

## ISLAMIC MANUSCRIPTS OF MERANAW MUSLIMS IN MINDANAO: AN INQUIRY OF THE RICHNESS OF THE INTELLECTUAL HERITAGE<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

*This inquiry on the Islamic manuscripts intends to illuminate the rich artistic and intellectual writing traditions of the Meranaw Muslims in the Philippines. These Meranaw manuscripts play an important role in guiding people's lives as a source of religious knowledge that reflects people's thoughts and aspirations. Moreover, these manuscripts are additionally an important source of knowledge in understanding people's culture, history, and relationships with other nations, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Brunei, and more. These manuscripts are handwritten in Arabic script called batang a Arab or in Jawi or kirim. Some of these manuscripts are the handwritten Qur'an, kisas (Islamic stories), prayer scrolls, medicinal manuscripts or mga bolongs, book of kakasi (book of charms), and the ilmo extreme unction and other Islamic manuscripts of importance to the Meranaw. There are also Islamic manuscripts that are written in stencil and printed like the Parokonan, the introductory guide to prayer, Alipalipan ( a book for beginners of the Arabic alphabet), Mawlid/ Barsindi (the devotional song about Prophet Muhammad (P.U.H)), Taabir Mimpi (the book of prophecy), qira'a, Sarf, and Tajwid. To the Meranaws, manuscripts are family belongings with great personal value. They are a family treasure handed down from generation to generation and strictly guarded with great care. Families cover the manuscripts with cloth or skin of an animal for protection and lock them in a chest so*

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<sup>1</sup>This paper is based on the research undertaken by the researcher in the different archival libraries that were mentioned earlier. It is also based on the paper that I presented in the 2019 Majlis Ilmu in Brunei Darussalam. It is supplemented by interviews with Ustadz, Imam, and other individuals knowledgeable in Islam. I would like to express my thanks and gratitude to the following: To the MSU system President Habib W.Macaayong, DPA, Vice-Chancellor for Research, Extension and Development, Dr. Cesar De la Seña, and Director of Research Dr. Fema M. Abamo for allowing me to attend this conference of Seminar Majelis Ilmu in which I got some valuable comments for the paper. To Dr. Eugene Torres, Assistant Dean of the College of Social Sciences, who patiently edited my paper. To Prof. Midori Kawashima, my project collaborator in studying Islamic manuscript. To the custodian of the different archival library. To the Ulama, Ustadj, and Imam whom I interviewed, especially to my uncle, Aleem Abdullah Abubacar, for explaining to me the meaning of some of the kitabs. To the conference organizers and convener for inviting me to present a paper, thanks to all of you. Allah bless us all. To the three professors of the Mindanao State University: Prof. Adam Acmad, Prof. Tirmizy Abdullah. and Prof. Shaha Dianalan Mustapha thank you for the peer review of this paper.

*that they will be accessed only by their family. This research paper presents the Islamic Manuscript of the Meranaw, describes its characteristics and contents to explain the tremendous value to the Meranaw Society, hence the richness of the archival libraries mentioned.*

**Keywords:** Islamic manuscript; Meranaw; Mindanao; intellectual heritage.

## INTRODUCTION

Meranaw refers to the people inhabiting the Lake Lanao area, in the island of Mindanao in the southern part of the Philippines. Meranaw, as the people are called, is also the name of the language that they speak. They are one of the largest among the thirteen Muslim ethno-linguistic groups in the country, with an estimated population of 1,142,000 (1.2% of the Philippine population). Historically, the Meranaw were the last major Philippine group to embrace Islam in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, and the most successful in resisting the Spaniards. They are Sunni Muslims, with evidence of minor Shiite and Sufi influence. There are also a considerable number of Shia in the Province of Lanao del sur and part of Lanao del Norte (Mackaughan, 1996).

The Meranaw have an important writing tradition indicated by the existence of numerous prized handwritten manuscripts found within the community. As other handwritten manuscript found in the history of human life, the Meranaw manuscripts are very unique. It is also understood that almost every manuscript carries a different sense of heritage within (Sintang et.al., 2020). The Meranaw manuscripts are also different from the manuscripts of other ethnic groups in the Philippines. These manuscripts refer to those materials written by hand in the Arabic, Malay, and Meranaw languages using Arabic-based script such as *batang a Arab* (Arabic Alphabet), *Jawi*, and *kirim* (system of writing of the Meranaw using the Arabic Alphabet because there are classical Meranaw that cannot be translated to Arabic). Lack of studies have been published on these collections of the manuscript. This paper intends to provide a close look into the collections of the manuscript in which intellectual heritage of Muslim Meranaw is being the focus of the analysis.

