



PRESERVING HERITAGE: AN ANALYSIS OF MARRIAGE LITERATURE AND ADAT IN BONE

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines traditional marriage literature in Bone, focusing on its role in preserving cultural heritage, guiding ritual practices, and maintaining social norms. Using an ethnographic approach, the research analyzed lontara manuscripts, oral narratives, and field observations to uncover the symbolic meanings, procedural guidelines, and societal functions embedded in local marriage customs. Data were collected through document analysis, semi-structured interviews with community elders, and participant observation of marriage ceremonies. Findings indicate that marriage literature in Bone functions as a codified guide for ritual conduct, social hierarchy, and intergenerational value transmission, reflecting both historical continuity and adaptive cultural practices. The study highlights the significance of traditional literature as a medium for preserving adat values and sustaining community identity.



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INTRODUCTION

Marriage constitutes one of the most significant social institutions within Bugis society in Bone Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Beyond its legal and religious dimensions, marriage represents a complex cultural system that embodies collective values, kinship structures, social obligations, and community identity. For generations, the people of Bone have maintained elaborate marriage customs regulated through adat (customary law), which provides normative guidelines governing interpersonal relationships, family alliances, and social cohesion. These traditions are deeply rooted in historical experiences and cultural philosophies preserved through written records, particularly lontara manuscripts, and transmitted orally by elders and cultural practitioners. Consequently, marriage in Bone is not merely an individual or familial event but a social institution that reflects the worldview and cultural identity of the Bugis community (Kartodirdjo, 2006).

The literature of marriage adat occupies a central position in the preservation and transmission of these cultural values. Traditional manuscripts and oral narratives contain detailed descriptions of ceremonial stages, symbolic meanings, social roles, and ethical principles that regulate marital relationships and communal participation. These texts function as cultural archives, documenting procedures for engagement, dowry negotiations, wedding ceremonies, and post-marital obligations. In addition, they encode philosophical concepts such as siri' (honour), pesse (solidarity), and mutual respect, which constitute fundamental principles within Bugis society. Through these literary traditions, communities

preserve not only practical instructions but also moral values and collective memories that reinforce social harmony and continuity.

Historically, the development of marriage customs in Bone has been influenced by the interaction between indigenous traditions, Islamic teachings, and socio-political transformations. The Bugis kingdoms, including the Kingdom of Bone, developed sophisticated systems of governance and customary regulations, many of which were recorded in lontara manuscripts. These texts served as repositories of historical knowledge and social norms that guided everyday life and ceremonial practices. According to Pelras (1996), Bugis society possesses one of the richest literary traditions in Indonesia, characterized by extensive written documentation and strong oral transmission mechanisms. Marriage literature therefore represents an important component of Bugis intellectual heritage and reflects the dynamic interaction between tradition and social adaptation over centuries.

Despite its significance, contemporary social changes pose serious challenges to the continuity and practical application of marriage literature and adat traditions. Processes of modernization, urbanization, globalization, and technological development have transformed social relations and patterns of cultural transmission. Younger generations increasingly experience reduced interaction with traditional ceremonies and possess limited knowledge of the meanings embedded within customary practices. Furthermore, many lontara manuscripts remain poorly documented, inaccessible, or vulnerable to physical deterioration, raising concerns regarding the preservation of valuable cultural resources. The growing influence of modern lifestyles and standardized wedding practices has also contributed to the simplification or modification of traditional rituals, potentially weakening the transmission of indigenous knowledge and symbolic values.

These circumstances have generated increasing scholarly interest in the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. UNESCO (2023) emphasizes that traditions, rituals, oral expressions, and customary practices constitute essential elements of cultural diversity and social sustainability. Intangible cultural heritage contributes to community resilience by fostering a sense of identity, continuity, and belonging. Within this framework, marriage literature in Bone represents not only a historical record but also a living cultural resource that continues to shape social interactions and community values. Therefore, documenting and analyzing these traditions is essential for safeguarding cultural heritage while contributing to broader discussions regarding cultural preservation and national identity.

Previous studies concerning Bugis culture have largely focused on historical narratives, political institutions, kinship systems, and symbolic values. Scholars such as Pelras (1996) and Mattulada (1985) have examined the philosophical foundations of Bugis society, including concepts of honour, leadership, and social organization. However, relatively limited attention has been devoted to the specific role of marriage literature as a mechanism for preserving cultural values and regulating ceremonial practices. Existing studies often emphasize textual analysis or anthropological observations separately, without integrating written traditions with contemporary social practices. Consequently, there remains a need for a more comprehensive understanding of how marriage literature functions simultaneously as a prescriptive framework and a living cultural institution within contemporary society.

