MALAY MANUSCRIPT CATALOGUING IN MALAYSIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Cataloguing of information materials is quintessentially one of the primary functions of libraries. It facilitates bibliographic control and provides information and access for users to the resources stored therein. Although modern practice of classification and cataloguing is based on certain international standards and formats, the same could not be said about manuscripts. In fact, in the case of the Malay manuscript in particular, its cataloguing is mostly based on the institutional policies and practices of the libraries which do not usually conform to the standards used in the cataloguing of other materials. This does not only create disparity in terms of the breadth and depth of the information provided, but can also confound users and researchers alike. Therefore, this paper aims to discuss this issue in further details. Specifically, it focuses on analysing some of the issues and challenges in cataloguing Malay manuscript in Malaysia as exemplified by the official published catalogues of Malay manuscripts by the National Library of Malaysia. Selected examples and cases are analysed and appraised based on the policies of the library as well as current international practices on the matter. Finally, suggestions and recommendations on improving the current state of the Malay manuscript catalogue and its practice are also provided for further reflection and consideration.

Keywords: Malay, manuscript, cataloguing, issues, National Library of Malaysia.
INTRODUCTION

One of the main functions of library is to effectively provide information and services to its users. In other words, it should be able to source, organize, store, maintain and make available information in its various packages and formats including print and non-printed materials, multimedia and digital files, electronic databases and others to meet the needs of its designated users. In this regard, catalogue serves an important tool that aids users to find the items they want in a library or collection.

Nonetheless, in order for a catalogue to be effective, it should not only contain description of the materials housed by a particular library, but also information on its location and accessibility to the users. This means that in order to facilitate retrieval, information needs to be properly organized and managed (Taylor, 2006). In current practice of library and information management, cataloguing is generally based on international standards such as the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules 2002 (AACR2), Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), the impending Resource Description and Access (RDA) and others and is usually stored electronically through the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) to provide a quick, flexible and reliable means of information search and retrieval.

Regarding manuscript cataloguing, it is pertinent to note that AACR2 also contains specific rules on cataloguing manuscripts and manuscript collections (Chapter 4), yet in reality, these are rarely adhered to by libraries. On the contrary, Malay manuscript cataloguing is usually based on the institutional policies and practices of the libraries which do not conform to the standards used in the cataloguing of other library materials. This does not only create disparity in terms of the breadth and depth of the information provided, but can also confound users and researchers alike. For instance, descriptive cataloguing of Malay manuscript can be a mere list of titles, authors and physical sizes arranged according to its accession numbers as opposed to the more detailed description stipulated by the international cataloguing standards and codes.

Even so, the so-called accession numbers are also varied and unique as given by the respective libraries based on their own needs and methods. For instance, both the National Library of Malaysia (PNM) and the Institute of Language and Literature of Malaysia or DBP (Kamariah & Wan Salhah: 2006) employ the symbol ‘MS’ or ‘MSS’, which is the abbreviation for the word manuscript(s), to denote the notation code or call number for the Malay manuscripts in their respective collections such as MS 1, MS 2 and so on. Whereas, the Islamic Art Museum Malaysia (Iamm: 2010) designates the call number of its manuscripts based on the museum’s acronym followed by year of manuscript acquisition and sequence numbering such as IAMM 1998.1.10, IAMM 1998.1.11 and so forth. As far as is known, notation systems used in other library materials
such as the Library of Congress Classification (LCC) and Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) have never been implemented in cataloguing Malay manuscript.

In a similar manner, subject heading classification is not always provided in a manuscript catalogue. Yet, when given, subjects are not usually based on standards such as LCSH but are freely adopted based on the content of the manuscripts. The main reason for this is due to the fact that the existing codes and standards in classification and subject headings are not suitable to be fully adopted in the case of Malay manuscripts (Raja Masittah, 1993). As a result, discrepancies and inconsistencies in the details of information provided in the catalogues of various repositories of Malay manuscripts are bound to occur and become parts of the challenges facing the users.

