

The Ritual Agency and Living Tradition of *Ad-Damm 'Alā Qalb al-Qur'ān* in Local Islamic Communities of Banyumas

Agensi Ritual dan Tradisi Hidup Ad-Damm 'Alā Qalb al-Qur'ān dalam Masyarakat Islam Lokal Banyumas

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Abstract

This ethnographic research investigates the living tradition and protective belief (*tolak bala'*) associated with the *Ad-Damm 'Alā Qalb al-Qur'ān* manuscripts preserved in two pesantren mosques in Banyumas, Central Java, i.e., Al-Djazuli Pliken and Pasulukan Sokaraja Lor. Local Muslim communities believe that possessing or storing these sacred manuscripts safeguards individuals, households, and places of worship from disasters, particularly fire. Over time, this belief has transformed from an individual conviction into an institutionalized communal practice, representing an intersection of Islamic textual reverence and localized ritual protection. Distinct from prior studies that focus primarily on textual content or codicological features, this study emphasizes the material, social, and symbolic dimensions of these manuscripts as active agents within local religious life. Drawing on in-depth interviews, participant observation, and narrative analysis, this research demonstrates how these manuscripts function simultaneously as sacred texts, material amulets, and markers of Islamic identity. Theoretically, this study contributes to debates on the materiality of sacred texts, folk belief systems, and the construction of ritual protection within localized Islamic traditions. The findings illustrate how *Penginyongan* Muslim communities in Banyumas embody and sustain a living tradition in which Islamic manuscripts transcend their textual function and are integrated into everyday practices of spiritual protection. This localized synthesis of belief, ritual, and manuscript materiality offers new insights into the interplay between Islam, culture, and protective traditions in Southeast Asian Muslim societies.

Keywords: *Ritual Agency, Living Tradition, Sacred Manuscript, Islamic Communities, Banyumas*

Abstrak

Penelitian etnografis ini mengkaji tradisi hidup dan kepercayaan protektif (*tolak bala'*) yang terkait dengan manuskrip *Ad-Damm 'Alā Qalb al-Qur'ān* yang disimpan di dua masjid pesantren di Banyumas, Jawa Tengah, yakni Al-Djazuli Pliken dan Pasulukan Sokaraja Lor. Komunitas Muslim setempat meyakini bahwa memiliki atau menyimpan manuskrip-manuskrip suci ini dapat melindungi individu, keluarga, dan tempat ibadah dari bencana, khususnya kebakaran. Seiring waktu, kepercayaan ini berkembang



dari keyakinan individual menjadi praktik komunal yang terinstitusionalisasi, merepresentasikan pertemuan antara penghormatan terhadap teks Islam dan perlindungan ritual yang bersifat lokal. Berbeda dari kajian-kajian sebelumnya yang berfokus pada isi teks atau ciri kodikologis, penelitian ini menekankan dimensi material, sosial, dan simbolik dari manuskrip-manuskrip tersebut sebagai agen aktif dalam kehidupan keagamaan lokal. Dengan menggunakan wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis naratif, penelitian ini menunjukkan bagaimana manuskrip-manuskrip ini berfungsi secara simultan sebagai teks suci, jimat material, dan penanda identitas keislaman. Secara teoretis, studi ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap perdebatan mengenai materialitas teks suci, sistem kepercayaan rakyat, dan konstruksi perlindungan ritual dalam tradisi Islam yang terlokalisasi. Temuan ini mengilustrasikan bagaimana komunitas Muslim Penginyongan di Banyumas mewujudkan dan mempertahankan sebuah tradisi hidup di mana manuskrip Islam melampaui fungsi tekstualnya dan terintegrasi dalam praktik perlindungan spiritual sehari-hari. Sintesis lokal antara kepercayaan, ritus, dan materialitas manuskrip ini menawarkan wawasan baru tentang keterhubungan antara Islam, budaya, dan tradisi protektif dalam masyarakat Muslim Asia Tenggara.

Kata Kunci: Agensi Ritual *Tradisi Hidup*; *Manuskrip Suci*; *Komunitas Muslim*; *Banyumas*

Introduction

While the Qur'an remains the most studied religious text in Islam, one of its most persistent dimensions, its embodied, material presence has been strikingly understudied. Despite the vast corpus of *tafsīr* and doctrinal exegesis, the everyday tactile, ritual, and protective relationships that Muslims cultivate with Qur'anic manuscripts often fall outside the dominant academic gaze. Across the Muslim world—from West Africa to Southeast Asia—these texts occupy a liminal space where theology, folklore, and local cosmologies converge. Revered not merely for their semantic content, Qur'anic manuscripts are venerated as sacred objects infused with barakah (blessing), mobilized in rituals of healing, safeguarding, and divine intercession.¹ This shifting focus—what scholars have termed the “material turn” in Islamic manuscript studies—has drawn attention to the Qur'an not only as a guide to be interpreted, but also as a presence to be felt, embodied, and materially enacted in the lives of Muslim communities.²

In the Indonesian archipelago, and particularly in Java, Islamic manuscripts, commonly referred to as *kitab kuning*, have played a crucial role in shaping religious

1 Anna M. Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice: Learning, Emotion, and the Recited Qur'an in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004); Konrad Hirschler, *A Monument to Medieval Syrian Book Culture: The Library of Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī*, *Edinburgh Studies in Classical Islamic History and Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021).

2 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, 1. publ. in pbk, *Clarendon Lectures in Management Studies* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007).

education, cultural transmission, and the articulation of local Islamic identities.³ Within pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), these handwritten or printed texts have traditionally served as both pedagogical tools and sacred heirlooms, often embedded within elaborate rituals and collective memory. Yet, beyond their role in formal religious instruction, certain manuscripts acquire an additional layer of significance as amuletic objects or protective artifacts believed to possess the power to ward off harm or misfortune, a belief system colloquially referred to as *tolak bala*.

Recent scholarship on the *Living Qur'an* and Qur'anic materiality has drawn attention to the sacred text's role not only as a scriptural guide, but as a living, ritual agent in protective practices across Muslim societies. Rafiq⁴ theorizes the performative transmission of Qur'anic efficacy through collective *dzikir*, while Mustofa examines the ethical negotiation of Saba' 13 among Javanese sculptors.⁵ In South Sulawesi, Pattula' Bala reflects a Bugis tradition where Qur'anic recitation intersects with healing and cosmology.⁶ Similar amuletic uses are found in West Africa, where Pontzen analyzes Qur'anic inscriptions in leather pouches among Asante Muslims, suggesting transregional continuities.⁷ Kiyanrad, through archaeological and textual study, traces the Sasanian roots of amulet practices in Iran,⁸ revealing pre-Islamic motifs reinterpreted through Qur'anic materiality. In Southeast Asia, Abidin et al. explore Qur'anic talismans in rural East Java,⁹ while Muttaqin and Jamil study the *Ratib Tolak Bala*' ritual in North Sumatra as a form of embodied Qur'anic protection.¹⁰ Complementing these, Rozali et al. and Hasim

3 Martin van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, Dan Tarekat* (Yogyakarta: Gading Publishing, 2012); Michael Francis Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past*, Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics (Princeton [N.J.] Oxford [England]: Princeton University Press, 2011).

4 Ahmad Rafiq, "The Living Qur'an: Its Text and Practice in the Function of the Scripture," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 22, no. 2 (July 2021): 469–84, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.2021.2202-10>.

5 Ahmad Mustofa, "Living QS. Saba': 13 among Javanese Moslem Sculptors," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 26, no. 1 (March 2025): 31–52, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v26i1.5723>.

