



# Traces Of Science And Islam In Traditional Medicine Practice Of Bengkulu Society : An Analysis Of Ulu Manuscript

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**Abstract:** This study aims to describe the coexistence of Islamic and scientific elements in traditional healing practices as documented in the Ulu Bengkulu manuscript. Traditional medicine in Bengkulu, Indonesia, is deeply rooted in local wisdom, often integrating Islamic principles and empirical observations. The Ulu Bengkulu manuscript, a valuable source of traditional knowledge, offers insights into these practices. This research employed a qualitative approach with a philological focus. Text analysis was conducted utilizing the framework of cultural studies to identify and analyze the presence of Islamic and scientific elements within the manuscript. This study demonstrates the harmonious coexistence of Islamic teachings and scientific approaches within the traditional healing practices documented in the Ulu Bengkulu manuscript. These findings not only contribute to the preservation of valuable cultural heritage but also offer potential avenues for further research and development in modern medicine, particularly through scientific investigations of the medicinal properties of the herbs mentioned and the ethical values embedded within the traditional practices.

**Keywords:** Ulu Manuscript, Traditional Healing, Islam, Science, Bengkulu

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## 1. Introduction

Traditional healing has become an integral part of the culture of people in various parts of the world, including in Indonesia. In Bengkulu Province, traditional medicine practices recorded in the Ulu manuscripts reflect the integration of Islamic and scientific elements in healing efforts. The Ulu manuscripts, written in traditional script, commonly called ulu letters, which European scholars commonly call Ka-Ga-Nga letters (Jaspan 1964) or rencong letters (Hasselt & Veth, 1881; Helfrich, 1894; Sturler, n.d.; Voorhoeve, 1955). The ulu script is a derivative and development of post-pallawa letters (Gonda, 1952; Sedyawati, 2004; Susanti, Ninie, 2015). serve as a source of medical knowledge that combines local wisdom with Islamic teachings (Sarwono & Rahayu, 2022). Studies of the Ulu manuscripts showed that these texts contain not only herbal recipes and treatment methods, but also rituals that contain elements of Islamic knowledge used in the healing process. This reflects how the Bengkulu people integrate their spiritual beliefs with everyday medical practices. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of the Ulu manuscripts in understanding the social and cultural dynamics of the Bengkulu community, especially in the context of traditional medicine (Sarwono & Rahayu, 2022).

In addition, the use of medicinal plants in the Ulu manuscripts shows the community's deep understanding of local flora and its properties. A study has identified various types of diseases traditionally treated by the Rejang tribe in Bengkulu, utilizing local natural resources (Setyowati et al., 2018). This is in line with the findings in the Ulu manuscript which records the use of various plants as medicinal ingredients. The integration of Islamic and scientific elements in Bengkulu traditional healing is also reflected in the use of mantras and prayers as part of therapy. The study on the physical and spiritual structure of traditional healing mantras showed how spiritual elements are used together with herbal treatment methods (Unsu et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the Ulu manuscript not only functions as a medical guide, but also as a medium for transmitting knowledge across generations. Another study emphasized the role of literacy and the Ulu manuscript in socio-cultural communication across various ethnic groups in Bengkulu in the early 20th century (Rahayu, 2019). This showed that the Ulu manuscript has significant historical and educational value. Thus, the study of the Ulu manuscript provided valuable insights into how the Bengkulu people integrate Islamic teachings with scientific knowledge in their traditional healing practices. Further study was needed to explore the potential of this manuscript in contributing to the development of modern medical science and practice (Setyowati et al., 2018; Unsu et al., 2021).

