

# THE SACRED VALUES OF KERINCI ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS AND OTHER ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS IN THE WORLD

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**Abstract.** The aims of this study are to explore the sacred meanings in the ancient manuscripts of Kerinci preserved by the Kerinci indigenous people and their comparison with other ancient manuscripts in the world. This study uses a qualitative approach, with data collection using a purposive sampling technique on selected informants based on predetermined criteria. The results of this study indicate that the manifestation of the sacred values of the ancient manuscripts of Kerinci does not lie in the physicality of the manuscripts, but is believed by the Kerinci people to be found in the values of protecting or maintaining ancient manuscripts. The Kerinci people view the preservation of ancient manuscripts as sacred because they believe it is obedience to the results of an agreement, continuing the mandate, respecting the *ikrar iyo* (pledge), a form of obedience to the adjunct directions of the country's leader in this case the Depati, respecting the contents of the manuscript in the form of ancestral teachings and history, and are afraid of being exposed disaster, harm or disaster such as wasting the manuscript as *harto pusako* as a consequence of the responsibility that has been jointly acknowledged and bound by the *iyo* pledge. Some contextually sacred reasons have similarities with traditions in other places such as the value of trust, adherence to customary rules, ancestral teachings such as rituals, traditional ceremonies, certain religious teachings and ancestral history, and fear of calamity if ancient manuscripts are wasted.

**Keywords:** *ancient manuscript, Kerinci ancient manuscript, manuscript preservation, sacred values*

## Introduction

The general characteristics of ancient manuscripts are using a variety of characters and media (Jarusawat, 2021), folded, rolled up or sewn (Monaco, 2017), produced in the sultanate or kingdom, for important purposes and events (Ding, 2014), handwritten by one or more people, not produced in print or before printing was invented, produced around the eleventh century to the twentieth century, at least 75 years old (Rasmussen, 2014; Gaur, 2011), it is a world treasure because it contains a variety of information (Dreamsea, 2021), related to culture and history, recognized as a world heritage of considerable importance, can bridge the past, present and future (Jarusawat, 2021). In addition, ancient manuscripts as primary data to parse history (Abdulkareem, 2012); contains accurate historical data (Susantio, 2016), a reflection of past civilizations and representations of cultural works.

Ancient manuscripts are not only managed by official institutions appointed by the state, but are still kept by the community or in traditional communities (Khadijah et al., 2021; Amin, 2012). In line with Adib (2017) statement, only a few percent of ancient manuscripts are stored in formal institutions, mostly in the community. Ancient manuscripts in only a small part of the community have been identified, even in

Southeast Asia, ancient manuscripts are massively scattered in the community, for example stored in mosques, mosques, monasteries, temples, residences, palaces or palaces, Islamic boarding schools and palaces (Jarusawat, 2021). Furthermore, Adib (2017) states that there are four categories of human behaviour towards ancient manuscripts. First, ancient manuscripts are considered sacred or sacred objects. Second, understand that ancient manuscripts have economic value that can be sold at high prices. Third, some people are starting to realize that ancient manuscripts are important to save. Fourth, there have been efforts to preserve ancient manuscripts from damage. Ancient manuscripts stored in the hands of the community or per person have their own uniqueness, it is not easy to transfer them to official institutions, such as national libraries or museums because there are several challenges to be faced. In line with another statement, it is impossible to physically hand over ancient manuscripts to state institutions (libraries or museums).