6 Abdul Muiz Amir, "Pattula' Bala as a Discursive Tradition: The Reception of the Qur'an in the Muslim Bugis Community," *PUSAKA* 10, no. 1 (July 2022): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.31969/pusaka.v10i1.661>.

7 Benedikt Pontzen, "What's (Not) in a Leather Pouch? Tracing Islamic Amulets in Asante, Ghana," *Africa* 90, no. 5 (November 2020): 870–89, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972020000625>.

8 Sarah Kiyanrad, "Sasanian Amulet Practices and Their Survival in Islamic Iran and Beyond," *Der Islam* 95, no. 1 (March 2018): 65–90, <https://doi.org/10.1515/islam-2018-0003>.

9 Ahmad Zainal Abidin, Salamah Noorhidayati, and Imam Ahmadi, "Amulet of Quranic Verses in East Javanese Rural: Unraveling Mystical Theology and Living Quran," *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 12, no. 6 (November 2023): 392, <https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2023-0177>.

10 Zainul Muttaqin and Jamil Jamil, "Exploring the Ratib Tolak Bala Ritual in Langkat, North Sumatra: Analysis of Living Qur'an," *HERMENEUTIK* 18, no. 1 (June 2024): 67, <https://doi.org/10.21043/hermeneutik.v18i1.25870>.

et al.¹¹ demonstrate, through systematic reviews, how Qur'anic recitation supports both mental and physical well-being, while Afsaruddin documents the enduring role of *faḍā'il* literature in shaping devotional practices. Collectively, these works affirm that Qur'anic texts—especially in their materialized and ritualized forms—are deeply interwoven with local cosmologies, mystical theologies, and protective traditions.¹²

Such is the case with the Aḍ-Ḍamm 'Alā Qalb al-Qur'ān manuscripts preserved in two pesantren mosques in Banyumas Regency, Central Java: the Al-Djazuli Pesantren in Pliken and the Pasulukan Pesantren in Sokaraja Lor. These texts, whose authorship remains unknown but are locally attributed to respected religious figures, occupy a distinctive place in the spiritual and cultural landscape of Panginyongan society, a Javanese Muslim community known for its syncretic expressions of Islam. The manuscripts are not merely regarded as texts for recitation or study, but are revered as powerful talismans believed to protect individuals, homes, and even entire neighborhoods from disasters—particularly fire.

Despite their cultural and ritual significance, these manuscripts and the belief system surrounding them have received limited scholarly attention, particularly within contemporary anthropology and Islamic studies. While existing literature on Javanese Islam has largely focused on textual transmission, pesantren pedagogy, or socio-religious transformations, it often overlooks how sacred texts operate as material agents of protection within local cosmologies. Similarly, scholarship on Islamic talismans in Southeast Asia tends to center on physical objects such as inscribed jewelry, *rajaḥ* diagrams, or talismanic garments—rarely addressing Qur'anic manuscripts themselves as ritual technologies of safeguarding.

To address a notable scholarly lacuna, this study adopts an ethnographic approach to explore the living tradition of *tolak bala'* associated with the Aḍ-Ḍamm 'Alā Qalb al-Qur'ān manuscripts in Banyumas, Central Java. Rather than focusing on textual content or codicological form, this research examines how local communities ascribe protective power to these manuscripts, how such beliefs are transmitted intergenerationally, and how they intersect with broader dynamics of Islamic piety, communal identity, and cultural resilience. Through interviews, participant observation, and narrative analysis, the study investigates how sacred texts operate not solely as objects of recitation, but as living agents embedded in the social and ritual fabric of Javanese Muslim life.

11 Ruziaton Hasim et al., “Scoping Review on the Benefits of Reciting, Listening and Memorising the Quran,” *Environment-Behaviour Proceedings Journal* 8, no. 25 (July 2023): 37–43, <https://doi.org/10.21834/e-bpj.v8i25.4826>.

12 Asma Afsaruddin, “In Praise of the Word of God: Reflections of Early Religious and Social Concerns in the Fada'il al-Qur'an Genre,” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 4, no. 1 (April 2002): 27–48, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2002.4.1.27>.

Theoretically, the study is grounded in two intersecting frameworks. The first, *Folk Belief and Ritual Protection*,¹³ conceptualizes sacred texts as materially inscribed with protective efficacy, attributing agency not only to their semantic content but to their physical presence within vernacular religious systems. The second framework, *Local Islam and Living Tradition*,¹⁴ challenges center–periphery models by emphasizing the agency of Muslim communities in negotiating, ritualizing, and adapting Islamic teachings to align with their historical and cultural realities.¹⁵ The veneration of *Aḍ-Ḍamm Alā Qalb al-Qur’ān* as a *tolak bala’* manuscript thus exemplifies a locally embedded religiosity that fuses textual authority with material devotion and cosmological belief.

The contribution of this study to existing scholarship lies in three primary dimensions. First, it enriches anthropological understandings of Islamic material culture by foregrounding manuscripts as active objects of ritual protection rather than static repositories of religious knowledge. Second, it offers an empirical case study that illustrates how sacred texts, beyond their semantic content, acquire agency within localized systems of belief and practice. Third, it challenges prevailing academic tendencies to relegate folk beliefs or *tolak bala’* traditions to the margins of Islamic studies, instead positioning them as central to the religious imagination and lived experiences of Muslim communities in rural Indonesia.

In doing so, this research responds to recent scholarly calls for more situated, context-sensitive approaches to Islamic manuscript cultures¹⁶ and for greater attention to the interplay between textual authority, materiality, and vernacular piety in Southeast Asian Islam.¹⁷ By documenting and analyzing the living tradition of *Aḍ-Ḍamm Alā Qalb al-Qur’ān* in Banyumas, this study offers critical insights into how sacred texts continue to animate, protect, and shape the religious lives of Muslims far beyond their canonical content—affirming that in the vernacular landscapes of

13 Alan Dundes, ed., *International Folkloristics: Classic Contributions by the Founders of Folklore* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); David J. Hufford, *The Terror That Comes in the Night: An Experience-Centered Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions*, Publications of the American Folklore Society New Series 7 (Philadelphia, Pa: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

14 Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, Dan Tarekat*, 19–21; Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice*, 18–23.

15 Jonathan Porter Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education*, Princeton Legacy Library (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017), 32–42; Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb*, First paperback edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1–9.

16 Scott Reese, ed., *Manuscript and Print in the Islamic Tradition* (De Gruyter, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110776485>.

17 A.C.S. Peacock, “Vernacular Religious Literature: Tales of Conversion, Eschatology and Unbelief,” in *Islam, Literature and Society in Mongol Anatolia*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 188–217, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108582124.006>.

Javanese Islam, belief, text, and protection remain profoundly intertwined.

To ground these concerns empirically, this study employs a qualitative ethnographic method¹⁸ to explore the living tradition and protective belief system associated with the *Ad-Damm Alā Qalb al-Qur'ān* manuscripts within Islamic communities in Banyumas, Central Java. The research investigates how these sacred texts are perceived, used, and ritualized not merely as religious manuscripts but as powerful objects of *tolak bala'* (disaster repellent), embodying both symbolic and material dimensions of Islamic piety. The primary variables under study include the perceived efficacy of the manuscripts, their role in local ritual practices, and their function in constructing communal religious identity.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on individuals directly involved in preserving or engaging with the manuscripts. A total of six informants participated in this study: three senior *kyai* affiliated with pesantren that house the manuscripts, as well as three lay Muslims from each community, representing the broader spectrum of popular belief and ritual participation. These community members included mosque attendees, local elders, and family representatives who maintain the manuscripts in private or semi-public spaces. All participants provided informed verbal consent before data collection.