In the context of traditional medicine in Bengkulu, although previous studies have provided valuable insights into the Ulu manuscript and the integration of Islamic

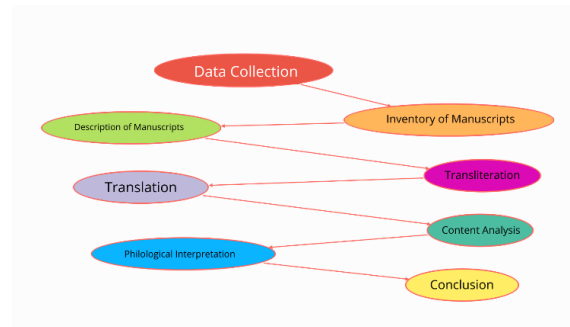
and scientific elements, there are still several research gaps that need to be further explored. First, existing research focuses more on the cultural and historical aspects of the Ulu manuscript, while in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of the treatments listed in the manuscript is still limited. The study by Sarwono & Rahayu (2022) and Setyowati et al. (2018) highlighted the use of medicinal plants, but no study has systematically tested the medicinal properties of the herbs mentioned in the Ulu manuscript scientifically. Furthermore, although Unsu et al. (2021) discussed the use of mantras and prayers. The study did not explore the psychological and physiological mechanisms that might occur during the practice of such treatment. Furthermore, Rahayu (2019) emphasized the importance of the Ulu manuscript in socio-cultural communication, but there has been insufficient exploration of how this knowledge can be applied in the context of modern medicine and the development of alternative therapies. Thus, further study was needed to explore the effectiveness of traditional medicine contained in the Ulu manuscript, as well as to understand how spiritual and scientific elements can contribute to contemporary medical practice in Indonesia.

This study aims to describe the coexistence of Islamic and scientific elements in traditional medicine in the Ulu Bengkulu manuscript. In addition, it aims to explore and understand the content of the manuscript, including herbal recipes, treatment methods, and existing rituals, in order to identify the role of spiritual elements in the healing process. Finally, this study is expected to reveal the potential of the Ulu manuscript in contributing to the development of modern medical science and practice and the relevance of traditional knowledge in the context of contemporary health.

## 2. Method

This study was conducted using a philological approach to analyze the Ulu manuscript (Murdiyanto, 2019). This approach was chosen because it was able to reveal the historical, cultural, and spiritual aspects contained in the manuscript in depth. The research stages began with the data collection. The Ulu manuscript was obtained from the various sources, museums, including libraries, private collections, and cultural institutions (Rahmadani, 2020). This process aims to ensure that the data used are relevant and representative (Smith, 2018). The next stage was the inventory of manuscripts. Each manuscript found was recorded in detail. The information documented included the origin of the manuscript, its physical condition, number of pages, type of paper, ink, and other elements (Sari, 2021). After that, a description of the manuscript was carried out to analyze the physical characteristics and contents of the manuscript (Abdulla, 2019). Moreover. The researchers note the script used

(Ulu script), text structure, and additional elements such as annotations or illustrations that may be contained in the manuscript (Watanabe, 2020).



The next step was transliteration, the process of changing the text from the Ulu script to the Latin script (Yulianto, 2020). This process is important to facilitate the reading and analysis of the text by modern researchers. After transliteration, translation was carried out, where the transliterated text was translated into Indonesian while maintaining the original context and meaning (Hidayat, 2021). Another important stage was content analysis, where the contents of the manuscript were analyzed in depth (Iskandar, 2019). The main focus of the analysis is on traditional medicine recorded in the manuscript, including the use of herbs and the integration of Islamic values. The results of this analysis are then strengthened by philological interpretation, where researchers understand the text in a historical, cultural, and Islamic context (Smith, 2018). Finally, this study ended with a conclusion. The main findings were summarized to provide an overview of the contribution of the Ulu manuscript to the Bengkulu community's healing traditions and the development of modern science (Rahmawati, 2022). The philological approach used ensured that the research was carried out systematically and comprehensively (Abdellan, 2020)

### 3. Result and Discussion

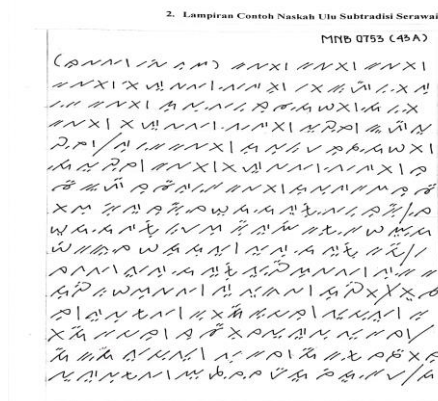
#### Result

The study on the Ulu manuscripts in Bengkulu reveals a harmonious integration of Islamic and scientific elements in the traditional healing practices of the local community. The ulu manuscripts function as a source of medical knowledge that combines local wisdom with Islamic teachings.

