

THE INTEGRATION OF ARAB-MALAY PHILOLOGICAL STUDIES AND MODERN RHETORICAL THEORY IN STRENGTHENING NUSANTARA CULTURAL IDENTITY

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Abstrak. *This study aims to examine the integration of Arab-Malay philological studies and modern rhetorical theory in explaining the role of Malay-Islamic manuscripts as a medium for constructing the cultural identity of the Nusantara. Previous philological studies have primarily focused on textual criticism, transliteration, and manuscript reconstruction, while the rhetorical dimensions embedded in Arab-Malay manuscripts have received relatively limited scholarly attention. This research employs a qualitative approach through library research, combining philological analysis and rhetorical criticism. The primary sources consist of influential Arab-Malay manuscripts within the Malay-Islamic intellectual tradition, including Hikayat Amir Hamzah, Hikayat Nabi Bercukur, Syair Perahu, Taj al-Salatin, and Bustan al-Salatin. The analysis is conducted by identifying Aristotelian rhetorical elements—ethos, pathos, and logos—and interpreting cultural meanings through the perspectives of cultural hybridity and social habitus. The findings reveal that Arab-Malay manuscripts function not only as historical documents and literary heritage but also as rhetorical instruments that establish moral authority, reinforce Islamic values, and reproduce Malay-Islamic cultural identity. The interaction between Arab-Islamic traditions and local Malay culture has generated a distinctive form of cultural hybridity that enriches the character of Nusantara civilization. Furthermore, the rhetorical strategies embedded in these manuscripts contribute significantly to the formation of collective consciousness and social habitus within Malay society. This study proposes an interdisciplinary analytical framework that broadens the scope of philological inquiry and highlights the continuing relevance of Arab-Malay manuscripts in strengthening the cultural identity of the Nusantara amid contemporary globalization and cultural transformation.*

Kata Kunci: Arab-Malay philology; Aristotelian rhetoric; cultural identity; Malay-Islamic manuscripts; Nusantara culture.

I. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The Nusantara region, broadly referring to the interconnected maritime societies of present-day Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, southern Thailand, and neighboring areas, has long constituted an important site of cultural interaction in the Islamic world. Trade, migration, religious instruction, and scholarly networks connected the Malay world with Arabia, Persia, India, and other Muslim regions over several centuries. These interactions facilitated not only the dissemination of Islam but also the translation and adaptation of religious knowledge into local languages and cultural forms. The emergence of Arab-Malay literary traditions was one of the most significant outcomes of this process because manuscripts became media through which religious teachings, moral principles, political ideas, and social values circulated among Malay-speaking communities (Ricci, 2011).

The development of Arab-Malay literature was closely associated with the adoption of Arabic-derived writing systems, particularly Jawi or the Arab-Malay script. Through Jawi, Malay intellectual communities produced and transmitted texts concerning theology, Islamic law, Sufism, history, governance, medicine, poetry, education, and ethics. The use of Arabic script did not simply reproduce Arabic knowledge in an unchanged form. Translation, annotation, interlinear explanation, and vernacular commentary enabled local scholars and readers to interpret Arabic-Islamic concepts according to Malay linguistic and cultural conventions. Recent studies of interlinear translation in Sumatran manuscripts demonstrate that translation was also a pedagogical practice through which

knowledge was explained and internalized, rather than merely transferred from one language into another (Iankovskaia, 2024; Maftuhin, 2023; Ricci, 2023).

Works such as *Hikayat Amir Hamzah*, *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur*, *Syair Perahu*, *Taj al-Salatin*, and *Bustan al-Salatin* illustrate the intellectual diversity of the Malay-Islamic manuscript tradition. These texts address themes of heroism, spirituality, moral conduct, political authority, social responsibility, and ideal leadership. *Hikayat Amir Hamzah*, for example, presents an Islamic heroic narrative that was adapted and widely transmitted within the literary traditions of the archipelago. Its protagonist is portrayed not only as a courageous warrior but also as a defender of religious and moral principles (Istanti, 2001). In *Syair Perahu*, maritime imagery is used to communicate Sufi teachings concerning human existence, spiritual preparation, death, and the afterlife. The image of the boat transforms an abstract religious teaching into a symbol familiar to the maritime communities of the Malay world (Ahsin & Suryadilaga, 2020).

Philological scholarship has made an essential contribution to the study and preservation of these manuscripts. Philology commonly involves manuscript identification, cataloguing, transliteration, textual criticism, comparison of textual variants, reconstruction of transmission histories, and the preparation of critical editions. These procedures are necessary because manuscripts often survive in multiple copies containing linguistic, orthographic, or narrative variations. Material characteristics, provenance, collecting histories, and cataloguing practices must also be considered because manuscript collections are shaped by historical institutions and scholarly assumptions. Hijas (2022), for example, demonstrates that colonial manuscript collections cannot be understood as entirely neutral archives because their organization and interpretation were influenced by colonial collecting practices.

Despite the significance of conventional philological work, a predominantly textual or material approach does not fully explain how manuscripts influenced their readers and communities. Manuscripts were not merely written artefacts preserved in libraries. They were copied, recited, translated, taught, interpreted, and incorporated into educational and religious practices. Recent research has consequently begun to examine manuscripts as socially active sources of cultural memory, religious education, and communal values. Studies of manuscript traditions in Indonesia and Malaysia indicate that the meanings contained in classical texts may continue to be interpreted and enacted within contemporary social and religious life (Hady et al., 2025).

This development reflects a broader scholarly debate regarding the Islamization of Southeast Asia. Diffusion-oriented interpretations tend to describe Islamization as the movement of beliefs, vocabulary, and cultural forms from Middle Eastern centers toward Southeast Asian recipients. Such interpretations risk portraying Malay communities as passive recipients of an established external tradition. In contrast, translation- and vernacularization-oriented studies argue that Islamization involved multidirectional processes of selection, negotiation, reinterpretation, and cultural adaptation. From this perspective, Arab-Malay manuscripts are not simply evidence of Arabic cultural influence; they are products of creative interaction through which Malay communities reformulated Islamic teachings within local linguistic, literary, political, and symbolic systems (Maftuhin, 2023; Ricci, 2011, 2023).