Code	Name / Description	Location	Interview Type & Period
K1	K.H. Ahmad Jamzuri (late)	Pondok Pesantren Al-Djazuli, Pliken	Personal interview, Jan 2021
K2	K.H. Achmad Saifuddin Thoha	Pondok Pesantren Al-Djazuli, Pliken	Series of personal interviews, 2022–2024
K3	K.H. R. Toriq Arif Ghuzdewan	Pondok Pasulukan, Sokaraja Lor	Personal interview, 22 April 2023
K4	K.H. Abdul Rozak	Pondok Al-Jauhariyyah, Sokaraja Lor	Personal interview, 5 October 2023

18 "Ethnographic Method," in *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences*, by Bonnie Pang (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2019), 443–56, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-5251-4_81; "Ethnographic Methods," in *The Handbook of Political, Social, and Economic Transformation*, by Tatjana Thelen (Oxford University Press, 2019), 201–11, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198829911.003.0020>; "Ethnography/Ethnographic Methods," in *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*, 1st ed., by Devika Chawla and Rebecca Mercado Jones (Wiley, 2017), 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118901731.iecrm0090>.

M1	Lay Muslims of Masjid Al-Djazuli Congregation	Pliken, Banyumas	Group interview & observation, 2023–2024
M2	Lay Muslims of Masjid Pondok Pasulukan Congregation	Sokaraja Lor, Banyumas	Group interview & observation, 2023–2024

Data were collected from January 2021 to February 2025 using three complementary tools: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and narrative documentation, a triangulation strategy commonly applied in studies on *tolak bala* and vernacular ritual efficacy.¹⁹ The interview guide consisted of 10 main prompts focusing on participants' beliefs, ritual practices, historical knowledge of the manuscripts, and experiences related to their protective functions. Observational data were gathered using a structured checklist comprising seven categories, including the placement of manuscripts, ritual behaviours, verbal invocations, and the social contexts of manuscript usage. Additionally, oral narratives and religious references, including locally transmitted *hadiths*, were documented for interpretive analysis.

The reliability of research instruments was ensured through preliminary testing in a comparable pesantren outside the study sites, following established guidelines in qualitative religious studies. Triangulation was applied by comparing data from different sources (*kyai*, laypersons, observation) to strengthen validity. Data analysis followed a thematic and narrative approach,²⁰ involving coding of transcripts and field notes to identify recurring motifs and belief structures. Cross-case comparison between the three research loci allowed for the identification of both shared patterns and site-specific variations in manuscript veneration practices.

19 Dela Adeliya and Nur Fateah, "Interaction in the Tradition of Tolak Balak by Juru Ladi at a Javanese Traditional Wedding: An Ethnolinguistic Study," *Journal of Innovation in Educational and Cultural Research* 5, no. 2 (May 2024): 319–28, <https://doi.org/10.46843/jiecr.v5i2.1473>; Resta Lisman, Darmaiza Darmaiza, and Dwi Wahyuni, "Safeguarding Communities: Exploring the Tradition of Tolak Bala in Nagari Bungus," *Journal of Contemporary Rituals and Traditions* 1, no. 1 (July 2023): 25–42, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jcrt.212>; Abdul Manan et al., "Tolak Bala as an Outbreak Prevention Within Sharia-Based Community: The Practice and Views," paper presented at 2nd International Conference on Science, Technology, and Modern Society (ICSTMS 2020), Langsa, Aceh, Indonesia, *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, Atlantis Press, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210909.034>; Muttaqin and Jamil, "Exploring the Ratib Tolak Bala Ritual in Langkat, North Sumatra."

20 Chad Lochmiller, "Conducting Thematic Analysis with Qualitative Data," *The Qualitative Report*, ahead of print, Nova Southeastern University, June 20, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.5008>; Kirstie McAllum et al., "A Comparative Tale of Two Methods: How Thematic and Narrative Analyses Author the Data Story Differently," *Communication Research and Practice* 5, no. 4 (October 2019): 358–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2019.1677068>.

Ritual Efficacy and the Living Qur'an in Banyumas

Before delving into the local tradition of the *Ad-Damm 'Alā Qalb al-Qur'an* manuscript, it is essential to frame this phenomenon within the broader classical discourse on *khawāṣṣ al-Qur'an*, the special properties and spiritual effects ascribed to certain verses and surahs of the Qur'an. As elaborated by al-Zarkashī in *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*²¹ and al-Suyūṭī in *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, specific portions of the Qur'an have long been believed to possess unique virtues (*faḍā'il*) and supernatural benefits (*khawāṣṣ*) when recited, written, or carried.²² These discussions reflect an enduring tradition in Qur'anic scholarship that acknowledges the metaphysical power of the divine word beyond its textual and exegetical meanings. The belief that certain verses can repel harm, cure illness, or draw divine protection has been documented for centuries and remains a vibrant strand of Muslim spiritual practice.

This understanding aligns with contemporary scholarship on the *Living Qur'an*, particularly Ahmad Rafiq's formulation in his dissertation. Rafiq distinguishes two primary functions of the *Living Qur'an*: the informative function, in which the Qur'an operates as a textual source of religious knowledge, and the performative function, in which it serves as a ritualized and embodied presence in Muslim life.²³ His ethnographic approach illustrates how the Qur'an is not only read and interpreted, but also enacted and materialized in local religious contexts. This conceptual framework is highly relevant to the case of *Ad-Damm 'Alā Qalb al-Qur'an* in Banyumas, where the manuscript is not merely recited for its textual meaning but ritually enacted through its use as a physical *jimat* (amulet) imbued with protective and spiritual efficacy in everyday practice. Here, the Qur'an becomes a living presence, interwoven into the social fabric through recitation, embodiment, and communal ritual.

In this context, the *Ad-Damm 'Alā Qalb al-Qur'an* manuscript tradition in Pliken and Sokaraja Lor Banyumas constitutes a vibrant living practice of Islamic ritual protection, deeply integrated into the religious lives of both pesantren kyai and ordinary *Penginyongan* Muslims. Through an ethnographic approach combining in-depth interviews, participant observation, and local narrative analysis, two primary findings emerge: (1) the systematized belief in the 51 *farwā'id* (benefits) of *Ad-Damm 'Alā Qalb al-Qur'an* recitation and possession, and (2) the tangible use of these verses as physical amulets (*jimat*) in daily protective rituals. These two dimensions are not isolated but rather co-constitute a holistic

21 Badr al-Din Muḥammad ibn Bahadır al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān Fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dar Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyah, 1958).

22 Jalal al-Din al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān Fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Riyāḍ: Wizarat al-Shu'un al-Islamiyyah wa al-Awqaf wa al-Da'wah wa al-Irshad, 1998).

23 Ahmad Rafiq, "The Reception of the Qur'an in Indonesia: A Case Study of the Place of the Qur'an in a Non-Arabic Speaking Community" (Temple University, 2014).

tradition of manuscript veneration in local Javanese Islam.

The manuscript preserved in Pondok Pesantren Al-Djazuli Pliken and Pondok Pesantren Pasulukan Sokaraja Lor serves not merely as a relic of written piety but as a sacred object of protective efficacy, continuously activated through ritual practice, spiritual belief, and communal storytelling. Interviews with representative *kyai* and the local Muslim communities in both pesantren's mosques reveal that the manuscript is treated with high reverence and is actively utilized in *tolak bala'* contexts. These scholars affirm the manuscript's power not only for its content but for its metaphysical properties believed to attract divine protection and blessing (*barakah*).

