maintaining our ancestral cultural heritage. Museums are responsible for the storage, care, and security of historical and natural objects, with the aim of protecting and preserving the nation's cultural wealth [27].

Manuscripts were written in various languages and scripts by different ethnic groups in Indonesia, and today, thousands of them are stored in various institutions both domestically and abroad. Additionally, there are also manuscripts privately owned by individuals spread across different communities. Some of these manuscripts remain undisclosed, as they are considered sacred by local communities, and thus, many are still kept by their owners [28]. In religious life, Quran manuscripts and other religious writings not only serve as guides for Muslims in performing worship but also as sources of inspiration and spiritual reflection. The use of manuscripts in religious rituals such as *tilawah* (Quran recitation), *tadabbur* (contemplation), and *tafsir* (Quran interpretation) is an important part of strengthening the spiritual bond between the faithful and God. Additionally, the act of copying Quran manuscripts is itself considered a form of worship, where the scribes carry out their tasks with great care and reverence as an expression of devotion to Allah [29].

Culturally, manuscripts also reflect the intellectual wealth and visual art of our ancestors. The unique calligraphy styles and artistic embellishments that adorn the pages of manuscripts reflect the beauty and diversity of Nusantara's written art [30]. Moreover, manuscripts are often decorated with illustrations and distinctive motifs that depict daily life, nature, and cultural myths believed by local

communities. As cultural heirlooms, manuscripts also serve as a bridge connecting past generations with the present, ensuring that the cultural, moral, and spiritual values they contain remain relevant and preserved from generation to generation [31].

#### 4. Conclusion

The codicological history of Quran manuscripts in the Nusantara illustrates the journey of Islam and the cultural diversity in this region. Through this research, a deep understanding of various aspects of Quran manuscripts has been gained, including writing techniques, stylistic variations, and their role in religious and cultural life. The evidence revealed from the discovery of ancient manuscripts, archaeological artifacts, and historical records provides a clear picture of the arrival of Islam in the Nusantara and the interaction between Islam and local culture. Additionally, Quran manuscripts stand as silent witnesses to the development of knowledge and religion in this region, offering inspiration for further understanding of the history, culture, and spirituality of the Nusantara people.

Based on this discussion, it is suggested that more research and preservation efforts should be directed towards Quran manuscripts in the Nusantara. This could be achieved through funding for further research, training for manuscript experts and conservators, and the development of dedicated museums or libraries that can safely store and display these valuable manuscripts. Furthermore, it is also important to raise public awareness about the significance of preserving these Quran manuscripts as part of the nation's identity and history. Education and outreach about the cultural and religious values contained within these manuscripts can help the community better understand and appreciate the heritage of their ancestors.

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