This article is based on a research project that describes the contents and characteristics of the Islamic Manuscripts of the Meranaw found in the archival materials of Guro Sa Masiu in Taraka, Lanao del Sur, the collection of Sheik Muhammad Said bin Imam sa Bayang at the Al-Imam As-Sadiq (A.S.) Library Barangay Biaba, Marawi City, the collection of Kamilol Islam Society,

Mapandi, Marawi City, and the Maisie Van Vactor Collection of Maranao Materials in the Arabic Script at the Gowing Memorial Research Center at Dansalan College in Marawi City. Hence, these archival materials enhance our understanding of Islamic civilization, reaffirming its richness.

### **MERANAW ISLAMIC MANUSCRIPTS**

The study of Islamic manuscripts is very important in the history of the people and society, including its relationship with neighboring countries (Mahrus et.al., 2020; Rahmi et.al., 2020). Meranaw manuscripts are precious gems and important cultural heritage of Mindanao people to be preserved for future generations. These manuscripts are an important source of knowledge in understanding their culture, history and their relationship with other countries such as Malay, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Brunei, and other Islamic countries. Manuscripts also guide the development of their lives as well as their communities both for the present and incoming generations. They are a treasure of the family that cannot be bought by money because they are works of their forefathers, which are irreplaceable.

Some of the most important Islamic manuscripts of the Meranaw which are covered in this study include the handwritten of the Quran, prayer scroll, *Ilmo* (manuscripts for extreme unction), *Bolong* (Medicinal Manuscript), book of *Kakasi* (the Book of Charms), *Mawlid (Barsindi)*, and *Taabir Mimpi* (Book of Prophecy). Those manuscripts carry religious and cultural insights of the people of the Meranaw Muslims in Mindanao. This study tries to explore intellectual heritage covered by those collections of Islamic manuscripts and each's detailed content where readers can understand the text and context of the collections in relation to the basis of community in which they are produced. This article also provides the detail of each manuscript to better understand the root of the intellectual claims contained within.

### **ISLAMIC MANUSCRIPTS AS THE SOURCE OF INTELECTUAL HERITAGE**

To understand the intellectual properties of a manuscript, looking closely to the formal objects being discussed within the thorough detail of the manuscript is the required first step (Patmawati & Wahida, 2018). And Manuscripts also carry important materials that become human heritages as they are originated from human cultures (Amin, 2014; Syarif, 2020). In the following session I intend to provide explanations for eight important manuscripts from the Meranaw Muslim collection in Mindanao.

## 1. Handwritten Qur'an.

The Qur'an is very much respected by the Meranaw because they believe that it is the word of Allah and believe in the *Barakah* of the Qur'an. According to Hadji Amer Guro sa Masiu<sup>2</sup>, large copies of printed Qur'an were brought to the people of Lanao in the past. There used to be four handwritten Qur'an in Lanao, one in each pengampong (Riwarung, 2012).<sup>3</sup> They are *Mokadam* for the Unayan Pengampong; *Maradika* for the Masiu Pengampong; *Dibolodan* for the Bayabao Pengampong; and *Kiraat* for the Baloi Pengampong.

One of these handwritten Qur'ans is owned by Guro sa Masiu in the municipality of Taraka, Lanao del Sur. This Qur'an was written by Maayod (Riwarung, 2012a)<sup>4</sup>, the second Guro sa Masiu. Maayod copied the text of the Qur'an from another Qur'an manuscript, written by *Abdul Carim Tuan Si sa Balabagan*. The scriptorium in copying the Qur'an was in *Wato-Lombayao*, because he was married to a lady from *Lombayao* while writing the manuscript. This handwritten manuscript is part of the cultural heritage of the descendants of Guro sa Masiu. Whoever gets enthroned with the title of *Guro sa Masiu*, will be entrusted as the new custodian of the manuscript set. The manuscript is estimated to be more than one hundred years old, based according to estimates from Muhammad Amer Guro sa Masiu, the Fifth Guro sa Masiu.