A second difference in scholarly interpretation concerns the status of manuscripts themselves. Text-centered approaches generally treat manuscripts as historical and linguistic objects whose authenticity and transmission must be reconstructed. Cultural and sociological approaches, however, understand texts as practices through which meaning, authority, and social dispositions are produced. The second perspective does not reject philological analysis, but it argues that textual reconstruction should be followed by an examination of how a text communicates, persuades, and legitimizes particular values. An interdisciplinary approach is consequently required to connect manuscript form and content with their broader social effects.

Rhetorical analysis provides a relevant framework for examining these effects. Although rhetoric is frequently associated with public speeches, political discourse, and contemporary media, it also concerns the strategies through which written texts establish authority, influence judgment, evoke emotion, and organize reasoning. Aristotle identifies three principal modes of persuasion: *ethos*, which constructs the credibility and moral character of the speaker or textual voice; *pathos*, which influences the emotions of an audience; and *logos*, which develops reasoning and argumentation (Aristotle, 2007). Contemporary rhetorical criticism extends these concepts beyond oral speech and applies them to literary, religious, political, and cultural texts.

These rhetorical elements can be identified in Arab-Malay manuscripts. The representation of Amir Hamzah as courageous, pious, loyal, and morally disciplined constructs an authoritative model of Islamic leadership through *ethos*. Narratives of conflict, sacrifice, suffering, and victory generate *pathos* by encouraging admiration, sympathy, fear, and collective solidarity. The repeated association between legitimate leadership, religious devotion, justice, and moral conduct provides a form of *logos* through narrative reasoning. Similarly, *Syair Perahu* constructs spiritual authority through the voice of a religious guide, evokes awareness of mortality through emotional and eschatological imagery, and develops an analogical argument connecting the boat with the human body and the voyage with the journey toward the afterlife.

The study of these rhetorical processes is significant because manuscript narratives may contribute to the formation of cultural identity. Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity explains that identities emerge through encounters and negotiations among different cultural traditions rather than through the preservation of a completely pure or isolated culture (Bhabha, 1994). Bourdieu's concept of habitus further explains how repeatedly communicated social values may become internalized dispositions that guide perception and conduct (Bourdieu, 1990). When applied to Arab-Malay manuscripts, these perspectives make it possible to examine how Arab-Islamic concepts were adapted through Malay language and symbolism and how their moral teachings could become part of collective cultural dispositions.

The analysis conducted in this study indicates that Arab-Malay manuscripts functioned not only as historical documents and literary heritage but also as persuasive cultural instruments. Through rhetorical representations of religious authority, heroism, spirituality, morality, and ideal leadership, the manuscripts contributed to the transmission and internalization of Malay-Islamic values. Their interaction with local language, narrative forms, and maritime symbolism produced a hybrid cultural formation that was neither wholly imported nor exclusively indigenous. These findings demonstrate that integrating philological analysis with rhetorical and cultural theories provides a more comprehensive explanation of the contribution of Malay-Islamic manuscripts to the formation of cultural identity within the broader Nusantara world.

Problem of the Study

Existing research has established the historical, linguistic, literary, religious, and material significance of Arab-Malay manuscripts. Nevertheless, the relationship between their textual characteristics and their persuasive social functions remains insufficiently explained. Philological studies frequently reconstruct the text, identify its variants, or establish its historical provenance, but they do not always examine how narrative structure, characterization, metaphor, emotional appeal, and moral reasoning influence the acceptance of cultural and religious values.

Conversely, studies addressing the moral or religious content of classical Malay literature often identify values such as courage, piety, justice, wisdom, and spirituality without explaining the rhetorical mechanisms through which these values are communicated. Describing the values contained in a manuscript is analytically different from examining how the text constructs credibility, evokes emotional identification, organizes reasoning, and legitimizes particular models of conduct. This separation between textual reconstruction and rhetorical interpretation limits the understanding of manuscripts as active forms of cultural communication.

A further problem concerns the relationship between manuscripts and identity formation. Claims that Arab-Malay manuscripts shaped Nusantara identity require a clear explanation of how values expressed in texts were negotiated with local culture and subsequently internalized in social life. Without such an explanation, cultural identity risks being treated as a fixed characteristic rather than as the outcome of historical processes of translation, adaptation, persuasion, and social reproduction.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research problems:

1. How do selected Arab-Malay manuscripts construct religious, moral, and cultural meanings through their textual and narrative characteristics?
2. How are *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* employed to communicate and legitimize Islamic, ethical, and social values?
3. How do Arab-Islamic elements interact with Malay language, literary forms, and cultural symbols to produce a hybrid Malay-Islamic identity?

4. How can the rhetorical values contained in these manuscripts be interpreted as contributing to the formation and reproduction of social habitus?
5. How does an integrated philological and rhetorical approach clarify the contemporary relevance of Arab-Malay manuscripts to the strengthening of Nusantara cultural identity?

Research's State of the Art

Recent scholarship has considerably expanded the study of Malay and Indonesian Islamic manuscripts. One major direction concerns translation and vernacularization. Ricci (2011) explains the formation of an Arabic cosmopolis in South and Southeast Asia through the circulation, translation, and adaptation of Islamic texts across Arabic, Malay, Javanese, and Tamil literary cultures. This approach rejects a purely unilateral model of cultural transmission and instead emphasizes the productive role of local languages and literary communities in the development of Islamic knowledge.

