

ULU MANUSCRIPTS:
transformation and recontextualization of ethnic cultural knowledge

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Abstract

The ulu script is a 'post Pallava' derived script, used widely, covering the Jambi, South Sumatra, Bengkulu and Lampung regions. The legacy of the ulu writing tradition, namely ulu manuscripts in various materials (such as bamboo, bark, rattan, buffalo horn, paper, and animal skins) which are stored in various museums and libraries in Indonesia and in several countries in Europe, as well as those stored in the community, proves this. The content of the ulu manuscript includes various ethnic cultural knowledge (including customary law, genealogy and tambo, folk prose and poetry, prayers or incantations, medicinal plants, religious texts, and *primbon*), as well as various social rites (such as *nyialang* i.e. collecting honey from *sialang* tree in the forest, planting rice, life cycle rites, and traditional medicine. Due to the nature of the manuscript material, in general, ulu texts tend to be short in text size and concise in composition. Further evidence shows that in the ulu writing tradition there is no phenomenon of text transmission. There is insufficient evidence for the existence of the ulu manuscript as a copy of another, older manuscript of a text. On the other hand, the phenomenon of text transformation is very common in the ulu writing tradition. There are many ulu texts on various cultural knowledge which can be ascertained written from oral text sources that live in oral tradition. In addition, it was found that there were quite a number of texts in the ulu manuscripts which were written based on the subjective experience of the author of the text about certain social rites. In the latter context, the texts in the ulu manuscript can be seen as a recontextualization of the relevant ethnic social rite.

Keywords: cultural knowledge, recontextualization, transformation, ulu manuscript