The Qur'an is 28.8 cm long and 18.7 cm wide. The number of pages is approximately 870 with 13 lines per page. Two types of paper are used - the first 710 pages are made from *karatas a probinsiya* (provincial paper) and the remainder is made from locally produced paper. The paper used has no watermarks. The Qur'an is bound by thread though some papers have fallen apart. There are illuminated pages that use black and red ink. Another handwritten Qur'an manuscript is the Qur'an of Bacong, Marantao, named *Dibolodan*. According to Tirmizy Abdullah (2012),<sup>5</sup> *Dibolodan* was the name given to the Qur'an by the community, which implies that it is recognized by the people in the area. Before the Marawi siege, the Qur'an is kept under the custody of the former *Bai a Labi sa Bacong, Faridah Tanggo Abdullah*. In the

<sup>2</sup> Guro sa Masiu, The fifth Guro sa Masiu, the custodian of Guro sa Masiu archival materials. He is 74 years old and an Arabic teacher in Taraka, Lanao del Sur.

<sup>3</sup> *Pengampong* is the social unit in the traditional ruling system in Lanao, consisting of four geographical areas, each of which is governed by four dynastic family. See Labi Riwarung (2012: 29).

<sup>4</sup> Maayod, the second Guro sa Masiu who scribed the Qur'an of Guro sa Masiu. See Labi Riwarung (2012a: 29).

<sup>5</sup> Tirmizy E. Abdullah. "*Dibolodan: The Qur'an of Bacong, Marantao*," in Midori Kawashima(ed). "*The Qur'an and Islamic Manuscripts of Mindanao*, Monograph Series No.10 (Tokyo: Institute of Asian Cultures, Sophia University, 2012), PP.27-28.

olden times, the Qur'an *Dibolodan* was used to settle disputes over land, both in *Bacong* and in other communities. Whichever of the conflicting parties swore in the Qur'an that their claim is true then, they assume the ownership of the land. However, if that person is lying, and he swore in the *Dibolodan* Qur'an, it is expected that person will receive the curse of the Qur'an. People believed in the *barakah* that the Qur'an possesses (Institute of Asian, African and Middle Eastern Studies, 2019).

The third handwritten Qur'an is the *Maradika*, the *Qur'an of Bayang*. The term *Maradika* is a Meranaw word meaning freedom. Midori Kawashima (2012)<sup>6</sup> undertakes research on this Qur'an. Based on her research, the Qur'an is written by Sayyidna, an Islamic Ulama in Lanao who studied in Mecca for seven years. Sayyidna was popularly known as *Hajj sa Binidayan*, a municipality in the province of Lanao del Sur. The Qur'an does not indicate the date it was written, but according to Alim Usman Imam (Kawasima, 2011a)<sup>7</sup>, it is between the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is also said to have been copied by Hajj Muhammad Sayyid, or Sayyidna, during his sojourn at Palembang on his journey home. The paper used in the Qur'an is European and in relatively good condition, though some parts are brittle. Kawashima (2012a) also mentioned that most of the pages are intact. The watermarks found on most of the pages, include fleur-de-lis, the inscription PRO PATRIA, and the words C & I HONIG ZOONEN (Riwarung, 2012).<sup>8</sup> The cover is made of same type of paper that is used for the main text. The illuminated pages use black and red ink. Gold powder is also used in some of the illuminations. The *Maradika* Qur'an was confiscated as a triumph trophy of the victory of the soldiers during the battle of Bayang, occurring May second and third 1902, when the people of Bayang and other Meranaw datus in the nearby municipalities in the Lanao del Sur province joined and fought the invading American forces headed by Col. Frank D. Baldwin. However, this Qur'an was returned to the Philippines and its photocopy is now preserved at the National Museum of the Philippines. Please refer to figure 3 for the picture of the Qur'an of Bayang. Aside from the aforementioned handwritten Qur'an there are also other Qur'an that have not been researched yet. Guro sa Masiu made mention of the

<sup>6</sup> Midori Kawashima, "*Maradika: The Qur'an of Bayang*," in Midori Kawashima (ed). "*The Qur'an and Islamic Manuscripts of Mindanao*, Monograph Series No.10 (Tokyo: Institute of Asian Cultures, Sophia University, 2012), PP.5-17.

