Sundanese Manuscripts:
Their Existence, Functions, and Contents

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In Indonesia two forms of writing tradition exist, namely inscriptions and manuscripts. The former were written on stone and metal, while the latter on palm leaf, bamboo, and paper. The texts of inscriptions are generally brief containing only of a small number of lines stating a royal decree or announcement, or commemorating of a royal or religious event, while the texts of the manuscripts are usually lengthy, even numbering to thousands of pages containing a variety of expressions, thoughts, experiences, and accounts.

Some regions in Indonesia have produced manuscripts, but others have only oral traditions. Tanah Sunda or West Java (see: maps) has produced both of the traditions. Inscriptions began to be made in mid-5th century (Vogel, 1925; Poerbatjaraka, 1952), while the time of the beginning of written manuscripts is still unknown. The main reason for this is the different materials used. Inscriptions are made on such materials as stone or metal which are more resistant to decay and weather, while manuscripts are made on leaves which are vulnerable. According to written sources of the 16th century (Atja, 1968; Atja & Saleh Danasasmita, 1981, Noorduyn, 1971), the tradition of writing manuscripts in Tanah Sunda had existed long before the 16th century, dating as far back as the times of the Kingdoms of Sunda and Galuh (8th century). Nevertheless, on the basis of the date stated in the texts, the oldest extant Sundanese manuscript dates back to the 14th century (Krom, 1915), and the writing of Sundanese manuscripts continued to be done until the end of the 20th century.

Any manuscript containing information on and accounts of the lives of the Sunda-
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inese people is known as a Sundanese manuscript. Generally, Sundanese manuscripts are written by Sundanese writers residing in Tanah Sunda. Three languages are used in Sundanese manuscripts, namely Malay, Javanese, and Sundanese. The Sundanese language is categorized into Old and Modern Sundanese. Such is also the case with Javanese. Both Old Sundanese and Old Javanese are used in texts of the pre-Islamic period bearing Hindu characteristics. Between the 17th and the mid-19th centuries, Modern Javanese was more frequently used in manuscripts, while Modern Sundanese at the time was more generally used for social oral communication. Only since the mid 19th century was Sundanese used in writing (Ekadjati et. al., 1988), including for the purposes of writing manuscripts.

In the course of history, six types of script have been used to write Sundanese manuscripts. They are: Old Javanese, Old Sundanese, Carakan (Modern Javanese), Cacarakan (Sundanese-Javanese), Pegon (Arabic), and Roman. Old Javanese and Old Sundanese scripts are used to write in the Old Javanese and Old Sundanese languages respectively, invented obviously by the Javanese and the Sundanese. Both scripts were designed based on the Pallavan script of India. The Carakan script, used to write in the Modern Javanese language differs from the Old Javanese script. The Cacarakan script is an imitation of the Carakan with modifications to accommodate the sounds and pronunciation of the Modern Sundanese language. The Pegon script is derived from the Arabic script to write in the Modern Sundanese language with modifications to suit the sounds and pronunciation of Modern Sundanese. Different from the Jawi script, also derived from the Arabic script to write in Malay which does not give marks for vowels, the Pegon scripts is provided with vowel marks.

Similar to the use of the languages, the Old Sundanese and Old Javanese scripts are used to preserve the pre-Islamic Sundanese culture. The latest manuscript using the Old Sundanese script is that which is entitled Carita Waruga Guru (The Story of Waruga Guru), written in early 18th century (Pleyte, 1913). The Carakan was used since the 17th century, the Cacarakan since the 19th century, the Pegon since the 17th century, and the Roman since late 19th century. In the 20th century the Pegon and Cacarakan scripts were still used though the intensity and frequency tended to decrease. The Roman script has been more frequently used in the 20th century due to the use of that script in schools and government administration as well as other social activities.

Sundanese manuscripts in Old Sundanese and Old Javanese scripts and languages are written on five kinds of palm leaves were used for the production of Sundanese manuscripts: lontar (palmyra), daun enau (sugar palm), daun kelapa (coconut palm),
nipah (thatch palm) and pandan (pandanus). Other forms of Sundanese manuscripts are written on paper. There were two kinds of paper used for Sundanese manuscripts: traditional paper and manufactured paper. The traditional paper named daluang or saeh were made from the bark of the saeh tree (Broussonetia papyfera). Saeh paper is coarse, while manufactured paper is relatively smoother and some bore watermarks.