On top of that, even the more extensive of the Malay manuscript catalogues might also contain inconsistencies and misattributions in defining the title of a work and/or its authorship. Perhaps, the absence of a ‘proper’ modern book format in the extant Malay manuscripts in terms of a cover page, table of content, page numbering, indexes and ISBN registration partly contributes to this problem as the inexperienced cataloguers struggle to locate the necessary bibliographic information from the soiled and torn folios of the manuscript and make sense of its relation to other works. More importantly, insufficient and inaccurate information provided by such catalogues fails to highlight the importance of a particular manuscript and its rightful status, thus diminishing its visibility and expediency to potential users.

In this regard, it is pertinent to note that issues surrounding the access to Malay manuscript and its cataloguing have also been raised by a number of researchers in the field. Johns (2005) for instance, lamented on the inadequacy in the cataloguing code and practice of Malay manuscripts as well as its representativeness in museums and libraries. Similarly, Ding (2003) has also highlighted some of the problems afflicting various Malay manuscript catalogues such as mistakes and misattributions in the titles and authors of some works as well as the impact of employing non-standardized classification system in the organization and control of the Malay manuscript collection.

In his survey of the Malay manuscript collections in various parts of the world, Mahayudin (2000) too has stressed on the deficiencies of the existing catalogues and the need for constant revision and correction. In a related study conducted earlier, Salimah and Adibah (1999) endeavoured to share their experiences and challenges in cataloguing Malay manuscript written in the Jawi script at the National Library of Malaysia. From these studies, it can be affirmed that there are issues with current practice of Malay manuscript cataloguing, and that some of these have been highlighted albeit generally and somewhat unsatisfactorily without the proper course of action.
Therefore, this paper aims to address this important issue and discuss it in further details. Specifically, it focuses on analysing some of the issues and challenges in cataloguing Malay manuscript in Malaysia as exemplified by the official published catalogues of Malay manuscript by the National Library of Malaysia. Selected examples and cases are analysed and appraised based on the policies of the library as well as current international practices on the matter. Finally, suggestions and recommendations on improving the current state of the Malay manuscript catalogue and its practice are also provided for further reflection and consideration.

MALAY MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION AT THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MALAYSIA

The National Library of Malaysia is a Federal Government Department under the Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia. It was officially established by the National Library Act (Act 80) passed on 1st September 1972 and functions primarily to make available for the use of present and future generations a national collection of library resources; to facilitate nation-wide access to library resources available within the country and abroad; and to provide leadership matters pertaining to libraries. In the same Act, the term ‘library resources’ is defined to mean ‘any form of written, printed or graphic matter on or in which information is written, recorded, stored, displayed or reproduced, including manuscripts, typescripts, books, newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, maps, microforms, music sheets, photographs, cinematograph films, phono-records, video and audio recordings on paper, film or other materials and reproductions thereof’.

Thus, it is clear that from its inception, PNM has been given the role as the national repository of cultural and literary outputs of the nation in various forms including manuscripts, published books and others. Nonetheless, it was only during a meeting on Malay Manuscript held on 10th October 1983 that saw its official status as the National Centre for Malay Manuscript (PMMe) affirmed by the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports. In fact, this provision is already incorporated within the National Library Act 1972 which explicitly states on the need to establish within the Library ‘the National Centre for Malay Manuscripts for the acquisition, documentation and use of Malay manuscripts’.

Consequently, two years later i.e. 10th July 1985, PMMe as an official department was finally established under PNM. It functions mainly to trace, locate and procure Malay manuscript in its various forms both locally and abroad; to document, manage and publish a union catalogue of Malay manuscript and its bibliographies; to ensure proper facilities for storing, and preservation of Malay manuscript; and to provide services relating to research and studies on Malay manuscript (PNM, 1986; 2002). It also works closely with other departments in PNM, especially the Conservation Division, in repairing and preserving damaged manuscripts. Proper storage of manuscripts is ensured by following international standards and practices on the matter.
It is also pertinent to note here that the term ‘Malay manuscripts’ was previously defined by PNM (2012) as ‘written works, especially those written in Jawi and were produced as early as the late 15th century or around the 16th century and as late as the early 20th century’. However, this definition poses quite a problem for the librarians as well as researchers due to the discovery of Malay manuscripts earlier than the 15th century as well as manuscripts written with local scripts in Malay other than Jawi that fall beyond the scope of the given definition. Thus, in its recent revision, a new definition of Malay manuscripts is proposed to include ‘all kinds of hand written materials in any of the Malay languages using the Jawi script concerning the Malays and their civilization that are at least a hundred years old’ (PNM, 2014).