More recent studies have examined specific translation practices. Ricci (2023) analyzes interlinear translations of the *Maulid Syaraf al-Anām* across the Indonesian-Malay world, showing how Arabic devotional texts were mediated through local languages. Maftuhin (2023) challenges the view that Qur'anic translation substantially ceased after the production of complete Malay translations. He argues that translation also occurred as an educational practice through glosses, oral explanation, and interlinear interpretation. Iankovskaia (2024) similarly demonstrates that interlinear translations in Sumatran manuscripts functioned within didactic settings and enabled readers to engage with Arabic texts through local linguistic support (Iankovskaia, 2024; Maftuhin, 2023; Ricci, 2023).

A second direction focuses on manuscript materiality, collection, and textual history. Hijjas (2022) reassesses William Marsden's Malay manuscript collection and demonstrates how colonial collecting practices shaped the representation and categorization of Malay literature. This study is important because it places philological evidence within the institutional and political history of manuscript preservation. It also shows that catalogues and collections are constructed historical products rather than transparent representations of the entire Malay textual tradition.

A third direction investigates the literary and religious meanings of individual works. Istanti (2001) traces the influence and transmission of *Hikayat Amir Hamzah* within Nusantara literature and classifies it as part of an Islamic heroic tradition. The study explains the literary circulation and ideological significance of the narrative but does not systematically examine its persuasive organization through *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. Ahsin and Suryadilaga (2020) examine the Sufi interpretation of hadith in *Syair Perahu* and demonstrate that poetry served as a medium for communicating religious teachings concerning faith, knowledge, good deeds, the afterlife, and divine unity. Their analysis emphasizes theological meaning and semiotic symbolism rather than the integrated relationship between textual history, rhetoric, and cultural identity.

A fourth direction treats manuscripts as living sources of cultural and social values. Hady et al. (2025) examine the transformation of manuscript heritage into living traditions associated with religious moderation in Indonesia and Malaysia. Their research demonstrates that manuscripts may retain social relevance when their values are interpreted and practiced by contemporary communities. Such findings move manuscript studies beyond preservation and textual editing toward questions of cultural continuity, social practice, and education.

These studies have substantially clarified manuscript transmission, translation, materiality, religious symbolism, and contemporary cultural use. However, they generally examine these dimensions separately. Translation studies emphasize linguistic mediation; traditional philology emphasizes textual authenticity and transmission; literary studies emphasize themes and symbolism; and cultural studies emphasize identity or social values. Few studies systematically connect the textual evidence established through philology with the persuasive strategies through which manuscripts construct authority, emotion, moral reasoning, and collective identification.

The current study is theoretically grounded in four complementary perspectives. Philology provides the basis for understanding textual form, transmission, vocabulary, narrative structure, and historical context. Aristotelian rhetoric identifies the persuasive operations of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. Bhabha's theory of hybridity explains cultural identity as the result of negotiation between Arab-Islamic and Malay traditions, while Bourdieu's concept of habitus explains how communicated values may become socially internalized dispositions (Aristotle, 2007; Bhabha, 1994; Bourdieu, 1990). This combination enables the study to move from identifying what the manuscripts contain to explaining how they communicate, persuade, and contribute to cultural reproduction.

Gap Study and Objective

The literature review identifies a theoretical and methodological gap. Existing research has not sufficiently integrated Arab-Malay philology with systematic rhetorical analysis to explain how textual features contribute to the formation of Malay-Islamic cultural identity. Although previous studies have established that manuscripts contain religious, moral, educational, and cultural values, the mechanisms through which these values acquire credibility, emotional force, and argumentative legitimacy have not been examined comprehensively.

A second gap concerns the limited connection between rhetorical analysis and cultural theory. The concepts of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* may identify persuasive strategies, but they do not independently explain how cultural identities emerge from encounters between different traditions or how textual values become socially embodied. Integrating rhetorical criticism with cultural hybridity and habitus therefore permits a more complete analysis of the movement from textual persuasion to cultural negotiation and social internalization.

A third gap concerns the contemporary significance of manuscript research. Digitization has increased the visibility and accessibility of classical manuscripts, but access alone does not guarantee meaningful cultural engagement. Texts may be digitally preserved while remaining unfamiliar to younger readers and disconnected from present-day education. Research must consequently interpret the communicative functions of manuscripts and demonstrate why their ethical, cultural, and intellectual content remains relevant to current discussions of cultural continuity and identity.

This study therefore aims to analyze the integration of Arab-Malay philology and contemporary rhetorical criticism grounded in Aristotelian theory in explaining the contribution of Malay-Islamic manuscripts to cultural identity formation. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. identify the textual, linguistic, narrative, and historical characteristics of selected Arab-Malay manuscripts;
2. analyze the construction of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* within the selected texts;
3. explain how Arab-Islamic concepts are adapted through Malay language, literary conventions, and cultural symbolism;
4. interpret the contribution of manuscript narratives to the formation and reproduction of Malay-Islamic habitus; and
5. establish the contemporary relevance of Arab-Malay manuscript heritage to the strengthening of cultural identity within the broader Nusantara formation.

The originality of the study lies in its integration of four analytical levels: textual reconstruction, rhetorical persuasion, cultural negotiation, and social internalization. Rather than treating manuscripts exclusively as historical artefacts or repositories of moral values, the study conceptualizes them as rhetorical-cultural practices. This approach explains not only the content of the manuscripts but also how their language, characters, symbols, emotions, and arguments could influence collective understandings of religion, morality, leadership, and cultural belonging.

II. METHOD

Type and Design

This study employed a qualitative research design based on library research, philological examination, and rhetorical-cultural analysis. The qualitative design was selected because the study sought to interpret the meanings, values, persuasive strategies, and cultural identity constructions contained in Arab-Malay manuscripts. The research did not measure numerical relationships or test statistical hypotheses; instead, it examined the relationship between textual features, rhetorical communication, cultural negotiation, and the social transmission of Malay-Islamic values.

