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Subject: Submission of Manuscript for Consideration
Cover Letter

Dear Editor-in-Chief,

I am writing to submit my manuscript titled "*Batu Qulhu*—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra" for consideration in *Heliyon*. I believe that this manuscript aligns well with the scope and interests of your esteemed journal. The study investigates the practices and significance of traditional funerals within the Mandailing community of North Sumatra. It explores the cultural rituals and ceremonies surrounding the use of "*Batu Qulhu*," a symbolic stone of great importance in the funeral rites. By examining the harmonization of traditional funeral practices in this community, the research sheds light on the cultural dynamics and sociocultural beliefs of the Mandailing people. The relevance of this study to *Heliyon* is further strengthened by its connection to a previous publication by Baan (2020) on Torajan funeral rituals, which was successfully published in your journal. Building upon Baan's work, this manuscript expands the understanding of funeral traditions within different cultural contexts, providing valuable insights into the diversity of funeral practices across Indonesia.

The manuscript adheres to rigorous research methodology and incorporates a comprehensive analysis of primary data gathered through interviews, participant observations, and document analysis. The findings offer a unique perspective on the cultural heritage of the Mandailing community, highlighting the significance of "*Batu Qulhu*" as a symbol of death and remembrance.

I believe that this research will contribute significantly to the existing literature on cultural anthropology, ethnography, and religious studies. The manuscript meets the high standards of originality, methodological rigor, and theoretical engagement upheld by *Heliyon*.

I kindly request that you consider my manuscript for publication in *Heliyon*. I am confident that it will make a valuable addition to the journal's collection of interdisciplinary research.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Sahrul

**SUBMIT ARTIKEL
BY SISTEM
(8 JUNI 2023)**

1. Bukti submit

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***Batu Qulhu*—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra**

Abstract: Death and funeral rituals hold significant cultural and spiritual importance in traditional communities worldwide, including within the Islamic faith. This study focuses on exploring the unique funeral ritual known as *Batu Qulhu* in the Muslim Mandailing community. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes field observations and interviews with ulama and imams who have practical knowledge and understanding of this traditional ritual. The study reveals two origin stories of *Batu Qulhu*: one attributed to the first Imam in the Mandailing community and the other associated with elderly parents, ulama, and village *malims* (religious teachers) without specifying an individual source. *Batu Qulhu* refers to the white river stones utilized by the congregation during the ritual to count the number of prayers offered. The procession of this tradition follows a strict protocol, encompassing prayers, recitation of the Quran, and seeking forgiveness for the deceased and their family. The efficacy of *Batu Qulhu* serves as a testament to the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of cultural identity. While *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar cultural practices can be observed in other regions, highlighting the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and uphold cultural traditions as an integral part of identity and social cohesion.

Keywords: death rituals, funeral traditions, *Batu Qulhu*, Mandailing community, norms and values

1. Introduction

The manner in which individuals navigate the concept of death holds significance as it encompasses their cultural engagement and utilization, similar to how religion, an integral component of culture, provides a framework for comprehending, interpreting, and making sense of death, albeit without necessarily diminishing its inherent challenges for those experiencing grief (Collier 2003). Throughout various cultures, the commemoration of the deceased and the support offered to grieving families manifest through a multitude of ritualistic practices (Muallimin 2021). These rituals hold particular significance within religious frameworks as they are not only guided by religious doctrines but also serve as fundamental aspects of communal worship (Gafar 2016). Within the Islamic tradition, the management of deceased bodies adheres to the teachings found in the Qur'an, specifically drawing attention to

33 Surah Al Imran (QS 3:185). This verse underscores the universal nature of mortality, asserting
34 that every individual is bound to experience death (Rosadi 2022). In his groundbreaking 1907
35 study, Robert Hertz skillfully intertwined three essential imperatives - moral, aesthetic, and
36 sociological - to present a captivating conceptualization of death (Bowen 1984). His intricate
37 analysis portrays death as a profound transformative journey that transcends the boundaries of
38 both the spiritual and physical realms.

39 In Indonesia, funeral rituals have been intricately intertwined with local cultural practices
40 and ethnic traditions. Various communities, such as the Tana Toraja people (Baan et al. 2022),
41 the traditional Javanese community (Woodward 1988; Munandar 2019), and the Balinese who
42 perform the *ngaben* ceremony (Ardhana et al. 2019; Priatini 2021), express their funeral
43 customs based on their specific cultural heritage. These burial practices and procedures provide
44 profound insights into the community and society in which they are performed. In these
45 traditions, feasts, animal sacrifices, and supplications are often conducted to honor the
46 deceased and their family. Additionally, Islamic values and rituals significantly influence
47 funeral practices across many regions in Indonesia. The practice of *tahlil* or *tahlilan*, which
48 involves collective remembrance gatherings, is commonly observed (Warisno and Tabrani
49 2018), and the *azan* (call to prayer) is often performed during burial ceremonies (Gafar 2016).
50 Moreover, in certain regions of Sumatra, Islamic funeral practices have assimilated with local
51 traditions. For example, the people of Minangkabau in Nagari Salayo incorporate the custom
52 of placing attributes on the head of the deceased during the funeral procession (Anggraini et
53 al. 2020). While in Nagari Anduring, the Minang community also practices *bakayaik*, which
54 takes place 100 days after someone's passing. *Bakayaik* vividly recounts the profound narrative
55 of Prophet Muhammad pbuh¹, beginning with his miraculous birth and chronicling his
56 relentless efforts to uphold the principles of Islam. This ceremonial tradition blends the
57 eloquence of Arabic and Minang languages, creating a captivating linguistic tapestry that
58 enhances the overall richness of the performance. In Aceh, the *reuhab* tradition involves
59 decorating the deceased person's bedroom for 40 days (Nurdin and Fazal 2022). These practices
60 exemplify the dynamic interplay between Islamic influences and local cultural expressions in
61 funeral rituals across Indonesia.

62 This study aims to contribute to the understanding of funeral traditions within the Muslim
63 community in Sumatra, specifically focusing on the practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance in
64 the Mandailing community of North Sumatra. The funeral rituals in this community are deeply
65 rooted in a rich tapestry of cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions. By exploring the
66 *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ceremonies, this research seeks to shed light on the significance and

intricacies of these rituals, offering valuable insights into the broader context of funeral traditions among Muslims in Sumatra. The study addresses the historical aspect of the ritual, the procession in current societies, and finally the norms and values contained in this ritual.

1.1. Mandailing Ethnic: Historical Context

The origin of the word "*Mandailing*" is linked to the Munda people of India, who experienced defeat in a war against the Aryan people. The term "*Mandailing*" is derived from either "*Mandala Holing*" (Lubis 2003; Nasution 2019) or "*Mundailing*," referring to the refugees from Munda (Wahyuni 2019). It is believed that the Munda people originally inhabited the northern regions of India before the arrival of the Aryans (Fitri et al. 2000). The historical interaction between the Aryans and the Munda people has been examined through linguistic evidence (Rau and Sidwell 2019). Due to pressure from the Aryans, the Munda people migrated southward within India (Rau and Sidwell 2019; Mullick 2020; Blench 2022), and this Aryan occupation of the Munda people occurred around 1200-1500 BC (Lal 1998). Eventually, the displaced Munda people migrated to Southeast Asia (Mullick 2020), although the specific country of their migration is not specified. It is likely that some of them reached North Sumatra through the Barus Port in Central Tapanuli, which was an international port at that time. Referred to "*Negarakertagama*" book from 1365, which mentions the presence of the Mandailing as one of the most significant ethnic groups in the archipelago (Lubis 2003, 2005). The names mentioned include Mandailing, Pane, and Padang Lawas. The mention of these names indicates that the name Mandailing has been known by outsiders since ancient dates. In addition, Tuanku Rao² suggests that the Mandailing people trace their origin back to the Bugis Makassar, who sailed to the Singkuang Port (now known as Natal), it is more commonly accepted that the Mandailing people are part of the Batak ethnic group.

The Mandailing community's ethnic origin is a subject of contention among scholars. While some argue that they are part of the Batak Toba ethnic group (Pulungan 2018; Sahrul and Fadhila Daulai 2019), this perspective faces opposition from Mandailing intellectuals and historians. However, an analysis of factors such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group. To establish their identity as the Mandailing community, they refer to themselves as "*halak kita*" (our people) of South Tapanuli (Sahrul 2018), rather than as "*halak batak*" (Batak people) (Rodgers 2012; Fitri and Suryana 2022). Regarding religious affiliation, the majority of the contemporary Mandailing population follows Islam, with a minority of Christians found in specific locations like Pakantan in Upper Mandailing, Medan,

and other Indonesian cities. Before embracing Islam, the religious beliefs of the Mandailing people focused around ancestral spirits referred to as "*si pele begu*" (Lubis 2005), incorporating influences from Hinduism and Buddhism (Janra 2017). Recent field research conducted in the Mandailing region revealed remnants and artefacts associated with both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, particularly in the vicinity of Panyabungan within the Greater Mandailing area (Lubis et al. 2020).

Padri wars has brought Islam to Mandailing around 1821 and the Dutch military breached and defeated this movement by 1835 (Kartomi 1981; Rodgers 2013; Amliansyah 2021). The term '*Padri*' has two possible origins. One explanation suggests that it stems from the Indonesian word '*padri*,' which referred to priests. It is important to emphasize that the notable figures associated with the Padri movement can be likened to 'Islamic priests' (Stark 2023). This movement emerged in the early 1800s as a reformist Islamic movement led by local scholars known as ulama. These ulama sought to purify and reform Islam in the region, criticizing what they perceived as syncretic practices and deviations from strict Islamic teachings (Nasution 2019; Amliansyah 2021). They aimed to establish a more orthodox and conservative interpretation of Islam in Mandailing. Padri movement gained support from various segments of the population, including the rural communities, who were attracted to their message of religious purity and social justice (Abdullah 1966). The Padris' growing influence and power threatened the traditional rulers, known as penghulu, who feared losing their authority and control (Amliansyah 2021; Stark 2023).

1.2. Mandailing Philosophy

The values of the Mandailing ethnic philosophy of life called *Poda Na Lima*. *Poda* means advice, *na* means five, and *lima* means five. In short, *Poda Na Lima* consists of five pieces of advice, namely: i) *Paias Rohamu* (keeping your heart clean); ii) *Paias Pamatangmu* (keeping your body clean); iii) *Paias Parabitonmu* (keeping your clothes clean); iv) *Paias Bagasmu* (keeping your house clean); and v) *Paias Pakaranganmu* (keeping your yard clean) (Pulungan 2018; Siregar and Siregar 2021). These five values are still firmly held by the Mandailing community and the Mandailing ethnicity in Indonesia and around the world. Despite the Madina people's reputation for being religious, their daily social lives are intertwined with various cultural practices that are imbued with religious significance. These rituals, such as *marhaban* (*barzanzi*)³, the use of plain flour, and *upah-upah*⁴, are performed on joyful occasions such as weddings, recoveries from illness, and the attainment of new positions, as

well as during significant life transitions such as the birth of a child and moving into a new home (Sahrul 2018).

The Mandailing ethnic community has a value system, *Dalihan Na Tolu* which means a forum used to organize life in carrying out *olong* (affection) between *mora*, *kahanggi* and *anak boru* (Pulungan 2018; Silalahi et al. 2018; Sahrul and Fadhila Daulai 2019; Suhendra et al. 2023). *Dalihan Na Tolu*, also referred to ‘three stones’ (Hasselgren 2000), is a cultural value, created by the Creator that guide Batakese attitude and behavior in the social lives and cultural relation (Harahap 2016). The three stones encompass family, community, and spirituality. In Mandailing community, *Dalihan Na Tolu* principles are deeply intertwined with Islamic values and teachings. Mandailing Islamic communities incorporate these cultural principles into their daily lives, alongside their Islamic beliefs and practices. This concept reinforces the importance of maintaining strong moral character, fostering harmonious relationships, and upholding social justice within the community.

2. Location Settings

The Mandailing Natal region, also shortly known as Madina, is located in North Sumatra Province and astronomically situated between 0°10’ and 1°50’ N and 98°10’ and 100°10’ E. This region is located on the west coast of Sumatra, has a 170 km coastline, and is home to 24 islands, though only 4 of these islands are inhabited. In 2021, Madina has a population of over 478,000 people, and has a total area of 6,134 km² (BPS-Statistics of Mandailing Natal Regency 2022). Based on official records, the predominant land use in this region comprises a mixed vegetation area, accounting for 39.15% or 252.57 hectares. Forested areas occupy 30.04% of the region, followed by palm oil plantations at 27.79%. Settlements in Madina cover 451.38 hectares (0.7%), while agriculture utilizes 2.17% of the land. Additionally, water bodies such as lakes and dams encompass 0.14% of the region's total area. This region is crossed by three river systems including Batang Pungkut, Batang Gadis, and Aek Pohan that represent upper, middle and lower part of the Batang Gadis watershed (Antoko and Sukmana 2007). These rivers are beneficial for major population in Madina including for agriculture, plantation and industrial sectors. However, for years the rivers have also become threatened to illegal mining activities including sands, rocks and gold (Nasution et al. 2021, 2022).

The majority of the population in Madina, around 95%, is Muslim, while the remaining 5% consists of Christians, Catholics, Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of Confucianism. Madina has more than 800 mosques and 70 churches (Statistics of Sumatra Utara Province 2022), to support the religious practices of its inhabitants, and the region is made up of 23

districts and over 370 villages. Muslim community in Madina, consisting of various ethnic groups, exhibits a rich diversity of cultural and religious practices. Mosques and Islamic schools, known as *madrasah*, hold a prominent position in shaping the religious and cultural life of the community. Furthermore, active participation in significant cultural and religious traditions, such as the celebration of two major Islamic holidays like *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*, is observed among the Muslim population. A strong emphasis on social responsibility and assisting those in need, in alignment with Islamic principles, is evident through the engagement of the Muslim community in charitable and community service activities. The local government plays a supportive role by implementing policies and providing necessary infrastructure to promote Islamic education (Lubis et al. 2019).

3. Methodology

3.1. Design of the Research

This study employs a qualitative research design, incorporating both phenomenological and ethnographic approaches. In this sense, qualitative research is concerned with understanding the unique characteristics and experiences of each case, rather than seeking to identify generalizable patterns or trends (Small and Calarco 2022). This approach focuses on capturing the richness and complexity of human experiences and behaviors as they occur in natural situations (Amaratunga et al. 2002; Creswell and Creswell 2018). The integration of research subjects' knowledge with that of the researchers holds substantial importance, as it facilitates the recognition and documentation of outcomes from a local perspective inherent to the subjects themselves (Reyes-García et al. 2013; Baan et al. 2022). By embracing an emic approach, this integration acknowledges the significance of understanding and interpreting the cultural context and subjective experiences of the subjects, ultimately enhancing the research process and its findings.

3.2. Fieldwork and Subjects

The present study collected data during fieldwork conducted over six months in 2022, focusing on five selected districts out of a total of 23 districts in the study area (see Figure 1). The research aimed to gain insights into the cultural practices surrounding the *Batu Qulhu* ritual among the Mandailing community in Madina. Here, *Batu Qulhu* event in July 2022 was observed and recorded through photos and videos.

In previous ethnographic studies, a constrained number of subjects were employed, exemplified by two studies focusing on the practices of anaesthesia within two British hospital

staffs (Smith et al. 2003). Additionally, Baan et al. (2022) conducted research on funeral rituals in Toraja with the involvement of two informants, whereas Lee et al. (2007) examined the experience of depression among the Chinese using a sample size of five informants. In line with the present study, data collection encompassed interviews with a total of eight carefully selected subjects, as indicated in Table 1. The selection process for these subjects was guided by specific criteria deemed relevant to the research objectives. Firstly, the informants were required to be imams or leaders of the *Batu Qulhu* dhikr (or remembrance) during funeral ceremonies within the Mandailing community. Secondly, they needed to possess a profound understanding of the norms and values associated with *Batu Qulhu*. Finally, the informants were expected to be *Ulama* or respected Islamic spiritual leaders within the local community. Fluency in the Mandailing language was also a prerequisite for the selection of informants. To identify suitable subjects, consultations were conducted with local authorities, such as the Indonesian Council of Ulama (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*) in Madina, as well as local figures. The research employed a combination of observation and in-depth interviews to gather data. Initially, contact with the informants was established through various means, including phone calls, emails, and WhatsApp messages, in order to arrange and conduct the interviews effectively.

Figure 1

Table 1

3.3. Ethical Consideration

The current study has been conducted in accordance with Cluster Interdisciplinary Basic Research and Ethical Approval (Approval No: 0616615683). This study adhered to rigorous ethical guidelines and received approval from the Rector of State Islamic University of North Sumatera (UINSU). All research data and records were securely stored in a password-protected computer located in the Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication at UINSU, with restricted access granted only to the author. Furthermore, prior to participation, informed consent was obtained from all eight subjects involved in the study, ensuring their voluntary and informed involvement.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Origin of the Rituals

Based on the interview, it is mentioned that Syeikh Haji Mustafa Husein bin Husein Nasution bin Umar Nasution Al-Mandaili (or known as Syeikh Mustafa Husein) (1886-1955), is credited as the first Imam to introduce the practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance at funeral ceremonies. In the beginning, was named by *Batu Balancing* based on the color of the stone used in this ritual. This insight was derived from interviews conducted with BN (65), an ulama, and MR (52), a teacher at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Panyabungan. In addition, Syeikh Musthafa Husein is also founder of the *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB)⁵ or Purba Baru Islamic boarding school. The practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been preserved and perpetuated by his students, who have established recitation congregations in various locations such as mosques, prayer rooms, and *surau*⁶. Notably, the students and alumni of Musthafawiyah have played a significant role in its development and expansion beyond Madina region, with a presence in several other provinces across Indonesia. As the oldest *pesantren* (or boarding school) in North Sumatra, the influence of this practice extends widely, facilitated by the widespread distribution of its students and graduates.

An alternative explanation, provided by PN (73) an ulama, diverges slightly from the previous informant. He has pointed out that the tradition of using *Batu Qulhu* or *Batu Balancing*⁷ as a medium for remembrance was explained with a slight variation, focusing on the customs upheld by elderly parents, ulama, village *malims* (religious teachers), without mentioning any specific individual. It was a means to alleviate the sorrow experienced by the bereaved and served as a form of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends. In addition to the customary acts of attending funerals and observing mourning rituals, the strategies employed to alleviate the profound grief experienced by individuals extended further. These encompassed multifaceted practices such as providing emotional support, proffering words of guidance and solace to foster resilience and acceptance in the face of adversity. Moreover, individuals were invited to partake in collective prayer sessions, where the use of *Batu Qulhu* stones served as facilitative elements in creating a conducive environment for these spiritual gatherings. PN further elucidated that this method, referred to as *alak na jolo martakziah*, involved family members, parents, spouses, children, relatives, and neighbors coming together for *tahlilan*.

“In the past people paid tribute to the homes of people who died; parents, wife, husband, children, siblings and neighbors are tahlilan, starting from reciting istighfar, al-Fatihah, tahlil, prayers and concluding selawat. To make the dhikr in congregation more solemn, they add media by using a Batu Balancing (white stone) within size of an adult's big toe

or larger than that. In the past, the white stone was said to be a *Batu Balancing*, now it is better known as the *Batu Qulhu*".

Batu Qulhu ritual refers to the use of certain stone as a means of carrying out dhikr worship. In general, this type of stone is typically known as white pebble. It should be noticed that most of these white pebbles are predominantly comprised of marble, a rock formation characterized by its crystallized carbonates and can easily be found in the riparian zone. Here, the family of the deceased person collect these stones from the nearest river. As mentioned in the interview, this ritual chooses approximately the size of an adult's thumb to enhance the solemnity of the remembrance (as can be seen in Figure 2a). During the interview ML (65), emphasized that in the past, people paid homage to the homes of the deceased, engaging in *tahlilan* rituals that encompassed prayers and concluding with 'selawat' (see Figure 2b). To augment the collective remembrance, a white balancing stone, known also as *Batu Bontar*, the size of an adult's big toe or larger, was employed. Over time, the *Batu Balancing* came to be recognized as the *Batu Qulhu*.

Figure 2

The utilization of *Batu Qulhu* in death ceremonies is also underpinned by the geographical sequences. Firstly, the abundance of rivers in Madina, notably the Batang Gadis River, Batang Natal River, Aek Kalungan River and Angkola River, facilitated the easy availability of these stones in the past. Nowadays, these rivers also threatened by illegal gold mining activities (Nasution et al. 2022), and tend to pollute due to its waste (Nasution et al. 2021). Secondly, these stones possess distinct characteristics that contribute to their suitability for the purpose at hand. They exhibit a white hue, imparting a visually soothing effect, while their cool and clean appearance further enhances their appeal. Third, these stones demonstrate resilience in withstanding the rigors of varying weather conditions, including heat, cold, and rainfall. Furthermore, the recitation of *Batu Qulhu* rituals is believed by the community to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave.

4.2. The Contemporary Practice of Batu Qulhu in the Mandailing Community

In the past, Islamic practices in Sumatra have exhibited influences from mystical and shamanistic traditions e.g., (Fraser 2015; Hasibuan et al. 2020). However, it is important to note that the religious activities associated with the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* are not influenced by shamanism, but rather stem solely from religious traditions previously followed by religious scholars, religious teachers, and traditional leaders. Currently, the contemporary practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been inherited and embraced by muslim society in

Madina. Based on interview with ML (65), it is evident that in the past, the observance of qulhu stone remembrance adhered to strict protocols as mentioned in the following statement.

“The tradition of recalling the qulhu stones was once a highly regulated practice. It required seeking consent from both the village leader and the syekh. Mastery of the 20 essential attributes of Allah was necessary, alongside the ability to read the Quran and comprehend its teachings. The stones themselves had to possess a pure white hue. The recitation of qulhu would take place during nighttime gatherings, where all the stones present had to be utilized fully, leaving no remnants behind before the congregation dispersed”.

These procedures include the following: 1) the procession necessitated obtaining permission from the head of the village⁸ and *tuan guru*⁹ (or *kulifah*); 2) the ritual leader was required to commit to memory and comprehend the twenty obligatory attributes of God, encompassing *nafsiyah* (self-related attributes) nature, *salbiyah* (attributes related to existence) nature, *ma'ani* (abstract attributes of God) nature, and *maknawiyah* (the essential nature and prevalence of *ma'ani*) nature; 3) the officiating Imam was expected to possess proficiency in both written and spoken Arabic-Malay; 4) the Imam leading the remembrance was required to proficiently recite the Qur'an and comprehend its meaning; 5) the *Batu Qulhu* utilized in the ritual had to be of a white hue; and 6) the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* transpired during evening hours, and all the stones had to be completed within a single procession conducted in the presence of the congregation. Preceding the initiation of the ritual, it is customary for the priest to cleanse himself through the observance of ablution, mirroring the ritualistic cleansing process associated with prayer as mentioned by ADL (60).

Basically, this ritual has many similarity to *tahlilan* tradition especially in the context prayers and recitations. This practice generally has been carried out by many Nahdatul Ulama (NU) community in Sumatra (Warisno and Tabrani 2018; Syahnun 2019). However, in *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, there are five Imams that lead this procession with different assignment. These Imams are voluntarily appointed by the group and relatively flexible based on their own agreement. The priests then read several prayers that beneficial to seek forgiveness for the deceased, his/her family as well to congregation. The Imams also recite some verses from the Surat of the Quran (QS), and praise the God. In this *Batu Qulhu* ritual, the congregation are voluntarily attend the ritual without any formal invitation. The ritual is held in three consecutive days after the death, and organized by group manager, neighbors and the Imams, and commonly referred to *Serikat Tolong Menolong* (STM) or Union of Help. The Imams and the congregation are artfully arranged in a circular formation, tailored to the venue's conditions.

This arrangement allows for the placement of stones in front of the congregation, effortlessly within reach for the worshippers' right hand. During the fieldwork in Panyabungan Kota district, it was noticed that there were more than 30 piles of stones in the congregation. As additional information that commonly they are sitting on the floor covered with *tikar* or mat, but some people also held the ritual with chairs. The priests hold the responsibility for overseeing the course of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual. The following Table 2 describes each Imams' responsibility in *Batu Qulhu* procession.

Table 2

The current study also reveals that *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Madina is held in three consecutive days where:

- In the day 1, the remembrance is taken where the Imam start the ceremony. In the first meeting, the priests wear neat clothes, wear caps, turbans and sarongs. Reflecting the figure of a religious expert and placing his position is a person who is highly respected in society. Their sitting position is arranged in a special place, different from the congregation in general. Here, the Imam will also read out the order of the *Batu qulhu* procession.
- For day 2, similar to the preceding event, the order of events for the first night procession remains unchanged. Prior to commencing the remembrance ceremony, the 'Imam pembaca takhtim' provided an explanation that after the recitation of the *takhtim*, the congregation would engage in the dhikr of *Batu Qulhu*, and were kindly requested to maintain their positions until the conclusion of the event. However, in contrast to the previous occasion, on the second night of recitation, qulhu stones are made available to facilitate the dhikr and are arranged in a stacked formation in front of the congregation. Subsequently, the qulhu remembrance stones are accumulated in the same location. The prescribed procedure entails the recitation of QS 112: 1-3, followed by the selection of a single stone. For each subsequent repetition, an additional stone is selected, such that two stones are chosen for a two-time reading, three stones for a three-time reading, four stones for a four-time reading, and so forth, in accordance with established practice.
- In day 3, *Batu Qulhu* procession replicates the format observed on the second meeting. However, a notable distinction lies in the extended duration of the dhikr, necessitated by the requirement to recite the prayer over each stone in the presence of the congregation. It is imperative to sustain the continuity of the dhikr until its completion, without interruption. Subsequent to the remembrance, a collective prayer and *salawat* are gathered. The *Batu Qulhu* employed as aids for remembrance are carefully placed within plastic

burlap bags or buckets (as can be seen in Figure 3a). The event concludes with a religious sermon or *tausiyah*, wherein expressions of gratitude are articulated on behalf of the congregation and the afflicted families. The content of the religious sermon encompasses themes such as death, the retribution of the grave, and serves as a reminder for individuals to perpetually prepare themselves and enhance their devotion before the arrival of death. This is because all living beings are destined to experience mortality (QS 3: 185), and its arrival cannot be postponed, even if one seeks refuge within a lofty and robust fortress (QS 4: 78).

In addition to the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, on the fourth day following an individual's passing, *Batu Qulhu* stones are transported to the cemetery and carefully positioned above the burial site, as illustrated in Figure 3b. The procedure involves the preparation of the grave bed, which includes the leveling of the ground in the designated area assigned for burial. Subsequently, these stones are poured in a manner that commences from the head of the deceased and extends towards their feet. Although typically performed by the bereaved family, this task can also be undertaken by others, such as neighbors or relatives. During the placement of the stones on the grave, it is customary to recite the phrase "*Bismillahi milata 'ala Rasulullah*," which translates to "In the name of Allah and in the religion of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh." The recitation performed during this act is identical to the prayer recitation conducted during the interment of the deceased's body. It is noteworthy that the selection of this specific recitation lacks a distinct foundational basis but rather originates from established tradition.

Figure 3

Presently, *Batu Qulhu* dhikr has undergone significant transformations over time, likely influenced by environmental factors, evolving understandings within the community, and technological advance, as well as societal changes. Presently, the implementation of the ritual varies across different areas of Madina. Traditionally, some individuals engage in the *Batu Qulhu* practice following the *Maghrib* prayer (after sunset) or around 6.30 pm – 7.00 pm local time and typically after the *Isya* prayer (7.30 pm – 8.00 pm), collectively performed at the mosque during evening as mentioned by HR (55). Among adult women, it takes place in the evening preceding *Maghrib*, while among the male youth (*naposo bulung*) and female youth (*nauli bulung*), it occurs in the afternoon (after *Asr* or around 3.00 pm) as mentioned by AT (45). Adult male worshipers partake in this practice during the night after the *Isya* prayer on the first, second, and third days following a person's demise. As mentioned earlier, the *Batu Qulhu* employed in this remembrance ritual is a stone recognized by the bereaved family,

retrieved from the river. To ensure cleanliness, the the stones are consistently washed and kept in a plastic sack or a large container. However, due to the increasing flexibility of people's mindset and the scarcity of these rocks in rivers, the people can now be acquired from funeral parlors, flower shops, or construction material stores in Madina region as mentioned by KN (50):

“Batu Qulhu are taken from the river by the family, if they are dirty, they are cleaned. Now, Batu Qulhu are easy to get and are sold in flower shops and building materials”).

4.3. Aspect of Norms of Batu Qulhu ritual

The *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice, introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein, holds significant cultural value in the Mandailing community of Madina. This ritual utilizes white pebbles from nearby rivers for dhikr worship and to alleviate the suffering of the deceased in the grave. It has been preserved and perpetuated by Syeikh Mustafa Husein's students and alumni, who have established recitation congregations in the region. As the oldest pesantren in North Sumatra, the influence of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends widely beyond Madina, with its students and graduates playing a significant role in its development and expansion. Similar cultural practices, like the *tahlilan* tradition among the NU community in Sumatra, can also be found.

Strict protocols surround the observance of Batu Qulhu remembrance. Prior permission from village and religious leaders, referred to as *Tuan Guru*, is required. The officiating Imam must possess proficiency in Arabic-Malay language. These protocols ensure the solemnity and authenticity of the ritual, aligning with the importance placed on established rituals and cultural heritage. The *tahlilan* tradition within the NU community also follows specific rituals, emphasizing the shared values of upholding traditions and seeking solace in times of mourning. As previously mentioned, obtaining permission from both village and religious leaders is necessary, as indicated by MR (52):

‘mangido izin Parjolo tu Tuan Guru’ (English: Ask permission from *Tuan Guru* first). Commonly answered by the teacher with *‘olo’ silahken acara dilanjut* (English: Okay, please continue the ritual), *‘marimom mau au’* (English: I will follow).

Batu Qulhu remembrance serves as a form of communal support, uniting family members, relatives, neighbors, and friends in times of sorrow. This fosters a sense of unity and solidarity within the Mandailing community, reflecting the value placed on collective resilience. Similar communal support can be found in other practices, such as the collective remembrance gatherings associated with the *tahlilan* tradition, reinforcing the cultural value of community

bonds and support networks. The significance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends beyond its cultural and spiritual aspects. It represents a cherished cultural heritage embraced by the Muslim society in Madina, highlighting the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of identity. While specific to the Mandailing community, similar practices can be observed in other regions, fulfilling the shared human need to honor the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and preserve cultural traditions as integral elements of identity and social cohesion. For a comprehensive overview of the norm aspects in the tradition of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community, please refer to Table 3.

Table 3

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ritual stands as a significant cultural and religious practice within the Mandailing community's funeral ceremonies. This tradition, which involves using stones for dhikr worship, holds deep historical and spiritual roots. While its origins can be traced back to Syeikh Mustafa Husein, who introduced the ritual, variations in accounts highlight the complex nature of its origin. Over time, the procession of *Batu Qulhu* has undergone modifications to streamline its organization, exemplifying the adaptive nature of cultural practices while maintaining their essence. Although *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar commemorative practices can be found in other regions. These rituals reflect the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, seeking solace through collective ceremonies, and preserving cultural traditions as integral components of identity and social cohesion. *Batu Qulhu* ritual serves as a testament to the rich cultural and religious heritage of the Mandailing community in North Sumatra, encapsulating collective mourning, spiritual devotion, and the preservation of cultural identity. As funeral ceremonies continue to play a pivotal role in communities worldwide, understanding and appreciating the significance of these rituals contributes to our broader knowledge of human beliefs, traditions, and the ways in which we commemorate and honor the departed.

While this study presents a preliminary investigation into the *Batu Qulhu* ritual, it acknowledges certain limitations. The absence of historical documentation detailing the ritual within the Mandailing community necessitates a proposed historical approach through extensive literature review, drawing upon the writings of earlier ulama. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the limited number of informants and the specific observed processions may not fully capture the diverse procedural variations of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual across the entire Madina region. Recognizing the modifications made by different communities

based on the guidance of their Imams or practical considerations further adds to the complexity of the ritual. Given these findings, the study recommends the cultural preservation and educational promotion of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual for the benefit of future generations. The creation of appropriate documentation, such as books and videos, accessible through various platforms including social media, can contribute to the wider dissemination of knowledge and understanding of the ritual. These efforts support the cultural preservation of the *Batu Qulhu* tradition and foster greater appreciation among the Mandailing community and beyond.

Declarations

Authors contribution statement

Design and study conceptualization, S., A.F.D; methodology and fieldwork, S., A.F.D; formal analysis, S., S.D., and A.W.N.; Data curation, S.D.; writing original draft, S., and A.F.D.; Review and editing, A.W.N. and S.D.; map design, A.W.N.; Project administration and funding acquisition, S., and A.F.D. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Figures

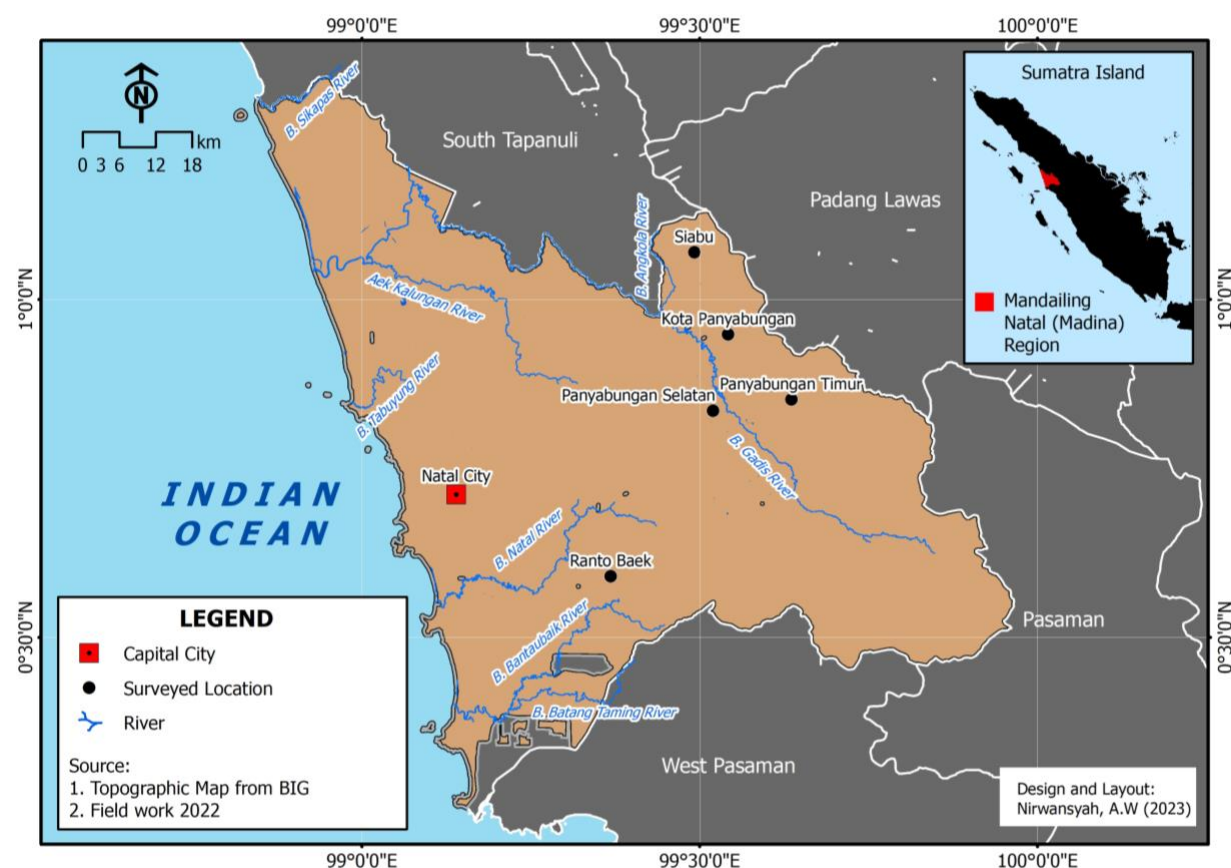


Figure 1. Area of the current research



Figure 2. a) White pebble collected for *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Mandailing, where each bucket contain 70 to 100 stones; and b) the congregation of the Mandailing Muslim community during this obituary ceremony. Photography by Sahrul on 22 July 2022.



Figure 3. Batu Qulhu remembrance by adult male where a) the organizer has collected and kept the stones back into the plastic sack for fourth day of casting procession; and b) where *Batu Qulhu* is finally poured on the grave of deceased person. (photographs of the ritual held at ML residence on 22 July 2022) (taken by Sahrul)

633 **Table 1.** Pseudonym of subjects' information in the current study

Informants	Initial	Age	Education Level	Occupation
1	BN	65	Bachelor degree	Teacher
2	MR	52	Bachelor degree	Teacher
3	PN	73	Bachelor degree	Ulama and local public figure
4	ML	65	Master degree	Public servant
5	KN	50	Master degree	Public servant
6	AT	45	Master degree	Teacher
7	ADL	60	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Businessman
8	MH	55	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Teacher

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635 **Table 2.** Construction of each Imam and their task in *Batu Qulhu* procession

Imam	Local term	Assignment	Quran recitation
First Imam	<i>Imam pembaca silsilah</i>	– Reciting <i>istighfar</i> ¹⁰ three times; – Reciting <i>wasilah</i> to nabi (propeth Muhammad pbuh), his appostles, ulama and parents of the deceased person, all moslem and the congregation	– QS 1: 1-6
Second Imam	<i>Imam pembaca takhtim</i>	– Reciting <i>takhtim</i> (known as "reading for the reward of the deceased" or "reciting for the benefit of the deceased")	– QS 112: 1-3 – QS 113: 1-5 – QS 114: 1-5 – QS 1: 1-7 – QS 2: 1-5; 255; 284-286 – QS 33: 56
Third Imam	<i>Imam pembaca tahlil</i>	– Reciting <i>tahlil</i> (compilation of dhikr) including: • <i>Istighfar</i> ;	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reciting ‘afdhalu dzikri’ followed by First <i>syahadat tauhid</i>¹¹. The congregation then answer by ‘hayyun baqi’; • Reciting second <i>syahadat tauhid</i>. Then answered by the congregation with ‘hayyun maujud’; • Reciting the third <i>syahadat tauhid</i>. And answered by all attendance by ‘hayyum maqsud’.
		– Finally, reciting <i>syahadat tauhid</i> together with the congregation 100 times. Here the congregation gradually loud their praise and at same time shaking the head
Fourth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca Al Baqarah</i>	– Reciting some verses from the Quran that contains concept and advise about calamities – QS 2: 152-156 – QS 67: 1-2
Fifth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca doa</i>	– Reciting closing prayer, with the following structure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Basmallah</i>¹²; • Praise to the Creator and His messenger (Muhammad pbuh); • Prayers for all Moslem (men and women); • Prayers for the deceased person and the family; • Prayers for attendance in the congregation;

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Source: compiled based on interview with BN (65)

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Table 3. Identified aspect of norms in the practice of *Batu Qulhu* Remembrance

Aspect of norm	Description
Preservation of traditions	The culture emphasizes the preservation and perpetuation of rituals and practices, such as the <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance, which was introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein and continued by his students and alumni. The students and graduates of Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding school play a significant role in preserving and expanding this practice.
Community support	The culture values community support during times of grief and mourning. The tradition of using <i>Batu Qulhu</i> serves as a means of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends, helping to alleviate sorrow and foster resilience.
Spiritual gatherings	Collective prayer sessions and remembrance gatherings are highly valued in the culture. The use of the stones during these gatherings creates a conducive environment for spiritual practices and collective remembrance.
Respect for the deceased	The culture emphasizes respect and care for the deceased. The ritual of collecting white pebbles, predominantly marble, from nearby rivers to be used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance shows reverence for the departed.
Connection to nature	The culture maintains a connection with nature, as the stones used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals are collected from rivers. The easy availability of these stones in the past and their resilience in varying weather conditions highlight the importance of nature in the culture.
Alleviation of suffering	The recitation of <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals is believed to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave. This demonstrates a value of compassion and empathy within the culture.

¹ Peace be upon him

² Tuanku Rao is characterized as enigmatic figure and one of the two significant leaders of the Padri movement, shared this status alongside Imam Bonjol himself. Tuanku Rao's origins can be traced to *Huta na Godang* or *Huta Godang*, also known as *Tano Godang*, located in Mandailing Julu (Upper Mandailing) (Lubis 2003).

³ The word *barzanzi* is associated with the name of Syeikh Barzanji, a prominent scholar and Sufi poet from Kurdistan. His renowned work, titled "*Mawlid al-Barzanji*," is a poetic composition that narrates the birth and life of the Prophet Muhammad, often recited during religious gatherings and celebrations.

-
- ⁴ *Upah-upah* refers to cultural practice or tradition of offering gifts or monetary compensation during significant events or ceremonies. The term "upah" itself can be translated as "wages" or "payment". *Upah-upah* is deeply rooted in the Mandailing culture and is often observed during various occasions such as weddings, funerals, or community gatherings.
- ⁵ *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB), was founded in 1912 by Syekh Musthafa Husein Nasution. This Islamic boarding school is located in Purba Baru sub-district, Madina Regency, North Sumatra (Haryanto 2017). Further reference on this boarding school can be read in Khairurrijal (Khairurrijal 2020).
- ⁶ Surau means a place of worship or a small mosque-like structure. The surau typically serves as a communal prayer space or a modest mosque, wherein Muslims congregate for congregational prayers, religious discourses, and other religious engagements.
- ⁷ Some community in Madina also use term of *Batu Bontar* to refer *Batu Qulhu*.
- ⁸ One crucial determinant is obtaining authorization from the village leader. The village head holds a position akin to that of a revered monarch, embodying nobility and commanding profound respect.
- ⁹ *Tuan guru* or teacher serves as a religious authority, serving as an exemplar and establishing a benchmark for societal norms through their words and actions. Additionally, they are often revered as sacred individuals known for their healing abilities, and they serve as a source of supplication for various needs such as well-being, sustenance, companionship, agricultural prosperity, and attainment of blessings.
- ¹⁰ The act of attempting forgiveness from the Almighty God, commonly by saying ‘*astagfirullāhu*
- ¹¹ The *syahadat tauhid* contains declaration of belief in the oneness of God Almighty
- ¹² *Basmallah* is phrase mention to the God before beginning any action or speech. It spells ‘*Bismillahi rāhmani rāhiim*’. It means: in the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful.

**RESPON TERIMAKASIH
DARI JURNAL
(9 Juni 2023)**

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Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

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**EVALUASI
ARTIKEL
SEBELUM REVISI
(18 JUNI 2023-13
JULI 2023)**


3. Evaluasi Artikel (18 Juni 2023)

Request to edit submission (18 Juni 2023)

Send Back to Author: Request to Edit Submission

Eksternal

Kotak Masuk x

 **Heliyon** <em@editorialmanager.com>
kepada saya ▾

Min, 18 Jun 2023, 11:40 ☆ ↶ ⋮

Article Title: Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra
Corresponding Author: Dr Sahrul Sahrul

Dear Dr Sahrul,

Your submission entitled "Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra" has been received by Heliyon. However, before we can proceed with the review process we ask you to address the following:

1. Please include list of author's names, affiliations and their contact details in the Manuscript file of this submission.
2. Since interview is applied in your study, please include interview questions (design) you applied in your paper.

Note: When making amendments please ensure you resubmit the current submission and do not create a new submission. The manuscript reference number should remain the same.

Please log onto Editorial Manager as an Author:

<https://www.editorialmanager.com/heliyon/>.


1. Go to the menu item "Submissions/Revisions Sent Back to Author".
2. Click "Edit Submission/Revision".
3. Click on the relevant submission step on the left-hand menu.
4. Provide or modify the item/information as appropriate.
5. Go to "Attach Files" and "Build PDF for my Approval".
6. View and Approve your new PDF file including the changed item(s), or if needed, Edit again.

Thank you for submitting your work to the journal, and if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Heliyon

Your incomplete transfer to Heliyon (20 Juni 2023)

 **Heliyon** <em@editorialmanager.com>
kepada saya ▾

Sel, 20 Jun 2023, 13:16 ☆ ↶ ⋮

Dear Dr Sahrul,

Based on our records, we understand you recently accepted a transfer offer of your article to Heliyon.

We have not seen your article come into Heliyon's submissions system yet and wanted to check in with you so we can trouble-shoot if we have had a systems problem. We would like to make this process as easy as possible for you.

To complete the transfer of your submission please log in as an author at <https://www.editorialmanager.com/HELIYON/> and navigate to the "Submissions Sent Back to Author" folder. There you can edit your submission by clicking "Edit submission" under the "Action Link" menu.

If you are actively working on revising your manuscript prior to finalizing the transfer into Heliyon, that is great, and please do feel free to contact us if there is anything we can do to help when you are ready to finalize your submission. If you have any other concerns about submitting to Heliyon or the journal transfer or submission processes, please don't hesitate to ask us.

We are very much look forward to helping you, both in transferring your article and in giving you and your article a fair review process at Heliyon.

Kind regards,

Heliyon.

Penulis menanyakan tentang revisi edit submission (12 Juli 2023)

From: Sahrul Sahrul
Date: 12/07/2023 01:55 AM

Manuscript Number: HELIYON-D-23-24599
Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra
Dr Sahrul Sahrul
Heliyon

Dear Editor(s),

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to kindly inquire about the status of my submitted manuscript with the manuscript number HELIYON-D-23-24599, titled "Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra," which I submitted to Heliyon on 24 June 2023.

I greatly appreciate the time and consideration given by the editorial team and reviewers in reviewing my manuscript. However, it has been [duration since submission] since I submitted my manuscript, and I have not received any updates regarding its status. I understand the workload involved and the complexities of the review process, and I kindly request your assistance in providing me with an update on the current status of my manuscript.

My research on traditional funerals in the Mandailing community of North Sumatra is of significant relevance to researchers and practitioners in the field. I believe it aligns well with the scope and objectives of Heliyon. If my manuscript requires revisions, I would be grateful for any feedback or specific comments from the reviewers to enhance its quality. I assure you of my commitment to addressing any concerns promptly.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I eagerly await your response and appreciate your efforts in providing an update on the status of my manuscript. Please feel free to contact me via email or if any additional information is required.

Yours sincerely,

Kind regards,
Dr Sahrul Sahrul

Status submission (12 Juli 2023)

Re: Status of Submission [230712-004454] Eksternal Kotak Masuk x



AuthorSupportGlobal (ELS) <AuthorSupport@elsevier.com>
kepada saya ▾

Rab, 12 Jul 2023, 17:22 ☆ ↶ ⋮

Dear Dr. Sahrul,

Thank you for your email.

I understand that you would like to speed up the process of your manuscript, HELIYON-D-23-24599.

From checking, I can confirm that your paper is in the status of With Editor as of July 11, 2023.

And I can also confirm that, as of the moment, your submission is still undergoing editorial assessment and is currently being handled by the Editor. The Editor is currently evaluating your submission to determine whether they should initiate review or make a decision.

In addition, please note that this phase can sometimes take longer as the Editor is required to review the paper in full before they can start the review process.

Rest assured that both reviewers and editors are sent regular reminders in the journal to expedite the process

As this is the case, your continued patience and understanding are highly appreciated.

Please let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Kind regards

Fernando Pasicolan
Researcher Support
ELSEVIER

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Your submission HELIYON-D-23-24599 to Heliyon (13 Juli 2023)

Your submission HELIYON-D-23-24599 to Heliyon Eksternal Kotak Masuk x



Heliyon <em@editorialmanager.com>
kepada saya ▾

Kam, 13 Jul 2023, 20:50 ★ ↶ ⋮

Manuscript Number: HELIYON-D-23-24599

Title: Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

Journal: Heliyon

Dear Dr Sahrul,

Thank you for submitting your manuscript to Heliyon. Before we begin the review process for your manuscript, we perform an initial check against formal criteria. Though we found your manuscript interesting, in its present form it is not suitable to be sent out for review. We would consider the manuscript for peer-review if you make changes/corrections as detailed in the comments below and re-submit the revised version.

We ask that you respond to each comment by either outlining how the criticism was addressed in the revised manuscript or by providing a rebuttal to the criticism. This should be carried out in a point-by-point fashion as illustrated here: [Guide for Authors, Heliyon](#). Furthermore, please note that Heliyon now uses a Numbered reference style. Please update the references in your manuscript accordingly, if necessary.

To submit your updated manuscript, please log in as an author at <https://www.editorialmanager.com/heliyon/>, and navigate to the "Submissions Needing Revision" folder under the Author Main Menu. Your revision due date is Jul 27, 2023.

If you need additional time to address the concerns that came up in the review process, please let us know so we can discuss a plan for moving your paper forward.

I look forward to receiving your updated manuscript.

Research Elements (optional)

This journal encourages you to share research objects - including your raw data, methods, protocols, software, hardware and more – which support your original research article in a Research Elements journal. Research Elements are open access, multidisciplinary, peer-reviewed journals which make the objects associated with your research more discoverable, trustworthy and promote replicability and reproducibility. As open access journals, there may be an Article Publishing Charge if your paper is accepted for publication. Find out more about the Research Elements journals at https://www.elsevier.com/authors/tools-and-resources/research-elements-journals?dgcid=ec_em_research_elements_email.

Kind regards,

Rachael Tucker, PhD
Associate Scientific Editor
Heliyon

Comments:

Thank you for this interesting submission. Before we can consider the manuscript further, please address the following points.

Please revisit the sections on page 6-8 where there appear to be some missing references when referring to literature/evidence that supports claims. For example, lines 105-107 on page 6, lines 109 to 112 on page 6, lines 151 to 156 on page 7, and lines 163 to 167 on page 7.

Please clarify if the initials provided to the participants are pseudonyms or actual initials. Were participants assured anonymity? It is common practice for participant numbers to be used to anonymise participants (e.g., P1, P2 etc) or if pseudonyms are used, please state this clearly in the methods.

Please clarify if participants provided written consent for their images to be used in publications.

Please clarify the ethics statement; is the approval number associated to the approving university or the 'Cluster Interdisciplinary Basic Research and Ethical Approval'?

Please provide more detail in the methods section regarding the ethnography and fieldwork. The authors state 6 months was spent in the field: was this daily field visits? How much time was spent with participants? How was the fieldwork carried out? What activities did the researchers participate in/observe? What role did the researcher undertake? Participant, observer, participant-observer etc? How was data collected- i.e., were interviews recorded and transcribed, were field notes taken?

Please outline how data was analysed.

Please use participant identifiers after the extracts from the data when not introduced, e.g., P1.

A small number of extracts are presented from the collected data to support the conclusions made; it may strengthen the manuscript to provide some more data extracts.

I look forward to receiving your updated manuscript.

Dear Editor,

Thank you very much for your time and valuable feedback. We realize that there were some weaknesses and error presented in our earlier draft. Here we have added some improvements including from your comments:

1. **Comments:** Please revisit the sections on page 6-8 where there appear to be some missing references when referring to literature/evidence that supports claims. For example, lines 105-107 on page 6, lines 109 to 112 on page 6, lines 151 to 156 on page 7, and lines 163 to 167 on page 7.

Response:

Thank you very much for detailed feedback. We have already added citation from lines 105-107 of earlier version into following sentence with change on references style as well.

“However, an analysis of factors such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group [25,26].”

Lines 109-112

“Regarding religious affiliation, the majority of the contemporary Mandailing population follows Islam, with a minority of Christians found in specific locations like Pakantan in Upper Mandailing, Medan, and other cities in North Sumatra [14,30].”

Lines 151-156

“The three stones encompass family, community, and spirituality. In Mandailing community, *Dalihan Na Tolu* principles are deeply intertwined with Islamic values and teachings. Mandailing Muslim communities incorporate these cultural principles into their daily lives, alongside their Islamic beliefs and practices [39,40]. This concept reinforces the importance of maintaining strong moral character, fostering harmonious relationships, and upholding social justice within the community [23,24,39].”

Lines 163-167

“Based on BPS-Statistics of Mandailing Natal Regency [41], during 2021, the predominant land use in this region comprises a mixed vegetation area, accounting for 39.15% or 252.57 hectares, while forested areas occupy 30.04% of the region, followed by palm oil plantations at 27.79%. Settlements in Madina cover 451.38 hectares (0.7%), while agriculture utilizes 2.17% of the land. Additionally, water bodies such as lakes and dams encompass 0.14% of the region's total area.”

2. **Comments:** Please clarify if the initials provided to the participants are pseudonyms or actual initials. Were participants assured anonymity? It is common practice for participant numbers to be used to anonymise participants (e.g., P1, P2 etc) or if pseudonyms are used, please state this clearly in the methods.

Response:

In order to secure the anonymity of the sources of the study, we decide to use the “P” for each or informants. The details of the procedure of the participant selection and protection of their identity have been presented in methods section especially in the ethical consideration in line 261-269 of the revised version.

3. **Comments:** Please clarify if participants provided written consent for their images to be used in publications.

Response:

All photographs were verbally agreed to be used in this publication.

4. **Comments:** Please clarify the ethics statement; is the approval number associated to the approving university or the 'Cluster Interdisciplinary Basic Research and Ethical Approval'?

Response:

Thank you very much for the query which relate to the ethical consideration section. We have rewritten this part to be more precise in the line 253-260.

"The present investigation was conducted under the auspices of Cluster Interdisciplinary Basic Research, adhering meticulously to stringent ethical guidelines. To ensure ethical compliance, the study received official approval from the Rector of State Islamic University of North Sumatera (UINSU) with the approval number: 0616615683. The utmost care was taken in handling the research data and records, which were securely stored on a password-protected computer housed within the Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, UINSU. Access to these records was strictly restricted to the authors."

5. **Comments:** Please provide more detail in the methods section regarding the ethnography and fieldwork. The authors state 6 months was spent in the field; was these daily field visits? How much time was spent with participants? How was the fieldwork carried out? What activities did the researchers participate in/observe? What role did the researcher undertake? Participant, observer, participant-observer etc? How was data collected- i.e., were interviews recorded and transcribed, were field notes taken?

Response:

Thank you for the critical feedbacks that relate to the unclear explanation in methodological section. Here we have restructured this section, and all information can be extracted in subchapter 3.2 line 218-231.

Line 218-231

"The current investigation involved the collection of data during a comprehensive six-month fieldwork period in 2022, specifically spanning from February to July. This fieldwork, which was coordinated by the first author, S, and A.F.D., extended over a total of 90 days. The study targeted five specifically chosen districts, selected from a larger pool of 23 districts in the designated study area (refer to Figure 1). The primary objective of the research was to obtain valuable insights into the cultural practices related to the Batu Qulhu ritual within the Mandailing community in the Madina region. The Batu Qulhu event occurring in July 2022 was meticulously observed and documented, employing a combination of photographs and videos for meticulous recording. Regarding the data collection process, individual interviews were conducted with each informant, with each session spanning approximately 2 hours. These interviews took place at mutually agreed locations, such as the informant's residence, school office, or the household of the deceased individual where the Batu Qulhu ritual took place. Thorough and meticulous recording of all pertinent information was undertaken for subsequent analysis purposes."

6. **Comment:** Please outline how data was analysed.

Response:

Thank you for your critical question. Here we have already added subchapter 3.3 Data analysis and all information can be read from line 234-251

7. **Comment:** Please use participant identifiers after the extracts from the data when not introduced, e.g., P1.

Response:

Thank you very much. We have used the participant identifiers for all data explained by informants.

8. **Comment:** A small number of extracts are presented from the collected data to support the conclusions made; it may strengthen the manuscript to provide some more data extracts.

Response:

Thank you. We have put all relevant data to support the conclusion.

PENJELASAN POIN 2 DAN 3

Apakah kunjungan dilakukan setiap hari? Penelitian ini dilaksanakan 6 bulan dengan kunjungan lapangan 1 kali dalam seminggu,

Berapa lama waktu dihabiskan dengan peserta? Durasi pertemuan 2 jam setiap kali pertemuan

Bagaimana Tata cara kerja lapangan? Dalam bentuk:

1. Mengeksplorasi data dari setiap informan
2. Merangkum data
3. Memilah-milah data akurat dan tidak akurat
4. Melakukan kategorisasi dan fokus pada data data yang penting dan membuang data yang tidak penting dan tidak berhubungan dengan tujuan penelitian

Aktivitas apa yang diikuti atau diamati oleh peneliti? Berkaitan dengan praktek zikir batu qulhu yang dibawakan oleh para imam zikir batu qulhu, dan praktek meletakkan zikir batu qulhu usai dizikirkan di kuburan

Apa peran peneliti? Sebagai observer dan pewawancara

Bagaimana data dikumpulkan? Apakah melalui rekaman transkrip wawancara atau dengan membuat catatan lapangan? Data dikumpulkan melalui catatan lapangan saja

Nomor 3

Bagaimana data dianalisis; pendekatan emic

***Batu Qulhu*—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra**

Sahrul^{1*}, Anang Widhi Nirwansyah², Seyithan Demirdag³, and Afrahul Fadhila Daulai⁴

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Abstract: Death and funeral rituals hold significant cultural and spiritual importance in traditional communities worldwide, including within the Islamic faith. This study focuses on exploring the unique funeral ritual known as *Batu Qulhu* in the Muslim Mandailing community. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes field observations and interviews with ulama and imams who have practical knowledge and understanding of this traditional ritual. The study reveals two origin stories of *Batu Qulhu*: one attributed to the first Imam in the Mandailing community and the other associated with elderly parents, ulama, and village *malims* (religious teachers) without specifying an individual source. *Batu Qulhu* refers to the white river stones utilized by the congregation during the ritual to count the number of prayers offered. The procession of this tradition follows a strict protocol, encompassing prayers, recitation of the Quran, and seeking forgiveness for the deceased and their family. The efficacy of *Batu Qulhu* serves as a testament to the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of cultural identity. While *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar cultural practices can be observed in other regions, highlighting the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and uphold cultural traditions as an integral part of identity and social cohesion.

Keywords: death rituals, funeral traditions, *Batu Qulhu*, Mandailing community, norms and values

1. Introduction

The manner in which individuals navigate the concept of death holds significance as it encompasses their cultural engagement and utilization, similar to how religion, an integral component of culture, provides a framework for comprehending, interpreting, and making sense of death, albeit without necessarily diminishing its inherent challenges for those experiencing grief [1]. Throughout various cultures, the commemoration of the deceased and the support offered to grieving families manifest through a multitude of ritualistic practices [2]. These rituals hold particular significance within religious frameworks as they are not only

guided by religious doctrines but also serve as fundamental aspects of communal worship [3]. Within the Islamic tradition, the management of deceased bodies adheres to the teachings found in the Qur'an, specifically drawing attention to Surah Al Imran (QS 3:185). This verse underscores the universal nature of mortality, asserting that every individual is bound to experience death [4]. In his groundbreaking 1907 study, Robert Hertz skillfully intertwined three essential imperatives - moral, aesthetic, and sociological - to present a captivating conceptualization of death [5]. His intricate analysis portrays death as a profound transformative journey that transcends the boundaries of both the spiritual and physical realms.