The 51 Benefits of Qalb al-Qur'ān

The *Aḍ-Ḍamm 'Alā Qalb al-Qur'ān* manuscript uniquely lists 51 distinct *farwā'id* or benefits associated with the *qalb* (heart) verses of the Qur'an. These benefits are believed to be granted to those who read, memorize, write, or keep the *qalb* verses. The benefits span spiritual purification, forgiveness of sins, protection from Hellfire, divine healing, and worldly success. These include relief from illness, prevention of disasters (especially fire), facilitation of sustenance, and mental peace.²⁴

This belief system is substantiated by a sacred narrative attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, rendered in both Arabic and vernacular Javanese (*Arab-Pegon*). The text states that the Qur'an comprises 30 juz and 114 surahs, and each surah has its own "heart." Memorizing the heart of a surah, according to the manuscript, is as meritorious as reciting the entire Qur'an a thousand times, performing hajj and umrah, and giving alms in gold equivalent to the mass of Mount Uhud. Additionally, the person who writes or keeps these verses will be protected from Hellfire and accompanied by angelic guardians (*malaikat hafazhah al-muqarrabun*). The manuscript concludes this promise by noting: "And in addition to all this, there are 51 kinds of benefits."²⁵

Such a detailed enumeration of benefits mirrors Sufi practices of *wird* (a prescribed devotional recitation or litany, especially within Sufi practice), where specific recitations are believed to unlock divine favours. This belief is not merely doctrinal but experiential. In-depth interviews with M1 uncovered numerous personal testimonies where individuals described being spared from accidents, housefires, and personal misfortune after acquiring or displaying the manuscript in their home. For instance, one informant recounted a near-fire incident in his wooden house where only the wall on which the manuscript was hung remained untouched. These stories were consistently shared by informants across

²⁴ Jamzuri, "Aḍ-Ḍamm 'Alā Qalb al-Qur'an," 1.

²⁵ Jamzuri, 1-3.

both pesantren and lay communities, forming a corpus of oral narratives that reinforce the manuscript's protective legitimacy.²⁶

Amuletic Use of Qalb Verses

Another essential finding is the use of *qalb* al-Qur'an verses as physical amulets (*azimat*). Observations revealed that copies of the *Aḍ-Ḍamm 'Alā Qalb al-Qur'ān* manuscript are often inserted into the pages of the Qur'an or other Islamic books—typically classical texts (*kitab kuning*), and then placed on top of bookshelves or in other elevated and secure locations deemed appropriate for their sanctity and protection. The following image documents the presence of the *Aḍ-Ḍamm 'Alā Qalb al-Qur'ān* manuscript, positioned at the top right corner of the photograph. The manuscript is placed in a high and secure location within the residence of the late K.H. Ahmad Jamzuri, reflecting the reverence and protective significance attributed to it by the family and local community.



Figure 1. The *Aḍ-Ḍamm 'Alā Qalb al-Qur'ān* manuscript is placed at the top right corner of the room, above the bookshelf, in the residence of the late K.H. Ahmad Jamzuri (Pliken, Banyumas). This elevated placement reflects the manuscript's sacred status and its role as a protective object within the household.

These practices reflect an active belief in the embodiment of Qur'anic energy in material form. The manuscript is not only kept in mosque libraries but is ritually activated through copying and redistribution, particularly by *kyai* who are seen as authorized transmitters.

This amuletic usage aligns with Islamic folk spirituality, where the written word of God is considered capable of mediating divine protection. Although contentious among some jurists, amuletic practices have deep roots in Islamic history, from *hilyah* posters to *ta'wīdh* scrolls and magical squares inscribed with Qur'anic verses. In the case of Banyumas, the use of *qalb* verses for talismanic purposes forms

26 Hanif, Ofa, and Ook, "M1 - Group Interview & Observation with Lay Muslims of Masjid Al-Djazuli Congregation," 2023.

a central component of communal *tolak bala'* rituals, performed at both individual and collective levels.

A noteworthy instance comes from the late K.H. Ahmad Jamzuri Pliken, K.H. Achmad Saifuddin Thoha, and K.H. Abdul Rozak, who prescribes amulets written from *qalb* verses for people. They write the verses with a specific ink on paper, then perform a supplication (*doa*), after which the amulet is wrapped in cloth and handed over for daily carrying.²⁷ According to K.H. Achmad Saifuddin Thoha, “*It is not the ink, nor the paper, but the niyyah (intention), the Prophet’s faidah, and the barakah of the Qur’an that gives healing.*”²⁸

In Sokaraja Lor, old women participants in the FGD mentioned placing the written verses under the pillows of their children to protect them from nightmares and illness. Others cited instances where these amulets were hung on the top of the door to prevent fire. These practices affirm that the manuscript operates in a liminal space, not merely as a sacred book, but as a dynamic, active object with spiritual presence in everyday life.²⁹

The Manuscript as Tolak Bala’ Ritual Agent

The analysis of both the manuscript and its community use underscores its role not merely as a textual artifact, but as a ritual agent embedded in lived piety. The *Aḍ-Ḍamm ‘Alā Qalb al-Qur’ān* manuscript is not publicly exhibited in communal religious events such as *haul*, *istighasah*, or *syukuran*, but is privately kept and recited by those who believe in its protective value (*barakah*). Rather than serving a performative function in ceremonies, the manuscript operates within a more intimate, domestic framework of ritual use.

According to the colophon, the principal scribe of the manuscript was the late K.H. Ahmad Jamzuri Pliken. The colophon reads: “*Tammat al-kitābah bi ‘aẓnillāh ta‘ālā wa lutfihī, Rabū Manis, 17 Ramaḍān 1441 / 3 April 1991, bi-qalami al-dzālīl al-ḥaqīr al-faqīr Aḥmad Jamzūrī bin Aḥmad Ṭohah Sālīmī bin Muḥammad Ḥasan Jāzūlī*” (The writing was completed with the help and grace of Allah, on Wednesday, 17 Ramadan 1441 / 3 April 1991, by the hand of the lowly, humble, and poor servant, Ahmad Jamzuri bin Ahmad Thohah Salimi bin Muhammad Hasan Djazuli).

³⁰ Copies of the manuscript, often in photocopied form, are requested by alumni of

27 K.H. Ahmad Jamzuri, “K1,” January 2021; K.H. Achmad Saifuddin Thoha, “K2,” 2024 2022; K.H. Abdul Rozak, “K4,” October 2023.

28 K.H. Achmad Saifuddin Thoha, “K2,” 2024 2022.

29 Irfan, Siti, and Laily, “M2 - Group Interview & Observation with Lay Muslims of Masjid Pondok Pasulukan Congregation,” 2023.

30 Jamzuri, “Aḍ-Ḍamm ‘Ala Qalb al-Qur’an,” 24.

the pesantren who have migrated to urban areas. These copies are typically stored reverently in homes, believed to extend spiritual protection to their new environments. While the physical manuscript remains stationary, its spiritual influence is thought to be portable through these mediated forms.

However, field data suggest that digital or photocopied reproductions are considered less potent in efficacy. As K.H. Saifuddin Thoha explains, “*The barakah is in the original ink and the tradition of its writing. If it is copied without adab, the protection may not manifest optimally.*”³¹ This reflects the community’s belief that material authenticity, the scribe’s spiritual intention, and the ritual manner of transmission are inseparable from the sacred power attributed to the object.

