Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims at examining the current condition of ancient manuscripts owned by locals in remote areas of Indonesia, which are mostly in poor condition. It is to describe the factors of these manuscript damages and the implications of the damage.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study employed qualitative design with philological, codicological and anthropological approaches. The participants are manuscript owners and keepers in Western, Central and Eastern parts of Indonesia. Data were collected by direct observations and interviews with the participants.

**Findings** – This paper provides empirical insights on how manuscripts were damaged due to human and environmental factors. These factors have caused the loss of part or whole information in the manuscripts, hence causing disconnected knowledge linkage from past to present.

**Research limitations/implications** – Due to the selected scope and area of study, this study may lack generalizability. Further studies can be conducted to examine the physical aspect and the content of the manuscripts.

**Practical implications** – This study suggests the urgency for stakeholders and local governments to preserve the manuscripts by taking specific measures that include preservation training to the locals and conducting a program for digitizing these manuscripts.

**Originality/value** – This paper fulfils an identified need to study how the damages suffered by the local manuscripts.
Further, it was found that these Important manuscripts had not been properly preserved since the 2000s resulting in their appalling conditions (Ming, 2013; Holil, 2018).

To date, studies of manuscripts tend to focus on three macro aspects. First, the creation of manuscript catalogues, especially for manuscripts which are kept in institutions (Behrend, 1998; Voorhoeve, 1994; Pudjiastuti et al., 2011; Wieringa, 2007). Second, manuscript restorations, such as studies conducted by Dubey and Tonazzini (Dubey, 2019; Tonazzini et al., 2019). Third, manuscript preservation through digitization (Wirajaya, 2016; Oetari et al., 2016; Prastiani and Subekti, 2017). It could be seen that local manuscripts have not been given adequate attention, which is unfortunate, given that preservations of these manuscripts need to start at the grassroot level, from individual citizens’ collections in remote areas. Many ancient manuscripts are owned by local figures, religious figures, or adat (customary) leaders. These local notables usually do not possess the necessary knowledge for manuscript preservation.

The purpose of this study is to fill the lacunae of previous research by focusing on the micro context. The focus is on the damages suffered by the local manuscripts including the cause and the effect of the damage. Three research questions are formulated, namely: (1) to what extent does the damage suffered by the manuscripts at the local level?; (2) what factors cause damage to these manuscripts?; and (3) what are the implications of this damage? Answers to these questions would help in improving the preservation efforts on ancient manuscripts owned by locals.

This study is based on the argument that “the damage suffered by manuscripts” kept by individual citizens in remote locations is caused by the lack of care towards their existence. The manuscripts’ content could have been studied and understood, as knowledge in the manuscripts can still be relevant to the present time. Unfortunately, society-at-large and policymakers might not even know of the existence of these manuscripts. The manuscripts are often deemed unimportant as a source of historical knowledge and local wisdom, nor have they been used as a teaching tool in local education. Moreover, manuscripts are often considered as merely property, no more. The lack of knowledge and awareness of their importance could explain why manuscript damage at the local level has been accepted as a social fact.

2. Literature review
2.1 The lack of care in preserving manuscripts
The lack of care in manuscript preservation could result in mild to severe damage to the manuscripts, a form of human-caused disaster. This lack of care usually stems from a lack of knowledge in manuscript preservation among the manuscript owners or keepers, which could result in damaged and even lost manuscripts (Permadi et al., 2018; Holil, 2018). The lack of care can be categorized into three patterns. First, the manuscripts were kept in wooden chests or gunny sacks, left unopened for an extended period of time. They were deemed sacred such that the chests and sacks were prohibited to be opened sometimes for years on end. Second, treating the manuscripts as ancient heritage requires a unique and complex skill set. They were often moldy and prone to disintegration, becoming harmful to their owner and the surrounding environment (Ayuba, 2013; Schep, 2019). Third, the manuscripts were deemed of no value such that they were kept in unprotected places and even used as food wrappers. There were no incentives to care for and manage the manuscripts for preservation (Streeter, 2008; Singh, 2012).