In Indonesia, funeral rituals have been intricately intertwined with local cultural practices and ethnic traditions. Various communities, such as the Tana Toraja people [6], the traditional Javanese community [7,8], and the Balinese who perform the *ngaben* ceremony [9,10], express their funeral customs based on their specific cultural heritage. These burial practices and procedures provide profound insights into the community and society in which they are performed. In these traditions, feasts, animal sacrifices, and supplications are often conducted to honor the deceased and their family. Additionally, Islamic values and rituals significantly influence funeral practices across many regions in Indonesia. The practice of *tahlil* or *tahlilan*, which involves collective remembrance gatherings, is commonly observed [11], and the *azan* (call to prayer) is often performed during burial ceremonies [3]. Moreover, in certain regions of Sumatra, Islamic funeral practices have assimilated with local traditions. For example, the people of Minangkabau in Nagari Salayo incorporate the custom of placing attributes on the head of the deceased during the funeral procession [12]. While in Nagari Anduring, the Minang community also practices *bakayaik*, which takes place 100 days after someone's passing. *Bakayaik* vividly recounts the profound narrative of Prophet Muhammad pbuh¹, beginning with his miraculous birth and chronicling his relentless efforts to uphold the principles of Islam. This ceremonial tradition blends the eloquence of Arabic and Minang languages, creating a captivating linguistic tapestry that enhances the overall richness of the performance. In Aceh, the *reuhab* tradition involves decorating the deceased person's bedroom for 40 days [13]. These practices exemplify the dynamic interplay between Islamic influences and local cultural expressions in funeral rituals across Indonesia.

This study aims to contribute to the understanding of funeral traditions within the Muslim community in Sumatra, specifically focusing on the practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance in the Mandailing community of North Sumatra. The funeral rituals in this community are deeply rooted in a rich tapestry of cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions. By exploring the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ceremonies, this research seeks to shed light on the significance and

intricacies of these rituals, offering valuable insights into the broader context of funeral traditions among Muslims in Sumatra. The study addresses the historical aspect of the ritual, the procession in current societies, and finally the norms and values contained in this ritual.

1.1. Mandailing Ethnic: Historical Context

The origin of the word "*Mandailing*" is linked to the Munda people of India, who experienced defeat in a war against the Aryan people. The term "*Mandailing*" is derived from either "*Mandala Holing*" [14,15] or "*Mundailing*," referring to the refugees from Munda [16]. It is believed that the Munda people originally inhabited the northern regions of India before the arrival of the Aryans [17]. The historical interaction between the Aryans and the Munda people has been examined through linguistic evidence [18]. Due to pressure from the Aryans, the Munda people migrated southward within India [18–20], and this Aryan occupation of the Munda people occurred around 1200-1500 BC [21]. Eventually, the displaced Munda people migrated to Southeast Asia [20], although the specific country of their migration is not specified. It is likely that some of them reached North Sumatra through the Barus Port in Central Tapanuli, which was an international port at that time. Referred to "*Negarakeragama*" book from 1365, which mentions the presence of the Mandailing as one of the most significant ethnic groups in the archipelago [14,22]. The names mentioned include Mandailing, Pane, and Padang Lawas. The mention of these names indicates that the name Mandailing has been known by outsiders since ancient dates. In addition, Tuanku Rao² suggests that the Mandailing people trace their origin back to the Bugis Makassar, who sailed to the Singkuang Port (now known as Natal), it is more commonly accepted that the Mandailing people are part of the Batak ethnic group.

The Mandailing community's ethnic origin is a subject of contention among scholars. While some argue that they are part of the Batak Toba ethnic group [23,24], this perspective faces opposition from Mandailing intellectuals and historians. However, an analysis of factors such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group [25,26]. To establish their identity as the Mandailing community, they refer to themselves as "*halak kita*" (referred to: our people) of South Tapanuli [27], rather than as "*halak batak*" (Batak people) [28,29]. Regarding religious affiliation, the majority of the contemporary Mandailing population follows Islam, with a minority of Christians found in specific locations like Pakantan in Upper Mandailing, Medan, and other cities in North Sumatra [14,30]. Before embracing Islam, the religious beliefs of the Mandailing people focused around ancestral spirits

referred to as "*si pele begu*" [22], incorporating influences from Hinduism and Buddhism [31]. Recent field research conducted in the Mandailing region revealed remnants and artefacts associated with both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, particularly in the vicinity of Panyabungan within the Greater Mandailing area [32].

Padri wars has brought Islam to Mandailing around 1821 and the Dutch military breached and defeated this movement by 1835 [25,30,33]. The term '*Padri*' has two possible origins. One explanation suggests that it stems from the Indonesian word '*padri*,' which referred to priests. It is important to emphasize that the notable figures associated with the Padri movement can be likened to 'Islamic priests' [34]. This movement emerged in the early 1800s as a reformist Islamic movement led by local scholars known as ulama. These ulama sought to purify and reform Islam in the region, criticizing what they perceived as syncretic practices and deviations from strict Islamic teachings [15,30]. They aimed to establish a more orthodox and conservative interpretation of Islam in Mandailing. Padri movement gained support from various segments of the population, including the rural communities, who were attracted to their message of religious purity and social justice [35]. The Padris' growing influence and power threatened the traditional rulers, known as penghulu, who feared losing their authority and control [30,34].

1.2. Mandailing Philosophy

The values of the Mandailing ethnic philosophy of life called *Poda Na Lima*. *Poda* means advice, *na* means five, and *lima* means five. In short, *Poda Na Lima* consists of five pieces of advice, namely: i) *Paias Rohamu* (keeping your heart clean); ii) *Paias Pamatangmu* (keeping your body clean); iii) *Paias Parabitonmu* (keeping your clothes clean); iv) *Paias Bagasmu* (keeping your house clean); and v) *Paias Pakaranganmu* (keeping your yard clean) [23,36]. These five values are still firmly held by the Mandailing community and the Mandailing ethnicity in Indonesia and around the world. Despite the Madina people's reputation for being religious, their daily social lives are intertwined with various cultural practices that are imbued with religious significance. These rituals, such as *marhaban* (*barzanzi*)³, the use of plain flour, and *upah-upah*⁴, are performed on joyful occasions such as weddings, recoveries from illness, and the attainment of new positions, as well as during significant life transitions such as the birth of a child and moving into a new home [27].

The Mandailing ethnic community has a value system, *Dalihan Na Tolu* which means a forum used to organize life in carrying out *olong* (affection) between *mora*, *kahanggi* and *anak boru* [23,24,37,38]. *Dalihan Na Tolu*, also referred to 'three stones' [26], is a cultural value,

created by the Creator that guide Bataknese attitude and behavior in the social lives and cultural relation [39]. The three stones encompass family, community, and spirituality. In Mandailing community, *Dalihan Na Tolu* principles are deeply intertwined with Islamic values and teachings. Mandailing Muslim communities incorporate these cultural principles into their daily lives, alongside their Islamic beliefs and practices [39,40]. This concept reinforces the importance of maintaining strong moral character, fostering harmonious relationships, and upholding social justice within the community [23,24,39].

2. Location Settings

The Mandailing Natal region, also shortly known as Madina, is located in North Sumatra Province and astronomically situated between 0°10' and 1°50' N and 98°10' and 100°10' E. This region is located on the west coast of Sumatra, has a 170 km coastline, and is home to 24 islands, though only 4 of these islands are inhabited. In 2021, Madina has a population of over 478,000 people, and has a total area of 6,134 km² [41]. Based on BPS-Statistics of Mandailing Natal Regency [41], during 2021, the predominant land use in this region comprises a mixed vegetation area, accounting for 39.15% or 252.57 hectares, while forested areas occupy 30.04% of the region, followed by palm oil plantations at 27.79%. Settlements in Madina cover 451.38 hectares (0.7%), while agriculture utilizes 2.17% of the land. Additionally, water bodies such as lakes and dams encompass 0.14% of the region's total area. This region is crossed by three river systems including Batang Pungkut, Batang Gadis, and Aek Pohan that represent upper, middle and lower part of the Batang Gadis watershed [42]. These rivers are beneficial for major population in Madina including for agriculture, plantation and industrial sectors. However, for years the rivers have also become threatened to illegal mining activities including sands, rocks and gold [43,44].

The majority of the population in Madina, around 95%, is Muslim, while the remaining 5% consists of Christians, Catholics, Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of Confucianism. Madina has more than 800 mosques and 70 churches [45], to support the religious practices of its inhabitants, and the region is made up of 23 districts and over 370 villages. Muslim community in Madina, consisting of various ethnic groups, exhibits a rich diversity of cultural and religious practices. Mosques and Islamic schools, known as *madrasah*, hold a prominent position in shaping the religious and cultural life of the community. Furthermore, active participation in significant cultural and religious traditions, such as the celebration of two major Islamic holidays like *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*, is observed among the Muslim population. A strong emphasis on social responsibility and assisting those in need, in alignment with

Islamic principles, is evident through the engagement of the Muslim community in charitable and community service activities. The local government plays a supportive role by implementing policies and providing necessary infrastructure to promote Islamic education [46].

3. Methodology

3.1. Design of the Research

This study adopts qualitative research design, employing combination of phenomenological and ethnographic approaches. The primary aim of qualitative research is to comprehend the distinctive characteristics and experiences of individual cases, rather than attempting to establish generalized patterns or trends [47]. This method emphasizes the comprehensive exploration of human behaviors and experiences as they unfold within natural settings [48,49]. Integral to this research is the integration of the subjects' knowledge with that of the researchers, which holds significant importance. This integration facilitates the recognition and documentation of outcomes from the local perspective inherent to the subjects themselves [6,50]. The current study employs an emic approach, which entails adopting the insider's perspective from within the culture where the research project is situated, as previously described in studies by [6,34,51–53]. By embracing an emic approach, the research acknowledges the critical importance of comprehending and interpreting the cultural context and subjective experiences of the subjects, thereby enriching both the research process and its findings.

3.2. Fieldwork and Subjects

The research employed an observational and interview-based approach to collect data. The researchers assumed the roles of both observers and interviewers. The observation phase focused on the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice in the study area, the activities of the Imam during the ritual, and the placement of stones in the graveyard after the final day of remembrance. For the interviews, a systematic process was followed to select appropriate sources. Initial contact with the informants was established through various means, such as phone calls, emails, and WhatsApp messages, to effectively arrange and conduct the interviews.

In prior ethnographic studies, a limited number of subjects were involved. For instance, two studies centered on the practices of anesthesia within two British hospital [54]. Similarly, Baan et al. [6] conducted research on funeral rituals in Toraja with only two informants, while

Lee et al. [55] examined the experience of depression among Chinese individuals with a sample size of five informants. In accordance with the present study, data collection encompassed interviews with a total of eight carefully selected subjects, as detailed in Table 1. The age range of the informants in this study was 45-73 years old.

The selection process for these subjects adhered to specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Firstly, the informants were required to hold the roles of imams or leaders of the *Batu Qulhu* dhikr (or remembrance) during funeral ceremonies within the Mandailing community. Secondly, they were expected to possess a profound understanding of the norms and values associated with *Batu Qulhu*. Lastly, the informants needed to be Ulama or respected Islamic spiritual leaders within the local community. Proficiency in the Mandailing language was also a prerequisite for informant selection. To identify suitable subjects, consultations were conducted with local authorities, such as the Indonesian Council of Ulama (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*) in Madina, as well as prominent local figures.

Table 1

The current investigation involved the collection of data during a comprehensive six-month fieldwork period in 2022, specifically spanning from February to July. This fieldwork, which was coordinated by the first author, S, and A.F.D., extended over a total of 90 days. The study targeted five specifically chosen districts, selected from a larger pool of 23 districts in the designated study area (refer to Figure 1). The primary objective of the research was to obtain valuable insights into the cultural practices related to the Batu Qulhu ritual within the Mandailing community in the Madina region. The *Batu Qulhu* event occurring in July 2022 was meticulously observed and documented, employing a combination of photographs and videos for meticulous recording. Regarding the data collection process, individual interviews were conducted with each informant, with each session spanning approximately 2 hours. These interviews took place at mutually agreed locations, such as the informant's residence, school office, or the household of the deceased individual where the *Batu Qulhu* ritual took place. Thorough and meticulous recording of all pertinent information was undertaken for subsequent analysis purposes.

Figure 1

3.3. Data Analysis

The present study utilized a qualitative data analysis approach, encompassing three key stages: 1) data reduction; 2) data presentation; and 3) drawing conclusions. This analytical process unfolded iteratively throughout the research. Initially, during the early phases of data

collection, the research maintained a broad and overarching focus, and the observations were comprehensive in nature. As the research progressed and the focus of the study became more apparent, the observations evolved to adopt a more structured approach, enabling the acquisition of specific and targeted data.

The data analysis commenced with data reduction, where the gathered information was streamlined and organized to facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Subsequently, the data were presented in a coherent and meaningful manner to facilitate effective interpretation. Finally, the study derived conclusions based on the analyzed data, allowing for the generation of valuable insights into the cultural practices surrounding the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina. Throughout the research, this qualitative data analysis process occurred in a cyclical manner, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the research topic and a nuanced understanding of the intricacies involved. By transitioning from broad and general observations to more structured and specific data collection, the study achieved a comprehensive and detailed exploration of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual's cultural significance and its relevance within the Mandailing community.

3.4. Ethical Consideration

The present investigation was conducted under the auspices of Cluster Interdisciplinary Basic Research, adhering meticulously to stringent ethical guidelines. To ensure ethical compliance, the study received official approval from the Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) University of North Sumatera (UINSU) with the approval number: 0616615683. The utmost care was taken in handling the research data and records, which were securely stored on a password-protected computer housed within the Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, UINSU. Access to these records was strictly restricted to the authors.

Prior to their participation in the study, informed consent was diligently obtained from all eight subjects involved, safeguarding their voluntary and informed engagement in the research. To ensure confidentiality, each subject was identified using an initial "P" followed by relevant details such as age and current profession. Additionally, all photographs presented in this study were done so with verbal agreement from all participants, emphasizing the paramount importance of respecting their autonomy and privacy throughout the research process. This stringent adherence to ethical principles underscores the rigor and integrity of the current study, enabling an ethically sound exploration of the cultural practices surrounding the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Origin of the Rituals

Based on the interview, it is mentioned that Syeikh Haji Mustafa Husein bin Husein Nasution bin Umar Nasution Al-Mandaili (or known as Syeikh Mustafa Husein) (1886-1955), is credited as the first Imam to introduce the practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance at funeral ceremonies. In the beginning, was named by *Batu Balancing* based on the color of the stone used in this ritual. This insight was derived from interviews conducted with P1 (65), an ulama, and P2 (52), a teacher at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Panyabungan. In addition, Syeikh Musthafa Husein is also founder of the *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB)⁵ or Purba Baru Islamic boarding school. The practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been preserved and perpetuated by his students, who have established recitation congregations in various locations such as mosques, prayer rooms, and *surau*⁶. Notably, the students and alumni of Musthafawiyah have played a significant role in its development and expansion beyond Madina region, with a presence in several other provinces across Indonesia. As the oldest *pesantren* (or boarding school) in North Sumatra, the influence of this practice extends widely, facilitated by the widespread distribution of its students and graduates.

An alternative explanation, provided by P3 (73) an ulama, diverges slightly from the previous informant. He has pointed out that the tradition of using *Batu Qulhu* or *Batu Balancing*⁷ as a medium for remembrance was explained with a slight variation, focusing on the customs upheld by elderly parents, ulama, village *malims* (religious teachers), without mentioning any specific individual. It was a means to alleviate the sorrow experienced by the bereaved and served as a form of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends. In addition to the customary acts of attending funerals and observing mourning rituals, the strategies employed to alleviate the profound grief experienced by individuals extended further. These encompassed multifaceted practices such as providing emotional support, proffering words of guidance and solace to foster resilience and acceptance in the face of adversity. Moreover, individuals were invited to partake in collective prayer sessions, where the use of *Batu Qulhu* stones served as facilitative elements in creating a conducive environment for these spiritual gatherings. P3 further elucidated that this method, referred to as *alak na jolo martakziah*, involved family members, parents, spouses, children, relatives, and neighbors coming together for *tahlilan*.

“In the past people paid tribute to the homes of people who died; parents, wife, husband, children, siblings and neighbors are *tahlilan*, starting from reciting *istighfar*, *al-Fatihah*,

303 *tahlil, prayers and concluding selawat. To make the dhikr in congregation more solemn,*
304 *they add media by using a Batu Balancing (white stone) within size of an adult's big toe*
305 *or larger than that. In the past, the white stone was said to be a Batu Balancing, now it is*
306 *better known as the Batu Qulhu”.*

307 *Batu Qulhu* ritual refers to the use of certain stone as a means of carrying out dhikr
308 worship. In general, this type of stone is typically known as white pebble. It should be noticed
309 that most of these white pebbles are predominantly comprised of marble, a rock formation
310 characterized by its crystallized carbonates and can easily be found in the riparian zone. Here,
311 the family of the deceased person collect these stones from the nearest river. As mentioned in
312 the interview, this ritual chooses approximately the size of an adult's thumb to enhance the
313 solemnity of the remembrance (as can be seen in Figure 2a). During the interview P4 (65),
314 emphasized that in the past, people paid homage to the homes of the deceased, engaging in
315 *tahlilan* rituals that encompassed prayers and concluding with ‘*selawat*’ (see Figure 2b). To
316 augment the collective remembrance, *Batu Qulhu*, the size of an adult's big toe or larger, was
317 employed. Over time, the *Batu Balancing* came to be recognized as the *Batu Qulhu*.

318 **Figure 2**

319 The utilization of *Batu Qulhu* in death ceremonies is also underpinned by the geographical
320 sequences. Firstly, the abundance of rivers in Madina, notably the Batang Gadis River, Batang
321 Natal River, Aek Kalungan River and Angkola River, facilitated the easy availability of these
322 stones in the past. Nowadays, these rivers also threatened by illegal gold mining activities [43],
323 and tend to pollute due to its waste [44]. Secondly, these stones possess distinct characteristics
324 that contribute to their suitability for the purpose at hand. They exhibit a white hue, imparting
325 a visually soothing effect, while their cool and clean appearance further enhances their appeal.
326 Third, these stones demonstrate resilience in withstanding the rigors of varying weather
327 conditions, including heat, cold, and rainfall. Furthermore, the recitation of *Batu Qulhu* rituals
328 is believed by the community to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave.

329 **4.2. The Contemporary Practice of Batu Qulhu in the Mandailing Community**

330 In the past, Islamic practices in Sumatra have exhibited influences from mystical and
331 shamanistic traditions e.g., [56,57]. However, it is important to note that the religious activities
332 associated with the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* are not influenced by shamanism, but rather
333 stem solely from religious traditions previously followed by religious scholars, religious
334 teachers, and traditional leaders. Currently, the contemporary practice of *Batu Qulhu*
335 remembrance has been inherited and embraced by Muslim society in Madina. Based on

interview with P4 (65), it is evident that in the past, the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance adhered to strict protocols as mentioned in the following statement.

“The tradition of recalling the Batu Qulhu was once a highly regulated practice. It required seeking consent from both the village leader and the syekh. Mastery of the 20 essential attributes of Allah was necessary, alongside the ability to read the Quran and comprehend its teachings. The stones themselves had to possess a pure white hue. The recitation of Qulhu would take place during evening gatherings, where all the stones present had to be utilized fully, leaving no remnants behind before the congregation dispersed”.

These procedures include the following: 1) the procession necessitated obtaining permission from the head of the village⁸ and *tuan guru*⁹ (or *kulifah*); 2) the ritual leader was required to commit to memory and comprehend the twenty obligatory attributes of God, encompassing *nafsiyah* (self-related attributes) nature, *salbiyah* (attributes related to existence) nature, *ma'ani* (abstract attributes of God) nature, and *maknawiyah* (the essential nature and prevalence of *ma'ani*) nature; 3) the officiating Imam was expected to possess proficiency in both written and spoken Arabic-Malay; 4) the Imam leading the remembrance was required to proficiently recite the Qur'an and comprehend its meaning; 5) the *Batu Qulhu* utilized in the ritual had to be of a white hue; and 6) the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* transpired during evening hours, and all the stones had to be completed within a single procession conducted in the presence of the congregation. Preceding the initiation of the ritual, it is customary for the priest to cleanse himself through the observance of ablution, mirroring the ritualistic cleansing process associated with prayer as mentioned by P7 (60).

Basically, this ritual has many similarities to *tahlilan* tradition especially in the context prayers and recitations. This practice generally has been carried out by many Nahdatul Ulama (NU) community in Sumatra [11,58]. However, in *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, there are five Imams that lead this procession with different assignment. These Imams are voluntarily appointed by the group and relatively flexible based on their own agreement. The priests then read several prayers that beneficial to seek forgiveness for the deceased, his/her family as well to congregation. The Imams also recite some verses from the Surat of the Quran (QS), and praise the God. In this *Batu Qulhu* ritual, the congregation are voluntarily attending the ritual without any formal invitation. The ritual is held in three consecutive days after the death, and organized by group manager, neighbors and the Imams, and commonly referred to *Serikat Tolong Menolong* (STM) or Union of Help. The Imams and the congregation are artfully arranged in a circular formation, tailored to the venue's conditions. This arrangement allows

for the placement of stones in front of the congregation, effortlessly within reach for the worshippers' right hand. During the fieldwork in Panyabungan Kota district, it was noticed that there were more than 30 piles of stones in the congregation. As additional information that commonly they are sitting on the floor covered with *tikar* or mat, but some people also held the ritual with chairs. The priests hold the responsibility for overseeing the course of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual. The following Table 2 describes each Imams' responsibility in *Batu Qulhu* procession.

Table 2

The current study also reveals that *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Madina is held in three consecutive days where:

- In the day 1, the remembrance is taken where the Imam start the ceremony. In the first meeting, the priests wear neat clothes, wear caps, turbans and sarongs. Reflecting the figure of a religious expert and placing his position is a person who is highly respected in society. Their sitting position is arranged in a special place, different from the congregation in general. Here, the Imam will also read out the order of the *Batu qulhu* procession.
- For day 2, similar to the preceding event, the order of events for the first night procession remains unchanged. Prior to commencing the remembrance ceremony, the 'Imam pembaca takhtim' provided an explanation that after the recitation of the *takhtim*, the congregation would engage in the dhikr of *Batu Qulhu*, and were kindly requested to maintain their positions until the conclusion of the event. However, in contrast to the previous occasion, on the second night of recitation, *Qulhu* stones are made available to facilitate the dhikr and are arranged in a stacked formation in front of the congregation. Subsequently, the *Qulhu* remembrance stones are accumulated in the same location. The prescribed procedure entails the recitation of QS 112: 1-3, followed by the selection of a single stone. For each subsequent repetition, an additional stone is selected, such that two stones are chosen for a two-time reading, three stones for a three-time reading, four stones for a four-time reading, and so forth, in accordance with established practice.
- In day 3, *Batu Qulhu* procession replicates the format observed on the second meeting. However, a notable distinction lies in the extended duration of the dhikr, necessitated by the requirement to recite the prayer over each stone in the presence of the congregation. It is imperative to sustain the continuity of the dhikr until its completion, without interruption. Subsequent to the remembrance, a collective prayer and *salawat* are gathered. The *Batu Qulhu* employed as aids for remembrance are carefully placed within plastic

burlap bags or buckets (as can be seen in Figure 3a). The event concludes with a religious sermon or *tausiyah*, wherein expressions of gratitude are articulated on behalf of the congregation and the afflicted families. The content of the religious sermon encompasses themes such as death, the retribution of the grave, and serves as a reminder for individuals to perpetually prepare themselves and enhance their devotion before the arrival of death. This is because all living beings are destined to experience mortality (QS 3: 185), and its arrival cannot be postponed, even if one seeks refuge within a lofty and robust fortress (QS 4: 78).

In addition to the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, on the fourth day following an individual's passing, *Batu Qulhu* stones are transported to the cemetery and carefully positioned above the burial site, as illustrated in Figure 3b. The procedure involves the preparation of the grave bed, which includes the leveling of the ground in the designated area assigned for burial. Subsequently, these stones are poured in a manner that commences from the head of the deceased and extends towards their feet. Although typically performed by the bereaved family, this task can also be undertaken by others, such as neighbors or relatives. During the placement of the stones on the grave, it is customary to recite the phrase "*Bismillahi milata 'ala Rasulullah*," which translates to "In the name of Allah and in the religion of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh." The recitation performed during this act is identical to the prayer recitation conducted during the interment of the deceased's body. It is noteworthy that the selection of this specific recitation lacks a distinct foundational basis but rather originates from established tradition.

Figure 3

Presently, *Batu Qulhu* dhikr has undergone significant transformations over time, likely influenced by environmental factors, evolving understandings within the community, and technological advance, as well as societal changes. Presently, the implementation of the ritual varies across different areas of Madina. Traditionally, some individuals engage in the *Batu Qulhu* practice following the *Maghrib* prayer (after sunset) or around 6.30 pm – 7.00 pm local time and typically after the *Isya* prayer (7.30 pm – 8.00 pm), collectively performed at the mosque during evening as mentioned by P8 (55). Among adult women, it takes place in the evening preceding *Maghrib*, while among the male youth (*naposo bulung*) and female youth (*nauli bulung*), it occurs in the afternoon (after *Asr* or around 3.00 pm) as mentioned by P6 (45). Adult male worshipers partake in this practice during the evening after the *Isya* prayer on the first, second, and third days following a person's demise. As mentioned earlier, the *Batu Qulhu* employed in this remembrance ritual is a stone recognized by the bereaved family,

retrieved from the river. To ensure cleanliness, the stones are consistently washed and kept in a plastic sack or a large container. However, due to the increasing flexibility of people's mindset and the scarcity of these rocks in rivers, the people can now be acquired from various stores in Madina region as mentioned by P5 (50):

“Batu Qulhu are taken from the river by the family, if they are dirty, they are cleaned. Now, Batu Qulhu are easy to get and are sold in flower shops and building material store”).

4.3. Aspect of Norms of *Batu Qulhu* ritual

The *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice, introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein, holds significant cultural value in the Mandailing community of Madina. This ritual utilizes white pebbles from nearby rivers for dhikr worship and to alleviate the suffering of the deceased in the grave. It has been preserved and perpetuated by Syeikh Mustafa Husein's students and alumni, who have established recitation congregations in the region. As the oldest pesantren in North Sumatra, the influence of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends widely beyond Madina, with its students and graduates playing a significant role in its development and expansion. Similar cultural practices, like the *tahlilan* tradition among the NU community in Sumatra, can also be found.

Strict protocols surround the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance. Prior permission from village and religious leaders, referred to as *Tuan Guru*, is required. The officiating Imam must possess proficiency in Arabic-Malay language. These protocols ensure the solemnity and authenticity of the ritual, aligning with the importance placed on established rituals and cultural heritage. The *tahlilan* tradition within the NU community also follows specific rituals, emphasizing the shared values of upholding traditions and seeking solace in times of mourning. As previously mentioned, obtaining permission from both village and religious leaders is necessary, as indicated by P2 (52):

‘mangido izin Parjolo tu Tuan Guru’ (English: Ask permission from *Tuan Guru* first). Commonly answered by the teacher with *‘olo’ silahken acara dilanjut* (English: Okay, please continue the ritual), *‘marimom mau au’* (English: I will follow).

Batu Qulhu remembrance serves as a form of communal support, uniting family members, relatives, neighbors, and friends in times of sorrow. This fosters a sense of unity and solidarity within the Mandailing community, reflecting the value placed on collective resilience. Similar communal support can be found in other practices, such as the collective remembrance gatherings associated with the *tahlilan* tradition, reinforcing the cultural value of community

bonds and support networks. The significance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends beyond its cultural and spiritual aspects. It represents a cherished cultural heritage embraced by the Muslim society in Madina, highlighting the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of identity. While specific to the Mandailing community, similar practices can be observed in other regions, fulfilling the shared human need to honor the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and preserve cultural traditions as integral elements of identity and social cohesion. For a comprehensive overview of the norm aspects in the tradition of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community, please refer to Table 3.

Table 3

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ritual stands as a significant cultural and religious practice within the Mandailing community's funeral ceremonies. This tradition, which involves using stones for dhikr worship, holds deep historical and spiritual roots. While its origins can be traced back to Syeikh Mustafa Husein, who introduced the ritual, variations in accounts highlight the complex nature of its origin. Over time, the procession of *Batu Qulhu* has undergone modifications to streamline its organization, exemplifying the adaptive nature of cultural practices while maintaining their essence. Although *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar commemorative practices can be found in other regions. These rituals reflect the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, seeking solace through collective ceremonies, and preserving cultural traditions as integral components of identity and social cohesion. *Batu Qulhu* ritual serves as a testament to the rich cultural and religious heritage of the Mandailing community in North Sumatra, encapsulating collective mourning, spiritual devotion, and the preservation of cultural identity. As funeral ceremonies continue to play a pivotal role in communities worldwide, understanding and appreciating the significance of these rituals contributes to our broader knowledge of human beliefs, traditions, and the ways in which we commemorate and honor the departed.

While this study presents a preliminary investigation into the *Batu Qulhu* ritual, it acknowledges certain limitations. The absence of historical documentation detailing the ritual within the Mandailing community necessitates a proposed historical approach through extensive literature review, drawing upon the writings of earlier ulama. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the limited number of informants and the specific observed processions may not fully capture the diverse procedural variations of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual across the entire Madina region. Recognizing the modifications made by different communities

based on the guidance of their Imams or practical considerations further adds to the complexity of the ritual. Given these findings, the study recommends the cultural preservation and educational promotion of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual for the benefit of future generations. The creation of appropriate documentation, such as books and videos, accessible through various platforms including social media, can contribute to the wider dissemination of knowledge and understanding of the ritual. These efforts support the cultural preservation of the *Batu Qulhu* tradition and foster greater appreciation among the Mandailing community and beyond.

Declarations

Authors contribution statement

Conceived and designed the experiments, S., A.F.D.; performed the experiments, S., A.F.D.; analyzed and interpreted the data, S., S.D., and A.W.N.; wrote the paper S., A.F.D.; A.W.N. and S.D. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Figures

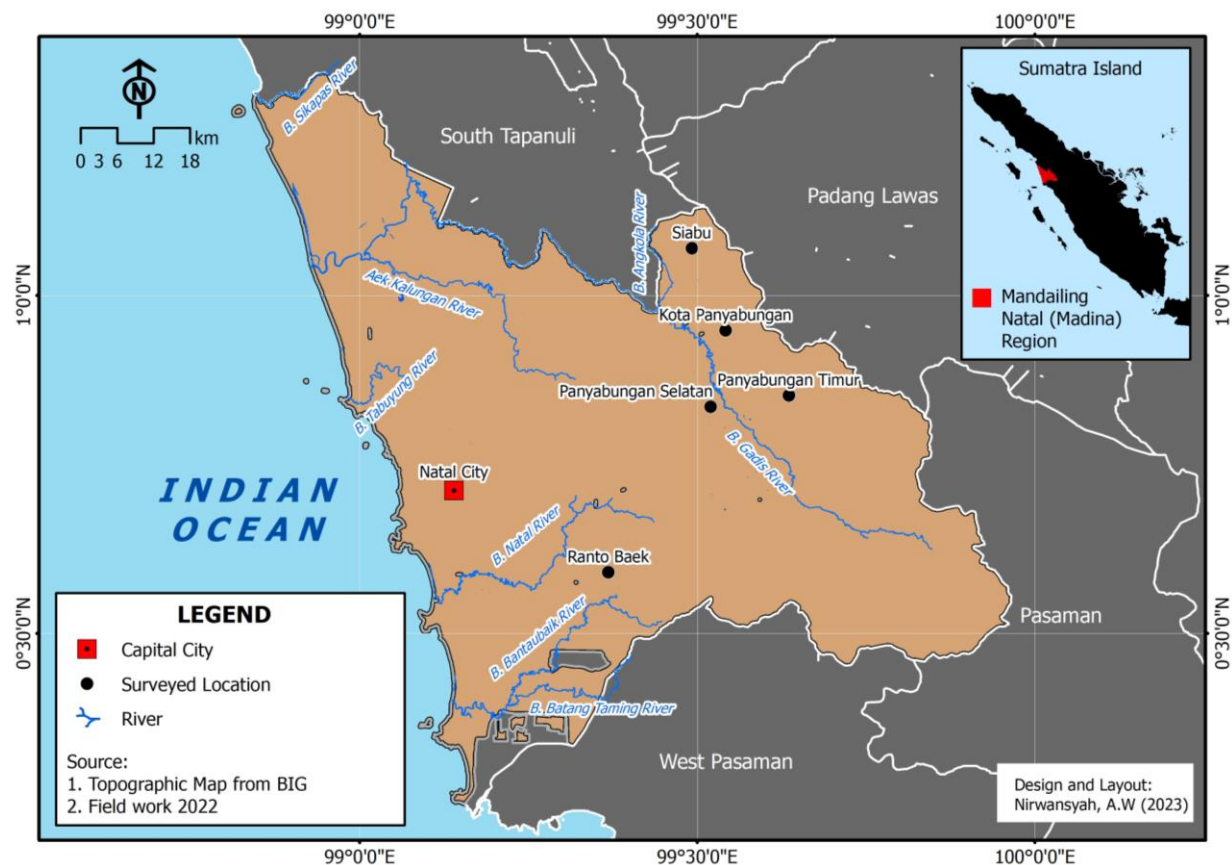


Figure 1. Area of the current research



Figure 2. a) White pebble collected for *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Mandailing, where each bucket contains 70 to 100 stones; and b) the congregation of the Mandailing Muslim community during this obituary ceremony. Photography by Sahrul on 22 July 2022.



Figure 3. *Batu Qulhu* remembrance by adult male where a) the organizer has collected and kept the stones back into the plastic sack for fourth day of casting procession; and b) where *Batu Qulhu* is finally poured on the grave of deceased person. (photographs of the ritual held at P4 residence on 22 July 2022) (taken by Sahrul)

Table 1. Pseudonym of subjects' information in the current study

Informants	Initial	Age	Education Level	Occupation
1	P1	65	Bachelor degree	Teacher
2	P2	52	Bachelor degree	Teacher
3	P3	73	Bachelor degree	Ulama and local public figure
4	P4	65	Master degree	Public servant
5	P5	50	Master degree	Public servant
6	P6	45	Master degree	Teacher
7	P7	60	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Businessman
8	P8	55	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Teacher

Table 2. Construction of each Imam and their task in *Batu Qulhu* procession

Imam	Local term	Assignment	Quran recitation
First Imam	<i>Imam pembaca silsilah</i>	– Reciting <i>istighfar</i> ¹⁰ three times; – Reciting <i>wasilah</i> to nabi (propeth Muhammad pbuh), his appostles, ulama and parents of the deceased person, all Muslim and the congregation	– QS 1: 1-6
Second Imam	<i>Imam pembaca takhtim</i>	– Reciting <i>takhtim</i> (known as "reading for the reward of the deceased" or "reciting for the benefit of the deceased")	– QS 112: 1-3 – QS 113: 1-5 – QS 114: 1-5 – QS 1: 1-7 – QS 2: 1-5; 255; 284-286 – QS 33: 56
Third Imam	<i>Imam pembaca tahlil</i>	– Reciting <i>tahlil</i> (compilation of dhikr) including: • <i>Istighfar</i> ;	

-
- Reciting ‘afdhalu dzikri’ followed by First *syahadat tauhid*¹¹. The congregation then answer by ‘hayyun baqi’;
 - Reciting second *syahadat tauhid*. Then answered by the congregation with ‘hayyun maujud’;
 - Reciting the third *syahadat tauhid*. And answered by all attendance by ‘hayyum maqsud’.
- Finally, reciting *syahadat tauhid* together with the congregation 100 times. Here the congregation gradually loud their praise and at same time shaking the head

Fourth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca Al Baqarah</i>	– Reciting some verses from the Quran that contains concept and advise about calamities	– QS 2: 152-156 – QS 67: 1-2
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Fifth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca doa</i>	– Reciting closing prayer, with the following structure:
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- *Basmallah*¹²;
- Praise to the Creator and His messenger (Muhammad pbuh);
- Prayers for all Moslem (men and women);
- Prayers for the deceased person and the family;
- Prayers for attendance in the congregation;

Source: compiled based on interview with P1 (65)

Table 3. Identified aspect of norms in the practice of *Batu Qulhu* Remembrance

Aspect of norm	Description
Preservation of traditions	The culture emphasizes the preservation and perpetuation of rituals and practices, such as the <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance, which was introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein and continued by his students and alumni. The students and graduates of Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding school play a significant role in preserving and expanding this practice.
Community support	The culture values community support during times of grief and mourning. The tradition of using <i>Batu Qulhu</i> serves as a means of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends, helping to alleviate sorrow and foster resilience.
Spiritual gatherings	Collective prayer sessions and remembrance gatherings are highly valued in the culture. The use of the stones during these gatherings creates a conducive environment for spiritual practices and collective remembrance.
Respect for the deceased	The culture emphasizes respect and care for the deceased. The ritual of collecting white pebbles, predominantly marble, from nearby rivers to be used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance shows reverence for the departed.
Connection to nature	The culture maintains a connection with nature, as the stones used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals are collected from rivers. The easy availability of these stones in the past and their resilience in varying weather conditions highlight the importance of nature in the culture.
Alleviation of suffering	The recitation of <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals is believed to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave. This demonstrates a value of compassion and empathy within the culture.

¹ Peace be upon him

² Tuanku Rao is characterized as enigmatic figure and one of the two significant leaders of the Padri movement, shared this status alongside Imam Bonjol himself. Tuanku Rao's origins can be traced to *Huta na Godang* or *Huta Godang*, also known as *Tano Godang*, located in Mandailing Julu (Upper Mandailing) [14].

³ The word *barzanzi* is associated with the name of Syeikh Barzanji, a prominent scholar and Sufi poet from Kurdistan. His renowned work, titled "*Mawlid al-Barzanji*," is a poetic composition that narrates the birth and life of the Prophet Muhammad, often recited during religious gatherings and celebrations.

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- ⁴ *Upah-upah* refers to cultural practice or tradition of offering gifts or monetary compensation during significant events or ceremonies. The term "upah" itself can be translated as "wages" or "payment". *Upah-upah* is deeply rooted in the Mandailing culture and is often observed during various occasions such as weddings, funerals, or community gatherings.
- ⁵ *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB), was founded in 1912 by Syeikh Musthafa Husein Nasution. This Islamic boarding school is located in Purba Baru sub-district, Madina Regency, North Sumatra [59]. Further reference on this boarding school can be read in Khairurrijal [60].
- ⁶ Surau means a place of worship or a small mosque-like structure. The surau typically serves as a communal prayer space or a modest mosque, wherein Muslims congregate for congregational prayers, religious discourses, and other religious engagements.
- ⁷ Some community in Madina also use term of *Batu Bontar* to refer *Batu Qulhu*.
- ⁸ One crucial determinant is obtaining authorization from the village leader. The village head holds a position akin to that of a revered monarch, embodying nobility and commanding profound respect.
- ⁹ *Tuan guru* or teacher serves as a religious authority, serving as an exemplar and establishing a benchmark for societal norms through their words and actions. Additionally, they are often revered as sacred individuals known for their healing abilities, and they serve as a source of supplication for various needs such as well-being, sustenance, companionship, agricultural prosperity, and attainment of blessings.
- ¹⁰ The act of attempting forgiveness from the Almighty God, commonly by saying ‘*astağfirullāhu*
- ¹¹ The *syahadat tauhid* contains declaration of belief in the oneness of God Almighty
- ¹² *Basmallah* is phrase mention to the God before beginning any action or speech. It spells ‘*Bismillahi rāhmani rāhiim*’. It means: in the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful.

1 **Table 1.** Pseudonym of subjects' information in the current study

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2

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- Prayers for attendance in the congregation;

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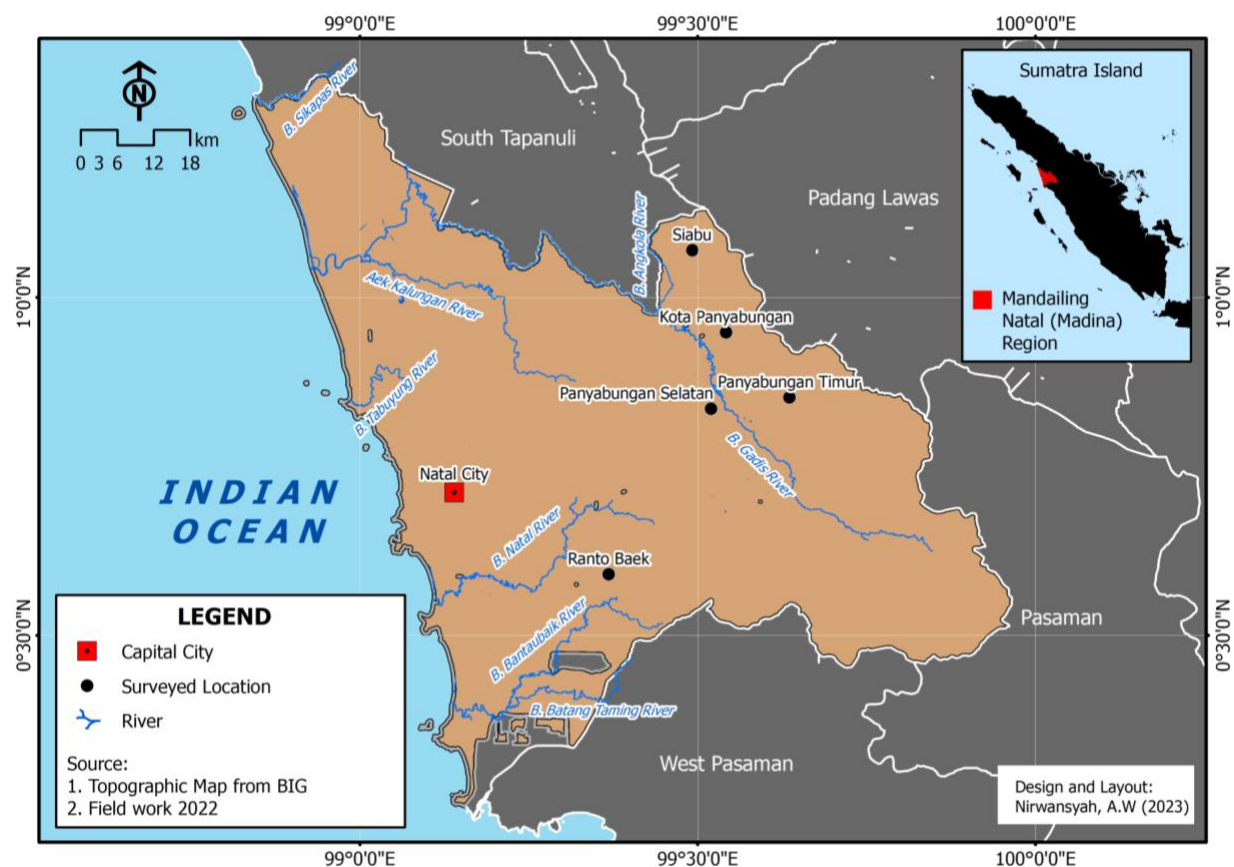


Figure 1. Area of the current research



Figure 2. a) White pebble collected for *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Mandailing, where each bucket contain 70 to 100 stones; and b) the congregation of the Mandailing Muslim community during this obituary ceremony. Photography by Sahrul on 22 July 2022.



Figure 3. Batu Qulhu remembrance by adult male where a) the organizer has collected and kept the stones back into the plastic sack for fourth day of casting procession; and b) where *Batu Qulhu* is finally poured on the grave of deceased person. (photographs of the ritual held at ML residence on 22 July 2022) (taken by Sahrul)

DAFTAR WAWANCARA
INFORMAN ZIKIR BATU QULHU PADA UPACARA KEMATIAN MASYARAKAT
MANDAILING DI SUMATERA UTARA

A. Sejarah

1. Sejak kapan sejarah zikir batu qulhu pada etnis Mandailing di Sumatera Utara?
2. Siapa orang pertama yang mempraktekkan zikir batu qulhu pada upacara kematian pada masyarakat Mandailing di Sumatera Utara?
3. Mengapa dahulu zikir batu qulhu cukup ketat pelaksanaannya di kalangan para ulama, leluhur, pemuka desa dan masyarakat?
4. Mengapa menggunakan batu warna putih?
5. Berapa besaran ukuran batu qulhu digunakan pada upacara kematian pada masyarakat Mandailing di Sumatera Utara?
6. Apakah zikir batu qulhu praktek agama atau warisan budaya leluhur?

B. Praktek zikir batu qulhu

1. Apakah zikir batu qulhu adalah praktek perdukunan atau praktek keagamaan yang dilaksanakan oleh para leluhur atau para ulama dahulunya?
2. Berapa orang imam yang memimpin zikir batu qulhu pada upacara kematian masyarakat Mandailing di Sumatera Utara?
3. Apa saja syarat-syarat yang diperlukan menjadi imam zikir batu qulhu pada upacara kematian masyarakat Mandailing di Sumatera Utara?
4. Setelah batu qulhu dizikirkan, apakah batu tersebut diletakkan di atas kuburan?
5. Bagaimana proses peletakan batu qulhu di kuburan pada hari keempat dari kematian?
6. Apakah kaum ibu, *naposo bulung* (pemuda) dan *nauli bulung* (perempuan gadis) melaksanakan zikir batu qulhu pada upacara kematian masyarakat Mandailing di Sumatera Utara?

C. Norma dan Nilai Zikir Batu Qulhu

1. Apa saja norma-norma yang terdapat dalam zikir batu qulhu pada upacara kematian masyarakat Mandailing di Sumatera Utara?
2. Apa makna gundal pada upacara kematian masyarakat Mandailing di Sumatera Utara?
3. Selain mengandung norma, apa saja nilai-nilai yang terkandung dalam zikir batu qulhu pada upacara kematian pada masyarakat Mandailing di Sumatera Utara?

4. Apakah zikir batu qulhu pada upacara kematian dapat mempererat hubungan sosial pada masyarakat Mandailing di Sumatera Utara?

List of Question

Batu Qulhu – The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

Narahubung / Correspondence: sahrul@uinsu.ac.id

Identitas Informan / Informant Identity	
Nama Lengkap / Full Name:	
Jenis Kelamin / Sex:	
Usia / Age:	
Alamat / Address:	
Pekerjaan / Occupation:	
Lama tinggal / Length of stay:	

A. Historical Inquiries
Sejak kapan sejarah dzikir Batu Qulhu pada etnis Mandailing di Sumatera Utara? <i>What is the chronological origin of the Batu Qulhu remembrance practice among the Mandailing ethnic group in North Sumatra?</i>
Siapa orang pertama yang mempraktekkan dzikir Batu Qulhu pada upacara kematian pada masyarakat Mandailing di Sumatera Utara? <i>Who was the initial individual to initiate the tradition of Batu Qulhu remembrance during funeral ceremonies among the Mandailing people in North Sumatra?</i>
Mengapa dahulu dzikir Batu Qulhu cukup ketat pelaksanaannya di kalangan para ulama, leluhur, pemuka desa dan masyarakat? <i>What were the factors contributing to the rigorous observance of Batu Qulhu remembrance by religious figures, ancestors, village leaders, and the community?</i>
Apakah alasan yang mendasari pelaksanaan dzikir Batu Qulhu menggunakan batu warna putih? <i>What is the rationale behind the utilization of white stones in this tradition?</i>
Berapa besar ukuran Batu Qulhu digunakan pada upacara kematian pada masyarakat Mandailing di Sumatera Utara? <i>What is the typical dimension of the Batu Qulhu employed in funeral ceremonies within the Mandailing community in North Sumatra?</i>
Bagaimana cara masyarakat lokal mendapatkan batu untuk keperluan ritual Batu Qulhu? <i>How do people get materials or pebbles for Batu Qulhu ritual?</i>
B. Implementation of Batu Qulhu Remembrance
Apakah zikir batu qulhu adalah praktek perdukunan atau praktek keagamaan yang dilaksanakan oleh para leluhur atau para ulama dahulunya? <i>Is the practice of Batu Qulhu remembrance rooted in shamanistic rituals or religious customs conducted by ancestral figures or former scholars?</i>
Berapa orang Imam yang memimpin zikir Batu Qulhu pada upacara kematian masyarakat Mandailing di Sumatera Utara? Dan apa peran masing-masing? <i>How many priests are involved in leading the Batu Qulhu remembrance during funeral ceremonies among the Mandailing people in North Sumatra? And what is the role of each Imam?</i>
Apa saja syarat-syarat yang diperlukan menjadi Imam zikir batu qulhu pada upacara kematian masyarakat Mandailing di Sumatera Utara? <i>What prerequisites are necessary to become a qulhu stone remembrance priest at the funeral ceremony for the Mandailing people in North Sumatra?</i>
Bagaimana proses pelaksanaan ritual Batu Qulhu yang dilakukan oleh masyarakat Mandailing pada masa sekarang?

In contemporary times, what are the current procedures involved in the execution of the Batu Qulhu ritual by the Mandailing community?

Bagaimana proses peletakan Batu Qulhu di kuburan pada hari keempat dari kematian?
Could you describe the procedure for depositing the Batu Qulhu into the grave on the fourth day following the decease?

Apakah kaum ibu, naposo bulung (pemuda) dan nauli bulung (perempuan gadis) melaksanakan zikir batu qulhu pada upacara kematian masyarakat Mandailing di Sumatera Utara?

Are mothers, naposo bulung (youth), and nauli bulung (women) actively engaged in the Batu Qulhu remembrance during the Mandailing people's funeral ceremony in North Sumatra?

C. Norms and Values Associated with Batu Qulhu Remembrance

Apa saja norma-norma yang terdapat dalam dzikir Batu Qulhu pada upacara kematian masyarakat Mandailing di Sumatera Utara?

What are the prevailing norms associated with the Batu Qulhu remembrance practice during funeral ceremonies among the Mandailing people in North Sumatra?

Apakah dzikir Batu Qulhu pada upacara kematian dapat mempererat hubungan sosial pada masyarakat Mandailing di Sumatera Utara?

To what extent does the practice of Batu Qulhu remembrance during funerals contribute to the strengthening of social relations within the Mandailing community in North Sumatra?

1 **Table 1.** Pseudonym of subjects' information in the current study

Informants	Initial	Age	Education Level	Occupation
1	BN	65	Bachelor degree	Teacher
2	MR	52	Bachelor degree	Teacher
3	PN	73	Bachelor degree	Ulama and local public figure
4	ML	65	Master degree	Public servant
5	KN	50	Master degree	Public servant
6	AT	45	Master degree	Teacher
7	ADL	60	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Businessman
8	MH	55	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Teacher

2

3 **Table 2.** Construction of each Imam and their task in *Batu Qulhu* procession

Imam	Local term	Assignment	Quran recitation
First Imam	<i>Imam pembaca silsilah</i>	– Reciting <i>istighfar</i> ¹ three times; – Reciting <i>wasilah</i> to nabi (propeth Muhammad pbuh), his appostles, ulama and parents of the deceased person, all moslem and the congregation	– QS 1: 1-6
Second Imam	<i>Imam pembaca takhtim</i>	– Reciting <i>takhtim</i> (known as "reading for the reward of the deceased" or "reciting for the benefit of the deceased)	– QS 112: 1-3 – QS 113: 1-5 – QS 114: 1-5 – QS 1: 1-7 – QS 2: 1-5; 255; 284-286 – QS 33: 56
Third Imam	<i>Imam pembaca tahlil</i>	– Reciting <i>tahlil</i> (compilation of dhikr) including: • <i>Istighfar</i> ;	

-
- Reciting ‘afdhalu dzikri’ followed by First *syahadat tauhid*². The congregation then answer by ‘hayyun baqi’;
 - Reciting second *syahadat tauhid*. Then answered by the congregation with ‘hayyun maujud’;
 - Reciting the third *syahadat tauhid*. And answered by all attendance by ‘hayyum maqsud’.
- Finally, reciting *syahadat tauhid* together with the congregation 100 times. Here the congregation gradually loud their praise and at same time shaking the head

Fourth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca Al Baqarah</i>	– Reciting some verses from the Quran that contains concept and advise about calamities	– QS 2: 152-156 – QS 67: 1-2
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Fifth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca doa</i>	– Reciting closing prayer, with the following structure:
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- *Basmallah*³;
- Praise to the Creator and His messenger (Muhammad pbuh);
- Prayers for all Moslem (men and women);
- Prayers for the deceased person and the family;
- Prayers for attendance in the congregation;

6 **Table 3.** Identified aspect of norms in the practice of *Batu Qulhu* Remembrance

Aspect of norm	Description
Preservation of traditions	The culture emphasizes the preservation and perpetuation of rituals and practices, such as the <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance, which was introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein and continued by his students and alumni. The students and graduates of Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding school play a significant role in preserving and expanding this practice.
Community support	The culture values community support during times of grief and mourning. The tradition of using <i>Batu Qulhu</i> serves as a means of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends, helping to alleviate sorrow and foster resilience.
Spiritual gatherings	Collective prayer sessions and remembrance gatherings are highly valued in the culture. The use of the stones during these gatherings creates a conducive environment for spiritual practices and collective remembrance.
Respect for the deceased	The culture emphasizes respect and care for the deceased. The ritual of collecting white pebbles, predominantly marble, from nearby rivers to be used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance shows reverence for the departed.
Connection to nature	The culture maintains a connection with nature, as the stones used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals are collected from rivers. The easy availability of these stones in the past and their resilience in varying weather conditions highlight the importance of nature in the culture.
Alleviation of suffering	The recitation of <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals is believed to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave. This demonstrates a value of compassion and empathy within the culture.

7

8

¹ The act of attempting forgiveness from the Almighty God, commonly by saying ‘astagfirullāhu

² The *syahadat tauhid* contains declaration of belief in the oneness of God Almighty

³ *Basmallah* is phrase mention to the God before beginning any action or speech. It spells ‘Bismillahi rāhmani rāhiim’. It means: in the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful.

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Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

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Response:

Thank you for your detailed review. In the current study, we obtained both written and verbal consent from participants, ensuring formal documentation and protection. Written consent adds an extra layer of transparency and adheres to ethical standards for data collection and publication. All relevant information about these agreements is included in the ethical consideration section (lines 261-272).

Best regards,
Authors

***Batu Qulhu*—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra**

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Abstract: Death and funeral rituals hold significant cultural and spiritual importance in traditional communities worldwide, including within the Islamic faith. This study focuses on exploring the unique funeral ritual known as *Batu Qulhu* in the Muslim Mandailing community. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes field observations and interviews with ulama and imams who have practical knowledge and understanding of this traditional ritual. The study reveals two origin stories of *Batu Qulhu*: one attributed to the first Imam in the Mandailing community and the other associated with elderly parents, ulama, and village *malims* (religious teachers) without specifying an individual source. *Batu Qulhu* refers to the white river stones utilized by the congregation during the ritual to count the number of prayers offered. The procession of this tradition follows a strict protocol, encompassing prayers, recitation of the Quran, and seeking forgiveness for the deceased and their family. The efficacy of *Batu Qulhu* serves as a testament to the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of cultural identity. While *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar cultural practices can be observed in other regions, highlighting the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and uphold cultural traditions as an integral part of identity and social cohesion.

Keywords: death rituals, funeral traditions, *Batu Qulhu*, Mandailing community, norms and values

1. Introduction

The manner in which individuals navigate the concept of death holds significance as it encompasses their cultural engagement and utilization, similar to how religion, an integral component of culture, provides a framework for comprehending, interpreting, and making sense of death, albeit without necessarily diminishing its inherent challenges for those experiencing grief [1]. Throughout various cultures, the commemoration of the deceased and the support offered to grieving families manifest through a multitude of ritualistic practices [2]. These rituals hold particular significance within religious frameworks as they are not only

guided by religious doctrines but also serve as fundamental aspects of communal worship [3]. Within the Islamic tradition, the management of deceased bodies adheres to the teachings found in the Qur'an, specifically drawing attention to Surah Al Imran (QS 3:185). This verse underscores the universal nature of mortality, asserting that every individual is bound to experience death [4]. In his groundbreaking 1907 study, Robert Hertz skillfully intertwined three essential imperatives - moral, aesthetic, and sociological - to present a captivating conceptualization of death [5]. His intricate analysis portrays death as a profound transformative journey that transcends the boundaries of both the spiritual and physical realms.

In Indonesia, funeral rituals have been intricately intertwined with local cultural practices and ethnic traditions. Various communities, such as the Tana Toraja people [6], the traditional Javanese community [7,8], and the Balinese who perform the *ngaben* ceremony [9,10], express their funeral customs based on their specific cultural heritage. These burial practices and procedures provide profound insights into the community and society in which they are performed. In these traditions, feasts, animal sacrifices, and supplications are often conducted to honor the deceased and their family. Additionally, Islamic values and rituals significantly influence funeral practices across many regions in Indonesia. The practice of *tahlil* or *tahlilan*, which involves collective remembrance gatherings, is commonly observed [11], and the *azan* (call to prayer) is often performed during burial ceremonies [3]. Moreover, in certain regions of Sumatra, Islamic funeral practices have assimilated with local traditions. For example, the people of Minangkabau in Nagari Salayo incorporate the custom of placing attributes on the head of the deceased during the funeral procession [12]. While in Nagari Anduring, the Minang community also practices *bakayaik*, which takes place 100 days after someone's passing. *Bakayaik* vividly recounts the profound narrative of Prophet Muhammad pbuh¹, beginning with his miraculous birth and chronicling his relentless efforts to uphold the principles of Islam. This ceremonial tradition blends the eloquence of Arabic and Minang languages, creating a captivating linguistic tapestry that enhances the overall richness of the performance. In Aceh, the *reuhab* tradition involves decorating the deceased person's bedroom for 40 days [13]. These practices exemplify the dynamic interplay between Islamic influences and local cultural expressions in funeral rituals across Indonesia.

This study aims to contribute to the understanding of funeral traditions within the Muslim community in Sumatra, specifically focusing on the practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance in the Mandailing community of North Sumatra. The funeral rituals in this community are deeply rooted in a rich tapestry of cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions. By exploring the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ceremonies, this research seeks to shed light on the significance and

intricacies of these rituals, offering valuable insights into the broader context of funeral traditions among Muslims in Sumatra. The study addresses the historical aspect of the ritual, the procession in current societies, and finally the norms and values contained in this ritual.

1.1. Mandailing Ethnic: Historical Context

The origin of the word "*Mandailing*" is linked to the Munda people of India, who experienced defeat in a war against the Aryan people. The term "*Mandailing*" is derived from either "*Mandala Holing*" [14,15] or "*Mundailing*," referring to the refugees from Munda [16]. It is believed that the Munda people originally inhabited the northern regions of India before the arrival of the Aryans [17]. The historical interaction between the Aryans and the Munda people has been examined through linguistic evidence [18]. Due to pressure from the Aryans, the Munda people migrated southward within India [18–20], and this Aryan occupation of the Munda people occurred around 1200-1500 BC [21]. Eventually, the displaced Munda people migrated to Southeast Asia [20], although the specific country of their migration is not specified. It is likely that some of them reached North Sumatra through the Barus Port in Central Tapanuli, which was an international port at that time. Referred to "*Negarakeragama*" book from 1365, which mentions the presence of the Mandailing as one of the most significant ethnic groups in the archipelago [14,22]. The names mentioned include Mandailing, Pane, and Padang Lawas. The mention of these names indicates that the name Mandailing has been known by outsiders since ancient dates. In addition, Tuanku Rao² suggests that the Mandailing people trace their origin back to the Bugis Makassar, who sailed to the Singkuang Port (now known as Natal), it is more commonly accepted that the Mandailing people are part of the Batak ethnic group.

The Mandailing community's ethnic origin is a subject of contention among scholars. While some argue that they are part of the Batak Toba ethnic group [23,24], this perspective faces opposition from Mandailing intellectuals and historians. However, an analysis of factors such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group [25,26]. To establish their identity as the Mandailing community, they refer to themselves as "*halak kita*" (referred to: our people) of South Tapanuli [27], rather than as "*halak batak*" (Batak people) [28,29]. Regarding religious affiliation, the majority of the contemporary Mandailing population follows Islam, with a minority of Christians found in specific locations like Pakantan in Upper Mandailing, Medan, and other cities in North Sumatra [14,30]. Before embracing Islam, the religious beliefs of the Mandailing people focused around ancestral spirits

referred to as "*si pele begu*" [22], incorporating influences from Hinduism and Buddhism [31]. Recent field research conducted in the Mandailing region revealed remnants and artefacts associated with both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, particularly in the vicinity of Panyabungan within the Greater Mandailing area [32].