To further contextualize the findings, this figure presents a scanned folio of the *Ad-Damm ‘Alā Qalb al-Qur’ān* manuscript preserved. This page includes the prophetic narration outlining the merits of the *qalb* verses and the concluding statement listing the existence of 51 distinct benefits (*fawā'id*). The visual presentation of the text, written in a mix of Arabic and vernacular Javanese, demonstrates the material and linguistic hybridity characteristic of localized Islamic esoteric texts.



Figure 2. Scanned folio from the *Ad-Damm ‘Alā Qalb al-Qur’ān* manuscript Courtesy of Pondok Pesantren Al-Djazuli Pliken.

These findings highlight the complex interplay between belief, ritual practice, and manuscript materiality in Banyumas Muslim communities. They offer a rich empirical foundation for deeper analytical reflection on the theological, ritual, and sociomaterial dimensions of this living manuscript tradition.

The following section presents a comprehensive analysis of the theological, ritual, and sociomaterial implications of the *Ad-Damm ‘Alā Qalb al-Qur’ān*

31 K.H. Achmad Saifuddin Thoha, “K2,” 2024 2022.

manuscript tradition in Banyumas. Drawing on ethnographic insights and theoretical contributions from the fields of material religion, anthropology of Islam, and manuscript studies, it engages with how sacred texts function not merely as carriers of divine content but as performative, living agents embedded in communal life. The discussions that follow explore this phenomenon from multiple angles: ritual efficacy, vernacular theology, religious authority, and scholarly trajectories, offering a nuanced portrait of how Islamic belief is embodied and enacted through material forms across time and local cosmologies.

Ritual Practice, Textual Materiality, and Local Belief

The *Ad-Damm 'Alā Qalb al-Qur'ān* manuscripts in Banyumas exemplify how Islamic texts transcend their function as scriptural repositories to become ritually active agents within local religious life. Rather than being merely read or stored as passive texts, these manuscripts are perceived by the community as conduits of *barakah* (divine blessing), mediating protection and spiritual presence in everyday contexts. This perception resonates with broader Islamic traditions in which the Qur'an is not only a source of guidance but also a bearer of *barakah*, as explored in works such as Damirel and Sahib,³² and Abidin's³³ studies on the protective use of the Qur'an, the *Ad-Damm* manuscript is embedded in a local cosmology that emphasizes the performative and material presence of scripture. Thus, these manuscripts reflect a shared Islamic logic of sacred textuality while embodying distinct Javanese ritual adaptations.

Unlike performative objects in public rituals, the Banyumas manuscripts are privately held, read, and venerated. They are often copied, either by hand or photocopied, for personal devotional use, especially by pesantren alumni who have migrated to urban areas. Yet, as K.H. Saifuddin Thoha notes, "*The barakah lies not in the printed copy but in the ink, the ritual context, and the kyai's intention.*"³⁴ This reflects a belief in the inseparability of material authenticity and ritual efficacy.³⁵

This aligns with broader theoretical currents in Material Religion. Meyer³⁶ describes "sensational forms" as media that render the invisible tangible, making divine presence experientially real. The material manuscript, its ink, layout, and mode of production function

32 Abidin, Noorhidayati, and Ahmadi, "Amulet of Quranic Verses in East Javanese Rural."

33 Serdar DemiRel and Hikmatullah Babu SahiB, "Concept of Barakah in Qur'an and Sunnah: Towards Its Realization in Modern Discourse," *FSM İlmî Araştırmalar İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Dergisi* 0, no. 5 (June 2015), <https://doi.org/10.16947/fsmiad.24408>.

34 K.H. Achmad Saifuddin Thoha, "K2," 2024 2022.

35 Dick Houtman and Birgit Meyer, eds., *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality*, 1st ed, The Future of the Religious Past (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

36 Houtman and Meyer.

not as a symbolic abstraction but as a material threshold between the sacred and the mundane. According to Anderson,³⁷ the materiality of scripture itself transforms the text from passive message to active agent, a process visibly realized in the Banyumas context.

Community narratives provide striking examples of this ritual agency. A late *kyai* in Pliken told of a house spared from fire because the manuscript was placed above its doorway.³⁸ Another informant in Sokaraja Lor attributed a child's healing to the presence of a *qalb* verse beneath the pillow.³⁹ These testimonies are not interpreted as metaphors but as evidentiary events reinforcing belief in the manuscript's power to intervene in worldly affairs, a phenomenon termed "ritual agency."

The manuscript's material engagement further demonstrates a ritual grammar: it is kissed after reading, kept on elevated surfaces, and never touched without *wuḍū'* (ritual purity). These embodied interactions reflect a performative theology in which the act of writing and preserving scripture constitutes a form of prayer and invocation, what some scholars describe as "writing as doing".⁴⁰

This materialized engagement also challenges dominant textualist assumptions in Islamic studies that emphasize semantic content over embodied practice. In contrast, the Banyumas case illustrates that religious authority and efficacy often emerge from how texts are ritually enacted rather than solely interpreted. In this sense, the manuscript is not only meaningful because of its words, but because of what it materially *does* in social life.⁴¹

Despite the proliferation of digital religious texts, local communities remain sceptical of digital reproductions' power. The perceived efficacy of the original manuscript resides in its being handwritten, ritually framed, and embedded in a lineage of transmission through respected *kyai*. While digital forms may visually replicate the text, local adherents acknowledge their presence but perceive them as lacking the sacred value embodied in manuscripts or, at minimum, physical photocopies, forms considered to carry proper *adab* (ritual propriety) and spiritual intentionality essential to the presence of *barakah*.⁴²

In sum, the *Ad-Damm* manuscripts in Banyumas offer a compelling ethnographic case of how sacred texts operate as ritual agents. They instantiate what Durkheim identified as the social energy of sacred objects, not merely as representations of belief but as active

37 Bradford A. Anderson, ed., *From Scrolls to Scrolling: Sacred Texts, Materiality, and Dynamic Media Cultures* (De Gruyter, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110634440>.

38 K.H. Ahmad Jamzuri, "K1," January 2021.

39 K.H. Abdul Rozak, "K4," October 2023.

40 Anderson, *From Scrolls to Scrolling*, Houtman and Meyer, *Things*.

41 Anderson, *From Scrolls to Scrolling*.

42 Hanif, Ofa, and Ook, "M1 - Group Interview & Observation with Lay Muslims of Masjid Al-Djazuli Congregation," 2023; Irfan, Siti, and Laily, "M2 - Group Interview & Observation with Lay Muslims of Masjid Pondok Pasulukan Congregation," 2023.

participants in communal life.⁴³ For material religion scholarship, this challenges modernist divides between form and meaning, text and object, presence and absence. These manuscripts are not relics of a past age but living embodiments of a vernacular theology that fuses textual tradition with everyday ritual practice.

Qur'anic Authority and Mystical Perception in Local Islam

The *Aḍ-Ḍamm 'Alā Qalb al-Qur'ān* manuscript from Banyumas encapsulates a unique convergence of mystical Qur'anic interpretation, local ritual practice, and vernacular textual authority. Central to this manuscript is a list of 51 *fawā'id* (spiritual benefits), which illustrate how specific Qur'anic verses, especially the so-called "hearts" (*qalb*) of the Qur'an, are understood not only as theological messages but as metaphysical tools capable of divine intercession. These include claims of protection from harm, healing, forgiveness, and even material abundance, reflecting what Nasr calls the mystical ontology of Qur'anic recitation, where the text carries inherent spiritual force.⁴⁴

Such interpretations are deeply rooted in Sufi traditions. As Chittick notes in his study of Ibn 'Arabi, practices like *wird* and *dhikr* are not merely devotional acts but metaphysical alignments that produce *kashf* (unveiling) through repetition.⁴⁵ In Banyumas, this metaphysics becomes lived reality: verses are copied by hand, placed in homes, distributed as talismans (*azimat*), and recited for protection, health, and transition. The manuscript becomes a sacred technology, embodying scripture as action and presence.