The methodological design integrated four analytical perspectives. First, philological examination was used to identify the textual characteristics, linguistic features, transmission contexts, narrative structures, and cultural vocabulary of the selected works. Second, Aristotelian rhetorical analysis was applied to identify the persuasive functions of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* (Aristotle, 2007). Third, cultural hybridity was used to interpret the negotiation between Arab-Islamic elements and Malay linguistic, literary, and symbolic traditions (Bhabha, 1994). Fourth, the concept of habitus was employed to explain how the values conveyed through manuscripts could be internalized and reproduced as social dispositions within Malay-Islamic communities (Bourdieu, 1990).

The study focused on textual interpretation rather than the production of a new critical edition. When more than one version, transliteration, or published edition of a manuscript was available, textual differences relevant to meaning, characterization, symbolism, or rhetorical effect were recorded. Orthographic differences that did not affect interpretation were not treated as separate analytical findings.

No human participants, animals, personal records, or identifiable private data were involved. Consequently, formal ethical approval was not required. All primary and secondary materials consisted of publicly accessible manuscripts, published editions, catalogues, books, and academic publications.

Data and Data Sources

The research data consisted of textual passages, narrative episodes, stanzas, metaphors, character representations, moral statements, religious arguments, and cultural symbols obtained from selected Arab-Malay manuscripts. The unit of analysis was a meaningful textual segment, which could take the form of a clause, sentence, stanza, paragraph, dialogue, or narrative episode containing evidence relevant to philological, rhetorical, or cultural interpretation.

The primary data were drawn from five Malay-Islamic works selected through purposive criterion sampling. The selected corpus and its principal analytical focus are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Selected manuscript corpus and analytical focus

No.	Manuscript	Principal analytical focus
1	<i>Hikayat Amir Hamzah</i>	Heroic rhetoric, moral authority, and Islamic leadership
2	<i>Hikayat Nabi Bercukur</i>	Religious persuasion and spiritual legitimation
3	<i>Syair Perahu</i> by Hamzah Fansuri	Sufi rhetoric, maritime symbolism, and spiritual consciousness
4	<i>Taj al-Salatin</i> by Bukhari al-Jauhari	Political rhetoric, justice, and Islamic leadership
5	<i>Bustan al-Salatin</i> by Nuruddin al-Raniri	Moral instruction, social character, and political ethics

The manuscripts listed in Table 1 were selected according to the following criteria:

1. the work had a recognized position in the Malay-Islamic intellectual or literary tradition;
2. the text demonstrated interaction between Arab-Islamic concepts and Malay cultural forms;
3. a readable manuscript reproduction, transliteration, translation, or scholarly edition was available;
4. the text contained identifiable religious, moral, political, social, or spiritual persuasion; and
5. the work was relevant to the construction of Malay-Islamic identity within the broader Nusantara cultural formation.

Primary materials were obtained from publicly accessible digital manuscript collections, catalogues, published reproductions, and critical or scholarly editions. These included collections associated with the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia, digital Malay manuscript repositories, catalogues of Malay-world manuscripts, and editions prepared by philologists. Repository names, edition details, catalogue numbers, shelf marks, and digital links were recorded whenever they were available.

Secondary data consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, book chapters, proceedings, theses, dissertations, catalogues, and other academic documents concerning Arab-Malay philology, classical Malay literature, Aristotelian rhetoric, cultural hybridity, social habitus, Malay-Islamic identity, the Islamization of Southeast Asia, and cultural communication. Secondary sources were used to establish the historical context, theoretical framework, and interpretation of the primary texts.

Materials were excluded when they consisted only of untraceable quotations, undocumented online reproductions, paraphrases that could not be linked to a primary or scholarly source, or textual fragments lacking sufficient context for interpretation.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection was conducted through documentary research and systematic textual reading. The process comprised four stages.

First, the researchers identified potentially relevant manuscripts through catalogues, digital libraries, bibliographic databases, published editions, and previous philological studies. Each source was recorded according to its title, attributed author, repository or publisher, edition, date, script, language, physical or digital format, and available catalogue information.

Second, the selected versions were examined to verify their relevance and readability. Published transliterations and translations were compared with manuscript reproductions when both were accessible. The researchers also recorded whether the analyzed material was based on a manuscript image, diplomatic transliteration, normalized transliteration, translation, or critical edition.

Third, the researchers conducted repeated close readings to identify textual units related to religious authority, leadership, heroism, spirituality, justice, knowledge, morality, social conduct, and cultural identity. Passages containing metaphors, symbols, analogies, emotional appeals, exemplary characters, religious legitimization, causal arguments, moral consequences, and normative statements were extracted.

Fourth, the selected data were entered into a structured coding matrix. The matrix included the following fields:

- manuscript title;
- edition, repository, or source;
- page, folio, stanza, or passage location;
- original quotation or accurate paraphrase;
- narrative and historical context;
- relevant philological feature;
- rhetorical category;
- Arab-Islamic cultural element;
- Malay cultural adaptation;
- possible habitus implication; and
- analytical notes.

Duplicate passages and textual fragments that did not contribute to the research questions were removed from the working dataset.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through an iterative, interpretive, and cross-textual procedure. Analysis proceeded through five interrelated stages.

1. Philological Examination

The first stage examined the textual and historical characteristics of each work. The analysis covered:

- title and attributed authorship;
- manuscript or edition provenance;
- script and language;
- Arabic loanwords and Islamic terminology;
- narrative structure and literary genre;
- textual variation relevant to interpretation;
- historical, political, religious, and cultural background; and
- evidence of localization or adaptation within the Malay world.

This stage was used to establish the meaning and context of the textual data before rhetorical interpretation was conducted. Where several textual versions were available, differences that affected narrative meaning, religious terminology, characterization, symbolism, or persuasive force were noted.

2. Rhetorical Analysis

The second stage classified persuasive features according to the Aristotelian categories of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*.