Padri wars has brought Islam to Mandailing around 1821 and the Dutch military breached and defeated this movement by 1835 [25,30,33]. The term '*Padri*' has two possible origins. One explanation suggests that it stems from the Indonesian word '*padri*,' which referred to priests. It is important to emphasize that the notable figures associated with the Padri movement can be likened to 'Islamic priests' [34]. This movement emerged in the early 1800s as a reformist Islamic movement led by local scholars known as ulama. These ulama sought to purify and reform Islam in the region, criticizing what they perceived as syncretic practices and deviations from strict Islamic teachings [15,30]. They aimed to establish a more orthodox and conservative interpretation of Islam in Mandailing. Padri movement gained support from various segments of the population, including the rural communities, who were attracted to their message of religious purity and social justice [35]. The Padris' growing influence and power threatened the traditional rulers, known as penghulu, who feared losing their authority and control [30,34].

1.2. Mandailing Philosophy

The values of the Mandailing ethnic philosophy of life called *Poda Na Lima*. *Poda* means advice, *na* means five, and *lima* means five. In short, *Poda Na Lima* consists of five pieces of advice, namely: i) *Paia Rohamu* (keeping your heart clean); ii) *Paia Pamatangmu* (keeping your body clean); iii) *Paia Parabitoimu* (keeping your clothes clean); iv) *Paia Bagasmu* (keeping your house clean); and v) *Paia Pakaranganmu* (keeping your yard clean) [23,36]. These five values are still firmly held by the Mandailing community and the Mandailing ethnicity in Indonesia and around the world. Despite the Madina people's reputation for being religious, their daily social lives are intertwined with various cultural practices that are imbued with religious significance. These rituals, such as *marhaban* (*barzanzi*)³, the use of plain flour, and *upah-upah*⁴, are performed on joyful occasions such as weddings, recoveries from illness, and the attainment of new positions, as well as during significant life transitions such as the birth of a child and moving into a new home [27].

The Mandailing ethnic community has a value system, *Dalihan Na Tolu* which means a forum used to organize life in carrying out *olong* (affection) between *mora*, *kahanggi* and *anak boru* [23,24,37,38]. *Dalihan Na Tolu*, also referred to 'three stones' [26], is a cultural value,

created by the Creator that guide Bataknese attitude and behavior in the social lives and cultural relation [39]. The three stones encompass family, community, and spirituality. In Mandailing community, *Dalihan Na Tolu* principles are deeply intertwined with Islamic values and teachings. Mandailing Muslim communities incorporate these cultural principles into their daily lives, alongside their Islamic beliefs and practices [39,40]. This concept reinforces the importance of maintaining strong moral character, fostering harmonious relationships, and upholding social justice within the community [23,24,39].

2. Location Settings

The Mandailing Natal region, also shortly known as Madina, is located in North Sumatra Province and astronomically situated between 0°10' and 1°50' N and 98°10' and 100°10' E. This region is located on the west coast of Sumatra, has a 170 km coastline, and is home to 24 islands, though only 4 of these islands are inhabited. In 2021, Madina has a population of over 478,000 people, and has a total area of 6,134 km² [41]. Based on BPS-Statistics of Mandailing Natal Regency [41], during 2021, the predominant land use in this region comprises a mixed vegetation area, accounting for 39.15% or 252.57 hectares, while forested areas occupy 30.04% of the region, followed by palm oil plantations at 27.79%. Settlements in Madina cover 451.38 hectares (0.7%), while agriculture utilizes 2.17% of the land. Additionally, water bodies such as lakes and dams encompass 0.14% of the region's total area. This region is crossed by three river systems including Batang Pungkut, Batang Gadis, and Aek Pohan that represent upper, middle and lower part of the Batang Gadis watershed [42]. These rivers are beneficial for major population in Madina including for agriculture, plantation and industrial sectors. However, for years the rivers have also become threatened to illegal mining activities including sands, rocks and gold [43,44].

The majority of the population in Madina, around 95%, is Muslim, while the remaining 5% consists of Christians, Catholics, Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of Confucianism. Madina has more than 800 mosques and 70 churches [45], to support the religious practices of its inhabitants, and the region is made up of 23 districts and over 370 villages. Muslim community in Madina, consisting of various ethnic groups, exhibits a rich diversity of cultural and religious practices. Mosques and Islamic schools, known as *madrasah*, hold a prominent position in shaping the religious and cultural life of the community. Furthermore, active participation in significant cultural and religious traditions, such as the celebration of two major Islamic holidays like *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*, is observed among the Muslim population. A strong emphasis on social responsibility and assisting those in need, in alignment with

Islamic principles, is evident through the engagement of the Muslim community in charitable and community service activities. The local government plays a supportive role by implementing policies and providing necessary infrastructure to promote Islamic education [46].

3. Methodology

3.1. Design of the Research

This study adopts qualitative research design, employing combination of phenomenological and ethnographic approaches. The primary aim of qualitative research is to comprehend the distinctive characteristics and experiences of individual cases, rather than attempting to establish generalized patterns or trends [47]. This method emphasizes the comprehensive exploration of human behaviors and experiences as they unfold within natural settings [48,49]. Integral to this research is the integration of the subjects' knowledge with that of the researchers, which holds significant importance. This integration facilitates the recognition and documentation of outcomes from the local perspective inherent to the subjects themselves [6,50]. The current study employs an emic approach, which entails adopting the insider's perspective from within the culture where the research project is situated, as previously described in studies by [6,34,51–53]. By embracing an emic approach, the research acknowledges the critical importance of comprehending and interpreting the cultural context and subjective experiences of the subjects, thereby enriching both the research process and its findings.

3.2. Fieldwork and Subjects

The research employed an observational and interview-based approach to collect data. The researchers assumed the roles of both observers and interviewers. The observation phase focused on the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice in the study area, the activities of the Imam during the ritual, and the placement of stones in the graveyard after the final day of remembrance. For the interviews, a systematic process was followed to select appropriate sources. Initial contact with the informants was established through various means, such as phone calls, emails, and WhatsApp messages, to effectively arrange and conduct the interviews.

In prior ethnographic studies, a limited number of subjects were involved. For instance, two studies centered on the practices of anesthesia within two British hospital [54]. Similarly, Baan et al. [6] conducted research on funeral rituals in Toraja with only two informants, while

Lee et al. [55] examined the experience of depression among Chinese individuals with a sample size of five informants. In accordance with the present study, data collection encompassed interviews with a total of eight carefully selected subjects, as detailed in Table 1. The age range of the informants in this study was 45-73 years old.

The selection process for these subjects adhered to specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Firstly, the informants were required to hold the roles of imams or leaders of the *Batu Qulhu* dhikr (or remembrance) during funeral ceremonies within the Mandailing community. Secondly, they were expected to possess a profound understanding of the norms and values associated with *Batu Qulhu*. Lastly, the informants needed to be Ulama or respected Islamic spiritual leaders within the local community. Proficiency in the Mandailing language was also a prerequisite for informant selection. To identify suitable subjects, consultations were conducted with local authorities, such as the Indonesian Council of Ulama (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*) in Madina, as well as prominent local figures.

Table 1

The current investigation involved the collection of data during a comprehensive six-month fieldwork period in 2022, specifically spanning from February to July. This fieldwork, which was coordinated by the first author, S, and A.F.D., extended over a total of 90 days. The study targeted five specifically chosen districts, selected from a larger pool of 23 districts in the designated study area (refer to Figure 1). The primary objective of the research was to obtain valuable insights into the cultural practices related to the Batu Qulhu ritual within the Mandailing community in the Madina region. The *Batu Qulhu* event occurring in July 2022 was meticulously observed and documented, employing a combination of photographs and videos for meticulous recording. Regarding the data collection process, individual interviews were conducted with each informant, with each session spanning approximately 2 hours. These interviews took place at mutually agreed locations, such as the informant's residence, school office, or the household of the deceased individual where the *Batu Qulhu* ritual took place. Thorough and meticulous recording of all pertinent information was undertaken for subsequent analysis purposes.

Figure 1

3.3. Data Analysis

The present study utilized a qualitative data analysis approach, encompassing three key stages: 1) data reduction; 2) data presentation; and 3) drawing conclusions. This analytical process unfolded iteratively throughout the research. Initially, during the early phases of data

collection, the research maintained a broad and overarching focus, and the observations were comprehensive in nature. As the research progressed and the focus of the study became more apparent, the observations evolved to adopt a more structured approach, enabling the acquisition of specific and targeted data.

The data analysis commenced with data reduction, where the gathered information was streamlined and organized to facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Subsequently, the data were presented in a coherent and meaningful manner to facilitate effective interpretation. Finally, the study derived conclusions based on the analyzed data, allowing for the generation of valuable insights into the cultural practices surrounding the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina. Throughout the research, this qualitative data analysis process occurred in a cyclical manner, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the research topic and a nuanced understanding of the intricacies involved. By transitioning from broad and general observations to more structured and specific data collection, the study achieved a comprehensive and detailed exploration of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual's cultural significance and its relevance within the Mandailing community.

3.4. Ethical Consideration

The present investigation was conducted under the auspices of Cluster Interdisciplinary Basic Research, adhering meticulously to stringent ethical guidelines. To ensure ethical compliance, the study received official approval from the Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) University of North Sumatera (UINSU) with the approval number: 0616615683. The utmost care was taken in handling the research data and records, which were securely stored on a password-protected computer housed within the Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, UINSU. Access to these records was strictly restricted to the authors.

In adherence to established ethical standards for data collection and publication, prior to their inclusion in the research, explicit informed consent was meticulously acquired from all eight subjects involved, thereby safeguarding their voluntary and informed engagement in the study. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, a coding system was employed, wherein each subject was allocated an initial "P" followed by pertinent demographic particulars, such as age and current profession. Moreover, all photographic materials featured in this investigation were obtained with written consent from all participants in the native *Bahasa* (Indonesian language), thereby emphasizing the paramount importance of respecting their autonomy and privacy throughout the research process. This unwavering commitment to

270 ethical principles serves to underscore the rigor and integrity of the present inquiry, facilitating
271 an ethically sound exploration of the cultural practices pertaining to the Batu Qulhu ritual
272 within the Mandailing community in Madina.

273 4. Findings and Discussion

274 4.1. Origin of the Rituals

275 Based on the interview, it is mentioned that Syeikh Haji Mustafa Husein bin Husein
276 Nasution bin Umar Nasution Al-Mandaili (or known as Syeikh Mustafa Husein) (1886-1955),
277 is credited as the first Imam to introduce the practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance at funeral
278 ceremonies. In the beginning, was named by *Batu Balancing* based on the color of the stone
279 used in this ritual. This insight was derived from interviews conducted with P1 (65), an ulama,
280 and P2 (52), a teacher at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Panyabungan. In addition, Syeikh
281 Musthafa Husein is also founder of the *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru*
282 (PPMPB)⁵ or Purba Baru Islamic boarding school. The practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance
283 has been preserved and perpetuated by his students, who have established recitation
284 congregations in various locations such as mosques, prayer rooms, and *surau*⁶. Notably, the
285 students and alumni of Musthafawiyah have played a significant role in its development and
286 expansion beyond Madina region, with a presence in several other provinces across Indonesia.
287 As the oldest *pesantren* (or boarding school) in North Sumatra, the influence of this practice
288 extends widely, facilitated by the widespread distribution of its students and graduates.

289 An alternative explanation, provided by P3 (73) an ulama, diverges slightly from the
290 previous informant. He has pointed out that the tradition of using *Batu Qulhu* or *Batu*
291 *Balancing*⁷ as a medium for remembrance was explained with a slight variation, focusing on
292 the customs upheld by elderly parents, ulama, village *malims* (religious teachers), without
293 mentioning any specific individual. It was a means to alleviate the sorrow experienced by the
294 bereaved and served as a form of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends. In
295 addition to the customary acts of attending funerals and observing mourning rituals, the
296 strategies employed to alleviate the profound grief experienced by individuals extended further.
297 These encompassed multifaceted practices such as providing emotional support, proffering
298 words of guidance and solace to foster resilience and acceptance in the face of adversity.
299 Moreover, individuals were invited to partake in collective prayer sessions, where the use of
300 *Batu Qulhu* stones served as facilitative elements in creating a conducive environment for these
301 spiritual gatherings. P3 further elucidated that this method, referred to as *alak na jolo*

302 *martakziah*, involved family members, parents, spouses, children, relatives, and neighbors
303 coming together for *tahlilan*.

304 “In the past people paid tribute to the homes of people who died; parents, wife, husband,
305 children, siblings and neighbors are *tahlilan*, starting from reciting *istighfar*, *al-Fatihah*,
306 *tahlil*, prayers and concluding *selawat*. To make the *dhikr* in congregation more solemn,
307 they add media by using a *Batu Balancing* (white stone) within size of an adult's big toe
308 or larger than that. In the past, the white stone was said to be a *Batu Balancing*, now it is
309 better known as the *Batu Qulhu*”.

310 *Batu Qulhu* ritual refers to the use of certain stone as a means of carrying out *dhikr*
311 worship. In general, this type of stone is typically known as white pebble. It should be noticed
312 that most of these white pebbles are predominantly comprised of marble, a rock formation
313 characterized by its crystallized carbonates and can easily be found in the riparian zone. Here,
314 the family of the deceased person collect these stones from the nearest river. As mentioned in
315 the interview, this ritual chooses approximately the size of an adult's thumb to enhance the
316 solemnity of the remembrance (as can be seen in Figure 2a). During the interview P4 (65),
317 emphasized that in the past, people paid homage to the homes of the deceased, engaging in
318 *tahlilan* rituals that encompassed prayers and concluding with ‘*selawat*’ (see Figure 2b). To
319 augment the collective remembrance, *Batu Qulhu*, the size of an adult's big toe or larger, was
320 employed. Over time, the *Batu Balancing* came to be recognized as the *Batu Qulhu*.

321 **Figure 2**

322 The utilization of *Batu Qulhu* in death ceremonies is also underpinned by the geographical
323 sequences. Firstly, the abundance of rivers in Madina, notably the Batang Gadis River, Batang
324 Natal River, Aek Kalungan River and Angkola River, facilitated the easy availability of these
325 stones in the past. Nowadays, these rivers also threatened by illegal gold mining activities [43],
326 and tend to pollute due to its waste [44]. Secondly, these stones possess distinct characteristics
327 that contribute to their suitability for the purpose at hand. They exhibit a white hue, imparting
328 a visually soothing effect, while their cool and clean appearance further enhances their appeal.
329 Third, these stones demonstrate resilience in withstanding the rigors of varying weather
330 conditions, including heat, cold, and rainfall. Furthermore, the recitation of *Batu Qulhu* rituals
331 is believed by the community to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave.

332 **4.2. The Contemporary Practice of Batu Qulhu in the Mandailing Community**

333 In the past, Islamic practices in Sumatra have exhibited influences from mystical and
334 shamanistic traditions e.g., [56,57]. However, it is important to note that the religious activities

associated with the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* are not influenced by shamanism, but rather stem solely from religious traditions previously followed by religious scholars, religious teachers, and traditional leaders. Currently, the contemporary practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been inherited and embraced by Muslim society in Madina. Based on interview with P4 (65), it is evident that in the past, the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance adhered to strict protocols as mentioned in the following statement.

“The tradition of recalling the Batu Qulhu was once a highly regulated practice. It required seeking consent from both the village leader and the syekh. Mastery of the 20 essential attributes of Allah was necessary, alongside the ability to read the Quran and comprehend its teachings. The stones themselves had to possess a pure white hue. The recitation of Qulhu would take place during evening gatherings, where all the stones present had to be utilized fully, leaving no remnants behind before the congregation dispersed”.

These procedures include the following: 1) the procession necessitated obtaining permission from the head of the village⁸ and *tuan guru*⁹ (or *kulifah*); 2) the ritual leader was required to commit to memory and comprehend the twenty obligatory attributes of God, encompassing *nafsiyah* (self-related attributes) nature, *salbiyah* (attributes related to existence) nature, *ma'ani* (abstract attributes of God) nature, and *maknawiyah* (the essential nature and prevalence of *ma'ani*) nature; 3) the officiating Imam was expected to possess proficiency in both written and spoken Arabic-Malay; 4) the Imam leading the remembrance was required to proficiently recite the Qur'an and comprehend its meaning; 5) the *Batu Qulhu* utilized in the ritual had to be of a white hue; and 6) the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* transpired during evening hours, and all the stones had to be completed within a single procession conducted in the presence of the congregation. Preceding the initiation of the ritual, it is customary for the priest to cleanse himself through the observance of ablution, mirroring the ritualistic cleansing process associated with prayer as mentioned by P7 (60).

Basically, this ritual has many similarities to *tahlilan* tradition especially in the context prayers and recitations. This practice generally has been carried out by many Nahdatul Ulama (NU) community in Sumatra [11,58]. However, in *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, there are five Imams that lead this procession with different assignment. These Imams are voluntarily appointed by the group and relatively flexible based on their own agreement. The priests then read several prayers that beneficial to seek forgiveness for the deceased, his/her family as well to congregation. The Imams also recite some verses from the Surat of the Quran (QS), and praise the God. In this *Batu Qulhu* ritual, the congregation are voluntarily attending the ritual

without any formal invitation. The ritual is held in three consecutive days after the death, and organized by group manager, neighbors and the Imams, and commonly referred to *Serikat Tolong Menolong* (STM) or Union of Help. The Imams and the congregation are artfully arranged in a circular formation, tailored to the venue's conditions. This arrangement allows for the placement of stones in front of the congregation, effortlessly within reach for the worshippers' right hand. During the fieldwork in Panyabungan Kota district, it was noticed that there were more than 30 piles of stones in the congregation. As additional information that commonly they are sitting on the floor covered with *tikar* or mat, but some people also held the ritual with chairs. The priests hold the responsibility for overseeing the course of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual. The following Table 2 describes each Imams' responsibility in *Batu Qulhu* procession.

Table 2

The current study also reveals that *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Madina is held in three consecutive days where:

- In the day 1, the remembrance is taken where the Imam start the ceremony. In the first meeting, the priests wear neat clothes, wear caps, turbans and sarongs. Reflecting the figure of a religious expert and placing his position is a person who is highly respected in society. Their sitting position is arranged in a special place, different from the congregation in general. Here, the Imam will also read out the order of the Batu qulhu procession.
- For day 2, similar to the preceding event, the order of events for the first night procession remains unchanged. Prior to commencing the remembrance ceremony, the 'Imam pembaca takhtim' provided an explanation that after the recitation of the *takhtim*, the congregation would engage in the dhikr of *Batu Qulhu*, and were kindly requested to maintain their positions until the conclusion of the event. However, in contrast to the previous occasion, on the second night of recitation, Qulhu stones are made available to facilitate the dhikr and are arranged in a stacked formation in front of the congregation. Subsequently, the Qulhu remembrance stones are accumulated in the same location. The prescribed procedure entails the recitation of QS 112: 1-3, followed by the selection of a single stone. For each subsequent repetition, an additional stone is selected, such that two stones are chosen for a two-time reading, three stones for a three-time reading, four stones for a four-time reading, and so forth, in accordance with established practice.
- In day 3, *Batu Qulhu* procession replicates the format observed on the second meeting. However, a notable distinction lies in the extended duration of the dhikr, necessitated by

the requirement to recite the prayer over each stone in the presence of the congregation. It is imperative to sustain the continuity of the dhikr until its completion, without interruption. Subsequent to the remembrance, a collective prayer and *salawat* are gathered. The *Batu Qulhu* employed as aids for remembrance are carefully placed within plastic burlap bags or buckets (as can be seen in Figure 3a). The event concludes with a religious sermon or *tausiyah*, wherein expressions of gratitude are articulated on behalf of the congregation and the afflicted families. The content of the religious sermon encompasses themes such as death, the retribution of the grave, and serves as a reminder for individuals to perpetually prepare themselves and enhance their devotion before the arrival of death. This is because all living beings are destined to experience mortality (QS 3: 185), and its arrival cannot be postponed, even if one seeks refuge within a lofty and robust fortress (QS 4: 78).

In addition to the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, on the fourth day following an individual's passing, *Batu Qulhu* stones are transported to the cemetery and carefully positioned above the burial site, as illustrated in Figure 3b. The procedure involves the preparation of the grave bed, which includes the leveling of the ground in the designated area assigned for burial. Subsequently, these stones are poured in a manner that commences from the head of the deceased and extends towards their feet. Although typically performed by the bereaved family, this task can also be undertaken by others, such as neighbors or relatives. During the placement of the stones on the grave, it is customary to recite the phrase "*Bismillahi milata 'ala Rasulullah*," which translates to "In the name of Allah and in the religion of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh." The recitation performed during this act is identical to the prayer recitation conducted during the interment of the deceased's body. It is noteworthy that the selection of this specific recitation lacks a distinct foundational basis but rather originates from established tradition.

Figure 3

Presently, *Batu Qulhu* dhikr has undergone significant transformations over time, likely influenced by environmental factors, evolving understandings within the community, and technological advance, as well as societal changes. Presently, the implementation of the ritual varies across different areas of Madina. Traditionally, some individuals engage in the *Batu Qulhu* practice following the *Maghrib* prayer (after sunset) or around 6.30 pm – 7.00 pm local time and typically after the *Isya* prayer (7.30 pm – 8.00 pm), collectively performed at the mosque during evening as mentioned by P8 (55). Among adult women, it takes place in the evening preceding *Maghrib*, while among the male youth (*naposo bulung*) and female youth

(*nauli bulung*), it occurs in the afternoon (after *Asr* or around 3.00 pm) as mentioned by P6 (45). Adult male worshipers partake in this practice during the evening after the *Isya* prayer on the first, second, and third days following a person's demise. As mentioned earlier, the *Batu Qulhu* employed in this remembrance ritual is a stone recognized by the bereaved family, retrieved from the river. To ensure cleanliness, the stones are consistently washed and kept in a plastic sack or a large container. However, due to the increasing flexibility of people's mindset and the scarcity of these rocks in rivers, the people can now be acquired from various stores in Madina region as mentioned by P5 (50):

“*Batu Qulhu are taken from the river by the family, if they are dirty, they are cleaned. Now, Batu Qulhu are easy to get and are sold in flower shops and building material store*”).

4.3. Aspect of Norms of *Batu Qulhu* ritual

The *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice, introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein, holds significant cultural value in the Mandailing community of Madina. This ritual utilizes white pebbles from nearby rivers for *dhikr* worship and to alleviate the suffering of the deceased in the grave. It has been preserved and perpetuated by Syeikh Mustafa Husein's students and alumni, who have established recitation congregations in the region. As the oldest pesantren in North Sumatra, the influence of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends widely beyond Madina, with its students and graduates playing a significant role in its development and expansion. Similar cultural practices, like the *tahlilan* tradition among the NU community in Sumatra, can also be found.

Strict protocols surround the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance. Prior permission from village and religious leaders, referred to as *Tuan Guru*, is required. The officiating Imam must possess proficiency in Arabic-Malay language. These protocols ensure the solemnity and authenticity of the ritual, aligning with the importance placed on established rituals and cultural heritage. The *tahlilan* tradition within the NU community also follows specific rituals, emphasizing the shared values of upholding traditions and seeking solace in times of mourning. As previously mentioned, obtaining permission from both village and religious leaders is necessary, as indicated by P2 (52):

‘*mangido izin Parjolo tu Tuan Guru*’ (English: Ask permission from *Tuan Guru* first). Commonly answered by the teacher with ‘*olo*’ *silahkan acara dilanjut* (English: Okay, please continue the ritual), ‘*marimom mau au*’ (English: I will follow).

Batu Qulhu remembrance serves as a form of communal support, uniting family members, relatives, neighbors, and friends in times of sorrow. This fosters a sense of unity and solidarity within the Mandailing community, reflecting the value placed on collective resilience. Similar communal support can be found in other practices, such as the collective remembrance gatherings associated with the tahlilan tradition, reinforcing the cultural value of community bonds and support networks. The significance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends beyond its cultural and spiritual aspects. It represents a cherished cultural heritage embraced by the Muslim society in Madina, highlighting the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of identity. While specific to the Mandailing community, similar practices can be observed in other regions, fulfilling the shared human need to honor the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and preserve cultural traditions as integral elements of identity and social cohesion. For a comprehensive overview of the norm aspects in the tradition of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community, please refer to Table 3.

Table 3

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ritual stands as a significant cultural and religious practice within the Mandailing community's funeral ceremonies. This tradition, which involves using stones for dhikr worship, holds deep historical and spiritual roots. While its origins can be traced back to Syeikh Mustafa Husein, who introduced the ritual, variations in accounts highlight the complex nature of its origin. Over time, the procession of *Batu Qulhu* has undergone modifications to streamline its organization, exemplifying the adaptive nature of cultural practices while maintaining their essence. Although *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar commemorative practices can be found in other regions. These rituals reflect the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, seeking solace through collective ceremonies, and preserving cultural traditions as integral components of identity and social cohesion. *Batu Qulhu* ritual serves as a testament to the rich cultural and religious heritage of the Mandailing community in North Sumatra, encapsulating collective mourning, spiritual devotion, and the preservation of cultural identity. As funeral ceremonies continue to play a pivotal role in communities worldwide, understanding and appreciating the significance of these rituals contributes to our broader knowledge of human beliefs, traditions, and the ways in which we commemorate and honor the departed.

While this study presents a preliminary investigation into the *Batu Qulhu* ritual, it acknowledges certain limitations. The absence of historical documentation detailing the ritual

within the Mandailing community necessitates a proposed historical approach through extensive literature review, drawing upon the writings of earlier ulama. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the limited number of informants and the specific observed processions may not fully capture the diverse procedural variations of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual across the entire Madina region. Recognizing the modifications made by different communities based on the guidance of their Imams or practical considerations further adds to the complexity of the ritual. Given these findings, the study recommends the cultural preservation and educational promotion of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual for the benefit of future generations. The creation of appropriate documentation, such as books and videos, accessible through various platforms including social media, can contribute to the wider dissemination of knowledge and understanding of the ritual. These efforts support the cultural preservation of the *Batu Qulhu* tradition and foster greater appreciation among the Mandailing community and beyond.

Declarations

Authors contribution statement

Conceived and designed the experiments, S., A.F.D.; performed the experiments, S., A.F.D.; analyzed and interpreted the data, S., S.D., and A.W.N.; wrote the paper S., A.F.D.; A.W.N. and S.D. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Figures

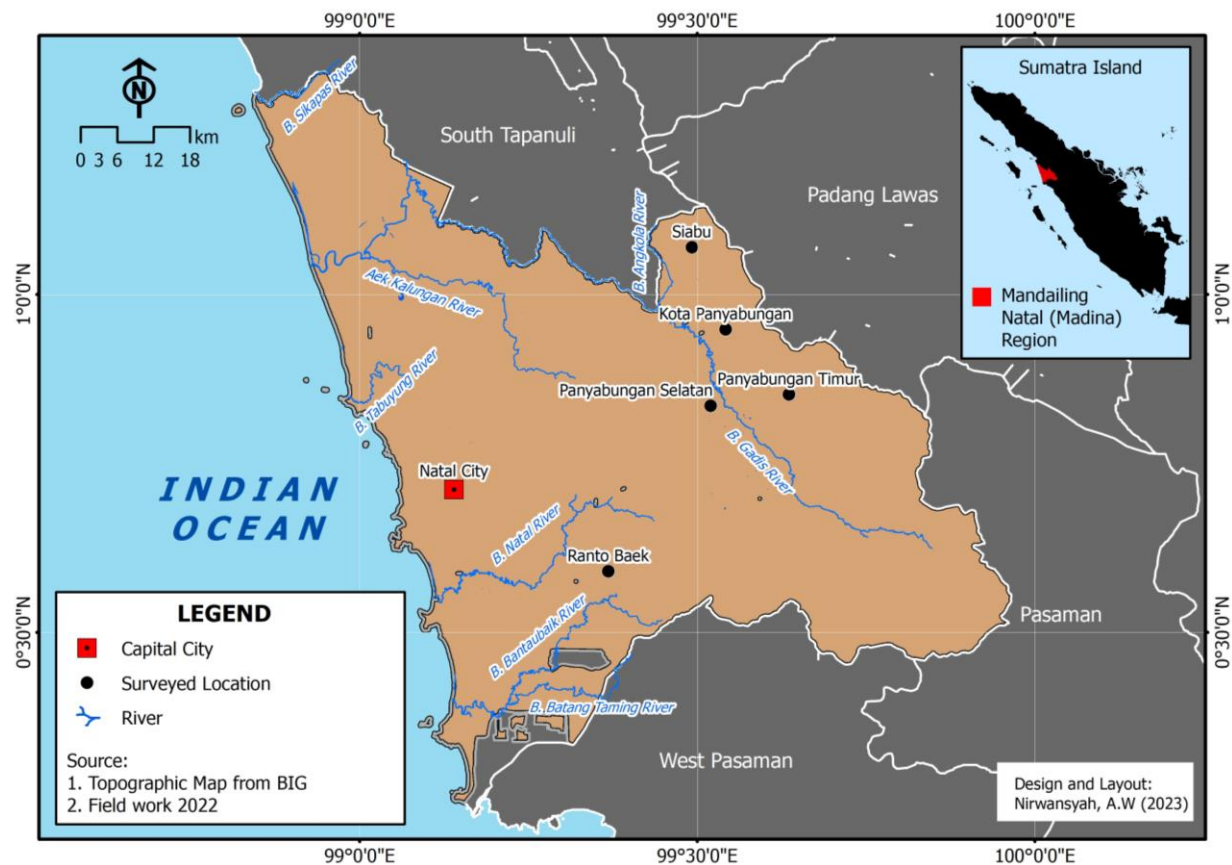


Figure 1. Area of the current research



Figure 2. a) White pebble collected for *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Mandailing, where each bucket contains 70 to 100 stones; and b) the congregation of the Mandailing Muslim community during this obituary ceremony. Photography by Sahrul on 22 July 2022.



Figure 3. *Batu Qulhu* remembrance by adult male where a) the organizer has collected and kept the stones back into the plastic sack for fourth day of casting procession; and b) where *Batu Qulhu* is finally poured on the grave of deceased person. (photographs of the ritual held at P4 residence on 22 July 2022) (taken by Sahrul)

Table 1. Pseudonym of subjects' information in the current study

Informants	Initial	Age	Education Level	Occupation
1	P1	65	Bachelor degree	Teacher
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4	P4	65	Master degree	Public servant
5	P5	50	Master degree	Public servant
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Table 2. Construction of each Imam and their task in *Batu Qulhu* procession

Imam	Local term	Assignment	Quran recitation
First Imam	<i>Imam pembaca silsilah</i>	– Reciting <i>istighfar</i> ¹⁰ three times; – Reciting <i>wasilah</i> to nabi (propeth Muhammad pbuh), his appostles, ulama and parents of the deceased person, all Muslim and the congregation	– QS 1: 1-6
Second Imam	<i>Imam pembaca takhtim</i>	– Reciting <i>takhtim</i> (known as "reading for the reward of the deceased" or "reciting for the benefit of the deceased")	– QS 112: 1-3 – QS 113: 1-5 – QS 114: 1-5 – QS 1: 1-7 – QS 2: 1-5; 255; 284-286 – QS 33: 56
Third Imam	<i>Imam pembaca tahlil</i>	– Reciting <i>tahlil</i> (compilation of dhikr) including: • <i>Istighfar</i> ;	

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- Reciting ‘afdhalu dzikri’ followed by First *syahadat tauhid*¹¹. The congregation then answer by ‘hayyun baqi’;
 - Reciting second *syahadat tauhid*. Then answered by the congregation with ‘hayyun maujud’;
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Fourth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca Al Baqarah</i>	– Reciting some verses from the Quran that contains concept and advise about calamities	– QS 2: 152-156 – QS 67: 1-2
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Fifth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca doa</i>	– Reciting closing prayer, with the following structure:
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- *Basmallah*¹²;
- Praise to the Creator and His messenger (Muhammad pbuh);
- Prayers for all Moslem (men and women);
- Prayers for the deceased person and the family;
- Prayers for attendance in the congregation;

Source: compiled based on interview with P1 (65)

Table 3. Identified aspect of norms in the practice of *Batu Qulhu* Remembrance

Aspect of norm	Description
Preservation of traditions	The culture emphasizes the preservation and perpetuation of rituals and practices, such as the <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance, which was introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein and continued by his students and alumni. The students and graduates of Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding school play a significant role in preserving and expanding this practice.
Community support	The culture values community support during times of grief and mourning. The tradition of using <i>Batu Qulhu</i> serves as a means of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends, helping to alleviate sorrow and foster resilience.
Spiritual gatherings	Collective prayer sessions and remembrance gatherings are highly valued in the culture. The use of the stones during these gatherings creates a conducive environment for spiritual practices and collective remembrance.
Respect for the deceased	The culture emphasizes respect and care for the deceased. The ritual of collecting white pebbles, predominantly marble, from nearby rivers to be used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance shows reverence for the departed.
Connection to nature	The culture maintains a connection with nature, as the stones used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals are collected from rivers. The easy availability of these stones in the past and their resilience in varying weather conditions highlight the importance of nature in the culture.
Alleviation of suffering	The recitation of <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals is believed to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave. This demonstrates a value of compassion and empathy within the culture.

¹ Peace be upon him

² Tuanku Rao is characterized as enigmatic figure and one of the two significant leaders of the Padri movement, shared this status alongside Imam Bonjol himself. Tuanku Rao's origins can be traced to *Huta na Godang* or *Huta Godang*, also known as *Tano Godang*, located in Mandailing Julu (Upper Mandailing) [14].

³ The word *barzanzi* is associated with the name of Syeikh Barzanji, a prominent scholar and Sufi poet from Kurdistan. His renowned work, titled "*Mawlid al-Barzanji*," is a poetic composition that narrates the birth and life of the Prophet Muhammad, often recited during religious gatherings and celebrations.

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- ⁴ *Upah-upah* refers to cultural practice or tradition of offering gifts or monetary compensation during significant events or ceremonies. The term "upah" itself can be translated as "wages" or "payment". *Upah-upah* is deeply rooted in the Mandailing culture and is often observed during various occasions such as weddings, funerals, or community gatherings.
- ⁵ *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB), was founded in 1912 by Syeikh Musthafa Husein Nasution. This Islamic boarding school is located in Purba Baru sub-district, Madina Regency, North Sumatra [59]. Further reference on this boarding school can be read in Khairurrijal [60].
- ⁶ Surau means a place of worship or a small mosque-like structure. The surau typically serves as a communal prayer space or a modest mosque, wherein Muslims congregate for congregational prayers, religious discourses, and other religious engagements.
- ⁷ Some community in Madina also use term of *Batu Bontar* to refer *Batu Qulhu*.
- ⁸ One crucial determinant is obtaining authorization from the village leader. The village head holds a position akin to that of a revered monarch, embodying nobility and commanding profound respect.
- ⁹ *Tuan guru* or teacher serves as a religious authority, serving as an exemplar and establishing a benchmark for societal norms through their words and actions. Additionally, they are often revered as sacred individuals known for their healing abilities, and they serve as a source of supplication for various needs such as well-being, sustenance, companionship, agricultural prosperity, and attainment of blessings.
- ¹⁰ The act of attempting forgiveness from the Almighty God, commonly by saying ‘*astağfirullāhu*
- ¹¹ The *syahadat tauhid* contains declaration of belief in the oneness of God Almighty
- ¹² *Basmallah* is phrase mention to the God before beginning any action or speech. It spells ‘*Bismillahi rāhmani rāhiim*’. It means: in the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful.

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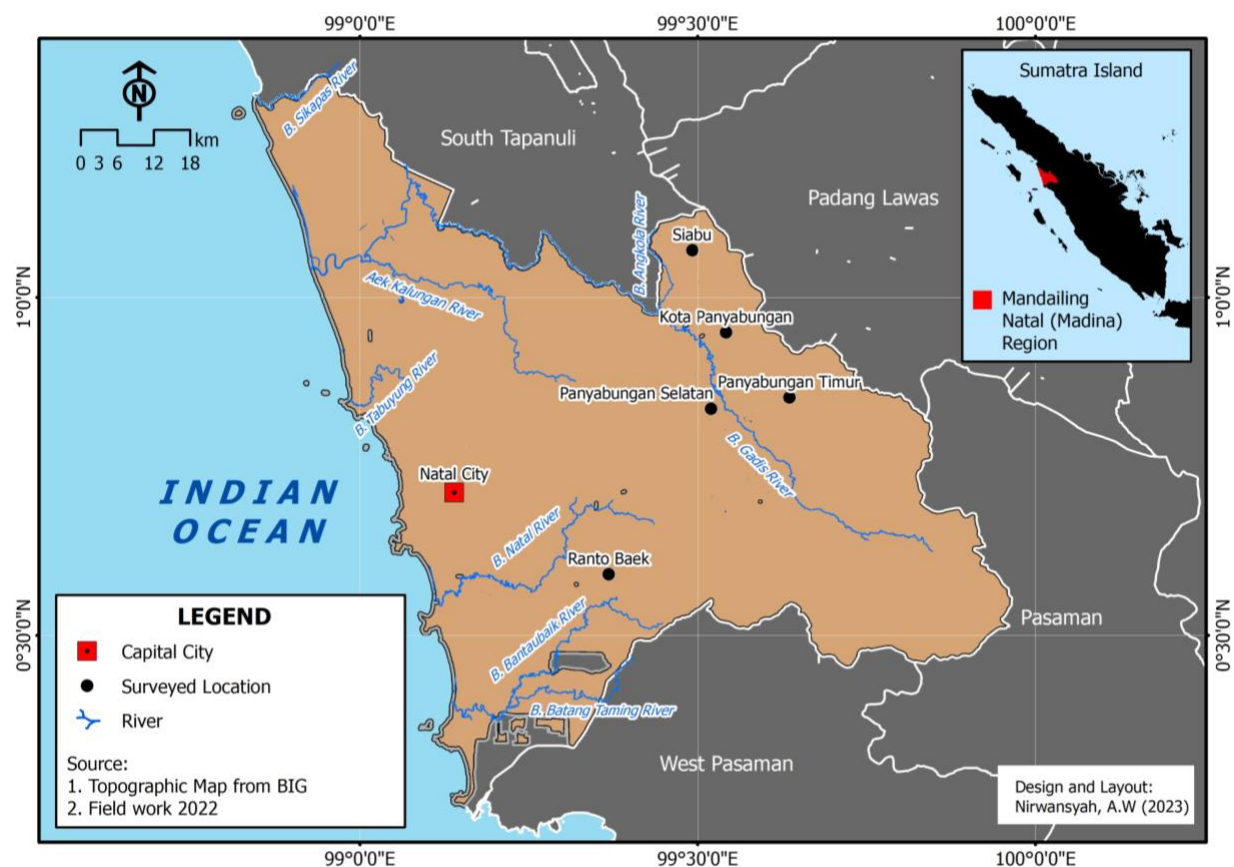


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Declaration of interests

☒The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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² The *syahadat tauhid* contains declaration of belief in the oneness of God Almighty

³ *Basmallah* is phrase mention to the God before beginning any action or speech. It spells ‘Bismillahi rāhmani rāhiim’. It means: in the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful.

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Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

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Keywords: death rituals, funeral traditions, *Batu Qulhu*, Mandailing community, norms and values

1. Introduction

The manner in which individuals navigate the concept of death holds significance as it encompasses their cultural engagement and utilization, similar to how religion, an integral component of culture, provides a framework for comprehending, interpreting, and making sense of death, albeit without necessarily diminishing its inherent challenges for those experiencing grief [1]. Throughout various cultures, the commemoration of the deceased and the support offered to grieving families manifest through a multitude of ritualistic practices [2]. These rituals hold particular significance within religious frameworks as they are not only

guided by religious doctrines but also serve as fundamental aspects of communal worship [3]. Within the Islamic tradition, the management of deceased bodies adheres to the teachings found in the Qur'an, specifically drawing attention to Surah Al Imran (QS 3:185). This verse underscores the universal nature of mortality, asserting that every individual is bound to experience death [4]. In his groundbreaking 1907 study, Robert Hertz skillfully intertwined three essential imperatives - moral, aesthetic, and sociological - to present a captivating conceptualization of death [5]. His intricate analysis portrays death as a profound transformative journey that transcends the boundaries of both the spiritual and physical realms.

In Indonesia, funeral rituals have been intricately intertwined with local cultural practices and ethnic traditions. Various communities, such as the Tana Toraja people [6], the traditional Javanese community [7,8], and the Balinese who perform the *ngaben* ceremony [9,10], express their funeral customs based on their specific cultural heritage. These burial practices and procedures provide profound insights into the community and society in which they are performed. In these traditions, feasts, animal sacrifices, and supplications are often conducted to honor the deceased and their family. Additionally, Islamic values and rituals significantly influence funeral practices across many regions in Indonesia. The practice of *tahlil* or *tahlilan*, which involves collective remembrance gatherings, is commonly observed [11], and the *azan* (call to prayer) is often performed during burial ceremonies [3]. Moreover, in certain regions of Sumatra, Islamic funeral practices have assimilated with local traditions. For example, the people of Minangkabau in Nagari Salayo incorporate the custom of placing attributes on the head of the deceased during the funeral procession [12]. While in Nagari Anduring, the Minang community also practices *bakayaik*, which takes place 100 days after someone's passing. *Bakayaik* vividly recounts the profound narrative of Prophet Muhammad pbuh¹, beginning with his miraculous birth and chronicling his relentless efforts to uphold the principles of Islam. This ceremonial tradition blends the eloquence of Arabic and Minang languages, creating a captivating linguistic tapestry that enhances the overall richness of the performance. In Aceh, the *reuhab* tradition involves decorating the deceased person's bedroom for 40 days [13]. These practices exemplify the dynamic interplay between Islamic influences and local cultural expressions in funeral rituals across Indonesia.

This study aims to contribute to the understanding of funeral traditions within the Muslim community in Sumatra, specifically focusing on the practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance in the Mandailing community of North Sumatra. The funeral rituals in this community are deeply rooted in a rich tapestry of cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions. By exploring the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ceremonies, this research seeks to shed light on the significance and

intricacies of these rituals, offering valuable insights into the broader context of funeral traditions among Muslims in Sumatra. The study addresses the historical aspect of the ritual, the procession in current societies, and finally the norms and values contained in this ritual.

1.1. Mandailing Ethnic: Historical Context

The origin of the word "*Mandailing*" is linked to the Munda people of India, who experienced defeat in a war against the Aryan people. The term "*Mandailing*" is derived from either "*Mandala Holing*" [14,15] or "*Mundailing*," referring to the refugees from Munda [16]. It is believed that the Munda people originally inhabited the northern regions of India before the arrival of the Aryans [17]. The historical interaction between the Aryans and the Munda people has been examined through linguistic evidence [18]. Due to pressure from the Aryans, the Munda people migrated southward within India [18–20], and this Aryan occupation of the Munda people occurred around 1200-1500 BC [21]. Eventually, the displaced Munda people migrated to Southeast Asia [20], although the specific country of their migration is not specified. It is likely that some of them reached North Sumatra through the Barus Port in Central Tapanuli, which was an international port at that time. Referred to "*Negarakeragama*" book from 1365, which mentions the presence of the Mandailing as one of the most significant ethnic groups in the archipelago [14,22]. The names mentioned include Mandailing, Pane, and Padang Lawas. The mention of these names indicates that the name Mandailing has been known by outsiders since ancient dates. In addition, Tuanku Rao² suggests that the Mandailing people trace their origin back to the Bugis Makassar, who sailed to the Singkuang Port (now known as Natal), it is more commonly accepted that the Mandailing people are part of the Batak ethnic group.

The Mandailing community's ethnic origin is a subject of contention among scholars. While some argue that they are part of the Batak Toba ethnic group [23,24], this perspective faces opposition from Mandailing intellectuals and historians. However, an analysis of factors such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group [25,26]. To establish their identity as the Mandailing community, they refer to themselves as "*halak kita*" (referred to: our people) of South Tapanuli [27], rather than as "*halak batak*" (Batak people) [28,29]. Regarding religious affiliation, the majority of the contemporary Mandailing population follows Islam, with a minority of Christians found in specific locations like Pakantan in Upper Mandailing, Medan, and other cities in North Sumatra [14,30]. Before embracing Islam, the religious beliefs of the Mandailing people focused around ancestral spirits

referred to as "*si pele begu*" [22], incorporating influences from Hinduism and Buddhism [31]. Recent field research conducted in the Mandailing region revealed remnants and artefacts associated with both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, particularly in the vicinity of Panyabungan within the Greater Mandailing area [32].

Padri wars has brought Islam to Mandailing around 1821 and the Dutch military breached and defeated this movement by 1835 [25,30,33]. The term '*Padri*' has two possible origins. One explanation suggests that it stems from the Indonesian word '*padri*,' which referred to priests. It is important to emphasize that the notable figures associated with the Padri movement can be likened to 'Islamic priests' [34]. This movement emerged in the early 1800s as a reformist Islamic movement led by local scholars known as ulama. These ulama sought to purify and reform Islam in the region, criticizing what they perceived as syncretic practices and deviations from strict Islamic teachings [15,30]. They aimed to establish a more orthodox and conservative interpretation of Islam in Mandailing. Padri movement gained support from various segments of the population, including the rural communities, who were attracted to their message of religious purity and social justice [35]. The Padris' growing influence and power threatened the traditional rulers, known as penghulu, who feared losing their authority and control [30,34].

1.2. Mandailing Philosophy

The values of the Mandailing ethnic philosophy of life called *Poda Na Lima*. *Poda* means advice, *na* means five, and *lima* means five. In short, *Poda Na Lima* consists of five pieces of advice, namely: i) *Paia Rohamu* (keeping your heart clean); ii) *Paia Pamatangmu* (keeping your body clean); iii) *Paia Parabitoimu* (keeping your clothes clean); iv) *Paia Bagasmu* (keeping your house clean); and v) *Paia Pakaranganmu* (keeping your yard clean) [23,36]. These five values are still firmly held by the Mandailing community and the Mandailing ethnicity in Indonesia and around the world. Despite the Madina people's reputation for being religious, their daily social lives are intertwined with various cultural practices that are imbued with religious significance. These rituals, such as *marhaban* (*barzanzi*)³, the use of plain flour, and *upah-upah*⁴, are performed on joyful occasions such as weddings, recoveries from illness, and the attainment of new positions, as well as during significant life transitions such as the birth of a child and moving into a new home [27].

The Mandailing ethnic community has a value system, *Dalihan Na Tolu* which means a forum used to organize life in carrying out *olong* (affection) between *mora*, *kahanggi* and *anak boru* [23,24,37,38]. *Dalihan Na Tolu*, also referred to 'three stones' [26], is a cultural value,

created by the Creator that guide Bataknese attitude and behavior in the social lives and cultural relation [39]. The three stones encompass family, community, and spirituality. In Mandailing community, *Dalihan Na Tolu* principles are deeply intertwined with Islamic values and teachings. Mandailing Muslim communities incorporate these cultural principles into their daily lives, alongside their Islamic beliefs and practices [39,40]. This concept reinforces the importance of maintaining strong moral character, fostering harmonious relationships, and upholding social justice within the community [23,24,39].

2. Location Settings

The Mandailing Natal region, also shortly known as Madina, is located in North Sumatra Province and astronomically situated between 0°10' and 1°50' N and 98°10' and 100°10' E. This region is located on the west coast of Sumatra, has a 170 km coastline, and is home to 24 islands, though only 4 of these islands are inhabited. In 2021, Madina has a population of over 478,000 people, and has a total area of 6,134 km² [41]. Based on BPS-Statistics of Mandailing Natal Regency [41], during 2021, the predominant land use in this region comprises a mixed vegetation area, accounting for 39.15% or 252.57 hectares, while forested areas occupy 30.04% of the region, followed by palm oil plantations at 27.79%. Settlements in Madina cover 451.38 hectares (0.7%), while agriculture utilizes 2.17% of the land. Additionally, water bodies such as lakes and dams encompass 0.14% of the region's total area. This region is crossed by three river systems including Batang Pungkut, Batang Gadis, and Aek Pohan that represent upper, middle and lower part of the Batang Gadis watershed [42]. These rivers are beneficial for major population in Madina including for agriculture, plantation and industrial sectors. However, for years the rivers have also become threatened to illegal mining activities including sands, rocks and gold [43,44].

The majority of the population in Madina, around 95%, is Muslim, while the remaining 5% consists of Christians, Catholics, Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of Confucianism. Madina has more than 800 mosques and 70 churches [45], to support the religious practices of its inhabitants, and the region is made up of 23 districts and over 370 villages. Muslim community in Madina, consisting of various ethnic groups, exhibits a rich diversity of cultural and religious practices. Mosques and Islamic schools, known as *madrasah*, hold a prominent position in shaping the religious and cultural life of the community. Furthermore, active participation in significant cultural and religious traditions, such as the celebration of two major Islamic holidays like *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*, is observed among the Muslim population. A strong emphasis on social responsibility and assisting those in need, in alignment with

Islamic principles, is evident through the engagement of the Muslim community in charitable and community service activities. The local government plays a supportive role by implementing policies and providing necessary infrastructure to promote Islamic education [46].

3. Methodology

3.1. Design of the Research

This study adopts qualitative research design, employing combination of phenomenological and ethnographic approaches. The primary aim of qualitative research is to comprehend the distinctive characteristics and experiences of individual cases, rather than attempting to establish generalized patterns or trends [47]. This method emphasizes the comprehensive exploration of human behaviors and experiences as they unfold within natural settings [48,49]. Integral to this research is the integration of the subjects' knowledge with that of the researchers, which holds significant importance. This integration facilitates the recognition and documentation of outcomes from the local perspective inherent to the subjects themselves [6,50]. The current study employs an emic approach, which entails adopting the insider's perspective from within the culture where the research project is situated, as previously described in studies by [6,34,51–53]. By embracing an emic approach, the research acknowledges the critical importance of comprehending and interpreting the cultural context and subjective experiences of the subjects, thereby enriching both the research process and its findings.

3.2. Fieldwork and Subjects

The research employed an observational and interview-based approach to collect data. The researchers assumed the roles of both observers and interviewers. The observation phase focused on the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice in the study area, the activities of the Imam during the ritual, and the placement of stones in the graveyard after the final day of remembrance. For the interviews, a systematic process was followed to select appropriate sources. Initial contact with the informants was established through various means, such as phone calls, emails, and WhatsApp messages, to effectively arrange and conduct the interviews.

In prior ethnographic studies, a limited number of subjects were involved. For instance, two studies centered on the practices of anesthesia within two British hospital [54]. Similarly, Baan et al. [6] conducted research on funeral rituals in Toraja with only two informants, while

Lee et al. [55] examined the experience of depression among Chinese individuals with a sample size of five informants. In accordance with the present study, data collection encompassed interviews with a total of eight carefully selected subjects, as detailed in Table 1. The age range of the informants in this study was 45-73 years old.

The selection process for these subjects adhered to specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Firstly, the informants were required to hold the roles of imams or leaders of the *Batu Qulhu* dhikr (or remembrance) during funeral ceremonies within the Mandailing community. Secondly, they were expected to possess a profound understanding of the norms and values associated with *Batu Qulhu*. Lastly, the informants needed to be Ulama or respected Islamic spiritual leaders within the local community. Proficiency in the Mandailing language was also a prerequisite for informant selection. To identify suitable subjects, consultations were conducted with local authorities, such as the Indonesian Council of Ulama (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*) in Madina, as well as prominent local figures.

Table 1

The current investigation involved the collection of data during a comprehensive six-month fieldwork period in 2022, specifically spanning from February to July. This fieldwork, which was coordinated by the first author, S, and A.F.D., extended over a total of 90 days. The study targeted five specifically chosen districts, selected from a larger pool of 23 districts in the designated study area (refer to Figure 1). The primary objective of the research was to obtain valuable insights into the cultural practices related to the Batu Qulhu ritual within the Mandailing community in the Madina region. The *Batu Qulhu* event occurring in July 2022 was meticulously observed and documented, employing a combination of photographs and videos for meticulous recording. Regarding the data collection process, individual interviews were conducted with each informant, with each session spanning approximately 2 hours. These interviews took place at mutually agreed locations, such as the informant's residence, school office, or the household of the deceased individual where the *Batu Qulhu* ritual took place. Thorough and meticulous recording of all pertinent information was undertaken for subsequent analysis purposes.

Figure 1

3.3. Data Analysis

The present study utilized a qualitative data analysis approach, encompassing three key stages: 1) data reduction; 2) data presentation; and 3) drawing conclusions. This analytical process unfolded iteratively throughout the research. Initially, during the early phases of data

collection, the research maintained a broad and overarching focus, and the observations were comprehensive in nature. As the research progressed and the focus of the study became more apparent, the observations evolved to adopt a more structured approach, enabling the acquisition of specific and targeted data.

The data analysis commenced with data reduction, where the gathered information was streamlined and organized to facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Subsequently, the data were presented in a coherent and meaningful manner to facilitate effective interpretation. Finally, the study derived conclusions based on the analyzed data, allowing for the generation of valuable insights into the cultural practices surrounding the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina. Throughout the research, this qualitative data analysis process occurred in a cyclical manner, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the research topic and a nuanced understanding of the intricacies involved. By transitioning from broad and general observations to more structured and specific data collection, the study achieved a comprehensive and detailed exploration of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual's cultural significance and its relevance within the Mandailing community.

3.4. Ethical Consideration

The present investigation was conducted under the auspices of Cluster Interdisciplinary Basic Research, adhering meticulously to stringent ethical guidelines. To ensure ethical compliance, the study received official approval from the Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) University of North Sumatera (UINSU) with the approval number: 0616615683. The utmost care was taken in handling the research data and records, which were securely stored on a password-protected computer housed within the Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, UINSU. Access to these records was strictly restricted to the authors.

In adherence to established ethical standards for data collection and publication, prior to their inclusion in the research, explicit informed consent was meticulously acquired from all eight subjects involved, thereby safeguarding their voluntary and informed engagement in the study. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, a coding system was employed, wherein each subject was allocated an initial "P" followed by pertinent demographic particulars, such as age and current profession. Moreover, all photographic materials featured in this investigation were obtained with written consent from all participants in the native *Bahasa* (Indonesian language), thereby emphasizing the paramount importance of respecting their autonomy and privacy throughout the research process. This unwavering commitment to

270 ethical principles serves to underscore the rigor and integrity of the present inquiry, facilitating
271 an ethically sound exploration of the cultural practices pertaining to the Batu Qulhu ritual
272 within the Mandailing community in Madina.

273 4. Findings and Discussion

274 4.1. Origin of the Rituals

275 Based on the interview, it is mentioned that Syeikh Haji Mustafa Husein bin Husein
276 Nasution bin Umar Nasution Al-Mandaili (or known as Syeikh Mustafa Husein) (1886-1955),
277 is credited as the first Imam to introduce the practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance at funeral
278 ceremonies. In the beginning, was named by *Batu Balancing* based on the color of the stone
279 used in this ritual. This insight was derived from interviews conducted with P1 (65), an ulama,
280 and P2 (52), a teacher at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Panyabungan. In addition, Syeikh
281 Musthafa Husein is also founder of the *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru*
282 (PPMPB)⁵ or Purba Baru Islamic boarding school. The practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance
283 has been preserved and perpetuated by his students, who have established recitation
284 congregations in various locations such as mosques, prayer rooms, and *surau*⁶. Notably, the
285 students and alumni of Musthafawiyah have played a significant role in its development and
286 expansion beyond Madina region, with a presence in several other provinces across Indonesia.
287 As the oldest *pesantren* (or boarding school) in North Sumatra, the influence of this practice
288 extends widely, facilitated by the widespread distribution of its students and graduates.

289 An alternative explanation, provided by P3 (73) an ulama, diverges slightly from the
290 previous informant. He has pointed out that the tradition of using *Batu Qulhu* or *Batu*
291 *Balancing*⁷ as a medium for remembrance was explained with a slight variation, focusing on
292 the customs upheld by elderly parents, ulama, village *malims* (religious teachers), without
293 mentioning any specific individual. It was a means to alleviate the sorrow experienced by the
294 bereaved and served as a form of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends. In
295 addition to the customary acts of attending funerals and observing mourning rituals, the
296 strategies employed to alleviate the profound grief experienced by individuals extended further.
297 These encompassed multifaceted practices such as providing emotional support, proffering
298 words of guidance and solace to foster resilience and acceptance in the face of adversity.
299 Moreover, individuals were invited to partake in collective prayer sessions, where the use of
300 *Batu Qulhu* stones served as facilitative elements in creating a conducive environment for these
301 spiritual gatherings. P3 further elucidated that this method, referred to as *alak na jolo*

302 *martakziah*, involved family members, parents, spouses, children, relatives, and neighbors
303 coming together for *tahlilan*.

304 “In the past people paid tribute to the homes of people who died; parents, wife, husband,
305 children, siblings and neighbors are *tahlilan*, starting from reciting *istighfar*, *al-Fatihah*,
306 *tahlil*, prayers and concluding *selawat*. To make the *dhikr* in congregation more solemn,
307 they add media by using a *Batu Balancing* (white stone) within size of an adult's big toe
308 or larger than that. In the past, the white stone was said to be a *Batu Balancing*, now it is
309 better known as the *Batu Qulhu*”.

310 *Batu Qulhu* ritual refers to the use of certain stone as a means of carrying out *dhikr*
311 worship. In general, this type of stone is typically known as white pebble. It should be noticed
312 that most of these white pebbles are predominantly comprised of marble, a rock formation
313 characterized by its crystallized carbonates and can easily be found in the riparian zone. Here,
314 the family of the deceased person collect these stones from the nearest river. As mentioned in
315 the interview, this ritual chooses approximately the size of an adult's thumb to enhance the
316 solemnity of the remembrance (as can be seen in Figure 2a). During the interview P4 (65),
317 emphasized that in the past, people paid homage to the homes of the deceased, engaging in
318 *tahlilan* rituals that encompassed prayers and concluding with ‘*selawat*’ (see Figure 2b). To
319 augment the collective remembrance, *Batu Qulhu*, the size of an adult's big toe or larger, was
320 employed. Over time, the *Batu Balancing* came to be recognized as the *Batu Qulhu*.

321 **Figure 2**

322 The utilization of *Batu Qulhu* in death ceremonies is also underpinned by the geographical
323 sequences. Firstly, the abundance of rivers in Madina, notably the Batang Gadis River, Batang
324 Natal River, Aek Kalungan River and Angkola River, facilitated the easy availability of these
325 stones in the past. Nowadays, these rivers also threatened by illegal gold mining activities [43],
326 and tend to pollute due to its waste [44]. Secondly, these stones possess distinct characteristics
327 that contribute to their suitability for the purpose at hand. They exhibit a white hue, imparting
328 a visually soothing effect, while their cool and clean appearance further enhances their appeal.
329 Third, these stones demonstrate resilience in withstanding the rigors of varying weather
330 conditions, including heat, cold, and rainfall. Furthermore, the recitation of *Batu Qulhu* rituals
331 is believed by the community to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave.

332 **4.2. The Contemporary Practice of Batu Qulhu in the Mandailing Community**

333 In the past, Islamic practices in Sumatra have exhibited influences from mystical and
334 shamanistic traditions e.g., [56,57]. However, it is important to note that the religious activities

associated with the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* are not influenced by shamanism, but rather stem solely from religious traditions previously followed by religious scholars, religious teachers, and traditional leaders. Currently, the contemporary practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been inherited and embraced by Muslim society in Madina. Based on interview with P4 (65), it is evident that in the past, the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance adhered to strict protocols as mentioned in the following statement.