Importantly, this practice is not confined to Arabic. Many copies contain Javanese glosses, Latinized scripts, and vernacular commentaries, emphasizing that Qur'anic authority here is multilingual and localized. Gibson has observed similar patterns across Southeast Asia, where Islamic texts are embedded in local oral traditions, family genealogies, and spiritual networks, forming what scholars term "vernacular Islam."⁴⁶

The manuscript's authority is further bolstered by its connection to K.H. Ahmad Jamzuri, the noted copyist. His association provides a chain of charisma and legitimacy, transforming the manuscript into a symbol of lineage-based *barakah*, a

43 Emile Durkheim, Carol Cosman, and Mark Sydney Cladis, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

44 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth: Knowledge, Love, and Action*, 1st ed (Bielefeld: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008).

45 William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al- Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 1989).

46 Thomas Gibson, *Islamic Narrative and Authority in Southeast Asia: From the 16th to the 21st Century*, Contemporary Anthropology of Religion (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

spiritual *isnād* rooted not only in textual transmission but in personal sanctity. This echoes Asad's framework of *discursive tradition*, where the meaning and authority of texts are co-constructed by those who preserve and perform them within lived contexts.⁴⁷

The manuscript includes Javanese expressions styled after *ḥadīth* and attributed to the Prophet, though not traceable through classical *isnād*, thus reflecting localized devotional interpretations rather than authenticated prophetic traditions, for example, that memorizing a *qalb* verse equals completing the Qur'an 1,000 times or giving gold equal to Mount Uhud.⁴⁸ While absent from canonical collections, these serve as "scripturalized folklore",⁴⁹ sustaining belief through oral forms, a process Ong called *secondary orality*, where textual transmission returns to oral stylization for communal retention.⁵⁰

These practices do not represent heterodoxy but rather glocalization, adapting universal Islamic texts to local spiritual ecologies.⁵¹ This glocalization is evident in how the *Ad-Damm 'Alā Qalb al-Qur'ān* manuscript, though not part of the canonized tafsir tradition, is embedded into everyday ritual practices by rural Muslim communities in Java. Rather than rejecting core Islamic teachings, the text is interpreted through a culturally resonant lens, its verses are deployed not merely for reading, but for protective and communal functions. This local ritual embedding allows the text to retain its Qur'anic authority while taking on distinct spiritual and material roles within Javanese Muslim life. Thus, glocalization here refers to the simultaneous affirmation of Qur'anic centrality and its adaptation into culturally specific forms of devotional practice, without falling into heterodoxy.

The *qalb* verses manuscripts are ritually employed for home protection against fire and for shielding individuals from harm, reflecting their function as spiritual safeguards. This confluence of mysticism and community ritual shows how the Qur'an operates beyond interpretation: it is a material participant in daily life. It is not merely read but enacted as both invocation and protective force. This use reflects a material engagement with the sacred, where the manuscript becomes an active agent of safety and blessing.

47 Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Islamology* 7, no. 1 (June 2017): 41, <https://doi.org/10.24848/ismlg.07.1.02>.

48 The author does not claim the cited Javanese expression as an authenticated *ḥadīth*. Rather, it reflects a local attribution to the Prophet that circulates within devotional manuscripts such as *Ad-Damm*, without verifiable *isnād*. While no identical *ḥadīth* is found in canonical collections, thematically similar traditions do exist, such as the *ḥadīth* on the virtues of reciting the Qur'an for protection and healing (e.g., *ṣaḥīḥ* Bukhari no. 5736 and Muslim no. 2201, on Surat al-Fatiḥah as a *ruqyah*). However, the exact Javanese phrasing and promises in *Ad-Damm* lack *sanad* validation and should be understood within the framework of local Islamic tradition, not formal *ḥadīth* sciences.

49 Charles Lindholm, *Culture and Authenticity* (Malden, MA ; Oxford: Blackwell Pub, 2008).

50 Walter Jackson Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, Ed. first published 2002, New Accents (London: Routledge, 2005).

51 Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam*.

Furthermore, the manuscript tradition reflects *pesantren* pedagogy, where texts are learned and memorized through *sorogan* and *bandongan* methods,⁵² emphasizing oral, embodied transmission alongside written forms. In this setting, meaning emerges not only from the textual content but also from the physical ways in which it is handled, recited, and lived. The Qur'anic manuscript thus occupies a liminal space: it is both sacred scripture and localized spiritual artifact, bridging universal revelation with lived religiosity.

In challenging binaries such as “orthodox vs. folk” or “textual vs. ritual,” this case aligns with Peacock and Sedgewick’s argument that Islamic pluralism cannot be captured by rigid categories.⁵³ The *Aḍ-Ḍamm* manuscript is both orthodox in form and mystical in function, demonstrating that Islamic textual authority is always negotiated across language, lineage, and locality.

In conclusion, the 51 *ḥawā'id* in this manuscript function as more than spiritual claims; they constitute a ritual grammar through which the Qur'anic word becomes a living, acting force. Banyumas exemplifies how Islamic textual traditions endure not as static doctrines but as embodied, vernacular expressions of belief.

Negotiating Amulets, Fiqh, and Vernacular Cosmology

The ritual use of *qalb* verses as protective amulets (*azimat*) in Banyumas reflects an enduring debate in Islamic jurisprudence: are Qur'anic inscriptions on talismans legitimate acts of piety (*i'tiqāḍi*) or superstitious innovations (*bid'ah*)? As Watt’s report, reformist critiques, especially from hanbali and Salafi thinkers such as Ibn Taymiyyah, have historically rejected amulet use as reminiscent of pre-Islamic *jahiliyyah*, arguing it compromises *tawḥīd*.⁵⁴ They stress that Qur'anic verses must be recited, not worn or deployed as magical devices.

In contrast, Sufi traditions, particularly Qādiri and Shādhili lineages, legitimize such uses within *sharī'ah*-informed spirituality. Some scholars in specific areas⁵⁵ argue that for many Sufi orders, physical inscriptions of Qur'anic verses function as vessels of *barakah*, effective when mediated through authorized spiritual figures. In Banyumas, this mediation is conducted by local *kyai*, who inscribe *qalb* verses on parchment, accompany them with supplications and *air doa* (ritually prepared water),

52 Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, Dan Tarekat*.

53 Peacock, “Vernacular Religious Literature.”

54 W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology: An Extended Survey*, 2nd ed (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995).

55 “The Branches of the Qadiriyya and the Shadhiliyya in Northern Mozambique: Silsilas to the South,” in *Islamic Sufi Networks in the Western Indian Ocean (c. 1880-1940)*, by Anne K. Bang (BRILL, 2014), 47–71, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004276543_004; “Challenging Orders: Tariqas and Muslim Society in Southeastern India and Lanka, ca. 1400–1950,” in *Buddhist and Islamic Orders in Southern Asia*, by Torsten Tschacher (University of Hawaii Press, 2019), 75–98, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824877200-005>.

and distribute them as amulets. These practices are framed not as superstition, but as embedded ritual acts grounded in local *taṣawwuf*.