<sup>7</sup> Alim Usman Imam. The informant in the Qur'an of Bayang. He is a direct descendant of Sayyidna. See Kawashima p. 6

<sup>8</sup> Labi Hadji Sarip Riwarung. "*The Qur'an and Prayer Scroll of Guro sa Masiu*," in Kawashima (ed). "*The Qur'an and Islamic Manuscripts of Mindanao*, Monograph Series No.10 (Tokyo: Institute of Asian Cultures, Sophia University, 2012), PP.29-31.

Qur'an named *Istanbul* which is under the custody of the family of Makalawan. The *Dunam*, *Stanbul*, *Makasiran*, and *Lokusamama*. Kawashima (2011) made mention of a printed Qur'an named "Ganassi" which Sayyidna presented to his wife *Bai sa Ganassi*. Aside from those aforementioned Qur'ans, there is also the Qur'an of Sheik Ahmad Basher, a famous *ulama* in the province of Lanao del Sur. He is a graduate of Madrasa Saulatiya in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. He led an Islamic reformist movement and founded the *Madrasah majlis al-shura* Islamic School, run by the council of the Agama Society. The school uses Arabic as the medium of instruction. It also uses the same curriculum and textbooks of Islamic schools in the Middle East. Manuscripts of Sheik Ahmad Basher are housed at the school named Jamiatu Muslim Mindanao, founded by Sheik Ahmed Basher.

## 2. Prayer Scroll.

This Islamic manuscript is in the archival materials of Guro sa Masiu Hadji Muhammad Amer in the Municipality of Taraka, Lanao del Sur. The scroll contains an elaborate illustration of a building, flagpole, parasol bird and seven layers of umbrella pole with a bird atop. It depicts the different layers of the places in paradise. The other side depicts the mythical serpent dragon (*monkar*), a creature associated with the Day of Judgment. This is rolled and placed in a bamboo tube, so that it is well preserved. Please, refer to figure 4.

## 3. Kissa or the Islamic Stories.

These Islamic stories are important to the Meranaws because the manuscripts can be an important source of knowledge in understanding their culture, Islamic history, and their relationship with the other parts of the World such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunie Darussalam and the Middle East (Fathurahman at.al., 2019). One very popular *kissa* among the Meranaws is the Baraperangan (Kawashima, 2012).<sup>9</sup> This is an Arabic story about the martyrdom of Amir Husain, the son of Fatima (peace be upon her), the daughter of Prophet Muhammad SAW, and Ali (R.A.). This Islamic story was translated into Meranaw by Ustadaj Abdulhalim Pengginagina Amboloto and Guro Alim sa Bayang. This is a printed manuscript, but I included it because the two *ulamas* copied them from the original context. *Baraperangan* means fighting in the path of Allah. This Manuscript enhances our understanding of Islamic thoughts, teaching the value of struggle in the path of Allah. It also teaches

<sup>9</sup> Kawashima, M. (2012). "*Baraperangan*: A Commentary with Excerpts, in Midori Kawashima(ed)A Catalogue of the Maisie van Vactor Collection of Maranao Materials in the Arabic Script at the Gowing Memorial research Center, Monograph Series No. 6. pp. 65-85.

the concept of social order. This refers to the rewards given to those who fight in the path of Allah. This motivates them to propagate the importance of defending the Muslim community against outside aggression.

Another popular *Kissa* of the Meranaw is *Ama I Sumpa* (Riwarung, 2012)<sup>10</sup>, or the father of beard (Abu Lihiya). This became popular among the Meranaw, the Maguindanaon, and the Tausug in the 1970s. The story was translated by Sheik Guro a Alam. He purchased the story from Mecca when he was assigned by the Philippines Pilgrimage Authority as a member of an advance party in order to make arrangement for the accommodation of Philippine pilgrims. While waiting for the Philippine pilgrims, he usually bought some stories in a store near *Masjid al-haram*, including this one. On their way home to the Philippines on a boat named Lydia, Guro a Alam narrated the *kissa* in three different language: Maguindanao, Meranaw and Tausog. Hence, the *kissa* become popular. The Kamilol Islam Society or the Ma'ahad Kamilul Islam, were publishing a series of *kissa* in Meranaw at that time. Their objective in publishing Islamic stories is to provide the Muslim masses with books that were easy to understand and entertaining. It also aims to instill Islamic values and in their readers' minds. Moreover, reading and listening to the *kissa* of *Ama I Sumpa* develops a good moral character in people, that would serve as model from which the Maranaw could learn. Another popular Islamic story is the *Samer*, popularized by Aleem Kunug Pumbaya. He translated the Islamic story of Joha to the Meranaw version called Samer.