In one aspect, the revised definition has successfully resolved the problem of dating by limiting the minimum age of a document to be at least a hundred years old thus making it more flexible to incorporate any new discoveries. Yet, in another aspect, Jawi script is the only officially recognized medium of writing in Malay manuscripts. The reason for this might be due to the fact that the overwhelming majority of extant Malay manuscripts are written in Jawi, yet there also exist a small number of manuscripts copied and/or translated by the Europeans during the manuscript age and written in Romanized Malay. An example of this is Babat Sekandar; a Malay translation of Serat Sekandar in Javanese copied at Surabaya in 1814. Thus, by delimiting the definition to only the Jawi script, other Malay texts written in other scripts are at risk of being excluded from the job scope and attention of PMMe.

Nonetheless, it is found that in practice, PMMe endeavours to locate and procure all manuscripts related to the Malays and found in Malaysia, and this has led it to also hold a total of 106 copies of Arabic manuscripts and 46 copies of the Quran (Siti Fathimah, 2014). Despite the use of Arabic as the medium of writing, these manuscripts form an integral part of the Malay thought and culture and were used alongside the texts written in Jawi, and towards certain extent reflect the cultural and intellectual borrowings of the Malays from the heartlands of Islam especially in matters relating to the religious sciences.

Proactive tracing and procurement strategies employed by PMMe throughout the years of its establishment have made it the largest repository of Malay manuscripts in Malaysia. Until 2008, the total number of Malay manuscripts at PMMe is 3,406 copies (Siti Fathimah, 2014). In 2015, it has grown to a total of about 4,557 copies (PNM, 2015). It is pertinent to note that most of the procurements by the library are in the forms of original manuscripts with a lesser number of reproductions of manuscripts held by other libraries in microfilm, microfiche and others.

To ensure proper management of its manuscript collection and provide accessibility to users, PMMe has also undertaken the responsibility to record and publish catalogues of Malay manuscripts. In principle, documentation of manuscripts is based on an unpublished working paper
on the *Documentation of Malay Manuscript* (PNM, 1987a). The outcome of the manuscript recording and description process is published in a series of catalogues and incorporated into the library’s OPAC system alongside other materials. As far as is known, PNM is the only library in the country that has successfully integrated the summary of its whole Malay manuscript collection and description in OPAC. Until 2015, PNM has published a total of 27 printed catalogues of Malay manuscripts. These can be further divided into six main categories as follows:

1. **Handlists of Malay Manuscripts**
   A handlist is a concise catalogue of manuscript consisting only minimal information of a work such as its call number, title, physical size and status whether complete or incomplete. Sometimes, it also contains additional information such authorship and date of completion. Each entry is presented as concise as possible and functions primarily to inform user on the existence of a particular manuscript in a collection. Altogether, PNM has published five series of handlists as follows:

   These catalogues document the collection of Malay manuscripts at PNM starting from MS 3 until MSS 2245. As has been alluded before, the call number of the manuscripts at the library is based on sequential numbering, and this has its own advantage in providing information on the total size of the collection based on the catalogues alone.

2. **Descriptive Catalogues of Malay Manuscripts**
   A descriptive catalogue is a substantially detailed documentation of a manuscript in its various aspects including call number, title, authorship, scribe, physical size and date of completion, provenance, structure, and type of writing material, script, illumination, illustration, binding, content and others. It aims to present a more detailed description of a manuscript so as to enable the users to distinguish its distinctive characteristics and compare it with other manuscripts in the collection. To date, a series of nine descriptive catalogues have been published as a continuation to the previously published handlists. Thus, the first of the series published in 2000 starts at MSS 2247 and ends at MSS 4557 in the last of the series. The details of the catalogues are as follows:


g) *Katalog Manuskrip Melayu Koleksi Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia, Tambahan Keenam* (2011)