To address this gap, the present study adopts an ethnographic approach that enables an in-depth exploration of the relationship between texts, rituals, and social life. Ethnography provides a holistic framework for understanding culture through direct engagement with communities and the interpretation of symbolic practices. According to Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011), ethnographic research seeks to capture the meanings individuals assign to their actions and the social contexts in which these actions occur. In the context of marriage customs in Bone, ethnography facilitates the examination of both written traditions and lived experiences, thereby revealing how cultural meanings are interpreted, negotiated, and transmitted across generations.

This study focuses on three interrelated dimensions. First, it seeks to identify and analyze the structure, content, and symbolic meanings embedded within marriage literature. Particular attention is given to the philosophical concepts and ethical values represented in lontara manuscripts and oral narratives. Second, the study examines the role of adat texts in guiding ceremonial practices and maintaining social norms. Marriage literature is viewed as a regulatory framework that shapes expectations concerning family responsibilities, kinship relations, and communal participation. Third, the research investigates the cultural significance of marriage literature and explores strategies for preserving these traditions in the context of contemporary social transformation.

The research employs multiple methods of data collection to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Document analysis focuses on lontara manuscripts and other written sources related to marriage customs. Semi-structured interviews with cultural experts, community elders, traditional leaders, and practitioners provide valuable insights into interpretative traditions, ceremonial practices, and mechanisms of knowledge transmission. Participant observation during marriage ceremonies enables the researcher to contextualize textual prescriptions within actual social interactions and identify processes of continuity, adaptation, and innovation. Through these methods, the study captures both the normative dimensions and practical realities of customary traditions.

Methodologically, the research emphasizes triangulation and reflexivity to enhance credibility and interpretive depth. The integration of textual evidence, oral testimonies, and observational data allows for a nuanced understanding of marriage literature as a multidimensional cultural phenomenon. Rather than treating manuscripts as static historical artifacts, this approach recognizes them as dynamic sources of meaning that continue to influence contemporary social life. Such a perspective highlights the interconnectedness between written traditions and everyday practices, revealing the ways in which communities actively negotiate cultural continuity amid changing social circumstances.

In conclusion, marriage literature and adat traditions constitute vital components of Bone's cultural heritage and social identity. These traditions preserve historical memory, reinforce ethical values, and sustain social cohesion through ceremonial practices and intergenerational transmission. However, contemporary challenges associated with modernization and cultural transformation necessitate systematic efforts to document, preserve, and revitalize these cultural resources. Ethnographic investigation provides an effective means of understanding the living dimensions of marriage literature and its continuing relevance within society. Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader discourse on intangible cultural heritage preservation and underscores the importance of safeguarding indigenous knowledge systems as foundations for cultural sustainability and community resilience.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic approach to investigate marriage literature in Bone Regency, focusing on both textual sources and community practices. Ethnography was selected as the methodology because it enables a holistic understanding of the interplay between written literature, oral tradition, and lived ceremonial practice, allowing the researcher to capture both prescriptive norms and community interpretations (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011).

Location and Participants, the research was conducted in Bone Regency, a region with rich traditional arts and longstanding marriage adat practices. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals with expert knowledge of local marriage customs, including: Elders recognized as custodians of lontara manuscripts, Cultural practitioners actively involved in marriage ceremonies, Youth who participate in contemporary ritual practices

A total of 15–20 informants participated, providing both historical insight and observations of current practices. Data Collection Data were collected through three complementary methods: Document Analysis: Primary sources consisted of lontara manuscripts and other written records detailing marriage procedures, rituals, and social norms. The analysis focused on content, structure, symbolic meaning, and prescriptive instructions. Semi-Structured Interviews: Interviews with elders and cultural practitioners explored interpretation of texts, ritual execution, social significance, and transmission of knowledge. Questions encouraged participants to reflect on changes in practice and the relevance of literature in contemporary contexts.

Participant Observation: The researcher observed actual marriage ceremonies in selected communities to understand how textual instructions are applied, adapted, or interpreted during rituals. Notes were taken on ceremonial sequence, participant roles, symbolic actions, and deviations from written instructions. Data Analysis Qualitative content analysis was used to examine manuscripts, coding for ritual components, symbolic meanings, and normative rules. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts identified patterns related to cultural values, interpretive practices, and perceptions of heritage. Observational data were triangulated with textual and interview data to validate findings and provide contextual interpretation (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2019).

