

Tracing the Documentation of Nusantara Ulama Manuscripts: A Review of *Katalog Manuskrip Melayu Koleksi Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia (2000)*

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Abstract: Malay manuscripts constitute highly valuable historical remnants in Southeast Asia. Among its genres are Arabo-Malay manuscripts that reflect the thoughts and religious traditions of the Islamic communities in the Nusantara region. However, due to issues related to the definition of Malay manuscripts and the absence of specific language proficiency requirements for those involved in documenting Arabo-Malay manuscripts, several shortcomings have emerged in the *Katalog Manuskrip Melayu Koleksi Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia*, particularly in the 2000 edition. MSS 2257 serves as an illustrative example to demonstrate these shortcomings. Upon re-examination, MSS 2257 was determined to be a miscellany manuscript containing 12 titles. Notably, one of the religious books in this miscellany manuscript belongs to Shamsuddin al-Sumatra'i, but it went unnoticed due to a policy that disregarded manuscripts in languages other than Malay. The lack of language proficiency requirements also led to the use of a general tone in the Malay manuscript catalog (2000), ultimately resulting in confusion for users seeking information. The study suggests that these issues be promptly addressed to prevent their perpetuation, ensuring the smooth progression of Malay manuscript studies in the future.

Keywords: manuscript documentation; manuscript cataloguing; Malay philology; textual analysis; manuscript of religious books

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Introduction

Reiterating a statement previously documented in 2017, manuscripts and rare Malay works represent a highly valuable ancestral mandate. Their significance is not solely based on sentiment but is substantiated by the historical impact that is crucial for the indigenous community to interpret independently.¹ Ironically, other nations recognized this essence earlier, prompting them to take proactive measures by acquiring and replicating these treasures for personal collections. The motives behind their desire to possess Malay manuscript treasures, whether driven by political incentives, scholarly value, or profound interest as amateur collectors, should be set aside.² Unfortunately, the negligence in managing the Malay nation's collections has led to physical damage and a significant depreciation of their value. Consequently, it is not surprising today to hear that a substantial number of surviving Malay manuscripts are from the collections of Farquhar, Klinkert, Maxwell, Raffles, S. Hurgronje, Van der Tuuk, Van Ophuysen, and Von de Wall. The value of their manuscript remnants is often higher than those in the Malay nation's collection, stemming from factors inherent within the Malay community itself.

There is no need to point fingers or harbor regret over past occurrences. It is not our fault if the mindset of the Malay society of yesteryears could not rival the more advanced European mentality. Each acted based on what they deemed appropriate for their respective eras. However, we should blame ourselves if we refuse to “learn” from past experiences. If we believe that the Malay nation of the past was negligent due to a lack of understanding of the true value of manuscripts, then what is our excuse for underestimating matters that have a significant impact on manuscript identity, especially if the definition of Malay manuscripts does not evolve with the times? What is our fault if we are slow to realize the fact that Malay manuscripts possess distinct characteristics that require a unique approach to conduct research on them?

This inevitably reopens discussions on the diversity of Malay manuscript types, which becomes increasingly evident from the new facts uncovered by academic experts. However, this article does not intend to delve further into new facts but merely presents another example of a problem affecting

¹ Amer Hudhaifah Hamzah, “Manuskrip Melayu: Isu Kontemporari dan Lontaran Idea,” *International Journal of West Asian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2017): 25–38.

² Ding Choo Ming, “Masalah Pengumpulan, Pendokumentasian dan Pengajian Manuskrip Melayu,” *Jurnal Filologi Melayu* 7 (1999): 21–41.

the manuscripts in the collection of the National Library of Malaysia due to the narrowness of the prevailing definition of Malay manuscripts.³ For this purpose, a manuscript from the National Library of Malaysia collection with the code MSS 2257, titled “Kitab bahasa Arab,” will be analyzed for its characteristics and content in detail to illustrate how language issues can marginalize a manuscript to the point where it is not considered valuable by researchers. Until now, it cannot be determined how many times it has been referenced, but based on published literature, no one else has mentioned it except the researcher in *the Malay Philology Journal* vol. 26.⁴

Mss 2257

The title “Kitab bahasa Arab” assigned to this manuscript in *Katalog Manuskrip Melayu Koleksi Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia* (2000) is deemed misleading. Although a segment of the manuscript’s pages marked with the letter D [ff. 79v.-104r.] can be identified with the actual title *al-Tuhfah al-Mursalah*, the repeated use of the title “Kitab bahasa Arab” occurs three times.⁵

According to Molen,⁶ “manuscripts and the texts they contain tend to be elusive,” therefore, according to him again, “an indispensable tool for access to manuscripts is catalogues.” However, what if the catalog, expected to provide descriptive information about the manuscript itself, could lead to confusion? The author often face this question when referring to this manuscript catalog, encountering titles like this: Does “Kitab bahasa Arab” refer to a manuscript book using the Arabic language, or does it denote a manuscript discussing the field of Arabic grammar? This dilemma was encountered by the author while collecting manuscript data in 2019.

³ Hamzah, “Manuskrip Melayu,” 34-36; 2019, 78.

⁴ Amer Hudhaifah Hamzah, “Kurikulum Bahasa Arab di Asia Tenggara berdasarkan Tinjauan terhadap Manuskrip Utama Nahw Alam Melayu Koleksi Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia,” *Jurnal Filologi Melayu* 26 (2019), 78-79, 81)

⁵ *Katalog Manuskrip Melayu Koleksi Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia*, 2000, pp. 10-11).

⁶ Willem van der Molen, “Ideas on the Cataloguing of Indonesian Manuscripts,” in *Dinamika Pernaskahan Nusantara*, ed. Mu’jizah (Jakarta: Prenadamedia in collaboration with the Archipelago Manuscript Society (MANASSA), Nusantara Manuscript Foundation (YANASSA), and the National Library of Indonesia, 2017), 12.