3. Catalogues of Malay Manuscripts in Microform

Prior to the digital age, microfilm and microfiche were the most common formats used to make copies of manuscripts. At PMMe, a number of manuscripts in microform were also procured. These are mostly copies of manuscripts held in institutions and repositories abroad such as the British Library, Bibliotheque Nationale de Paris, KITLV Library, Universiteit Bibliotheek Leiden and others. The information presented in the catalogues a very concise in nature consisting only the microform identification number, title of manuscript, its original call number and library of origin. Users are advised to consult the catalogues published by the libraries of origin for a more detailed description of the manuscripts. A total of three microform catalogues are published as follows:

a) *Katalog Manuskrip Melayu Mikrofom* (1989)


4. Catalogues of Malay Manuscripts Held Abroad

Among the main functions of PMMe are to locate, document and procure Malay manuscripts both locally and abroad as alluded before. However, in cases where it is not possible to procure such manuscripts, efforts are made to document them for reference and comparison. Thus far, a total of six catalogues have been published for the Malay manuscript collections in the Netherlands, France, West Germany, United States of America, South Africa and Singapore. The methods used in cataloguing the manuscripts in these catalogues varied considerably from one cataloguer to another. Some catalogues are very concise while others are more elaborate and descriptive in nature. The details of the catalogues are as follows:
5. Union Catalogue of Malay Manuscript
Another important function of PMMe is to publish a union catalogue of Malay manuscript and its bibliographies. A union catalogue is extremely useful not only as a form of bibliographic control, but also as an important tool for research and studies. However, only one such catalogue is published thus far, which is *Katalog Induk Manuskrip Melayu di Malaysia* (1993). It contains information on 2,153 manuscripts held by 12 institutions in Malaysia, both public and private until 1991. The manuscripts are arranged according to its respective institutions and are documented concisely resembling a handlist.

6. Exhibition Catalogues
In addition, PMMe has also published exhibition catalogues of selected manuscripts based on certain themes. These catalogues are generally published with illustrations and colourful images that accompany descriptions of the manuscripts and aim to attract the attention of the readers and entice them to learn more of the exhibited texts. Despite this, these catalogues are also useful for researchers for the extra information and detailed description contained therein which might not be available in the original catalogues. Only a total of three exhibition catalogues are published until 2015 which are as follows:
   a) *Manuskrip Melayu Kegemilangan Tamadun Melayu: Katalog Pameran* (1990)
   b) *Katalog Pameran Manuskrip Melayu Antarabangsa* (1995)

**ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN MALAY MANUSCRIPT CATALOGUING**

From the preceding discussion, it can be seen that PMMe, as a public entity and official repository of Malay manuscripts for the country, has undertaken serious responsibilities in collecting, managing and facilitating access of the manuscripts to users and is fast emerging as amongst the important Malay manuscript repositories both nationally and internationally. Specifically, in terms of manuscript documentation, it has also successfully published numerous volumes of manuscript catalogues based on the library’s guidelines on the matter.
More importantly, PNM (1987a) has also established a guidelines for Malay manuscript documentation through a working paper prepared on 2\textsuperscript{nd} July 1987 as briefly mentioned before. Yet, before discussing some of the issues, challenges and areas of concern in the present catalogues, it is very important to analyse the details of the guidelines and compare it with other international practices on the matter. This will not only provide a more comprehensive insight on the mechanics of manuscript documentation at PMMe, but also its sustainability for present and future use.

The absence of suitable standards such as ISBD (International Standard Bibliographic Description) and others for manuscript description and cataloguing as stated at the beginning of this paper has resulted in the emergence of various cataloguing rules and guidelines for manuscript documentation developed by respective libraries that house manuscript collections. In the early years of the establishment of PMMe, a question was raised on the best method to document a manuscript. There were three choices; a handlist, descriptive catalogue or proper research catalogue (catalogue raisonné). A handlist can be prepared in short period of time but lacks the depth and breadth of manuscript description. A research catalogue on the other hand is ideal yet time consuming and difficult to prepare. Thus, a descriptive catalogue, which is not too brief nor too lengthy, is thought to be sufficient and suitable to disseminate basic information about Malay manuscript in the library.