Interviews confirm the central role of the *kyai*. One remarked, “*Without the blessing of the teacher, it’s just ink. The barakah is in the lineage.*”⁵⁶ This echoes *tarbiyat al-barakah*, where spiritual efficacy stems from continuity of transmission and proper ritual form. The *kyai* become not merely scribes, but spiritual custodians whose authority validates the amulet’s religious legitimacy.

Comparable patterns appear in West Sumatra, where Qur’anic verses are ritually integrated with local cosmological items like *keris* or sacred stones.⁵⁷ As in Banyumas, the practice is embedded in a framework that reconciles Islamic orthodoxy with indigenous cosmology. Citing Qur’anic promises of divine protection, *kyai* in Banyumas situate these amulets within accepted Islamic categories, aligning them with broader Qur’anic cosmology.

Unlike in some regions where amulet use is private, Banyumas exhibits a communal dimension. *Qalb* amulets are distributed in mosque gatherings, *tahlil*, *mawlid*, and *doa keselamatan*, providing social validation and integration into institutionalized ritual life. This public deployment further protects the practice from accusations of *bid’ah*, embedding it within accepted religious structure.

More broadly, the manuscripts participate in a Javanese cosmological system where sacred heirlooms (*pusaka*), such as *keris*, ancestral artifacts, and genealogy charts, intersect with Islamic objects like Qur’anic manuscripts. These sacred items are not in competition, but in synergy. One informant described an altar that included a *keris*, *qalb* manuscript fragment, and ancestral relics: each symbolizing a layer of protection, physical, spiritual, and ancestral. The blessing ritual includes Qur’anic recitation, incense (*kemenyan*), and collective *tahlil*, representing a cosmological integration of Islamic and local elements.⁵⁸

This syncretic layering results in a hybrid religious object: (1) Scriptural: Qur’anic verses, *ḥadīth*-style vernacular statements, exegesis; (2) Heirloom: Transmitted across generations, endorsed by *kyai*; (3) Protective: Carried, blessed, and invoked in times of danger.

Rather than being marginal or folkloric, these objects are central to the lived religious economy. As such, they challenge binary frameworks in Islamic studies that

56 K.H. R. Toriq Arif Ghuzdewan, “K3,” April 2023.

57 Lathifah Anggriana et al., “Jimat Dan Mistisme Pengikut Tarekat Syattariyah Di Sumatera Barat Abad Ke-19 M,” *Hijaz: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 1, no. 3 (March 2022): 144–55, <https://doi.org/10.57251/hij.v1i3.913>.

58 Niels Mulder, *Mysticism in Java: Ideology in Indonesia*, 2nd ed (Deresan, Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Kanisius Pub. House, 2005).

separate text from ritual or orthodoxy from local belief.⁵⁹

By locating amulets within vernacular cosmology, Banyumas Muslims express a theology that is holistic and non-dualistic. Instead of opposing “orthodox” Islam, the amulets are seen as scriptural embodiments of divine promise. They derive legitimacy from scriptural content, ritual procedure, and *kyai* mediation.

Ultimately, the *qalb* amulet tradition represents a dynamic negotiation between Islamic jurisprudence and indigenous cosmology. It offers scholars a model of how sacred texts are not only interpreted but *activated*, how textual authority is constructed through ritual, lineage, and local cosmological frames. Rather than erasing tension, this tradition *performs* it productively, blending law, mysticism, and culture into a coherent spiritual praxis.

Local Theology and the Agency of Sacred Texts

The ritual life of the *Aḍ-Ḍamm ‘Ala Qalb al-Qur’an* manuscripts in Banyumas, Central Java, contributes significantly to contemporary scholarship in material religion and Islamic manuscript studies. This ethnographic account demonstrates that Islamic texts are not merely semantic repositories but dynamic objects that participate in social life through ritual, memory, and localized belief. These manuscripts are inscribed, carried, kissed, hung, and consulted, not to be interpreted discursively but to be enacted materially.

This aligns with Gruber’s call to shift focus from the textual to the tactile, from meaning to use.⁶⁰ The *qalb* manuscripts in Banyumas reflect what Meyer calls “sensational forms,”⁶¹ where engagement with religious objects enables the felt presence of the divine. These manuscripts are ritually active, materially efficacious, and socially embedded, operating in *dzikir*, home protection, healing rituals, and *doa keselamatan* ceremonies.

Bradford Anderson’s theory of performative scripture is crucial here.⁶² In Banyumas, the manuscript is not interpreted through tafsir but activated through presence and ritual: wrapped in cloth, placed above doorways, and invoked during illness or crisis. This reflects Talal Asad’s notion of Islam as a discursive tradition, where embodied practice validates textual authority.⁶³ Accordingly, the power of

59 Peacock, “Vernacular Religious Literature.”

60 Christiane J. Gruber, ed., *The Islamic Manuscript Tradition: Ten Centuries of Book Arts in Indiana University Collections* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

61 Houtman and Meyer, *Things*.

62 Anderson, *From Scrolls to Scrolling*.

63 Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

the manuscript is not symbolic alone; it is material, enacted, and embedded in local cosmology.

Further, these manuscripts challenge assumptions of static relics. Echoing Hirschler's⁶⁴ findings on textual communities, the *qalb* manuscripts circulate within familial, pedagogical, and village networks. They are inscribed by *kyai* with ritual authority and copied by hand, not only for preservation but to replicate their spiritual efficacy. This manuscript culture resists the digital turn by maintaining a robust, non-digitized ritual economy.

In Banyumas, the 51 *fawā'id* (benefits) associated with the manuscript demonstrate how texts become ritual scripts. Community members recount specific outcomes, healing, fire avoidance, dream visitations, that affirm the text's power. These are not seen as superstition but as confirmation of divine barakah. This performative epistemology displaces hermeneutics with expectancy: the manuscript "works" because it continues to deliver.

The ritual authority of these manuscripts is inseparable from local *kyai* and pesantren networks. As mediators of textual legitimacy, *kyai* ensure ritual conditions and barakah transmission. This is similar to practices among Minangkabau Muslims,⁶⁵ where Qur'anic verses are ritually fused with local heirlooms and sacred objects. Such practices exemplify Peacock and Sedgewick's argument for a "social life of Islamic texts,"⁶⁶ where manuscripts function within layered ritual systems, not abstract doctrinal domains.

This case also problematizes binaries in Islamic studies: orthodox vs. folk, legal vs. magical, scriptural vs. superstitious. In Banyumas, the *qalb* manuscript is simultaneously scripture, heirloom, and talisman. It is copied with reverence, distributed ritually, and placed within home altars alongside *keris* and genealogical charts. Each layer, scriptural, ancestral, and protective, coexists, forming a coherent cosmology.

The implications of this study for material Islam are manifold. First, it calls scholars to reframe theology not only as discourse but as practice. In Banyumas, theological authority arises from ritual repetition, affective proximity, and communal validation. Following Asad and Gade, the sacred is located in how the manuscript is used, not merely what it says.⁶⁷

64 Hirschler, *A Monument to Medieval Syrian Book Culture*.

65 Irhash A. Shamad and Danil Mahmud Chaniago, *Islam Dan Praksis Kultural Masyarakat Minangkabau*, Cetakan I (Palembang, Indonesia: Noer Fikri Offset, 2022).

66 Peacock, "Vernacular Religious Literature."

67 Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam"; Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice*.

Second, the manuscript serves as a mnemonic archive. Its presence in homes and mosques preserves a lineage of belief, serving as a social memory object. This reinforces Hirschler's argument that manuscripts shape textual communities through embodied practices, not just through semantic transmission.⁶⁸

Finally, this case offers a counterpoint to digital trends in Islamic manuscript preservation. While digitization enhances accessibility, it often strips manuscripts of their ritual context. The *qalb* manuscripts of Banyumas remain active, handwritten, and performative. They resist reduction to data and instead assert themselves as agents within a living religious ecology.