Muhammad Mustaqim Mohd Zarif⁷ and Mohd. Anuar Mamat⁸ have also voiced similar concerns in the context of their respective studies.

Without delving further into the weaknesses of the cataloging system in the series of catalogs of the National Library of Malaysia, the issue of language style alone during manuscript documentation is considered problematic. This situation does not align with the status of a “descriptive catalog” as given by Wan Ali Wan Mamat in his article *Malay Manuscripts in Malaysia: A Review of Their Catalogues*⁹ covering publications between 2000 and 2015. If scrutinized, it brings us back to the issue of the definition of Malay manuscripts raised by the author in 2017.¹⁰ Although the language tone is milder in the book “The Legacy of Malay Manuscripts,” published in 2012, when mentioning “especially those written in Jawi,” the impact of the limited, exclusive definition cannot be avoided.

Based on the discussion on October 10, 1983, organized by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP), Malay manuscripts were defined as “*apa-apa tulisan Jawi/Rumi berbahasa Melayu yang ditulis dengan tangan di atas bahan-bahan seperti kertas, kulit, daun lontar, buluh, gading, kayu, kain dengan isi kandungan dan jangka waktu yang tidak terbatas.*”¹¹ In terms of content and time frame, this definition is inclusive and not particularly problematic. However, concerning language medium and script, several questions arise. Does a manuscript in a language other than Malay, such as Arabic or other Austronesian languages, fall outside the collection of Malay manuscripts? Even if it is in the Malay language, is a manuscript

⁷ Muhammad Mustaqim Mohd. Zarif, “Malay Manuscript Cataloguing in Malaysia: Issues and Challenges” (paper presented at the Seminar Perpustakaan Islam Serantau 2016, Library of the Islamic University of Science Malaysia, Bandar Baru Nilai, September 28–29, 2016), 12–13.

⁸ Mohd. Anuar Mamat, “Manuskrip Melayu dalam Bidang Pendidikan Islam: Suatu Kajian Awal di Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia,” *Jurnal Islam dan Masyarakat Kontemporari* 15, no. 1 (2017): 61–83.

⁹ Wan Ali Wan Mamat, “Malay Manuscripts in Malaysia: A Review of Their Catalogues,” in *Dinamika Pernaskahan Nusantara*, ed. Mu’jizah (Jakarta: Prenadamedia in collaboration with MANASSA, YANASSA, and the National Library of Indonesia, 2017), 63.

¹⁰ Hamzah, “Manuskrip Melayu,” 34–36.

¹¹ Ibrahim Ismail, *Pertemuan Mengenai Manuskrip Melayu 10 Oktober 1983: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka*, accessed December 17, 2023, <http://eprints.um.edu.my/15813/1/0001.pdf>, 25).

written in scripts other than Jawi/Rumi, such as Pallava and Rencong, considered not part of Malay manuscripts?¹²

Additionally affecting this matter is the absence of specific language proficiency requirements in the appointment of the Malay Manuscript Advisory Committee.¹³ Isn't the process of documenting manuscripts, which typically lack title pages, table of contents, publisher information, or publication years, highly dependent on the proficiency in the medium language of the manuscript to discern elusive information and elucidate interpretations of texts characterized by ambiguity? Indeed, relevant requirements are established for the selection of Mualim Tamu, but due to the fact that Mualim Tamu is one person and his duty are perceived as highly specific to editing and publishing tasks, his expertise in languages such as Arabic, Sanskrit, and others is seen as not significantly contributing to the documentation aspect (Refer to Appendix C). Therefore, a drastic measure is warranted to mitigate the impact of the series of issues mentioned earlier.

MSS 2257 is just one of the manuscripts affected by this problem. Besides MSS 2257, many manuscripts have been neglected due to an inadequate cataloging system. Most of them are listed in *Senarai Manuskrip Arab di Pusat Manuskrip Melayu* with a number exceeding 500 manuscript copies. Isn't this quantity significant if we genuinely value the historical, intellectual, and aesthetic aspects of the manuscripts owned by the Malay nation? It may not necessarily require in-depth study; at the very least, improved documentation of manuscripts and their contents would suffice. Therefore, this article aims to illustrate an example of a manuscript documented in a haphazard manner leading to confusion for many researchers.

Internal Manuscript Investigation

Internal manuscript investigation entails the scholarly endeavor of extracting insights into a manuscript through a thorough examination of its content. This investigative approach stands in contrast to external considerations, which focus on the physical attributes of the manuscript, including aspects such as paper quality, ink composition, and related characteristics.¹⁴

¹² See, for example, Uli Kozok, "A 14th Century Malay Manuscript from Kerinci," *Archipel* 67 (2004): 37–55, on Malay manuscripts in Kerinci, Jambi).

¹³ Refer to Appendix E, *Dasar Manuskrip Melayu Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia* approved on January 14, 2014.

¹⁴ Amer Hudhaifah Hamzah, *Kitab al-Risalah al-Fataniyyah fi al-Nahw: Tahqiq dan Analisis Kandungan* (Master's thesis, National University of Malaysia, 2016), 18.

The findings of the internal investigation reveal that MSS 2257 constitutes a miscellany manuscript (akin to an anthology within the context of literary composition) encompassing diverse religious texts, with a particular emphasis on works related to ‘aqidah and tasawwuf. Partial pages of the manuscript retain their original writing, while others have been damaged due to exposure to water and the acidic properties of ink.