In principle, there are ten sections of information that needs to be presented in order to prepare a research catalogue. These are as follows:

1. Identification
This section provides introductory remarks on a manuscript in terms of its location, identification and holding as follows:
   a) Name of institution or repository that holds the manuscript.
   b) Identification or call number of the manuscript.
   c) Title of the manuscript. This can be obtained internally (within the text) or externally (through the use of secondary sources). If unavailable, the cataloguer should suggest a suitable title and place it in square brackets. Arabic titles need to be transliterated accordingly.
   d) Name of author and/or copyist.
   e) Language of the manuscript if other than Malay.
   f) Place of composition.
   g) Date of manuscript. Hijri date should be converted to Gregorian calendar.
2. Structure of manuscript
This section details the physical aspect of a manuscript in the following aspects:
   a) Number of folios. Should also mention lacunae in text. Information on foliation should also be stated.
   b) Size of the manuscript in cm. including the size of its writing material.
   c) Writing materials such as parchment, paper, tree bark and others. If written on paper, should mention its origin (European or Eastern), type (laid/wove), chain lines, thickness, colour and physical condition. Watermarks should also be recorded and verified using relevant literatures.
   d) Collation of manuscript and number of quires.
   e) Catchwords and its location in the text.
   f) Rulings used in the text including text block and its size. Mention also the methods used in ruling and number of column.

3. Script
The style of script used in the manuscript and description of the expertise of the scribe. Also should describe the ink used and its colour, rubrication, vocalization, correction marks and whether the manuscript is copied by more than one hand.

4. Decoration
Description of decoration and illumination (if any) in the manuscript, its motifs and colours.

5. Illustration
Description of illustration (if any) in the manuscript, its colour and quality (whether professional or ordinary).

6. Binding
Status of the manuscript whether bound or unbound. State the materials used in binding, its colour and decoration.

7. History
Copy the colophon of the manuscript in verbatim. State also ownership statements, seals and other information of historical value to the manuscript.

8. Content
Reproduce the incipit and explicit of the manuscript. Prepare also a summary of the manuscript content and its proper subject heading.
9. Bibliography
References used in documenting the manuscript including catalogues of its holding in other collections, its studies and published editions. Reproductions of the manuscript in microfilm and other forms should also be mentioned.

10. Reference
Date of manuscript documentation, name of the cataloguer and relevant files for internal record and reference.

In addition, the guidelines is also appended with a sample of four manuscripts described in details befitting proper research catalogue entries. It is interesting here to note that upon comparison with current international practices on the matter, the guidelines developed by PNM is on a par with those proposed by the FIHRIST Open Archives Initiative for manuscript description (2016), Gacek (2009) and Deroche (2006) in terms of the depth and breadth of information presented. The only main difference amongst them is in terms of categorization of the information to be described. FIHRIST summarises it into four main categories, i.e. common data, content and history of the manuscript, physical description and information on location and cataloguer, while Gacek particularises it into 14 categories as follows: preliminary data, composition, copy/transcript, writing surface, text block, script, ink, painted decoration/illustration, bookbinding, transmission of the text, history of the manuscript, other observations, state of preservation and references. Deroche, on the other hand, aptly condenses it into three categories only; bibliographic, historical and physical details of a manuscript.

Regardless, based upon analysis of the published catalogues, there are several issues and areas of concern regarding the Malay manuscript documentation practice at PMMe, which can be summarised as follows:

- Consistency in complying with the guidelines in manuscript cataloguing
To date, PNM has yet to produce a single research catalogue. As afore-discussed, only series of handlists and descriptive catalogues have been published so far. In this regard, it is unfortunate that the guidelines discussed here does not delineate the standards to prepare a handlist and descriptive catalogue. Yet, the official form [PNM.PK.(0).PMM.01(B3)] used for Malay manuscript cataloguing at the library enumerates most of the sections of information presented above with the exception of some details such as language of the manuscript, catchwords, rulings, vocalization and correction marks, reproduction of incipit and explicit, subject identification and bibliography (Siti Fathimah, 2014). Nonetheless, in practice, inconsistency is bound to occur from one published catalogue to another reflecting the changes in adapting the guidelines by the cataloguers.
To illustrate this in further details, the first handlist published by PNM (1987b) lists ten sections of information for the description of a manuscript, i.e. reference number, title, author/copyist, place of copy, date of manuscript, total number of folios, number of lines per folio, size of the manuscript, completeness of the text and form of the manuscript (whether original or in microform). Yet, in the subsequent editions of the series, the last section (form of manuscript) was omitted. Perhaps this is due to the fact that most of the holdings at PNM are original manuscripts and not its reproductions. Interestingly though, information on the number of lines per folio is also included in all editions except the last of the series (PNM, 1999) where it was omitted. The term folio used in manuscript description was also sometimes changed to page (*halaman*), which is usually used in describing books and other printed materials without any apparent reason. An example of a standard entry in the handlist (PNM, 1987b: 27) is as follows:

**MS 310**

*Sullam al-Mubtadi fi ma‘rifah tariq al-muhtadi*

 وسلم المبتدي في معرفة طريق المهتدي

[Karya asal disusun oleh Daud bin Abdullah Patani pada hari Isnin, 13 Rejab 1252 A.H. (1836 A.D.) di Mekah].

[35] ff. ; 25 b. ; 24x17 cm.

Tidak lengkap.

The information presented for each manuscript generally covers the criteria of description mentioned before except in cases where the manuscripts are incomplete (such as fragments) or relatively unidentified due to the anonymity of the text and its author such as MSS 1981 (PNM, 1999: 10):

**MSS 1981**

*[Azimat. Kitab tib]*

[268] hlm. ; 10.2x8.5 cm.

Tidak lengkap.

However, there is also an instance where the description of a manuscript (MSS 1621) is limited to its call number, number of folios, size and status of completeness only without any attempt to suggest its title, authorship and content (PNM, 1997: 10). With this much of information, it is almost impossible for the reader to guess the title or subject of the manuscript without having to look at the manuscript and read it by himself.

In fact, these are amongst the main challenges facing the cataloguers and also researchers of Malay manuscript as it is extremely difficult to check and verify information regarding Malay authors and works produced during the manuscript age due to the relative absence of authoritative and
comprehensive bio-bibliographical sources on the matter. On the contrary, Islamic works written in Arabic for instance, are much easier to be identified and verified due to the abundance of such works composed by Muslims and other scholars (Khalifah, 2007).

Similarly, the descriptive catalogues of PNM are also found to be inconsistent in the description of the manuscripts. In general, 13 main sections of information as contained in the cataloguing form discussed above are adhered to. An exception to this can be seen in the section on the history of the manuscript, where it is no longer included in the catalogues published from 2006 until 2015. An example of a standard entry in the descriptive catalogue (PNM, 2000: 95) is as follows:

**MSS 2382**  
*Aghmad al-sa’il*  
Disusun oleh Abdul Rauf bin Ali al-Jawi al-Fansuri.  
Kolofon:  
... تمت الرسالة المسمى بأغمض السايل... عبد الرؤف بن علي الجاوي الفنصوري...  
Kandungan: Sebuah kitab yang membincangkan mengenai ilmu tauhid.  
Tidak lengkap.

More surprisingly though, the 2008 edition of the catalogue (PNM, 2008), seems to revert to the brief method of description resembling a handlist. Only seven sections of information are selected to be presented with important details on colophon, history, content, ink, script and binding omitted. Even so, information on authorship of known works for some entries is also missing and this clearly defies the cataloguing scheme stated at the outset of the catalogue. For instance, MSS 3575 (PNM, 2008: 31) is briefly catalogued as follows:

**MSS 3575**  
*Hujjat al-balighah*  
[44] ff. ; 22.4x17 cm. ; 17 baris. Kertas laid Eropah. Tera air: 3 bulan sabit sederet dengan saiznya mengecil.  
Lengkap.

In another aspect, the series of handlists published by PNM strived to reproduce the exact titles of the manuscripts in the original *Jawi* script and spelling. Similarly, the titles of religious works, which are usually composed in Arabic, are also presented in the original spelling using the Arabic script as can be seen from the afore-mentioned description of MS 310. Certainly, this practice is
laudable as the reader can verify the exact title in the original script especially in cases of mistakes and doubts on the part of the cataloguer. Nonetheless, it is unfortunate to find that the descriptive catalogues discontinued this practice and only present the titles of works in Romanized Malay.