For Examples:

Manuscript MNB 07.53 (43 A)

Manuscript MNB 07.83 (F.122)



The traces of Islamic elements are indicated by the discovery of the use of several words or terms derived from Islamic knowledge, while the traces of science are seen from the use of herbal medicinal ingredients that can be scientifically accounted for their efficacy such as turmeric, ginger and *remunggai*. The coexistence of the traces of these elements will be described in the following explanation:

### ***Islamic Elements in Traditional Healing***

The Ulu Manuscript has an important role in expressing the coexistence of Islamic teachings in traditional medicine in Bengkulu. The use of spiritual elements such as the use of words or phrases derived from Islamic knowledge such as "*rukuno*", "*sedeka*", and "*salam salam mankalak ikum*" and the post-treatment rituals that require the patient's family to donate food in a predetermined amount and type. This certainly reflects the local community's belief in the power of God in healing. The synergy between spiritual and physical aspects makes treatment not only a biological process, but also a profound mental and emotional experience for patients. Several previous studies have emphasized that in many cultures, the presence of spiritual elements in traditional medicine can provide comfort and hope to patients, which ultimately affects the success of therapy. It also shows that traditional medicine based on spiritual practices, as reflected in the Ulu manuscript, plays an important role in maintaining cultural identity and serves to strengthen social cohesion in the community amidst the flow of modernization (Nasution, 2021; Malik and Yuniarti, 2020; Abdullah, 2019; Khairunnisa, 2021).

In traditional healing, people believe that healing is the result of the interaction between physical and spiritual efforts. This shows that although herbal medicine and ritual practices are important, a successful recovery is still believed to be the result of God's will. Prayers, mantras, spells and herbal ingredients used in traditional medicine of the Serawai tribe not only have ritual functions, but also spiritual footprints that

provide hope and mental support for patients (Unsu et al., 2021). Through this analysis, it can be seen that healing is not only seen as a physical mechanism, but also as a spiritual journey that fosters trust and peace in the hearts of the community. Further, other studies add information that traditional medicine in various cultures often reflects a deep belief that spiritual forces are actively involved in the healing process, and this is in line with the Islamic approach that emphasizes *tawakal* and *ikhtiar* as two sides of the same coin (Ali, 2020). Similar research results emphasized the importance of understanding the spiritual context in traditional healing practices in Indonesia as a way to preserve cultural heritage and inherited religious values (Hamka, 2019).

### ***Science Elements in Traditional Healing***

The Ulu Manuscript records the use of various medicinal plants, indicating a deep understanding of the local flora and its properties. The herbal recipes contained in the manuscript reflect an empirical approach to medicine, where the effectiveness of the herbs is tested through experience and observation. Several studies have identified the various types of diseases traditionally treated by the Rejang people in Bengkulu, utilizing local natural resources (Setyowati et al, 2018).

In addition, the simple diagnostic methods such as observing physical symptoms and patient behavior indicate a scientific approach to understanding disease. Treatment techniques such as massage, compresses, and the use of herbal steam (*tangas*) are also recorded in the manuscript, indicating their knowledge of human anatomy and physiology.

### ***Integration of Islam and Science in Traditional Healing***

The integration of Islamic and scientific elements in Bengkulu traditional healing is an interesting phenomenon to study, especially through the study of the Ulu manuscript. The use of certain rituals containing elements of Islamic teachings in the practice of medicine together with herbal concoctions shows a holistic approach applied by the local community. In this context, health is seen not only as a physical condition, but also as a spiritual balance that is important for the continuation of a healthy life. Several previous studies have highlighted how the Ulu manuscript functions as a tool to understand the social and cultural dynamics of the Bengkulu community, especially in traditional healing that reflects the underlying Islamic values. In addition, it shows that traditional medicine practices seek to understand the relationship between physical health and spiritual conditions, which form a comprehensive treatment framework (Prasetyo et al. 2020; Yulianto, 2021).