Table 1: Information on Religious Books Contained in MSS 2257

Seg.	Title	Author/scribe	Field	Status	Medium
A	<i>... al-Bayan fi ma la budda min Ma'rifat Allah al-Mannan</i>	Not determined	'Aqidah	Complete	Arabic
B	<i>Adab solat dan cara membaca surah al-Fatihah secara bertajwid</i>	Not determined	Fiqh and qira'at	Complete	Arabic
C	<i>Sharh al-Muqaddimah al-Jazariyyah fi al-Tajwid</i>	Not determined	Qira'at	Fragmen	Arabic
D	<i>Kitab tasawwuf</i>	Lebai Salih	Tasawwuf	Complete	Malay
E	<i>Sharh al-Tilimsani 'ala al-'Aqidah al-Sanusiyah</i>	Muhammad ibn 'Umar al-Tilimsani	'Aqidah	Complete	Arabic
F	<i>Al-Tuhfah al-Mursalah ila Ruh al-Nabi</i>	Muhammad ibn Fadlillah	Tasawwuf	Complete	Arabic
G	<i>Bayan al-Muwahhid wa al-Mulhid fi Dhikr Allah</i>	Shamsuddin al-Sumatra'i	'Aqidah	Complete	Arabic
H	<i>Hukum-hakam solat, sujud sahwi, masbuk dan sebagainya</i>	Not determined	Fiqh	Fragmen	Malay
I	<i>Al-Fiqh al-Akbar</i>	Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i	'Aqidah	Complete	Arabic
J	<i>Kitab 'aqidah tentang sifat-sifat Tuhan, Rasulullah SAW</i>	Not determined	'Aqidah	Complete	Arabic
K	<i>Kitab al-Mufid</i>	Not determined	'Aqidah	Complete	Arabic
L	<i>Al-'Aqwal al-Jaliyyah bi Sharh al-Wasilah</i>	Not determined	Tasawwuf	Complete	Arabic



Diagram 1: Portions of MSS 2257 severely affected

The manuscript of religious texts represents one of the most extensive genres in the collection of the National Library of Malaysia.¹⁵ It was collected directly by local institutions through periodic acquisitions starting from the late 20th century to the early 21st century.¹⁶ Typically, manuscripts in this genre are individual writings that exhibit less formal craftsmanship compared to expatriate collections utilizing the services of professional scribes equipped with high-quality ink and writing tools. This distinction underscores the characteristics of manuscripts produced in official scriptorium versus those crafted by the amateur skills of the community. However, as emphasized earlier, these manuscripts still hold significant historical and literary value, particularly considering the considerable cost at which they were acquired in substantial quantities. Therefore, proper management is crucial to prevent a serious loss of value.

A prominent feature of religious manuscripts is the extensive use of Arabic loanwords and the transformation of Malay-Arabic codes, reflecting a more pronounced influence of the Arabic language. Some even utilize the Arabic language entirely due to its theological significance within the context of Islam. This demands a better command of the Arabic language for individuals involved in manuscript documentation work. MSS 2257 contains 12 diverse manuscript titles, as illustrated in Table 1, in addition to blank paper and used paper, which can be itemized as follows:

¹⁵ Oman Fathurahman, "Filologi dan Penelitian Teks-teks Keagamaan," *Al-Turas* 9, no. 2 (2003): 107–22 once employed the term 'abundance of religious texts' to signify the substantial quantity of manuscript genres, particularly religious scripture, in the broader context of the Malay world, extending beyond the confines of Malaysia.

¹⁶ Mamat, "Malay Manuscripts in Malaysia," 31.

	Blank paper	Used manuscript paper
Pages	ff. 10v., 107r., 109v.-112r., 115v., 116r.	Front cover, back cover, ff. 1v.-3r., 5, 77v.-79r., 109v.-113A, 161

There are still pages containing non-book notes, namely: ff. 1r. written in Malay-Arabic, 9v.-11r. Malay, 34v.-35r. Arabic, 35v.-38r. Malay, 107v.-109r. Malay-Arabic, 115r.-116r. Malay-Arabic. Each mentioned category (blank paper, used manuscript paper, non-book notes and book notation manuscript) will be elucidated one by one by the author while comparing them with the descriptions provided in the *Katalog Manuskrip Melayu Koleksi Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia* (2000) to demonstrate shortcomings in the cataloging system that has been in use for a considerable period.

Before delving into a serious discussion of the texts, it is pertinent to first state some information about the manuscripts successfully gathered by the author for comparison with the catalog information. Reference to the catalog does not provide much information about the author, scribe, owner, or even the title of the manuscript. Still, a cursory reading made by the author supplies more meaningful and substantial information. The catalog does not offer a clear title to discern the manuscript's field of discussion, except for a tasawwuf book (marked with the letter B) and another identified as *al-Tuhfah al-Mursalah*, also in the field of tasawwuf (marked with the letter D). Both works also mention the scribe and author, namely Lebai Salleh as the scribe for the first book, while Muḥammad ibn Faḍlillah as the author of the second book.¹⁷

Al-Tuhfah al-Mursalah is among the well-known works in the Malay world, hence it is easily recognizable.¹⁸ However, regarding the tasawwuf book marked with the letter D, the catalog statement that reads '*Disalin oleh Lebai Salleh*' raises questions due to the manuscript note stating 'Bermula menyurat kitab ini Lebai Salih' The issue arises because the person documenting only reads this statement in isolation without completing the sentence, leading them to interpret the word 'writing' as 'copying'.

¹⁷See *Katalog Manuskrip Melayu Koleksi Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia*, 2000, pp. 10-11.

¹⁸ The renown of *al-Tuhfah al-Mursalah* once elicited the interest of the son of the Sultan of Kedah, prompting him to delve into its study. This led to the translation of its commentary by a Malay scholar and advisor to the Sultan of Kedah, named

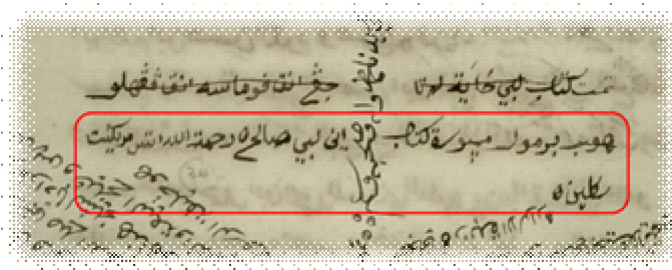


Diagram 2: Information regarding the scribe of the manuscript in folio 34r.