As the manuscripts are catalogued and arranged consecutively according to its date of procurement, the presence of an index at the end of the catalogue is very helpful for the reader to quickly find the information needed. In this regard, PNM has also appended a set of indexes in every catalogue it published notwithstanding some variations. For instance, some handlists have three sets of indexes for titles, names (author/copyist) and places, yet some have only two sets of indexes while omitting a specific index for places. In the descriptive catalogues, three different sets of indexes are prepared for titles, names and watermarks and included throughout the series consistently. The only issue to be raised here is the absence of a specific index for subjects, though it might be difficult to be prepared considering the diverse nature of some manuscripts that contain more than one subject.

Finally, the guidelines on manuscript description by PNM dictates that transliteration of titles of works in Romanized script should be made according to the predetermined rules. It is very important to ensure correct pronunciation and meaning of the Arabic words used in the manuscripts especially in catalogues where the titles are not reproduced in their original script. However, it is found that while most handlists comply with this, recent volumes of descriptive catalogues tend to dispense with the rules of Arabic transliteration altogether. This can possibly lead to confusion and misattributions in determining the accurate titles of works as will be discussed below. In a similar manner, errors in transcribing colophons can also affect one’s understanding of the texts especially in cases where other information is unknown.

- Inaccuracies and misattributions in manuscript description

Generally, the Malay manuscripts at PNM are described in the published catalogues with emphasis on accuracy and precision of the information presented. This is particularly the case with the most basic and important identifiers of a work, i.e. its title and author. Nonetheless, there are also some instances of misattributions and inaccuracies which might cause confusion and mistakes for the inexperienced users in the field of Malay manuscript studies who attempt to search for a particular manuscript in the catalogues.

Regarding inaccuracies and misattributions in presenting the title of a work, it is pertinent to note that contrary to subject identification which can be estimated by the cataloguer, the title of a work is fixed as given by its author. Thus, changing a work’s title will also inadvertently imply a change in its identity to a different work by a different author. Examples are as follows:

1. The work entitled *Durrat al-nadhirah tanbihan li durrat al-fakhirah* is also written as *Durrat al-nakhirah* (MSS 2026 & MSS 2172), *Darrat al-nadirah* (MSS 2144A), *Duratun
Nazhirah (MSS 3447A), Durr al-Nazirah (MSS 4528), and is only correctly transcribed in MSS 2983D.

2. The title for MS 764 is given as Nazam nur la nama in Romanized Malay. This is clearly a misattribution from its real title of Nazam Nur al-Anam which might be caused by the cataloguer’s unfamiliarity with the style of script and also Arabic language. The correct title is transcribed in another copy held by the library (MSS 2730).

3. In the case of MS 186, the title transcribed in the Jawi script is totally illegible and unintelligible. MSS 3451 is also simply entitled as Kitab itikam which is unintelligible.

4. MSS 4222 is given the title of Tadhkir al-qobi while in fact it should be Tadhkir al-ghabi. Similarly, MSS 4102F mentions Zabit as a title while in fact it is Zubad.

5. The title for MSS 4197B is given as Tahrir al-ma’ani ‘ala al-jazari. However, this contradicts the title mentioned in the colophon transcribed in the same entry which states it as Tajwid al-Quran.

6. MSS 4483A is entitled as Safith al-hakam fi taqlith al-khosam while in actual fact it should be Safinah al-hukkam fi takhlis al-khassam; a well-known work in jurisprudence by Jalal al-Din al-Tarusani.

7. A Rejang calendar in MS 291 is simply catalogued as Petua (Farouk, 2015).

8. A work by Abdul Rauf al-Fansuri entitled Munyat al-i’tiqad (MS 1314L) is written as Munibat al-i’tiqad in MSS 1530G and Manbat al-i’tiqad in MSS 2457 (Salmah & M.Syukri, 2007).

