

Unknown **brown agent** applied to the inside covers of Indonesian manuscripts (18th – 19th c.)

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Numerous Indonesian manuscripts have an as-of-yet unidentified brown agent applied to their inside covers and spines, leaving conservators with a blind spot when making both preventive and interventive decisions for the care of these manuscripts. The application of this brown agent seems to be connected to the use of dluwang – an Indonesian writing substrate made of beaten bark – in the bindings. Building on Karin Scheper's work on Southeast Asian manuscripts, the focus of this interdisciplinary contribution is to further the understanding of the material composition, the historical role, intended purpose and present condition of this brown agent. The methodology used for this research weaves together four main research approaches:

- 1) The in-depth visual and haptic analysis, description and illustration (with special attention to the retracing of the binding steps) of ten 18th – 19th c Indonesian manuscripts found in the Special Collection of the University Library in Leiden,
- 2) Consultations with Indonesian experts and craftspeople
- 3) A literature review on Indonesian binding techniques as a sub-category of Islamic bindings,
- 4) Analyses of samples of the brown agent with liquid chromatography- and gas chromatography-mass spectrometry.

Keywords: Indonesian manuscripts 18th and 19th century, dluwang, Indonesian crafts people, instrumental analysis