Ethos referred to textual strategies that constructed moral, spiritual, political, or intellectual credibility. Indicators included religious legitimacy, exemplary conduct, genealogy, divine support, knowledge, piety, justice, courage, and representations of ideal leadership.

Pathos referred to textual strategies that evoked emotional responses. Indicators included fear, hope, admiration, sympathy, grief, spiritual longing, solidarity, shame, devotion, and awareness of death or divine

judgment. Metaphors, heroic conflict, suffering, sacrifice, eschatological imagery, and devotional expressions were also examined as emotional devices.

Logos referred to the organization of reasoning within the text. Indicators included causal relationships, analogies, moral consequences, religious explanations, exemplary comparison, advice, classification, and arguments connecting justice, piety, knowledge, leadership, and social order.

A passage could be assigned to more than one rhetorical category when it simultaneously constructed authority, evoked emotion, and presented moral reasoning. Categories were therefore treated as interrelated rather than mutually exclusive.

3. Cultural Hybridity Analysis

The third stage examined how Arab-Islamic concepts interacted with Malay language, literary genres, political conventions, social norms, and symbolic environments. The analysis focused on:

- the adaptation of Arabic religious vocabulary into Malay discourse;
- the localization of Islamic heroes and religious narratives;
- the use of Malay poetic and narrative forms;
- the integration of Islamic ethics with concepts of kingship and customary conduct;
- the use of maritime and local environmental imagery; and
- the negotiation between imported religious knowledge and local cultural experience.

Evidence of hybridity was identified when a textual element combined Arab-Islamic concepts with Malay forms in a way that produced a new or localized cultural meaning. Hybridity was not interpreted as the simple mixture of two fixed cultures but as a process of translation, selection, negotiation, and reinterpretation.

4. Habitus Analysis

The fourth stage examined how repeatedly communicated values could contribute to the formation of social dispositions. The analysis considered whether the manuscripts normalized or encouraged values such as piety, courage, justice, obedience, wisdom, spiritual discipline, consultation, social harmony, and respect for knowledge.

The interpretation of habitus was based on textual and historical evidence concerning the circulation, teaching, recitation, copying, or social use of the works. The presence of a value in a text was not automatically treated as proof that the value had been internalized by society. Claims regarding social reproduction were made only when supported by evidence from the textual pattern, manuscript transmission, educational use, previous scholarship, or documented cultural practice.

5. Cross-Textual Interpretation and Synthesis

The final stage compared findings across the five manuscripts. Similarities and differences were organized according to:

- dominant rhetorical strategy;
- type of authority constructed;
- emotional orientation;
- form of moral reasoning;
- pattern of Arab-Malay cultural negotiation;
- social values promoted; and
- contribution to Malay-Islamic identity formation.

The cross-textual comparison was used to determine whether the manuscripts shared common rhetorical-cultural patterns or represented different models of heroism, spirituality, political ethics, and moral education.

Analytical consistency was maintained through source triangulation, theoretical triangulation, and investigator review. Source triangulation involved comparing manuscript versions, transliterations, translations, critical editions, catalogues, and previous studies. Theoretical triangulation combined philology, rhetoric, cultural hybridity, and habitus. The coded passages and interpretations were reviewed by the research team, and differences in classification were resolved through discussion and re-examination of the relevant textual evidence.

Data and Materials Availability

The study used publicly accessible manuscript reproductions, catalogues, published editions, and academic literature. No confidential or restricted personal data were used. The complete bibliographic list of primary editions, available catalogue or shelf-mark information, extracted textual passages, and coding matrix should be included as

supplementary material when the manuscript is submitted. Any restrictions imposed by individual manuscript repositories must be stated together with the relevant repository access conditions.

No large dataset was deposited in a public database, and no accession number was required. No custom computer code or newly developed software was used in the analysis.

III. RESULTS

Philological Characteristics of the Selected Manuscripts

The philological examination identified three recurring characteristics across the five selected Arab-Malay works. First, the texts employ Malay as the principal language while incorporating Arabic vocabulary, particularly for concepts related to theology, spirituality, morality, law, knowledge, and governance. Terms associated with faith, piety, justice, wisdom, religious law, the afterlife, and spiritual truth were not merely lexical borrowings. They introduced conceptual categories derived from Islamic intellectual traditions into Malay literary discourse.

Second, Arab-Islamic narratives and teachings were adapted through established Malay literary forms. Heroic accounts were presented as *hikayat*, spiritual instruction was communicated through *syair*, and political and moral teachings were organized as advice for rulers and society. This adaptation made religious and ethical concepts intelligible through genres already familiar to Malay readers and listeners.

Third, the manuscripts demonstrated textual mobility rather than textual uniformity. The availability of different copies, recensions, scripts, and regional adaptations indicates that the works were repeatedly copied, interpreted, and adjusted. Such transmission allowed scribes and communities to preserve the central religious narratives while modifying vocabulary, emphasis, and cultural details according to local conditions. The manuscripts therefore functioned as dynamic textual traditions rather than fixed literary products.

The comparative analysis produced five dominant rhetorical configurations, as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Dominant rhetorical and cultural patterns in the selected manuscripts

Manuscript	Dominant <i>ethos</i>	Dominant <i>pathos</i>	Dominant <i>logos</i>	Cultural function
<i>Hikayat Amir Hamzah</i>	Pious and courageous Islamic hero	Admiration, solidarity, courage, and opposition to injustice	Victory is connected with and faith, moral discipline, and legitimate struggle	Construction of heroic and leadership ideals
<i>Hikayat Nabi Bercukur</i>	Prophetic authority and sacred exemplarity	Reverence, devotion, purity, and expectation of blessing	Religious practice is legitimized through association with the Prophet	Legitimation of religious-customary practices
<i>Syair Perahu</i>	Spiritual authority of the Sufi guide	Fear, hope, spiritual longing, and awareness of mortality	Human life is analogized as a temporary voyage toward the afterlife	Formation of reflective and spiritual consciousness
<i>Taj al-Salatin</i>	Knowledgeable, just, and morally disciplined ruler	Fear of tyranny, divine judgment, and social disorder	Justice and self-control produce legitimate and stable government	Political ethics and ideal Islamic leadership
<i>Bustan al-Salatin</i>	Religious scholarship and authority of historical exempla	Moral admiration, warning, fear, and respect for rulers	Historical narratives demonstrate the consequences of virtue and misconduct	Moral instruction and political-social education