If we examine the entire sentence, as indicated in Diagram 2, it is evident that the person who wrote the excerpt is, in fact, the anonymous scribe, while Lebai Salih is either the original author or, at the very least, the first individual to copy the work that was later copied by the anonymous scribe. This assertion is made because following the quoted statement, there is an additional note, “*rahmat Allah atas mereka itu sekalian,*” a prayer for the mercy of Allah be upon Lebai Salih, indicating that Lebai Salih had passed away when the statement was written. What strengthens the argument further that Lebai Salih is the original author of this tasawwuf work is the word “*bermula,*” mentioned before the word “*menyurat,*” implying that Lebai Salih was the initial author.

However, regardless of whether the first or second interpretation is more accurate, the information provided by the catalog that Lebai Salih copied the manuscript is an error. Premature catalog information like this can invite oversight by researchers who are not cautious and neglect cross-checking methods, even though this issue is relatively easy to understand with a thorough reading, not in fragments as in the catalog.

Regarding the anonymous scribe, it is quite challenging for the author to determine who this person actually is. Is he an individual, or a group of scribes, each producing a single book considering the number of manuscript books contained in MSS 2257? The external aspects of the script (*khat*) may suggest that there were many scribes due to differences in size and script type, but the actual truth may not necessarily be so. Handwriting is highly subjective and can show external differences based on circumstances and the time it was written, even by the same writer. Therefore, the acknowledgment by the author or the scribe in the colophon is extremely crucial. Relying solely on the isomorphism of script and orthography may not lead to a decision unless there are no other clear sources of information to be utilized.

Malay manuscripts are not necessarily copied by students themselves. The payment for copying manuscripts is quite substantial, causing some students to be willing to copy for other students who are more financially capable, even if they are not more knowledgeable or skilled than them.¹⁹ So, in the case of MSS 2257, there are many questions that are not easy to answer. Fortunately, some signs overlooked by the catalog were discovered, proving to be invaluable in aiding research to construct a theory about copying manuscripts. Based on a cursory reading of the manuscript, the author found at least three places in the manuscript that mentioned the name “Nanyan” as the scribe, student, and benefactor of the manuscript. The excerpts are as follows:

1. *Wa min jumlat ṭalabat al-‘ilm al-ṣulaha’ in shā Allāh al-rajul al-‘āqil Lebai Nāyan ibn Aḥmad al-Ashi kāna Allāh lahu fī kulli ḥāl wa raqqāhu ila rutab al-kamāl qad talaqqana al-dhikr min hadhā al-faqīr wa ajztuhu wa albastuhu al-khirqah al-faqriyyah ...* as mentioned in the chain of the Sufi order. [ff. 34v.]
2. *Hadhā mā waqafa Teuku Nāyan li wajh Allāh al-Karīm, la yubā’ wa lā yūḥab ḥatta taritha al-ard wa Allāh khayr al-wārithin, āmīn yā Rabb al-‘Ālamīn* at the beginning of the note that contains the book *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*. [ff. 115v.]
3. *Wa kātibuhu wa ṣāḥibuhu Lebai Nāyan Mempāro bin Pūmalī bin Lebai Selāmat Lam Bunut bin Pūcārī bin Pūnāyan bin Pūmalīm bin Shaykh Dewang ghafara Allāh lahum* at the end of the manuscript of *al-Fiqh al-Akbar* by Imam al-Shafi’i RA. [ff. 130v.]

Muhammad Tayyib bin Mas’ud al-Banjari. The translated work was completed on the 4th of Jamadilakhir 1282 (25th September 1865) and titled *Fath al-Hadi fi Tarjamat Sharh Ibn al-Nabīsi al-Naqshabandi*. Wan Mohd Shaghir Abdullah, *Ensiklopedia Naskhah Klasik Nusantara* (Kuala Lumpur: Fathaniyah Treasury, 2015), 302.

¹⁹ This phenomenon explains to us how errors, whether in the form of *tahrif* (alteration of letter shapes) or *tashif* (alteration of diacritical marks), in copied manuscripts often repeat or worsen compared to the original manuscripts. Consequently, we understand that the work of copying manuscripts did not only occur in official scriptorium, as imagined by Ding Choo Ming, “Skriptoria Melayu: Tinjauan Umum,” in *Tradisi Penulisan Manuskrip Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: National Library of Malaysia, 1997), pp. 220-222, but also took place in more informal settings like dayah, pondok, and surau. Amateur scribes did not have assistants to provide them with quality tools and colorful inks for decorating manuscripts with various beautiful illuminations. Instead, they used whatever materials were available, such as lampblack and reed pens, to complete a study manuscript.

Drawing upon the Arabic information above, it can be inferred that MSS 2257 is the result of the writings of an individual known as Nanyan Memparo, whose name is recorded multiple times. He is also suspected to be the person who wrote prayer notes to Lebai Salih, exhibiting a high command of the Arabic language and a broad knowledge of sciences. It is quite evident that he is a scholar from Aceh, given the title “al-Ashi.” However, there are still several unanswered questions regarding his connection to a place in Aceh Besar called Lam Barih. As seen in the diagram below, there is a pencil-written acknowledgment that this manuscript belongs to “Tengku Lam Barih”.