The challenges of transferring ancient manuscripts from the community to official state institutions are the various interpretations of ancient manuscripts (Khadijah et al., 2021), as identity and pride (Seli et al., 2017) and the existence of cultural differences and views between owner of the manuscript with a digitizer (Widiyanarti et al., 2021). Then in some areas or some people until now still believe in sacred ancient texts (Van Der Meij, 2012) because the beginning of the activity of producing and distributing ancient manuscripts was mostly in religious circles or the palace (Ramadina, 2021; Hidayat, 2008), not just anyone can open the ancient manuscripts (Jarusawat, 2021), seeing physically the ancient manuscripts must meet various requirements and believe that if the manuscript is given to other parties it can bring disaster (Pradipta, 2008), and giving ancient manuscripts to others, it is tantamount to selling and dishonouring the ancestors (Ayuba, 2013). Due to these factors, each region has its own rituals, carefully preserving ancient manuscripts and their storage areas according to local culture. In line with the statement of Hamsiati and Hamid (2021), those ancient manuscripts in the Nusantara have their own place for storage. Even in certain areas, including pusako (Khadijah et al., 2021; Syaputra, 2021; Ramadhona, 2018; Adib, 2017) they are passed down from generation to generation and has become part of people's lives (Rachman, 2017). So that its maintenance is trusted to certain people by means of religious rituals (Radar Tanjab Official Portal, 2021; Motsi, 2017) and is issued at certain moments. As found in several areas, both at home and abroad. Among others, in Nigeria, Assam, Pakistan, Myanmar, Yogyakarta, Kuningan, Ciamis, Maluku, Lombok, South Sumatra, Bali, Kerinci and so on.

Every society treats ancient manuscripts differently. This is because according to Zuriati (2014), ancient manuscripts have their own position and function in local society. As emphasized by Van Der Meij (2012) that it is impossible to treat ancient manuscripts the same and assume that ancient manuscripts are merely artefacts, because each area of the status or function of ancient manuscripts is different. Not much different from the opinion of Jaiswal and Singh (2022) and Widiyanarti et al. (2021), namely that cultural heritage such as ancient manuscripts cannot be separated from local history and culture. Therefore, ancient manuscripts cannot be viewed from the same perspective and must prioritize the linkage of ancient manuscripts with tradition. But unfortunately, there is also a certain individual or part of society's perspective on the treatment of ancient manuscripts which is a bit excessive. For example, Khadijah et al. (2021), Radar Tanjab Official Portal (2021) and Syahputra (2021), see people's treatment of ancient texts as an act containing elements of heresy or polytheism.

Whereas the variety of people's treatment of the ancient manuscripts cannot be concluded rashly, but first understand the meaning of the ancient text and the important role of the ancient text for the community.

Therefore, it is important to examine the meaning of ancient manuscripts for the community so that there is no negative stigma and misunderstanding of the actions of the people who sanctify their ancient manuscripts as *harto pusako* that they preserved through their cultural traditions from generation to generation. What's more, Subair (2016) states that the study of the meaning of ancient manuscripts is interesting to study because there are differences and similarities between texts in various regions. In line with the statement of Van Der Meij (2021) that so far no one has conducted research on the meaning of ancient manuscripts in certain local communities, even though it is very important to be studied in detail. In this regard, the focus of the issues in this research is to explore the meaning of sacred values in the ancient Kerinci manuscripts that have been kept for centuries by the Kerinci people, and their comparison with sacred meanings in other ancient manuscripts in the world. So, the purpose of this research is to explore the sacred meaning in the ancient manuscripts of Kerinci preserved by the Kerinci indigenous people and their comparison with other ancient manuscripts in the world.

## **Materials and Methods**

The study uses a qualitative approach with field research in Kerinci District, Jambi Province. Qualitative research aims to collect and even focus attention in detail to reveal questions about how, where, what, when and why a certain person or group does a certain thing on a certain problem (Denzin et al., 2011). Collecting data in this study by interviewing informants. Interviews are a series of ways to obtain data from individuals or groups (Jackson et al., 2007). Then, the informants selected using a purposive sampling technique with the criteria were people who were able to provide detailed data information about the Kerinci ancient manuscripts as *harto pusako*, the culture of preservation of the ancient manuscripts of Kerinci, the cultural meaning of local wisdom in the ancient manuscripts of Kerinci and able to describe the reasons for maintaining the preservation script based on local wisdom. Furthermore, the data were analyzed through the stages of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Miles and Huberman, 1992).