Based on a catalogue book (Ekadjati et. al., 1988), there are 1920 Sundanese manuscripts. They can be found in collections both in Indonesia (The National Library in Jakarta, The Sri Baduga Provincial Museum and the Manuscripts Maintenance Foundation in Bandung, the Old Banten Archeological Museum in Serang, the Pangeran Geusan Ulun Museum in Sumedang, the Kasepuhan, Kaprabonan, and Kacrebonan Palaces in Cirebon, and the Cigugur Museum in Kuningan) numbering 577 manuscripts; and abroad (Leiden University Library and KITLV Library in the Netherlands and British Library and Bodleian Library in Great Britain) numbering 789 manuscripts and in Sundanese society, likes in former capitals of regencies, old pesantren compounds, traditional leaders numbering 554 manuscripts. Furthermore, another catalogue book (Ekadjati & Undang A. Darsa, 1999) records 1012 manuscripts which have been transferred onto microfilm numbering 30 rolls. The manuscripts themselves have become part of collections of five institutions in West Java, namely the Sri Baduga Museum in Bandung, the EFEO Office in Bandung, the Pangeran Geusan Ulun Museum in Sumedang, the Keraton Kasepuhan in Cirebon, the Keraton Kacrebonan in Cirebon, and the Center for Social and Cultural Research at Padjadjaran University, as well as in private collections. In addition, there are still 21 rolls of microfilm which have not been entered into the catalogue.

There concern about the condition of the manuscripts kept in private collections and in Indonesian institutions except the ones in the National Library, because the maintenance and preservation of these manuscripts are far from adequate, while the climate of Tanah Sunda, as well as Indonesia in general, is not conducive to the survival of these manuscripts (high moisture, high precipitation, insects which feed on dry leaves and paper).

As are manuscripts in general, Sundanese manuscripts can be divided into two categories, namely original manuscripts and transcriptions. Original manuscripts are written by the author of the text. This means the author also plays the role of the scribe. In contrast, transcriptions are written by individuals other than the author. This person, thus, only functions as a scribe, and is usually known as the transcriber. The text for transcriptions is usually taken from an existing manuscript. The transcription of a manuscript may be done only once, or several times by the same transcriber, or by different transcribers.
Therefore, various manuscripts may contain the same texts with only minor differences during the process of transcription. Nevertheless, great differences may also occur when the transcriber takes the creative initiative to make changes from the text he is transcribing. Transcriptions may be done for several reasons, such as (1) to preserve a text due to damage to the original, (2) to enable a particular individual to have personal possession of a text, (3) to cater to the order of an individual who commissions for a new manuscript to be made, (4) to earn a living as a transcriber, and (5) to earn a living by leasing manuscripts creating the need for several copies of the text.

It has been mentioned above that the writing of manuscripts came to a stop at the end of the 20th century, while the maintenance of the manuscripts by the members of society is inadequate, so the preservation of these manuscripts is in danger. It is a fact that the number of manuscripts in the possession of members of society is continuously decreasing due to loss, damage, and disintegration of the manuscripts. To my knowledge the reasons for the decrease are: (1) neglect by the owner or the bearer deeming the manuscript to be of no use; (2) death of the owner or bearer with the heir’s finding no use for the manuscript causing it to be misplaced and eventually lost or destroyed; (3) the manuscript’s being lent but not returned with no information of the borrower’s whereabouts; (4) deliberate damage or destruction of the manuscript due to the view that the manuscript is a threat to a particular religious belief; (5) inadequate storage as in a loft with a leaky roof or underground; (6) insect infestation; (7) some sort of disturbance of the peace causing the owner or bearer to flee abandoning the manuscript to be lost or burnt along with the premises.

Based on the time of its composition as well as the features of the manuscript and its content, a manuscript can be classified into three periods of composition, namely the (1) old, (2) transitional, and (3) modern periods. The old period include manuscripts written in the pre-Islamic period, written by individuals bearing pre-Islamic identities living in localities of pre-Islamic cultures, of which the contents represent pre-Islamic people and cultures. Generally, the manuscripts are written on leaves with knife-pens (peso pangot) or pen and ink in Old Sundanese or Old Javanese script and language. The pre-Islamic period in Tanah Sunda covers the time prior to the 16th century. The manuscripts of the period were composed during the reign of the Sunda and Galuh kingdoms (approximately between the 8th and 16th centuries). Apparently, however, the writing of manuscripts bearing the features of the old period continued to be done unto the early 18th century marked by the composition of the manuscript entitled Carita Waruga Guru. This is possible because there might have descendants of old period scribes (priests) and the existence of
such manuscript-producing sites (*kabuyutan*, *mandala*, *the centre of religious activities*) keeping orientation to the old period culture. Manuscripts produced in the old period include among others *Bujangga Manik, Sri Ajnyana, Ramayana, Sanghiyang Siaksakandang Karesian, Sewaka Darma, Carita Parahiyangan* (The History of Parahiyangan), Amanat Galunggung (The Messages of Galunggung), *Serat Catur Bumi, Kawih Paningkes, Jatiniskala, Sanghiyang Raga Dewata, Serat Dewa Buda, and Carita Ratu Pakuan* (The History of Pakuan Queens).

The transitional period produced Sundanese manuscripts written on paper, generally traditional paper (known as *daluang* or *saeh*) with pen and ink using Pegon or Carakan script in Javanese or a mixture of Javanese, Sundanese and Arabic. The writers apparently show characteristics of Javanese culture or very much influenced by it. These manuscripts are written in the Cirebon or Banten courts, in Priangan *kabupaten* palaces (pendopo), and in pesantren compounds. They were written in the period between the 17th and mid-19th centuries containing matters pertaining to Islamic religious teachings; the process of Islamization; Islamic governments based in Cirebon, Banten, Demak, and Mataram; Islamic and Javanese mysticism, and the histories of Banten and Cirebon Islamic kingdoms and Priangan regencies. Manuscripts produced in this period include *Sajarah Banten* (The Banten Chronicles), *Carita Purwaka Caruban Nagari* (The History of the Beginning of Cirebon Islamic Kingdom), *Cariosan Prabu Silihwangi* (The Story of Prabu Silihwangi), and *Kitab Pancakaki* (The Book of Genealogy).