There were around 33 titles and 220 volumes of these Islamic stories at the Gowing Memorial Research Center in Marawi City but many were destroyed during the Marawi siege. There are also other collections of *Kissa* owned by private individuals. All these Islamic stories teach moral lessons both to the leaders and the people. These also teach the value of education and patience.

#### **4. *Ilmo* or manuscripts for extreme unction.**

In the olden times, there were only few ulama or educated persons in Islamic Teachings. Thus, people were very eager to pay a visit when they heard the arrival of an ulama in a certain place. It is because Meranaw are very much concerned about life after death. This manuscript about dying is extremely private, and the owner takes extra care to ensure it is studied appropriately

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<sup>10</sup> Riwarung, L.H.S. (2012) "Ama I Sumpa: The background and Synopsis, in Midori Kawashima(ed). A Catalogue of the Maisie van Vactor Collection of Maranao Materials in the Arabic Script at the Gowing Memorial research Center, Monograph Series No. 6. pp. 53-64.

by those who interact with it. This is the one they would search for when an *ulama* or learned person in Islam has arrived from Mecca. The *ilmo* contains the text of the words they want to utter at the last breath of a person. When the *ulama* is asked to impart this *ilmo* to a certain individual, they must look for most auspicious day. This is usually done at night, when people, dogs, and cats alike are asleep. They will pull down mosquito net so that there will be no distraction. The *guro* can properly impart the knowledge to the learner.

**5. *Bolong* or Medicinal Manuscript.** According to the Meranaw, there are people who are possessed by an evil spirit and cannot be cured with medicines only. There are manuscripts that need to be recited to drive away evil spirits. An example is the manuscript that drive away rats so that rice fields will not be infected with rats. The practice as indicated by the manuscript is commonly found with the Meranaw.

#### **6. Book of *Kakasi* or the Book of Charms**

This refers to a manuscript of becoming charming and lovable to the people.

#### **7. *Mawlid* or *Barsindi*.**

There is handwritten *mawlid* manuscript copy and there are also some printed copy. This refers to the manuscript that guided the chanter of *dikir* during the birthdate of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). This is a literary form of the *kitab mawlid* or homage.

#### **8. *Taabir Mimpi* or Book of Prophecy**

This is a collection of knowledge regarding the interpretation of natural phenomena such as earthquakes, lunar eclipses, good days, bad days for travelling, good colors for certain occasions, names of animals assigned to the days of the week and each month in the traditional Meranaw calendar, names to be given to the newly born babies, prophecy on the meaning of dream, and others. The Meranaw use this manuscript when somebody is going to be married, building a house and enthronement ceremony. *Taabir Mimpi* is consulted for the best and lucky day. They always aim for the best, by the grace of Allah. This is owned by Hadji Muhammad Sarip. He reproduced it by stencil and printed it in mimeographing machine owned by Sheik Abdulgani, one of the Guro in Kamilol Islam Society. All the other manuscripts such as the *alipalipan*, *parokonan*, *Qira'a*, *sarf*, and *tajwid* are intended for the education



of the Meranaw.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MANUSCRIPT

Scholars agreed to the notion that manuscripts have their own characteristics including character of writing, pattern, model, tendency and art (Asna, 2019; Amin, 2014). In the olden times, Meranaw had no system of writing, and why the Meranaw epic called *Darangen* has not been transcribed. When Islam was introduced in Mindanao in the first quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Meranaw learned the Arabic script (Riwarung, 2017; Churchill and Borrinaga, 2017; Kawashima, 2011). The Meranaw have a style of writing called *kirim*, patterned after the Arabic alphabet or the *batang a arab*. They use the *Kirim* in writing Meranaw stories and cultural manuscripts. For the Islamic manuscript the system of writing is the *batang a arab*. The common characteristics of Islamic manuscripts are written in *Jawi* or *batang a arab*. The Meranaw manuscripts use the Meranaw language and the Islamic manuscripts use Arabic and Malay languages but translated into Meranaw language.