### ***Reasons for ancient manuscripts to be sacred***

Ancient manuscripts have their own position and function (Zuriati, 2014). In Meitei (2020) view ancient manuscripts are evidence of a combination of past humanistic and artistic activities. Meanwhile, according to Jaiswal dan Singh (2022) ancient manuscripts are always related to local history and culture. However, for the people of the Nusantara, ancient manuscripts are valuable things, because they are heirlooms (Pradipta, 2022) or inherited from generation to generation, and are used for rituals (Mediana, 2020). Indeed, ancient manuscripts as sacred heirlooms can be found in several countries in the world, including in Indonesia. Overseas can be found in Africa (Tigray-Ethiopia, Nigeria and Timbukutu), India (Assam, Manipur, and Orissa), Pakistan, China, Thailand, Myanmar and Vietnam. While in Indonesia it can be found on the island of Java (Surakarta, Ciamis, Yogyakarta, Indramayu, Kuningan and Garut), and outside Java (Maluku, Lombok, Lampung, North and South Sumatra, and Kerinci).

### ***Reasons for ancient manuscripts to be sacred in abroad***

However, there are reasons why ancient manuscripts are sacred or respected in every place in the world, including in Indonesia. Nigerian people believe that ancient manuscripts are sacred objects, so they are stored in wooden boxes and the guards refuse to give them to other parties, because giving them to others means wasting their ancestors or is the same as selling their ancestor's property (Ayuba, 2013). The people of Timbukutu still believe that ancient manuscripts have power, so they are kept secret and never shown to others. Therefore, every family has a custodian of ancient manuscripts and swears to protect them (Motsi, 2017). The Assamese (Vaisnava people) believe that ancient manuscripts are sacred items because they are based on religious beliefs (Meitei et al., 2020; Mazumdar, 2009). The people of Thailand believe in ancient texts as sacred, because they are used for weddings, fumigation of houses, illness, death, rituals before and after harvest so that they are guarded by religious people (Samutthakhot et al., 2002). The people of Northern Thailand also believe in ancient Lanna manuscripts as sacred objects, because they contain Buddhist teachings and are used for religious activities and other social aspects (Jarusawat, 2017). The Burmese people sacred ancient manuscripts because most of them contain the teachings of Buddhism, therefore the ancient manuscripts were carefully guarded by monks, nobles and the public (Oo, 2016). Vietnamese people consider ancient manuscripts as sacred objects, because they are a family heritage (Phan, 2015). The people of Nepal (Newar people) have Buddhist and Hindu Sanskrit ancient texts as objects that are respected because they are part of the Newar religious life so that there are special rituals (British Library Official Portal, 2023).

### ***Reasons for ancient manuscripts to be sacred in Indonesia***

In Java Indonesia, the Kuningan people make ancient manuscripts sacred because they serve as a guide for Karuhun Urang (Indigenous Peoples) people in being civilized, social and used to solve social problems faced by local communities (Indrawardana et al., 2016). The people of Indramayu value ancient manuscripts as sacred objects, because they contain advice, can avoid disasters and are used for certain events (weddings, naming children and so on) (Widiyanarti et al., 2021). The Ciamis people hold ancient manuscripts as valuable, important objects and sacred heirlooms (Khadijah et al., 2017). The people of the Kabuyutan Ciburuy Site, Garut Regency, consider ancient manuscripts to be sacred items, so they are not allowed to be stored elsewhere (Aghisni and Saefudin, 2022). The people of Sumenep-Madura (Village Papas) believe in ancient manuscripts as sacred items, because they are hundreds of years old and have magical powers (Sulistiyorini, 2009).

Outside of Java, The Balinese believe that ancient manuscripts are sacred objects, heirlooms that must be stored in a special place, because they can be used as a guide for everyday life (Narendra, 2021). The people of Lombok also categorize ancient manuscripts as sacred items, because they contain supernatural powers and are used for certain ceremonies or rituals (Van Der Meij, 2012). The people of Wajo-South Sulawesi still believe that ancient manuscripts are sacred items, because they are family heirlooms. So that the ancient manuscripts were hidden, placed in a certain place and not just anyone could see them for fear of disaster (Hamsiati and Hamid, 2021). The Maluku-Tidore people place sacred ancient manuscripts and do not dare to show them

to others, because they are ancestral heritage that has been passed down from generation to generation, display social symbols, are afraid of getting Poso (curses or curses), and are used for several activities (Bodi, 2017; Idham, 2017; 2011; Mansi, 2017). The Papuan people also consider ancient texts to be sacred. There is a fear of opening ancient manuscripts, so that not just anyone can open them, and they can only be opened at certain times according to customary rules (Holil, 2016).