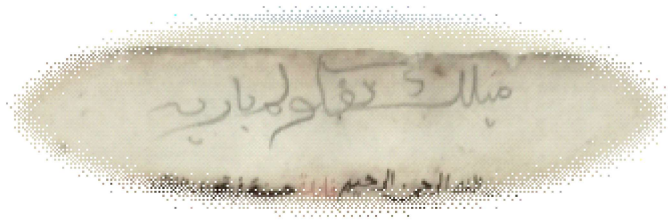


Diagram 3: Ownership statement of Tengku Lam Barih on the upper part of folio 3v.

The inquiry arises as to whether Lebai Nanyan, also known as Tengku Nanyan, originates from Lam Barih. Alternatively, is Tengku Lam Barih the manuscript owner subsequent to Tengku Nanyan? If the latter is the proprietor post Tengku Nanyan, how is this possession maintained given that Tengku Nanyan has already dedicated this manuscript to public use (*waqf*)? There are several assumptions that can be made based on writings using the pen and the spelling *milik* (with *ya'*), yet this matter is currently impractical for discussion as it demands further research that has not been conducted. Therefore, all queries remain open for further deliberation in future investigations.

Manuscript Text

Returning to the discourse on the text and the types of writings contained in MSS 2257, there are four types of pages, namely: (1) blank paper, (2) used manuscript paper, (3) non-book notes, and (4) book notation manuscript.

(1) and (2), i.e., blank paper and used manuscript paper

Blank papers refer to pages that are empty without any annotations. This is quite self-explanatory and almost requires no extensive clarification. However, it is sometimes necessary to state that the blank papers are a result of the manuscript proprietor not having had the opportunity to record anything on those pages. In another scenario, it also occurs because the manuscript proprietor wants to preserve and maintain the cleanliness of the gathering (*kuras*),²⁰ which is considered very important. The second situation seldom occurs, but it allows new questions to arise; whether the maintained cleanliness of the gathering is intended to be utilized in creating separate manuscript copies, but has accidentally become intermixed among other manuscript gatherings during acquisition and preservation?

In the context of MSS 2257, such questions do not arise because there is no occurrence of a gathering that the manuscript proprietor intends to preserve for its cleanliness. All blank pages are a result of the manuscript proprietor not having had the opportunity to write anything on those pages. This is because MSS 2257 was not produced under the direction of an authority in a scriptorium, as is the case with many manuscripts. It was also not created to attract buyers or as a skillful art collection. MSS 2257 is evidently crafted for scholarly purposes, as the sole book fully written on a single gathering, namely *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, also lacks cleanliness on the first page of that gathering [ff. 115v].

²⁰ The individual who employs the term ‘gathering’ to translate the word ‘kuras’ is Russell Jones in his article; “Malay Manuscripts: Gatherings and Soiled Pages” *Archipel* 57 (1999): 97-108). The Malay term ‘kuras’ is actually borrowed from the Arabic word ‘*kurrās*’, which refers to a group of folded sheets of paper forming a portion of a manuscript before being sewn with several other sections, eventually becoming a codex. According to Russell Jones, “Malay Manuscripts: Gatherings and Soiled Pages,” *Archipel* 57 (1999), the unsewn gatherings are a tradition in the Arab context. “In the Malay world, we find that many of the manuscripts were bound into the usual (western) book format. But not by any means always, and it may be worth while to look further at those manuscripts, usually on Islamic topics which are in the Arab format”. MSS 2257 is one of these types of manuscripts.



Diagram 4: The gathering in MSS 2257, complementing a title, *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, yet with an unclean first page of the gathering. As for the other gatherings, either they contain numerous used sheets or do not complement a title. The examination of gatherings is crucial in the study of miscellaneous manuscript types, as there is concern that other manuscripts may be inadvertently inserted during acquisition and preservation.

In general, the acquisition and preservation of MSS 2257 are well executed, although it is not denied that used pages are still present and inserted as ff. 5. Refer to the Diagram 5 below; it can be observed that the catchword on ff. 4v, '*faṣāra*' refers to the first word on ff. 6r, which reads: '*faṣāra huwa min 'abd al-ḥurūf,*' confirming ff. 5 as an unrelated inserted sheet.



Diagram 5: ff. 4v., 5 and 6r. of MSS 2257

The term ‘used papers’ refers to manuscript pages or sheets that were previously utilized and repurposed to create a new manuscript.

As we are aware, the cost of paper in the past was relatively high due to the labor-intensive manufacturing process, which was not as efficient as it is today. Paper was imported and required manual cutting work. Therefore, it is not surprising that used sheets would be recycled, either as non-writable paper (because they had already been written on) or as paper intended for writing new manuscript pages. There are two forms of reuse for non-writable manuscript sheets:

1. As the cover of a manuscript after being patched with another material, such as fabric, for example, or
2. As an extension of pages to create a gathering.



Diagram 6: Used papers repurposed to create the cover of MSS 2257.

Caption for the figure: Top: Outer view image patched with worn fabric to serve as the manuscript cover. Consequently, in the fabric's crevices, remnants of manuscript writing can still be discerned where it was affixed. Bottom: Inner view image revealing the previous manuscript, which is an Arabic grammar manuscript, namely *Alfiyyat Ibn Malik* and *Matn al-Madkhal*. The *Alfiyyat Ibn Malik* manuscript containing verses 162-168 might no longer be needed, thus it has been torn from its old gathering to form the front cover of MSS 2257, while the *al-Madkhal* manuscript, with its writing not finalized, serves as the back cover.

For the second form of reuse mentioned above, there are two possibilities. Firstly, if the extension of pages to create a gathering is not fully inscribed, meaning there is still space available for writing, it is likely to be retained (not cut). However, for pages that have been fully utilized, manuscript makers (whether a bookbinder, author, or scribe) usually cut off a significant portion of those pages (leaving only a small portion as the extension of the gathering) to avoid the used pages interfering with the reading of the new manuscript. Several diagrams below illustrate pages that have been fully used and cut, leaving a small portion as the extension of the gathering.