Important manuscripts are covered with yellow cloth (sometimes in layers or the skin of an animal), and kept in a *kaban* (chest) and locked. They cannot be accessed without the permission of the owner or his authorized person. To assure the owner that the contents of the manuscripts are kept confidential, the pages of the manuscripts are purposely disarranged to confuse the reader. Furthermore, the owner uses also a non-grammatical language which they call as *balig*. Thus, it cannot be understood without the guidance of the owner.

Some of the manuscripts, especially the Islamic stories originated from Saudi Arabia or in other Malay countries, are translated to Meranaw language so that it will be easily understood by the masses. This implies that Muslim countries are related to each other in terms of religion specially on Islamic Manuscripts. Every person wants to documents in good condition, enjoying a good life in this universe with a long life. That is why Islamic manuscripts are kept in excellent care by the owner (Riwarung, 2019).

### CONCLUSION

Based on the data presented, the Meranaw in Mindanao in the southern part of the Philippines have rich cultural and Islamic history that is reflected in their written Manuscripts. They are original manuscript, though some of them have not been translated yet (many of which were from Saudi Arabia and other Islamic countries). They are primary sources of information that reveal the history of a certain society. Hence, they are handed down from

generation to generation.

Islamic manuscripts mirror the past, and are important sources for the history of Mindanao and its relation to the other Islamic countries. The owner guarded them jealousy because they are the work of their ancestors which are irreplaceable. They value it very much because it marks the Islamic civilization of the people in Mindanao. This is shown in the archival materials of the mentioned libraries in the province of Lanao del sur and Marawi City. Islamic manuscripts of the Meranaw are rich because they cover all aspects of life from childhood up to the day of their last breath. I recommend that further studies on Islamic manuscripts should be undertaken.

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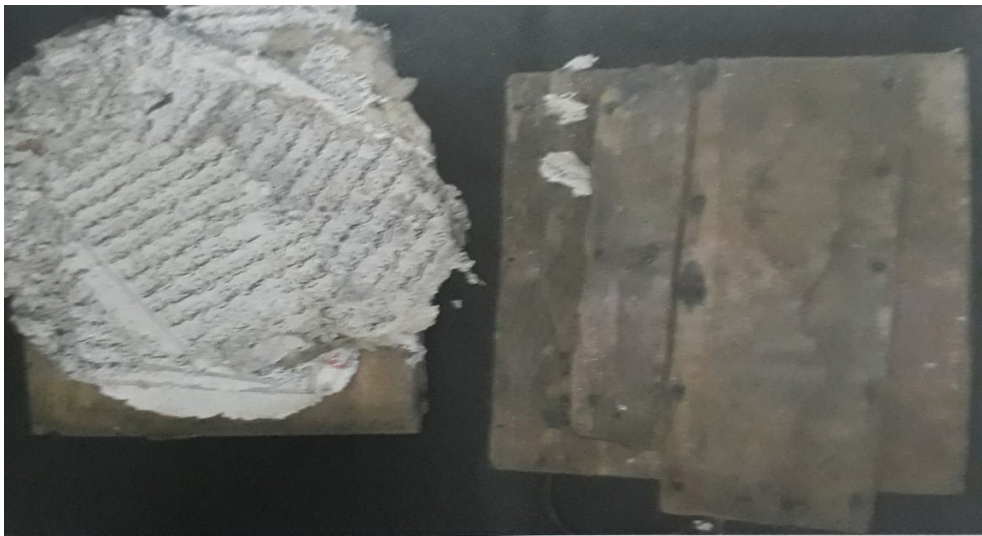
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**ATTACHMENTS OF PICTURES:**



**Picture 1** showing the Qurán of Guro sa Masiu of Taraka, Lanao del Sur and the other side is the Surah Al-Fatiha of the Qurán of Guro sa Masiu.



**Picture 2** showing the Qurán Dibolodan. Picture was taken from the article of Dr. Tirmizy Abdullah.



**Picture 3:** The Qurán of Bayang. The collection of the author taken at the National Museum of the Philippines during her trip to Manila, November 20, 2019.



**Picture 4:** Prayer scroll of Guro sa Masiu, copied from my article in Sophia Journal



**Picture 5:** Some other manuscript of Guro sa Masiu with the Bamboo tube were the manuscript were kept for them to preserved.