The Pasemah-South Sumatran people consider ancient manuscripts to be sacred because they are Pesake Puyang, only certain families can keep them (offspring and tubes) (Andhifani and Ali, 2021). The Sarolangun people still believe in ancient manuscripts as sacred items, because they respect their ancestors and preserve culture (Devi Asrianti et al., 2019). The Acehnese people sacred ancient manuscripts because they are believed to be able to avoid disaster, still hold strong ancestral teachings and traditions and not just anyone may touch them (Hermansyah, 2015). The people of West Sumatra (Solok) and Pesisir Selatan (Rumah Gadang Mandeh Rubiah) still think that ancient manuscripts are sacred objects, cannot be moved because of a mandate from their predecessors and as a talisman (Pebriona et al., 2023).

## Results and Discussion

### *The reason for the sacred value of the Kerinci ancient manuscripts compared to other ancient manuscripts*

In Kerinci, the concept of sacred in ancient manuscripts is related to community agreements bound by the word *iyó*. As explained by Sahid Hanafi, who is the Depati of Talam Tuo, the sacred meaning is the agreement of the people with the word *iyó* accompanied by the sound of Gung. In addition, the word *iyó* also means trust and trust. If the community and the Head of District have said yes, then they are obliged to carry out the mandate straightly. Likewise, the community fully trusts the Depati to become the leader of the country and is able to be directed or led by the Depati. In short, the sacred value is not in the physicality of the manuscript, but lies in the form of agreement and the belief of the people to uphold and carry out the mandate in an upright manner in safeguarding the ancient manuscript. The informant's statement was conveyed as follows:

*“Pengaruh kato iyo uha tadi. bukan barangnya sakral tapi kesepakatan. sebab salamo ini banyak beranggapan keramat. jadi keramat kato iyo uha banyak itoh keramat. Kalau masyarakat dan Depati mengato iyo, maka tidak boleh melanggar, iyo penuh kepercayaan dengan Depati dan iyo akan diatur oleh Depati disertai bunyi gung Depati tiga kali, ninik mamak dua kali dan pegawai satu kali. Iyo berarti percaya dan amanah sudah dititipkan. dibalik iyo terkait dengan amanah dititipkan, iyo percaya Depati menjadi pimpinan negeri dan iyo sanggup untuk diatur oleh Depati. iyo nian amanah dan jalan lurus dijalankan oleh Depati.”*

(Sahid Hanafi, Depati Talam Tuo Desa Tanjung Tanah, 13 Oktober 2021)

In line with Ibrahim, one of the traditional leaders of Tanjung Tanah Kerinci stated that the ancient manuscripts as *harto pusako* were respected because they contained sacred elements. The sacredness of the Kerinci ancient manuscripts does not lie in the physical existence of the manuscripts, but because there is an agreement that the negeri

has pledged the word *iyó*. The *iyó* pledge should not be violated; if it is violated there will be an impact. The persistence of the ancient Kerinci manuscripts until now, is because of the agreement and trust held. This is based on the results of interviews with the following traditional figure:

*“Dihormati nya naskah kuno tersebut karena ada kekuatan sakral. Bukan naskah yang sakral, melainkan yang dimaksud dengan sakral adalah kesepakatan orang banyak atau negeri sudah mengatakan iyo yang diiringi bunyi gung. Kata iyo tersebutlah dimaksud dengan sakral. Oleh karena itu tidak boleh melangkah kesepakatan orang banyak tersebut, dan bilamana mengingkari kesepakatan tersebut ada resiko nya...”*

(Ibrahim, Tanjung Tanah Traditional Figure, 18 April 2021)

Ibrahim also added that the sacred value of ancient manuscripts was engraved with the word *iyó* in the sense of an agreement on customary rules that were stipulated accompanied by a Gung sound which means acknowledged. In the Kerinci custom there are three *iyó*, namely the customary stakeholders comply with *prabayu*, carry out directions, and the *iyó* people will obey with adjunct directions. The word *iyó* implies that something has been agreed upon, so it cannot be violated simply because it is believed that if it is violated, it can bring great harm in this world and the hereafter. This statement was conveyed as in the following interview:

*“Sakral keno banyak kato iyo. karena sakral mako ado mudaratnya didunia dan diakhir. walaupun sko kecil tapi mudarat besar. Melangkahi kato “sepakat dan tidak bisa dilangkahi. kato iyo makanya bunyi gung. bunyi gung berarti kita mengakui. tinggi filosofi kato iyo dikerinci. iyo akan patuh diajun arah, iyo dengan parabayu dan iyo dengan Depati dan iyo mengarah ataupun mengajukan. Ado tiga iyo di Kerinci yaitu Uha adat patuh dengan prabayu dan menjalankan arah dan masyarakat iyo akan patuh dengan ajun arah yang dipatrikan dengan gung.”*

(Ibrahim, Tanjung Tanah Traditional Figure, 14 Oktober 2021)

Likewise, the opinion of Buya Zakaria from the elements of the Kerinci religious leaders who are also the management staff of the Tanjung Tanah Kerinci customary institution stated that the Kerinci ancient manuscripts were sacred, possibly because of an ancestral agreement with their successors, so that it became sacred from generation to generation. In addition, the Kerinci ancient manuscripts are sacred because they describe the ancestors of the Kerinci tribe, and contain important teachings for the Kerinci people. The explanation is stated as follows:

*“Disakralkan pasti adanya perjanjian leluhur dengan penerusnya, sehingga sakral tersebut turun menurun. Selain itu disakralkan disebabkan informasi yang terkandung naskah kuno tersebut mengandung ajaran-ajaran dan menceritakan tentang leluhur Kerinci...”*

(Buya Zakaria, Tanjung Tanah Kerinci religious figure, 29 Maret 2021)

Essentially, the sacred value of the Kerinci ancient manuscripts is based on several reasons attached to the text and binding for all levels of the Kerinci community. *Mufakat (Consensus)*, that is, the sacred value in the ancient Kerinci manuscripts does not lie in the physical text of the manuscript but is due to the consensus of all elements of society, the country's leaders who are bound by a vow to pronounce the word *iyó* accompanied by the sound of gung as a sign of being acknowledged. *Ikrar iyó (pledge)* is a statement made jointly by the people of Kerinci and the Depati as leaders of the country as a binding agreement on the preservation of the ancient manuscripts of Kerinci. *Amanah (Mandate)* which can also be interpreted as a promise or entrusted by an ancestor attached to the responsibility of safeguarding the ancient Kerinci manuscripts from generation to generation is believed by the Kerinci people to follow the applicable customary rules. This is also one of the sacred reasons for preserving the Kerinci ancient manuscripts. Contextually, this is understood as a mandatory form of responsibility bequeathed by the Kerinci ancestors to be carried out by the community or individuals who hold the mandate from generation to generation. The sacred values attached to the responsibility of carrying out the mandate of preserving ancient manuscripts according to the advice of previous ancestors can also be found in the tradition of preserving ancient manuscripts by the people of Nigeria (Ayuba, 2013), the people of Aceh (Hermansyah, 2015), and West Sumatra, namely in Solok and Pesisir Selatan (Pebriona et al., 2023)