2.2 Manuscripts
Manuscripts are considered ancient due to their hundreds-of-years of age. The sheets used to write the manuscripts were in accordance with this age. Today, these sheets show the ageing
effect, as seen from the discoloration and susceptibility to decay (Madden, 2011) due to mold or improper humidity. The acidity of the ink used has consumed the media, resulting in many fragile manuscripts (Marín et al., 2015; Tonazzini et al., 2019). Ammonia contained in the ink could be dangerous when inhaled. The sheets used for the manuscripts ranged from European papers, date palm midribs, Javanese paper (dluwang), bamboo strips and tree barks (Sahoo and Mohanty, 2015). These manuscripts could be found in many far-flung corners of Indonesia.

The manuscripts were usually handwritten by knowledgeable authors or experienced copyists (Sahoo and Mohanty, 2015; Dubey, 2019). Information found in the manuscripts covers a variety of subjects such as history, law, Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), Islamic spirituality (tasawwuf), stories (hikayat), the Qur'an, litanies (ratib), genealogies (sisilah) and arts (Fathurahman, 2003; Rachman, 2017; Pudjiastuti, 2018; Iswanto, 2019). Most of those manuscripts are decorated with beautiful illumination and illustration containing profound meanings reflecting interactions with other nations of the world (Gallop, 2004; Gallop and Akbar, 2006; Mu’jizah, 2009; Akbar, 2015). The information contained in manuscripts was usually related to the authors or copyists and the society they lived in. Generally, manuscripts are relative and influenced by social and political context. There were some manuscripts were written by Sultan instruction, such manuscript of Mir’atut Tullab written by Abdurrauf Singkil because of Ratu Saifyatuddin Instruction (Gallop, 2016; Chambert-Loir, 2017; Muttaqin, 2020; Siraj, 2020).

2.3 Local treatment on the manuscripts

The term local treatment is composed of the words “local” and “treatment”. The word “local” refers to a place or area (in a sense of making, producing, or growing something locally; or living locally). The word “treatment” here means a process or means to recover from sickness (for a person) or damage (for a thing) (Sutopo et al., 2017; Pignot et al., 2019). The combined words “local treatment” this means the care and effort taken by the local government or community towards manuscript preservation. Such treatments by local governments were performed in Aceh, Lombok, Yogyakarta, Surakarta, Riau (Syukri, 2012; Anwar et al., 2018) and Minangkabau region (Zulfiri, 2014), as well as other local regions (Wirajaya, 2016; Agusti and Wasisto, 2017; Prastiani and Subekti, 2017; Hamid, 2019; Lisnawaty et al., 2020). However, these efforts were limited and operate locally.

Local treatment of manuscripts can be performed with a traditional or modern method. The traditional method is usually performed by smoking the manuscripts on top of frankincense (Khadijah et al., 2017); traditional rituals (Primadesi, 2010; Nurhata, 2018); using citronella oil mixed with candlenut (Sedana et al., 2013); by giving offerings and putting camphor in lontar storage areas or inside the worship tower (pelingsih) around the palm-leaf (lontar) chest (kropak) – with the lontar manuscript being re-written (transliterated) should any damage be found on it (Sedana et al., 2013; Purnami, 2019). The modern method is performed by digitization, transliteration, catalogization, indexation, duplication, as well as creating abstracts and researching the manuscripts to discover their content (Zulfiri, 2014; Latiar, 2018; Sahidi, 2019).

3. Method

The focus of this study is to investigate the damages found on manuscripts kept by individual citizens of local communities in Indonesia. The communities are in three zones: West (Sumatra), Central (Java and Bali) and East (Sulawesi and Maluku). Direct observations conducted indicate that many manuscripts are in poor condition. The manuscripts’ owners or keepers preserved the manuscripts according to their ability and knowledge. They also tended to suspect visitors who wish to examine their manuscripts, due to their perceived sacred nature.