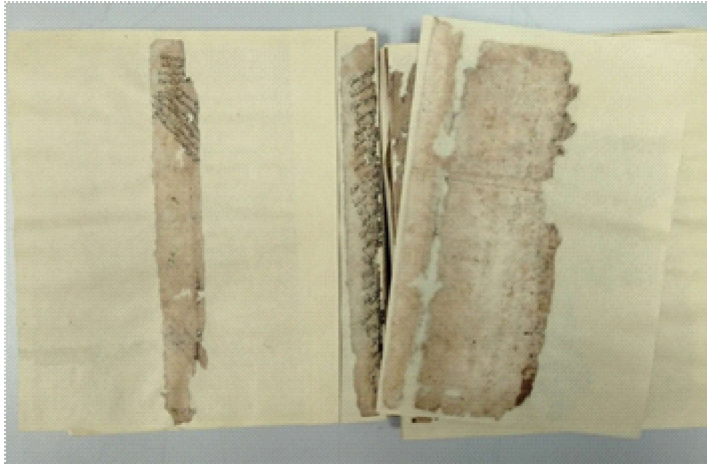


Diagram 7: Some pages, including used pages, in MSS 2257. Arrows indicate cut used pages, leaving a small portion as the extension of the gathering. The third image below shows fully used pages that have been cut as extensions of the gathering but have become separated from their original gatherings, making it unknown which pages in MSS 2257 they pair with.

It is a crucial question to answer: how do manuscript makers distinguish between used and unused pages? Technical questions like these should have technical answers, as intuitive methods may not be meaningful in distinguishing between the two. Frequently, used pages that are not cut for certain reasons, if considered part of the manuscript, can disrupt the study of its contents. Similarly, if a manuscript page is mistakenly regarded as a used sheet not included in the manuscript, it could potentially lead to serious misinterpretations. Therefore, concrete evidence is needed to support arguments before determining whether a manuscript page is used or original.

Based on the researcher's experience, there are several methods by which a scribe or manuscript writer distinguishes between used and new manuscript pages. The researcher has mentioned one of these methods above, i.e., by cutting away unrelated used pages, especially when they no longer have available empty space. The second method involves removing text unrelated to markings, and the third, most noticeable in MSS 2257, is the use of used pages in reverse. There are numerous examples from MSS 2257 demonstrating the manuscript writer's use of the page reversal technique to differentiate notes from old manuscripts and new notes, such as on ff. 1v.-3r, 5, 78v, and 161. However, it is essential to distinguish

between page reversal techniques and reversed marginalia, as it may lead to unintended misunderstandings.



Diagram 8: Among the pages of MSS 2257 reveals the use of the page reversal method to distinguish between old and new annotations. Caption for the figure: In the first diagram (top left), a used page containing old annotations may be a complete treatise-sized manuscript. It is read starting from the arrow on ff. 3r with the doxological text: *bismi llāhi l-raḥmāni l-raḥīm, al-ḥamdu lillāhi alladhī akramanā bi-l-īmāni wa-l-yaqīn*, ending on ff. 1v without a colophon: *Wa-llāhu a‘lamu bi-l-ṣawāb, tamma al-kitāb [bi-‘aw]ni Allāh Ta‘ālā*?. In the second diagram (top right), it can be seen that the manuscript maker is still reading the work, thus making marginalia in response to the inverted discussion in the manuscript.

It is important to note that classifying a manuscript into used or original pages serves as a guide for manuscript researchers when considering content analysis. It is not a universal condition that allows a page to be set aside or arbitrarily deemed as used paper, and it does not represent the views of the manuscript’s writer/proprietor. This is because, apart from the space still available on the paper, the possibility that the retained page (not cut away) respects its content, and thus the manuscript maker refrains from discarding the page. Therefore, there are other indicators that need to be considered reasonably.

In the context of MSS 2257 as an example, not all used pages can be considered insignificant, especially when they involve manuscripts related to creed and Sufism. If a manuscript in the field of Arabic grammar can be torn and attached with worn fabric to become a manuscript cover, as demonstrated in the case of the *Alfiyyat Ibn Mālik* and *Matn al-Madkhal* above, it is not as straightforward for manuscripts deemed sacred. There are still certain taboos, especially when it comes to verses of the holy Qur'an, the noble phrase *Allāh*, and the name of Prophet Muhammad SAW. Starting from this point, every method of text deletion mentioned earlier has boundaries that cannot be crossed. It is not surprising that there is a fourth method, which is to stop at an error without deletion, and then write the correct word after the incorrect one.²¹ Ding Choo Ming²² only mentions that this method aims to ensure the cleanliness of the manuscript, so as not to incur displeasure for defiling its beauty, but he is less aware that there are other reasons, including religious sentiments, which are not less significant.



Diagram 9: Among the pages suspected to be used but not marked due to containing the sacred phrase *Āllāh*. Unlike the name of Prophet Muhammad SAW in diagram 8, it is reversed and not marked or cut away out of respect for His position without equating it with reverence for Allah SWT, the Lord of all worlds.

Therefore, we find that all four methods mentioned above might be used in combination by a manuscript maker. Manuscript researchers must deeply understand this reality to assist during the interaction with

²¹ Amer Hudhaifah Hamzah, “Kecinambungan Persuratan Melayu Bidang Bahasa Arab melalui MSS 2875, MSS 2889, MSS 3790 Koleksi Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia,” *Jurnal Filologi Melayu* 28 (2021), p. 156.

²² Ming, “Skriptoria Melayu,” 220-221.

the text. Each manuscript is subject to the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of its writer (whether the author or the scribe) during its compilation. Hence, any perspective errors can lead to inaccuracies in interpretations that should not occur in scholarly research.