“The tradition of recalling the Batu Qulhu was once a highly regulated practice. It required seeking consent from both the village leader and the syekh. Mastery of the 20 essential attributes of Allah was necessary, alongside the ability to read the Quran and comprehend its teachings. The stones themselves had to possess a pure white hue. The recitation of Qulhu would take place during evening gatherings, where all the stones present had to be utilized fully, leaving no remnants behind before the congregation dispersed”.

These procedures include the following: 1) the procession necessitated obtaining permission from the head of the village⁸ and *tuan guru*⁹ (or *kulifah*); 2) the ritual leader was required to commit to memory and comprehend the twenty obligatory attributes of God, encompassing *nafsiyah* (self-related attributes) nature, *salbiyah* (attributes related to existence) nature, *ma'ani* (abstract attributes of God) nature, and *maknawiyah* (the essential nature and prevalence of *ma'ani*) nature; 3) the officiating Imam was expected to possess proficiency in both written and spoken Arabic-Malay; 4) the Imam leading the remembrance was required to proficiently recite the Qur'an and comprehend its meaning; 5) the *Batu Qulhu* utilized in the ritual had to be of a white hue; and 6) the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* transpired during evening hours, and all the stones had to be completed within a single procession conducted in the presence of the congregation. Preceding the initiation of the ritual, it is customary for the priest to cleanse himself through the observance of ablution, mirroring the ritualistic cleansing process associated with prayer as mentioned by P7 (60).

Basically, this ritual has many similarities to *tahlilan* tradition especially in the context prayers and recitations. This practice generally has been carried out by many Nahdatul Ulama (NU) community in Sumatra [11,58]. However, in *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, there are five Imams that lead this procession with different assignment. These Imams are voluntarily appointed by the group and relatively flexible based on their own agreement. The priests then read several prayers that beneficial to seek forgiveness for the deceased, his/her family as well to congregation. The Imams also recite some verses from the Surat of the Quran (QS), and praise the God. In this *Batu Qulhu* ritual, the congregation are voluntarily attending the ritual

without any formal invitation. The ritual is held in three consecutive days after the death, and organized by group manager, neighbors and the Imams, and commonly referred to *Serikat Tolong Menolong* (STM) or Union of Help. The Imams and the congregation are artfully arranged in a circular formation, tailored to the venue's conditions. This arrangement allows for the placement of stones in front of the congregation, effortlessly within reach for the worshippers' right hand. During the fieldwork in Panyabungan Kota district, it was noticed that there were more than 30 piles of stones in the congregation. As additional information that commonly they are sitting on the floor covered with *tikar* or mat, but some people also held the ritual with chairs. The priests hold the responsibility for overseeing the course of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual. The following Table 2 describes each Imams' responsibility in *Batu Qulhu* procession.

Table 2

The current study also reveals that *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Madina is held in three consecutive days where:

- In the day 1, the remembrance is taken where the Imam start the ceremony. In the first meeting, the priests wear neat clothes, wear caps, turbans and sarongs. Reflecting the figure of a religious expert and placing his position is a person who is highly respected in society. Their sitting position is arranged in a special place, different from the congregation in general. Here, the Imam will also read out the order of the Batu qulhu procession.
- For day 2, similar to the preceding event, the order of events for the first night procession remains unchanged. Prior to commencing the remembrance ceremony, the 'Imam pembaca takhtim' provided an explanation that after the recitation of the *takhtim*, the congregation would engage in the dhikr of *Batu Qulhu*, and were kindly requested to maintain their positions until the conclusion of the event. However, in contrast to the previous occasion, on the second night of recitation, Qulhu stones are made available to facilitate the dhikr and are arranged in a stacked formation in front of the congregation. Subsequently, the Qulhu remembrance stones are accumulated in the same location. The prescribed procedure entails the recitation of QS 112: 1-3, followed by the selection of a single stone. For each subsequent repetition, an additional stone is selected, such that two stones are chosen for a two-time reading, three stones for a three-time reading, four stones for a four-time reading, and so forth, in accordance with established practice.
- In day 3, *Batu Qulhu* procession replicates the format observed on the second meeting. However, a notable distinction lies in the extended duration of the dhikr, necessitated by

the requirement to recite the prayer over each stone in the presence of the congregation. It is imperative to sustain the continuity of the dhikr until its completion, without interruption. Subsequent to the remembrance, a collective prayer and *salawat* are gathered. The *Batu Qulhu* employed as aids for remembrance are carefully placed within plastic burlap bags or buckets (as can be seen in Figure 3a). The event concludes with a religious sermon or *tausiyah*, wherein expressions of gratitude are articulated on behalf of the congregation and the afflicted families. The content of the religious sermon encompasses themes such as death, the retribution of the grave, and serves as a reminder for individuals to perpetually prepare themselves and enhance their devotion before the arrival of death. This is because all living beings are destined to experience mortality (QS 3: 185), and its arrival cannot be postponed, even if one seeks refuge within a lofty and robust fortress (QS 4: 78).

In addition to the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, on the fourth day following an individual's passing, *Batu Qulhu* stones are transported to the cemetery and carefully positioned above the burial site, as illustrated in Figure 3b. The procedure involves the preparation of the grave bed, which includes the leveling of the ground in the designated area assigned for burial. Subsequently, these stones are poured in a manner that commences from the head of the deceased and extends towards their feet. Although typically performed by the bereaved family, this task can also be undertaken by others, such as neighbors or relatives. During the placement of the stones on the grave, it is customary to recite the phrase "*Bismillahi milata 'ala Rasulullah*," which translates to "In the name of Allah and in the religion of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh." The recitation performed during this act is identical to the prayer recitation conducted during the interment of the deceased's body. It is noteworthy that the selection of this specific recitation lacks a distinct foundational basis but rather originates from established tradition.

Figure 3

Presently, *Batu Qulhu* dhikr has undergone significant transformations over time, likely influenced by environmental factors, evolving understandings within the community, and technological advance, as well as societal changes. Presently, the implementation of the ritual varies across different areas of Madina. Traditionally, some individuals engage in the *Batu Qulhu* practice following the *Maghrib* prayer (after sunset) or around 6.30 pm – 7.00 pm local time and typically after the *Isya* prayer (7.30 pm – 8.00 pm), collectively performed at the mosque during evening as mentioned by P8 (55). Among adult women, it takes place in the evening preceding *Maghrib*, while among the male youth (*naposo bulung*) and female youth

(*nauli bulung*), it occurs in the afternoon (after *Asr* or around 3.00 pm) as mentioned by P6 (45). Adult male worshipers partake in this practice during the evening after the *Isya* prayer on the first, second, and third days following a person's demise. As mentioned earlier, the *Batu Qulhu* employed in this remembrance ritual is a stone recognized by the bereaved family, retrieved from the river. To ensure cleanliness, the stones are consistently washed and kept in a plastic sack or a large container. However, due to the increasing flexibility of people's mindset and the scarcity of these rocks in rivers, the people can now be acquired from various stores in Madina region as mentioned by P5 (50):

“Batu Qulhu are taken from the river by the family, if they are dirty, they are cleaned. Now, Batu Qulhu are easy to get and are sold in flower shops and building material store”).

4.3. Aspect of Norms of *Batu Qulhu* ritual

The *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice, introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein, holds significant cultural value in the Mandailing community of Madina. This ritual utilizes white pebbles from nearby rivers for *dhikr* worship and to alleviate the suffering of the deceased in the grave. It has been preserved and perpetuated by Syeikh Mustafa Husein's students and alumni, who have established recitation congregations in the region. As the oldest pesantren in North Sumatra, the influence of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends widely beyond Madina, with its students and graduates playing a significant role in its development and expansion. Similar cultural practices, like the *tahlilan* tradition among the NU community in Sumatra, can also be found.

Strict protocols surround the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance. Prior permission from village and religious leaders, referred to as *Tuan Guru*, is required. The officiating Imam must possess proficiency in Arabic-Malay language. These protocols ensure the solemnity and authenticity of the ritual, aligning with the importance placed on established rituals and cultural heritage. The *tahlilan* tradition within the NU community also follows specific rituals, emphasizing the shared values of upholding traditions and seeking solace in times of mourning. As previously mentioned, obtaining permission from both village and religious leaders is necessary, as indicated by P2 (52):

‘mangido izin Parjolo tu Tuan Guru’ (English: Ask permission from *Tuan Guru* first). Commonly answered by the teacher with *‘olo’ silahken acara dilanjut* (English: Okay, please continue the ritual), *‘marimom mau au’* (English: I will follow).

Batu Qulhu remembrance serves as a form of communal support, uniting family members, relatives, neighbors, and friends in times of sorrow. This fosters a sense of unity and solidarity within the Mandailing community, reflecting the value placed on collective resilience. Similar communal support can be found in other practices, such as the collective remembrance gatherings associated with the tahlilan tradition, reinforcing the cultural value of community bonds and support networks. The significance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends beyond its cultural and spiritual aspects. It represents a cherished cultural heritage embraced by the Muslim society in Madina, highlighting the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of identity. While specific to the Mandailing community, similar practices can be observed in other regions, fulfilling the shared human need to honor the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and preserve cultural traditions as integral elements of identity and social cohesion. For a comprehensive overview of the norm aspects in the tradition of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community, please refer to Table 3.

Table 3

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ritual stands as a significant cultural and religious practice within the Mandailing community's funeral ceremonies. This tradition, which involves using stones for dhikr worship, holds deep historical and spiritual roots. While its origins can be traced back to Syeikh Mustafa Husein, who introduced the ritual, variations in accounts highlight the complex nature of its origin. Over time, the procession of *Batu Qulhu* has undergone modifications to streamline its organization, exemplifying the adaptive nature of cultural practices while maintaining their essence. Although *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar commemorative practices can be found in other regions. These rituals reflect the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, seeking solace through collective ceremonies, and preserving cultural traditions as integral components of identity and social cohesion. *Batu Qulhu* ritual serves as a testament to the rich cultural and religious heritage of the Mandailing community in North Sumatra, encapsulating collective mourning, spiritual devotion, and the preservation of cultural identity. As funeral ceremonies continue to play a pivotal role in communities worldwide, understanding and appreciating the significance of these rituals contributes to our broader knowledge of human beliefs, traditions, and the ways in which we commemorate and honor the departed.

While this study presents a preliminary investigation into the *Batu Qulhu* ritual, it acknowledges certain limitations. The absence of historical documentation detailing the ritual

within the Mandailing community necessitates a proposed historical approach through extensive literature review, drawing upon the writings of earlier ulama. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the limited number of informants and the specific observed processions may not fully capture the diverse procedural variations of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual across the entire Madina region. Recognizing the modifications made by different communities based on the guidance of their Imams or practical considerations further adds to the complexity of the ritual. Given these findings, the study recommends the cultural preservation and educational promotion of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual for the benefit of future generations. The creation of appropriate documentation, such as books and videos, accessible through various platforms including social media, can contribute to the wider dissemination of knowledge and understanding of the ritual. These efforts support the cultural preservation of the *Batu Qulhu* tradition and foster greater appreciation among the Mandailing community and beyond.

Declarations

Authors contribution statement

Conceived and designed the experiments, S., A.F.D.; performed the experiments, S., A.F.D.; analyzed and interpreted the data, S., S.D., and A.W.N.; wrote the paper S., A.F.D.; A.W.N. and S.D. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Figures

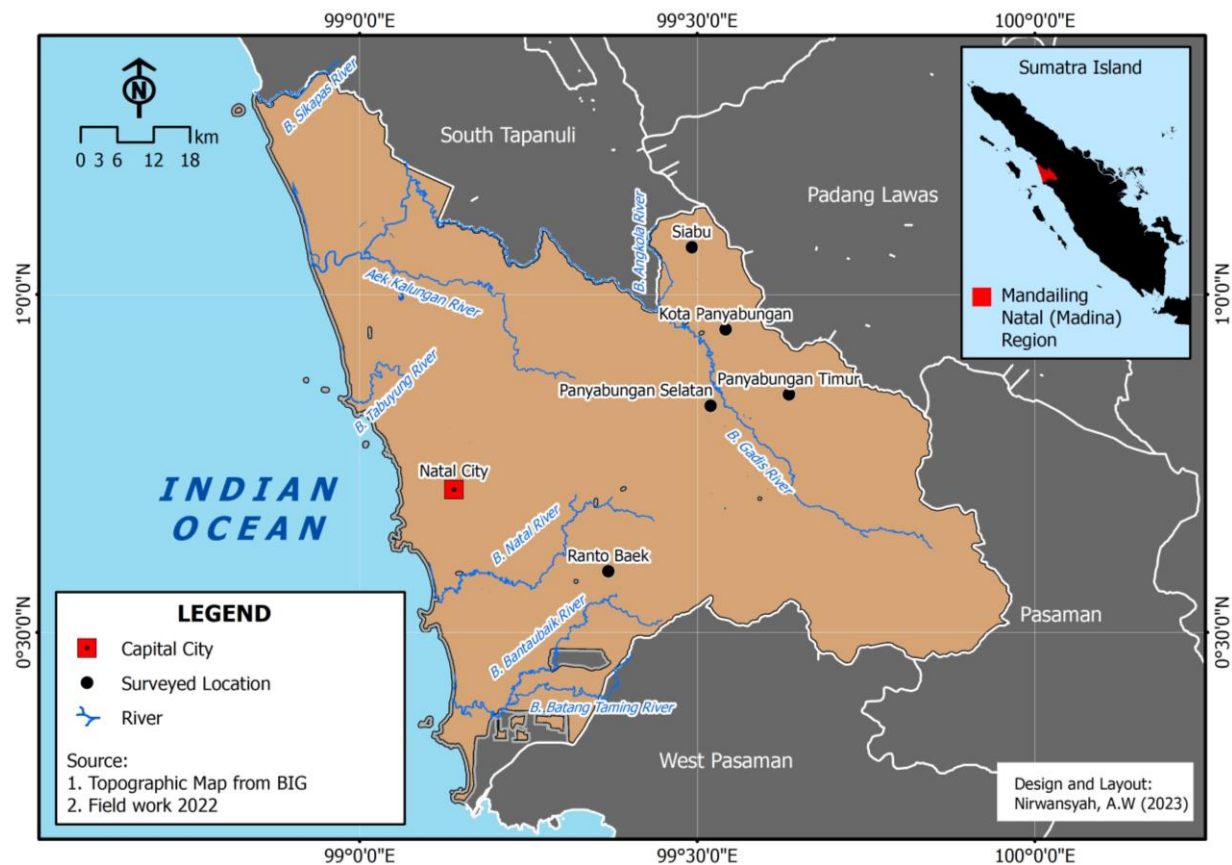


Figure 1. Area of the current research



Figure 2. a) White pebble collected for *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Mandailing, where each bucket contains 70 to 100 stones; and b) the congregation of the Mandailing Muslim community during this obituary ceremony. Photography by Sahrul on 22 July 2022.



Figure 3. *Batu Qulhu* remembrance by adult male where a) the organizer has collected and kept the stones back into the plastic sack for fourth day of casting procession; and b) where *Batu Qulhu* is finally poured on the grave of deceased person. (photographs of the ritual held at P4 residence on 22 July 2022) (taken by Sahrul)

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First Imam	<i>Imam pembaca silsilah</i>	– Reciting <i>istighfar</i> ¹⁰ three times; – Reciting <i>wasilah</i> to nabi (propeth Muhammad pbuh), his appostles, ulama and parents of the deceased person, all Muslim and the congregation	– QS 1: 1-6
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Connection to nature	The culture maintains a connection with nature, as the stones used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals are collected from rivers. The easy availability of these stones in the past and their resilience in varying weather conditions highlight the importance of nature in the culture.
Alleviation of suffering	The recitation of <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals is believed to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave. This demonstrates a value of compassion and empathy within the culture.

¹ Peace be upon him

² Tuanku Rao is characterized as enigmatic figure and one of the two significant leaders of the Padri movement, shared this status alongside Imam Bonjol himself. Tuanku Rao's origins can be traced to *Huta na Godang* or *Huta Godang*, also known as *Tano Godang*, located in Mandailing Julu (Upper Mandailing) [14].

³ The word *barzanzi* is associated with the name of Syeikh Barzanji, a prominent scholar and Sufi poet from Kurdistan. His renowned work, titled "*Mawlid al-Barzanji*," is a poetic composition that narrates the birth and life of the Prophet Muhammad, often recited during religious gatherings and celebrations.

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- ⁴ *Upah-upah* refers to cultural practice or tradition of offering gifts or monetary compensation during significant events or ceremonies. The term "upah" itself can be translated as "wages" or "payment". *Upah-upah* is deeply rooted in the Mandailing culture and is often observed during various occasions such as weddings, funerals, or community gatherings.
- ⁵ *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB), was founded in 1912 by Syeikh Musthafa Husein Nasution. This Islamic boarding school is located in Purba Baru sub-district, Madina Regency, North Sumatra [59]. Further reference on this boarding school can be read in Khairurrijal [60].
- ⁶ Surau means a place of worship or a small mosque-like structure. The surau typically serves as a communal prayer space or a modest mosque, wherein Muslims congregate for congregational prayers, religious discourses, and other religious engagements.
- ⁷ Some community in Madina also use term of *Batu Bontar* to refer *Batu Qulhu*.
- ⁸ One crucial determinant is obtaining authorization from the village leader. The village head holds a position akin to that of a revered monarch, embodying nobility and commanding profound respect.
- ⁹ *Tuan guru* or teacher serves as a religious authority, serving as an exemplar and establishing a benchmark for societal norms through their words and actions. Additionally, they are often revered as sacred individuals known for their healing abilities, and they serve as a source of supplication for various needs such as well-being, sustenance, companionship, agricultural prosperity, and attainment of blessings.
- ¹⁰ The act of attempting forgiveness from the Almighty God, commonly by saying ‘*astağfirullāhu*
- ¹¹ The *syahadat tauhid* contains declaration of belief in the oneness of God Almighty
- ¹² *Basmallah* is phrase mention to the God before beginning any action or speech. It spells ‘*Bismillahi rāḥmani rāḥim*’. It means: in the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful.

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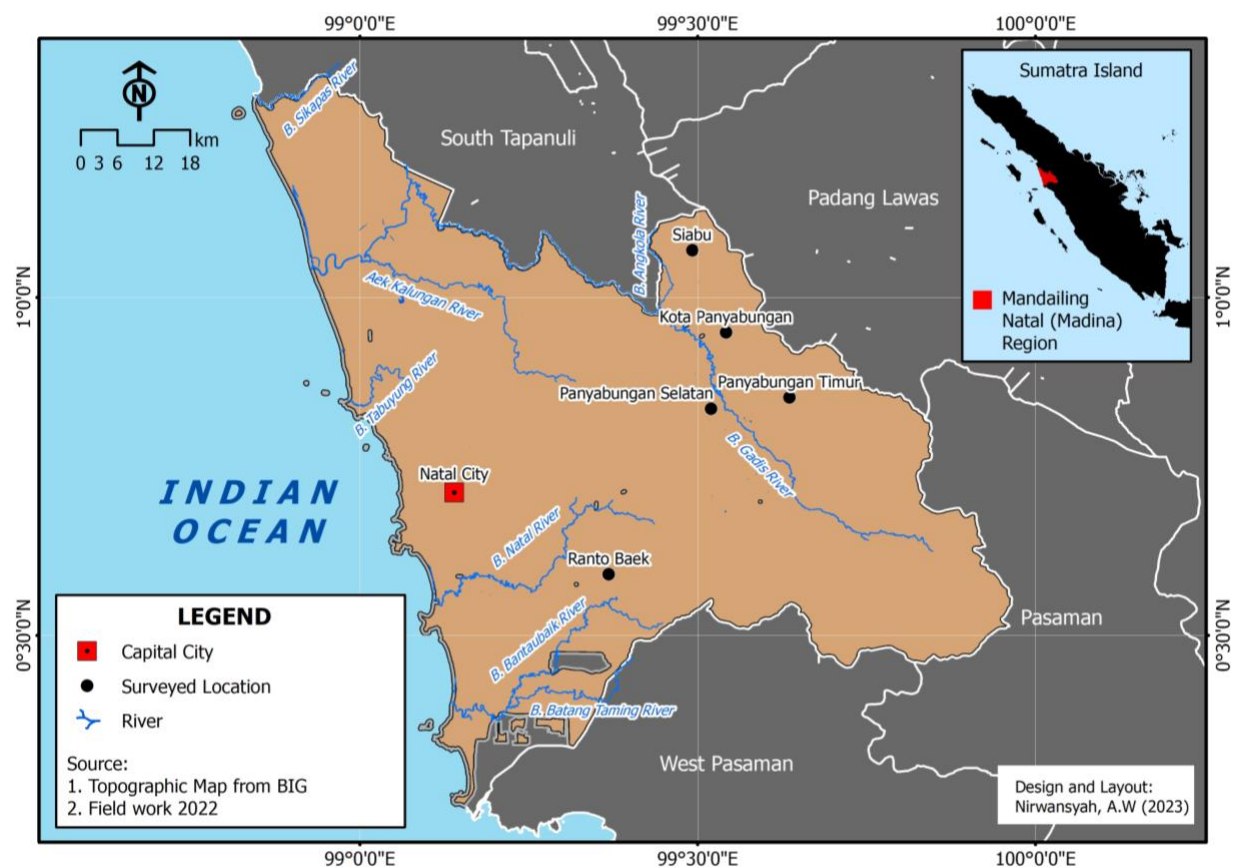


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Revisi artikel ketiga (15 Agustus 2023)

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Journal: Heliyon

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Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

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***Batu Qulhu*—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra**

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Keywords: death rituals, funeral traditions, *Batu Qulhu*, Mandailing community, norms and values

1. Introduction

The manner in which individuals navigate the concept of death holds significance as it encompasses their cultural engagement and utilization, similar to how religion, an integral component of culture, provides a framework for comprehending, interpreting, and making sense of death, albeit without necessarily diminishing its inherent challenges for those experiencing grief [1]. Throughout various cultures, the commemoration of the deceased and the support offered to grieving families manifest through a multitude of ritualistic practices [2]. These rituals hold particular significance within religious frameworks as they are not only

guided by religious doctrines but also serve as fundamental aspects of communal worship [3]. Within the Islamic tradition, the management of deceased bodies adheres to the teachings found in the Qur'an, specifically drawing attention to Surah Al Imran (QS 3:185). This verse underscores the universal nature of mortality, asserting that every individual is bound to experience death [4]. In his groundbreaking 1907 study, Robert Hertz skillfully intertwined three essential imperatives - moral, aesthetic, and sociological - to present a captivating conceptualization of death [5]. His intricate analysis portrays death as a profound transformative journey that transcends the boundaries of both the spiritual and physical realms.

In Indonesia, funeral rituals have been intricately intertwined with local cultural practices and ethnic traditions. Various communities, such as the Tana Toraja people [6], the traditional Javanese community [7,8], and the Balinese who perform the *ngaben* ceremony [9,10], express their funeral customs based on their specific cultural heritage. These burial practices and procedures provide profound insights into the community and society in which they are performed. In these traditions, feasts, animal sacrifices, and supplications are often conducted to honor the deceased and their family. Additionally, Islamic values and rituals significantly influence funeral practices across many regions in Indonesia. The practice of *tahlil* or *tahlilan*, which involves collective remembrance gatherings, is commonly observed [11], and the *azan* (call to prayer) is often performed during burial ceremonies [3]. Moreover, in certain regions of Sumatra, Islamic funeral practices have assimilated with local traditions. For example, the people of Minangkabau in Nagari Salayo incorporate the custom of placing attributes on the head of the deceased during the funeral procession [12]. While in Nagari Anduring, the Minang community also practices *bakayaik*, which takes place 100 days after someone's passing. *Bakayaik* vividly recounts the profound narrative of Prophet Muhammad pbuh¹, beginning with his miraculous birth and chronicling his relentless efforts to uphold the principles of Islam. This ceremonial tradition blends the eloquence of Arabic and Minang languages, creating a captivating linguistic tapestry that enhances the overall richness of the performance. In Aceh, the *reuhab* tradition involves decorating the deceased person's bedroom for 40 days [13]. These practices exemplify the dynamic interplay between Islamic influences and local cultural expressions in funeral rituals across Indonesia.

This study aims to contribute to the understanding of funeral traditions within the Muslim community in Sumatra, specifically focusing on the practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance in the Mandailing community of North Sumatra. The funeral rituals in this community are deeply rooted in a rich tapestry of cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions. By exploring the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ceremonies, this research seeks to shed light on the significance and

intricacies of these rituals, offering valuable insights into the broader context of funeral traditions among Muslims in Sumatra. The study addresses the historical aspect of the ritual, the procession in current societies, and finally the norms and values contained in this ritual.

1.1. Mandailing Ethnic: Historical Context

The origin of the word "*Mandailing*" is linked to the Munda people of India, who experienced defeat in a war against the Aryan people. The term "*Mandailing*" is derived from either "*Mandala Holing*" [14,15] or "*Mundailing*," referring to the refugees from Munda [16]. It is believed that the Munda people originally inhabited the northern regions of India before the arrival of the Aryans [17]. The historical interaction between the Aryans and the Munda people has been examined through linguistic evidence [18]. Due to pressure from the Aryans, the Munda people migrated southward within India [18–20], and this Aryan occupation of the Munda people occurred around 1200-1500 BC [21]. Eventually, the displaced Munda people migrated to Southeast Asia [20], although the specific country of their migration is not specified. It is likely that some of them reached North Sumatra through the Barus Port in Central Tapanuli, which was an international port at that time. Referred to "*Negarakeragama*" book from 1365, which mentions the presence of the Mandailing as one of the most significant ethnic groups in the archipelago [14,22]. The names mentioned include Mandailing, Pane, and Padang Lawas. The mention of these names indicates that the name Mandailing has been known by outsiders since ancient dates. In addition, Tuanku Rao² suggests that the Mandailing people trace their origin back to the Bugis Makassar, who sailed to the Singkuang Port (now known as Natal), it is more commonly accepted that the Mandailing people are part of the Batak ethnic group.

The Mandailing community's ethnic origin is a subject of contention among scholars. While some argue that they are part of the Batak Toba ethnic group [23,24], this perspective faces opposition from Mandailing intellectuals and historians. However, an analysis of factors such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group [25,26]. To establish their identity as the Mandailing community, they refer to themselves as "*halak kita*" (referred to: our people) of South Tapanuli [27], rather than as "*halak batak*" (Batak people) [28,29]. Regarding religious affiliation, the majority of the contemporary Mandailing population follows Islam, with a minority of Christians found in specific locations like Pakantan in Upper Mandailing, Medan, and other cities in North Sumatra [14,30]. Before embracing Islam, the religious beliefs of the Mandailing people focused around ancestral spirits

referred to as "*si pele begu*" [22], incorporating influences from Hinduism and Buddhism [31]. Recent field research conducted in the Mandailing region revealed remnants and artefacts associated with both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, particularly in the vicinity of Panyabungan within the Greater Mandailing area [32].

Padri wars has brought Islam to Mandailing around 1821 and the Dutch military breached and defeated this movement by 1835 [25,30,33]. The term '*Padri*' has two possible origins. One explanation suggests that it stems from the Indonesian word '*padri*,' which referred to priests. It is important to emphasize that the notable figures associated with the Padri movement can be likened to 'Islamic priests' [34]. This movement emerged in the early 1800s as a reformist Islamic movement led by local scholars known as ulama. These ulama sought to purify and reform Islam in the region, criticizing what they perceived as syncretic practices and deviations from strict Islamic teachings [15,30]. They aimed to establish a more orthodox and conservative interpretation of Islam in Mandailing. Padri movement gained support from various segments of the population, including the rural communities, who were attracted to their message of religious purity and social justice [35]. The Padris' growing influence and power threatened the traditional rulers, known as penghulu, who feared losing their authority and control [30,34].

1.2. Mandailing Philosophy

The values of the Mandailing ethnic philosophy of life called *Poda Na Lima*. *Poda* means advice, *na* means five, and *lima* means five. In short, *Poda Na Lima* consists of five pieces of advice, namely: i) *Paias Rohamu* (keeping your heart clean); ii) *Paias Pamatangmu* (keeping your body clean); iii) *Paias Parabitonmu* (keeping your clothes clean); iv) *Paias Bagasmu* (keeping your house clean); and v) *Paias Pakaranganmu* (keeping your yard clean) [23,36]. These five values are still firmly held by the Mandailing community and the Mandailing ethnicity in Indonesia and around the world. Despite the Madina people's reputation for being religious, their daily social lives are intertwined with various cultural practices that are imbued with religious significance. These rituals, such as *marhaban* (*barzanzi*)³, the use of plain flour, and *upah-upah*⁴, are performed on joyful occasions such as weddings, recoveries from illness, and the attainment of new positions, as well as during significant life transitions such as the birth of a child and moving into a new home [27].

The Mandailing ethnic community has a value system, *Dalihan Na Tolu* which means a forum used to organize life in carrying out *olong* (affection) between *mora*, *kahanggi* and *anak boru* [23,24,37,38]. *Dalihan Na Tolu*, also referred to 'three stones' [26], is a cultural value,

created by the Creator that guide Bataknese attitude and behavior in the social lives and cultural relation [39]. The three stones encompass family, community, and spirituality. In Mandailing community, *Dalihan Na Tolu* principles are deeply intertwined with Islamic values and teachings. Mandailing Muslim communities incorporate these cultural principles into their daily lives, alongside their Islamic beliefs and practices [39,40]. This concept reinforces the importance of maintaining strong moral character, fostering harmonious relationships, and upholding social justice within the community [23,24,39].

2. Location Settings

The Mandailing Natal region, also shortly known as Madina, is located in North Sumatra Province and astronomically situated between 0°10' and 1°50' N and 98°10' and 100°10' E. This region is located on the west coast of Sumatra, has a 170 km coastline, and is home to 24 islands, though only 4 of these islands are inhabited. In 2021, Madina has a population of over 478,000 people, and has a total area of 6,134 km² [41]. Based on BPS-Statistics of Mandailing Natal Regency [41], during 2021, the predominant land use in this region comprises a mixed vegetation area, accounting for 39.15% or 252.57 hectares, while forested areas occupy 30.04% of the region, followed by palm oil plantations at 27.79%. Settlements in Madina cover 451.38 hectares (0.7%), while agriculture utilizes 2.17% of the land. Additionally, water bodies such as lakes and dams encompass 0.14% of the region's total area. This region is crossed by three river systems including Batang Pungkut, Batang Gadis, and Aek Pohan that represent upper, middle and lower part of the Batang Gadis watershed [42]. These rivers are beneficial for major population in Madina including for agriculture, plantation and industrial sectors. However, for years the rivers have also become threatened to illegal mining activities including sands, rocks and gold [43,44].

The majority of the population in Madina, around 95%, is Muslim, while the remaining 5% consists of Christians, Catholics, Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of Confucianism. Madina has more than 800 mosques and 70 churches [45], to support the religious practices of its inhabitants, and the region is made up of 23 districts and over 370 villages. Muslim community in Madina, consisting of various ethnic groups, exhibits a rich diversity of cultural and religious practices. Mosques and Islamic schools, known as *madrasah*, hold a prominent position in shaping the religious and cultural life of the community. Furthermore, active participation in significant cultural and religious traditions, such as the celebration of two major Islamic holidays like *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*, is observed among the Muslim population. A strong emphasis on social responsibility and assisting those in need, in alignment with

Islamic principles, is evident through the engagement of the Muslim community in charitable and community service activities. The local government plays a supportive role by implementing policies and providing necessary infrastructure to promote Islamic education [46].

3. Methodology

3.1. Design of the Research

This study adopts qualitative research design, employing combination of phenomenological and ethnographic approaches. The primary aim of qualitative research is to comprehend the distinctive characteristics and experiences of individual cases, rather than attempting to establish generalized patterns or trends [47]. This method emphasizes the comprehensive exploration of human behaviors and experiences as they unfold within natural settings [48,49]. Integral to this research is the integration of the subjects' knowledge with that of the researchers, which holds significant importance. This integration facilitates the recognition and documentation of outcomes from the local perspective inherent to the subjects themselves [6,50]. The current study employs an emic approach, which entails adopting the insider's perspective from within the culture where the research project is situated, as previously described in studies by [6,34,51–53]. By embracing an emic approach, the research acknowledges the critical importance of comprehending and interpreting the cultural context and subjective experiences of the subjects, thereby enriching both the research process and its findings.

3.2. Fieldwork and Subjects

The research employed an observational and interview-based approach to collect data. The researchers assumed the roles of both observers and interviewers. The observation phase focused on the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice in the study area, the activities of the Imam during the ritual, and the placement of stones in the graveyard after the final day of remembrance. For the interviews, a systematic process was followed to select appropriate sources. Initial contact with the informants was established through various means, such as phone calls, emails, and WhatsApp messages, to effectively arrange and conduct the interviews.

In prior ethnographic studies, a limited number of subjects were involved. For instance, two studies centered on the practices of anesthesia within two British hospital [54]. Similarly, Baan et al. [6] conducted research on funeral rituals in Toraja with only two informants, while

Lee et al. [55] examined the experience of depression among Chinese individuals with a sample size of five informants. In accordance with the present study, data collection encompassed interviews with a total of eight carefully selected subjects, as detailed in Table 1. The age range of the informants in this study was 45-73 years old.

The selection process for these subjects adhered to specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Firstly, the informants were required to hold the roles of imams or leaders of the *Batu Qulhu* dhikr (or remembrance) during funeral ceremonies within the Mandailing community. Secondly, they were expected to possess a profound understanding of the norms and values associated with *Batu Qulhu*. Lastly, the informants needed to be Ulama or respected Islamic spiritual leaders within the local community. Proficiency in the Mandailing language was also a prerequisite for informant selection. To identify suitable subjects, consultations were conducted with local authorities, such as the Indonesian Council of Ulama (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*) in Madina, as well as prominent local figures.

Table 1

The current investigation involved the collection of data during a comprehensive six-month fieldwork period in 2022, specifically spanning from February to July. This fieldwork, which was coordinated by the first author, S, and A.F.D., extended over a total of 90 days. The study targeted five specifically chosen districts, selected from a larger pool of 23 districts in the designated study area (refer to Figure 1). The primary objective of the research was to obtain valuable insights into the cultural practices related to the Batu Qulhu ritual within the Mandailing community in the Madina region. The *Batu Qulhu* event occurring in July 2022 was meticulously observed and documented, employing a combination of photographs and videos for meticulous recording. Regarding the data collection process, individual interviews were conducted with each informant, with each session spanning approximately 2 hours. These interviews took place at mutually agreed locations, such as the informant's residence, school office, or the household of the deceased individual where the *Batu Qulhu* ritual took place. Thorough and meticulous recording of all pertinent information was undertaken for subsequent analysis purposes.

Figure 1

3.3. Data Analysis

The present study utilized a qualitative data analysis approach, encompassing three key stages: 1) data reduction; 2) data presentation; and 3) drawing conclusions. This analytical process unfolded iteratively throughout the research. Initially, during the early phases of data

collection, the research maintained a broad and overarching focus, and the observations were comprehensive in nature. As the research progressed and the focus of the study became more apparent, the observations evolved to adopt a more structured approach, enabling the acquisition of specific and targeted data.

The data analysis commenced with data reduction, where the gathered information was streamlined and organized to facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Subsequently, the data were presented in a coherent and meaningful manner to facilitate effective interpretation. Finally, the study derived conclusions based on the analyzed data, allowing for the generation of valuable insights into the cultural practices surrounding the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina. Throughout the research, this qualitative data analysis process occurred in a cyclical manner, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the research topic and a nuanced understanding of the intricacies involved. By transitioning from broad and general observations to more structured and specific data collection, the study achieved a comprehensive and detailed exploration of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual's cultural significance and its relevance within the Mandailing community.

3.4. Ethical Consideration

The present investigation was conducted under the auspices of Cluster Interdisciplinary Basic Research, adhering meticulously to stringent ethical guidelines. To ensure ethical compliance, the study received official approval from the Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) University of North Sumatera (UINSU) with the approval number: 0616615683. The utmost care was taken in handling the research data and records, which were securely stored on a password-protected computer housed within the Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, UINSU. Access to these records was strictly restricted to the authors.

In adherence to established ethical standards for data collection and publication, prior to their inclusion in the research, explicit informed consent was meticulously acquired from all eight subjects involved, thereby safeguarding their voluntary and informed engagement in the study. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, a coding system was employed, wherein each subject was allocated an initial "P" followed by pertinent demographic particulars, such as age and current profession. Moreover, all photographic materials featured in this investigation were obtained with written consent from all participants in the native *Bahasa* (Indonesian language), thereby emphasizing the paramount importance of respecting their autonomy and privacy throughout the research process. This unwavering commitment to

270 ethical principles serves to underscore the rigor and integrity of the present inquiry, facilitating
271 an ethically sound exploration of the cultural practices pertaining to the Batu Qulhu ritual
272 within the Mandailing community in Madina.

273 4. Findings and Discussion

274 4.1. Origin of the Rituals

275 Based on the interview, it is mentioned that Syeikh Haji Mustafa Husein bin Husein
276 Nasution bin Umar Nasution Al-Mandaili (or known as Syeikh Mustafa Husein) (1886-1955),
277 is credited as the first Imam to introduce the practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance at funeral
278 ceremonies. In the beginning, was named by *Batu Balancing* based on the color of the stone
279 used in this ritual. This insight was derived from interviews conducted with P1 (65), an ulama,
280 and P2 (52), a teacher at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Panyabungan. In addition, Syeikh
281 Musthafa Husein is also founder of the *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru*
282 (PPMPB)⁵ or Purba Baru Islamic boarding school. The practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance
283 has been preserved and perpetuated by his students, who have established recitation
284 congregations in various locations such as mosques, prayer rooms, and *surau*⁶. Notably, the
285 students and alumni of Musthafawiyah have played a significant role in its development and
286 expansion beyond Madina region, with a presence in several other provinces across Indonesia.
287 As the oldest *pesantren* (or boarding school) in North Sumatra, the influence of this practice
288 extends widely, facilitated by the widespread distribution of its students and graduates.

289 An alternative explanation, provided by P3 (73) an ulama, diverges slightly from the
290 previous informant. He has pointed out that the tradition of using *Batu Qulhu* or *Batu*
291 *Balancing*⁷ as a medium for remembrance was explained with a slight variation, focusing on
292 the customs upheld by elderly parents, ulama, village *malims* (religious teachers), without
293 mentioning any specific individual. It was a means to alleviate the sorrow experienced by the
294 bereaved and served as a form of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends. In
295 addition to the customary acts of attending funerals and observing mourning rituals, the
296 strategies employed to alleviate the profound grief experienced by individuals extended further.
297 These encompassed multifaceted practices such as providing emotional support, proffering
298 words of guidance and solace to foster resilience and acceptance in the face of adversity.
299 Moreover, individuals were invited to partake in collective prayer sessions, where the use of
300 *Batu Qulhu* stones served as facilitative elements in creating a conducive environment for these
301 spiritual gatherings. P3 further elucidated that this method, referred to as *alak na jolo*

302 *martakziah*, involved family members, parents, spouses, children, relatives, and neighbors
303 coming together for *tahlilan*.

304 “In the past people paid tribute to the homes of people who died; parents, wife, husband,
305 children, siblings and neighbors are *tahlilan*, starting from reciting *istighfar*, *al-Fatihah*,
306 *tahlil*, prayers and concluding *selawat*. To make the *dhikr* in congregation more solemn,
307 they add media by using a *Batu Balancing* (white stone) within size of an adult's big toe
308 or larger than that. In the past, the white stone was said to be a *Batu Balancing*, now it is
309 better known as the *Batu Qulhu*”.

310 *Batu Qulhu* ritual refers to the use of certain stone as a means of carrying out *dhikr*
311 worship. In general, this type of stone is typically known as white pebble. It should be noticed
312 that most of these white pebbles are predominantly comprised of marble, a rock formation
313 characterized by its crystallized carbonates and can easily be found in the riparian zone. Here,
314 the family of the deceased person collect these stones from the nearest river. As mentioned in
315 the interview, this ritual chooses approximately the size of an adult's thumb to enhance the
316 solemnity of the remembrance (as can be seen in Figure 2a). During the interview P4 (65),
317 emphasized that in the past, people paid homage to the homes of the deceased, engaging in
318 *tahlilan* rituals that encompassed prayers and concluding with ‘*selawat*’ (see Figure 2b). To
319 augment the collective remembrance, *Batu Qulhu*, the size of an adult's big toe or larger, was
320 employed. Over time, the *Batu Balancing* came to be recognized as the *Batu Qulhu*.

321 **Figure 2**

322 The utilization of *Batu Qulhu* in death ceremonies is also underpinned by the geographical
323 sequences. Firstly, the abundance of rivers in Madina, notably the Batang Gadis River, Batang
324 Natal River, Aek Kalungan River and Angkola River, facilitated the easy availability of these
325 stones in the past. Nowadays, these rivers also threatened by illegal gold mining activities [43],
326 and tend to pollute due to its waste [44]. Secondly, these stones possess distinct characteristics
327 that contribute to their suitability for the purpose at hand. They exhibit a white hue, imparting
328 a visually soothing effect, while their cool and clean appearance further enhances their appeal.
329 Third, these stones demonstrate resilience in withstanding the rigors of varying weather
330 conditions, including heat, cold, and rainfall. Furthermore, the recitation of *Batu Qulhu* rituals
331 is believed by the community to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave.

332 **4.2. The Contemporary Practice of Batu Qulhu in the Mandailing Community**

333 In the past, Islamic practices in Sumatra have exhibited influences from mystical and
334 shamanistic traditions e.g., [56,57]. However, it is important to note that the religious activities

associated with the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* are not influenced by shamanism, but rather stem solely from religious traditions previously followed by religious scholars, religious teachers, and traditional leaders. Currently, the contemporary practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been inherited and embraced by Muslim society in Madina. Based on interview with P4 (65), it is evident that in the past, the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance adhered to strict protocols as mentioned in the following statement.

“The tradition of recalling the Batu Qulhu was once a highly regulated practice. It required seeking consent from both the village leader and the syekh. Mastery of the 20 essential attributes of Allah was necessary, alongside the ability to read the Quran and comprehend its teachings. The stones themselves had to possess a pure white hue. The recitation of Qulhu would take place during evening gatherings, where all the stones present had to be utilized fully, leaving no remnants behind before the congregation dispersed”.

These procedures include the following: 1) the procession necessitated obtaining permission from the head of the village⁸ and *tuan guru*⁹ (or *kulifah*); 2) the ritual leader was required to commit to memory and comprehend the twenty obligatory attributes of God, encompassing *nafsiyah* (self-related attributes) nature, *salbiyah* (attributes related to existence) nature, *ma'ani* (abstract attributes of God) nature, and *maknawiyah* (the essential nature and prevalence of *ma'ani*) nature; 3) the officiating Imam was expected to possess proficiency in both written and spoken Arabic-Malay; 4) the Imam leading the remembrance was required to proficiently recite the Qur'an and comprehend its meaning; 5) the *Batu Qulhu* utilized in the ritual had to be of a white hue; and 6) the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* transpired during evening hours, and all the stones had to be completed within a single procession conducted in the presence of the congregation. Preceding the initiation of the ritual, it is customary for the priest to cleanse himself through the observance of ablution, mirroring the ritualistic cleansing process associated with prayer as mentioned by P7 (60).

Basically, this ritual has many similarities to *tahlilan* tradition especially in the context prayers and recitations. This practice generally has been carried out by many Nahdatul Ulama (NU) community in Sumatra [11,58]. However, in *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, there are five Imams that lead this procession with different assignment. These Imams are voluntarily appointed by the group and relatively flexible based on their own agreement. The priests then read several prayers that beneficial to seek forgiveness for the deceased, his/her family as well to congregation. The Imams also recite some verses from the Surat of the Quran (QS), and praise the God. In this *Batu Qulhu* ritual, the congregation are voluntarily attending the ritual

without any formal invitation. The ritual is held in three consecutive days after the death, and organized by group manager, neighbors and the Imams, and commonly referred to *Serikat Tolong Menolong* (STM) or Union of Help. The Imams and the congregation are artfully arranged in a circular formation, tailored to the venue's conditions. This arrangement allows for the placement of stones in front of the congregation, effortlessly within reach for the worshippers' right hand. During the fieldwork in Panyabungan Kota district, it was noticed that there were more than 30 piles of stones in the congregation. As additional information that commonly they are sitting on the floor covered with *tikar* or mat, but some people also held the ritual with chairs. The priests hold the responsibility for overseeing the course of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual. The following Table 2 describes each Imams' responsibility in *Batu Qulhu* procession.

Table 2

The current study also reveals that *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Madina is held in three consecutive days where:

- In the day 1, the remembrance is taken where the Imam start the ceremony. In the first meeting, the priests wear neat clothes, wear caps, turbans and sarongs. Reflecting the figure of a religious expert and placing his position is a person who is highly respected in society. Their sitting position is arranged in a special place, different from the congregation in general. Here, the Imam will also read out the order of the Batu qulhu procession.
- For day 2, similar to the preceding event, the order of events for the first night procession remains unchanged. Prior to commencing the remembrance ceremony, the 'Imam pembaca takhtim' provided an explanation that after the recitation of the *takhtim*, the congregation would engage in the dhikr of *Batu Qulhu*, and were kindly requested to maintain their positions until the conclusion of the event. However, in contrast to the previous occasion, on the second night of recitation, Qulhu stones are made available to facilitate the dhikr and are arranged in a stacked formation in front of the congregation. Subsequently, the Qulhu remembrance stones are accumulated in the same location. The prescribed procedure entails the recitation of QS 112: 1-3, followed by the selection of a single stone. For each subsequent repetition, an additional stone is selected, such that two stones are chosen for a two-time reading, three stones for a three-time reading, four stones for a four-time reading, and so forth, in accordance with established practice.
- In day 3, *Batu Qulhu* procession replicates the format observed on the second meeting. However, a notable distinction lies in the extended duration of the dhikr, necessitated by

the requirement to recite the prayer over each stone in the presence of the congregation. It is imperative to sustain the continuity of the dhikr until its completion, without interruption. Subsequent to the remembrance, a collective prayer and *salawat* are gathered. The *Batu Qulhu* employed as aids for remembrance are carefully placed within plastic burlap bags or buckets (as can be seen in Figure 3a). The event concludes with a religious sermon or *tausiyah*, wherein expressions of gratitude are articulated on behalf of the congregation and the afflicted families. The content of the religious sermon encompasses themes such as death, the retribution of the grave, and serves as a reminder for individuals to perpetually prepare themselves and enhance their devotion before the arrival of death. This is because all living beings are destined to experience mortality (QS 3: 185), and its arrival cannot be postponed, even if one seeks refuge within a lofty and robust fortress (QS 4: 78).

In addition to the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, on the fourth day following an individual's passing, *Batu Qulhu* stones are transported to the cemetery and carefully positioned above the burial site, as illustrated in Figure 3b. The procedure involves the preparation of the grave bed, which includes the leveling of the ground in the designated area assigned for burial. Subsequently, these stones are poured in a manner that commences from the head of the deceased and extends towards their feet. Although typically performed by the bereaved family, this task can also be undertaken by others, such as neighbors or relatives. During the placement of the stones on the grave, it is customary to recite the phrase "*Bismillahi milata 'ala Rasulullah*," which translates to "In the name of Allah and in the religion of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh." The recitation performed during this act is identical to the prayer recitation conducted during the interment of the deceased's body. It is noteworthy that the selection of this specific recitation lacks a distinct foundational basis but rather originates from established tradition.

Figure 3

Presently, *Batu Qulhu* dhikr has undergone significant transformations over time, likely influenced by environmental factors, evolving understandings within the community, and technological advance, as well as societal changes. Presently, the implementation of the ritual varies across different areas of Madina. Traditionally, some individuals engage in the *Batu Qulhu* practice following the *Maghrib* prayer (after sunset) or around 6.30 pm – 7.00 pm local time and typically after the *Isya* prayer (7.30 pm – 8.00 pm), collectively performed at the mosque during evening as mentioned by P8 (55). Among adult women, it takes place in the evening preceding *Maghrib*, while among the male youth (*naposo bulung*) and female youth

(*nauli bulung*), it occurs in the afternoon (after *Asr* or around 3.00 pm) as mentioned by P6 (45). Adult male worshipers partake in this practice during the evening after the *Isya* prayer on the first, second, and third days following a person's demise. As mentioned earlier, the *Batu Qulhu* employed in this remembrance ritual is a stone recognized by the bereaved family, retrieved from the river. To ensure cleanliness, the stones are consistently washed and kept in a plastic sack or a large container. However, due to the increasing flexibility of people's mindset and the scarcity of these rocks in rivers, the people can now be acquired from various stores in Madina region as mentioned by P5 (50):

“*Batu Qulhu are taken from the river by the family, if they are dirty, they are cleaned. Now, Batu Qulhu are easy to get and are sold in flower shops and building material store*”).

4.3. Aspect of Norms of *Batu Qulhu* ritual

The *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice, introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein, holds significant cultural value in the Mandailing community of Madina. This ritual utilizes white pebbles from nearby rivers for *dhikr* worship and to alleviate the suffering of the deceased in the grave. It has been preserved and perpetuated by Syeikh Mustafa Husein's students and alumni, who have established recitation congregations in the region. As the oldest pesantren in North Sumatra, the influence of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends widely beyond Madina, with its students and graduates playing a significant role in its development and expansion. Similar cultural practices, like the *tahlilan* tradition among the NU community in Sumatra, can also be found.

Strict protocols surround the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance. Prior permission from village and religious leaders, referred to as *Tuan Guru*, is required. The officiating Imam must possess proficiency in Arabic-Malay language. These protocols ensure the solemnity and authenticity of the ritual, aligning with the importance placed on established rituals and cultural heritage. The *tahlilan* tradition within the NU community also follows specific rituals, emphasizing the shared values of upholding traditions and seeking solace in times of mourning. As previously mentioned, obtaining permission from both village and religious leaders is necessary, as indicated by P2 (52):

‘*mangido izin Parjolo tu Tuan Guru*’ (English: Ask permission from *Tuan Guru* first). Commonly answered by the teacher with ‘*olo*’ *silahkan acara dilanjut* (English: Okay, please continue the ritual), ‘*marimom mau au*’ (English: I will follow).

Batu Qulhu remembrance serves as a form of communal support, uniting family members, relatives, neighbors, and friends in times of sorrow. This fosters a sense of unity and solidarity within the Mandailing community, reflecting the value placed on collective resilience. Similar communal support can be found in other practices, such as the collective remembrance gatherings associated with the tahlilan tradition, reinforcing the cultural value of community bonds and support networks. The significance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends beyond its cultural and spiritual aspects. It represents a cherished cultural heritage embraced by the Muslim society in Madina, highlighting the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of identity. While specific to the Mandailing community, similar practices can be observed in other regions, fulfilling the shared human need to honor the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and preserve cultural traditions as integral elements of identity and social cohesion. For a comprehensive overview of the norm aspects in the tradition of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community, please refer to Table 3.

Table 3

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ritual stands as a significant cultural and religious practice within the Mandailing community's funeral ceremonies. This tradition, which involves using stones for dhikr worship, holds deep historical and spiritual roots. While its origins can be traced back to Syeikh Mustafa Husein, who introduced the ritual, variations in accounts highlight the complex nature of its origin. Over time, the procession of *Batu Qulhu* has undergone modifications to streamline its organization, exemplifying the adaptive nature of cultural practices while maintaining their essence. Although *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar commemorative practices can be found in other regions. These rituals reflect the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, seeking solace through collective ceremonies, and preserving cultural traditions as integral components of identity and social cohesion. *Batu Qulhu* ritual serves as a testament to the rich cultural and religious heritage of the Mandailing community in North Sumatra, encapsulating collective mourning, spiritual devotion, and the preservation of cultural identity. As funeral ceremonies continue to play a pivotal role in communities worldwide, understanding and appreciating the significance of these rituals contributes to our broader knowledge of human beliefs, traditions, and the ways in which we commemorate and honor the departed.

While this study presents a preliminary investigation into the *Batu Qulhu* ritual, it acknowledges certain limitations. The absence of historical documentation detailing the ritual

within the Mandailing community necessitates a proposed historical approach through extensive literature review, drawing upon the writings of earlier ulama. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the limited number of informants and the specific observed processions may not fully capture the diverse procedural variations of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual across the entire Madina region. Recognizing the modifications made by different communities based on the guidance of their Imams or practical considerations further adds to the complexity of the ritual. Given these findings, the study recommends the cultural preservation and educational promotion of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual for the benefit of future generations. The creation of appropriate documentation, such as books and videos, accessible through various platforms including social media, can contribute to the wider dissemination of knowledge and understanding of the ritual. These efforts support the cultural preservation of the *Batu Qulhu* tradition and foster greater appreciation among the Mandailing community and beyond.

Declarations

Authors contribution statement

Conceived and designed the experiments, S., A.F.D.; performed the experiments, S., A.F.D.; analyzed and interpreted the data, S., S.D., and A.W.N.; wrote the paper S., A.F.D.; A.W.N. and S.D. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Figures

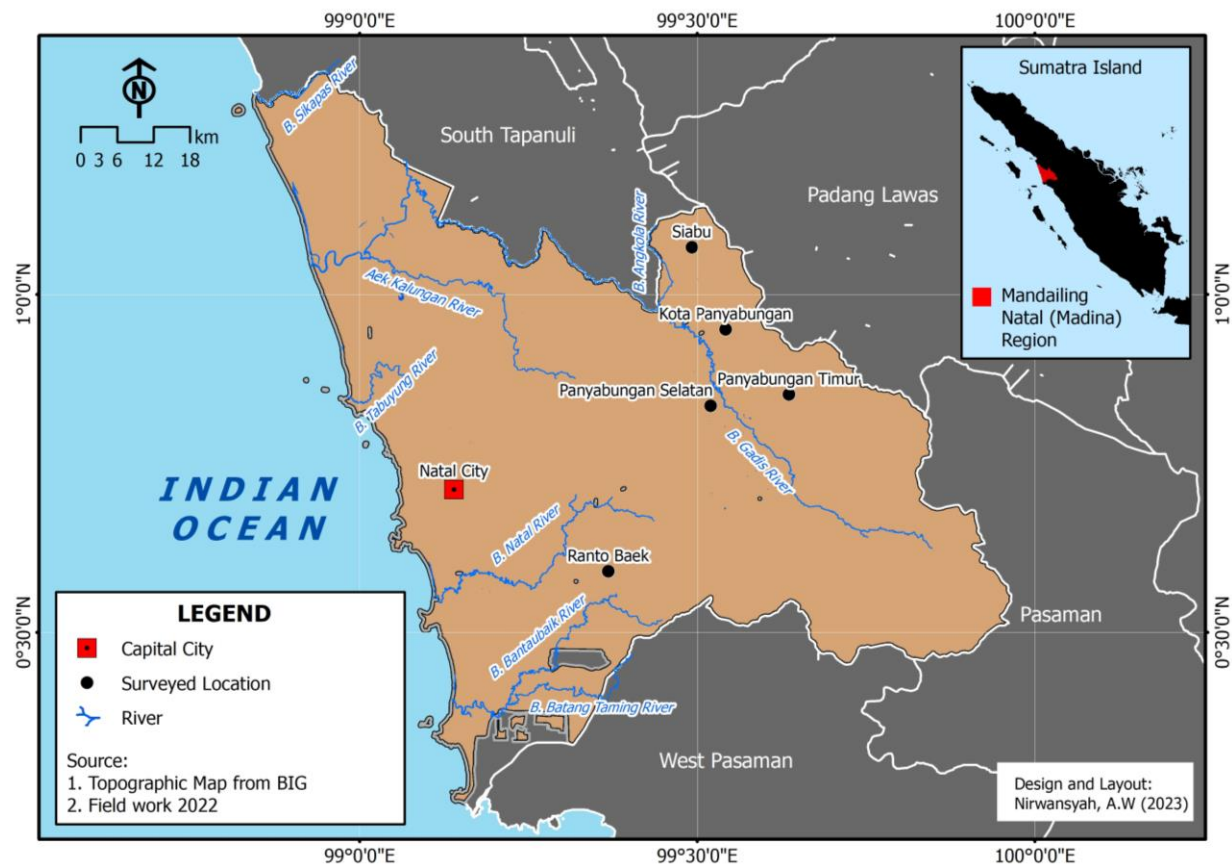


Figure 1. Area of the current research



Figure 2. a) White pebble collected for *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Mandailing, where each bucket contains 70 to 100 stones; and b) the congregation of the Mandailing Muslim community during this obituary ceremony. Photography by Sahrul on 22 July 2022.



Figure 3. *Batu Qulhu* remembrance by adult male where a) the organizer has collected and kept the stones back into the plastic sack for fourth day of casting procession; and b) where *Batu Qulhu* is finally poured on the grave of deceased person. (photographs of the ritual held at P4 residence on 22 July 2022) (taken by Sahrul)

Table 1. Pseudonym of subjects' information in the current study

Informants	Initial	Age	Education Level	Occupation
1	P1	65	Bachelor degree	Teacher
2	P2	52	Bachelor degree	Teacher
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 - Reciting second *syahadat tauhid*. Then answered by the congregation with ‘hayyun maujud’;
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Table 3. Identified aspect of norms in the practice of *Batu Qulhu* Remembrance

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Alleviation of suffering	The recitation of <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals is believed to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave. This demonstrates a value of compassion and empathy within the culture.

¹ Peace be upon him

² Tuanku Rao is characterized as enigmatic figure and one of the two significant leaders of the Padri movement, shared this status alongside Imam Bonjol himself. Tuanku Rao's origins can be traced to *Huta na Godang* or *Huta Godang*, also known as *Tano Godang*, located in Mandailing Julu (Upper Mandailing) [14].

³ The word *barzanzi* is associated with the name of Syeikh Barzanji, a prominent scholar and Sufi poet from Kurdistan. His renowned work, titled "*Mawlid al-Barzanji*," is a poetic composition that narrates the birth and life of the Prophet Muhammad, often recited during religious gatherings and celebrations.

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- ⁴ *Upah-upah* refers to cultural practice or tradition of offering gifts or monetary compensation during significant events or ceremonies. The term "upah" itself can be translated as "wages" or "payment". *Upah-upah* is deeply rooted in the Mandailing culture and is often observed during various occasions such as weddings, funerals, or community gatherings.
- ⁵ *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB), was founded in 1912 by Syeikh Musthafa Husein Nasution. This Islamic boarding school is located in Purba Baru sub-district, Madina Regency, North Sumatra [59]. Further reference on this boarding school can be read in Khairurrijal [60].
- ⁶ Surau means a place of worship or a small mosque-like structure. The surau typically serves as a communal prayer space or a modest mosque, wherein Muslims congregate for congregational prayers, religious discourses, and other religious engagements.
- ⁷ Some community in Madina also use term of *Batu Bontar* to refer *Batu Qulhu*.
- ⁸ One crucial determinant is obtaining authorization from the village leader. The village head holds a position akin to that of a revered monarch, embodying nobility and commanding profound respect.
- ⁹ *Tuan guru* or teacher serves as a religious authority, serving as an exemplar and establishing a benchmark for societal norms through their words and actions. Additionally, they are often revered as sacred individuals known for their healing abilities, and they serve as a source of supplication for various needs such as well-being, sustenance, companionship, agricultural prosperity, and attainment of blessings.
- ¹⁰ The act of attempting forgiveness from the Almighty God, commonly by saying ‘*astağfirullāhu*
- ¹¹ The *syahadat tauhid* contains declaration of belief in the oneness of God Almighty
- ¹² *Basmallah* is phrase mention to the God before beginning any action or speech. It spells ‘*Bismillahi rāḥmani rāḥim*’. It means: in the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful.