Using qualitative design with philological, codicological and anthropological approaches, this study combines both field and library studies. The philological approach is used to analyse
the texts written in a manuscript while the codicological approach is focused on analysing the physics of a manuscript, like its paper and ink. The manuscripts were also identified and catalogued. The anthropological approach is employed to collect the data from the owners of the manuscripts and the local people who have adequate knowledge related to the manuscripts.

The data are collected in two stages. First, data is gathered through semi-structured interviews in order to obtain comprehensive information from the participants. The interviews focused on the two kinds of participants; those who possess the manuscripts and those who concern and attempt to preserve the manuscripts. The interview is performed during observation by visiting informant houses to find the spare time of the informants for long interviews. Second, direct observations are conducted at the houses of informants and the places where the manuscripts are kept. This is to describe the manuscripts’ condition and the way it has been preserved.

The data are then analysed into three stages, namely data reduction, data display and data verification. Data reduction is performed systematically by grouping them into themes such as involvement and motivation in preserving the manuscripts. Data display is conducted by presenting relevant excerpts from the interviews into tables. The data are then transcribed, coded and verified with written sources and direct observations. The processed data are then mapped and classified according to the research questions. Finally, the data are analysed and interpreted, with attention paid to the context of the communities and environment in which the manuscripts were preserved.

4. Result
Focusing on the micro aspects of the manuscripts (i.e. physical aspects), the data collected in this study consisted of the damages suffered by the manuscripts, the factors causing these damages and the impact of the damages to the manuscripts. The following section describes and elaborates these data.

4.1 Damages suffered by the manuscripts
The ancient manuscripts kept by individual citizens in various remote locations of Indonesia have experienced serious damage. 80% of Indonesian manuscripts are damaged due to moldiness, dust and ink (Pudjiastuti, 2011; Hendrawati, 2018). The damages could be found in the manuscript sheet, binding and ink. There were a variety of sheets used for manuscripts in this region, such as European paper, dluwang, lontar, bamboo, animal horn and pustaha wood, with the first three paper-like sheets being the most commonly used type. Damages could occur on all these types of manuscript sheets.

For the binding, only those manuscripts with used paper-like sheets were found to be damaged, as these were the only ones that required binding to tie the sheets together. For the ink, damage could cause the ink to fade and spread, obscuring the writing on the manuscript. The types of damage which occurred to the three types of paper-like manuscript sheets were different. The extent of the damage could be categorized into mild, moderate and severe.

Mildly damaged manuscripts were relatively safe to touch and read. Only the sheets of the manuscripts were damaged, not the writings in the manuscript. For example, the binding of the manuscript could be loose or corroded. Or, the sides of the manuscript could be folded or torn. The sheets might have holes due to moths, as well as being moldy due to improper humidity in the surrounding environment. Despite all these damages, the manuscript could still be opened and read, albeit with careful handling to prevent further damage. An example of the mildly damaged manuscript can be seen in Plate 1.

In general, the damages suffered by manuscripts are in the mild category, especially those kept by locals living in remote areas. Table 1 further describes the types of damage, their causes and the origin of the manuscripts.
### Table 1. Mild manuscript damage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manuscript part</th>
<th>Damage type</th>
<th>Damage cause</th>
<th>Manuscript example</th>
<th>Manuscript sheet type and Manuscript origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper-like sheet</td>
<td>Holes in the paper</td>
<td>Moth bites</td>
<td></td>
<td>European paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Go Lan Ing Collection, Makassar, South Sulawesi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folded paper</td>
<td>Human acts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>European paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ibu Sumiyaton Collection, Serang, Banten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water-stained paper</td>
<td>Improper storage, unopened</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dluwang paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>manuscript, water infiltration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>La Umbu Collection, Bau-Bau City, Southeast Sulawesi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crumbly papers</td>
<td>Environmental factor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>European paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ol Collection, Sorong, West Papua.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in Table 1, there were manuscripts experiencing moderate to severe damage, resulting in a loss of information contained in the manuscripts. Consequently, religious knowledge and local wisdom contained in the manuscripts would also be lost. Letters, words, sentences, paragraphs and even the whole pages of these manuscripts become faded up to the point of disappearance. Hence, the existing writing could not be read due to these faded or missing elements.