9. MS 538 is given the title of Hadis Nabi. However, it is actually part of a work in jurisprudence beginning with the chapter on hunting and slaughter (kitab al-sayd wa al-zaba’ih).

Inaccuracy in naming the author of a work rarely occurs in the published catalogues of PNM. Perhaps, an example of this can be seen in the case of Wan Zainal Abidin bin Wan Muhammad al-Fatani or Tuan Minal who is simply named as Zainal Abidin in MS 112, while in MSS 167 written as Tuan Mina Patani. Readers without prior knowledge of the personage might regard the names mentioned in the two manuscripts as referring to two different people and not one as mentioned before.
In a related manner, inaccuracies can also happen in describing the content of certain manuscripts. For instance, MSS 2998 (*Tuhfat al-ikhwan fi fadl al-rajab wa sya’ban wa ramadan*) is described as a work dealing with the levels of one’s faith. However, as can be seen from its title, the work actually deals with the encouragement and virtues of performing virtuous deeds in the months of Rajab, Sha’ban and Ramadan.

Perhaps, the biggest challenge that awaits anyone entrusted to catalogue and describe Malay manuscripts lies in the fact that the person must not only be intellectually equipped with various academic disciplines, but also mentally prepared for the impending difficulties and complications. A fresh graduate in the field of library and information science will likely struggle to comply with the requirements in manuscript cataloguing without proper knowledge in the fields of codicology, Jawi palaeography and towards certain extent intellectual and cultural history of the Malays. Although mastery in reading Jawi script is a must, so is knowledge of Arabic and other regional languages which have had its impact on the Malay manuscripts, whether directly or indirectly. At the same time, the cataloguer also has to meet the pre-set deadlines and publish the catalogues within the stipulated time in addition to performing other tasks and responsibilities as a librarian.

**SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Having said that, it is thus pertinent to recapitulate here that the main purpose of this paper is to discuss and analyse some of the issues and challenges in cataloguing Malay manuscripts as exemplified by the published catalogues of PNM. In other words, it is not the aim of this paper to depreciate the efforts of PNM nor demean its contributions by discussing some of the inconsistencies and misattributions found in its catalogues. On the contrary, the critique presented here is solely based on years of experience as an active user of the catalogues. Therefore, it is only appropriate to propose some practical suggestions to further improve the practice of Malay manuscript cataloguing at PNM as the main outcome of this discussion, which are as follows:

- PNM through PMMe should strive to produce proper research catalogue for the Malay manuscripts in its collection. This will not only diminish the issues of inconsistencies and misattributions in the current catalogues, but also provide a comprehensive and accurate description of manuscripts that incorporates codicological as well philological and other kinds of studies conducted on the texts based on its various copies held at PNM and others. In other words, a good manuscript catalogue functions not only to inform user of its existence in a collection, but also represents a genuine research tool (Deroche, 2006: 356). In fact, this also conforms to the suggestion stated in the guidelines on the Malay manuscript documentation (PNM, 1987a: 7) that emphasised on the needs to produce a detailed manuscript catalogue alongside the concise handlists and descriptive catalogues for the benefits of the users.
In the same manner, efforts should be made to update the existing union catalogue of Malay manuscripts after a lapse of more than twenty years since its first publication. Recent developments and procurements of Malay manuscripts by local libraries entail a revision of the existing record to reflect current reality. Perhaps, this can be undertaken through PNM’s own digital library system (PERDANA) project or other similar platforms.

PNM should also endeavour to develop in-house expertise in the field of Malay manuscripts amongst its staff. Potential staff should be groomed and provided with opportunities to further their studies at the Master and Doctorate levels in manuscript studies (codicology, palaeography and philology). Perhaps, in this regard, it is also appropriate to revise the existing scheme of such librarians from managerial-based to research-based librarians as implemented in other important manuscript libraries such as the British Library, Universiteit Bibliotheek Leiden and others.

At the same time, smart partnership and active collaboration with local researchers through research projects, academic attachments and others in various aspects of manuscript studies and its management (including description and cataloguing) should also be fostered. Both PNM and local academics will greatly benefit from such cooperation and experience in advancing and disseminating Malay manuscript and its studies.

REFERENCES