Traditional healing in Indonesia does not only focus on clinical aspects, but also integrates spiritual and social values. The underlying medical ethics emphasize good



intentions, sincerity, and trust, in line with Islamic values. The use of natural ingredients and empirical methods, as seen in the study of the Serawai tribe's healing mantras, demonstrate a scientific approach combined with spiritual elements. Thus, traditional healing in Indonesia offers a holistic approach that considers the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of the individual in achieving optimal health (Hidayat and Hasanah 2019; Sari and Firdaus, 2020).

### **Relevance in the Modern Era**

The study of the Ulu manuscript provides valuable insights into how the Bengkulu community integrated Islamic teachings with scientific knowledge in their traditional healing practices. Further study is needed to explore the potential of this manuscript in its contribution to the development of modern medical science and practice. Various types of diseases have been identified as being traditionally treated by the Rejang tribe in Bengkulu, utilizing local natural resources (Setyowati et al, 2018).

Hence, the Ulu manuscript not only functions as a medical guide, but also as a medium for transmitting knowledge across generations. This means that there is a role for literacy in the Ulu manuscript in socio-cultural communication in various ethnic groups in Bengkulu in the early 20th century (Rahayu, 2019). This shows that the Ulu manuscript has significant historical and educational value. By preserving and studying this manuscript, we are not only preserving cultural heritage but also contributing to the development of science rooted in tradition and noble values.

### **Discussion**

Based on the research results that have been obtained, there are several important points that need to be discussed in more detail to describe the integration between Islamic and scientific elements in traditional medicine of the Bengkulu community as recorded in the Ulu manuscript.

### **The Role Of Post-Treatment Rituals In The Traditional Healing Process**

The Ulu manuscript clearly explained the traditional healing procession using herbal ingredients which was closed with a post-treatment ritual which is a must or in the Bengkulu Ulu manuscript language it is called "*rukuno sedeka*", namely the obligation to give alms in the form of porridge and *lemang* which illustrates gratitude for the healing given by Allah SWT for healing from the disease suffered.

"Abdullah bin Mas'ud and Ubadah bin Samit reported that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

ودأؤوامر ضاكم بالصدقة

'Treat your sick with charity.'

(This hadith is considered hasan by Shaykh al-Albani in both Sahih al-Jami' and Sahih at-Targhib.)"

This creates synergy between the spiritual and physical aspects of treatment. This alms is not only limited to a ritual of worship, but it is also believed to have spiritual power that can influence individual healing and reflects a deep belief that Allah is the main source of all healing. In the context of the Bengkulu community, the combination of spiritual beliefs and herbal medicine creates a holistic approach that implies that health involves a balance between body and soul. This is in line with the practice of integrating spirituality into traditional healing in Indonesia which can significantly improve therapeutic outcomes (Yulianto et al. 2020). In addition, the disharmony between the spiritual and physical aspects in the healing process can result in inhibition of the recovery process, so that the integration of these two dimensions in treatment practices is very important (Wong & Lee, 2021).

### ***Effectiveness of Herbs in Traditional Healing***

The research result showed that the use of herbs in the Ulu manuscript was based on the empirical understanding of the Bengkulu community regarding the rich and beneficial local flora. This is in line with the content of the Koran Surah Ali Imran verse 191 which reads:

الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمٰوٰتِ  
وَالْاَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هٰذَا بَاطِلًا سُبْحٰنَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ ﴿١٩١﴾

“(namely) those who remember Allah while standing, sitting, or lying down, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth (and say), “Our Lord, You have not created all this in vain. Glory be to You. Protect us from the punishment of the Fire.”