Sometimes, when the manuscripts' pages were opened, the writings were left behind, sticking together to become dust. The main cause was the high acidity of the European papers used for the manuscripts' sheets. However, manuscripts which used local materials such as lontar and dluwang did not fare better. The ink which form the writings of these latter manuscripts were fading so much that the writings also became difficult to read. To overcome this problem, local

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Binding</th>
<th>Detached</th>
<th>Poor quality of binding</th>
<th>European paper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Umi Collection, Palembang</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corroded</th>
<th>Contaminated by water or sweat</th>
<th>Ruled paper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Masykur Collection, Pidie, Aceh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writings</th>
<th>Low visibility</th>
<th>Ink consuming paper</th>
<th>European paper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Raja Malik Collection, Riau Islands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source(s): Manuscripts kept by locals in West, Central, and East Indonesia

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residents usually use candle nut as an aid to reading the fading writings on the *lontar* manuscripts (direct observations during a visit to the Bali region).

### 4.2 Factors causing damage to the manuscripts

Research data showed that the manuscripts were damaged due to two factors namely: environmental and human factors. The environmental factors consist of natural disasters and the natural condition where the manuscript is stored. The former led to the disappearance of many manuscripts, while the latter means that the humid and hot condition of this region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manuscript sheet type</th>
<th>Damage type</th>
<th>Damage cause</th>
<th>Manuscript example</th>
<th>Manuscript origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lontar</td>
<td>Fading writings</td>
<td>Humidity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hariyadi Collection, East Lombok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pande’s family Collection, Gianyar, Bali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dluwang</td>
<td>Fading writings and illustration</td>
<td>Fading ink</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cirebon dluwang manuscript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European paper</td>
<td>Missing alphabets</td>
<td>The high acidity caused illumination letter to be detached from the paper</td>
<td></td>
<td>Syakur Rauf Collection, Paser, East Kalimantan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European paper</td>
<td>Missing parts of the pages</td>
<td>Insects</td>
<td></td>
<td>Go Lan Ing Collection, Makassar, South Sulawesi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European paper</td>
<td>Missing pages</td>
<td>Human actions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Masykur Collection, Aceh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European paper and dluwang (local paper)</td>
<td>Scattered manuscripts</td>
<td>Human actions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pangeran Mangkubumi Collected, Waringin City, Central Kalimantan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source(s):** Manuscripts kept by individual citizens in West, Central, and East Indonesia

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**Table 2.** Moderate to severe manuscript damage
accelerated the damages suffered by the manuscripts. Ideally, written manuscripts should be kept in an environment with humidity level between 45% and 60% and temperature level between 20 and 24 °C. Most manuscripts in Indonesia, unfortunately, were kept in an environment where the humidity level could reach 90% and the temperature between 29 and 36 °C (Purwani, 2021).

The environmental-caused damage to the manuscripts could be divided into physiological, mechanical and biological factors. Physiological factors include weather and the climate that is not suitable and possible for manuscript preservation. Mechanical factors include natural disasters and the contamination of other objects near the manuscript storage. Finally, biological factors include attack by termites, fungi and other microorganisms. These environmental factors could cause damage at different levels, from severe to minor. For instance, disasters like earthquakes and floods, could destroy and completely obliterate the manuscripts at once. In other words, natural disasters could bring severe damage instantly to the manuscripts. Meanwhile, termites, fungi and other microorganisms do not damage manuscripts as severe as disasters as it may cause minor damage (such as little holes, mold).