(3) Pages with non-book notes

As inferred from the preceding discourse, a study manuscript created by a student may be composed of new and used sheets mixed together. The used sheets may be blank or may contain past notes. Since sheets with four pages; front-back, left-right, have not been fully used, they are recycled to be included in one of the new manuscript gatherings, especially if the notes made are not continuous with the other pages of the old manuscript. If they are continuous, like a sheet from a still useful book, it is likely not to be separated from the old manuscript, even if it contains some blank pages.

Whether used or new, because the blank pages are limited and the unmarked space is not substantial, it is challenging to use them for writing a book. Therefore, the available option is important study information known as *fawā'id*, which the author refers to as non-book notes. In MSS 2257, notes of this type are the second most common after complete books or book fragments. Some of the information written can be listed as follows:

No.	Content Description	Medium	Location
1.	A verse with the meaning: The beating of a child (due to neglecting prayers) after the age of 10, after 7 years only guidance is sufficient.	Arabic	Front cover
2.	Chronology of the life of Prophet Muhammad SAW and notes on 'mukjizat', 'keramat' and 'istidraj' (all 3 of them mean miracles with a slight difference in concept)	Arabic, Malay	1r.
3.	Repentance and prayers for forgiveness from Allah SWT refer to the discussion of repentance at the end of a book	Arabic	2r.
4.	Several hadith excerpts on the virtues of scholars, the dangers of scholars accompanying the sultan and sleeping etiquette (adab). Some are extracted from the book <i>Ihya' Ulum al-Din</i> .	Arabic	5r.-5v.
5.	Notes on the etiquette of trimming nails, explanations of the term <i>Allah</i> , scholars of qira'at and their students as well as the importance of seeking guidance in learning tajwid.	Malay	9v.-11r.
6.	Notes on the sanad (chain of transmission) of Lebai Nanyan bin Ahmad al-Ashi.	Arabic	34v.-35r.

6.	Notes on the sanad (chain of transmission) of Lebai Nanyan bin Ahmad al-Ashi.	Arabic	34v.-35r.
7.	Notes on various answers to Sufism questions such as the hadith <i>Alinsan sirri wa ana sirrah</i> , existence, the relationship of Allah's name with the name of Prophet Muhammad, the relationship of the body of Prophet Adam with the soul of Prophet Muhammad etc.	Malay	35v.-38r.
8.	Notes on the 20 divine attributes, creed, Sufism etc. Including an explanation of the term محمد.	Arabic, Malay	77v.-79r.
9.	Notes on zakat, schools of jurisprudence, Sufism, akikah prayers and notes on basmalah.	Arabic, Malay	107v.-109r.
10.	Notes on various excerpts in the field of jurisprudence, principles of jurisprudence and statements on <i>waqf</i> (Islamic endowment).	Arabic, Malay	115r.

Some of these *fawā'id* are old notes that are retained, or new notes on old used paper, or perhaps new notes on new paper (whether in the form of marginalia or notes on the surplus pages of the manuscript, before or after). *Fawā'id* are not the main notes; indeed, the main notes are the compiled books, in the context of miscellaneous manuscript types. *Fawā'id* are secondary notes made as reminders, ideas and notes of feelings intended to fill the available empty spaces.

(4) Papers with book notation manuscript

Information about book annotation pages can be referred to in Table 2 below and Table 1 at the beginning of the article.

Table 2: Pages of annotated book manuscripts in MSS 2257

ff.	Manuscript Title	Status
1v.-3r.	... <i>al-Bayān fī mā lā budda min Ma 'rifat Alla'h al-Manna'</i>	Complete
3v.-7v.	The etiquettes of prayer and the method of reciting surah <i>al-Fātihah</i> with tajweed.	Complete
7v.-9r.	<i>Sharh al-Muqaddimah al-Jazariyyah fī al-Tajwīd</i>	Fragment
11v.-34r.	Book of Sufism	Complete
38v.-77r.	<i>Sharh al-Tilimsānī 'ala al-'Aqīdah al-Sanūsiyyah</i>	Complete
79v.-104r.	<i>Al-Tuḥfah al-Mursalāh ila Rūḥ al-Nabī</i>	Complete
104v.-106v.	<i>Bayān al-Muwahḥid wa al-Mulḥid fī Dhikr Allāh</i>	Complete
114r.-114v.	Rulings on prayer, <i>sajda sahwī</i> , <i>masbuk</i> (coming in after the prayer has begun) and so on	Fragment
116v.-130v.	<i>Al-Fiqh al-Akbar</i>	Complete
131r.-132r.	Book of creed about the attributes of God, the Prophet Muhammad	Complete
132v.-148r.	<i>Kitāb al-Mufīd</i>	Complete
148v.-160v.	<i>Al-'Aqwāl al-Jaliyyah bi Sharḥ al-Wasīlah</i>	Complete

Of the 12 identified manuscript titles, the catalog only provides information on four of them without clear titles. Section 5 of the manuscript marked with the letter E only writes “Pelbagai kitab bahasa Arab” as if the manuscript is unrelated to the Malay world. When compared with Chamber-Loir’s catalog in the article *Malay (and some other) manuscripts in the Muzium Negara (Kuala Lumpur)* (1980), there is a significant range of quality and quantity of information than what can be found in *Katalog Manuskrip Melayu Koleksi Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia* (2000) even though both are categorized as descriptive catalogues by Wan Ali Wan Mamat.²³

It is also quite dramatic that section E, written “Pelbagai kitab bahasa Arab” starting from ff. 104v., is actually the beginning of the complete book *Bayān al-Muwahhid wa al-Mulhid fī Dhikr Allāh*, an original work by Shamsuddin al-Sumatra’i, also known as “Sheikh Shamsuddin Pasai”, a renowned Malay scholar in the history of Aceh’s glory. His role in the Aceh palace as the “Sheikh al-Islām” during the reign of Iskandar Muda is also narrated in several Malay epics, including *Hikayat Aceh*.²⁴ At the beginning of the manuscript, the full name of Shamsuddin al-Sumatra’i is clearly written: *Qāla Shams al-Dīn ibn ‘Abd Allāh*, proving that this work is his writing. However, since this manuscript is in Arabic, is it considered outside the scope of Malay manuscripts that purportedly “cover a wide range of subject matter including various aspects of life and Malay civilization”?²⁵ It is difficult for us to guess the answer to this question.