Heroic Rhetoric in *Hikayat Amir Hamzah*

The rhetorical structure of *Hikayat Amir Hamzah* is centered on the construction of an ideal Islamic hero. The protagonist's credibility does not depend solely on military strength. His authority is established through courage, religious devotion, loyalty, perseverance, and trust in divine assistance. These attributes construct *ethos* by presenting Amir Hamzah as a morally legitimate leader whose actions are guided by religious principles.

The narrative produces *pathos* through descriptions of conflict, danger, sacrifice, suffering, and resistance to injustice. These episodes encourage readers to admire the protagonist and emotionally identify with the community he defends. Heroic action consequently acquires a collective religious meaning rather than functioning merely as individual adventure.

The text's *logos* is expressed through narrative causality. Legitimate victory is repeatedly associated with piety, patience, honesty, courage, and moral commitment, whereas defeat and disorder are associated with injustice, betrayal, or the misuse of power. The narrative thus communicates an implicit argument that physical strength without moral and religious discipline is insufficient for legitimate leadership.

Religious Legitimation in *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur*

The analysis of *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* identified prophetic exemplarity as its central rhetorical resource. The representation of the Prophet Muhammad establishes a strong sacred *ethos*. Practices connected with shaving, purification, prayer, blessing, and communal ceremony receive authority because they are narrated in relation to the Prophet.

The text generates *pathos* through reverence for the Prophet, emotional attachment to sacred history, and the expectation of spiritual blessing. The narrative transforms shaving from an ordinary physical act into a meaningful religious event associated with purity, devotion, and communal remembrance.

Its *logos* operates through exemplary reasoning. A practice is presented as meaningful and legitimate because it is linked narratively to prophetic conduct. This reasoning enables religious teaching to enter local custom without requiring an abstract theological explanation. The text consequently serves as a bridge between Islamic narratives and the ceremonial life of Malay communities. Previous studies similarly identify the manuscript's didactic function and its role in linking religious narratives with localized shaving traditions (Dewi et al., 2022).

Sufi Rhetoric in *Syair Perahu*

Syair Perahu employs an extended maritime metaphor to communicate spiritual teachings. The boat represents the human body or self, the sea represents worldly existence, the voyage represents the course of human life, and the final destination represents death and the afterlife. The use of familiar maritime imagery makes abstract Sufi and eschatological ideas accessible within the experiential world of Malay maritime society.

The speaker's *ethos* is constructed through the position of a spiritual guide who invites readers to recognize themselves, prepare for death, and orient their lives toward God. Authority is established through religious knowledge and reflective instruction rather than through political office or physical power.

The poem's *pathos* arises from images of waves, storms, uncertainty, limited time, death, and the final destination. These images evoke fear, hope, spiritual longing, and existential awareness. They encourage readers to evaluate the condition of their own spiritual preparation.

The *logos* of the poem is predominantly analogical. Just as a boat requires a sound structure, guidance, provisions, and control to reach its destination, human beings require knowledge, faith, moral action, and spiritual discipline to complete the journey of life. This finding supports previous research showing that the poem communicates teachings concerning faith, knowledge, charitable preparation, the afterlife, and divine unity through a network of maritime symbols (Ahsin & Suryadilaga, 2020).

Political Rhetoric in *Taj al-Salatin*

The analysis of *Taj al-Salatin* identified the ethical ruler as its principal rhetorical construction. Political authority is represented as a moral and religious responsibility rather than an unrestricted privilege. The ruler's *ethos* is established through knowledge, justice, wisdom, self-control, piety, and concern for the welfare of the population.

The text employs *pathos* by presenting tyranny, uncontrolled desire, death, divine judgment, and social disorder as warnings to rulers. Emotional appeals are directed toward fear of moral failure and responsibility before God. At the same time, representations of a just and prosperous society produce hope and admiration for ethical leadership.

Its *logos* is developed through normative and causal reasoning. Justice, knowledge, and moral restraint are presented as the foundations of legitimate and stable government, whereas ignorance, desire, and oppression lead to social decline. This interpretation is consistent with previous studies that identify leadership as a divine mandate and emphasize knowledge, morality, spiritual discipline, and justice as qualifications for rulers in *Taj al-Salatin* (Suhaimy et al., 2018).

Moral and Historical Rhetoric in *Bustan al-Salatin*

Bustan al-Salatin combines universal history, religious knowledge, political instruction, and exemplary accounts of rulers. Its *ethos* is constructed through the authority of Islamic scholarship, sacred sources, historical knowledge, and moral exempla. The use of Qur'anic material, hadith, accounts of prophets, caliphs, and rulers strengthens the credibility of its ethical and political instruction.

The text's *pathos* is produced through admiration for virtuous rulers and warnings concerning injustice, arrogance, moral corruption, and political failure. Historical narratives generate emotional responses by presenting the consequences of both commendable and reprehensible conduct.

The principal form of *logos* is exemplary-historical reasoning. Past events are not narrated only to record chronology; they are used to demonstrate that moral conduct has political and social consequences. Accounts of earlier rulers therefore function as evidence supporting broader arguments concerning justice, responsibility, governance, and social order. Research on the sources of *Bustan al-Salatin* confirms its extensive reliance on Qur'anic verses, hadith, Islamic history, and narratives of rulers as the basis of its historical and moral discourse (Hamzah et al., 2020).