The manuscript tradition of *Aḍ-Ḍamm 'Alā Qalb al-Qur'ān* in Banyumas not only reflects the persistence of material Islam, but also demonstrates the construction of a localized, vernacular theology, one that is enacted through ritual performance, oral transmission, and embodied belief. Rather than deriving authority from formal theological institutions or centralized doctrinal orthodoxy, the tradition develops its legitimacy from situated religious praxis. This vernacular ritual theology is relational and experiential: articulated through the Javanese language, sustained by the presence and charisma of the *kyai*, and transmitted via intergenerational community rituals. Such a model provides a rich counterpoint to the rigid dichotomies often imposed between "orthodox" and "folk" Islam.

In this context, theology is not merely a set of abstract doctrines but a lived epistemology that emerges through practice. As articulated by Gade, vernacular Islam in Southeast Asia often bridges canonical text and local cosmology, producing hybrid theological expressions rooted in community contexts.⁶⁹ In Banyumas, *qalb* manuscripts are not only sacred because of their Qur'anic content but because they serve as loci of collective belief and ritual expectation. The theological meaning of protection (*tolak bala'*) is not only textual, it is manifest in daily experiences, such as spared homes, cured illnesses, and dreams interpreted as divine communication. These are not anecdotal superstitions; they are constitutive of a cosmological system in which divine will, human agency, and sacred objects are integrally linked.

This understanding aligns with van Bruinessen's argument that *pesantren* Islam in Java operates through a syncretic blending of Sufi devotionism, local customs, and Islamic jurisprudence.⁷⁰ The *kyai* occupy a central role in mediating this synthesis, functioning as both guardians of scriptural orthodoxy and ritual specialists authorized to manipulate sacred matter, be it through copying, blessing,

68 Hirschler, *A Monument to Medieval Syrian Book Culture*.

69 Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice*.

70 Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, Dan Tarekat*.

or distributing manuscript amulets. Consequently, theological meaning is embedded in both speech and silence, in the recited verse and the unspoken reverence toward sacred manuscripts placed above doorways or within household altars.

By situating the *qalb* manuscript as a spiritual and cultural *pusaka* (heirloom), this study highlights the importance of ritual materiality as a site of theological innovation. It challenges the notion that theology is exclusively discursive, proposing instead that it can be materially enacted and socially circulated through symbols, actions, and ritual performances. This resonates with Asad's view of Islam as a discursive tradition in which power, meaning, and knowledge are historically situated and mediated by institutional and social actors.⁷¹ In Banyumas, vernacular theology is not peripheral; it is central to how Islam is believed, felt, and practiced.

Looking forward, future research could expand upon these findings by exploring comparative manuscript-based traditions across Indonesia and Southeast Asia. For instance, protective uses of Qur'anic texts have also been documented among Minangkabau Muslims in West Sumatra⁷² and in Javanese practices of Qur'anic wrapping or water-inscription (*air doa*).⁷³ Such comparative ethnographies could illuminate regional variations in how Qur'anic materiality is ritualized, revealing how socio-cultural, historical, and institutional contexts shape the function and legitimacy of protective manuscript usage.

In addition to qualitative exploration, quantitative ethnography offers promising directions. Future research could employ mixed-methods approaches to analyze correlations between *qalb* manuscript possession and perceived protection outcomes, e.g., frequencies of fire avoidance, healing experiences, or spiritual dreams. While such research must guard against reductionist tendencies that strip these practices of their sacred character, careful design could yield valuable insight into how belief systems operate at the community level and how ritual efficacy is sustained through narrative reinforcement and shared memory.

The expanding digitization of Islamic manuscripts also presents new opportunities for longitudinal research. Digital repositories such as those at the British Library have begun preserving Qur'anic fragments and talismanic scrolls from across Indonesia, many of which bear striking similarity to the *qalb* verses in Banyumas. Comparative studies between digitized artifacts and living manuscript traditions could shed light on continuities and ruptures between archival preservation and ritual usage, particularly in communities that resist or reinterpret digitization as

71 Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*; Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam."

72 Shamad and Chaniago, *Islam Dan Praksis Kultural Masyarakat Minangkabau*.

73 Shamad and Chaniago, *Islam Dan Praksis Kultural Masyarakat Minangkabau*.

part of their religious life.

Moreover, there is growing academic interest in tracing the transregional flows of Islamic devotional objects, particularly between Indonesia and South Asia. Azra's work on the *ulama* networks of the 17th–19th centuries underscores that the use of protective manuscripts, prayers, and talismans was not only widespread but systematically institutionalized across spiritual orders and madrasas.⁷⁴ The *qalb* manuscript of Banyumas, while locally grounded, shares formal and functional affinities with protective *wird* collections used in Chishtiyya and Qadiriyya Sufi networks, suggesting a deeper historical genealogy of talismanic practice in the Islamic world.

Finally, future work might also engage the theological implications of these findings more explicitly. How do local theologies of protection interact with mainstream Islamic concepts of *tawakkul* (trust in God), *qadar* (divine decree), or *shifa* (healing)? Do users of *qalb* manuscripts see these practices as symbolic aids, metaphysical interventions, or theological obligations? Unpacking these nuances could contribute meaningfully to broader discourses on Islamic spirituality, agency, and sacred materiality.

In conclusion, the *qalb* manuscript tradition of Banyumas affirms that Islamic theology is not the exclusive domain of seminaries or clerics, it is cultivated in villages, sanctified in rituals, and transmitted through ink, memory, and devotion. It invites scholars of Islam to engage not only with what Muslims believe, but with how they enact belief through the tangible and affective dimensions of religious life. By doing so, we uncover a richer, more textured landscape of Islamic practice, one that refuses to be neatly divided into “orthodox” and “folk,” and instead thrives in the fluid, performative space where the sacred becomes real.

Conclusion

This study has revealed how the *Aḍ-Ḍamm 'Alā Qalb al-Qur'ān* manuscript tradition in Banyumas functions as a living embodiment of vernacular Islamic belief and ritual practice. By documenting how local Muslim communities recite, inscribe, and venerate these manuscripts as protective amulets (*tolak bala'*), the research demonstrates that sacred texts in this context are not static objects of doctrinal study but are materially and ritually enacted within everyday religious life. The 51 enumerated *farwā'id* serve not only as symbolic affirmations of divine blessing but also as pragmatic guidelines for spiritual and physical protection, manifested through

⁷⁴ Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII & XVIII: Akar Pembaruan Islam Indonesia*, Ed. rev (Jakarta: Kencana, 2004).

communal ceremonies, kyai-led ritual mediation, and embedded oral tradition.

The findings contribute to Islamic studies, anthropology of religion, and material religion scholarship by illustrating how Qur'anic manuscripts act as ritual agents that mediate divine presence, social authority, and communal identity. This research underscores the importance of examining localized scriptural traditions not through the lens of deviation or innovation, but as integral expressions of lived Islam. It offers a case for broadening the analytical scope of manuscript studies beyond codicology to include ethnographic, performative, and cosmological dimensions, highlighting the dynamic, protective, and participatory roles that sacred texts continue to play in Muslim societies today.

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Authors' Contribution

I did this research by myself, from preparing the materials, writing the paper, reviewing, and revising.

Data availability statement

All data underlying the results are available as part of the article and no additional source data are required.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors affirm that there are no conflicts of interest that could potentially influence the research outcomes or compromise its integrity.

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