From the verse above, it can be concluded that everything that Allah creates must have benefits, including the herbal plants that grow in the area around the residence of the people of Ulu Bengkulu.

In Ulu manuscript, several frequently mentioned plants such as turmeric, ginger, banana, *remunggai* and cogongrass roots have been identified as effective herbs for treating various types of diseases, ranging from fever, wounds, to digestive disorders. The use of these plants in traditional medicine shows a legacy of knowledge that has accumulated over the years, although more modern scientific approaches related to the bioactive content and mechanisms of action of these herbs have only just begun to be developed. The study conducted by Ahmadi showed that turmeric and ginger have active compounds that have been proven to have anti-inflammatory and



antioxidant properties, adding credibility to traditional healing practices that have been passed down through generations (Ahmadi et al, 2020). Furthermore, the study conducted by Pham confirmed that identifying the pharmacological potential of these herbs through scientific analysis methods can provide global recognition of traditional healing expertise in Bengkulu and bridge local knowledge with the development of modern health sciences (Pham et al, 2021).

### **Traditional Diagnostic Methods**

One of the interesting findings from the Ulu manuscript was the existence of a simple methodology applied by the traditional Bengkulu community, which was carried out through physical observation of patients which in the local language was called "*cinungan*" or "*cirio*" which includes signs such as changes in skin color which in the Ulu manuscript is described as "*nyighap abang*" or "*nyighap kuning*," body temperature, and behavior. This method, although seemingly simple, reflects an early understanding of the relationship between physical symptoms and disease conditions, indicating that the community has developed a form of systematic medical knowledge based on empirical observation (Unsu et al, 2021). This is in line with the concept in modern medical science which emphasizes the importance of clinical observation as the first step in the medical diagnosis process, where observed symptoms can provide crucial information regarding the patient's possible health condition. This means that this observation practice is not only applicable in the context of traditional medicine, but can also be applied in the context of modern medicine, where careful clinical observation can lead to a more accurate diagnosis (Hidayati and Anggraini, 2020). In addition, other studies emphasized that this observation-based diagnostic approach allows doctors to respond quickly to changes in patient conditions, which is the essence of an effective and patient-oriented medical approach (Tanjung et al, 2022)

### **Medical Ethics in Islam**

The Ulu Manuscript strongly emphasized the importance of good intentions and sincerity in the treatment process, showing that in Islam, treatment was not only a medical effort, but it is also considered a form of worship to Allah. This doctrine directs traditional healers (*betara*) to act responsibly, honestly, and not only oriented towards material gain, thus creating a more ethical and integrity-based practice environment

. In this practice, sincerity is expected to create a more humane relationship between healer and patient, emphasizing moral values that are very important in treatment. The study showed that medical practices that emphasized good

intentions can improve patient satisfaction and treatment outcomes, because patients feel more cared for and appreciated as individuals (Badawi and Nasution, 2020). In addition, the study by Flanagan emphasized that the integration of moral and ethical values into modern medical practice not only increases public trust in health professionals, but also serves as a guide for more empathetic and holistic practices, which are in line with the approaches taught in many religious traditions, including Islam (Flanagan et al, (2021)

### ***Synergy Between Science and Spirituality***

The integration of Islamic and scientific elements in the Ulu manuscript illustrated the views of the traditional Bengkulu community who believe that health is not only related to physical aspects, but also required spiritual balance. The healing practices contained in this manuscript showed that a holistic approach has been the part of their tradition long before similar concepts were adopted in modern medicine, emphasizing the importance of synergy between body and soul in achieving optimal health. The various elements such as prayer and alms rituals act as mental and emotional strengtheners, providing peace for patients who are trying to recover, while the use of herbal concoctions offers concrete physical solutions to various health problems. The study by Mulyani added that holistic medicine that combines spiritual and physical aspects not only has a positive effect on individual healing, but also builds solidarity in the community, where healing practices are carried out with good intentions and mutual support (Mulyani and Latifah, 2020). Furthermore, the study by Khan emphasized that the concept of holistic health centered on the connection between physical and spiritual aspects can provide a sustainable and more humane alternative in modern medical practices, especially in contexts that support local cultural beliefs and values. Khan et al. (2021).