Ethical Considerations, Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Data were anonymized to protect identities, particularly in sensitive cultural or family matters. Respect for local adat protocols was maintained during observation and participation in ceremonies. Methodological Justification, The combined approach of ethnographic observation, document analysis, and interviews was justified because marriage literature in Bone is both textual and performative. Understanding its role in guiding ritual practices, shaping social norms, and transmitting cultural values requires examining both the written codices and their lived enactment within the community. This triangulated approach ensures comprehensive and culturally grounded findings, providing insights into the preservation and interpretation of Bone's marriage adat.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The ethnographic study of marriage literature in Bone Regency reveals that traditional texts serve as both prescriptive and interpretive frameworks, guiding social behavior, ritual practices, and the transmission of cultural values. The lontara manuscripts examined in this study contain detailed accounts of pre-marriage rituals, engagement ceremonies, dowry arrangements, wedding processes, and post-marriage obligations, which collectively form a comprehensive code for social and cultural conduct (Kartodirdjo, 2006). Each stage of the ritual is embedded with symbolic meaning and social expectation, illustrating the intricate ways in which literature organizes familial responsibilities, social hierarchies, and communal interactions. For instance, rice, often a ceremonial offering, symbolizes fertility and prosperity, water represents purity and continuity, and traditional attire communicates identity, social status, and regional affiliation, reinforcing both visual and moral codifications of the adat.

Observations of actual marriage ceremonies revealed that while textual prescriptions provide guidelines for ritual sequence and symbolic acts, communities actively interpret and adapt these instructions to align with contemporary constraints and available resources. For example, the manuscripts often specify extensive sequences of offerings and ritual chants; however, due to logistical limitations, communities sometimes condense or modify the order while preserving the symbolic essence of the act. This demonstrates the adaptive flexibility inherent in Bone's marriage literature, which allows for practical application without loss of cultural integrity. Community members consistently emphasized that adherence to the lontara manuscripts demonstrates respect for ancestors, social coherence, and moral

propriety, highlighting the dual function of literature as both a prescriptive authority and a living cultural guide.

Interviews with elders and cultural practitioners reinforced these findings, showing that marriage literature serves multiple social and cultural functions. First, it acts as a mechanism for social regulation, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the bride, groom, and respective families. This codification ensures that ceremonial practices maintain social order and legitimacy, reflecting hierarchical and communal norms that are central to Bone's adat system.

Second, the literature serves as a moral and ethical conduit, transmitting values such as reciprocity, respect for elders, generosity, and solidarity. By codifying these principles, the manuscripts help maintain interpersonal harmony and cultural cohesion, ensuring that younger generations internalize and reproduce community values. Third, the literature provides a framework for cultural continuity, serving as a reference for ritual performance, symbolic interpretation, and community engagement. It ensures that ceremonial acts, linguistic expressions, and material symbols are consistently reproduced and understood across generations, maintaining both tradition and social identity (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011).

The study found that engagement with marriage literature is not merely academic or textual; rather, it is deeply intertwined with community participation and experiential learning. Participant observation revealed that rituals are enacted collectively, with elders guiding youth in interpreting texts, preparing ceremonial elements, and performing symbolic actions. This hands-on participation fosters intergenerational knowledge transfer, as youth learn to negotiate ritual sequences, understand symbolic meaning, and assume active roles in the community. Women's participation, often in ceremonial preparation, crafts, and performance, was found to be crucial for maintaining continuity and social balance, demonstrating that inclusive participation enhances both practical implementation and cultural transmission.

Symbolic analysis of the marriage literature demonstrated that objects, gestures, and ceremonial sequences encode complex meanings that extend beyond ritual efficacy. For instance, the use of woven textiles, specific foods, ceremonial music, and ritualized speech acts communicate social identity, moral values, and communal affiliation. These symbols function as cultural anchors, connecting participants to historical lineage, spiritual beliefs, and societal norms. Community members emphasized that correct interpretation and execution of symbols reinforce moral behavior, respect for hierarchy, and social cohesion, highlighting the dual function of literature as both a guide and a socializing agent.

Field observations also highlighted the adaptive dimension of the literature. While textual codification exists, community elders allow for contextual modifications, such as adjusting ceremonial duration, substituting materials, or altering performance order, without undermining the ritual's symbolic or social integrity. Such flexibility is crucial for sustaining traditions in the face of modern challenges, including time constraints, migration, urbanization, and limited resources. This adaptive function ensures that literature remains relevant and meaningful, bridging the gap between historical codification and contemporary practice.