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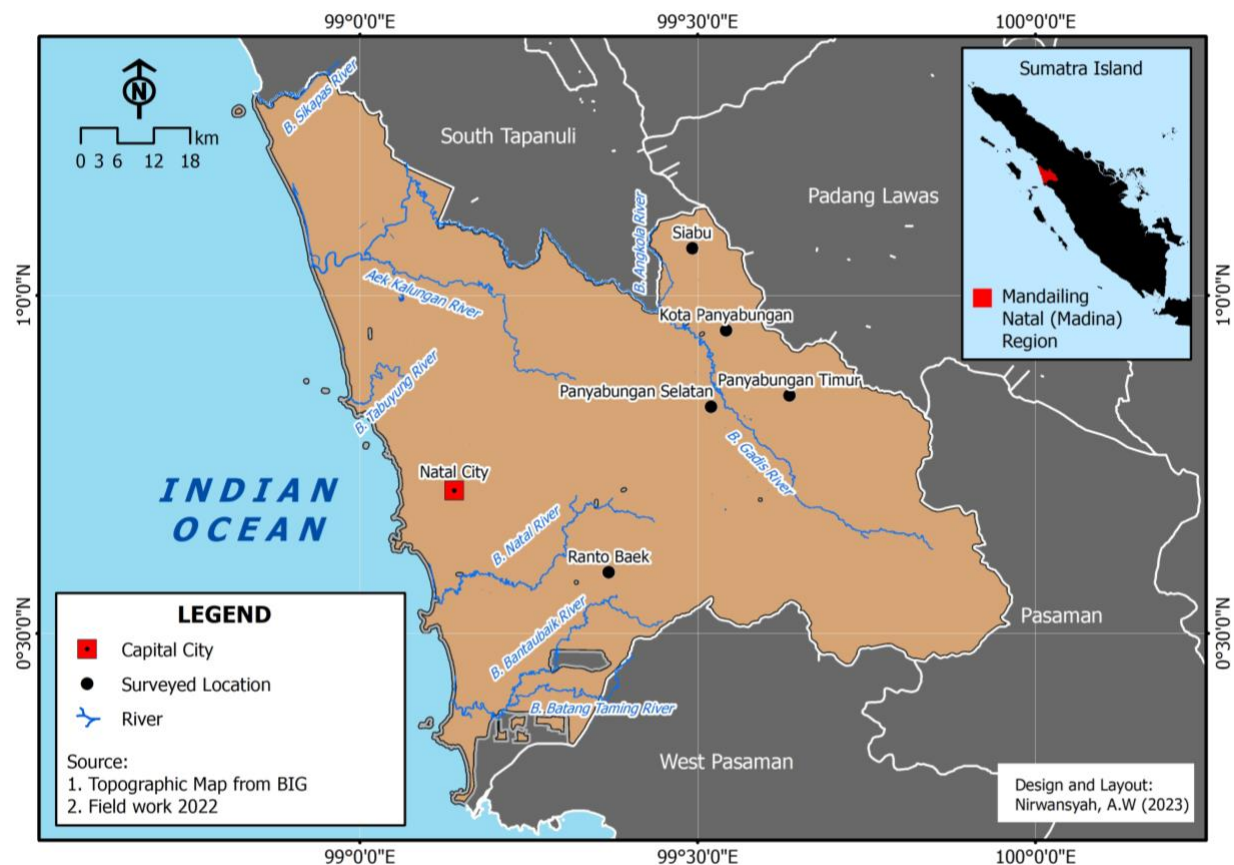


Figure 1. Area of the current research



Figure 2. a) White pebble collected for *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Mandailing, where each bucket contain 70 to 100 stones; and b) the congregation of the Mandailing Muslim community during this obituary ceremony. Photography by Sahrul on 22 July 2022.



Figure 3. Batu Qulhu remembrance by adult male where a) the organizer has collected and kept the stones back into the plastic sack for fourth day of casting procession; and b) where *Batu Qulhu* is finally poured on the grave of deceased person. (photographs of the ritual held at ML residence on 22 July 2022) (taken by Sahrul)

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Penulis menanyakan progress revisi artikel keempat (14 November 2023)

From: Sahrul Sahrul
Date: 14/11/2023 09.16 AM

Manuscript Number: HELIYON-D-23-24599R4
Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra
Dr Sahrul Sahrul
Heliyon

Dear Editor(s),

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to inquire about the current status of my manuscript titled "Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra," which was submitted to Heliyon under Manuscript Number HELIYON-D-23-24599R4 on August 20, 2023.

As it has been some time since the submission, I am eager to know if there have been any updates regarding the review process or if any additional information or revisions are required from my end. Your prompt feedback regarding the progress or any possible timeline for further actions would be greatly appreciated.

I understand the complexities of the reviewing process and the commitment involved from both authors and reviewers. Nonetheless, an update on the current status of my manuscript would be immensely helpful for me to plan accordingly and manage expectations.

I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the esteemed publication that is Heliyon and appreciate the efforts invested by the editorial board and reviewers in evaluating submissions. Please do not hesitate to contact me if there is any additional information needed or if I can assist in any way to expedite the process.

Thank you very much for your time and attention to this matter. I eagerly await your response.

Warm regards,

Kind regards,
Dr Sahrul Sahrul

Respon jurnal: Mengkonfirmasi artikel revisi keempat dalam proses review (14 November 2023 dan 15 November 2023)

From: [redacted]
Date: November 14, 2023 09:16 AM GMT

Hello!

Thank you for contacting Elsevier Researcher Support.

To help us jump right into the solution, please ensure you have provided as much information as possible.

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Re: General inquiry to journal office [231114-021544] Eksternal Kotak Masuk x



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15 Nov 2023, 15:20 ☆ ↶ ⋮

How was our service today? 👍 🗨

Dear Prof Sahrul,

Thank you for contacting Elsevier Researcher Support. Upon checking, I can confirm that the manuscript HELIYON-D-23-24599R4 has been listed as Under Review since November 05, 2023.

Please keep in mind that This phase can sometimes take a few weeks because the Editor needs to review the paper based on the changes you made in response to the review comments you received.

The Handling Editor will be in touch as soon as their review is complete.

In the meantime, your utmost patience and understanding are highly appreciated.

If you need further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

Ma Princes Fernandez
Researcher Support
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- Visit the [Editor Guide to Editorial Manager](#) to access guided learning pathways, designed for each editor role, which include links to instructional videos and articles.
- Visit the [Author Guide to Editorial Manager](#) for a guided walkthrough of author key tasks, such as manuscript submission process and how to track your manuscript.

Penulis menanyakan kembali progress artikel revisi keempat (31 Januari 2024)

From: Sahrul Sahrul
Date: 31/01/2024 04.10 AM

Manuscript Number: HELIYON-D-23-24599R4
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To ensure this email reaches the intended recipient, please do not delete the above code

Respon jurnal: Status of Review (31 Januari 2024)

Re: [ASK] Status of Review - HELIYON-D-23-24599R4 [240131-019907]

Eksternal

Kotak Masuk x



Researcher Support <support@elsevier.com>

31 Jan 2024, 11:10



kepada saya ▾

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While you wait, you can take a look at our [Journal Article Publishing Support Center](#) where you can review FAQs and 'how to' videos.

To help ensure a fast response, please do not change the subject line of this email when replying. For any future correspondence, remember to quote your unique reference number provided in the subject line.

Regards,

Elsevier Researcher Support

Respon jurnal: Mengkonfirmasi artikel revisi keempat dalam proses review (2 Februari 2024)

Re: [ASK] Status of Review - HELIYON-D-23-24599R4 [240131-019907] [240131-019907] Eksternal Kotak Masuk x



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kepada saya ▾

2 Feb 2024, 12.01 ☆ ↶ ⋮

How was our service today? 👍 👎

Dear Dr. Sahrul,

Thank you for contacting us regarding the progress of your submission HELIYON-D-23-24599R4.

I can confirm that your manuscript is now Under review. There are a number of factors that may influence the review time, such as the availability and responsiveness of reviewers.

Currently there are 7 completed reviewers.

Additional reminders will be sent to the Editor to expedite the process.

Thank you for your continued patience during this process, and please let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Kind regards,

Lenilyn Vigo
Research Support Agent
ELSEVIER | Researcher Support

Visit [Journal Article Publishing Support Center](#)

Revisi artikel keempat (6 Februari 2024)

Decision on submission HELIYON-D-23-24599R4 to Heliyon

Eksternal Kotak Masuk x

Heliyon <em@editorialmanager.com>
kepada saya ▾

6 Feb 2024, 17:13 ☆ ↶ ⋮

Ref.: Ms. No. HELIYON-D-23-24599R4
Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra
Heliyon

Dear Dr Sahrul,

Thank you for submitting your manuscript to Heliyon. We have completed the review of your manuscript. A summary is appended below. While revising the paper please consider the reviewers' comments carefully. We look forward to receiving your detailed response and your revised manuscript.

We also request you to ensure the following about data availability.

While first submitting your manuscript, you were asked two questions regarding data availability. The questions and your responses to them are as follows,

Additional Information

1. Sahrul Sahrul, Dr

Question	Response
<p>Data Availability</p> <p>Sharing research data helps other researchers evaluate your findings, build on your work and to increase trust in your article. We encourage all our authors to make as much of their data publicly available as reasonably possible. Please note that your response to the following questions regarding the public data availability and the reasons for potentially not making data available will be available alongside your article upon publication.</p> <p>Has data associated with your study been deposited into a publicly available repository?</p> <p>Please select why. Please note that this statement will be available alongside your article upon publication.</p> <p>as follow-up to "Data Availability</p> <p>Sharing research data helps other researchers evaluate your findings, build on your work and to increase trust in your article. We encourage all our authors to make as much of their data publicly available as reasonably possible. Please note that your response to the following questions regarding the public data availability and the reasons for potentially not making data available will be available alongside your article upon publication.</p> <p>Has data associated with your study been deposited into a publicly available repository?</p> <p>"</p>	<p>No</p> <p>The data that has been used is confidential</p>

Please add these responses to the 'Data availability statement' section of your manuscript. If your manuscript doesn't contain a 'Data availability statement' section, please add one right before the 'References' section and then include these responses therein.

To submit a revision, go to <https://www.editorialmanager.com/heliyon/> and log in as an Author where you will see a menu item called 'Submission Needing Revision'.

Please note that our ethics requirements are now updated. Please choose all applicable statements in our ethics declarations list (available here: <https://www.cell.com/heliyon/ethics>) and include them as a complete ethics statement in the declarations section at the end of your manuscript.

Please resubmit your manuscript by Feb 27, 2024.

I look forward to receiving your revised manuscript.

Kind regards,

Rachael Tucker, PhD
Scientific Editor
Heliyon

Comments from the Editors and Reviewers:

Please note that manuscripts with inadequate language quality will not be accepted in the journal. If editors and / or reviewers indicate that language revisions are required for your manuscript, we strongly encourage using a professional language editing service. Elsevier's Language Editing services provides professional and prompt editing of scientific language for research submissions (<https://websites.elsevier.com/language-editing-services/language-editing/>). All manuscripts edited with Elsevier's Language Editing services are accompanied by a certificate that may be submitted to the journal as proof for language editing. Poor language may lead to rejection of your manuscript even at the revision stage.

Reviewer's Responses to Questions

Note: In order to effectively convey your recommendations for improvement to the author(s), and help editors make well-informed and efficient decisions, we ask you to answer the following specific questions about the manuscript and provide additional suggestions where appropriate.

1. Are the objectives and the rationale of the study clearly stated?

Please provide suggestions to the author(s) on how to improve the clarity of the objectives and rationale of the study. Please number each suggestion so that author(s) can more easily respond.

Reviewer #1: Mark as appropriate with an X:
Not Applicable [] No and here is how they should be improved []
Yes, there is no need for improvement x

Provide further comments here: There is a bit of English-language editing needed throughout the entire paper but it is clear what the objectives and purpose/rationale of the study are. There is quite a lot of background needed to help the reader understand the objectives and rationale of this study. Perhaps it would help if this study (carried out in one small region of Sumatra) were also explained in relation to how the findings may be similar to or different from that of other regions there or in other Muslim countries, so the reader could envision distinct or similar insights across them.

Reviewer #2: Objectives from line 68 to 75 should be clearly stated based on the research questions and the results of the study.

1. Consider adding two sentences describing the clear research questions objectives in the beginning of this paragraph.

2. The example of objectives could be as: "This study aims to investigate the origin of the Batu Qulhu rituals, exploring its contemporary practices and norms based on the social cohesion and identity."

Reviewer #3: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒ X

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #4: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☒ X Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here: (please revisit the introduction section)

To underscore the distinctive contributions of this research, it is imperative for the authors to undertake a comprehensive comparative analysis of the funeral ritual observed in Sumatra (as investigated in the present study) with analogous funeral practices documented in multiple international contexts. A more nuanced approach would involve extending the scope beyond the elucidation of funeral rituals solely within the Indonesian cultural milieu. To enhance the scholarly depth and breadth of the study, the authors should engage in a cross-cultural examination by incorporating data from funeral practices in a minimum of three diverse countries. Such a comparative framework will afford a more comprehensive understanding of the uniqueness and cultural specificity of the Sumatran funeral ritual, thereby enriching the scholarly discourse surrounding funeral rites on a global scale.

Reviewer #5: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒ X

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #6: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒ X

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #7: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒ x

Provide further comments here:

Yes.

2. If applicable, is the application/theory/method/study reported in sufficient detail to allow for its replicability and/or reproducibility?

Please provide suggestions to the author(s) on how to improve the replicability/reproducibility of their study. Please number each suggestion so that the author(s) can more easily respond.

Reviewer #1: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐

Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒ X

Provide further comments here: the background historical material/theory is essential for the reader. Other introductory material is also helpful to the reader.

Reviewer #2: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198797043.003.0003>

The author should cite this source as the theory rooted in this research: social cohesion and identity.

Reviewer #3: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☒ X Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Reviewer #3: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☒ X Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #4: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☒ X Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here:

The author is urged to engage in a more comprehensive exploration of the scholarly discourse and theoretical underpinnings pertaining to the concept of "Batu Qulhu remembrance." Such a scholarly endeavor is indispensable, serving not merely as informative content for readers but also as a potential alternative solution within the academic context.

Reviewer #5: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☒ X Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here: As a study that claims to use ethnography and phenomenology design, I think this study is more of a thematic analysis one. The authors need to elaborate what makes this study different from a thematic analysis study.

Reviewer #6: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒ X

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #7: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☒ x No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here:

3. If applicable, are statistical analyses, controls, sampling mechanism, and statistical reporting (e.g., P-values, CIs, effect sizes) appropriate and well described?

Please clearly indicate if the manuscript requires additional peer review by a statistician. Kindly provide suggestions to the author(s) on how to improve the statistical analyses, controls, sampling mechanism, or statistical reporting. Please number each suggestion so that the author(s) can more easily respond.

Reviewer #1: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐

Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒ X

Provide further comments here: A good introduction to the study design and good information about the study as conducted is provided. One small improvement would be to state how many themes were derived from the data, and also introduce them as Theme 1, etc.

Reviewer #2: Yes, there is no need for improvement

Reviewer #3: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☒ X No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement.

Provide further comments here: The method should be written according to the ethnographic research approach.

Reviewer #4: Mark as appropriate with an X:
Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved [X] Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here:

This research is closely related to traditional culture in Sumatra, then, why did the authors only choose research subjects from religious circles? It is also necessary to choose subjects that focus on cultural aspects (who are very familiar with the culture of Batu Qulhu in the context of tradition)

Reviewer #5: Mark as appropriate with an X:
Not Applicable [X] No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #6: Mark as appropriate with an X:
Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement [X]

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #7: Mark as appropriate with an X:
Not Applicable [x] No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here:

4. If applicable, are the existing tables and/or figures complete and acceptable for publication?

Please provide specific suggestions for improvements, removals, or additions of figures or tables. Please number each suggestion so that the author(s) can more easily respond.

Reviewer #1: Mark as appropriate with an X:
Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐

Yes, there is no need for improvement x

Provide further comments here: fabulous pictures and supplemental material.

Reviewer #2: Yes, there is no need for improvement

Reviewer #3: Mark as appropriate with an X:
Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement [X]

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #4: Mark as appropriate with an X:
Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement [X]

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #5: Mark as appropriate with an X:
Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement [X]

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #6: Mark as appropriate with an X:
Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement [X]

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #7: Mark as appropriate with an X:
Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement [x]

Provide further comments here:

Yes

5. If applicable, are the interpretation of results and study conclusions supported by the data?

Please provide suggestions (if needed) to the author(s) on how to improve, tone down, or expand the study interpretations/conclusions. Please number each suggestion so that the author(s) can more easily respond.

Reviewer #1: Mark as appropriate with an X:
Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐

Yes, there is no need for improvement X

Provide further comments here: Other than helping the reader through better labelling of data finding themes, the results and conclusion information is clearly and comprehensively presented.

Reviewer #2: Connect the findings to the social cohesion and identity.

Reviewer #3: Mark as appropriate with an X:
Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement [X]

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #4: Mark as appropriate with an X:
Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved [X] Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here:

In the delineation of findings, the researchers exclusively expounded upon observational data related to the Batu Qulhu remembrance practice and interview-derived results. A noteworthy facet discerned within this ritualistic procession is the discourse articulated by the Imam. It is imperative to transcribe and subsequently subject this discourse to rigorous analysis, thereby elucidating its semantic nuances and enhancing the robustness of the research findings dataset.

Reviewer #5: Mark as appropriate with an X:
Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved [X] Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here: I think this study is a better fit for Indonesian journals. I do not think the global audience of Heliyon will be interested to read this.

Reviewer #6: Mark as appropriate with an X:
Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement [X]

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #7: Mark as appropriate with an X:
Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement [x]

Provide further comments here:

6. Have the authors clearly emphasized the strengths of their study/theory/methods/argument?

Please provide suggestions to the author(s) on how to better emphasize the strengths of their study. Please number each suggestion so that the author(s) can more easily respond.

Please provide suggestions to the author(s) on how to better emphasize the strengths of their study. Please number each suggestion so that the author(s) can more easily respond.

Reviewer #1: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐

Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here: a good insightful study, one that is quite dense to read and comprehend for a non-Muslim person, and a person who has not travelled to Sumatra for over 30 years.

Reviewer #2: 1. This paper should emphasize the social cohesion and identity.

2. The first sentence in design of the research requires citation on employing combination of phenomenological and ethnographic approaches.

Reviewer #3: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☒ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #4: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #5: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #6: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #7: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

7. Have the authors clearly stated the limitations of their study/theory/methods/argument?

Please list the limitations that the author(s) need to add or emphasize. Please number each limitation so that author(s) can more easily respond.

Reviewer #1: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐

Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here: One small point is that the interviewed people were all well educated, and so this study may be limited to the viewpoints of well educated people in the region.

Reviewer #2: Restructure the limitation of the study based on the objectives.

Reviewer #3: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☒ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #4: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #5: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #6: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #7: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

8. Is the manuscript's structure, flow, or writing acceptable for publication? (Think for example of the addition of subheadings, shortening of text, reorganization of sections, or moving details from one section to another)

Please provide suggestions to the author(s) on how to improve the manuscript structure and flow. Please number each suggestion so that author(s) can more easily respond.

Reviewer #1: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐

Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here: nicely done, other than a need to edit for English-language conventions.

Reviewer #2: 1.1 and 1.2 should be another heading (Literature Review) after the Introduction.

Reviewer #3: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #4: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #5: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #6: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #7: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☒ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here:

Typos

Eg. 441-443 However, due to the increasing flexibility of people's mindset and the scarcity of these rocks in rivers, the people can now be acquired from various stores in Madina region as mentioned by P5 (50):

9. Could the manuscript benefit from language editing?

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: Yes

Reviewer #3: Yes

Reviewer #4: Yes

Reviewer #5: Yes

Reviewer #6: No

Reviewer #7: Yes

Please note, any recommended citations are not mandatory. Please only cite if relevant.

Reviewer #1: Thank you for this insightful study. I have made a few small revision comments in my review (above).

Reviewer #2: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198797043.003.0003>

Cite this source and state clearly in your paper this your research is rooted from social cohesion and identity.

Reviewer #3: 1. The concept of phenomenology needs to be removed from the text.

2. The research should be reviewed according to the rules of ethnographic study. There are basic texts that should be particularly looked at on this subject. Especially Turner and Douglas.

3. More photos can be used if the authors have them.

4. The analysis of the findings should also be updated in accordance with the ethnographic approach.

Reviewer #6: The reviewed study undertakes a preliminary investigation of the Batu Quihu ritual. Local modifications to funeral practices were reported by members of the Mandailing community. Such firsthand sources are crucial for studies of local community traditions. While the earlier editorial remarks have enhanced the text, certain further changes are necessary:

Line 84:

When referring to BC (Before Christ), larger numbers correspond to earlier dates. This aligns with the chronological order when using BC dates. Therefore, it would be more accurate to state: ... "Munda people occurred around 1500-1200 BC."

Line 124-125:

The sentence 'Poda means advice, na means five, and lima means five' seems a bit unclear and might contain a mistake. It seems there's a repetition in the translation of "five."

Lines 147-148: The sentence should be changed:

The term 'astronomically' is commonly associated with astronomy and celestial objects. In a geographical context, the more suitable term is 'geographically.' Therefore, the corrected statement is as follows: "Medan, often abbreviated as Madina, is situated in North Sumatra Province, spanning approximately 3°10' to 3°50' N latitude and 98°10' to 100°10' E longitude."

Lines 162-163:

Christians and Catholics are both followers of Christianity so this sentence should be rephrase:

"The majority of the population in Madina, around 95%, is Muslim, while the remaining 5% consists of Christians (including Catholics), Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of Confucianism."

In this way Catholics are included within the broader category of Christians.

Reviewer #7: Establishing connections with other scholars' writings, analyses, and concepts would be helpful in future writings.

I have some fundamental comments about the compositional style of the paper (racial origin and profiling could have been handled better).

In my view, the essay's contribution is that funerary rites within Islam can be varied and legitimate at the same time (notwithstanding the fact that a certain ethnic community is being described here).

"The Mandailing community's ethnic origin is a subject of contention among scholars.

96 While some argue that they are part of the Batak Toba ethnic group [23,24], this perspective

97 faces opposition from Mandailing intellectuals and historians. However, an analysis of factors

98 such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the

99 Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group [25,26]. To

100 establish their identity as the Mandailing community, they refer to themselves as "halak kita"

101 (referred to: our people) of South Tapanuli [27], rather than as "halak batak" (Batak people)

102 [28,29]. Regarding religious affiliation, the majority of the contemporary Mandailing

103 population follows Islam, with a minority of Christians found in specific locations like

104 Pakantan in Upper Mandailing, Medan, and other cities in North Sumatra [14,30]. Before

105 embracing Islam, the religious beliefs of the Mandailing people focused around ancestral spirits

referred to as "si pele begu" [22], incorporating 106 influences from Hinduism and Buddhism [31].

107 Recent field research conducted in the Mandailing region revealed remnants and artefacts

108 associated with both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, particularly in the vicinity of Panyabungan

109 within the Greater Mandailing area [32].

110 Padri has brought Islam to Mandailing around 1821 and the Dutch military breached

111 and defeated this movement by 1835 [25,30,33]."

I was referring to this part of the writing. I understand the essay's intent and appreciate the efforts toward substantiating the point that what might look like an ethnic and (thus) an un-Islamic practice is actually a legitimate practice. I suggest that it can be done better than the way it is presented here. The description, amongst other things, seems to convey that in the interim made between ancient times and the nineteenth century, the only valid way to mark ethnicity is this: "factors such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group." And, if indeed this is the case, the writer must substantiate a little more about the remarkable presence of Islam within a century, a milieu within which the funeral rite is being expressed as Islamic. What has such a presence done to the 'genealogy,' 'clan structure,' 'language,' and even 'skin color'? Is it the case that the Mandailing are ethnically pristine and conforming with Islamic practices at the same time? If that is the case, then it would have to be spelled out because, usually, such a radical co-presence is a site of negotiation and adaptation.

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Respon jurnal Heliyon: Konfirmasi telah menerima naskah revisi artikel keempat (24 Februari 2024)

Confirming submission to Heliyon

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kepada saya

24 Feb 2024, 20:57

Balas

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Manuscript Number: HELIYON-D-23-24599R5

Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

Dear Dr Sahrul,

We have received the above referenced revision of your manuscript at Heliyon. To track the status of your manuscript, please log in as an author at <https://www.editorialmanager.com/heliyon/>, and navigate to the "Revisions Being Processed" folder.

Kind regards,
Heliyon

More information and support

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In compliance with data protection regulations, you may request that we remove your personal registration details at any time. (Use the following URL: <https://www.editorialmanager.com/heliyon/login.asp?a=1>).
Please contact the publication office if you have any questions.

Cover Letter

Medan, 24 February 2024

Subject: Revision Manuscript Submission

Dear Editor-in-Chief,

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to resubmit my manuscript titled "Batu Qulhu – The Stone of Death: Exploring Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra" for reconsideration in Heliyon. Following the insightful feedback provided during the previous review process, I have meticulously revised the article to address the concerns raised by the reviewers.

This manuscript investigates into the intricate practices and cultural significance surrounding traditional funerals within the Mandailing community of North Sumatra, focusing particularly on the symbolic role of "Batu Qulhu" in the funeral rites. Through a detailed examination of the cultural rituals and ceremonies, the study aims to elucidate the complexities of traditional funeral practices and their sociocultural implications among the Mandailing people.

The revised manuscript upholds rigorous research methodology, encompassing a thorough analysis of primary data derived from interviews, participant observations, and document analysis. By offering a nuanced perspective on the cultural heritage of the Mandailing community, it underscores the profound symbolism of "Batu Qulhu" as a poignant emblem of death and remembrance within their traditions.

I firmly believe that this research holds substantial value for the fields of cultural anthropology, ethnography, and religious studies. It aligns closely with the interdisciplinary focus of Heliyon and meets the journal's criteria for originality, methodological rigor, and theoretical engagement.

I respectfully request your reconsideration of my manuscript for publication in Heliyon. I am confident that it will contribute meaningfully to the journal's collection of interdisciplinary research and foster deeper insights into the diverse cultural landscape in Muslim society.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this submission. I eagerly await your response and the opportunity to further discuss any additional revisions or inquiries.

Warm regards,

Sahrul

Reviewer's Responses to Questions

Note: In order to effectively convey your recommendations for improvement to the author(s), and help editors make well-informed and efficient decisions, we ask you to answer the following specific questions about the manuscript and provide additional suggestions where appropriate.

1. Are the objectives and the rationale of the study clearly stated?

Please provide suggestions to the author(s) on how to improve the clarity of the objectives and rationale of the study. Please number each suggestion so that author(s) can more easily respond.

Reviewer #1: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐

Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here: There is a bit of English-language editing needed throughout the entire paper but it is clear what the objectives and purpose/rationale of the study are. There is quite a lot of background needed to help the reader understand the objectives and rationale of this study. Perhaps it would help if this study (carried out in one small region of Sumatra) were also explained in relation to how the findings may be similar to or different from that of other regions there or in other Muslim countries, so the reader could envision distinct or similar insights across them. (done)

Reviewer #2: Objectives from line 68 to 75 should be clearly stated based on the research questions and the results of the study

1. Consider adding two sentences describing the clear research questions objectives in the beginning of this paragraph.

2. The example of objectives could be as: "This study aims to investigate the origin of the Batu Qulhu rituals, exploring its contemporary practices and norms based on the social cohesion and identity." (OK)

Reviewer #3: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #4: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☒ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here:(please revisit the introduction section)

To underscore the distinctive contributions of this research, it is imperative for the authors to undertake a comprehensive comparative analysis of the funeral ritual observed in Sumatra (as investigated in the present study) with analogous funeral practices documented in multiple international contexts. A more nuanced approach would involve extending the scope beyond the elucidation of funeral rituals solely within the Indonesian cultural milieu. To enhance the scholarly depth and breadth of the study, the authors should engage in a cross-cultural examination by incorporating data from funeral practices in a minimum of three diverse countries. Such a comparative framework will afford a more comprehensive understanding of

the uniqueness and cultural specificity of the Sumatran funeral ritual, thereby enriching the scholarly discourse surrounding funeral rites on a global scale.

Reviewer #5: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #6: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #7: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Yes.

2. If applicable, is the application/theory/method/study reported in sufficient detail to allow for its replicability and/or reproducibility?

Please provide suggestions to the author(s) on how to improve the replicability/reproducibility of their study. Please number each suggestion so that the author(s) can more easily respond.

Reviewer #1: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐

Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here: the background historical material/theory is essential for the reader. Other introductory material is also helpful to the reader. (done line 71-86)

Reviewer #2: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198797043.003.0003>

The author should cite this source as the theory rooted in this research: social cohesion and identity. (done)

Reviewer #3: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☒ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #4: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☒ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here:

The author is urged to engage in a more comprehensive exploration of the scholarly discourse and theoretical underpinnings pertaining to the concept of "Batu Qulhu remembrance." Such

a scholarly endeavor is indispensable, serving not merely as informative content for readers but also as a potential alternative solution within the academic context (in conclusion).

Reviewer #5: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved [X] Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here: As a study that claims to use ethnography and phenomenology design, I think this study is more of a thematic analysis one. The authors need to elaborate what makes this study different from a thematic analysis study. (186-191)

Reviewer #6: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement [X]

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #7: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable [x] No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here:

3. If applicable, are statistical analyses, controls, sampling mechanism, and statistical reporting (e.g., P-values, CIs, effect sizes) appropriate and well described?

Please clearly indicate if the manuscript requires additional peer review by a statistician. Kindly provide suggestions to the author(s) on how to improve the statistical analyses, controls, sampling mechanism, or statistical reporting. Please number each suggestion so that the author(s) can more easily respond.

Reviewer #1: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐

Yes, there is no need for improvement X

Provide further comments here: A good introduction to the study design and good information about the study as conducted is provided. One small improvement would be to state how many themes were derived from the data, and also introduce them as Theme 1, etc.

Reviewer #2: Yes, there is no need for improvement

Reviewer #3: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable [X] No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement.

Provide further comments here: The method should be written according to the ethnographic research approach.

Reviewer #4: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved [X] Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here:

This research is closely related to traditional culture in Sumatra, then, why did the authors

only choose research subjects from religious circles? It is also necessary to choose subjects that focus on cultural aspects (who are very familiar with the culture of Batu Qulhu in the context of tradition) -> the culture practiced by religious person

Reviewer #5: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☒ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #6: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #7: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☒ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here:

4. If applicable, are the existing tables and/or figures complete and acceptable for publication?

Please provide specific suggestions for improvements, removals, or additions of figures or tables. Please number each suggestion so that the author(s) can more easily respond.

Reviewer #1: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐

Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here: fabulous pictures and supplemental material

Reviewer #2: Yes, there is no need for improvement

Reviewer #3: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #4: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #5: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #6: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #7: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Yes

5. If applicable, are the interpretation of results and study conclusions supported by the data?

Please provide suggestions (if needed) to the author(s) on how to improve, tone down, or expand the study interpretations/conclusions. Please number each suggestion so that the author(s) can more easily respond.

Reviewer #1: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐

Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here: Other than helping the reader through better labelling of data finding themes, the results and conclusion information is clearly and comprehensively presented.

Reviewer #2: Connect the findings to the social cohesion and identity. (done)

Reviewer #3: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #4: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☒ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here:

In the delineation of findings, the researchers exclusively expounded upon observational data related to the Batu Qulhu remembrance practice and interview-derived results. A noteworthy facet discerned within this ritualistic procession is the discourse articulated by the Imam. It is imperative to transcribe and subsequently subject this discourse to rigorous analysis, thereby elucidating its semantic nuances and enhancing the robustness of the research findings dataset.

Reviewer #5: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☒ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here: I think this study is a better fit for Indonesian journals. I do not think the global audience of Heliyon will be interested to read this.

Reviewer #6: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #7: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

6. Have the authors clearly emphasized the strengths of their study/theory/methods/argument?

Please provide suggestions to the author(s) on how to better emphasize the strengths of their study. Please number each suggestion so that the author(s) can more easily respond.

Reviewer #1: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐

Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here: a good insightful study, one that is quite dense to read and comprehend for a non-Muslim person, and a person who has not travelled to Sumatra for over 30 years.

Reviewer #2: 1. This paper should emphasize the social cohesion and identity

2. The first sentence in design of the research requires citation on employing combination of phenomenological and ethnographic approaches. (done)

Reviewer #3: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☒ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #4: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #5: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #6: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #7: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

7. Have the authors clearly stated the limitations of their study/theory/methods/argument?

Please list the limitations that the author(s) need to add or emphasize. Please number each limitation so that author(s) can more easily respond.

Reviewer #1: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐

Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here: One small point is that the interviewed people were all well educated, and so this study may be limited to the viewpoints of well educated people in the region.

Reviewer #2: Restructure the limitation of the study based on the objectives.

Reviewer #3: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☒ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #4: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #5: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #6: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #7: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

8. Is the manuscript's structure, flow, or writing acceptable for publication? (Think for example of the addition of subheadings, shortening of text, reorganization of sections, or

moving details from one section to another)

Please provide suggestions to the author(s) on how to improve the manuscript structure and flow. Please number each suggestion so that author(s) can more easily respond.

Reviewer #1: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐

Yes, there is no need for improvement X

Provide further comments here: nicely done, other than a need to edit for English-language conventions.

Reviewer #2: 1.1 and 1.2 should be another heading (Literature Review) after the Introduction.

Reviewer #3: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement [X]

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #4: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement [X]

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #5: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement [X]

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #6: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement [X]

Provide further comments here:

Reviewer #7: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved [x] Yes, there is no need for improvement ☐

Provide further comments here:

Typos

Eg. 441-443 However, due to the increasing flexibility of people's mindset and the scarcity of these rocks in rivers, the people can now be acquired from various stores in Madina region as mentioned by P5 (50): (done)

9. Could the manuscript benefit from language editing?

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: Yes

Reviewer #3: Yes

Reviewer #4: Yes

Reviewer #5: Yes

Reviewer #6: No

Reviewer #7: Yes

Please note, any recommended citations are not mandatory. Please only cite if relevant.

Reviewer #1: Thank you for this insightful study. I have made a few small revision comments in my review (above).

Reviewer #2: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198797043.003.0003>

Cite this source and state clearly in your paper this your research is rooted from social cohesion and identity. (done)

Reviewer #3: 1. The concept of phenomenology needs to be removed from the text.
2. The research should be reviewed according to the rules of ethnographic study. There are basic texts that should be particularly looked at on this subject. Especially Turner and Douglas.
3. More photos can be used if the authors have them.
4. The analysis of the findings should also be updated in accordance with the ethnographic approach.

Reviewer #6: The reviewed study undertakes a preliminary investigation of the Batu Qulhu ritual. Local modifications to funeral practices were reported by members of the Mandailing community. Such first-hand sources are crucial for studies of local community traditions. While the earlier editorial remarks have enhanced the text, certain further changes are necessary:

Line 84:

When referring to BC (Before Christ), larger numbers correspond to earlier dates. This aligns with the chronological order when using BC dates. Therefore, it would be more accurate to state: ... "Munda people occurred around 1500-1200 BC."

Line 124-125:

The sentence 'Poda means advice, na means (yang) five, and lima means five' seems a bit unclear and might contain a mistake. It seems there's a repetition in the translation of "five."

Lines 147-148: The sentence should be changed:

The term 'astronomically' is commonly associated with astronomy and celestial objects. In a geographical context, the more suitable term is 'geographically.' Therefore, the corrected statement is as follows: "Medan, often abbreviated as Madina, is situated in North Sumatra Province, spanning approximately 3°10' to 3°50' N latitude and 98°10' to 100°10' E

longitude." (done)

Lines 162-163:

Christians and Catholics are both followers of Christianity so this sentence should be rephrased:

"The majority of the population in Madina, around 95%, is Muslim, while the remaining 5% consists of Christians (including Catholics), Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of Confucianism."

In this way Catholics are included within the broader category of Christians. (done)

Reviewer #7: Establishing connections with other scholars' writings, analyses, and concepts would be helpful in future writings.

I have some fundamental comments about the compositional style of the paper (racial origin and profiling could have been handled better).

In my view, the essay's contribution is that funerary rites within Islam can be varied and legitimate at the same time (notwithstanding the fact that a certain ethnic community is being described here).

"The Mandailing community's ethnic origin is a subject of contention among scholars.

96 While some argue that they are part of the Batak Toba ethnic group [23,24], this perspective

97 faces opposition from Mandailing intellectuals and historians. However, an analysis of factors

98 such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the

99 Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group [25,26].

To

100 establish their identity as the Mandailing community, they refer to themselves as "halak kita"

101 (referred to: our people) of South Tapanuli [27], rather than as "halak batak" (Batak people)

102 [28,29]. Regarding religious affiliation, the majority of the contemporary Mandailing

103 population follows Islam, with a minority of Christians found in specific locations like

104 Pakantan in Upper Mandailing, Medan, and other cities in North Sumatra [14,30]. Before

105 embracing Islam, the religious beliefs of the Mandailing people focused around ancestral spirits

referred to as "si pele begu" [22], incorporating 106 influences from Hinduism and Buddhism [31].

107 Recent field research conducted in the Mandailing region revealed remnants and artefacts

108 associated with both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, particularly in the vicinity of Panyabungan

109 within the Greater Mandailing area [32].

110 Padri wars has brought Islam to Mandailing around 1821 and the Dutch military breached

111 and defeated this movement by 1835 [25,30,33]."

I was referring to this part of the writing. I understand the essay's intent and appreciate the efforts toward substantiating the point that what might look like an ethnic and (thus) an un-Islamic practice is actually a legitimate practice. I suggest that it can be done better than the way it is presented here. The description, amongst other things, seems to convey that in the interim made between ancient times and the nineteenth century, the only valid way to mark ethnicity is this: "factors such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group." And, if indeed this is the case, the writer must substantiate a little more about the remarkable presence of Islam within a century, a milieu within which the funeral rite is being expressed as Islamic. What has such a presence done to the 'genealogy,' 'clan structure,' 'language,' and even 'skin color'? Is it the case that the Mandailing are ethnically pristine and conforming with Islamic practices at the same time? If that is the case, then it would have to be spelled out because, usually, such a radical co-presence is a site of negotiation and adaptation.

Dear editor,

We sincerely appreciate the invaluable feedback provided by the reviewers for our article. Your time and expertise have been instrumental in refining the quality of our paper, and we are truly grateful for your commitment to enhancing its scholarly merit. Each comment and suggestion offered by the reviewers has been carefully considered, and we are dedicated to addressing them thoroughly to ensure the integrity and coherence of our research findings.

In response to the specific questions raised by the reviewers, we have meticulously reviewed and revised the relevant sections of the article. We have considered the constructive criticisms and suggestions provided, incorporating necessary clarifications, additional analyses, and revisions to strengthen the argumentation and presentation of our research. Your insightful feedback has undoubtedly contributed to the refinement of our work, and we remain committed to meeting the high standards of academic excellence that you have helped to uphold. Once again, we extend our deepest gratitude for your invaluable contributions to the advancement of our scholarly endeavor.

1. Are the objectives and the rationale of the study clearly stated?

Reviewer #1:

Comment:

“There is a bit of English-language editing needed throughout the entire paper but it is clear what the objectives and purpose/rationale of the study are. There is quite a lot of background needed to help the reader understand the objectives and rationale of this study. Perhaps it would help if this study (carried out in one small region of Sumatra) were also explained in relation to how the findings may be similar to or different from that of other regions there or in other Muslim countries, so the reader could envision distinct or similar insights across them.”

Response:

Thank you very much for the feedback. We believe and agree to add more background to support the reader in understanding our paper. That's why we have mentioned funeral practice in Muslim community especially in Sumatra and Indonesia (see line 49-69). Here, we add more paragraph in the introduction including social cohesion and identity aspects in the current article (see line 70-85), as suggested by Reviewer #2.

Reviewer #2:

Comment:

“Objectives from line 68 to 75 should be clearly stated based on the research questions and the results of the study”.

1. Consider adding two sentences describing the clear research questions objectives in the beginning of this paragraph.
2. The example of objectives could be as: "This study aims to investigate the origin of the Batu Qulhu rituals, exploring its contemporary practices and norms based on the social cohesion and identity."

Response:

Thank you very much for positive comments. We have already revised and add sentences in the clear objectives in the beginning of the paragraph (see line 86-88), and research questions (see line 92-96).

Reviewer #4:**Comment:**

“To underscore the distinctive contributions of this research, it is imperative for the authors to undertake a comprehensive comparative analysis of the funeral ritual observed in Sumatra (as investigated in the present study) with analogous funeral practices documented in multiple international contexts. A more nuanced approach would involve extending the scope beyond the elucidation of funeral rituals solely within the Indonesian cultural milieu. To enhance the scholarly depth and breadth of the study, the authors should engage in a cross-cultural examination by incorporating data from funeral practices in a minimum of three diverse countries. Such a comparative framework will afford a more comprehensive understanding of the uniqueness and cultural specificity of the Sumatran funeral ritual, thereby enriching the scholarly discourse surrounding funeral rites on a global scale”.

Response:

We appreciate your contribution. Recognizing the importance of connecting research on funeral practices in a specific area of Sumatra to broader contexts, this article also touches upon the Muslim community's funeral customs in Indonesia, albeit in limited detail. However, our primary focus lies in delving deeper into burial rituals within Mandailing society, encompassing historical perspectives and contemporary practices. Moreover, this paper aims to uncover the underlying aspects of social cohesion and inherent values within these rituals.

By narrowing the scope to the burial rituals of Mandailing society, this paper seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and social dynamics at play within this particular community. By delving deeply into these rituals, including their historical evolution and contemporary significance, we can gain valuable insights into the values and principles that underpin Mandailing society's cohesion and identity. Understanding these intricacies not only enriches scholarly discourse but also fosters greater appreciation and respect for diverse cultural practices. Moreover, by contextualizing these rituals within broader social frameworks, we can draw connections and parallels with funeral practices in other cultures, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of human societies' collective experiences with death and mourning rituals.

2. If applicable, is the application/theory/method/study reported in sufficient detail to allow for its replicability and/or reproducibility?

Reviewer #1:**Comment:**

“Provide further comments here: the background historical material/theory is essential for the reader. Other introductory material is also helpful to the reader”.

Response:

Thank you for positive comment and critical point to add historical material in this introduction. Previously we have mentioned 1907 study, Robert Hertz in line 44-49. To correspond this comment, we have already added background on social cohesion and identity in line 70-85 which is related to social cohesion. Meanwhile, we have also

addressed the historical information on Mandailing community which mentioned in line 144-159 as suggested by Reviewer #7.

Reviewer #2:

Comment:

“<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198797043.003.0003>

The author should cite this source as the theory rooted in this research: social cohesion and identity”.

Response:

We are very delighted to receive additional reference as theory rooted in current research related to social cohesion and identity. For this, we have already included the suggested reference to in introduction part (see line 73-76). As well as we use this reference to support our finding in the discussion part (as presented in line 536-537).

“Despite, there is no clear description on concept of social cohesion [19], for the purpose of this study, social cohesion is defined by the interconnectedness of social networks and the customs, bonds, and values that uphold their unity [20].”

Reviewer #4:

Comment:

The author is urged to engage in a more comprehensive exploration of the scholarly discourse and theoretical underpinnings pertaining to the concept of "Batu Qulhu remembrance." Such a scholarly endeavor is indispensable, serving not merely as informative content for readers but also as a potential alternative solution within the academic context.

Response:

We express gratitude for the favorable feedback. In our draft, we have duly noted the resemblance of this practice to those within the Muslim community, particularly in Indonesia, and its role in fostering social cohesion, a phenomenon recognized universally across global communities. This statement is articulated within the discussion section, as indicated in lines 534-536;

“This ritual also plays crucial role in fostering social cohesion through different ways, including community participation, shared religious practices, as well transmission of values and traditions”.

Furthermore, we advocate for the fundamental premise that funeral ceremonies should be regarded as integral components of human beliefs and traditions within diverse communities (refer to lines 560-563).

“As funeral ceremonies continue to play a pivotal role in communities worldwide, understanding and appreciating the significance of these rituals contributes to our broader knowledge of human beliefs, traditions, and the ways in which we commemorate and honor the departed”.

Lastly, we elucidate the potential utility of this method in elucidating the cultural dimensions of funeral practices within traditional communities to derive significant value and symbolism inherent in the rituals, as outlined in the conclusion (refer to lines 563-568).

“The employed methods in this study allows for an in-depth exploration of the cultural, social, and emotional dimensions surrounding funeral practices within specific

communities. This approach provides nuanced insights into the significance, symbolism, and evolving meanings attributed to funeral rituals, thereby enriching scholarly discourse and bridging gaps in understanding of this complex phenomenon”.

Reviewer #5

Comment:

As a study that claims to use ethnography and phenomenology design, I think this study is more of a thematic analysis one. The authors need to elaborate what makes this study different from a thematic analysis study.

Response:

Thank you very much for this critical question. And we kindly argue that the chosen methodology for this study is a qualitative research design, integrating both phenomenological and ethnographic approaches. These methodologies are selected for their intrinsic exploratory nature, where the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection. By synergizing the principles of phenomenological analysis and ethnography, this study underscores a thorough investigation of human experiences within their authentic contexts. Phenomenology aims to unveil the core essence of lived experiences, while ethnography supplements this by elucidating the cultural and social nuances that frame these experiences within particular communities or social groups. All supporting information about the method has been written in the method section especially in sub chapter 3.1.

3. If applicable, are statistical analyses, controls, sampling mechanism, and statistical reporting (e.g., P-values, CIs, effect sizes) appropriate and well described?

Reviewer #1:

Comment:

“A good introduction to the study design and good information about the study as conducted is provided. One small improvement would be to state how many themes were derived from the data, and also introduce them as Theme 1, etc”.

Response:

We express gratitude for the valuable suggestion. In the most recent iteration, we have endeavored to amend the introduction within the methodology section, as detailed in lines 215-225. With respect to data presentation, our approach involves the segregation of topics outlined in the findings into three distinct subchapters denoted as 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3. Each of these subsections is aligned with the predetermined objectives articulated in the introduction. We trust that these adjustments address and fulfill your recommendation.

The strategic modification of the introduction within the methodology section, as well as the organization of data presentation into delineated subchapters, serves to enhance the clarity, coherence, and logical progression of the research framework. By refining the introduction, we ensure that the methodological approach is succinctly outlined, providing readers with a clear understanding of the research design and objectives from the outset.

Reviewer #3:

Comment:

“The method should be written according to the ethnographic research approach”.

Response:

Your inquiry is greatly appreciated. We assert that our research adopts a qualitative research design that integrates both phenomenological and ethnographic methodologies. These approaches are deliberately selected for their capacity to delve deeply into the subject matter, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument of data collection. By intertwining phenomenological analysis and ethnography, our investigation thoroughly examines human experiences within genuine contexts. Phenomenology delves into the core essence of lived experiences, while ethnography unveils the cultural and social intricacies within specific communities or groups. In our case, we concentrate on the funeral ritual observed in the Muslim community of Mandailing, particularly focusing on the utilization of white stones as a significant component of the ritual. Further elaboration on our methodology can be found in subchapter 3.1 of the methods section.

Reviewer #4:

Comment:

“This research is closely related to traditional culture in Sumatra, then, why did the authors only choose research subjects from religious circles? It is also necessary to choose subjects that focus on cultural aspects (who are very familiar with the culture of Batu Qulhu in the context of tradition)”.

Response:

Thank you for your input. This study delves into the traditional funeral rites observed within the Mandailing community. Given its longstanding practice among traditional Muslims in this region over the centuries, our focus lies in gathering data from religious figures or ulama who are intimately familiar with these rituals and comprehend the underlying cultural norms. For more details regarding the selected resources, please refer to subchapter 3.2, specifically lines 254-262 as mentioned in the following paragraph.

“The selection process for these subjects adhered to specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Firstly, the informants were required to hold the roles of imams or leaders of the Batu Qulhu dhikr (or remembrance) during funeral ceremonies within the Mandailing community. Secondly, they were expected to possess a profound understanding of the norms and values associated with Batu Qulhu. Lastly, the informants needed to be Ulama or respected Islamic spiritual leaders within the local community. Proficiency in the Mandailing language was also a prerequisite for informant selection. To identify suitable subjects, consultations were conducted with local authorities, such as the Indonesian Council of Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia) in Madina, as well as prominent local figures”.

4. If applicable, are the existing tables and/or figures complete and acceptable for publication?

Reviewer #1:

Comment:

“Fabulous pictures and supplemental material”.

Response:

Thank you very much, we have modified Figure 3b to portray the white stones pouring in the graveyard by the family of deceased person. This step is also taken based on Reviewer #3 suggestion.

5. If applicable, are the interpretation of results and study conclusions supported by the data?**Reviewer #1:****Comment:**

Other than helping the reader through better labelling of data finding themes, the results and conclusion information is clearly and comprehensively presented.

Response:

Thank you for your comment. Based on your feedback and other reviewers, we have modified part of the results and conclusion (see line 427-437); (line 534-542); and also (line 557-568).

Reviewer #2:**Comment:**

Connect the findings to the social cohesion and identity.

Response:

Thank you for remind us this. As mentioned in question 1 before, we have mentioned and linked the social cohesion and identity in the introduction, discussion as well as conclusion (see line 534-537; 557-560).

Reviewer #4:**Comment:**

In the delineation of findings, the researchers exclusively expounded upon observational data related to the Batu Qulhu remembrance practice and interview-derived results. A noteworthy facet discerned within this ritualistic procession is the discourse articulated by the Imam. It is imperative to transcribe and subsequently subject this discourse to rigorous analysis, thereby elucidating its semantic nuances and enhancing the robustness of the research findings dataset.

Response:

Thank you. Due to the importance of the discourse of the Imam which presented in sermon. Here we mentioned the sermon session in the draft as well as the content of the speech in the supplementary file (see line 433-437).

Reviewer #5:**Comment:**

I think this study is a better fit for Indonesian journals. I do not think the global audience of Heliyon will be interested to read this.

Response:

Thank you for the critics. We understand the context of our study is mainly presenting traditional practice of local Muslim community in Sumatra. However, this type of article is also benefit for broader readers to explore the diversity of traditional funeral practices in

different societies. We also propose the combined method on ethnography and phenomenology in revealing this ritual and its connection to social cohesion and identity of the community. Further, earlier study of Torajan funeral has been also published in Heliyon recently (see <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e08925>).

6. Have the authors clearly emphasized the strengths of their study/theory/ methods/argument?

Reviewer #1:

Comment:

a good insightful study, one that is quite dense to read and comprehend for a non-Muslim person, and a person who has not travelled to Sumatra for over 30 years.

Response:

Thank you. I hope this study gives valuable insight for more audiences as well.

Reviewer #2:

Comment:

1. This paper should emphasize the social cohesion and identity.
2. The first sentence in design of the research requires citation on employing combination of phenomenological and ethnographic approaches.

Response:

1. Thank you for giving the valuable comments. Here, we have already mentioned in the revised draft including in the introduction (line 72-82), we also mentioned in the objectives and research questions of the study (line 86-96).
2. We have also placed additional references to support the applied method in the study as written in line 215-218.

7. Have the authors clearly stated the limitations of their study/theory /methods/argument?

Reviewer #1:

Comment:

One small point is that the interviewed people were all well-educated, and so this study may be limited to the viewpoints of well-educated people in the region.

Response:

Acknowledgments are extended for your contribution. This investigation delves into the traditional funeral customs observed within the Mandailing community. Given the enduring practice among traditional Muslims in this locale spanning centuries, our focus centers on acquiring data from religious figures or ulama who possess an intimate familiarity with these rituals and an understanding of the underlying cultural norms. Notably, all sources engaged in this study exhibit varying levels of education obtained from *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), ranging from high-school equivalence to master's degrees. Additionally, the qualification of Imams is underscored by their proficiency in the Arab-Malay language and Quranic recitation, as detailed in lines 394-401.

8. Is the manuscript's structure, flow, or writing acceptable for publication? (Think for example of the addition of subheadings, shortening of text, reorganization of sections, or moving details from one section to another)

Reviewer #1:

Comment:

Provide further comments here: nicely done, other than a need to edit for English-language conventions.

Response:

Thank you. We have tried to present this article in English through several feedbacks from our proof reading.

Reviewer #2:

Comment:

1.1 and 1.2 should be another heading (Literature Review) after the Introduction.

Response:

Thank you. We involve all literatures in the introduction to simplify this article as supported by other reviewers.

Reviewer #7:

Comment:

Typos. 441-443 However, due to the increasing flexibility of people's mindset and the scarcity of these rocks in rivers, the people can now be acquired from various stores in Madina region as mentioned by P5 (50):

Response:

Thank you very much this feedback. Here we have rewritten this part (see line 498-500) *"Nevertheless, owing to the evolving perspectives of individuals and the limited availability of such rocks in riverbeds, these stones are now obtainable from multiple outlets across the Madina region, as noted by P5 (50):"*

9. Could the manuscript benefit from language editing?

Reviewer #1:

Comment:

Thank you for this insightful study. I have made a few small revision comments in my review (above).

Response:

Thank you for support this article for perfection. We think we have already responded your comments and feedbacks in former question.

Reviewer #2:

Comment:

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198797043.003.0003>

Cite this source and state clearly in your paper this your research is rooted from social cohesion and identity.

Response:

We express our gratitude for the provision of supplementary references, particularly those grounded in contemporary research concerning social cohesion and identity. To incorporate this valuable contribution, we have integrated the suggested reference into the introductory section of our study, as delineated in lines 73-76. Furthermore, we have utilized this reference to bolster our findings within the discussion section, as elucidated in lines 536-537.

Reviewer #3:

Comment:

1. The concept of phenomenology needs to be removed from the text.
2. The research should be reviewed according to the rules of ethnographic study. There are basic texts that should be particularly looked at on this subject. Especially Turner and Douglas.
3. More photos can be used if the authors have them.
4. The analysis of the findings should also be updated in accordance with the ethnographic approach.

Response:

(1 and 2)

Thank you for your valuable input. Our research adopts a phenomenological approach, which is elaborated upon in section 3.1. This methodological choice is justified by Douglas's conceptual framework, which identifies four elements crucial for the formation of social cohesion and identity. Furthermore, Turner's work provides insights into the specific aspects of the reading and tools utilized in the *Batu Qulhu* ritual, underscoring their significance for our research inquiry.

Utilizing a phenomenological approach in our research is essential for comprehensively exploring the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals within the Mandailing community. This method allows us to delve deeply into the cultural significance and symbolic meanings embedded within the *Batu Qulhu* ritual. By incorporating Douglas's framework on social cohesion and identity formation, we establish a robust theoretical foundation that informs our analysis of the ritual's role in shaping communal bonds and individual identities. Additionally, Turner's insights guide our investigation by highlighting key elements of the ritual that warrant closer examination, thereby enriching our understanding of its cultural significance. Overall, the integration of these theoretical perspectives strengthens the rigor and depth of our research, contributing to a nuanced exploration of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community.

3. All available photos were displayed to support the ritual.
4. Within the chosen method and data collected during fieldwork, we have written the findings based on ethnography and phenomenology. Further supporting argument on the chosen method can be found in sub chapter 3.1 and 3.2.

Reviewer #6:

Comment:

The reviewed study undertakes a preliminary investigation of the Batu Qulhu ritual. Local modifications to funeral practices were reported by members of the Mandailing

community. Such first-hand sources are crucial for studies of local community traditions. While the earlier editorial remarks have enhanced the text, certain further changes are necessary:

Line 84:

When referring to BC (Before Christ), larger numbers correspond to earlier dates. This aligns with the chronological order when using BC dates. Therefore, it would be more accurate to state: ... "Munda people occurred around 1500-1200 BC."

Line 124-125:

The sentence 'Poda means advice, na means (yang) five, and lima means five' seems a bit unclear and might contain a mistake. It seems there's a repetition in the translation of "five."

Lines 147-148: The sentence should be changed:

The term 'astronomically' is commonly associated with astronomy and celestial objects. In a geographical context, the more suitable term is 'geographically.' Therefore, the corrected statement is as follows: "Medan, often abbreviated as Madina, is situated in North Sumatra Province, spanning approximately 3°10' to 3°50' N latitude and 98°10' to 100°10' E longitude."

Lines 162-163:

Christians and Catholics are both followers of Christianity so this sentence should be rephrased:

"The majority of the population in Madina, around 95%, is Muslim, while the remaining 5% consists of Christians (including Catholics), Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of Confucianism."

In this way Catholics are included within the broader category of Christians.

Response:

Thank you very much for the feedback. All revision has been made based on those comments.

(line 103-105)

Due to pressure from the Aryans, the Munda people migrated southward within India [29–31], and this Aryan occupation of the Munda people occurred around 1500-1200 BC [32].

(161-162)

"The values of the Mandailing ethnic philosophy of life called Poda Na Lima. Poda means advice, na means which/that/is, and lima means five".

(184-185)

"The Mandailing Natal region, often abbreviated as Madina, is situated in North Sumatra Province, spanning approximately between 0°10' and 1°50' N and 98°10' and 100°10' E".

(199-201)

The majority of the population in Madina, around 95%, is Muslim, while the remaining 5% consists of Christians (including Catholics), Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of Confucianism.

Reviewer #7:

Comment:

Establishing connections with other scholars' writings, analyses, and concepts would be helpful in future writings.

I have some fundamental comments about the compositional style of the paper (racial origin and profiling could have been handled better).

In my view, the essay's contribution is that funerary rites within Islam can be varied and legitimate at the same time (notwithstanding the fact that a certain ethnic community is being described here).

"The Mandailing community's ethnic origin is a subject of contention among scholars.

96 While some argue that they are part of the Batak Toba ethnic group [23,24], this perspective

97 faces opposition from Mandailing intellectuals and historians. However, an analysis of factors

98 such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the

99 Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group [25,26]. To

100 establish their identity as the Mandailing community, they refer to themselves as "halak kita"

101 (referred to: our people) of South Tapanuli [27], rather than as "halak batak" (Batak people)

102 [28,29]. Regarding religious affiliation, the majority of the contemporary Mandailing

103 population follows Islam, with a minority of Christians found in specific locations like 104 Pakantan in Upper Mandailing, Medan, and other cities in North Sumatra [14,30].

Before

105 embracing Islam, the religious beliefs of the Mandailing people focused around ancestral spirits

referred to as "si pele begu" [22], incorporating 106 influences from Hinduism and Buddhism [31].

107 Recent field research conducted in the Mandailing region revealed remnants and artefacts

108 associated with both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, particularly in the vicinity of Panyabungan

109 within the Greater Mandailing area [32].

110 Padri wars has brought Islam to Mandailing around 1821 and the Dutch military breached

111 and defeated this movement by 1835 [25,30,33]."

I was referring to this part of the writing. I understand the essay's intent and appreciate the efforts toward substantiating the point that what might look like an ethnic and (thus) an un-Islamic practice is actually a legitimate practice. I suggest that it can be done better than the way it is presented here. The description, amongst other things, seems to convey that in the interim made between ancient times and the nineteenth century, the only valid way to mark ethnicity is this: "factors such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group." And, if indeed this is the case, the writer must

substantiate a little more about the remarkable presence of Islam within a century, a milieu within which the funeral rite is being expressed as Islamic. What has such a presence done to the 'genealogy,' 'clan structure,' 'language,' and even 'skin color'? Is it the case that the Mandailing are ethnically pristine and conforming with Islamic practices at the same time? If that is the case, then it would have to be spelled out because, usually, such a radical co-presence is a site of negotiation and adaptation.