The damage by human factors can be caused by, at least, two of these situations. First is the lack of knowledge in preserving the manuscripts in their possession, especially the knowledge of proper manuscript storage techniques. Manuscript owners who did not have this knowledge did not consider environmental humidity or temperature, or the presence of moths and termites, when storing the manuscripts. One of the manuscript owners in Cirebon, for instance, put perfume on his manuscripts and smoked them with frankincense once every year, with the intention of honoring his ancestral heritage. Little did he know that his actions caused the writings in his manuscripts to be unreadable due to the discoloration of the lontar.

The second cause of human factors in manuscript damage is the lack of knowledge on the uses and benefits of the manuscripts. Manuscripts were treated as outdated useless objects, instead of a source of knowledge containing valuable information to be studied by the current generation. Manuscripts were stacked on top of each other like piles of worthless objects, such as those found in Waringin City of Central Kalimantan region (see Plate 2).
Finally, the third cause is the assumption of manuscripts as a sacred heritage. Sacred objects are perceived to be haunted, harmful and untouchable. For some people, sacred objects such as ancient manuscripts are also considered as unIslamic. In East Lombok that is heavily influenced by Islam for instance, manuscripts containing religious knowledge required particular rituals to touch, open or move. Particular timing had to be calculated and a goat had to be sacrificed for the village feast before the manuscript could be opened and read (direct observation in Lombok Timur in 2016). The same attitude was found in Bali which is mostly influenced by Hinduism. The manuscript owners deemed the manuscript to have special powers which could save their life. They wrapped the manuscripts in an orange and white cloth as a special colour for Hindu people in Bali and placed them in a special area regarded as a holy place as a form of their respect for their ancestor efforts. To take and read the manuscripts, one must first perform a specific ritual in order to obtain permission from their ancestors (see Plates 3–5).

Plate 3 shows a Hindu ritual procession when the manuscripts are moved from its original storage to the new space. This ritual procession should be conducted by a priest (pedande). Plate 4 presents some researchers who read the manuscripts after being allowed by the

Plate 3.
A priest was opening his collection in Pura Bukit Batu, Gianyar, Bali

Plate 4.
Researchers identified old lontar, Bali manuscripts, in Culik, Karang Asen, Bali
The religious leader guided us in treating the manuscripts and guided us to understanding the content. Plate 5 shows manuscripts wrapped in white cloth and presented to be touched and read by researchers.

In addition to these human factors, there is also an indirect cause for manuscript damage, which is the lack of attention towards existing manuscripts by schools, local government and national institutions. Despite being rich in cultural and historic resources, manuscripts are not part of university or school curriculums, even at the level of local content (muatan lokal).

4.3 Discontinuity of intellectual heritage

The assumption and treatment of ancient manuscripts as merely familial or spiritual artifacts resulted in a discontinuation of their intellectual heritage. The manuscripts were left untouched in the storage, without any effort by the family members or the descendants to study the content. Ancient manuscripts that are considered as sacred and having a power of healing, are believed to be harmful when being touched or opened. This belief was proven by a case of Banten manuscripts, which had to be burned because they blinded the eyes of the readers when the manuscript chest was opened (Interview with YD, a manuscript observer in Banten).

A similar case is found in Palembang, where the manuscript keeper chose to keep the manuscript in a closed storage without even opening it. The participant (Mr A) reported that he does not know the content of the manuscripts in his possession. He was quite content just by having the manuscript, as shown in his placement of the manuscript in a shroud-wrapped chest, accompanied by a glass of frankincense. Another participant from Ogan Komering Ilir, also has manuscripts which were left untouched for decades in a cupboard in his house. Mr M said that his father bequeathed the manuscripts to him, saying

My father asked me to keep the cupboard containing the manuscripts and said that his own father, my grandfather, asked him to keep the cupboard as an heirloom. I did not ask my father about the content of the cupboard. I was satisfied just by fulfilling my father’s request (Interview with M).