Cultural Hybridity in Arab-Malay Manuscript Traditions

Cross-textual analysis showed that the interaction between Arab-Islamic and Malay elements did not take the form of complete cultural replacement. Islamic concepts were communicated through Malay language, Jawi writing, local literary genres, maritime imagery, customary ceremonies, and existing ideas of leadership. The resulting texts were neither direct reproductions of Arabic works nor expressions of an isolated indigenous tradition.

Three forms of cultural negotiation were identified. Linguistic negotiation occurred through the incorporation of Arabic religious vocabulary into Malay grammatical and narrative structures. Literary negotiation occurred when Islamic narratives and teachings were transformed into *hikayat*, *syair*, historical accounts, and advice literature. Social negotiation occurred when religious teachings were associated with customary practices, political institutions, communal ceremonies, and models of interpersonal conduct.

The manuscripts consequently formed a hybrid Malay-Islamic discourse. This hybridity retained recognizable Islamic concepts while expressing them through cultural forms accessible to Malay audiences. The texts demonstrate that cultural identity was constructed through translation, selection, adaptation, and reinterpretation rather than through passive acceptance of an external tradition.

Manuscripts and the Formation of Cultural Dispositions

The five manuscripts promote recurring dispositions involving piety, courage, justice, spiritual discipline, respect for knowledge, responsible leadership, and social harmony. *Hikayat Amir Hamzah* presents courage and religious loyalty as qualities of legitimate leadership. *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* connects prophetic devotion with ritual and communal practice. *Syair Perahu* encourages reflection, preparation, and spiritual self-discipline. *Taj al-Salatin* associates political legitimacy with justice and moral restraint, while *Bustan al-Salatin* uses historical examples to communicate the social consequences of ethical and unethical conduct.

These findings suggest that manuscripts offered symbolic frameworks through which readers and listeners could understand ideal conduct. However, textual evidence alone does not establish that these values were uniformly internalized by all Malay communities. The manuscripts should therefore be interpreted as cultural resources capable of supporting the formation of social dispositions, rather than as direct proof of actual behavioral change.

Discussions

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings support the working proposition that Arab-Malay manuscripts functioned as both textual artefacts and rhetorical-cultural practices. Philological features provided the linguistic and historical structures through which the works were transmitted, while rhetorical strategies helped transform religious and moral concepts into persuasive narratives. The integration of these approaches demonstrates that manuscript influence cannot be explained solely by identifying the values contained in a text. It is also necessary to examine how those values are authorized, emotionalized, reasoned, and culturally localized.

The analysis of *Hikayat Amir Hamzah* extends earlier descriptions of the work as an Islamic heroic narrative. Istanti (2001) identifies the text as part of a literary tradition centered on heroes who defend and disseminate Islam.

The present findings clarify the persuasive mechanism of that heroic representation: piety and courage create *ethos*, conflict and sacrifice generate *pathos*, and the relationship between virtue and victory establishes narrative *logos*.

The findings concerning *Syair Perahu* are consistent with Ahsin and Suryadilaga's (2020) identification of faith, knowledge, the afterlife, and divine unity as central religious contents. The present analysis adds that maritime symbols are not merely aesthetic signs. They organize a persuasive analogy that translates metaphysical teachings into a sequence of practical spiritual obligations. The boat metaphor simultaneously provides intelligibility, emotional intensity, and moral reasoning.

The analysis of *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* also demonstrates that rhetorical authority may operate through the relationship between sacred narrative and customary practice. The text legitimizes a local ceremony by placing it within a prophetic narrative. Nevertheless, the manuscript tradition does not produce a single, uncontested interpretation. Existing research records regional variation, reinterpretation, and even critical responses to elements considered incompatible with particular understandings of religious orthodoxy. This divergence indicates that localization is a negotiated process involving acceptance, modification, and rejection rather than an automatic synthesis.

The political texts reveal a different configuration of persuasion. *Taj al-Salatin* constructs political authority through the ethical self-discipline of the ruler, while *Bustan al-Salatin* combines sacred references and historical exempla to demonstrate the consequences of political conduct. The findings are consistent with research identifying Islamic leadership, morality, knowledge, and responsibility as central themes in *Taj al-Salatin* and with studies showing that *Bustan al-Salatin* derives substantial authority from Qur'anic, hadith, and historical sources.

These patterns also clarify the debate between diffusion-oriented and localization-oriented interpretations of Islamization. A diffusion model may explain the origin and circulation of Arabic vocabulary, religious narratives, and Islamic political concepts. It does not, however, fully explain why those elements acquired distinct Malay forms. The present findings support a localization perspective because Islamic concepts were transformed through Malay genres, maritime symbols, ritual practices, and political traditions. Arab-Malay manuscripts therefore record active cultural negotiation rather than one-directional cultural transfer.

The habitus interpretation requires greater caution. The recurrence of particular values across influential manuscripts indicates the availability of durable moral and cultural schemes. Yet Bourdieu's concept of habitus refers to embodied dispositions produced through sustained social practice, not simply ideas written in a text. Manuscripts could contribute to habitus when they were copied, recited, taught, performed, or incorporated into communal practices. Recent research showing that manuscript values continue to be interpreted within living religious traditions supports this possibility, but direct claims about social internalization require reception-based evidence beyond textual analysis (Hady et al., 2025).

Novelty and Contribution

Previous studies have generally examined Arab-Malay manuscripts through separate disciplinary perspectives. Philological research has emphasized textual history, variants, scripts, sources, and transmission. Literary and religious studies have concentrated on symbolism, theological meaning, moral values, or individual works. Studies of cultural identity have discussed localization and cultural continuity but have not always specified the textual mechanisms through which values become persuasive.

The present study contributes an integrated analytical model connecting four levels of interpretation. The philological level establishes the textual and historical form of the manuscript. The rhetorical level explains how the text constructs credibility, emotion, and reasoning. The hybridity level explains how Arab-Islamic elements are negotiated through Malay language and cultural forms. The habitus level considers how repeated values may become resources for social dispositions.