Response:

Thank you very much for this positive feedback. We have added historical context including Islam spreading in Sumatra during classical era, including in South Tapanuli, as well as the existence of Panai Kingdom and finally short background on how Islam came to Mandailing (mentioned in line 144-154). Further, we also add the genealogy in broader context of Batak community as presented in line 155-159 (revised draft).

(line 144-154)

Before then, in the classical era, marked by the introduction of Hinduism preceding Islam into South Tapanuli, is substantiated by the presence of the Bahal temple in Portibi (now Padang Lawas), a relic of the Panai kingdom during the 12th and 13th centuries. Schnitger [47] documented that around 1000 AD, the Panai kingdom stood as the foremost realm of its time. Nevertheless, around 11th century, the Panai kingdom succumbed to Rajendrakola from India, an adherent of the Hindu faith. Despite the presence of Hindus within the Mandailing Sultanate, the Mandailing populace did not embrace Islam. This decision was influenced by the religion's veneration of numerous idols. Through a traditional lens, there exists a fusion of religion and culture, exemplified by customs such as upah-upah (gift) during weddings, rites marking childbirth, and housewarming ceremonies. Additionally, observances spanning 7, 40, 100, and 1000 days following the demise of parents are upheld.

(line 155-159)

The Mandailing Sultanate fell under the dominion of the Aru kingdom circa 1295 AD, spanning the 13th to 15th centuries AD. Subsequent to this period, the Pulungan kingdom emerged, followed by the ascendancy of the Nasution clan, which assumed control over the Mandailing Godang region (now Panyabungan), and the Lubis clan, which governed Mandailing Julu (now Kotanopan).

Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

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Abstract: Death and funeral rituals hold significant cultural and spiritual importance in traditional communities worldwide, including within the Islamic faith. This study focuses on exploring the unique funeral ritual known as *Batu Qulhu* in the Muslim Mandailing community. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes field observations and interviews with ulama and imams who have practical knowledge and understanding of this traditional ritual. The study reveals two origin stories of *Batu Qulhu*: one attributed to the first Imam in the Mandailing community and the other associated with elderly parents, ulama, and village *malims* (religious teachers) without specifying an individual source. *Batu Qulhu* refers to the white river stones utilized by the congregation during the ritual to count the number of prayers offered. The procession of this tradition follows a strict protocol, encompassing prayers, recitation of the Quran, and seeking forgiveness for the deceased and their family. The efficacy of *Batu Qulhu* serves as a testament to the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of cultural identity. While *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar cultural practices can be observed in other regions, highlighting the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and uphold cultural traditions as an integral part of identity and social cohesion.

Keywords: death rituals, funeral traditions, *Batu Qulhu*, Mandailing community, norms and values

1. Introduction

As a traditional aspect of culture, funeral practices serve as an initial stride towards fostering harmonious relations within multi-ethnic communities [1]. The manner in which individuals navigate the concept of death holds significance as it encompasses their cultural engagement and utilization, similar to how religion, an integral component of culture, provides a framework for comprehending, interpreting, and making sense of death, albeit without necessarily diminishing its inherent challenges for those experiencing grief [2]. Throughout various cultures, the commemoration of the deceased and the support offered to grieving

families manifest through a multitude of ritualistic practices [3]. These rituals hold particular significance within religious frameworks as they are not only guided by religious doctrines but also serve as fundamental aspects of communal worship [4]. Within the Islamic tradition, the management of deceased bodies adheres to the teachings found in the Qur'an, specifically drawing attention to Surah Al Imran (QS 3:185). This verse underscores the universal nature of mortality, asserting that every individual is bound to experience death [5]. In his groundbreaking 1907 study, Robert Hertz skillfully intertwined three essential imperatives - moral, aesthetic, and sociological - to present a captivating conceptualization of death [6]. His intricate analysis portrays death as a profound transformative journey that transcends the boundaries of both the spiritual and physical realms.

In Indonesia, funeral rituals have been intricately intertwined with local cultural practices and ethnic traditions. Various communities, such as the Tana Toraja people [7], the traditional Javanese community [8,9], and the Balinese who perform the *ngaben* ceremony [10,11], express their funeral customs based on their specific cultural heritage. These burial practices and procedures provide profound insights into the community and society in which they are performed. In these traditions, feasts, animal sacrifices, and supplications are often conducted to honor the deceased and their family. Additionally, Islamic values and rituals significantly influence funeral practices across many regions in Indonesia. The practice of *tahlil* or *tahlilan*, which involves collective remembrance gatherings, is commonly observed [12], and the *azan* (call to prayer) is often performed during burial ceremonies [4]. Moreover, in certain regions of Sumatra, Islamic funeral practices have assimilated with local traditions. For example, the people of Minangkabau in Nagari Salayo incorporate the custom of placing attributes on the head of the deceased during the funeral procession [13]. While in Nagari Anduring, the Minang community also practices *bakayaik*, which takes place 100 days after someone's passing. *Bakayaik* vividly recounts the profound narrative of Prophet Muhammad pbuh¹, beginning with his miraculous birth and chronicling his relentless efforts to uphold the principles of Islam. This ceremonial tradition blends the eloquence of Arabic and Minang languages, creating a captivating linguistic tapestry that enhances the overall richness of the performance. In Aceh, the *reuhab* tradition involves decorating the deceased person's bedroom for 40 days [14]. These practices exemplify the dynamic interplay between Islamic influences and local cultural expressions in funeral rituals across Indonesia.

Throughout history, archaeological evidence of ancient burials reveals a persistent pattern: human societies, since their inception, have convened to form social bonds and articulate emotions and intentions in response to the phenomenon of death [15]. This ritual also promotes

social cohesion in many communities practiced in various belief systems [16–18]. Despite, there is no clear description on concept of social cohesion [19], for the purpose of this study, social cohesion is defined by the interconnectedness of social networks and the customs, bonds, and values that uphold their unity [20]. The idea of social cohesion traces back to Emile Durkheim's theory. He proposed the notion of mechanical solidarity in society, suggesting its presence through the strength of influential individuals [21]. Hence, social cohesion emerges from socio-spatial factors that influence individuals within specific locations, representing a reflection of the classification of spaces [22,23]. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct thorough research into the rituals and traditions of specific communities within their local contexts to better understand and extract the factors contributing to social cohesion. This approach allows for a more nuanced analysis, considering the unique cultural and social dynamics that shape cohesion within distinct groups. Further, the traditional ceremony holds facilitates religious and spiritual practices as well as strengthening social bond and sense of identity [24].

This study aims to investigate the origin of *Batu Qulhu* rituals, exploring its contemporary practices and norms based on the social cohesion and identity in the Mandailing community of North Sumatra. The funeral rituals in this community are deeply rooted in a rich tapestry of cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions. By exploring the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ceremonies, this research seeks to shed light on the significance and intricacies of these rituals, offering valuable insights into the broader context of funeral traditions among Muslims in Sumatra. Regarding to the goals, the current article addresses the following research question the research question, what is the historical background of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community? How do the practices surround *Batu Qulhu* manifest in present-day Mandailing Muslim society? What are the norms associated with *Batu Qulhu* within the Mandailing community based on social cohesion and identity?

1.1. Mandailing Ethnic: Historical Context

The origin of the word "*Mandailing*" is linked to the Munda people of India, who experienced defeat in a war against the Aryan people. The term "*Mandailing*" is derived from either "*Mandala Holing*" [25,26] or "*Mundailing*," referring to the refugees from Munda [27]. It is believed that the Munda people originally inhabited the northern regions of India before the arrival of the Aryans [28]. The historical interaction between the Aryans and the Munda people has been examined through linguistic evidence [29]. Due to pressure from the Aryans, the Munda people migrated southward within India [29–31], and this Aryan occupation of the Munda people occurred around 1500-1200 BC [32]. Eventually, the displaced Munda people

migrated to Southeast Asia [31], although the specific country of their migration is not specified. It is likely that some of them reached North Sumatra through the Barus Port in Central Tapanuli, which was an international port at that time. Referred to "*Negarakertagama*" book from 1365, which mentions the presence of the Mandailing as one of the most significant ethnic groups in the archipelago [25,33]. The names mentioned include Mandailing, Pane, and Padang Lawas. The mention of these names indicates that the name Mandailing has been known by outsiders since ancient dates. In addition, Tuanku Rao² suggests that the Mandailing people trace their origin back to the Bugis Makassar, who sailed to the Singkuang Port (now known as Natal), it is more commonly accepted that the Mandailing people are part of the Batak ethnic group.

The Mandailing community's ethnic origin is a subject of contention among scholars. While some argue that they are part of the Batak Toba ethnic group [34,35], this perspective faces opposition from Mandailing intellectuals and historians. However, an analysis of factors such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group [36,37]. To establish their identity as the Mandailing community, they refer to themselves as "*halak kita*" (referred to: our people) of South Tapanuli [38], rather than as "*halak batak*" (Batak people) [39,40]. Regarding religious affiliation, the majority of the contemporary Mandailing population follows Islam, with a minority of Christians found in specific locations like Pakantan in Upper Mandailing, Medan, and other cities in North Sumatra [25,41]. Before embracing Islam, the religious beliefs of the Mandailing people focused around ancestral spirits referred to as "*si pele begu*" [33], incorporating influences from Hinduism and Buddhism [42]. Recent field research conducted in the Mandailing region revealed remnants and artefacts associated with both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, particularly in the vicinity of Panyabungan within the Greater Mandailing area [43].

Padri wars has brought Islam to Mandailing around 1821 and the Dutch military breached and defeated this movement by 1835 [36,41,44]. The term '*padri*' has two possible origins. One explanation suggests that it stems from the Indonesian word '*padri*,' which referred to priests. It is important to emphasize that the notable figures associated with the Padri movement can be likened to 'Islamic priests' [45]. This movement emerged in the early 1800s as a reformist Islamic movement led by local scholars known as ulama. These ulama sought to purify and reform Islam in the region, criticizing what they perceived as syncretic practices and deviations from strict Islamic teachings [26,41]. They aimed to establish a more orthodox and conservative interpretation of Islam in Mandailing. Padri movement gained support from

various segments of the population, including the rural communities, who were attracted to their message of religious purity and social justice [46]. The Padris' growing influence and power threatened the traditional rulers, known as penghulu, who feared losing their authority and control [41,45].

Before then, in the classical era, marked by the introduction of Hinduism preceding Islam into South Tapanuli, is substantiated by the presence of the Bahal temple in Portibi (now Padang Lawas), a relic of the Panai kingdom during the 12th and 13th centuries. Schnitger [47] documented that around 1000 AD, the Panai kingdom stood as the foremost realm of its time. Nevertheless, around 11th century, the Panai kingdom succumbed to Rajendrakola from India, an adherent of the Hindu faith. Despite the presence of Hindus within the Mandailing Sultanate, the Mandailing populace did not embrace Islam. This decision was influenced by the religion's veneration of numerous idols. Through a traditional lens, there exists a fusion of religion and culture, exemplified by customs such as *upah-upah*³ (gift) during weddings, rites marking childbirth, and housewarming ceremonies. Additionally, observances spanning 7, 40, 100, and 1000 days following the demise of parents are upheld.

The Mandailing Sultanate fell under the dominion of the Aru kingdom circa 1295 AD, spanning the 13th to 15th centuries AD. Subsequent to this period, the Pulungan kingdom emerged, followed by the ascendancy of the Nasution clan, which assumed control over the Mandailing Godang region (now Panyabungan), and the Lubis clan, which governed Mandailing Julu (now Kotanopan).

1.2. Mandailing Philosophy

The values of the Mandailing ethnic philosophy of life called *Poda Na Lima*. *Poda* means advice, *na* means which/that/is, and *lima* means five. In short, *Poda Na Lima* consists of five pieces of advice, namely: i) *Paias Rohamu* (keeping your heart clean); ii) *Paias Pamatangmu* (keeping your body clean); iii) *Paias Parabitonmu* (keeping your clothes clean); iv) *Paias Bagasmu* (keeping your house clean); and v) *Paias Pakaranganmu* (keeping your yard clean) [34,48]. These five values are still firmly held by the Mandailing community and the Mandailing ethnicity in Indonesia and around the world. Despite the Madina people's reputation for being religious, their daily social lives are intertwined with various cultural practices that are imbued with religious significance. These rituals, such as *marhaban* (*barzanzi*)⁴, the use of plain flour, and *upah-upah*, are performed on joyful occasions such as weddings, recoveries from illness, and the attainment of new positions, as well as during significant life transitions such as the birth of a child and moving into a new home [38].

The Mandailing ethnic community has a value system, *Dalihan Na Tolu* which means a forum used to organize life in carrying out *olong* (affection) between *mora*, *kahanggi* and *anak boru* [34,35,49,50]. *Dalihan Na Tolu*, also referred to ‘three stones’ [37], is a cultural value, created by the Creator that guide Bataknese attitude and behavior in the social lives and cultural relation [51]. The three stones encompass family, community, and spirituality. In Mandailing community, *Dalihan Na Tolu* principles are deeply intertwined with Islamic values and teachings. Mandailing Muslim communities incorporate these cultural principles into their daily lives, alongside their Islamic beliefs and practices [51,52]. This concept reinforces the importance of maintaining strong moral character, fostering harmonious relationships, and upholding social justice within the community [34,35,51].

2. Location Settings

The Mandailing Natal region, often abbreviated as Madina, is situated in North Sumatra Province, spanning approximately between 0°10’ and 1°50’ N and 98°10’ and 100°10’ E. This region is located on the west coast of Sumatra, has a 170 km coastline, and is home to 24 islands, though only 4 of these islands are inhabited. In 2021, Madina has a population of over 478,000 people, and has a total area of 6,134 km² [53]. Based on BPS-Statistics of Mandailing Natal Regency [53], during 2021, the predominant land use in this region comprises a mixed vegetation area, accounting for 39.15% or 252.57 hectares, while forested areas occupy 30.04% of the region, followed by palm oil plantations at 27.79%. Settlements in Madina cover 451.38 hectares (0.7%), while agriculture utilizes 2.17% of the land. Additionally, water bodies such as lakes and dams encompass 0.14% of the region's total area. This region is crossed by three river systems including Batang Pungkut, Batang Gadis, and Aek Pohan that represent upper, middle and lower part of the Batang Gadis watershed [54]. These rivers are beneficial for major population in Madina including for agriculture, plantation and industrial sectors. However, for years the rivers have also become threatened to illegal mining activities including sands, rocks and gold [55,56].

The majority of the population in Madina, around 95%, is Muslim, while the remaining 5% consists of Christians (including Catholics), Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of Confucianism. Madina has more than 800 mosques and 70 churches [57], to support the religious practices of its inhabitants, and the region is made up of 23 districts and over 370 villages. Muslim community in Madina, consisting of various ethnic groups, exhibits a rich diversity of cultural and religious practices. Mosques and Islamic schools, known as *madrasah*, hold a prominent position in shaping the religious and cultural life of the community.

Furthermore, active participation in significant cultural and religious traditions, such as the celebration of two major Islamic holidays like *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*, is observed among the Muslim population. A strong emphasis on social responsibility and assisting those in need, in alignment with Islamic principles, is evident through the engagement of the Muslim community in charitable and community service activities. The local government plays a supportive role by implementing policies and providing necessary infrastructure to promote Islamic education [58].

3. Methodology

3.1. Design of the Research

This study adopts qualitative research design, employing combination of phenomenological and ethnographic approaches. Both methodologies are characterized by their exploratory nature, utilizing the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection [59]. By intertwining the principles of phenomenological analysis and ethnography, this current study approach emphasizes a comprehensive exploration of human experiences within their natural settings. While phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of lived experiences, ethnography complements this by elucidating the cultural and social intricacies that contextualize these experiences within specific communities or groups. Additionally, they both underscore the importance of adopting a self-conscious approach to research, wherein researchers are attentive to their own perspectives, biases, and influences throughout the research process. It is worth to be noticed that the primary aim of qualitative research is to comprehend the distinctive characteristics and experiences of individual cases, rather than attempting to establish generalized patterns or trends [60]. This method emphasizes the comprehensive exploration of human behaviors and experiences as they unfold within natural settings [61,62]. Integral to this research is the integration of the subjects' knowledge with that of the researchers, which holds significant importance. This integration facilitates the recognition and documentation of outcomes from the local perspective inherent to the subjects themselves [7,63]. The current study employs an emic approach, which entails adopting the insider's perspective from within the culture where the research project is situated, as previously described in studies by [7,45,64–66]. By embracing an emic approach, the research acknowledges the critical importance of comprehending and interpreting the cultural context and subjective experiences of the subjects, thereby enriching both the research process and its findings.

3.2. Fieldwork and Subjects

The research employed an observational and interview-based approach to collect data. The researchers assumed the roles of both observers and interviewers. The observation phase focused on the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice in the study area, the activities of the Imam during the ritual, and the placement of stones in the graveyard after the final day of remembrance. For the interviews, a systematic process was followed to select appropriate sources. Initial contact with the informants was established through various means, such as phone calls, emails, and WhatsApp messages, to effectively arrange and conduct the interviews.

In prior ethnographic studies, a limited number of subjects were involved. For instance, two studies centered on the practices of anesthesia within two British hospital [67]. Similarly, Baan et al. [7] conducted research on funeral rituals in Toraja with only two informants, while Lee et al. [68] examined the experience of depression among Chinese individuals with a sample size of five informants. In accordance with the present study, data collection encompassed interviews with a total of eight carefully selected subjects, as detailed in Table 1. The age range of the informants in this study was 45-73 years old.

The selection process for these subjects adhered to specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Firstly, the informants were required to hold the roles of imams or leaders of the *Batu Qulhu* dhikr (or remembrance) during funeral ceremonies within the Mandailing community. Secondly, they were expected to possess a profound understanding of the norms and values associated with *Batu Qulhu*. Lastly, the informants needed to be Ulama or respected Islamic spiritual leaders within the local community. Proficiency in the Mandailing language was also a prerequisite for informant selection. To identify suitable subjects, consultations were conducted with local authorities, such as the Indonesian Council of Ulama (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*) in Madina, as well as prominent local figures.

Table 1

The current investigation involved the collection of data during a comprehensive six-month fieldwork period in 2022, specifically spanning from February to July. This fieldwork, which was coordinated by the first author, S, and A.F.D., extended over a total of 90 days. The study targeted five specifically chosen districts, selected from a larger pool of 23 districts in the designated study area (refer to Figure 1). The primary objective of the research was to obtain valuable insights into the cultural practices related to the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in the Madina region. The *Batu Qulhu* event occurring in July 2022

was meticulously observed and documented, employing a combination of photographs and videos for meticulous recording. Regarding the data collection process, individual interviews were conducted with each informant, with each session spanning approximately 2 hours. These interviews took place at mutually agreed locations, such as the informant's residence, school office, or the household of the deceased individual where the *Batu Qulhu* ritual took place. Thorough and meticulous recording of all pertinent information was undertaken for subsequent analysis purposes.

Figure 1

3.3. Data Analysis

The present study utilized a qualitative data analysis approach, encompassing three key stages: 1) data reduction; 2) data presentation; and 3) drawing conclusions. This analytical process unfolded iteratively throughout the research. Initially, during the early phases of data collection, the research maintained a broad and overarching focus, and the observations were comprehensive in nature. As the research progressed and the focus of the study became more apparent, the observations evolved to adopt a more structured approach, enabling the acquisition of specific and targeted data.

The data analysis commenced with data reduction, where the gathered information was streamlined and organized to facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Subsequently, the data were presented in a coherent and meaningful manner to facilitate effective interpretation. Finally, the study derived conclusions based on the analyzed data, allowing for the generation of valuable insights into the cultural practices surrounding the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina. Throughout the research, this qualitative data analysis process occurred in a cyclical manner, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the research topic and a nuanced understanding of the intricacies involved. By transitioning from broad and general observations to more structured and specific data collection, the study achieved a comprehensive and detailed exploration of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual's cultural significance and its relevance within the Mandailing community.

3.4. Ethical Consideration

The present investigation was conducted under the auspices of Cluster Interdisciplinary Basic Research, adhering meticulously to stringent ethical guidelines. To ensure ethical compliance, the study received official approval from the Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) University of North Sumatera (UINSU) with the approval number:

0616615683. The utmost care was taken in handling the research data and records, which were securely stored on a password-protected computer housed within the Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, UINSU. Access to these records was strictly restricted to the authors.

In adherence to established ethical standards for data collection and publication, prior to their inclusion in the research, explicit informed consent was meticulously acquired from all eight subjects involved, thereby safeguarding their voluntary and informed engagement in the study. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, a coding system was employed, wherein each subject was allocated an initial "P" followed by pertinent demographic particulars, such as age and current profession. Moreover, all photographic materials featured in this investigation were obtained with written consent from all participants in the native *Bahasa* (Indonesian language), thereby emphasizing the paramount importance of respecting their autonomy and privacy throughout the research process. This unwavering commitment to ethical principles serves to underscore the rigor and integrity of the present inquiry, facilitating an ethically sound exploration of the cultural practices pertaining to the Batu Qulhu ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Origin of the Rituals

Based on the interview, it is mentioned that Syeikh Haji Mustafa Husein bin Husein Nasution bin Umar Nasution Al-Mandaili (or known as Syeikh Mustafa Husein) (1886-1955), is credited as the first Imam to introduce the practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance at funeral ceremonies. In the beginning, was named by *Batu Balancing* based on the color of the stone used in this ritual. This insight was derived from interviews conducted with P1 (65), an ulama, and P2 (52), a teacher at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Panyabungan. In addition, Syeikh Musthafa Husein is also founder of the *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB)⁶ or Purba Baru Islamic boarding school. The practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been preserved and perpetuated by his students, who have established recitation congregations in various locations such as mosques, prayer rooms, and *surau*⁷. Notably, the students and alumni of Musthafawiyah have played a significant role in its development and expansion beyond Madina region, with a presence in several other provinces across Indonesia. As the oldest *pesantren* (or boarding school) in North Sumatra, the influence of this practice extends widely, facilitated by the widespread distribution of its students and graduates.

An alternative explanation, provided by P3 (73) an ulama, diverges slightly from the previous informant. He has pointed out that the tradition of using *Batu Qulhu* or *Batu Balancing*⁸ as a medium for remembrance was explained with a slight variation, focusing on the customs upheld by elderly parents, ulama, village *malims* (religious teachers), without mentioning any specific individual. It was a means to alleviate the sorrow experienced by the bereaved and served as a form of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends. In addition to the customary acts of attending funerals and observing mourning rituals, the strategies employed to alleviate the profound grief experienced by individuals extended further. These encompassed multifaceted practices such as providing emotional support, proffering words of guidance and solace to foster resilience and acceptance in the face of adversity. Moreover, individuals were invited to partake in collective prayer sessions, where the use of *Batu Qulhu* stones served as facilitative elements in creating a conducive environment for these spiritual gatherings. P3 further elucidated that this method, referred to as *alak na jolo martakziah*, involved family members, parents, spouses, children, relatives, and neighbors coming together for *tahlilan*.

“In the past people paid tribute to the homes of people who died; parents, wife, husband, children, siblings and neighbors are tahlilan, starting from reciting istighfar, al-Fatihah, tahlil, prayers and concluding selawat. To make the dhikr in congregation more solemn, they add media by using a Batu Balancing (white stone) within size of an adult's big toe or larger than that. In the past, the white stone was said to be a Batu Balancing, now it is better known as the Batu Qulhu”.

Batu Qulhu ritual refers to the use of certain stone as a means of carrying out dhikr worship. In general, this type of stone is typically known as white pebble. It should be noticed that most of these white pebbles are predominantly comprised of marble, a rock formation characterized by its crystallized carbonates and can easily be found in the riparian zone. Here, the family of the deceased person collect these stones from the nearest river. As mentioned in the interview, this ritual chooses approximately the size of an adult's thumb to enhance the solemnity of the remembrance (as can be seen in Figure 2a). During the interview P4 (65), emphasized that in the past, people paid homage to the homes of the deceased, engaging in *tahlilan* rituals that encompassed prayers and concluding with ‘*selawat*’ (see Figure 2b). To augment the collective remembrance, *Batu Qulhu*, the size of an adult's big toe or larger, was employed. Over time, the *Batu Balancing* came to be recognized as the *Batu Qulhu*.

Figure 2

The utilization of *Batu Qulhu* in death ceremonies is also underpinned by the geographical sequences. Firstly, the abundance of rivers in Madina, notably the Batang Gadis River, Batang Natal River, Aek Kalungan River and Angkola River, facilitated the easy availability of these stones in the past. Nowadays, these rivers also threatened by illegal gold mining activities [55], and tend to pollute due to its waste [56]. Secondly, these stones possess distinct characteristics that contribute to their suitability for the purpose at hand. They exhibit a white hue, imparting a visually soothing effect, while their cool and clean appearance further enhances their appeal. Third, these stones demonstrate resilience in withstanding the rigors of varying weather conditions, including heat, cold, and rainfall. Furthermore, the recitation of *Batu Qulhu* rituals is believed by the community to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave.

4.2. The Contemporary Practice of Batu Qulhu in the Mandailing Community

In the past, Islamic practices in Sumatra have exhibited influences from mystical and shamanistic traditions e.g., [69,70]. However, it is important to note that the religious activities associated with the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* are not influenced by shamanism, but rather stem solely from religious traditions previously followed by religious scholars, religious teachers, and traditional leaders. Currently, the contemporary practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been inherited and embraced by Muslim society in Madina. Based on interview with P4 (65), it is evident that in the past, the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance adhered to strict protocols as mentioned in the following statement.

“The tradition of recalling the Batu Qulhu was once a highly regulated practice. It required seeking consent from both the village leader and the syekh. Mastery of the 20 essential attributes of Allah was necessary, alongside the ability to read the Quran and comprehend its teachings. The stones themselves had to possess a pure white hue. The recitation of Qulhu would take place during evening gatherings, where all the stones present had to be utilized fully, leaving no remnants behind before the congregation dispersed”.

These procedures include the following: 1) the procession necessitated obtaining permission from the head of the village⁹ and *tuan guru*¹⁰ (or *kulifah*); 2) the ritual leader was required to commit to memory and comprehend the twenty obligatory attributes of God, encompassing *nafsiyah* (self-related attributes) nature, *salbiyah* (attributes related to existence) nature, *ma'ani* (abstract attributes of God) nature, and *maknawiyah* (the essential nature and prevalence of *ma'ani*) nature; 3) the officiating Imam was expected to possess proficiency in both written and spoken Arabic-Malay; 4) the Imam leading the remembrance was required to

proficiently recite the Qur'an and comprehend its meaning; 5) the *Batu Qulhu* utilized in the ritual had to be of a white hue; and 6) the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* transpired during evening hours, and all the stones had to be completed within a single procession conducted in the presence of the congregation. Preceding the initiation of the ritual, it is customary for the priest to cleanse himself through the observance of ablution, mirroring the ritualistic cleansing process associated with prayer as mentioned by P7 (60).

Basically, this ritual has many similarities to *tahlilan* tradition especially in the context prayers and recitations. This practice generally has been carried out by many Nahdatul Ulama (NU) community in Sumatra [12,71]. However, in *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, there are five Imams that lead this procession with different assignment. These Imams are voluntarily appointed by the group and relatively flexible based on their own agreement. The priests then read several prayers that beneficial to seek forgiveness for the deceased, his/her family as well to congregation. The Imams also recite some verses from the Surat of the Quran (QS), and praise the God. In this *Batu Qulhu* ritual, the congregation are voluntarily attending the ritual without any formal invitation. The ritual is held in three consecutive days after the death, and organized by group manager, neighbors and the Imams, and commonly referred to *Serikat Tolong Menolong* (STM) or Union of Help. The Imams and the congregation are artfully arranged in a circular formation, tailored to the venue's conditions. This arrangement allows for the placement of stones in front of the congregation, effortlessly within reach for the worshippers' right hand. During the fieldwork in Panyabungan Kota district, it was noticed that there were more than 30 piles of stones in the congregation. As additional information that commonly they are sitting on the floor covered with *tikar* or mat, but some people also held the ritual with chairs. The priests hold the responsibility for overseeing the course of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual. The following Table 2 describes each Imams' responsibility in *Batu Qulhu* procession.

Table 2

As presented in table 2 that the five Imams stone remembrance fulfill distinct roles during funeral rituals. The first Imam recites *wasilah*, invoking blessings upon the prophets, companions, scholars, and deceased parents. The second Imam performs *takhtim*, while the third recites *dhikr tahlil*. The fourth Imam recites selected verses from the Qur'an. The fifth priest concludes with a closing prayer and religious guidance, including expressions of gratitude to Allah SWT and salutations to Prophet Muhammad SAW, supplications for the forgiveness of the deceased's sins, and prayers for the widening of their grave. The sermon includes an oath regarding the deceased's parents, beseeching acceptance of their worship,

forgiveness of sins, and enlargement of their grave. Additionally, the imam delivers a sermon during this ritual (text written in Mandailing and the translation can be read in Supplementary file).

The current study also reveals that *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Madina is held in three consecutive days where:

- In the day 1, the remembrance is taken where the Imam start the ceremony. In the first meeting, the priests wear neat clothes, wear caps, turbans and sarongs. Reflecting the figure of a religious expert and placing his position is a person who is highly respected in society. Their sitting position is arranged in a special place, different from the congregation in general. Here, the Imam will also read out the order of the *Batu Qulhu* procession.
- For day 2, similar to the preceding event, the order of events for the first night procession remains unchanged. Prior to commencing the remembrance ceremony, the 'Imam pembaca takhtim' provided an explanation that after the recitation of the *takhtim*, the congregation would engage in the dhikr of *Batu Qulhu*, and were kindly requested to maintain their positions until the conclusion of the event. However, in contrast to the previous occasion, on the second night of recitation, Qulhu stones are made available to facilitate the dhikr and are arranged in a stacked formation in front of the congregation. Subsequently, the Qulhu remembrance stones are accumulated in the same location. The prescribed procedure entails the recitation of QS 112: 1-3, followed by the selection of a single stone. For each subsequent repetition, an additional stone is selected, such that two stones are chosen for a two-time reading, three stones for a three-time reading, four stones for a four-time reading, and so forth, in accordance with established practice.
- In day 3, *Batu Qulhu* procession replicates the format observed on the second meeting. However, a notable distinction lies in the extended duration of the dhikr, necessitated by the requirement to recite the prayer over each stone in the presence of the congregation. It is imperative to sustain the continuity of the dhikr until its completion, without interruption. Subsequent to the remembrance, a collective prayer and *salawat* are gathered. The *Batu Qulhu* employed as aids for remembrance are carefully placed within plastic burlap bags or buckets (as can be seen in Figure 3a). The event concludes with a religious sermon or *tausiyah*, wherein expressions of gratitude are articulated on behalf of the congregation and the afflicted families. The content of the religious sermon encompasses themes such as death, the retribution of the grave, and serves as a reminder for individuals to perpetually prepare themselves and enhance their devotion before the arrival of death.

This is because all living beings are destined to experience mortality (QS 3: 185), and its arrival cannot be postponed, even if one seeks refuge within a lofty and robust fortress (QS 4: 78).

In addition to the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, on the fourth day following an individual's passing, *Batu Qulhu* stones are transported to the cemetery and carefully positioned above the burial site, as illustrated in Figure 3b. The procedure involves the preparation of the grave bed, which includes the leveling off the ground in the designated area assigned for burial. Subsequently, these stones are poured in a manner that commences from the head of the deceased and extends towards their feet. Although typically performed by the bereaved family, this task can also be undertaken by others, such as neighbors or relatives. During the placement of the stones on the grave, it is customary to recite the phrase "*Bismillahi milata 'ala Rasulullah*," which translates to "In the name of Allah and in the religion of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh." The recitation performed during this act is identical to the prayer recitation conducted during the interment of the deceased's body. It is noteworthy that the selection of this specific recitation lacks a distinct foundational basis but rather originates from established tradition.

Figure 3

Presently, *Batu Qulhu* dhikr has undergone significant transformations over time, likely influenced by environmental factors, evolving understandings within the community, and technological advance, as well as societal changes. Presently, the implementation of the ritual varies across different areas of Madina. Traditionally, some individuals engage in the *Batu Qulhu* practice following the *Maghrib* prayer (after sunset) or around 6.30 pm – 7.00 pm local time and typically after the *Isya* prayer (7.30 pm – 8.00 pm), collectively performed at the mosque during evening as mentioned by P8 (55). Among adult women, it takes place in the evening preceding *Maghrib*, while among the male youth (*naposo bulung*) and female youth (*nauli bulung*), it occurs in the afternoon (after *Asr* or around 3.00 pm) as mentioned by P6 (45). Adult male worshipers partake in this practice during the evening after the *Isya* prayer on the first, second, and third days following a person's demise. As mentioned earlier, the *Batu Qulhu* employed in this remembrance ritual is a stone recognized by the bereaved family, retrieved from the river. To ensure cleanliness, the stones are consistently washed and kept in a plastic sack or a large container. Nevertheless, owing to the evolving perspectives of individuals and the limited availability of such rocks in riverbeds, these stones are now obtainable from multiple outlets across the Madina region, as noted by P5 (50):

“*Batu Qulhu* are taken from the river by the family, if they are dirty, they are cleaned. Now, *Batu Qulhu* are easy to get and are sold in flower shops and building material store”).

4.3. Aspect of Norms of *Batu Qulhu* ritual

The *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice, introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein, holds significant cultural value in the Mandailing community of Madina. This ritual utilizes white pebbles from nearby rivers for dhikr worship and to alleviate the suffering of the deceased in the grave. It has been preserved and perpetuated by Syeikh Mustafa Husein's students and alumni, who have established recitation congregations in the region. As the oldest pesantren in North Sumatra, the influence of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends widely beyond Madina, with its students and graduates playing a significant role in its development and expansion. Equivalent cultural customs, such as the *tahlilan* tradition observed within the NU community in Sumatra, are also prevalent in Java under the same name. In Java, the Muslim community holds *tahlilan* remembrances on many occasions, a tradition historically introduced by the *Wali Songo* (The Nine Saints of Islam) [12].

Strict protocols surround the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance. Prior permission from village and religious leaders, referred to as *Tuan Guru*, is required. The officiating Imam must possess proficiency in Arabic-Malay language. These protocols ensure the solemnity and authenticity of the ritual, aligning with the importance placed on established rituals and cultural heritage. The *tahlilan* tradition within the NU community also follows specific rituals, emphasizing the shared values of upholding traditions and seeking solace in times of mourning. As previously mentioned, obtaining permission from both village and religious leaders is necessary, as indicated by P2 (52):

‘*mangido izin Parjolo tu Tuan Guru*’ (English: Ask permission from *Tuan Guru* first). Commonly answered by the teacher with ‘*olo*’ *silahkan acara dilanjut* (English: Okay, please continue the ritual), ‘*marimom mau au*’ (English: I will follow).

Batu Qulhu remembrance serves as a form of communal support, uniting family members, relatives, neighbors, and friends in times of sorrow. This fosters a sense of unity and solidarity within the Mandailing community, reflecting the value placed on collective resilience. Similar communal support can be found in other practices, such as the collective remembrance gatherings associated with the *tahlilan* tradition, reinforcing the cultural value of community bonds and support networks. The significance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends beyond its cultural and spiritual aspects. It represents a cherished cultural heritage embraced by the

Muslim society in Madina, highlighting the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of identity. This ritual also plays crucial role in fostering social cohesion through different ways, including community participation, shared religious practices, as well transmission of values and traditions. This study also highlights solidarity aspect as other form of social cohesion in the societal level [20]. While specific to the Mandailing community, similar practices can be observed in other regions in Indonesia, especially in the traditional Islam community [4,72]. They are still fulfilling the shared human need to honor the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and preserve cultural traditions as integral elements of identity and social cohesion. For a comprehensive overview of the norm aspects in the tradition of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community, please refer to Table 3.

Table 3

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ritual stands as a significant cultural and religious practice within the Mandailing community's funeral ceremonies. This tradition, which involves using stones for dhikr worship, holds deep historical and spiritual roots. While its origins can be traced back to Syeikh Mustafa Husein, who introduced the ritual, variations in accounts highlight the complex nature of its origin. Over time, the procession of *Batu Qulhu* has undergone modifications to streamline its organization, exemplifying the adaptive nature of cultural practices while maintaining their essence. Although *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar commemorative practices can be found in other regions. These rituals reflect the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, seeking solace through collective ceremonies, and preserving cultural traditions as integral components of identity and social cohesion. *Batu Qulhu* ritual serves as a testament to the rich cultural and religious heritage of the Mandailing community in North Sumatra, encapsulating collective mourning, spiritual devotion, and the preservation of cultural identity. By adhering to these rituals, individuals reaffirm their cultural identity and strengthen their sense of belonging within the community. Shared cultural practices during funeral ceremonies serve as markers of group identity, fostering a sense of solidarity among participants. As funeral ceremonies continue to play a pivotal role in communities worldwide, understanding and appreciating the significance of these rituals contributes to our broader knowledge of human beliefs, traditions, and the ways in which we commemorate and honor the departed. The employed methods in this study allows for an in-depth exploration of the cultural, social, and emotional dimensions surrounding funeral practices within specific communities. This

approach provides nuanced insights into the significance, symbolism, and evolving meanings attributed to funeral rituals, thereby enriching scholarly discourse and bridging gaps in understanding of this complex phenomenon.

While this study presents a preliminary investigation into the *Batu Qulhu* ritual, it acknowledges certain limitations. The absence of historical documentation detailing the ritual within the Mandailing community necessitates a proposed historical approach through extensive literature review, drawing upon the writings of earlier ulama. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the limited number of informants and the specific observed processions may not fully capture the diverse procedural variations of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual across the entire Madina region. Recognizing the modifications made by different communities based on the guidance of their Imams or practical considerations further adds to the complexity of the ritual. Given these findings, the study recommends the cultural preservation and educational promotion of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual for the benefit of future generations. The creation of appropriate documentation, such as books and videos, accessible through various platforms including social media, can contribute to the wider dissemination of knowledge and understanding of the ritual. These efforts support the cultural preservation of the *Batu Qulhu* tradition and foster greater appreciation among the Mandailing community and beyond.

Declarations

Authors contribution statement

Conceived and designed the experiments, S., A.F.D.; performed the experiments, S., A.F.D.; analyzed and interpreted the data, S., S.D., and A.W.N.; wrote the paper S., A.F.D.; A.W.N. and S.D. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Figures

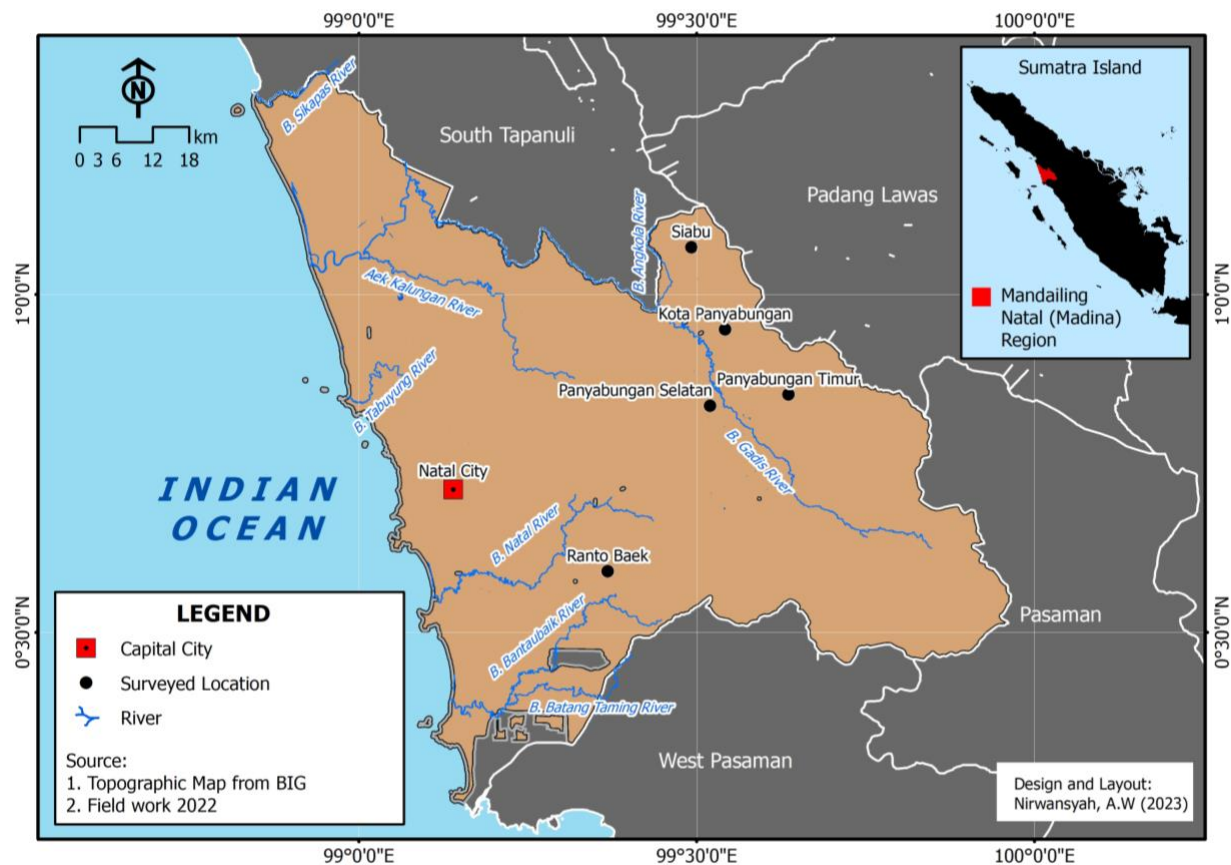


Figure 1. Area of the current research



Figure 2. a) White pebble collected for *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Mandailing, where each bucket contains 70 to 100 stones; and b) the congregation of the Mandailing Muslim community during this obituary ceremony. Photography by Sahrul on 22 July 2022.



Figure 3. *Batu Qulhu* remembrance by adult male where a) the organizer has collected and kept the stones back into the plastic sack for fourth day of casting procession; and b) where *Batu Qulhu* is finally poured on the grave of deceased person. (photographs of the ritual held at P4 residence on 22 July 2022) (taken by Sahrul)

832 **Table 1.** Pseudonym of subjects' information in the current study

Informants	Initial	Age	Education Level	Occupation
1	P1	65	Bachelor degree	Teacher
2	P2	52	Bachelor degree	Teacher
3	P3	73	Bachelor degree	Ulama and local public figure
4	P4	65	Master degree	Public servant
5	P5	50	Master degree	Public servant
6	P6	45	Master degree	Teacher
7	P7	60	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Businessman
8	P8	55	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Teacher

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834 **Table 2.** Construction of each Imam and their task in *Batu Qulhu* procession

Imam	Local term	Assignment	Quran recitation
First Imam	<i>Imam pembaca silsilah</i>	– Reciting <i>istighfar</i> ¹¹ three times; – Reciting <i>wasilah</i> to nabi (propeth Muhammad pbuh), his appostles, ulama and parents of the deceased person, all Muslim and the congregation	– QS 1: 1-6
Second Imam	<i>Imam pembaca takhtim</i>	– Reciting <i>takhtim</i> (known as "reading for the reward of the deceased" or "reciting for the benefit of the deceased")	– QS 112: 1-3 – QS 113: 1-5 – QS 114: 1-5 – QS 1: 1-7 – QS 2: 1-5; 255; 284-286 – QS 33: 56
Third Imam	<i>Imam pembaca tahlil</i>	– Reciting <i>tahlil</i> (compilation of dhikr) including: • <i>Istighfar</i> ;	

-
- Reciting ‘afdhalu dzikri’ followed by First *syahadat tauhid*¹². The congregation then answer by ‘hayyun baqi’;
 - Reciting second *syahadat tauhid*. Then answered by the congregation with ‘hayyun maujud’;
 - Reciting the third *syahadat tauhid*. And answered by all attendance by ‘hayyum maqsud’.
- Finally, reciting *syahadat tauhid* together with the congregation 100 times. Here the congregation gradually loud their praise and at same time shaking the head

Fourth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca Al Baqarah</i>	– Reciting some verses from the Quran that contains concept and advise about calamities	– QS 2: 152-156 – QS 67: 1-2
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Fifth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca doa</i>	– Reciting closing prayer, with the following structure:
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- *Basmallah*¹³;
- Praise to the Creator and His messenger (Muhammad pbuh);
- Prayers for all Moslem (men and women);
- Prayers for the deceased person and the family;
- Prayers for attendance in the congregation;

837 **Table 3.** Identified aspect of norms in the practice of *Batu Qulhu* Remembrance

Aspect of norm	Description
Preservation of traditions	The culture emphasizes the preservation and perpetuation of rituals and practices, such as the <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance, which was introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein and continued by his students and alumni. The students and graduates of Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding school play a significant role in preserving and expanding this practice.
Community support	The culture values community support during times of grief and mourning. The tradition of using <i>Batu Qulhu</i> serves as a means of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends, helping to alleviate sorrow and foster resilience.
Spiritual gatherings	Collective prayer sessions and remembrance gatherings are highly valued in the culture. The use of the stones during these gatherings creates a conducive environment for spiritual practices and collective remembrance.
Respect for the deceased	The culture emphasizes respect and care for the deceased. The ritual of collecting white pebbles, predominantly marble, from nearby rivers to be used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance shows reverence for the departed.
Connection to nature	The culture maintains a connection with nature, as the stones used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals are collected from rivers. The easy availability of these stones in the past and their resilience in varying weather conditions highlight the importance of nature in the culture.
Alleviation of suffering	The recitation of <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals is believed to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave. This demonstrates a value of compassion and empathy within the culture.

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¹ Peace be upon him

² Tuanku Rao is characterized as enigmatic figure and one of the two significant leaders of the Padri movement, shared this status alongside Imam Bonjol himself. Tuanku Rao's origins can be traced to *Huta na Godang* or *Huta Godang*, also known as *Tano Godang*, located in Mandailing Julu (Upper Mandailing) [25].

-
- ³ *Upah-upah* refers to cultural practice or tradition of offering gifts or monetary compensation during significant events or ceremonies. The term "upah" itself can be translated as "wages" or "payment". *Upah-upah* is deeply rooted in the Mandailing culture and is often observed during various occasions such as weddings, funerals, or community gatherings.
- ⁴ The word *barzanzi* is associated with the name of Syekh Barzanji, a prominent scholar and Sufi poet from Kurdistan. His renowned work, titled "*Mawlid al-Barzanji*," is a poetic composition that narrates the birth and life of the Prophet Muhammad, often recited during religious gatherings and celebrations.
- ⁶ *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB), was founded in 1912 by Syekh Musthafa Husein Nasution. This Islamic boarding school is located in Purba Baru sub-district, Madina Regency, North Sumatra [73]. Further reference on this boarding school can be read in Khairurrijal [74].
- ⁷ Surau means a place of worship or a small mosque-like structure. The surau typically serves as a communal prayer space or a modest mosque, wherein Muslims congregate for congregational prayers, religious discourses, and other religious engagements.
- ⁸ Some community in Madina also use term of *Batu Bontar* to refer *Batu Qulhu*.
- ⁹ One crucial determinant is obtaining authorization from the village leader. The village head holds a position akin to that of a revered monarch, embodying nobility and commanding profound respect.
- ¹⁰ *Tuan guru* or teacher serves as a religious authority, serving as an exemplar and establishing a benchmark for societal norms through their words and actions. Additionally, they are often revered as sacred individuals known for their healing abilities, and they serve as a source of supplication for various needs such as well-being, sustenance, companionship, agricultural prosperity, and attainment of blessings.
- ¹¹ The act of attempting forgiveness from the Almighty God, commonly by saying 'astagfirullāhu
- ¹² The *syahadat tauhid* contains declaration of belief in the oneness of God Almighty
- ¹³ *Basmallah* is phrase mention to the God before beginning any action or speech. It spells 'Bismillahi rāhmani rāhiim'. It means: in the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful.

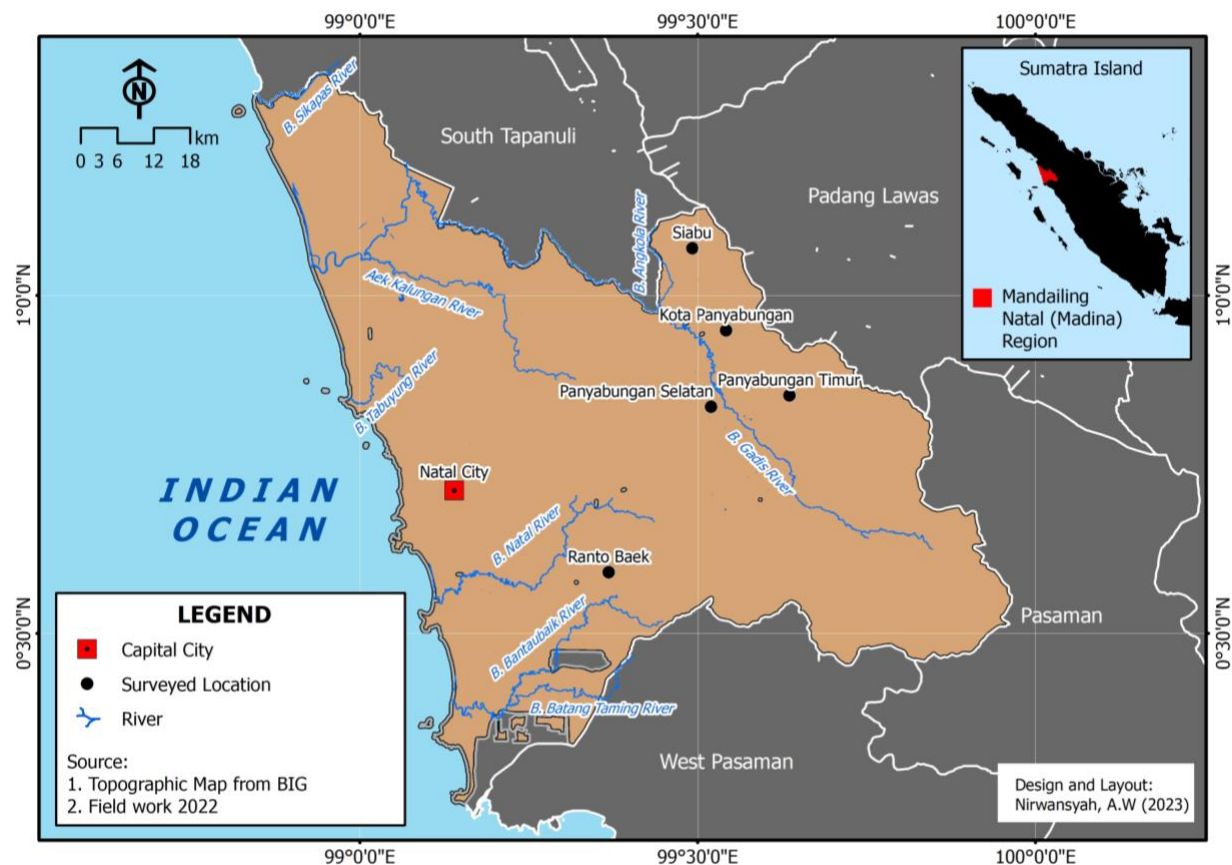


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Penulis menanyakan kembali naskah revisi artikel kelima (24 Maret 2024)

From: Sahrul Sahrul
Date: 24/03/2024 05:19 AM

Manuscript Number: HELIYON-D-23-24599R5
Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra
Dr Sahrul Sahrul
Heliyon

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This manuscript has undergone five revisions and has received comments from a total of seven reviewers. I have responded to all reviewer comments comprehensively.

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Title: Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

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<p>Data Availability</p> <p>Sharing research data helps other researchers evaluate your findings, build on your work and to increase trust in your article. We encourage all our authors to make as much of their data publicly available as reasonably possible. Please note that your response to the following questions regarding the public data availability and the reasons for potentially not making data available will be available alongside your article upon publication.</p> <p>Has data associated with your study been deposited into a publicly available repository?</p> <p>Please select why. Please note that this statement will be available alongside your article upon publication.</p> <p>as follow-up to "Data Availability</p> <p>Sharing research data helps other researchers evaluate your findings, build on your work and to increase trust in your article. We encourage all our authors to make as much of their data publicly available as reasonably possible. Please note that your response to the following questions regarding the public data availability and the reasons for potentially not making data available will be available alongside your article upon publication.</p> <p>Has data associated with your study been deposited into a publicly available repository?</p> <p>"</p>	<p>No</p> <p>The data that has been used is confidential</p>

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Your revision due date is Apr 17, 2024. We understand that the COVID-19 pandemic may well be causing disruption for you and your colleagues. If that is the case for you and it has an impact on your ability to make revisions to address the concerns that came up in the review process, please reach out to us.

If you need additional time to address the concerns that came up in the review process, please let us know so we can discuss a plan for moving your paper forward.

I look forward to receiving your revised manuscript.

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Rachael Tucker, PhD

Scientific Editor

Heliyon

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Reviewer's Responses to Questions

Note: In order to effectively convey your recommendations for improvement to the author(s), and help editors make well-informed and efficient decisions, we ask you to answer the following specific questions about the manuscript and provide additional suggestions where appropriate.

1. Are the objectives and the rationale of the study clearly stated?

Please provide suggestions to the author(s) on how to improve the clarity of the objectives and rationale of the study. Please number each suggestion so that author(s) can more easily respond.

Reviewer #7: Mark as appropriate with an X:

Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

Provide further comments here:

2. If applicable, is the application/theory/method/study reported in sufficient detail to allow for its replicability and/or reproducibility?

Please provide suggestions to the author(s) on how to improve the replicability/reproducibility of their study. Please number each suggestion so that the author(s) can more easily respond.

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Provide further comments here:

3. If applicable, are statistical analyses, controls, sampling mechanism, and statistical reporting (e.g., P-values, CIs, effect sizes) appropriate and well described?

Please clearly indicate if the manuscript requires additional peer review by a statistician. Kindly provide suggestions to the author(s) on how to improve the statistical analyses, controls, sampling mechanism, or statistical reporting. Please number each suggestion so that the author(s) can more easily respond.

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Not Applicable ☐ No and here is how they should be improved ☐ Yes, there is no need for improvement ☒

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4. If applicable, are the existing tables and/or figures complete and acceptable for publication?

Please provide specific suggestions for improvements, removals, or additions of figures or tables. Please number each suggestion so that the author(s) can more easily respond.

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5. If applicable, are the interpretation of results and study conclusions supported by the data?

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6. Have the authors clearly emphasized the strengths of their study/theory/methods/argument?

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7. Have the authors clearly stated the limitations of their study/theory/methods/argument?

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8. Is the manuscript's structure, flow, or writing acceptable for publication? (Think for example of the addition of subheadings, shortening of text, reorganization of sections, or moving details from one section to another)

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Provide further comments here:

9. Could the manuscript benefit from language editing?

Reviewer #7: Yes

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What considerations and consent were put in place for the relatives/friends/attendees of the funeral rituals was taken? Consent was taken from the participants, but there is no mention of those who were attending. Did they know the researcher was observing and the purpose of this? The author mentions some interviews took place in the homes of the deceased individual where the ritual took place- did relatives provide permission for this?

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Respon jurnal Heliyon: Konfirmasi telah menerima naskah revisi artikel kelima (16 April 2024)

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Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

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Cover Letter

Medan, 15 April 2024

Subject: Revision Manuscript Submission

Dear Editor-in-Chief,

Thank you for your previous feedback on my manuscript, "*Batu Qulhu – The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra*." I have carefully revised the article to address the reviewer's concerns, particularly regarding written consent from informants and individuals in the photographs. We obtained written consent from all sources. However, to ensure confidentiality, we are not including the consent letters with the manuscript.

I believe the revised manuscript aligns well with Heliyon's focus on interdisciplinary research and will provide valuable insights into the diverse cultural practices within Muslim societies. I respectfully request your reconsideration for publication.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your response and am happy to discuss any further revisions or answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Sahrul

Dear Editor,

We want to express our sincere gratitude for the invaluable feedback provided by the reviewers. Your expertise has significantly enhanced the quality of our paper, and we are truly grateful for your dedication. We have meticulously considered each comment and suggestion and are fully committed to addressing them comprehensively.

In response to the reviewers' inquiries regarding the consent of our informant and all individuals photographed during the observation, we have made appropriate revisions to the relevant section. Your insightful feedback has played a crucial role in refining our work, and we are unwavering in our commitment to upholding academic excellence.

Once again, thank you for your invaluable contributions.

9. Could the manuscript benefit from language editing?

Reviewer #7

What considerations and consent were put in place for the relatives/friends/attendees of the funeral rituals was taken? Consent was taken from the participants, but there is no mention of those who were attending. Did they know the researcher was observing and the purpose of this? The author mentions some interviews took place in the homes of the deceased individual where the ritual took place- did relatives provide permission for this?

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Response

In accordance with our discussion in subsection 3.4, consent was obtained from all participants as indicated by the host's announcement (refer to lines 315-317). Additionally, written consent was obtained from guests. Moreover, during the observation of the deceased individual, permission was sought from the family representative, who was briefed on the study's objectives, note-taking, and photography. Specifically, we approached P4, a relative who had experienced the loss of a family member and participated in the *Batu Qulhu* ritual (depicted in figures 2b, 3a, and 3b). To ensure the confidentiality of individuals depicted in the photographs, facial features, particularly the eyes, were partially covered.

(line 315-317)

This consent, granted by the host and announced to all the guests, allows for photography during the ritual and the publication of those images.....



Figure 1. a) White pebble collected for *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Mandailing, where each bucket contains 70 to 100 stones; and b) the congregation of the Mandailing Muslim community during this obituary ceremony. (Photography by Sahrul on 22 July 2022)



Figure 2. *Batu Qulhu* remembrance by adult male where a) the organizer has collected and kept the stones back into the plastic sack for fourth day of casting procession; and b) where *Batu Qulhu* is finally poured on the grave of deceased person. (photographs of the ritual [a] held at P4 residence on 22 July 2022; and white stone teeming in the day 4) (taken by Sahrul)

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I look forward to receiving your revised manuscript.

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Figures 2b and 3a- these seem to include non-participants in the images. Did they provide written consent for their image to be included? Same for 3b- this is stated it was taken at someone's residence. Did they provide consent for this to be published?

As we mentioned in sub chapter 3.4, all consent was given by the participant that announced by host (see line 315-317). Here we have already accepted the written consent from the guest as well. Further, during the observation in the deceased person, we ask permission the family representative including the purpose of the study, taking notes and photographs. Here we ask P4 as one of relative who lost his family member and held the Batu Qulhu ritual (as portrayed in figure 2b, 3a, and 3b). However, to protect confidentiality of individuals appeared in the photos we decide to cover part of their face (eyes).

In accordance with our discussion in subsection 3.4, consent was obtained from all participants as indicated by the host's announcement (refer to lines 315-317). Additionally, written consent was obtained from guests. Moreover, during the observation of the deceased individual, permission was sought from the family representative, who was briefed on the study's objectives, note-taking, and photography. Specifically, we approached P4, a relative who had experienced the loss of a family member and participated in the *Batu Qulhu* ritual (depicted in figures 2b, 3a, and 3b). To ensure the confidentiality of individuals depicted in the photographs, facial features, particularly the eyes, were partially covered.