The damage of ancient written manuscripts have prevented the transmission of local cultural knowledge for two reasons. First, the scripts are no longer recognizable by today’s readers as they have not been present and used in public communication for a long time. Second, ancient scripts are often perceived as unIslamic. The manuscript owners/keepers and their communities often consider ancient scripts to be a legacy of Indonesia’s pre-Islamic past.
One of manuscript owners named R (from Palembang), stated “Ancient script is a legacy of the time before Islam in this region, so there is no use in learning it.” (Interview with R). In line with this statement, a traditional Palembang leader, S, also mentioned “Not only is the script difficult to read, but there is also no purpose in understanding it” (interview with S). The reason for this indifference could be, as stated by A: “There is no prohibition or recommendation to study the ancient scripts”.

The outdated physical appearance of the manuscripts also hindered the study of their content. Most local people in contact with the manuscripts deemed the content to be as outdated as their appearance. They became perplexed as to why anyone would be interested in reading the manuscripts. As K exclaimed, “Paken droe neuh neujak buka kitab brök nyan, ka meu abée arée, jeut keu ñeunyakét lom. Lon han ék þëu toe keunan”. This statement means that “Why do you want to open those ancient manuscripts, full of dust which could spread diseases? I don’t wish to even go near it.” (Interview with K in Kayee Jato, Teupin Raya Pidie Aceh). Mrs K seems to believe that ancient manuscripts are no longer relevant to the present time. This assumption could be inaccurate, given the fact that the manuscripts she owned contain past intellectual achievements in topics such as local literature, Qur’anic interpretation, Hadith, prophetic history, fiqh and tasawwuf. Evenmore, there is also unique artistic illumination in some Acehnese manuscripts which contain artistic values. An example of an Acehnese manuscript containing illumination is as shown in Plate 6.

As shown in Plate 3, this Sarakata mentions Acehnese ulee balangs ruling in the 19th century in the Pidie area. The manuscript was decorated with unique illumination using sulur flowers with dominantly red and black colours. These artistic decorations can still be found today, for instance in Acehnese wedding ornaments. This linkage of present and past suggests that information and knowledge contained in the manuscripts written in the past
are still relevant to the present time. Hence, assumptions that knowledge of manuscripts are no longer useful are proven as inaccurate. Therefore, damage in the manuscript as in this Sarakata could result in the discontinuity of local intellectual heritage.

5. Discussion

When manuscripts are left as they are, without proper preservation methods, they will undergo a process of disintegration. This process is harmful, because the damaged pages, binding, or ink of the manuscripts could form chemical dust which could be inhaled by humans. Manuscript owners/keepers, their family members and those in contact with the manuscripts could be inhaling this toxic substance. Disintegrated manuscripts are also difficult to read, which means that the knowledge, information, or wisdom contained in the manuscripts cannot be obtained or shared. Meanwhile, history reveals the past and enables humans to learn from it. The loss of ancient manuscripts means the loss of knowledge connected from past to present. Manuscripts with richness in cultural, religious, social and economic and even political values can disappear forever (Fathurahman, 2003; Marin et al., 2015; Wieringa, 2017; Tonazzini et al., 2019; Madden, 2011). Indonesia as a multicultural archipelago suffers from this unfortunate situation and potentially loses a lot of its intellectual heritage, as a result of this manuscript damage.

Ancient manuscripts are essential to elucidate the meaning and function of a particular community’s tradition. When manuscripts are lost or damaged, the traditions would cease to be understood fully by its communities (Streeter, 2008; Singh, 2012). As a result, manuscripts would only exist as memories that disappear over time (Permadi et al., 2018; Holil, 2018). New traditions would no longer be based on past traditions, which might cause alienation and detachment among members of the local communities (Scheper, 2019).