²³ Mamat, “Malay Manuscripts in Malaysia,” 36-37.

²⁴ *Hikayat Aceh*, ed. Teuku Iskandar (Kuala Lumpur: Yayasan Karyawan, 2001), 68, 83, 98.

²⁵ *The Legacy of Malay Manuscripts* (Kuala Lumpur: National Library of Malaysia, 2012), 16.

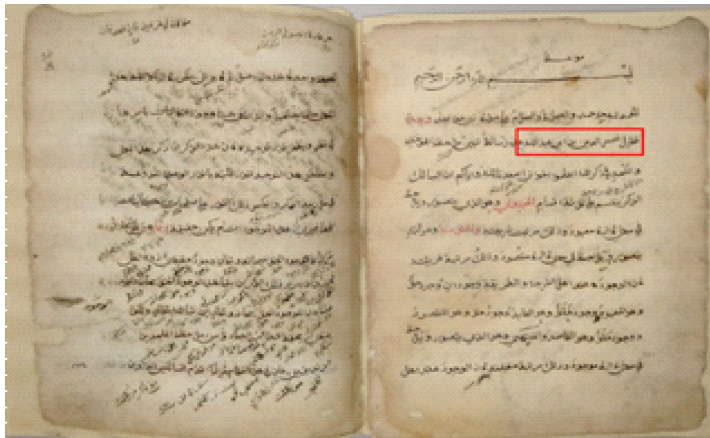


Diagram 10: The first and second pages of the book *Bayan al-Muwahhid wa al-Mulhid fi Dhikr Allah*, bearing the name of the author “Shams al-Din ibn ‘Abd Allah,” ff. 104v., 105r.

It is undeniable that three out of the twelve book titles that have been successfully identified are not the works of Malays, namely *Sharḥ al-Tilimsānī ‘ala al-‘Aqā’id al-Sanūsiyyah* (ff. 38v.-77r.), *al-Tuḥfah al-Mursalāh ila Rūḥ al-Nabī* (79v.-104r.), and *al-Fiqh al-Akbar* (116v.-130v.). But what about the other two manuscripts found, the works of Lebai Salih and Shamsuddin al-Sumatra’i from among the Malay people? Furthermore, seven other titles are yet to identify their authors. Based on the current and past research findings proving that many Malay scholars wrote using the Arabic language, starting from Shamsuddin al-Sumatra’i, Abdus Samad al-Falimbani, Nawawi Banten, Ahmad al-Fatani, Muhammad Mukhtar bin Utarid Bogor, Abdul Qadir Sena and others, can we easily conclude that an Arabic manuscript in the collection of the National Library of Malaysia (PNM) is the work of Arabs and unrelated to the history and culture of the Malay world? This question will be left open for the esteemed readers to answer for themselves.

Conclusion

Manuscripts of religious books constitute the largest collection gathered in Southeast Asia. Some of these collections are Arabo-Malay manuscripts, authored by Malays, employing the Arabic language significantly. Although many manuscripts of Arab/Persian scholars brought into the Malay world since the early Islamization have been continuously transcribed by Malay

students, it is not as easy for us to decide whether Arabic-language manuscripts are Arab manuscripts unrelated to the history and culture of the Malay world. Therefore, the National Library of Malaysia (PNM) has taken the right action by not arbitrarily disregarding Arabic-language manuscripts in its acquisition activities. However, in the documentation process, some deficiencies were found that need to be corrected to avoid ultimately causing a deficit in the value of manuscripts, leading to losses to the PNM collection.

The author takes the example of MSS 2257 to explain the deficiencies of *Katalog Manuskrip Melayu Koleksi Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia* (2000) in delivering important information to researchers. Firstly, it does not catalog the entire 12 manuscript titles found in MSS 2257 but only mentions 4 of them and concludes the others under the general title “Pelbagai kitab Bahasa Arab”. Secondly, it uses a general language to describe the titles/content of Arabic manuscripts, such as “Kitab bahasa Arab”. These issues ultimately hinder researchers from utilizing the catalog as effectively as expected from its publication. The researcher attributes these problems to the issue of Arabic language proficiency by those involved in the documentation process, along with the unresolved issue of the definition of Malay manuscripts.

Based on the research conducted, the author found that MSS 2257 is actually a kitab miscellany containing 12 manuscripts, most of which are complete and intact. Some can be easily identified by their authors, while others require further research. Importantly, only 3 out of these titles are the works of foreign scholars. Two of them are definitely the works of Malay scholars, while 7 others require further investigation. This manuscript includes manuscripts written in traditional study centers such as dayah and pondok, thus, it is very modest and not illuminated. However, its value cannot be underestimated because it contains much information about the history, culture, and thought of the Malays, especially those living in the environment of Islamic studies in the homeland, not only through books but also through side notes and marginalia.

The tradition of writing manuscript books needs to be continuously studied in the future to be on par with the level achieved for Malay literary manuscripts. The results of past studies and research also need to be reviewed and evaluated in line with the development of Malay manuscript research, which is advancing, to prevent it from being stuck at certain points that will cause this field to lag far behind other fields. Last but not least, the author would like to express a million thanks to fellow researchers at the

National Center for Malay Manuscripts (PKMM) in particular and the National Library of Malaysia (PNM) in general for dedicating time and energy to store and facilitate the path of research. Without all of them, it would be impossible for manuscript studies to continue. May their kindness and goodness be rewarded by Allah SWT with the best reward.

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