The modern period has produced Sundanese manuscripts written on paper, generally manufactured paper, with pen, fountain pen, and ink using the Carakan, Pegon, and Roman scripts in modern Sundanese. In general, the writers are Muslims, government officials (active and retired), traditional Islamic leaders, and traditional artists. The manuscripts were written in traditional royal courts (Cirebon), kabupaten palaces, and private residences in the period between mid 19th and 20th centuries. The content includes various matters pertaining to Sundanese life and culture such as literature, history, language, art, divination, and genealogy. The manuscripts of the modern period are, to name only a few, *Wawacan Carios Munada* (The Poetic History of Munada), *Babad Sumedang* (The History of Sumedang), *Wawacan Sajarah Galuh* (The Poetic History of Galuh), *Layang Seh* (The Biography of Seh Abdulqadir Zaelani), *Wawacan Babar Nabi* (The Poetic History of the Muhammad Prophet Birth), *Wawacan Perang Cina di Tanjungpura Kabupaten Purwakarta* (The Poetic History of a Chinese War in Tanjungpura of Purwakarta Regency), *Sajarah Bandung* (The History of Bandung), *Babad Martanagara* (The Autobiography of Martanagara), *Wawacan Amir Hamzah* (The Poetic Story of Amir Hamzah),
According to the 1988 catalogue of Sundanese manuscripts (Ekadjati et. al., 1988), based on the content, registered Sundanese manuscripts (covering about 1920 manuscripts) can be classified into 12 groups, namely religion, language, (traditional) law, society, mythology, education, science, divination, literature, literary history, history and art. Among the twelve groups of manuscripts, most pertain to religion, then literature, and next literary history. According to the 1999 catalogue (Ekadjati & Undang A. Darsa, 1999), based on the content, the registered manuscripts (1012 manuscripts) can be classified into 6 groups, namely history, Islamic religion, literature, divination and traditional medicine, and miscellany. The classification of history is divided into three subgroups, namely History of West Java, History of Java, and mythology; while the Islamic religion group is divided into 8 subgroups, namely manuscripts pertaining to the Quran, Islamic stories, fiqh (jurisprudence), tasawuf (sufism), manakib, tauhid (monotheism), adab (ethics), and prayer collections. The subgroup of Islamic stories includes accounts of the Prophet Muhammad, his companions and Islamic leaders, and other prophets.

In their respective periods, Sundanese manuscripts serve various functions depending on their content, place of storage, and their purpose in human life. The function of the manuscripts can be distinguished based on the perspective whether to view the manuscripts as concrete objects (a collection of leaves and paper on which texts are written) and as a text (content). During the course of time, especially after the introduction of print technology and the influence of rational Western culture, the view of the Sundanese society towards manuscripts has shifted. Manuscripts were previously believed to be sacred bearing supernatural powers, both their physical substance and content. Now such a belief has faded, except for a certain social enclaves. In the past, manuscripts containing genealogy were used by the elite to legitimize their identity and social status insofar as their relation to past royalty and nobility. In the past a person’s proximity to past rulers determined his rank and office in government and society. Manuscripts containing religious teachings were used as media for education. Manuscripts on literature or art served as means for entertainment and the dissemination of ethical views. Manuscripts containing divination served to fulfill practical daily purposes to keep peace in everyday life in such occasions as building houses, moving, and weddings. In addition, there were
other functions as the acquisition of knowledge, dissemination of information to young people, medical purposes, and others.

Research on Sundanese manuscripts was initiated in mid-19th century by two Dutch scholars residing in Tanah Sunda who took interest in Sundanese people and culture, namely K.F. Holle (1829-1896) and C.M. Pleyte (1863-1917). Afterwards, a number of Dutch scholars and Indonesian ones, mostly Sundanese, have studied Sundanese manuscripts based on their respective interests and disciplines, such as philologists who reconstruct texts, linguists who study the language, historians who use them as historical sources, anthropologists who study their functions in society, literary scholars who study their literary value and the thematic wealth of their contents, and religious scholars who study the religious meanings, beliefs, and views. However, unresearched manuscripts greatly outnumber those on which scholars have conducted studies. Since the 1980s of the Sundanese manuscripts written on leaves kept in the National Library in Jakarta, only 20 have been studied to reveal their content and meaning. Even so, of the few which have been studied, great amounts of information have been contributed to the reconstruction and knowledge of the pre-Islamic Sundanese history and culture.

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No. 4: *Babad Pajajaran* (Biography of Prabu Siliwangi). Javanese Language, Pegon Character. Written on manufactured paper.