***Batu Qulhu*—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra**

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Abstract: Death and funeral rituals hold significant cultural and spiritual importance in traditional communities worldwide, including within the Islamic faith. This study focuses on exploring the unique funeral ritual known as *Batu Qulhu* in the Muslim Mandailing community. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes field observations and interviews with ulama and imams who have practical knowledge and understanding of this traditional ritual. The study reveals two origin stories of *Batu Qulhu*: one attributed to the first Imam in the Mandailing community and the other associated with elderly parents, ulama, and village *malims* (religious teachers) without specifying an individual source. *Batu Qulhu* refers to the white river stones utilized by the congregation during the ritual to count the number of prayers offered. The procession of this tradition follows a strict protocol, encompassing prayers, recitation of the Quran, and seeking forgiveness for the deceased and their family. The efficacy of *Batu Qulhu* serves as a testament to the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of cultural identity. While *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar cultural practices can be observed in other regions, highlighting the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and uphold cultural traditions as an integral part of identity and social cohesion.

Keywords: death rituals, funeral traditions, *Batu Qulhu*, Mandailing community, norms and values

1. Introduction

As a traditional aspect of culture, funeral practices serve as an initial stride towards fostering harmonious relations within multi-ethnic communities [1]. The manner in which individuals navigate the concept of death holds significance as it encompasses their cultural engagement and utilization, similar to how religion, an integral component of culture, provides a framework for comprehending, interpreting, and making sense of death, albeit without necessarily diminishing its inherent challenges for those experiencing grief [2]. Throughout various cultures, the commemoration of the deceased and the support offered to grieving

families manifest through a multitude of ritualistic practices [3]. These rituals hold particular significance within religious frameworks as they are not only guided by religious doctrines but also serve as fundamental aspects of communal worship [4]. Within the Islamic tradition, the management of deceased bodies adheres to the teachings found in the Qur'an, specifically drawing attention to Surah Al Imran (QS 3:185). This verse underscores the universal nature of mortality, asserting that every individual is bound to experience death [5]. In his groundbreaking 1907 study, Robert Hertz skillfully intertwined three essential imperatives - moral, aesthetic, and sociological - to present a captivating conceptualization of death [6]. His intricate analysis portrays death as a profound transformative journey that transcends the boundaries of both the spiritual and physical realms.

In Indonesia, funeral rituals have been intricately intertwined with local cultural practices and ethnic traditions. Various communities, such as the Tana Toraja people [7], the traditional Javanese community [8,9], and the Balinese who perform the *ngaben* ceremony [10,11], express their funeral customs based on their specific cultural heritage. These burial practices and procedures provide profound insights into the community and society in which they are performed. In these traditions, feasts, animal sacrifices, and supplications are often conducted to honor the deceased and their family. Additionally, Islamic values and rituals significantly influence funeral practices across many regions in Indonesia. The practice of *tahlil* or *tahlilan*, which involves collective remembrance gatherings, is commonly observed [12], and the *azan* (call to prayer) is often performed during burial ceremonies [4]. Moreover, in certain regions of Sumatra, Islamic funeral practices have assimilated with local traditions. For example, the people of Minangkabau in Nagari Salayo incorporate the custom of placing attributes on the head of the deceased during the funeral procession [13]. While in Nagari Anduring, the Minang community also practices *bakayaik*, which takes place 100 days after someone's passing. *Bakayaik* vividly recounts the profound narrative of Prophet Muhammad pbuh¹, beginning with his miraculous birth and chronicling his relentless efforts to uphold the principles of Islam. This ceremonial tradition blends the eloquence of Arabic and Minang languages, creating a captivating linguistic tapestry that enhances the overall richness of the performance. In Aceh, the *reuhab* tradition involves decorating the deceased person's bedroom for 40 days [14]. These practices exemplify the dynamic interplay between Islamic influences and local cultural expressions in funeral rituals across Indonesia.

Throughout history, archaeological evidence of ancient burials reveals a persistent pattern: human societies, since their inception, have convened to form social bonds and articulate emotions and intentions in response to the phenomenon of death [15]. This ritual also promotes

social cohesion in many communities practiced in various belief systems [16–18]. Despite, there is no clear description on concept of social cohesion [19], for the purpose of this study, social cohesion is defined by the interconnectedness of social networks and the customs, bonds, and values that uphold their unity [20]. The idea of social cohesion traces back to Emile Durkheim's theory. He proposed the notion of mechanical solidarity in society, suggesting its presence through the strength of influential individuals [21]. Hence, social cohesion emerges from socio-spatial factors that influence individuals within specific locations, representing a reflection of the classification of spaces [22,23]. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct thorough research into the rituals and traditions of specific communities within their local contexts to better understand and extract the factors contributing to social cohesion. This approach allows for a more nuanced analysis, considering the unique cultural and social dynamics that shape cohesion within distinct groups. Further, the traditional ceremony holds facilitates religious and spiritual practices as well as strengthening social bond and sense of identity [24].

This study aims to investigate the origin of *Batu Qulhu* rituals, exploring its contemporary practices and norms based on the social cohesion and identity in the Mandailing community of North Sumatra. The funeral rituals in this community are deeply rooted in a rich tapestry of cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions. By exploring the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ceremonies, this research seeks to shed light on the significance and intricacies of these rituals, offering valuable insights into the broader context of funeral traditions among Muslims in Sumatra. Regarding to the goals, the current article addresses the following research question the research question, what is the historical background of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community? How do the practices surround *Batu Qulhu* manifest in present-day Mandailing Muslim society? What are the norms associated with *Batu Qulhu* within the Mandailing community based on social cohesion and identity?

1.1. Mandailing Ethnic: Historical Context

The origin of the word "*Mandailing*" is linked to the Munda people of India, who experienced defeat in a war against the Aryan people. The term "*Mandailing*" is derived from either "*Mandala Holing*" [25,26] or "*Mundailing*," referring to the refugees from Munda [27]. It is believed that the Munda people originally inhabited the northern regions of India before the arrival of the Aryans [28]. The historical interaction between the Aryans and the Munda people has been examined through linguistic evidence [29]. Due to pressure from the Aryans, the Munda people migrated southward within India [29–31], and this Aryan occupation of the Munda people occurred around 1500-1200 BC [32]. Eventually, the displaced Munda people

migrated to Southeast Asia [31], although the specific country of their migration is not specified. It is likely that some of them reached North Sumatra through the Barus Port in Central Tapanuli, which was an international port at that time. Referred to "*Negarakertagama*" book from 1365, which mentions the presence of the Mandailing as one of the most significant ethnic groups in the archipelago [25,33]. The names mentioned include Mandailing, Pane, and Padang Lawas. The mention of these names indicates that the name Mandailing has been known by outsiders since ancient dates. In addition, Tuanku Rao² suggests that the Mandailing people trace their origin back to the Bugis Makassar, who sailed to the Singkuang Port (now known as Natal), it is more commonly accepted that the Mandailing people are part of the Batak ethnic group.

The Mandailing community's ethnic origin is a subject of contention among scholars. While some argue that they are part of the Batak Toba ethnic group [34,35], this perspective faces opposition from Mandailing intellectuals and historians. However, an analysis of factors such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group [36,37]. To establish their identity as the Mandailing community, they refer to themselves as "*halak kita*" (referred to: our people) of South Tapanuli [38], rather than as "*halak batak*" (Batak people) [39,40]. Regarding religious affiliation, the majority of the contemporary Mandailing population follows Islam, with a minority of Christians found in specific locations like Pakantan in Upper Mandailing, Medan, and other cities in North Sumatra [25,41]. Before embracing Islam, the religious beliefs of the Mandailing people focused around ancestral spirits referred to as "*si pele begu*" [33], incorporating influences from Hinduism and Buddhism [42]. Recent field research conducted in the Mandailing region revealed remnants and artefacts associated with both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, particularly in the vicinity of Panyabungan within the Greater Mandailing area [43].

Padri wars has brought Islam to Mandailing around 1821 and the Dutch military breached and defeated this movement by 1835 [36,41,44]. The term '*padri*' has two possible origins. One explanation suggests that it stems from the Indonesian word '*padri*,' which referred to priests. It is important to emphasize that the notable figures associated with the Padri movement can be likened to 'Islamic priests' [45]. This movement emerged in the early 1800s as a reformist Islamic movement led by local scholars known as ulama. These ulama sought to purify and reform Islam in the region, criticizing what they perceived as syncretic practices and deviations from strict Islamic teachings [26,41]. They aimed to establish a more orthodox and conservative interpretation of Islam in Mandailing. Padri movement gained support from

various segments of the population, including the rural communities, who were attracted to their message of religious purity and social justice [46]. The Padris' growing influence and power threatened the traditional rulers, known as penghulu, who feared losing their authority and control [41,45].

Before then, in the classical era, marked by the introduction of Hinduism preceding Islam into South Tapanuli, is substantiated by the presence of the Bahal temple in Portibi (now Padang Lawas), a relic of the Panai kingdom during the 12th and 13th centuries. Schnitger [47] documented that around 1000 AD, the Panai kingdom stood as the foremost realm of its time. Nevertheless, around 11th century, the Panai kingdom succumbed to Rajendrakola from India, an adherent of the Hindu faith. Despite the presence of Hindus within the Mandailing Sultanate, the Mandailing populace did not embrace Islam. This decision was influenced by the religion's veneration of numerous idols. Through a traditional lens, there exists a fusion of religion and culture, exemplified by customs such as *upah-upah*³ (gift) during weddings, rites marking childbirth, and housewarming ceremonies. Additionally, observances spanning 7, 40, 100, and 1000 days following the demise of parents are upheld.

The Mandailing Sultanate fell under the dominion of the Aru kingdom circa 1295 AD, spanning the 13th to 15th centuries AD. Subsequent to this period, the Pulungan kingdom emerged, followed by the ascendancy of the Nasution clan, which assumed control over the Mandailing Godang region (now Panyabungan), and the Lubis clan, which governed Mandailing Julu (now Kotanopan).

1.2. Mandailing Philosophy

The values of the Mandailing ethnic philosophy of life called *Poda Na Lima*. *Poda* means advice, *na* means which/that/is, and *lima* means five. In short, *Poda Na Lima* consists of five pieces of advice, namely: i) *Paias Rohamu* (keeping your heart clean); ii) *Paias Pamatangmu* (keeping your body clean); iii) *Paias Parabitonmu* (keeping your clothes clean); iv) *Paias Bagasmu* (keeping your house clean); and v) *Paias Pakaranganmu* (keeping your yard clean) [34,48]. These five values are still firmly held by the Mandailing community and the Mandailing ethnicity in Indonesia and around the world. Despite the Madina people's reputation for being religious, their daily social lives are intertwined with various cultural practices that are imbued with religious significance. These rituals, such as *marhaban* (*barzanzi*)⁴, the use of plain flour, and *upah-upah*, are performed on joyful occasions such as weddings, recoveries from illness, and the attainment of new positions, as well as during significant life transitions such as the birth of a child and moving into a new home [38].

The Mandailing ethnic community has a value system, *Dalihan Na Tolu* which means a forum used to organize life in carrying out *olong* (affection) between *mora*, *kahanggi* and *anak boru* [34,35,49,50]. *Dalihan Na Tolu*, also referred to ‘three stones’ [37], is a cultural value, created by the Creator that guide Bataknese attitude and behavior in the social lives and cultural relation [51]. The three stones encompass family, community, and spirituality. In Mandailing community, *Dalihan Na Tolu* principles are deeply intertwined with Islamic values and teachings. Mandailing Muslim communities incorporate these cultural principles into their daily lives, alongside their Islamic beliefs and practices [51,52]. This concept reinforces the importance of maintaining strong moral character, fostering harmonious relationships, and upholding social justice within the community [34,35,51].

2. Location Settings

The Mandailing Natal region, often abbreviated as Madina, is situated in North Sumatra Province, spanning approximately between 0°10’ and 1°50’ N and 98°10’ and 100°10’ E. This region is located on the west coast of Sumatra, has a 170 km coastline, and is home to 24 islands, though only 4 of these islands are inhabited. In 2021, Madina has a population of over 478,000 people, and has a total area of 6,134 km² [53]. Based on BPS-Statistics of Mandailing Natal Regency [53], during 2021, the predominant land use in this region comprises a mixed vegetation area, accounting for 39.15% or 252.57 hectares, while forested areas occupy 30.04% of the region, followed by palm oil plantations at 27.79%. Settlements in Madina cover 451.38 hectares (0.7%), while agriculture utilizes 2.17% of the land. Additionally, water bodies such as lakes and dams encompass 0.14% of the region's total area. This region is crossed by three river systems including Batang Pungkut, Batang Gadis, and Aek Pohan that represent upper, middle and lower part of the Batang Gadis watershed [54]. These rivers are beneficial for major population in Madina including for agriculture, plantation and industrial sectors. However, for years the rivers have also become threatened to illegal mining activities including sands, rocks and gold [55,56].

The majority of the population in Madina, around 95%, is Muslim, while the remaining 5% consists of Christians (including Catholics), Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of Confucianism. Madina has more than 800 mosques and 70 churches [57], to support the religious practices of its inhabitants, and the region is made up of 23 districts and over 370 villages. Muslim community in Madina, consisting of various ethnic groups, exhibits a rich diversity of cultural and religious practices. Mosques and Islamic schools, known as *madrasah*, hold a prominent position in shaping the religious and cultural life of the community.

Furthermore, active participation in significant cultural and religious traditions, such as the celebration of two major Islamic holidays like *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*, is observed among the Muslim population. A strong emphasis on social responsibility and assisting those in need, in alignment with Islamic principles, is evident through the engagement of the Muslim community in charitable and community service activities. The local government plays a supportive role by implementing policies and providing necessary infrastructure to promote Islamic education [58].

3. Methodology

3.1. Design of the Research

This study adopts qualitative research design, employing combination of phenomenological and ethnographic approaches. Both methodologies are characterized by their exploratory nature, utilizing the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection [59]. By intertwining the principles of phenomenological analysis and ethnography, this current study approach emphasizes a comprehensive exploration of human experiences within their natural settings. While phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of lived experiences, ethnography complements this by elucidating the cultural and social intricacies that contextualize these experiences within specific communities or groups. Additionally, they both underscore the importance of adopting a self-conscious approach to research, wherein researchers are attentive to their own perspectives, biases, and influences throughout the research process. It is worth to be noticed that the primary aim of qualitative research is to comprehend the distinctive characteristics and experiences of individual cases, rather than attempting to establish generalized patterns or trends [60]. This method emphasizes the comprehensive exploration of human behaviors and experiences as they unfold within natural settings [61,62]. Integral to this research is the integration of the subjects' knowledge with that of the researchers, which holds significant importance. This integration facilitates the recognition and documentation of outcomes from the local perspective inherent to the subjects themselves [7,63]. The current study employs an emic approach, which entails adopting the insider's perspective from within the culture where the research project is situated, as previously described in studies by [7,45,64–66]. By embracing an emic approach, the research acknowledges the critical importance of comprehending and interpreting the cultural context and subjective experiences of the subjects, thereby enriching both the research process and its findings.

3.2. Fieldwork and Subjects

The research employed an observational and interview-based approach to collect data. The researchers assumed the roles of both observers and interviewers. The observation phase focused on the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice in the study area, the activities of the Imam during the ritual, and the placement of stones in the graveyard after the final day of remembrance. For the interviews, a systematic process was followed to select appropriate sources. Initial contact with the informants was established through various means, such as phone calls, emails, and WhatsApp messages, to effectively arrange and conduct the interviews.

In prior ethnographic studies, a limited number of subjects were involved. For instance, two studies centered on the practices of anesthesia within two British hospital [67]. Similarly, Baan et al. [7] conducted research on funeral rituals in Toraja with only two informants, while Lee et al. [68] examined the experience of depression among Chinese individuals with a sample size of five informants. In accordance with the present study, data collection encompassed interviews with a total of eight carefully selected subjects, as detailed in Table 1. The age range of the informants in this study was 45-73 years old.

The selection process for these subjects adhered to specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Firstly, the informants were required to hold the roles of imams or leaders of the *Batu Qulhu* dhikr (or remembrance) during funeral ceremonies within the Mandailing community. Secondly, they were expected to possess a profound understanding of the norms and values associated with *Batu Qulhu*. Lastly, the informants needed to be Ulama or respected Islamic spiritual leaders within the local community. Proficiency in the Mandailing language was also a prerequisite for informant selection. To identify suitable subjects, consultations were conducted with local authorities, such as the Indonesian Council of Ulama (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*) in Madina, as well as prominent local figures.

Table 1

The current investigation involved the collection of data during a comprehensive six-month fieldwork period in 2022, specifically spanning from February to July. This fieldwork, which was coordinated by the first and second author, extended over a total of 90 days. The study targeted five specifically chosen districts, selected from a larger pool of 23 districts in the designated study area (refer to Figure 1). The primary objective of the research was to obtain valuable insights into the cultural practices related to the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in the Madina region. The *Batu Qulhu* event occurring in July 2022

was meticulously observed and documented, employing a combination of photographs and videos for meticulous recording. Regarding the data collection process, individual interviews were conducted with each informant, with each session spanning approximately 2 hours. These interviews took place at mutually agreed locations, such as the informant's residence, school office, or the household of the deceased individual where the *Batu Qulhu* ritual took place. Thorough and meticulous recording of all pertinent information was undertaken for subsequent analysis purposes.

Figure 1

3.3. Data Analysis

The present study utilized a qualitative data analysis approach, encompassing three key stages: 1) data reduction; 2) data presentation; and 3) drawing conclusions. This analytical process unfolded iteratively throughout the research. Initially, during the early phases of data collection, the research maintained a broad and overarching focus, and the observations were comprehensive in nature. As the research progressed and the focus of the study became more apparent, the observations evolved to adopt a more structured approach, enabling the acquisition of specific and targeted data.

The data analysis commenced with data reduction, where the gathered information was streamlined and organized to facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Subsequently, the data were presented in a coherent and meaningful manner to facilitate effective interpretation. Finally, the study derived conclusions based on the analyzed data, allowing for the generation of valuable insights into the cultural practices surrounding the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina. Throughout the research, this qualitative data analysis process occurred in a cyclical manner, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the research topic and a nuanced understanding of the intricacies involved. By transitioning from broad and general observations to more structured and specific data collection, the study achieved a comprehensive and detailed exploration of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual's cultural significance and its relevance within the Mandailing community.

3.4. Ethical Consideration

The present investigation was conducted under the auspices of Cluster Interdisciplinary Basic Research, adhering meticulously to stringent ethical guidelines. To ensure ethical compliance, the study received official approval from the Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) University of North Sumatera (UINSU) with the approval number:

0616615683. The utmost care was taken in handling the research data and records, which were securely stored on a password-protected computer housed within the Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, UINSU. Access to these records was strictly restricted to the authors.

In adherence to established ethical standards for data collection and publication, prior to their inclusion in the research, explicit informed consent was meticulously acquired from all eight subjects involved, thereby safeguarding their voluntary and informed engagement in the study. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, a coding system was employed, wherein each subject was allocated an initial "P" followed by pertinent demographic particulars, such as age and current profession. Moreover, all photographic materials featured in this investigation were obtained with written consent from all participants in the native *Bahasa* (Indonesian language), thereby emphasizing the paramount importance of respecting their autonomy and privacy throughout the research process. This consent, granted by the host and announced to all the guests, allows for photography during the ritual and the publication of those images. This unwavering commitment to ethical principles serves to underscore the rigor and integrity of the present inquiry, facilitating an ethically sound exploration of the cultural practices pertaining to the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Origin of the Rituals

Based on the interview, it is mentioned that Syeikh Haji Mustafa Husein bin Husein Nasution bin Umar Nasution Al-Mandaili (or known as Syeikh Mustafa Husein) (1886-1955), is credited as the first Imam to introduce the practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance at funeral ceremonies. In the beginning, was named by *Batu Balancing* based on the color of the stone used in this ritual. This insight was derived from interviews conducted with P1 (65), an ulama, and P2 (52), a teacher at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Panyabungan. In addition, Syeikh Musthafa Husein is also founder of the *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB)⁶ or Purba Baru Islamic boarding school. The practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been preserved and perpetuated by his students, who have established recitation congregations in various locations such as mosques, prayer rooms, and *surau*⁷. Notably, the students and alumni of Musthafawiyah have played a significant role in its development and expansion beyond Madina region, with a presence in several other provinces across Indonesia.

As the oldest *pesantren* (or boarding school) in North Sumatra, the influence of this practice extends widely, facilitated by the widespread distribution of its students and graduates.

An alternative explanation, provided by P3 (73) an ulama, diverges slightly from the previous informant. He has pointed out that the tradition of using *Batu Qulhu* or *Batu Balancing*⁸ as a medium for remembrance was explained with a slight variation, focusing on the customs upheld by elderly parents, ulama, village *malims* (religious teachers), without mentioning any specific individual. It was a means to alleviate the sorrow experienced by the bereaved and served as a form of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends. In addition to the customary acts of attending funerals and observing mourning rituals, the strategies employed to alleviate the profound grief experienced by individuals extended further. These encompassed multifaceted practices such as providing emotional support, proffering words of guidance and solace to foster resilience and acceptance in the face of adversity. Moreover, individuals were invited to partake in collective prayer sessions, where the use of *Batu Qulhu* stones served as facilitative elements in creating a conducive environment for these spiritual gatherings. P3 further elucidated that this method, referred to as *alak na jolo martakziah*, involved family members, parents, spouses, children, relatives, and neighbors coming together for *tahlilan*.

“In the past people paid tribute to the homes of people who died; parents, wife, husband, children, siblings and neighbors are tahlilan, starting from reciting istighfar, al-Fatihah, tahlil, prayers and concluding selawat. To make the dhikr in congregation more solemn, they add media by using a Batu Balancing (white stone) within size of an adult's big toe or larger than that. In the past, the white stone was said to be a Batu Balancing, now it is better known as the Batu Qulhu”.

Batu Qulhu ritual refers to the use of certain stone as a means of carrying out dhikr worship. In general, this type of stone is typically known as white pebble. It should be noticed that most of these white pebbles are predominantly comprised of marble, a rock formation characterized by its crystallized carbonates and can easily be found in the riparian zone. Here, the family of the deceased person collect these stones from the nearest river. As mentioned in the interview, this ritual chooses approximately the size of an adult's thumb to enhance the solemnity of the remembrance (as can be seen in Figure 2a). During the interview P4 (65), emphasized that in the past, people paid homage to the homes of the deceased, engaging in *tahlilan* rituals that encompassed prayers and concluding with ‘selawat’ (see Figure 2b). To augment the collective remembrance, *Batu Qulhu*, the size of an adult's big toe or larger, was employed. Over time, the *Batu Balancing* came to be recognized as the *Batu Qulhu*.

Figure 2

The utilization of *Batu Qulhu* in death ceremonies is also underpinned by the geographical sequences. Firstly, the abundance of rivers in Madina, notably the Batang Gadis River, Batang Natal River, Aek Kalungan River and Angkola River, facilitated the easy availability of these stones in the past. Nowadays, these rivers also threatened by illegal gold mining activities [55], and tend to pollute due to its waste [56]. Secondly, these stones possess distinct characteristics that contribute to their suitability for the purpose at hand. They exhibit a white hue, imparting a visually soothing effect, while their cool and clean appearance further enhances their appeal. Third, these stones demonstrate resilience in withstanding the rigors of varying weather conditions, including heat, cold, and rainfall. Furthermore, the recitation of *Batu Qulhu* rituals is believed by the community to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave.

4.2. The Contemporary Practice of Batu Qulhu in the Mandailing Community

In the past, Islamic practices in Sumatra have exhibited influences from mystical and shamanistic traditions e.g., [69,70]. However, it is important to note that the religious activities associated with the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* are not influenced by shamanism, but rather stem solely from religious traditions previously followed by religious scholars, religious teachers, and traditional leaders. Currently, the contemporary practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been inherited and embraced by Muslim society in Madina. Based on interview with P4 (65), it is evident that in the past, the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance adhered to strict protocols as mentioned in the following statement.

“The tradition of recalling the Batu Qulhu was once a highly regulated practice. It required seeking consent from both the village leader and the syekh. Mastery of the 20 essential attributes of Allah was necessary, alongside the ability to read the Quran and comprehend its teachings. The stones themselves had to possess a pure white hue. The recitation of Qulhu would take place during evening gatherings, where all the stones present had to be utilized fully, leaving no remnants behind before the congregation dispersed”.

These procedures include the following: 1) the procession necessitated obtaining permission from the head of the village⁹ and *tuan guru*¹⁰ (or *kulifah*); 2) the ritual leader was required to commit to memory and comprehend the twenty obligatory attributes of God, encompassing *nafsiyah* (self-related attributes) nature, *salbiyah* (attributes related to existence) nature, *ma'ani* (abstract attributes of God) nature, and *maknawiyah* (the essential nature and prevalence of *ma'ani*) nature; 3) the officiating Imam was expected to possess proficiency in

both written and spoken Arabic-Malay; 4) the Imam leading the remembrance was required to proficiently recite the Qur'an and comprehend its meaning; 5) the *Batu Qulhu* utilized in the ritual had to be of a white hue; and 6) the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* transpired during evening hours, and all the stones had to be completed within a single procession conducted in the presence of the congregation. Preceding the initiation of the ritual, it is customary for the priest to cleanse himself through the observance of ablution, mirroring the ritualistic cleansing process associated with prayer as mentioned by P7 (60).

Basically, this ritual has many similarities to *tahlilan* tradition especially in the context prayers and recitations. This practice generally has been carried out by many Nahdatul Ulama (NU) community in Sumatra [12,71]. However, in *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, there are five Imams that lead this procession with different assignment. These Imams are voluntarily appointed by the group and relatively flexible based on their own agreement. The priests then read several prayers that beneficial to seek forgiveness for the deceased, his/her family as well to congregation. The Imams also recite some verses from the Surat of the Quran (QS), and praise the God. In this *Batu Qulhu* ritual, the congregation are voluntarily attending the ritual without any formal invitation. The ritual is held in three consecutive days after the death, and organized by group manager, neighbors and the Imams, and commonly referred to *Serikat Tolong Menolong* (STM) or Union of Help. The Imams and the congregation are artfully arranged in a circular formation, tailored to the venue's conditions. This arrangement allows for the placement of stones in front of the congregation, effortlessly within reach for the worshippers' right hand. During the fieldwork in Panyabungan Kota district, it was noticed that there were more than 30 piles of stones in the congregation. As additional information that commonly they are sitting on the floor covered with *tikar* or mat, but some people also held the ritual with chairs. The priests hold the responsibility for overseeing the course of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual. The following Table 2 describes each Imams' responsibility in *Batu Qulhu* procession.

Table 2

As presented in table 2 that the five Imams stone remembrance fulfill distinct roles during funeral rituals. The first Imam recites *wasilah*, invoking blessings upon the prophets, companions, scholars, and deceased parents. The second Imam performs *takhtim*, while the third recites dhikr tahlil. The fourth Imam recites selected verses from the Qur'an. The fifth priest concludes with a closing prayer and religious guidance, including expressions of gratitude to Allah SWT and salutations to Prophet Muhammad SAW, supplications for the forgiveness of the deceased's sins, and prayers for the widening of their grave. The sermon

includes an oath regarding the deceased's parents, beseeching acceptance of their worship, forgiveness of sins, and enlargement of their grave. Additionally, the imam delivers a sermon during this ritual (text written in Mandailing and the translation can be read in Supplementary file).

The current study also reveals that *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Madina is held in three consecutive days where:

- In the day 1, the remembrance is taken where the Imam start the ceremony. In the first meeting, the priests wear neat clothes, wear caps, turbans and sarongs. Reflecting the figure of a religious expert and placing his position is a person who is highly respected in society. Their sitting position is arranged in a special place, different from the congregation in general. Here, the Imam will also read out the order of the *Batu Qulhu* procession.
- For day 2, similar to the preceding event, the order of events for the first night procession remains unchanged. Prior to commencing the remembrance ceremony, the 'Imam pembaca takhtim' provided an explanation that after the recitation of the *takhtim*, the congregation would engage in the dhikr of *Batu Qulhu*, and were kindly requested to maintain their positions until the conclusion of the event. However, in contrast to the previous occasion, on the second night of recitation, Qulhu stones are made available to facilitate the dhikr and are arranged in a stacked formation in front of the congregation. Subsequently, the Qulhu remembrance stones are accumulated in the same location. The prescribed procedure entails the recitation of QS 112: 1-3, followed by the selection of a single stone. For each subsequent repetition, an additional stone is selected, such that two stones are chosen for a two-time reading, three stones for a three-time reading, four stones for a four-time reading, and so forth, in accordance with established practice.
- In day 3, *Batu Qulhu* procession replicates the format observed on the second meeting. However, a notable distinction lies in the extended duration of the dhikr, necessitated by the requirement to recite the prayer over each stone in the presence of the congregation. It is imperative to sustain the continuity of the dhikr until its completion, without interruption. Subsequent to the remembrance, a collective prayer and *salawat* are gathered. The *Batu Qulhu* employed as aids for remembrance are carefully placed within plastic burlap bags or buckets (as can be seen in Figure 3a). The event concludes with a religious sermon or *tausiyah*, wherein expressions of gratitude are articulated on behalf of the congregation and the afflicted families. The content of the religious sermon encompasses themes such as death, the retribution of the grave, and serves as a reminder for individuals

to perpetually prepare themselves and enhance their devotion before the arrival of death. This is because all living beings are destined to experience mortality (QS 3: 185), and its arrival cannot be postponed, even if one seeks refuge within a lofty and robust fortress (QS 4: 78).

In addition to the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, on the fourth day following an individual's passing, *Batu Qulhu* stones are transported to the cemetery and carefully positioned above the burial site, as illustrated in Figure 3b. The procedure involves the preparation of the grave bed, which includes the leveling off the ground in the designated area assigned for burial. Subsequently, these stones are poured in a manner that commences from the head of the deceased and extends towards their feet. Although typically performed by the bereaved family, this task can also be undertaken by others, such as neighbors or relatives. During the placement of the stones on the grave, it is customary to recite the phrase "*Bismillahi milata 'ala Rasulullah*," which translates to "In the name of Allah and in the religion of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh." The recitation performed during this act is identical to the prayer recitation conducted during the interment of the deceased's body. It is noteworthy that the selection of this specific recitation lacks a distinct foundational basis but rather originates from established tradition.

Figure 3

Presently, *Batu Qulhu* dhikr has undergone significant transformations over time, likely influenced by environmental factors, evolving understandings within the community, and technological advance, as well as societal changes. Presently, the implementation of the ritual varies across different areas of Madina. Traditionally, some individuals engage in the *Batu Qulhu* practice following the *Maghrib* prayer (after sunset) or around 6.30 pm – 7.00 pm local time and typically after the *Isya* prayer (7.30 pm – 8.00 pm), collectively performed at the mosque during evening as mentioned by P8 (55). Among adult women, it takes place in the evening preceding *Maghrib*, while among the male youth (*naposo bulung*) and female youth (*nauli bulung*), it occurs in the afternoon (after *Asr* or around 3.00 pm) as mentioned by P6 (45). Adult male worshipers partake in this practice during the evening after the *Isya* prayer on the first, second, and third days following a person's demise. As mentioned earlier, the *Batu Qulhu* employed in this remembrance ritual is a stone recognized by the bereaved family, retrieved from the river. To ensure cleanliness, the stones are consistently washed and kept in a plastic sack or a large container. Nevertheless, owing to the evolving perspectives of individuals and the limited availability of such rocks in riverbeds, these stones are now obtainable from multiple outlets across the Madina region, as noted by P5 (50):

“*Batu Qulhu* are taken from the river by the family, if they are dirty, they are cleaned. Now, *Batu Qulhu* are easy to get and are sold in flower shops and building material store”).

4.3. Aspect of Norms of *Batu Qulhu* ritual

The *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice, introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein, holds significant cultural value in the Mandailing community of Madina. This ritual utilizes white pebbles from nearby rivers for dhikr worship and to alleviate the suffering of the deceased in the grave. It has been preserved and perpetuated by Syeikh Mustafa Husein's students and alumni, who have established recitation congregations in the region. As the oldest pesantren in North Sumatra, the influence of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends widely beyond Madina, with its students and graduates playing a significant role in its development and expansion. Equivalent cultural customs, such as the *tahlilan* tradition observed within the NU community in Sumatra, are also prevalent in Java under the same name. In Java, the Muslim community holds *tahlilan* remembrances on many occasions, a tradition historically introduced by the *Wali Songo* (The Nine Saints of Islam) [12].

Strict protocols surround the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance. Prior permission from village and religious leaders, referred to as *Tuan Guru*, is required. The officiating Imam must possess proficiency in Arabic-Malay language. These protocols ensure the solemnity and authenticity of the ritual, aligning with the importance placed on established rituals and cultural heritage. The *tahlilan* tradition within the NU community also follows specific rituals, emphasizing the shared values of upholding traditions and seeking solace in times of mourning. As previously mentioned, obtaining permission from both village and religious leaders is necessary, as indicated by P2 (52):

‘*mangido izin Parjolo tu Tuan Guru*’ (English: Ask permission from *Tuan Guru* first). Commonly answered by the teacher with ‘*olo*’ *silahkan acara dilanjut* (English: Okay, please continue the ritual), ‘*marimom mau au*’ (English: I will follow).

Batu Qulhu remembrance serves as a form of communal support, uniting family members, relatives, neighbors, and friends in times of sorrow. This fosters a sense of unity and solidarity within the Mandailing community, reflecting the value placed on collective resilience. Similar communal support can be found in other practices, such as the collective remembrance gatherings associated with the *tahlilan* tradition, reinforcing the cultural value of community bonds and support networks. The significance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends beyond its cultural and spiritual aspects. It represents a cherished cultural heritage embraced by the

Muslim society in Madina, highlighting the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of identity. This ritual also plays crucial role in fostering social cohesion through different ways, including community participation, shared religious practices, as well transmission of values and traditions. This study also highlights solidarity aspect as other form of social cohesion in the societal level [20]. While specific to the Mandailing community, similar practices can be observed in other regions in Indonesia, especially in the traditional Islam community [4,72]. They are still fulfilling the shared human need to honor the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and preserve cultural traditions as integral elements of identity and social cohesion. For a comprehensive overview of the norm aspects in the tradition of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community, please refer to Table 3.

Table 3

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ritual stands as a significant cultural and religious practice within the Mandailing community's funeral ceremonies. This tradition, which involves using stones for dhikr worship, holds deep historical and spiritual roots. While its origins can be traced back to Syeikh Mustafa Husein, who introduced the ritual, variations in accounts highlight the complex nature of its origin. Over time, the procession of *Batu Qulhu* has undergone modifications to streamline its organization, exemplifying the adaptive nature of cultural practices while maintaining their essence. Although *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar commemorative practices can be found in other regions. These rituals reflect the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, seeking solace through collective ceremonies, and preserving cultural traditions as integral components of identity and social cohesion. *Batu Qulhu* ritual serves as a testament to the rich cultural and religious heritage of the Mandailing community in North Sumatra, encapsulating collective mourning, spiritual devotion, and the preservation of cultural identity. By adhering to these rituals, individuals reaffirm their cultural identity and strengthen their sense of belonging within the community. Shared cultural practices during funeral ceremonies serve as markers of group identity, fostering a sense of solidarity among participants. As funeral ceremonies continue to play a pivotal role in communities worldwide, understanding and appreciating the significance of these rituals contributes to our broader knowledge of human beliefs, traditions, and the ways in which we commemorate and honor the departed. The employed methods in this study allows for an in-depth exploration of the cultural, social, and emotional dimensions surrounding funeral practices within specific communities. This

approach provides nuanced insights into the significance, symbolism, and evolving meanings attributed to funeral rituals, thereby enriching scholarly discourse and bridging gaps in understanding of this complex phenomenon.

While this study presents a preliminary investigation into the *Batu Qulhu* ritual, it acknowledges certain limitations. The absence of historical documentation detailing the ritual within the Mandailing community necessitates a proposed historical approach through extensive literature review, drawing upon the writings of earlier ulama. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the limited number of informants and the specific observed processions may not fully capture the diverse procedural variations of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual across the entire Madina region. Recognizing the modifications made by different communities based on the guidance of their Imams or practical considerations further adds to the complexity of the ritual. Given these findings, the study recommends the cultural preservation and educational promotion of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual for the benefit of future generations. The creation of appropriate documentation, such as books and videos, accessible through various platforms including social media, can contribute to the wider dissemination of knowledge and understanding of the ritual. These efforts support the cultural preservation of the *Batu Qulhu* tradition and foster greater appreciation among the Mandailing community and beyond.

Declarations

CReditT authorship contribution statement

Sahrul: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data collection, Data interpretation, Writing - original draft, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Afrahul Fadhila Daulai:** Methodology, Data collection, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – Review and editing. **Anang Widhi Nirwansyah:** Data interpretation, Formal analysis, Writing – Review and editing, Visualization. **Seyithan Demirdag:** Writing – Review and editing, Validation, Resources.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement

Data included in article/supplementary material/referenced in article.

Ethics Statement

This study was ethically reviewed and approved by Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) at the University of North Sumatera (UINSU) under approval number 0616615683. All participants, including those photographed, provided informed consent to participate in the study.

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Figures

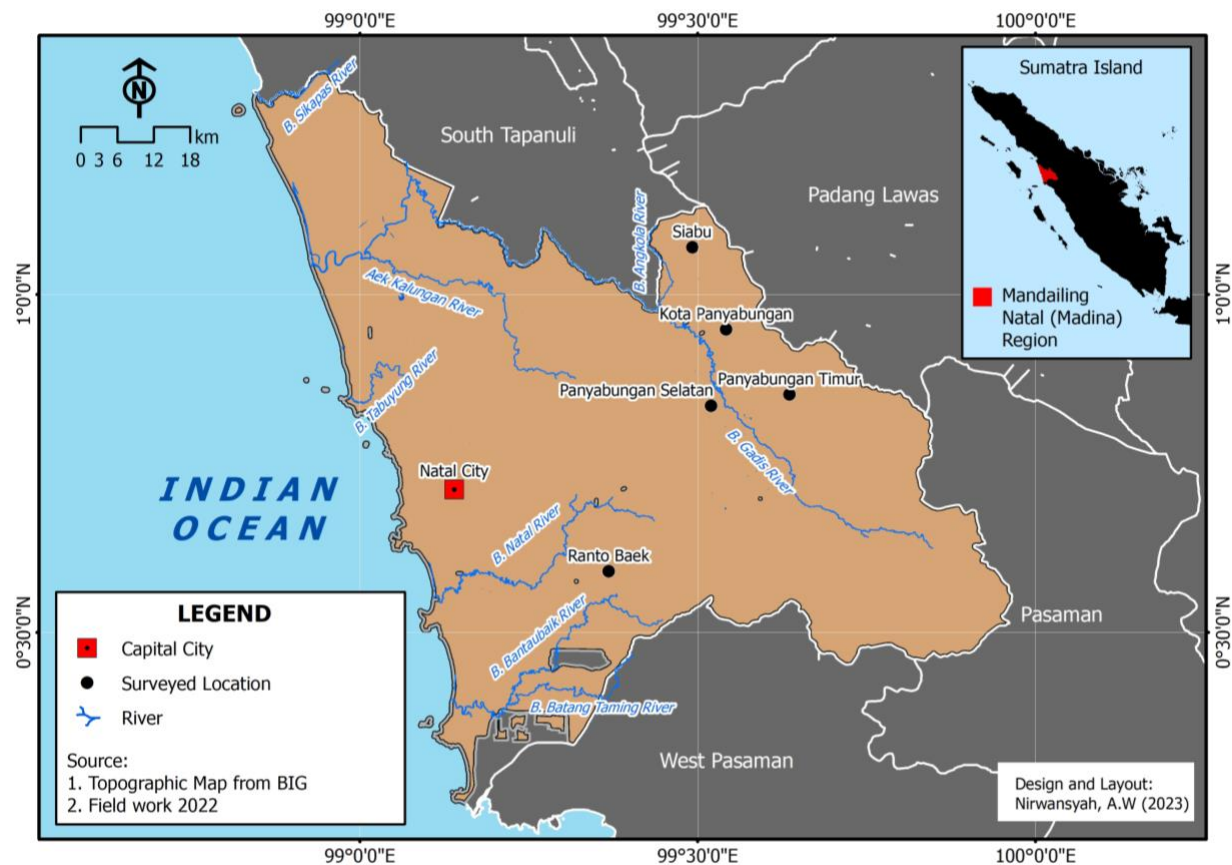


Figure 1. Area of the current research



Figure 2. a) White pebble collected for *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Mandailing, where each bucket contains 70 to 100 stones; and b) the congregation of the Mandailing Muslim community during this obituary ceremony. (Photography by Sahrul on 22 July 2022)



Figure 3. *Batu Qulhu* remembrance by adult male where a) the organizer has collected and kept the stones back into the plastic sack for fourth day of casting procession; and b) where *Batu Qulhu* is finally poured on the grave of deceased person. (photographs of the ritual [a] held at P4 residence on 22 July 2022; and [b] white stone teeming in the day 4) (taken by Sahrul)

846 **Table 1.** Pseudonym of subjects' information in the current study

Informants	Initial	Age	Education Level	Occupation
1	P1	65	Bachelor degree	Teacher
2	P2	52	Bachelor degree	Teacher
3	P3	73	Bachelor degree	Ulama and local public figure
4	P4	65	Master degree	Public servant
5	P5	50	Master degree	Public servant
6	P6	45	Master degree	Teacher
7	P7	60	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Businessman
8	P8	55	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Teacher

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848 **Table 2.** Construction of each Imam and their task in *Batu Qulhu* procession

Imam	Local term	Assignment	Quran recitation
First Imam	<i>Imam pembaca silsilah</i>	– Reciting <i>istighfar</i> ¹¹ three times; – Reciting <i>wasilah</i> to nabi (propeth Muhammad pbuh), his appostles, ulama and parents of the deceased person, all Muslim and the congregation	– QS 1: 1-6
Second Imam	<i>Imam pembaca takhtim</i>	– Reciting <i>takhtim</i> (known as "reading for the reward of the deceased" or "reciting for the benefit of the deceased")	– QS 112: 1-3 – QS 113: 1-5 – QS 114: 1-5 – QS 1: 1-7 – QS 2: 1-5; 255; 284-286 – QS 33: 56
Third Imam	<i>Imam pembaca tahlil</i>	– Reciting <i>tahlil</i> (compilation of dhikr) including: • <i>Istighfar</i> ;	

-
- Reciting ‘afdhalu dzikri’ followed by First *syahadat tauhid*¹². The congregation then answer by ‘hayyun baqi’;
 - Reciting second *syahadat tauhid*. Then answered by the congregation with ‘hayyun maujud’;
 - Reciting the third *syahadat tauhid*. And answered by all attendance by ‘hayyum maqsud’.
- Finally, reciting *syahadat tauhid* together with the congregation 100 times. Here the congregation gradually loud their praise and at same time shaking the head

Fourth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca Al Baqarah</i>	– Reciting some verses from the Quran that contains concept and advise about calamities	– QS 2: 152-156 – QS 67: 1-2
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Fifth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca doa</i>	– Reciting closing prayer, with the following structure:
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- *Basmallah*¹³;
- Praise to the Creator and His messenger (Muhammad pbuh);
- Prayers for all Moslem (men and women);
- Prayers for the deceased person and the family;
- Prayers for attendance in the congregation;

851 **Table 3.** Identified aspect of norms in the practice of *Batu Qulhu* Remembrance

Aspect of norm	Description
Preservation of traditions	The culture emphasizes the preservation and perpetuation of rituals and practices, such as the <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance, which was introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein and continued by his students and alumni. The students and graduates of Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding school play a significant role in preserving and expanding this practice.
Community support	The culture values community support during times of grief and mourning. The tradition of using <i>Batu Qulhu</i> serves as a means of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends, helping to alleviate sorrow and foster resilience.
Spiritual gatherings	Collective prayer sessions and remembrance gatherings are highly valued in the culture. The use of the stones during these gatherings creates a conducive environment for spiritual practices and collective remembrance.
Respect for the deceased	The culture emphasizes respect and care for the deceased. The ritual of collecting white pebbles, predominantly marble, from nearby rivers to be used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance shows reverence for the departed.
Connection to nature	The culture maintains a connection with nature, as the stones used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals are collected from rivers. The easy availability of these stones in the past and their resilience in varying weather conditions highlight the importance of nature in the culture.
Alleviation of suffering	The recitation of <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals is believed to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave. This demonstrates a value of compassion and empathy within the culture.

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¹ Peace be upon him

² Tuanku Rao is characterized as enigmatic figure and one of the two significant leaders of the Padri movement, shared this status alongside Imam Bonjol himself. Tuanku Rao's origins can be traced to *Huta na Godang* or *Huta Godang*, also known as *Tano Godang*, located in Mandailing Julu (Upper Mandailing) [25].

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- ³ *Upah-upah* refers to cultural practice or tradition of offering gifts or monetary compensation during significant events or ceremonies. The term "upah" itself can be translated as "wages" or "payment". *Upah-upah* is deeply rooted in the Mandailing culture and is often observed during various occasions such as weddings, funerals, or community gatherings.
- ⁴ The word *barzanzi* is associated with the name of Syeikh Barzanji, a prominent scholar and Sufi poet from Kurdistan. His renowned work, titled "*Mawlid al-Barzanji*," is a poetic composition that narrates the birth and life of the Prophet Muhammad, often recited during religious gatherings and celebrations.
- ⁶ *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB), was founded in 1912 by Syeikh Musthafa Husein Nasution. This Islamic boarding school is located in Purba Baru sub-district, Madina Regency, North Sumatra [73]. Further reference on this boarding school can be read in Khairurrijal [74].
- ⁷ Surau means a place of worship or a small mosque-like structure. The surau typically serves as a communal prayer space or a modest mosque, wherein Muslims congregate for congregational prayers, religious discourses, and other religious engagements.
- ⁸ Some community in Madina also use term of *Batu Bontar* to refer *Batu Qulhu*.
- ⁹ One crucial determinant is obtaining authorization from the village leader. The village head holds a position akin to that of a revered monarch, embodying nobility and commanding profound respect.
- ¹⁰ *Tuan guru* or teacher serves as a religious authority, serving as an exemplar and establishing a benchmark for societal norms through their words and actions. Additionally, they are often revered as sacred individuals known for their healing abilities, and they serve as a source of supplication for various needs such as well-being, sustenance, companionship, agricultural prosperity, and attainment of blessings.
- ¹¹ The act of attempting forgiveness from the Almighty God, commonly by saying 'astagfirullāhu
- ¹² The *syahadat tauhid* contains declaration of belief in the oneness of God Almighty
- ¹³ *Basmallah* is phrase mention to the God before beginning any action or speech. It spells 'Bismillahi rāhmani rāhiim'. It means: in the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful.

Figures

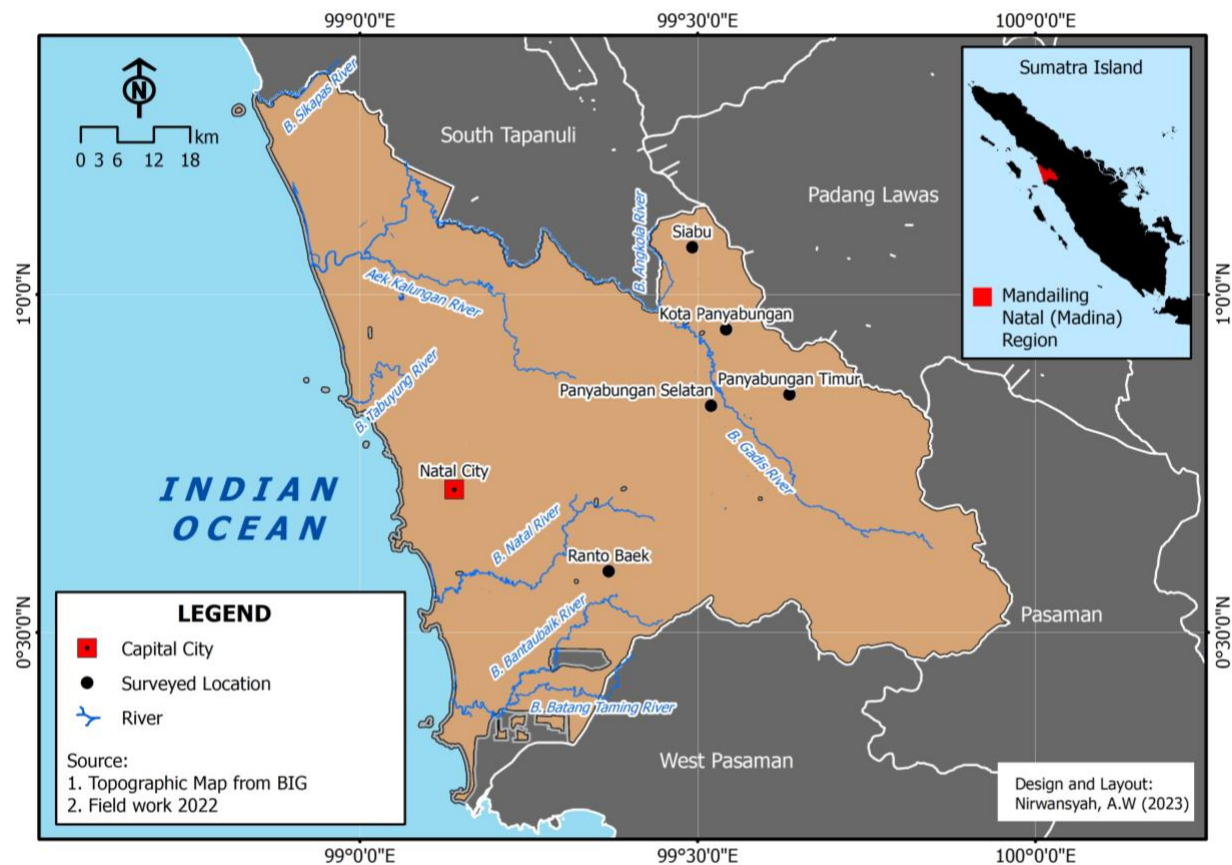




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Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing
Community of North Sumatra

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Participant Consent:

I am 18 years of age or older and hereby grant the researcher designated above from Universitas Negeri
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UINSU. I will make no monetary claim against UINSU for the use of the photograph(s), audio
recording(s), and/or video recording(s).

Printed Name: Hasan Ma'sum Nasution

Date: 02 Agustus 2023

Signature: 

If Participant is under 18 years old, consent must be provided by the parent or legal guardian:

Printed Name: _____


Date: _____

Signature: _____

OSU Researcher:

Name: Dr. Sahrul, M.A.

Date: 2 Agustus 2023

Signature: 

PHOTO/VIDEO PUBLICATION RELEASE FORM

Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing
Community of North Sumatra

Researcher(s): Dr. Sahrul, M.A

Contact Information: Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic
Communication, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UINSU), Jl. Williem Iskandar Ps. V Medan Estate, Medan,
20371, Indonesia; sahrul@uinsu.ac.id

Participant Consent:

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Islam Sumatra Utara (UINSU) permission to photograph, audio record, and/or videotape my voice and
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UINSU. I will make no monetary claim against UINSU for the use of the photograph(s), audio
recording(s), and/or video recording(s).

Printed Name: MUNAWIR LUBIS

Date: 02 Agustus 2023

Signature: Munawir

If Participant is under 18 years old, consent must be provided by the parent or legal guardian:

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

OSU Researcher:

Name: Dr. Sahrul, M.A

Date: _____

Signature: Sahrul

2 Agustus 2023

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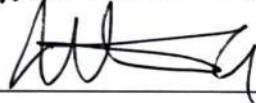
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UINSU. I will make no monetary claim against UINSU for the use of the photograph(s), audio
recording(s), and/or video recording(s).

Printed Name: Ahlan Nuhur Lubis

Date: 2 Agustus 2023

Signature: 

If Participant is under 18 years old, consent must be provided by the parent or legal guardian:

Printed Name: _____

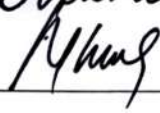
Date: _____

Signature: _____

OSU Researcher:

Name: Dr. Sahrul, M.A

Date: 2 Agustus 2023

Signature: 

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UINSU. I will make no monetary claim against UINSU for the use of the photograph(s), audio
recording(s), and/or video recording(s).

Printed Name:

Ucot Harahap

Date:

2 Agustus 2023

Signature:



If Participant is under 18 years old, consent must be provided by the parent or legal guardian:

Printed Name:

Date:

Signature:

OSU Researcher:

Name:

Dr. Sahrul, M.A

Date:

2 Agustus 2023

Signature:



PHOTO/VIDEO PUBLICATION RELEASE FORM

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UINSU. I will make no monetary claim against UINSU for the use of the photograph(s), audio
recording(s), and/or video recording(s).

Printed Name: Aswath HAZIBUAN

Date: 02 Agustus 2023

Signature: 

If Participant is under 18 years old, consent must be provided by the parent or legal guardian:

Printed Name: _____

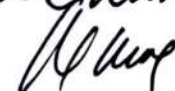
Date: _____

Signature: _____

OSU Researcher:

Name: Dr. Sahrul, M.A

Date: 2 Agustus 2023

Signature: 

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UINSU. I will make no monetary claim against UINSU for the use of the photograph(s), audio
recording(s), and/or video recording(s).

Printed Name:

TUNAIDI

Date:

02 Agustus 2023

Signature:



If Participant is under 18 years old, consent must be provided by the parent or legal guardian:

Printed Name:

Date:

Signature:

OSU Researcher:

Name:

Dr. Sahrul, M.A

Date:

2 Agustus 2023

Signature:



PHOTO/VIDEO PUBLICATION RELEASE FORM

Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing
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Researcher(s): Dr. Sahrul, M.A

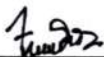
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UINSU. I will make no monetary claim against UINSU for the use of the photograph(s), audio
recording(s), and/or video recording(s).

Printed Name: Bukhari Parinduri Date: 02 Agustus 2023

Signature: 

If Participant is under 18 years old, consent must be provided by the parent or legal guardian:

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

OSU Researcher:

Name: Dr. Sahrul, M.A

Date: 2 Agustus 2023

Signature: 

PHOTO/VIDEO PUBLICATION RELEASE FORM

Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing
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UINSU. I will make no monetary claim against UINSU for the use of the photograph(s), audio
recording(s), and/or video recording(s).

Printed Name: Ayuluddin Rangkuti Date: 02 Agustus 2023

Signature: _____

If Participant is under 18 years old, consent must be provided by the parent or legal guardian:

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

OSU Researcher:

Name: _____

Dr. Sahrul, M.A

Date: _____

2 Agustus 2023

Signature: _____

PHOTO/VIDEO PUBLICATION RELEASE FORM

Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing
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UINSU. I will make no monetary claim against UINSU for the use of the photograph(s), audio
recording(s), and/or video recording(s).

Printed Name: RAHMAN SALEH

Date: 02 Agustus 2023

Signature: 

If Participant is under 18 years old, consent must be provided by the parent or legal guardian:

Printed Name:

Date:

Signature: _____

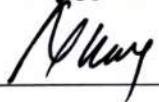
OSU Researcher:

Name:

Dr. Sahrul M.A

Date:

2 Agustus 2023

Signature: 

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Researcher(s): Dr. Sahrul, M.A

Contact Information: Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic
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UINSU. I will make no monetary claim against UINSU for the use of the photograph(s), audio
recording(s), and/or video recording(s).

Printed Name: Azhar Hadi

Date: 02 Agustus 2023

Signature: Mai

If Participant is under 18 years old, consent must be provided by the parent or legal guardian:

Printed Name:

Date:

Signature: _____

OSU Researcher:

Name:

Dr. Sahrul, M.A

Date:

2 Agustus 2023

Signature: Mai

Title of the study involving human participant(s):

Author Name(s):

Institution(s):

Date:

I, the undersigned author of the above-mentioned study, hereby declare the following:

1. I have obtained written informed consent from the participant(s) / patient(s) for the publication of this study, any accompanying data and images. Where consent was obtained from someone other than the participant(s) / patient(s), I confirm that this proxy was authorised to provide consent on the participant's / patient's behalf.
2. Where the participant(s) / patient(s) is/are a minor(s), we followed local laws on the age and circumstances under which they may consent for themselves. If they were not of legal age to consent, consent was obtained from an authorised proxy i.e., the parents or legal guardian(s). If the minor(s) has/have reasonable understanding of the informed consent and implications, signature (or assent, as appropriate) was also obtained from the minor(s).
3. Where the participant(s) / patient(s) provided consent themselves, I confirm that they had capacity to do so, and any mental or physical disabilities were taken into consideration in the process of informing and obtaining written informed consent.
4. Where the participant(s) / patient(s) has/have died, I confirm that the consent given still allows for publication.
5. I confirm that all content presented in this study, associated data and images have been deidentified and anonymized to the best possible extent.
6. The original signed and dated consent form is held by the treating institution or appropriate governing local / regional / national body and will be retained according to the policies and procedures of the institution or governing body.
7. The written informed consent form (please **do not** include with your submission) includes all relevant information pertinent to each participant / patient (such as the name, age, condition, medical history, diagnosis, and treatment)
8. The participant(s) / patient(s) / authorized proxy were fully informed of the purpose of this study, the potential risks and benefits of publication, and the consequence of disclosing their personal information.
9. The participant(s) / patient(s) or authorized proxy were given the opportunity to ask questions regarding publication of the study, had their questions answered fully and have consented to publish all associated data and images. In the case of clinical studies, the participant(s) / patient(s) or authorized proxy approved the final version of the manuscript.
10. The participant(s) / patient(s) or legal guardian(s) were informed that their consent and participation in the publication of this study is entirely voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw their consent at any time.
11. If this is a clinical study manuscript, I confirm that at least one of the authors of this paper was involved in the care of the participant(s) / patient(s).
12. I confirm that my article complies with the appropriate local / regional / national law on consent and privacy.

By signing this declaration form, I acknowledge that I have read and understood the information provided above, and I attest to the accuracy of this declaration. I understand that any false or misleading information may result in the rejection of the manuscript or other disciplinary actions.

As corresponding author, I hereby declare that I sign this document on behalf of all the authors of the above-mentioned study involving human participants.

Corresponding author's signature:	
Date:	

Please submit this **Human Participant Declaration Form** along with the manuscript to the journal. **Note:** The written informed consent form must NOT be submitted with your manuscript but must be made available to the journal if specifically requested.

Please retain a copy of this declaration for your records.

Title of the study involving human participant(s):

Author Name(s): *Dr. SAHRUL, M.A*

Institution(s): *Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication,
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UINSU)*

Date: *10 April 2024*

I, the undersigned author of the above-mentioned study, hereby declare the following:

1. I have obtained written informed consent from the participant(s) / patient(s) for the publication of this study, any accompanying data and images. Where consent was obtained from someone other than the participant(s) / patient(s), I confirm that this proxy was authorised to provide consent on the participant's / patient's behalf.
2. Where the participant(s) / patient(s) is/are a minor(s), we followed local laws on the age and circumstances under which they may consent for themselves. If they were not of legal age to consent, consent was obtained from an authorised proxy i.e., the parents or legal guardian(s). If the minor(s) has/have reasonable understanding of the informed consent and implications, signature (or assent, as appropriate) was also obtained from the minor(s).
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9. The participant(s) / patient(s) or authorized proxy were given the opportunity to ask questions regarding publication of the study, had their questions answered fully and have consented to publish all associated data and images. In the case of clinical studies, the participant(s) / patient(s) or authorized proxy approved the final version of the manuscript.
10. The participant(s) / patient(s) or legal guardian(s) were informed that their consent and participation in the publication of this study is entirely voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw their consent at any time.
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As corresponding author, I hereby declare that I sign this document on behalf of all the authors of the above-mentioned study involving human participants.

Corresponding author's signature:	<i>Muhammad</i>
Date:	<i>10 April 2024</i>

Please submit this **Human Participant Declaration Form** along with the manuscript to the journal. **Note:** The written informed consent form must NOT be submitted with your manuscript but must be made available to the journal if specifically requested.

Please retain a copy of this declaration for your records.