### ***Relevance of the Ulu Manuscript in the Modern Era***

The Ulu Manuscript has significant relevance in the context of modern medicine and pharmacy, especially through pharmacological research that can be conducted on the herbal ingredients listed in it. Researching the bioactive compounds contained in these plants can not only reveal new therapeutic potentials but also open up opportunities for the development of innovative medicines that can provide more natural and efficient treatment alternatives (Suhardi et al., 2020). In addition, the spiritual approach reflected in this manuscript offers a way to integrate psychological aspects into modern medicine, which is very important in treating chronic and psychosomatic diseases, where mental and emotional factors often affect the physical condition of patients (Nasir et al., 2021). A holistic approach involving both physical therapeutic interventions and spiritual support can improve treatment

outcomes, reinforcing the importance of understanding traditional values in the context of contemporary health. Thus, the integration of findings from the Ulu manuscript can provide valuable insights and encourage innovation in current medical practice (Ahmad & Sulaiman, 2022).

### ***Manuscripts as a Source of Education and Cultural Preservation***

As a valuable source of knowledge, the Ulu manuscripts was not only function as a guide to medicine but also had significant educational value in preserving the cultural and religious heritage of the Bengkulu people. In this context, literacy about these manuscripts is very important to educate the younger generation about the importance of maintaining a balance between tradition, religion, and science (Rahayu, 2019). By understanding the historical and cultural context contained in the Ulu manuscripts, the younger generation can appreciate local knowledge and raise awareness of the importance of preserving their cultural heritage. Research confirms that teaching about local traditions and sources of knowledge such as the Ulu manuscripts can foster a deeper sense of identity and social responsibility among young people (Muhammad et al, 2020). In addition, a study by Simanjuntak and Rahman shows that an integrative approach that combines tradition, spirituality, and science can create a generation that is more aware of the importance of maintaining cultural sustainability and developing knowledge that is harmonious with local culture. Thus, the Ulu manuscripts function more than just medical documents; it is a potential educational tool to strengthen identity and inspire innovation in a broader context (Simanjuntak and Rahman, 2021)

### ***Potential for Development in Scientific Studies***

Further studies of the Ulu manuscript can be carried out through cross-disciplinary collaboration involving the fields of philology, pharmacy, medicine, and anthropology, which will open up opportunities to uncover more unique aspects related to this historical document. This kind of multidisciplinary research has the potential to identify and explore the influence of culture, history, and religion on the medical practices of the Bengkulu community, while providing a deeper understanding of how local traditions are formed and developed in the context of health. For example, the study by Ibrahim and Rahman showed that a philological understanding of the text can help see how language and cultural symbols contribute to healing practices, while a pharmaceutical approach can explore the potential of bioactive compounds in the herbal concoctions listed therein (Ibrahim & Rahman, 2020). On the other hand, anthropological research can explore the social and religious aspects that influence how people understand and apply medicine, as

expressed by Santoso and Munir, who emphasize the importance of analyzing the socio-cultural context in understanding traditional medical practices (Santoso and Munir 2022). Thus, this collaboration not only enriches our understanding of the Ulu manuscript but also provides meaningful insights into the development of modern medical practices that are more in line with local values.

#### 4. Conclusion

The study on the Ulu manuscripts in Bengkulu revealed a harmonious integration of Islamic and scientific elements in the traditional healing practices of the local community, where these manuscripts served as a source of medical knowledge that combines local wisdom and Islamic teachings, and emphasized that healing is the result of the interaction between physical and spiritual efforts. The use of spiritual elements, such as prayer and almsgiving rituals, combined with herbal medicine based on an empirical understanding of local flora, created a holistic approach that considered the balance between body and soul. In the modern era, the Ulu manuscripts have significant value for the development of science and cultural preservation, opening up opportunities for cross-disciplinary studies that can enrich medical practice and increase public awareness of their cultural heritage.

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