Documentation practices were significantly enhanced through the study. Communities previously had fragmented or incomplete records of marriage rituals. Through participatory ethnography, residents were trained to document ceremonies using audio-visual recordings, photography, and detailed textual descriptions, resulting in a comprehensive repository of local marriage adat. Over 50 new documented artifacts were produced, capturing ritual sequences, participant roles, symbolic objects, and community interpretations. These materials serve not only as preservation tools but also as educational resources for younger generations, researchers, and policy makers. By involving the community in documentation,

the study ensured accuracy, contextual understanding, and local ownership of cultural knowledge.

The research further demonstrates that marriage literature functions as a living resource for empowerment. Participation in workshops, mentorship, and documentation enhanced community members' confidence, skill acquisition, and leadership abilities. Youth and women reported increased agency in performing rituals, managing ceremonial resources, and contributing to cultural continuity. Elders expressed satisfaction that knowledge previously confined to a few custodians is now shared broadly, promoting sustainability and inclusivity. This empowerment fosters intergenerational collaboration, social cohesion, and community pride, reinforcing the idea that literature is not only a textual artifact but also a catalyst for social and cultural resilience.

The socio-cultural implications of these findings are significant. Engagement with marriage literature strengthens cultural identity, moral understanding, and communal participation, ensuring that ceremonies are performed in ways that reflect both tradition and contemporary social reality. Communities also reported economic benefits, as documented ceremonies, crafts, and performances can support local cultural tourism, small-scale craft markets, and ceremonial services, providing supplementary income while sustaining heritage practices. This demonstrates that cultural preservation can simultaneously enhance social cohesion, identity, and local economic resilience.

Challenges identified during the study include fragility of manuscripts, limited youth engagement with textual sources, and logistical constraints in ceremonial preparation. Adaptive strategies such as simplified documentation training, flexible mentorship schedules, and inclusive participation plans addressed these challenges effectively. These strategies illustrate that context-sensitive approaches are critical in ensuring both practical adoption and preservation of marriage adat.

Overall, the study indicates that marriage literature in Bone Regency is central to cultural preservation, social regulation, and community empowerment. Its structured guidance, symbolic depth, and adaptive capacity allow communities to navigate modern social challenges while maintaining heritage continuity. The combination of textual analysis, interviews, and participant observation provides a holistic understanding of both prescriptive and enacted dimensions of marriage adat, highlighting the dynamic interplay between tradition and contemporary practice.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that marriage literature in Bone functions as a living, adaptive, and socially embedded cultural resource. It guides ritual practice, reinforces moral and social norms, fosters intergenerational knowledge transfer, and empowers community members to actively preserve and transmit cultural heritage. Participatory ethnographic approaches not only allow for detailed documentation and analysis but also enable communities to own, adapt, and sustain their traditions, ensuring that marriage literature continues to serve as both a cultural guide and a vehicle for identity, cohesion, and heritage preservation (UNESCO, 2019).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that marriage literature in Bone Regency functions as a critical medium for preserving cultural heritage, guiding ceremonial practices, and reinforcing community identity. By combining analysis of lontara manuscripts, oral narratives, and participant observation, the research shows that traditional texts provide both prescriptive guidance and adaptive flexibility, allowing communities to maintain ceremonial integrity while accommodating contemporary challenges. Engagement with the literature enhances knowledge, skills, and empowerment, particularly among youth and women, ensuring intergenerational transmission of cultural values. Participation in documentation and ritual

practice also strengthens community cohesion, pride, and cultural resilience, highlighting the importance of active engagement alongside textual preservation.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that cultural authorities, researchers, and community leaders implement programs that integrate participatory learning, mentorship, and structured documentation. Such initiatives should focus on: (1) training community members in recording and archiving manuscripts and oral knowledge to prevent loss, (2) organizing workshops and mentorship programs to improve skill acquisition and interpretive understanding, (3) encouraging inclusive participation of youth and women to foster continuity, and (4) facilitating dissemination of documented practices through exhibitions, educational programs, and digital media to promote both local and national cultural awareness. These measures will help ensure that marriage literature remains a living, dynamic resource, sustaining heritage practices while contributing to national cultural development objectives.

In conclusion, the study underscores that community-based engagement with marriage literature is essential for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. The research provides a replicable model demonstrating how literature, field observation, and participatory practice can collectively preserve cultural knowledge, reinforce social norms, and empower communities, ensuring the continuity and vitality of Bone's traditional marriage customs for future generations.

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