A second contribution is the comparative identification of different rhetorical modes across manuscript genres. Heroic, prophetic, Sufi, political, and historical texts do not employ identical persuasive strategies. *Hikayat Amir Hamzah* emphasizes exemplary heroism; *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* relies on prophetic legitimation; *Syair Perahu* uses spiritual analogy; *Taj al-Salatin* develops normative political reasoning; and *Bustan al-Salatin* employs sacred and historical exempla. This comparison demonstrates that Malay-Islamic identity was not constructed through a single narrative pattern.

A third contribution is the conceptualization of manuscripts as rhetorical-cultural practices. The manuscripts did not merely preserve pre-existing identity. Through language, symbolism, narrative authority, emotional appeals,

and ethical arguments, they participated in continuously defining what piety, leadership, spirituality, justice, and cultural belonging could mean within Malay-Islamic society.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the corpus was limited to five works and cannot represent the full linguistic, regional, religious, and literary diversity of the Nusantara manuscript tradition. The conclusions should therefore be understood as applying primarily to selected Malay-Islamic texts rather than to all cultural traditions of Nusantara.

Second, the study did not produce new critical editions or examine every extant manuscript witness. Its analysis depended on accessible reproductions, transliterations, translations, and published editions. Differences among copies may affect vocabulary, narrative structure, and rhetorical meaning. Future research should compare identified manuscript witnesses systematically and record folio-level textual variants.

Third, the rhetorical classification was interpretive and qualitative. The study did not calculate the frequency or distribution of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, nor did it test coding agreement statistically. Subsequent studies could develop a larger annotated digital corpus and combine qualitative interpretation with corpus linguistics, semantic analysis, or computer-assisted coding.

Fourth, the study inferred the potential contribution of manuscripts to cultural dispositions from textual and historical evidence. It did not directly examine reader reception, ritual performance, classroom use, oral transmission, or contemporary community interpretation. Future research should combine philology with ethnography, interviews, reception studies, and observation of living manuscript traditions.

Fifth, the concept of cultural hybridity may obscure unequal power relations when it is used only to emphasize harmonious synthesis. Future studies should examine conflict, exclusion, religious contestation, scribal intervention, and resistance alongside adaptation. Comparative research could also investigate Arab-Malay manuscripts in relation to Persian, Indian, Turkish, Javanese, Bugis, Acehnese, and other manuscript traditions.

Implications and Suggestions

Theoretically, the findings indicate that philology can be expanded without abandoning its textual rigor. Rhetorical and cultural analysis should follow, rather than replace, careful identification of editions, variants, provenance, language, and historical context. This sequence allows researchers to connect textual form with cultural function while avoiding interpretations detached from manuscript evidence.

Methodologically, manuscript studies should document the exact edition, repository, shelf mark, folio or page number, transcription method, and textual variant used in every quotation. Digital projects should provide manuscript images together with diplomatic transcription, normalized text, translation, metadata, and analytical annotations. Such documentation would improve reproducibility and facilitate comparative research.

Educational institutions may use selected manuscript passages to teach literary analysis, cultural history, ethical reflection, and religious literacy. However, manuscripts should not be reduced to lists of character values. Teaching materials should explain the historical context, textual variation, rhetorical strategy, and cultural negotiation contained in the works.

Libraries, archives, museums, universities, and cultural communities should develop collaborative programs for manuscript preservation and public interpretation. Priority should be given to digitizing vulnerable collections, improving catalogue metadata, training researchers in Jawi literacy, and producing reliable bilingual editions for broader audiences.

The principal conclusion is that Arab-Malay manuscripts contributed to Malay-Islamic cultural identity through diverse persuasive mechanisms. Their significance lies not only in the preservation of historical knowledge but also in their capacity to construct moral authority, evoke collective and spiritual emotion, organize ethical reasoning, and translate Islamic concepts into locally meaningful cultural forms. The integration of philology, rhetoric, hybridity, and habitus therefore provides a more precise account of how manuscripts could participate in the formation and continued interpretation of cultural identity in the Nusantara world.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Arab-Malay manuscripts should be understood not only as historical and literary artefacts but also as rhetorical-cultural media through which religious authority, moral values, political ideals, and collective identity were communicated and negotiated. The analysis of *Hikayat Amir Hamzah*, *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur*, *Syair Perahu*, *Taj al-Salatin*, and *Bustan al-Salatin* shows that each text employed a distinct configuration of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* to construct heroic leadership, prophetic legitimacy, spiritual awareness, political justice, and moral responsibility. These persuasive strategies were strengthened by the adaptation of Arab-Islamic concepts into Malay language, Jawi writing, local literary genres, maritime symbolism, customary practices, and established models of kingship. The findings therefore support the study's initial proposition that Malay-Islamic cultural identity emerged through processes of translation, localization, persuasion, and cultural negotiation rather than through the passive reception of an external tradition. The principal contribution of this research lies in integrating philological examination, Aristotelian rhetoric, cultural hybridity, and habitus into a single analytical framework that connects textual form with persuasive function, cultural adaptation, and the potential reproduction of social dispositions. This interdisciplinary approach improves existing manuscript studies by explaining not only what values are contained in classical texts, but also how those values acquire credibility, emotional force, and cultural legitimacy. Nevertheless, the influence of manuscripts on actual social behavior cannot be established through textual analysis alone. Future research should therefore compare additional manuscript witnesses, examine regional textual variations, develop annotated digital corpora, and combine philology with reception studies, ethnography, oral-history research, and analyses of contemporary educational and ritual practices. Such development would strengthen the empirical basis for understanding how Arab-Malay manuscript heritage continues to contribute to cultural memory, ethical reflection, and the interpretation of Malay-Islamic identity within the broader Nusantara world.

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