*Obedience to orders and directions of traditional leaders*, namely sacred values that are reflected in the obedient attitude believed by the Kerinci people to the rules or mandates of state leaders in preserving the ancient manuscripts of Kerinci. Compliance with rules or orders from traditional leaders to protect ancient manuscripts is a reflection of sacred values which are also present in the attitudes and beliefs of the Papuan people because they are afraid of violating rules (Holil, 2016). *Respect for the values of ancestral teachings and history*, namely the attitude of respect or appreciation that exists in every individual of the community and traditional leaders for the contents of the Kerinci ancient manuscripts is a form of sacred values because the manuscript contains the values of the teachings and history of the Kerinci ancestors, therefore the text must preserve. Respect for ancient manuscripts like this is also found in other community traditions, although in the form of a narrative that is not exactly the same but has the same contextual meaning, namely containing elements of teaching values, advice, guidelines, advice and teachings of a certain belief and religious value. For example, respecting ancient manuscripts because of the contents of the manuscript about the teachings of the ancestors of the Acehnese (Hermansyah, 2015), the contents of the Kuningan ancient manuscript regarding the teachings of solving community social problems (Indrawardana et al., 2016), the ancient manuscript contains teachings on rituals or traditional ceremonies used by people in the areas of Bali, Lombok, Sarolangun, and Indramayu (Narendra, 2021; Widiyanarti et al., 2021; Devi Asrianti, 2019; Van Der Meij, 2012), ancient texts contain religious teachings and advice as applicable to the people of Indramayu (Widiyanarti et al., 2021), Burmese people (Oo, 2016), The Assamese (Meitei, 2020; Mazumdar, 2009), The Newar people (British Library Official Portal, 2023), and the people of Thailand (Jarusawat, 2017; Samutthakhot et al., 2002). Furthermore, respect for ancient manuscripts because they are based on the contents of ancient manuscripts with historical status or ancestral heritage that can be found such as The Pasemah-South Sumatran people (Andhifani and

Ali, 2021), the people of Wajo-South Sulawesi (Hamsiati and Hamid, 2021), The Papuan people (Holil, 2016), and Vietnamese people (Phan, 2015).

*The fear of being afflicted* with calamities or harm is a form of attitude for each individual in the Kerinci community who believes that it can cause harm or harm in the world and in the hereafter for people who intentionally neglect the ancient Kerinci manuscripts. An attitude of fear of being afflicted by misfortune or harm when wasting ancient manuscripts like this can be seen as a manifestation of the sacred values attached to ancient manuscripts as a consequence of pronouncing an agreement between the community and the country's leaders bound by the *ikrar iyo*. This pledge also places the ancient manuscripts of Kerinci as *harto pusako* which are entrusted or mandated by the ancestors to be guarded and cared for by each successive generation from generation to generation. In other words, preserving ancient manuscripts is a form of effort to avoid disaster, harm or disaster if you waste them. This also applies in various regions of Indonesia such as the beliefs of the people of Aceh (Hermansyah, 2015), the people of Maluku-Tidore (Bodi, 2017; Idham, 2017; 2011; Mansi, 2017), the people of Indramayu (Widiyanarti et al., 2021), and the people of Wajo-South Sulawesi (Hamsiati and Hamid, 2021).

## Conclusion

That the sacred values in the process of preserving the ancient manuscripts of Kerinci are not attached to the physical form of the manuscripts, but are contained in values that are believed, respected, recognized jointly by all levels of the Kerinci ethnic community on the basis of reasons, namely the preservation of ancient manuscripts is a form of seriousness in carrying out a consensus the people of the Kerinci tribe who are bound by the *ikrar iyo* and are believed to be the recipients of the mandate ancestors from generation to generation which apply to all levels of the Kerinci community. This is also a special value for the Kerinci people because it is not confirmed by tradition in other communities. In addition, the sacred in the ancient Kerinci manuscripts also reflects an attitude of obedience to the directions and orders (*arah ajun*) of the traditional leaders, respect and respect for the contents of the text which contains the teachings, rules, and history of Kerinci's ancestors which are of high value as a way of life for the Kerinci people, so that they are embedded with a sense of afraid of being hit by misfortune, harm or calamity if they waste an ancient manuscript that has the status of a *harto pusako*.

Wasting manuscripts is also believed to be an act of violating the mandate that has been given responsibility by the ancestors to the next generation for generations to save the ancient manuscripts of Kerinci. In addition, there are similarities in the contextual understanding of sacred values in the tradition of preserving the ancient manuscripts of Kerinci with other places in the world and in other parts of Indonesia such as aspects of trustworthiness, obedience to rules, respect for ancestral teachings such as those related to ritual procedures, traditional ceremonies, certain religious teachings and ancestral history, and also includes fear of the possibility of misfortune, harm, or disaster if you neglect or violate the rules that apply in the preservation of ancient manuscripts according to those outlined by the ancestors or ancestors to be carried down from generation to generation.



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## Conflict of interest

The researcher confirms that there is no conflict of interest with any parties involved in the study.

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