This study shows that manuscript-related institutions should pay attention to the large number of manuscripts kept by individual citizens in remote areas, not only to the fewer manuscripts in certain institutions (Nurwahyuningsih and Ismayati, 2019). This is especially crucial as the manuscript owners and keepers in general, are not aware about the significant historical and scientific values in manuscripts of their possession and do not even understand the content of the manuscripts. They treat the manuscripts as an artifact that is only kept, not as a resource they could learn from and share to the younger generations. Due to this ignorance, ancient manuscripts owned by locals have suffered from ink and paper destruction, which can only be repaired by manuscript professionals and experts in the national and regional institutions. The micro damage can actually be traditionally prevented by: putting some cloves and camphors (to avoid paper destruction) and spreading candlenuts (to preserve the readability of the ink on palm leaves, bamboo blades and logs) (Pudjiastuti, 2011; Scheper, 2019). While the macro strategy of manuscript preservation such as cataloguing, digitalizing, transliteration and transferring manuscripts in existing institutions (Behrend, 1998; Voorhoeve, 1994; Pudjiastuti et al., 2011; Wieringa, 2007) is beneficial and needed, preservation strategy that involves local owners and keepers should also be strengthened. This could be applied to situations where manuscripts are kept in the local area instead of institutions.

Measures need to be taken by local government and relevant stakeholders (e.g. manuscript enthusiasts) to teach manuscript preservation techniques to these owners and keepers. They should be taught simple actions routines, such as: regularly opening and cleaning the manuscript storage and putting cloves or camphor in the storage area (Primadesi, 2010; Nurbata, 2018; Sedana et al, 2013; Purnami, 2019). Temperature and humidity should be controlled as much as possible (Ayuba, 2013; Scheper, 2019). Local resources should also be utilized given that manuscript owners mostly live in remote areas (Marin et al., 2015; Khadijah et al., 2017). These efforts would help greatly in creating
awareness of the importance of manuscripts (Bunnell et al., 2018; Houston, 2014; Maniaci and Rogge, 2014; Emami Alorizi et al., 2015; Emami Alorizi et al., 2015, 2015). The upcoming law on the promotion of culture should provide a solid legal foundation to preserve these manuscripts, making them valuable, instead of being treated as a shabby and outdated heritage as has been done so far (Streeter, 2008; Singh, 2012).

6. Conclusion

Ancient manuscripts kept by individuals in remote locations in Indonesia suffered from a variety of damage, categorised as mild, medium, to severe. The damage was mainly caused by the ignorance of the manuscript owners and keepers. They lack preservation knowledge and skill to treat the manuscripts in a proper manner. Additionally, local manuscript owners hold a belief that manuscripts are sacred objects. Therefore, they cannot be opened, read or studied without performing particular rituals. As a result, these manuscripts were tightly kept in a closed space, which then caused damage. This situation was made worse by physiological, mechanical and biological factors related to natural conditions and the environment of the manuscript storage. Humidity, insects or acidity of the storage space contributed to damaging the ancient manuscripts whose material is intricate. Once these manuscripts were damaged, it resulted in the loss of knowledge, discontinued narratives of particular cultural/religious groups wealth decrease in the nation’s history and traditions.

This study suggests that the prevalent damage of ancient manuscripts requires specialized treatment and management from relevant stakeholders, especially local government and manuscript owners and keepers. Fundings should be made available by the central government to hire competent and dedicated manuscript experts for training the manuscripts’ owners and keepers. Comparative studies should also be conducted to the countries which have succeeded in preserving their ancient manuscripts such as Turkey and other European countries. These studies need to include manuscript owners and keepers to hear their perspectives and perceived challenges in their manuscript preservation process.

The limitation of this study lies in the scope in which this study only focused on the extent to which manuscript damage has caused difficulty for historians and other scholars to gain knowledge from the manuscripts. Much of this knowledge, though produced in the past, is still very relevant for the present. For example, ancient manuscripts that explain the way in which people in the past dealt with disasters could help scientists in the present to mitigate biological disasters such as the current Covid-19 pandemic. Further studies need to be carried out regarding ancient manuscripts, not only regarding the preservation efforts, but also on the other aspects of the manuscripts, for instance, the types of ancient scripts and the types of illustration on and illumination in the manuscripts, as well as the type of binding to tie the manuscript sheets. All these details contain knowledge of local nature and culture. A manuscript is never written in a vacuum, rather reflects the variety of backgrounds, history and the environment of its authors and hence reflects our past.

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