Ethics Committee Letter of Approval

No. 0616615683

Project Title: *Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra*

Researcher: Dr. Sahrul

Affiliation:

Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UINSU)

Date: 1-May-2022 to 31-October-2022 | **Contract Number:** 328

Introduction

This letter confirms the approval of the ethical research proposal for the project titled "Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra" by Dr. Sahrul, affiliated with the Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program at UINSU.

Approval for Research Methods

The Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved the proposed research methods, which include:

- Interviews
- Observations
- Photo collection

Ethical Considerations

The committee commends the inclusion of the following ethical considerations in the research proposal:

- **Informed Consent:**
 - A process to obtain written informed consent from all participants before interviews, observations, and photo collection must be implemented.
 - The consent form should explain the research purpose, data collection methods, potential risks and benefits of participation, confidentiality measures, and the right to withdraw from the study at any point.
- **Confidentiality:**
 - Measures to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants must be outlined. This includes anonymizing interview transcripts, observation notes, and photographs.
 - Data storage protocols that protect participant privacy should be established.
- **Respect for Cultural Sensitivities:**
 - The research should be conducted with sensitivity to the cultural practices and beliefs of the Mandailing community regarding death and funerals.
 - Permission should be sought from appropriate community authorities before commencing research activities.

Conditions of Approval

This approval is granted with the following conditions:

- Any deviations from the approved research plan must be reported to the Ethics Committee for review and approval.
- Unexpected ethical issues arising during the research must be reported to the Ethics Committee promptly.
- A copy of the final research report summarizing the findings and addressing any ethical considerations must be submitted to the Ethics Committee upon completion of the project.

Contact Information

For any questions or concerns regarding ethical procedures, please contact the LPPM Ethics Committee, UINSU, at lppm@uinsu.ac.id

Sincerely,
Chair, LPPM Ethics Committee
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera
Utara (UINSU)

Dr. Nispul Khoiri, M. Ag

Revisi artikel keenam (18 April 2024)

Decision on submission HELIYON-D-23-24599R6 to Heliyon

Eksternal Kotak Masuk x

Heliyon <em@editorialmanager.com>
kepada saya ▾

18 Apr 2024, 20:11 ☆ ↶ ⋮

Ms. No.: HELIYON-D-23-24599R6

Title: Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

Journal: Heliyon

Dear Dr Sahrul,

Thank you for submitting your manuscript to Heliyon. We have now received all of the editor and reviewer comments on your recent submission to Heliyon. The reviewers have advised that your manuscript requires revisions prior to being considered for publication. We ask that you respond to each reviewer comment by either outlining how the criticism was addressed in the revised manuscript or by providing a rebuttal to the criticism. This should be carried out in a point-by-point fashion as illustrated here: <https://www.cell.com/heliyon/guide-for-authors#RevisionsTo> allow the editors and reviewers to easily assess your revised manuscript, we also ask that you upload a version of your manuscript highlighting any revisions made. You may wish to use Microsoft Word's Track Changes tool or, for LaTeX files, the latexdiff Perl script (<https://ctan.org/pkg/latexdiff>).

We also request you to ensure the following about data availability.

While first submitting your manuscript, you were asked two questions regarding data availability. The questions and your responses to them are as follows,

Additional Information

1. Sahrul Sahrul, Dr

Question	Response
<p>Data Availability</p> <p>Sharing research data helps other researchers evaluate your findings, build on your work and to increase trust in your article. We encourage all our authors to make as much of their data publicly available as reasonably possible. Please note that your response to the following questions regarding the public data availability and the reasons for potentially not making data available will be available alongside your article upon publication.</p> <p>Has data associated with your study been deposited into a publicly available repository?</p> <p>Please select why. Please note that this statement will be available alongside your article upon publication.</p> <p>as follow-up to "Data Availability"</p> <p>Sharing research data helps other researchers evaluate your findings, build on your work and to increase trust in your article. We encourage all our authors to make as much of their data publicly available as reasonably possible. Please note that your response to the following questions regarding the public data availability and the reasons for potentially not making data available will be available alongside your article upon publication.</p> <p>Has data associated with your study been deposited into a publicly available repository?</p> <p>"</p>	<p>No</p> <p>The data that has been used is confidential</p>

Please add these responses to the 'Data availability statement' section of your manuscript. If your manuscript doesn't contain a 'Data availability statement' section, please add one right before the 'References' section and then include these responses therein.

Furthermore, please note that Heliyon now uses a Numbered reference style. Please update the references in your manuscript accordingly, if necessary.

To submit your revised manuscript, please log in as an author at <https://www.editorialmanager.com/heliyon/>, and navigate to the "Submissions Needing Revision" folder under the Author Main Menu.

Please note that our ethics requirements are now updated. Please choose all applicable statements in our ethics declarations list (available here: <https://www.cell.com/heliyon/ethics>) and include them as a complete ethics statement in the declarations section at the end of your manuscript.

Your revision due date is May 02, 2024. We understand that the COVID-19 pandemic may well be causing disruption for you and your colleagues. If that is the case for you and it has an impact on your ability to make revisions to address the concerns that came up in the review process, please reach out to us.

If you need additional time to address the concerns that came up in the review process, please let us know so we can discuss a plan for moving your paper forward.

I look forward to receiving your revised manuscript.

Research Elements (optional)

This journal encourages you to share research objects - including your raw data, methods, protocols, software, hardware and more – which support your original research article in a Research Elements journal. Research Elements are open access, multidisciplinary, peer-reviewed journals which make the objects associated with your research more discoverable, trustworthy and promote replicability and reproducibility. As open access journals, there may be an Article Publishing Charge if your paper is accepted for publication. Find out more about the Research Elements journals at https://www.elsevier.com/authors/tools-and-resources/research-elements-journals?dgcid=ec_em_research_elements_email.

Kind regards,

Rachael Tucker, PhD

Scientific Editor

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All guests at the ritual provided written consent (including statement of consent for photography and publication if applicable).

Permission was sought from the family representative, who was briefed on the study's objectives, note-taking, and photography.

The additional information regarding participant 4 can also be offered at the author's discretion.

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Furthermore, please clarify the dates of data collection. The manuscript states this was from February 2022 to July 2022. The ethics approval provided seems to only cover the period 1st May 2022 to 31st October 2022.

Dear Editor,

We want to express our sincere gratitude for the invaluable feedback provided by the reviewers.

In response to the editors suggestion regarding the consent of our informant, participant and all individuals photographed during the observation, we have made appropriate revisions to the relevant section based on the suggested statements (line 315-319). Further, we have already received revised ethics approval letter from the university within valid dates. Your insightful feedback has played a crucial role in refining our work, and we are unwavering in our commitment to upholding academic excellence.

Once again, thank you for your invaluable contributions.

Dear Editor,

We are grateful for the reviewers' insightful feedback, especially regarding informed consent. We've revised the relevant section (lines 315-319) to address reviewer concerns by incorporating the suggested consent statements. Additionally, we've obtained a revised ethics approval letter from the university, which remains valid.

Best,
Sahrul

Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

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Abstract: Death and funeral rituals hold significant cultural and spiritual importance in traditional communities worldwide, including within the Islamic faith. This study focuses on exploring the unique funeral ritual known as *Batu Qulhu* in the Muslim Mandailing community. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes field observations and interviews with ulama and imams who have practical knowledge and understanding of this traditional ritual. The study reveals two origin stories of *Batu Qulhu*: one attributed to the first Imam in the Mandailing community and the other associated with elderly parents, ulama, and village *malims* (religious teachers) without specifying an individual source. *Batu Qulhu* refers to the white river stones utilized by the congregation during the ritual to count the number of prayers offered. The procession of this tradition follows a strict protocol, encompassing prayers, recitation of the Quran, and seeking forgiveness for the deceased and their family. The efficacy of *Batu Qulhu* serves as a testament to the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of cultural identity. While *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar cultural practices can be observed in other regions, highlighting the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and uphold cultural traditions as an integral part of identity and social cohesion.

Keywords: death rituals, funeral traditions, *Batu Qulhu*, Mandailing community, norms and values

1. Introduction

As a traditional aspect of culture, funeral practices serve as an initial stride towards fostering harmonious relations within multi-ethnic communities [1]. The manner in which individuals navigate the concept of death holds significance as it encompasses their cultural engagement and utilization, similar to how religion, an integral component of culture, provides a framework for comprehending, interpreting, and making sense of death, albeit without necessarily diminishing its inherent challenges for those experiencing grief [2]. Throughout various cultures, the commemoration of the deceased and the support offered to grieving

families manifest through a multitude of ritualistic practices [3]. These rituals hold particular significance within religious frameworks as they are not only guided by religious doctrines but also serve as fundamental aspects of communal worship [4]. Within the Islamic tradition, the management of deceased bodies adheres to the teachings found in the Qur'an, specifically drawing attention to Surah Al Imran (QS 3:185). This verse underscores the universal nature of mortality, asserting that every individual is bound to experience death [5]. In his groundbreaking 1907 study, Robert Hertz skillfully intertwined three essential imperatives - moral, aesthetic, and sociological - to present a captivating conceptualization of death [6]. His intricate analysis portrays death as a profound transformative journey that transcends the boundaries of both the spiritual and physical realms.

In Indonesia, funeral rituals have been intricately intertwined with local cultural practices and ethnic traditions. Various communities, such as the Tana Toraja people [7], the traditional Javanese community [8,9], and the Balinese who perform the *ngaben* ceremony [10,11], express their funeral customs based on their specific cultural heritage. These burial practices and procedures provide profound insights into the community and society in which they are performed. In these traditions, feasts, animal sacrifices, and supplications are often conducted to honor the deceased and their family. Additionally, Islamic values and rituals significantly influence funeral practices across many regions in Indonesia. The practice of *tahlil* or *tahlilan*, which involves collective remembrance gatherings, is commonly observed [12], and the *azan* (call to prayer) is often performed during burial ceremonies [4]. Moreover, in certain regions of Sumatra, Islamic funeral practices have assimilated with local traditions. For example, the people of Minangkabau in Nagari Salayo incorporate the custom of placing attributes on the head of the deceased during the funeral procession [13]. While in Nagari Anduring, the Minang community also practices *bakayaik*, which takes place 100 days after someone's passing. *Bakayaik* vividly recounts the profound narrative of Prophet Muhammad pbuh¹, beginning with his miraculous birth and chronicling his relentless efforts to uphold the principles of Islam. This ceremonial tradition blends the eloquence of Arabic and Minang languages, creating a captivating linguistic tapestry that enhances the overall richness of the performance. In Aceh, the *reuhab* tradition involves decorating the deceased person's bedroom for 40 days [14]. These practices exemplify the dynamic interplay between Islamic influences and local cultural expressions in funeral rituals across Indonesia.

Throughout history, archaeological evidence of ancient burials reveals a persistent pattern: human societies, since their inception, have convened to form social bonds and articulate emotions and intentions in response to the phenomenon of death [15]. This ritual also promotes

social cohesion in many communities practiced in various belief systems [16–18]. Despite, there is no clear description on concept of social cohesion [19], for the purpose of this study, social cohesion is defined by the interconnectedness of social networks and the customs, bonds, and values that uphold their unity [20]. The idea of social cohesion traces back to Emile Durkheim's theory. He proposed the notion of mechanical solidarity in society, suggesting its presence through the strength of influential individuals [21]. Hence, social cohesion emerges from socio-spatial factors that influence individuals within specific locations, representing a reflection of the classification of spaces [22,23]. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct thorough research into the rituals and traditions of specific communities within their local contexts to better understand and extract the factors contributing to social cohesion. This approach allows for a more nuanced analysis, considering the unique cultural and social dynamics that shape cohesion within distinct groups. Further, the traditional ceremony holds facilitates religious and spiritual practices as well as strengthening social bond and sense of identity [24].

This study aims to investigate the origin of *Batu Qulhu* rituals, exploring its contemporary practices and norms based on the social cohesion and identity in the Mandailing community of North Sumatra. The funeral rituals in this community are deeply rooted in a rich tapestry of cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions. By exploring the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ceremonies, this research seeks to shed light on the significance and intricacies of these rituals, offering valuable insights into the broader context of funeral traditions among Muslims in Sumatra. Regarding to the goals, the current article addresses the following research question the research question, what is the historical background of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community? How do the practices surround *Batu Qulhu* manifest in present-day Mandailing Muslim society? What are the norms associated with *Batu Qulhu* within the Mandailing community based on social cohesion and identity?

1.1. Mandailing Ethnic: Historical Context

The origin of the word "*Mandailing*" is linked to the Munda people of India, who experienced defeat in a war against the Aryan people. The term "*Mandailing*" is derived from either "*Mandala Holing*" [25,26] or "*Mundailing*," referring to the refugees from Munda [27]. It is believed that the Munda people originally inhabited the northern regions of India before the arrival of the Aryans [28]. The historical interaction between the Aryans and the Munda people has been examined through linguistic evidence [29]. Due to pressure from the Aryans, the Munda people migrated southward within India [29–31], and this Aryan occupation of the Munda people occurred around 1500-1200 BC [32]. Eventually, the displaced Munda people

migrated to Southeast Asia [31], although the specific country of their migration is not specified. It is likely that some of them reached North Sumatra through the Barus Port in Central Tapanuli, which was an international port at that time. Referred to "*Negarakertagama*" book from 1365, which mentions the presence of the Mandailing as one of the most significant ethnic groups in the archipelago [25,33]. The names mentioned include Mandailing, Pane, and Padang Lawas. The mention of these names indicates that the name Mandailing has been known by outsiders since ancient dates. In addition, Tuanku Rao² suggests that the Mandailing people trace their origin back to the Bugis Makassar, who sailed to the Singkuang Port (now known as Natal), it is more commonly accepted that the Mandailing people are part of the Batak ethnic group.

The Mandailing community's ethnic origin is a subject of contention among scholars. While some argue that they are part of the Batak Toba ethnic group [34,35], this perspective faces opposition from Mandailing intellectuals and historians. However, an analysis of factors such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group [36,37]. To establish their identity as the Mandailing community, they refer to themselves as "*halak kita*" (referred to: our people) of South Tapanuli [38], rather than as "*halak batak*" (Batak people) [39,40]. Regarding religious affiliation, the majority of the contemporary Mandailing population follows Islam, with a minority of Christians found in specific locations like Pakantan in Upper Mandailing, Medan, and other cities in North Sumatra [25,41]. Before embracing Islam, the religious beliefs of the Mandailing people focused around ancestral spirits referred to as "*si pele begu*" [33], incorporating influences from Hinduism and Buddhism [42]. Recent field research conducted in the Mandailing region revealed remnants and artefacts associated with both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, particularly in the vicinity of Panyabungan within the Greater Mandailing area [43].

Padri wars has brought Islam to Mandailing around 1821 and the Dutch military breached and defeated this movement by 1835 [36,41,44]. The term '*padri*' has two possible origins. One explanation suggests that it stems from the Indonesian word '*padri*,' which referred to priests. It is important to emphasize that the notable figures associated with the Padri movement can be likened to 'Islamic priests' [45]. This movement emerged in the early 1800s as a reformist Islamic movement led by local scholars known as ulama. These ulama sought to purify and reform Islam in the region, criticizing what they perceived as syncretic practices and deviations from strict Islamic teachings [26,41]. They aimed to establish a more orthodox and conservative interpretation of Islam in Mandailing. Padri movement gained support from

various segments of the population, including the rural communities, who were attracted to their message of religious purity and social justice [46]. The Padris' growing influence and power threatened the traditional rulers, known as penghulu, who feared losing their authority and control [41,45].

Before then, in the classical era, marked by the introduction of Hinduism preceding Islam into South Tapanuli, is substantiated by the presence of the Bahal temple in Portibi (now Padang Lawas), a relic of the Panai kingdom during the 12th and 13th centuries. Schnitger [47] documented that around 1000 AD, the Panai kingdom stood as the foremost realm of its time. Nevertheless, around 11th century, the Panai kingdom succumbed to Rajendrakola from India, an adherent of the Hindu faith. Despite the presence of Hindus within the Mandailing Sultanate, the Mandailing populace did not embrace Islam. This decision was influenced by the religion's veneration of numerous idols. Through a traditional lens, there exists a fusion of religion and culture, exemplified by customs such as *upah-upah*³ (gift) during weddings, rites marking childbirth, and housewarming ceremonies. Additionally, observances spanning 7, 40, 100, and 1000 days following the demise of parents are upheld.

The Mandailing Sultanate fell under the dominion of the Aru kingdom circa 1295 AD, spanning the 13th to 15th centuries AD. Subsequent to this period, the Pulungan kingdom emerged, followed by the ascendancy of the Nasution clan, which assumed control over the Mandailing Godang region (now Panyabungan), and the Lubis clan, which governed Mandailing Julu (now Kotanopan).

1.2. Mandailing Philosophy

The values of the Mandailing ethnic philosophy of life called *Poda Na Lima*. *Poda* means advice, *na* means which/that/is, and *lima* means five. In short, *Poda Na Lima* consists of five pieces of advice, namely: i) *Paias Rohamu* (keeping your heart clean); ii) *Paias Pamatangmu* (keeping your body clean); iii) *Paias Parabitonmu* (keeping your clothes clean); iv) *Paias Bagasmu* (keeping your house clean); and v) *Paias Pakaranganmu* (keeping your yard clean) [34,48]. These five values are still firmly held by the Mandailing community and the Mandailing ethnicity in Indonesia and around the world. Despite the Madina people's reputation for being religious, their daily social lives are intertwined with various cultural practices that are imbued with religious significance. These rituals, such as *marhaban* (*barzanzi*)⁴, the use of plain flour, and *upah-upah*, are performed on joyful occasions such as weddings, recoveries from illness, and the attainment of new positions, as well as during significant life transitions such as the birth of a child and moving into a new home [38].

The Mandailing ethnic community has a value system, *Dalihan Na Tolu* which means a forum used to organize life in carrying out *olong* (affection) between *mora*, *kahanggi* and *anak boru* [34,35,49,50]. *Dalihan Na Tolu*, also referred to ‘three stones’ [37], is a cultural value, created by the Creator that guide Bataknese attitude and behavior in the social lives and cultural relation [51]. The three stones encompass family, community, and spirituality. In Mandailing community, *Dalihan Na Tolu* principles are deeply intertwined with Islamic values and teachings. Mandailing Muslim communities incorporate these cultural principles into their daily lives, alongside their Islamic beliefs and practices [51,52]. This concept reinforces the importance of maintaining strong moral character, fostering harmonious relationships, and upholding social justice within the community [34,35,51].

2. Location Settings

The Mandailing Natal region, often abbreviated as Madina, is situated in North Sumatra Province, spanning approximately between 0°10’ and 1°50’ N and 98°10’ and 100°10’ E. This region is located on the west coast of Sumatra, has a 170 km coastline, and is home to 24 islands, though only 4 of these islands are inhabited. In 2021, Madina has a population of over 478,000 people, and has a total area of 6,134 km² [53]. Based on BPS-Statistics of Mandailing Natal Regency [53], during 2021, the predominant land use in this region comprises a mixed vegetation area, accounting for 39.15% or 252.57 hectares, while forested areas occupy 30.04% of the region, followed by palm oil plantations at 27.79%. Settlements in Madina cover 451.38 hectares (0.7%), while agriculture utilizes 2.17% of the land. Additionally, water bodies such as lakes and dams encompass 0.14% of the region's total area. This region is crossed by three river systems including Batang Pungkut, Batang Gadis, and Aek Pohan that represent upper, middle and lower part of the Batang Gadis watershed [54]. These rivers are beneficial for major population in Madina including for agriculture, plantation and industrial sectors. However, for years the rivers have also become threatened to illegal mining activities including sands, rocks and gold [55,56].

The majority of the population in Madina, around 95%, is Muslim, while the remaining 5% consists of Christians (including Catholics), Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of Confucianism. Madina has more than 800 mosques and 70 churches [57], to support the religious practices of its inhabitants, and the region is made up of 23 districts and over 370 villages. Muslim community in Madina, consisting of various ethnic groups, exhibits a rich diversity of cultural and religious practices. Mosques and Islamic schools, known as *madrasah*, hold a prominent position in shaping the religious and cultural life of the community.

Furthermore, active participation in significant cultural and religious traditions, such as the celebration of two major Islamic holidays like *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*, is observed among the Muslim population. A strong emphasis on social responsibility and assisting those in need, in alignment with Islamic principles, is evident through the engagement of the Muslim community in charitable and community service activities. The local government plays a supportive role by implementing policies and providing necessary infrastructure to promote Islamic education [58].

3. Methodology

3.1. Design of the Research

This study adopts qualitative research design, employing combination of phenomenological and ethnographic approaches. Both methodologies are characterized by their exploratory nature, utilizing the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection [59]. By intertwining the principles of phenomenological analysis and ethnography, this current study approach emphasizes a comprehensive exploration of human experiences within their natural settings. While phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of lived experiences, ethnography complements this by elucidating the cultural and social intricacies that contextualize these experiences within specific communities or groups. Additionally, they both underscore the importance of adopting a self-conscious approach to research, wherein researchers are attentive to their own perspectives, biases, and influences throughout the research process. It is worth to be noticed that the primary aim of qualitative research is to comprehend the distinctive characteristics and experiences of individual cases, rather than attempting to establish generalized patterns or trends [60]. This method emphasizes the comprehensive exploration of human behaviors and experiences as they unfold within natural settings [61,62]. Integral to this research is the integration of the subjects' knowledge with that of the researchers, which holds significant importance. This integration facilitates the recognition and documentation of outcomes from the local perspective inherent to the subjects themselves [7,63]. The current study employs an emic approach, which entails adopting the insider's perspective from within the culture where the research project is situated, as previously described in studies by [7,45,64–66]. By embracing an emic approach, the research acknowledges the critical importance of comprehending and interpreting the cultural context and subjective experiences of the subjects, thereby enriching both the research process and its findings.

3.2. Fieldwork and Subjects

The research employed an observational and interview-based approach to collect data. The researchers assumed the roles of both observers and interviewers. The observation phase focused on the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice in the study area, the activities of the Imam during the ritual, and the placement of stones in the graveyard after the final day of remembrance. For the interviews, a systematic process was followed to select appropriate sources. Initial contact with the informants was established through various means, such as phone calls, emails, and WhatsApp messages, to effectively arrange and conduct the interviews.

In prior ethnographic studies, a limited number of subjects were involved. For instance, two studies centered on the practices of anesthesia within two British hospital [67]. Similarly, Baan et al. [7] conducted research on funeral rituals in Toraja with only two informants, while Lee et al. [68] examined the experience of depression among Chinese individuals with a sample size of five informants. In accordance with the present study, data collection encompassed interviews with a total of eight carefully selected subjects, as detailed in Table 1. The age range of the informants in this study was 45-73 years old.

The selection process for these subjects adhered to specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Firstly, the informants were required to hold the roles of imams or leaders of the *Batu Qulhu* dhikr (or remembrance) during funeral ceremonies within the Mandailing community. Secondly, they were expected to possess a profound understanding of the norms and values associated with *Batu Qulhu*. Lastly, the informants needed to be Ulama or respected Islamic spiritual leaders within the local community. Proficiency in the Mandailing language was also a prerequisite for informant selection. To identify suitable subjects, consultations were conducted with local authorities, such as the Indonesian Council of Ulama (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*) in Madina, as well as prominent local figures.

Table 1

The current investigation involved the collection of data during a comprehensive six-month fieldwork period in 2022, specifically spanning from February to July. This fieldwork, which was coordinated by the first and second author, extended over a total of 90 days. The study targeted five specifically chosen districts, selected from a larger pool of 23 districts in the designated study area (refer to Figure 1). The primary objective of the research was to obtain valuable insights into the cultural practices related to the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in the Madina region. The *Batu Qulhu* event occurring in July 2022

was meticulously observed and documented, employing a combination of photographs and videos for meticulous recording. Regarding the data collection process, individual interviews were conducted with each informant, with each session spanning approximately 2 hours. These interviews took place at mutually agreed locations, such as the informant's residence, school office, or the household of the deceased individual where the *Batu Qulhu* ritual took place. Thorough and meticulous recording of all pertinent information was undertaken for subsequent analysis purposes.

Figure 1

3.3. Data Analysis

The present study utilized a qualitative data analysis approach, encompassing three key stages: 1) data reduction; 2) data presentation; and 3) drawing conclusions. This analytical process unfolded iteratively throughout the research. Initially, during the early phases of data collection, the research maintained a broad and overarching focus, and the observations were comprehensive in nature. As the research progressed and the focus of the study became more apparent, the observations evolved to adopt a more structured approach, enabling the acquisition of specific and targeted data.

The data analysis commenced with data reduction, where the gathered information was streamlined and organized to facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Subsequently, the data were presented in a coherent and meaningful manner to facilitate effective interpretation. Finally, the study derived conclusions based on the analyzed data, allowing for the generation of valuable insights into the cultural practices surrounding the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina. Throughout the research, this qualitative data analysis process occurred in a cyclical manner, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the research topic and a nuanced understanding of the intricacies involved. By transitioning from broad and general observations to more structured and specific data collection, the study achieved a comprehensive and detailed exploration of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual's cultural significance and its relevance within the Mandailing community.

3.4. Ethical Consideration

The present investigation was conducted under the auspices of Cluster Interdisciplinary Basic Research, adhering meticulously to stringent ethical guidelines. To ensure ethical compliance, the study received official approval from the Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) University of North Sumatera (UINSU) with the approval number:

0616615683. The utmost care was taken in handling the research data and records, which were securely stored on a password-protected computer housed within the Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, UINSU. Access to these records was strictly restricted to the authors.

In adherence to established ethical standards for data collection and publication, prior to their inclusion in the research, explicit informed consent was meticulously acquired from all eight subjects involved, thereby safeguarding their voluntary and informed engagement in the study. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, a coding system was employed, wherein each subject was allocated an initial "P" followed by pertinent demographic particulars, such as age and current profession. Moreover, all photographic materials featured in this investigation were obtained with written consent from all participants in the native *Bahasa* (Indonesian language), thereby emphasizing the paramount importance of respecting their autonomy and privacy throughout the research process. All participants provided written consent to participate, for the data to be published and for inclusion of photographs. All guests at the ritual provided written consent. Permission was sought from the family representative, who was briefed on the study's objectives, note-taking, and photography. The additional information regarding participant 4 can also be offered at the author's discretion. This unwavering commitment to ethical principles serves to underscore the rigor and integrity of the present inquiry, facilitating an ethically sound exploration of the cultural practices pertaining to the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Origin of the Rituals

Based on the interview, it is mentioned that Syeikh Haji Mustafa Husein bin Husein Nasution bin Umar Nasution Al-Mandaili (or known as Syeikh Mustafa Husein) (1886-1955), is credited as the first Imam to introduce the practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance at funeral ceremonies. In the beginning, was named by *Batu Balancing* based on the color of the stone used in this ritual. This insight was derived from interviews conducted with P1 (65), an ulama, and P2 (52), a teacher at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Panyabungan. In addition, Syeikh Musthafa Husein is also founder of the *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB)⁶ or Purba Baru Islamic boarding school. The practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been preserved and perpetuated by his students, who have established recitation congregations in various locations such as mosques, prayer rooms, and *surau*⁷. Notably, the

students and alumni of Musthafawiyah have played a significant role in its development and expansion beyond Madina region, with a presence in several other provinces across Indonesia. As the oldest *pesantren* (or boarding school) in North Sumatra, the influence of this practice extends widely, facilitated by the widespread distribution of its students and graduates.

An alternative explanation, provided by P3 (73) an ulama, diverges slightly from the previous informant. He has pointed out that the tradition of using *Batu Qulhu* or *Batu Balancing*⁸ as a medium for remembrance was explained with a slight variation, focusing on the customs upheld by elderly parents, ulama, village *malims* (religious teachers), without mentioning any specific individual. It was a means to alleviate the sorrow experienced by the bereaved and served as a form of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends. In addition to the customary acts of attending funerals and observing mourning rituals, the strategies employed to alleviate the profound grief experienced by individuals extended further. These encompassed multifaceted practices such as providing emotional support, proffering words of guidance and solace to foster resilience and acceptance in the face of adversity. Moreover, individuals were invited to partake in collective prayer sessions, where the use of *Batu Qulhu* stones served as facilitative elements in creating a conducive environment for these spiritual gatherings. P3 further elucidated that this method, referred to as *alak na jolo martakziah*, involved family members, parents, spouses, children, relatives, and neighbors coming together for *tahlilan*.

“In the past people paid tribute to the homes of people who died; parents, wife, husband, children, siblings and neighbors are tahlilan, starting from reciting istighfar, al-Fatihah, tahlil, prayers and concluding selawat. To make the dhikr in congregation more solemn, they add media by using a Batu Balancing (white stone) within size of an adult's big toe or larger than that. In the past, the white stone was said to be a Batu Balancing, now it is better known as the Batu Qulhu”.

Batu Qulhu ritual refers to the use of certain stone as a means of carrying out dhikr worship. In general, this type of stone is typically known as white pebble. It should be noticed that most of these white pebbles are predominantly comprised of marble, a rock formation characterized by its crystallized carbonates and can easily be found in the riparian zone. Here, the family of the deceased person collect these stones from the nearest river. As mentioned in the interview, this ritual chooses approximately the size of an adult's thumb to enhance the solemnity of the remembrance (as can be seen in Figure 2a). During the interview P4 (65), emphasized that in the past, people paid homage to the homes of the deceased, engaging in *tahlilan* rituals that encompassed prayers and concluding with ‘*selawat*’ (see Figure 2b). To

augment the collective remembrance, *Batu Qulhu*, the size of an adult's big toe or larger, was employed. Over time, the *Batu Balancing* came to be recognized as the *Batu Qulhu*.

Figure 2

The utilization of *Batu Qulhu* in death ceremonies is also underpinned by the geographical sequences. Firstly, the abundance of rivers in Madina, notably the Batang Gadis River, Batang Natal River, Aek Kalungan River and Angkola River, facilitated the easy availability of these stones in the past. Nowadays, these rivers also threatened by illegal gold mining activities [55], and tend to pollute due to its waste [56]. Secondly, these stones possess distinct characteristics that contribute to their suitability for the purpose at hand. They exhibit a white hue, imparting a visually soothing effect, while their cool and clean appearance further enhances their appeal. Third, these stones demonstrate resilience in withstanding the rigors of varying weather conditions, including heat, cold, and rainfall. Furthermore, the recitation of *Batu Qulhu* rituals is believed by the community to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave.

4.2. The Contemporary Practice of Batu Qulhu in the Mandailing Community

In the past, Islamic practices in Sumatra have exhibited influences from mystical and shamanistic traditions e.g., [69,70]. However, it is important to note that the religious activities associated with the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* are not influenced by shamanism, but rather stem solely from religious traditions previously followed by religious scholars, religious teachers, and traditional leaders. Currently, the contemporary practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been inherited and embraced by Muslim society in Madina. Based on interview with P4 (65), it is evident that in the past, the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance adhered to strict protocols as mentioned in the following statement.

“The tradition of recalling the Batu Qulhu was once a highly regulated practice. It required seeking consent from both the village leader and the syekh. Mastery of the 20 essential attributes of Allah was necessary, alongside the ability to read the Quran and comprehend its teachings. The stones themselves had to possess a pure white hue. The recitation of Qulhu would take place during evening gatherings, where all the stones present had to be utilized fully, leaving no remnants behind before the congregation dispersed”.

These procedures include the following: 1) the procession necessitated obtaining permission from the head of the village⁹ and *tuan guru*¹⁰ (or *kulifah*); 2) the ritual leader was required to commit to memory and comprehend the twenty obligatory attributes of God, encompassing *nafsiyah* (self-related attributes) nature, *salbiyah* (attributes related to existence)

nature, *ma'ani* (abstract attributes of God) nature, and *maknawiyah* (the essential nature and prevalence of *ma'ani*) nature; 3) the officiating Imam was expected to possess proficiency in both written and spoken Arabic-Malay; 4) the Imam leading the remembrance was required to proficiently recite the Qur'an and comprehend its meaning; 5) the *Batu Qulhu* utilized in the ritual had to be of a white hue; and 6) the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* transpired during evening hours, and all the stones had to be completed within a single procession conducted in the presence of the congregation. Preceding the initiation of the ritual, it is customary for the priest to cleanse himself through the observance of ablution, mirroring the ritualistic cleansing process associated with prayer as mentioned by P7 (60).

Basically, this ritual has many similarities to *tahlilan* tradition especially in the context prayers and recitations. This practice generally has been carried out by many Nahdatul Ulama (NU) community in Sumatra [12,71]. However, in *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, there are five Imams that lead this procession with different assignment. These Imams are voluntarily appointed by the group and relatively flexible based on their own agreement. The priests then read several prayers that beneficial to seek forgiveness for the deceased, his/her family as well to congregation. The Imams also recite some verses from the Surat of the Quran (QS), and praise the God. In this *Batu Qulhu* ritual, the congregation are voluntarily attending the ritual without any formal invitation. The ritual is held in three consecutive days after the death, and organized by group manager, neighbors and the Imams, and commonly referred to *Serikat Tolong Menolong* (STM) or Union of Help. The Imams and the congregation are artfully arranged in a circular formation, tailored to the venue's conditions. This arrangement allows for the placement of stones in front of the congregation, effortlessly within reach for the worshippers' right hand. During the fieldwork in Panyabungan Kota district, it was noticed that there were more than 30 piles of stones in the congregation. As additional information that commonly they are sitting on the floor covered with *tikar* or mat, but some people also held the ritual with chairs. The priests hold the responsibility for overseeing the course of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual. The following Table 2 describes each Imams' responsibility in *Batu Qulhu* procession.

Table 2

As presented in table 2 that the five Imams stone remembrance fulfill distinct roles during funeral rituals. The first Imam recites *wasilah*, invoking blessings upon the prophets, companions, scholars, and deceased parents. The second Imam performs *takhtim*, while the third recites dhikr tahlil. The fourth Imam recites selected verses from the Qur'an. The fifth priest concludes with a closing prayer and religious guidance, including expressions of

gratitude to Allah SWT and salutations to Prophet Muhammad SAW, supplications for the forgiveness of the deceased's sins, and prayers for the widening of their grave. The sermon includes an oath regarding the deceased's parents, beseeching acceptance of their worship, forgiveness of sins, and enlargement of their grave. Additionally, the imam delivers a sermon during this ritual (text written in Mandailing and the translation can be read in Supplementary file).

The current study also reveals that *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Madina is held in three consecutive days where:

- In the day 1, the remembrance is taken where the Imam start the ceremony. In the first meeting, the priests wear neat clothes, wear caps, turbans and sarongs. Reflecting the figure of a religious expert and placing his position is a person who is highly respected in society. Their sitting position is arranged in a special place, different from the congregation in general. Here, the Imam will also read out the order of the *Batu Qulhu* procession.
- For day 2, similar to the preceding event, the order of events for the first night procession remains unchanged. Prior to commencing the remembrance ceremony, the 'Imam pembaca takhtim' provided an explanation that after the recitation of the *takhtim*, the congregation would engage in the dhikr of *Batu Qulhu*, and were kindly requested to maintain their positions until the conclusion of the event. However, in contrast to the previous occasion, on the second night of recitation, Qulhu stones are made available to facilitate the dhikr and are arranged in a stacked formation in front of the congregation. Subsequently, the Qulhu remembrance stones are accumulated in the same location. The prescribed procedure entails the recitation of QS 112: 1-3, followed by the selection of a single stone. For each subsequent repetition, an additional stone is selected, such that two stones are chosen for a two-time reading, three stones for a three-time reading, four stones for a four-time reading, and so forth, in accordance with established practice.
- In day 3, *Batu Qulhu* procession replicates the format observed on the second meeting. However, a notable distinction lies in the extended duration of the dhikr, necessitated by the requirement to recite the prayer over each stone in the presence of the congregation. It is imperative to sustain the continuity of the dhikr until its completion, without interruption. Subsequent to the remembrance, a collective prayer and *salawat* are gathered. The *Batu Qulhu* employed as aids for remembrance are carefully placed within plastic burlap bags or buckets (as can be seen in Figure 3a). The event concludes with a religious sermon or *tausiyah*, wherein expressions of gratitude are articulated on behalf of the

congregation and the afflicted families. The content of the religious sermon encompasses themes such as death, the retribution of the grave, and serves as a reminder for individuals to perpetually prepare themselves and enhance their devotion before the arrival of death. This is because all living beings are destined to experience mortality (QS 3: 185), and its arrival cannot be postponed, even if one seeks refuge within a lofty and robust fortress (QS 4: 78).

In addition to the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, on the fourth day following an individual's passing, *Batu Qulhu* stones are transported to the cemetery and carefully positioned above the burial site, as illustrated in Figure 3b. The procedure involves the preparation of the grave bed, which includes the leveling off the ground in the designated area assigned for burial. Subsequently, these stones are poured in a manner that commences from the head of the deceased and extends towards their feet. Although typically performed by the bereaved family, this task can also be undertaken by others, such as neighbors or relatives. During the placement of the stones on the grave, it is customary to recite the phrase "*Bismillahi milata 'ala Rasulullah*," which translates to "In the name of Allah and in the religion of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh." The recitation performed during this act is identical to the prayer recitation conducted during the interment of the deceased's body. It is noteworthy that the selection of this specific recitation lacks a distinct foundational basis but rather originates from established tradition.

Figure 3

Presently, *Batu Qulhu* dhikr has undergone significant transformations over time, likely influenced by environmental factors, evolving understandings within the community, and technological advance, as well as societal changes. Presently, the implementation of the ritual varies across different areas of Madina. Traditionally, some individuals engage in the *Batu Qulhu* practice following the *Maghrib* prayer (after sunset) or around 6.30 pm – 7.00 pm local time and typically after the *Isya* prayer (7.30 pm – 8.00 pm), collectively performed at the mosque during evening as mentioned by P8 (55). Among adult women, it takes place in the evening preceding *Maghrib*, while among the male youth (*naposo bulung*) and female youth (*nauli bulung*), it occurs in the afternoon (after *Asr* or around 3.00 pm) as mentioned by P6 (45). Adult male worshipers partake in this practice during the evening after the *Isya* prayer on the first, second, and third days following a person's demise. As mentioned earlier, the *Batu Qulhu* employed in this remembrance ritual is a stone recognized by the bereaved family, retrieved from the river. To ensure cleanliness, the stones are consistently washed and kept in a plastic sack or a large container. Nevertheless, owing to the evolving perspectives of

individuals and the limited availability of such rocks in riverbeds, these stones are now obtainable from multiple outlets across the Madina region, as noted by P5 (50):

“*Batu Qulhu* are taken from the river by the family, if they are dirty, they are cleaned. Now, *Batu Qulhu* are easy to get and are sold in flower shops and building material store”).

4.3. Aspect of Norms of *Batu Qulhu* ritual

The *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice, introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein, holds significant cultural value in the Mandailing community of Madina. This ritual utilizes white pebbles from nearby rivers for dhikr worship and to alleviate the suffering of the deceased in the grave. It has been preserved and perpetuated by Syeikh Mustafa Husein's students and alumni, who have established recitation congregations in the region. As the oldest pesantren in North Sumatra, the influence of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends widely beyond Madina, with its students and graduates playing a significant role in its development and expansion. Equivalent cultural customs, such as the *tahlilan* tradition observed within the NU community in Sumatra, are also prevalent in Java under the same name. In Java, the Muslim community holds *tahlilan* remembrances on many occasions, a tradition historically introduced by the *Wali Songo* (The Nine Saints of Islam) [12].

Strict protocols surround the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance. Prior permission from village and religious leaders, referred to as *Tuan Guru*, is required. The officiating Imam must possess proficiency in Arabic-Malay language. These protocols ensure the solemnity and authenticity of the ritual, aligning with the importance placed on established rituals and cultural heritage. The *tahlilan* tradition within the NU community also follows specific rituals, emphasizing the shared values of upholding traditions and seeking solace in times of mourning. As previously mentioned, obtaining permission from both village and religious leaders is necessary, as indicated by P2 (52):

‘*mangido izin Parjolo tu Tuan Guru*’ (English: Ask permission from *Tuan Guru* first). Commonly answered by the teacher with ‘*olo*’ *silahkan acara dilanjut* (English: Okay, please continue the ritual), ‘*marimom mau au*’ (English: I will follow).

Batu Qulhu remembrance serves as a form of communal support, uniting family members, relatives, neighbors, and friends in times of sorrow. This fosters a sense of unity and solidarity within the Mandailing community, reflecting the value placed on collective resilience. Similar communal support can be found in other practices, such as the collective remembrance gatherings associated with the *tahlilan* tradition, reinforcing the cultural value of community

bonds and support networks. The significance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends beyond its cultural and spiritual aspects. It represents a cherished cultural heritage embraced by the Muslim society in Madina, highlighting the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of identity. This ritual also plays crucial role in fostering social cohesion through different ways, including community participation, shared religious practices, as well transmission of values and traditions. This study also highlights solidarity aspect as other form of social cohesion in the societal level [20]. While specific to the Mandailing community, similar practices can be observed in other regions in Indonesia, especially in the traditional Islam community [4,72]. They are still fulfilling the shared human need to honor the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and preserve cultural traditions as integral elements of identity and social cohesion. For a comprehensive overview of the norm aspects in the tradition of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community, please refer to Table 3.

Table 3

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ritual stands as a significant cultural and religious practice within the Mandailing community's funeral ceremonies. This tradition, which involves using stones for dhikr worship, holds deep historical and spiritual roots. While its origins can be traced back to Syeikh Mustafa Husein, who introduced the ritual, variations in accounts highlight the complex nature of its origin. Over time, the procession of *Batu Qulhu* has undergone modifications to streamline its organization, exemplifying the adaptive nature of cultural practices while maintaining their essence. Although *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar commemorative practices can be found in other regions. These rituals reflect the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, seeking solace through collective ceremonies, and preserving cultural traditions as integral components of identity and social cohesion. *Batu Qulhu* ritual serves as a testament to the rich cultural and religious heritage of the Mandailing community in North Sumatra, encapsulating collective mourning, spiritual devotion, and the preservation of cultural identity. By adhering to these rituals, individuals reaffirm their cultural identity and strengthen their sense of belonging within the community. Shared cultural practices during funeral ceremonies serve as markers of group identity, fostering a sense of solidarity among participants. As funeral ceremonies continue to play a pivotal role in communities worldwide, understanding and appreciating the significance of these rituals contributes to our broader knowledge of human beliefs, traditions, and the ways in which we commemorate and honor the departed. The

employed methods in this study allows for an in-depth exploration of the cultural, social, and emotional dimensions surrounding funeral practices within specific communities. This approach provides nuanced insights into the significance, symbolism, and evolving meanings attributed to funeral rituals, thereby enriching scholarly discourse and bridging gaps in understanding of this complex phenomenon.

While this study presents a preliminary investigation into the *Batu Qulhu* ritual, it acknowledges certain limitations. The absence of historical documentation detailing the ritual within the Mandailing community necessitates a proposed historical approach through extensive literature review, drawing upon the writings of earlier ulama. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the limited number of informants and the specific observed processions may not fully capture the diverse procedural variations of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual across the entire Madina region. Recognizing the modifications made by different communities based on the guidance of their Imams or practical considerations further adds to the complexity of the ritual. Given these findings, the study recommends the cultural preservation and educational promotion of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual for the benefit of future generations. The creation of appropriate documentation, such as books and videos, accessible through various platforms including social media, can contribute to the wider dissemination of knowledge and understanding of the ritual. These efforts support the cultural preservation of the *Batu Qulhu* tradition and foster greater appreciation among the Mandailing community and beyond.

Declarations

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Sahrul: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data collection, Data interpretation, Writing - original draft, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Afrahul Fadhila Daulai:** Methodology, Data collection, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – Review and editing. **Anang Widhi Nirwansyah:** Data interpretation, Formal analysis, Writing – Review and editing, Visualization. **Seyithan Demirdag:** Writing – Review and editing, Validation, Resources.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement

Data included in article/supplementary material/referenced in article.

Ethics Statement

This study was ethically reviewed and approved by Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) at the University of North Sumatera (UINSU) under approval number 0616615683. All participants, including those photographed, provided informed consent to participate in the study.

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Figures

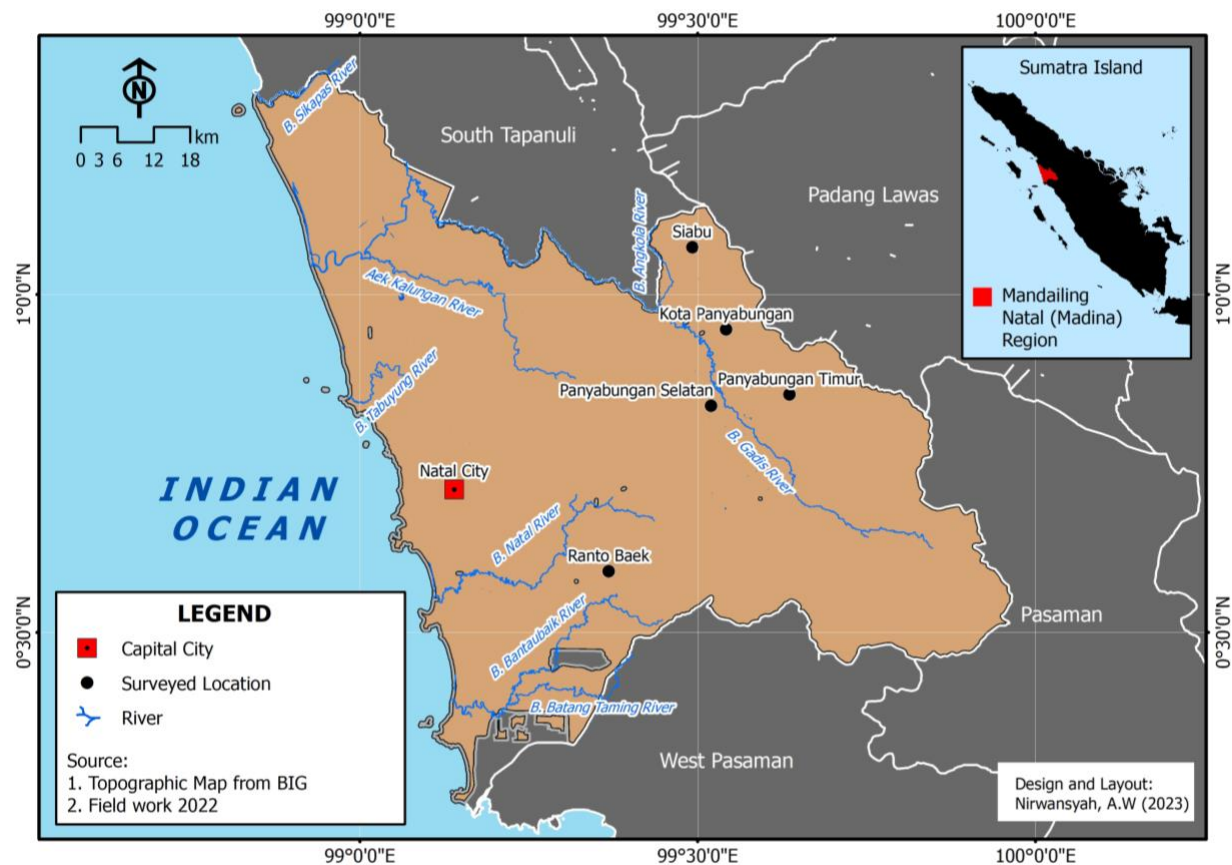


Figure 1. Area of the current research



Figure 2. a) White pebble collected for *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Mandailing, where each bucket contains 70 to 100 stones; and b) the congregation of the Mandailing Muslim community during this obituary ceremony. (Photography by Sahrul on 22 July 2022)



Figure 3. *Batu Qulhu* remembrance by adult male where a) the organizer has collected and kept the stones back into the plastic sack for fourth day of casting procession; and b) where *Batu Qulhu* is finally poured on the grave of deceased person. (photographs of the ritual [a] held at P4 residence on 22 July 2022; and [b] white stone teeming in the day 4) (taken by Sahrul)

848 **Table 1.** Pseudonym of subjects' information in the current study

Informants	Initial	Age	Education Level	Occupation
1	P1	65	Bachelor degree	Teacher
2	P2	52	Bachelor degree	Teacher
3	P3	73	Bachelor degree	Ulama and local public figure
4	P4	65	Master degree	Public servant
5	P5	50	Master degree	Public servant
6	P6	45	Master degree	Teacher
7	P7	60	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Businessman
8	P8	55	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Teacher

849

850 **Table 2.** Construction of each Imam and their task in *Batu Qulhu* procession

Imam	Local term	Assignment	Quran recitation
First Imam	<i>Imam pembaca silsilah</i>	– Reciting <i>istighfar</i> ¹¹ three times; – Reciting <i>wasilah</i> to nabi (propeth Muhammad pbuh), his appostles, ulama and parents of the deceased person, all Muslim and the congregation	– QS 1: 1-6
Second Imam	<i>Imam pembaca takhtim</i>	– Reciting <i>takhtim</i> (known as "reading for the reward of the deceased" or "reciting for the benefit of the deceased")	– QS 112: 1-3 – QS 113: 1-5 – QS 114: 1-5 – QS 1: 1-7 – QS 2: 1-5; 255; 284-286 – QS 33: 56
Third Imam	<i>Imam pembaca tahlil</i>	– Reciting <i>tahlil</i> (compilation of dhikr) including: • <i>Istighfar</i> ;	

-
- Reciting ‘afdhalu dzikri’ followed by First *syahadat tauhid*¹². The congregation then answer by ‘hayyun baqi’;
 - Reciting second *syahadat tauhid*. Then answered by the congregation with ‘hayyun maujud’;
 - Reciting the third *syahadat tauhid*. And answered by all attendance by ‘hayyum maqsud’.
- Finally, reciting *syahadat tauhid* together with the congregation 100 times. Here the congregation gradually loud their praise and at same time shaking the head

Fourth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca Al Baqarah</i>	– Reciting some verses from the Quran that contains concept and advise about calamities	– QS 2: 152-156 – QS 67: 1-2
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Fifth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca doa</i>	– Reciting closing prayer, with the following structure:
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- *Basmallah*¹³;
- Praise to the Creator and His messenger (Muhammad pbuh);
- Prayers for all Moslem (men and women);
- Prayers for the deceased person and the family;
- Prayers for attendance in the congregation;

Aspect of norm	Description
Preservation of traditions	The culture emphasizes the preservation and perpetuation of rituals and practices, such as the <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance, which was introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein and continued by his students and alumni. The students and graduates of Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding school play a significant role in preserving and expanding this practice.
Community support	The culture values community support during times of grief and mourning. The tradition of using <i>Batu Qulhu</i> serves as a means of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends, helping to alleviate sorrow and foster resilience.
Spiritual gatherings	Collective prayer sessions and remembrance gatherings are highly valued in the culture. The use of the stones during these gatherings creates a conducive environment for spiritual practices and collective remembrance.
Respect for the deceased	The culture emphasizes respect and care for the deceased. The ritual of collecting white pebbles, predominantly marble, from nearby rivers to be used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance shows reverence for the departed.
Connection to nature	The culture maintains a connection with nature, as the stones used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals are collected from rivers. The easy availability of these stones in the past and their resilience in varying weather conditions highlight the importance of nature in the culture.
Alleviation of suffering	The recitation of <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals is believed to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave. This demonstrates a value of compassion and empathy within the culture.

¹ Peace be upon him

² Tuanku Rao is characterized as enigmatic figure and one of the two significant leaders of the Padri movement, shared this status alongside Imam Bonjol himself. Tuanku Rao's origins can be traced to *Huta na Godang* or *Huta Godang*, also known as *Tano Godang*, located in Mandailing Julu (Upper Mandailing) [25].

-
- ³ *Upah-upah* refers to cultural practice or tradition of offering gifts or monetary compensation during significant events or ceremonies. The term "upah" itself can be translated as "wages" or "payment". *Upah-upah* is deeply rooted in the Mandailing culture and is often observed during various occasions such as weddings, funerals, or community gatherings.
- ⁴ The word *barzanzi* is associated with the name of Syekh Barzanji, a prominent scholar and Sufi poet from Kurdistan. His renowned work, titled "*Mawlid al-Barzanji*," is a poetic composition that narrates the birth and life of the Prophet Muhammad, often recited during religious gatherings and celebrations.
- ⁶ *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB), was founded in 1912 by Syekh Musthafa Husein Nasution. This Islamic boarding school is located in Purba Baru sub-district, Madina Regency, North Sumatra [73]. Further reference on this boarding school can be read in Khairurrijal [74].
- ⁷ Surau means a place of worship or a small mosque-like structure. The surau typically serves as a communal prayer space or a modest mosque, wherein Muslims congregate for congregational prayers, religious discourses, and other religious engagements.
- ⁸ Some community in Madina also use term of *Batu Bontar* to refer *Batu Qulhu*.
- ⁹ One crucial determinant is obtaining authorization from the village leader. The village head holds a position akin to that of a revered monarch, embodying nobility and commanding profound respect.
- ¹⁰ *Tuan guru* or teacher serves as a religious authority, serving as an exemplar and establishing a benchmark for societal norms through their words and actions. Additionally, they are often revered as sacred individuals known for their healing abilities, and they serve as a source of supplication for various needs such as well-being, sustenance, companionship, agricultural prosperity, and attainment of blessings.
- ¹¹ The act of attempting forgiveness from the Almighty God, commonly by saying 'astagfirullāhu
- ¹² The *syahadat tauhid* contains declaration of belief in the oneness of God Almighty
- ¹³ *Basmallah* is phrase mention to the God before beginning any action or speech. It spells 'Bismillahi rāhmani rāhiim'. It means: in the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful.

PHOTO/VIDEO PUBLICATION RELEASE FORM

Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing
Community of North Sumatra

Researcher(s): Dr. Sahrul, M.A

Contact Information: Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UINSU), Jl. Willem Iskandar Ps. V Medan Estate, Medan, 20371, Indonesia; sahrul@uinsu.ac.id

Participant Consent:

I am 18 years of age or older and hereby grant the researcher designated above from Universitas Negeri Islam Sumatra Utara (UINSU) permission to photograph, audio record, and/or videotape my voice and likeness and to use my voice and likeness in photograph(s), audio recordings, and/or videotaping as part of the above titled IRB approved research study.

I give permission for the researcher to distribute and/or use any photograph(s), audio recording(s), and/or videotape(s) made as part of this research project in research presentations, publications, for educational uses, or through any other venue as long as my name is not used. All media will become the property of UINSU. I will make no monetary claim against UINSU for the use of the photograph(s), audio recording(s), and/or video recording(s).

Ethics Committee Letter of Approval No. 0616615683

Project Title: *Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra*

Researcher: Dr. Sahrul

Affiliation:

*Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication,
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara*

Date: 1-February-2022 - 31-Oct-2022 | **Contract Number:** 328

Introduction

This letter confirms the approval of the ethical research proposal for the project titled "Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra" by Dr. Sahrul, affiliated with the Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program at *Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara*.

Approval for Research Methods

The Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved the proposed research methods, which include:

-) Interviews
-) Observations
-) Photo collection

Ethical Considerations

The committee commends the inclusion of the following ethical considerations in the research proposal:

-) **Informed Consent:**
 - o A process to obtain written informed consent from all participants before interviews, observations, and photo collection must be implemented.
 - o The consent form should explain the research purpose, data collection methods, potential risks and benefits of participation, confidentiality measures, and the right to withdraw from the study at any point.
-) **Confidentiality:**
 - o Measures to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants must be outlined. This includes anonymizing interview transcripts, observation notes, and photographs.
 - o Data storage protocols that protect participant privacy should be established.
-) **Respect for Cultural Sensitivities:**
 - o The research should be conducted with sensitivity to the cultural practices and beliefs of the Mandailing community regarding death and funerals.
 - o Permission should be sought from appropriate community authorities before commencing research activities.

Conditions of Approval

This approval is granted with the following conditions:

-) Any deviations from the approved research plan must be reported to the Ethics Committee for review and approval.
-) Unexpected ethical issues arising during the research must be reported to the Ethics Committee promptly.
-) A copy of the final research report summarizing the findings and addressing any ethical considerations must be submitted to the Ethics Committee upon completion of the project.

Contact Information

For any questions or concerns regarding ethical procedures, please contact the LPPM Ethics Committee, *Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara*, at lpmm@uinsu.ac.id

Sincerely,
Chair, LPPM Ethics Committee
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara



Dr. Nispul Khoiri, M.Ag

Respon Heliyon: ethics approval (9 Mei 2024)

Heliyon

<em@editorialmanager.com>

kepada saya ▾

Kam, 9 Mei 2024, 19.28

☆ ↶ ⋮

Query on your submission: HELIYON-D-23-24599R7 Eksternal Kotak Masuk x

Ref.: Ms. No. HELIYON-D-23-24599R7
Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra
Heliyon
Sahrul Sahrul; Anang Widhi Nirwansyah; Seyithan Demirdag; Afrahul Fadhila Daulai

Dear Dr Sahrul,

Thank you for your revised submission.

Due to a change in the start date of the ethics approval between HELIYON-D-23-24599R7 and R0-R6, we wish to verify the ethics approval with the approving committee.

The contact details provided on the ethics approval do not appear to be correct. Therefore, we would like to request that the authors provide a direct email address for the approving ethics committee and the listed ethics chair, Dr Nispul Khoir.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Rachael Tucker, PhD
Scientific Editor
Heliyon

Have questions or need assistance?

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In compliance with data protection regulations, you may request that we remove your personal registration details at any time. (Use the following URL: <https://www.editorialmanager.com/heliyon/login.asp?a=r>). Please contact the publication office if you have any questions.

Respon penulis mengenai ethics approval (10 Mei 2024)

sahrul sahrul

<sahrul@uinsu.ac.id>

kepada Heliyon ▾

10 Mei 2024, 07.31

☆ ↶ ⋮

Dear Dr Tucker,

Scientific Editor of Heliyon

Thank you sincerely for your prompt response. We regret to inform you that the official email address associated with the Ethical Committee, managed by LPPM UINSU, is currently experiencing technical difficulties. However, for any further inquiries regarding our research under approval number **0616615683** and project title **"Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra,"** please contact Dr. Nispul Khoir, M.Ag, via email at nisfulkhoir@uinsu.ac.id, or Dr. Muhammad Irwan Padli Nasution, ST., MM., M.Kom, Head of the Research and Publication Department, at irwannst@uinsu.ac.id for prompt assistance. We trust this information will suffice for the final assessment of our paper.

Best regards,

Sahrul

...

Respon jurnal: Terimakasih sudah merespon (11 Mei 2024)



AuthorSupportGlobal (ELS) <AuthorSupport@elsevier.com>
kepada saya ▾

11 Mei 2024, 12.52 ☆ ↶ ⋮

Dear Dr. Sahrul,

Thank you for your email.

With this, please be informed that I have escalated your concern to the editors for further assistance and advice.

Rest assured that you will be notified once a response is available.

Should you have any other concern, please do let me know.

Kind regards,

Ronald Renzo Ligas
Researcher Support
ELSEVIER

- Visit the [Editor Guide to Editorial Manager](#) to access guided learning pathways, designed for each editor role, which include links to instructional videos and articles.
- Visit the [Author Guide to Editorial Manager](#) for a guided walkthrough of author key tasks, such as manuscript submission process and how to track your manuscript.
- Visit the [Reviewer Guide to Editorial Manager](#) for a guided walkthrough of reviewer key tasks.

Balasan email dari scientific editor Heliyon: ethics approval (14 Mei 2024)

Query regarding your submission HELIYON-D-23-24599R7 Eksternal Kotak Masuk x



Tucker, Rachael (ELS-LOW) <r.tucker@cell.com>
kepada saya ▾

Sel, 14 Mei 2024, 15.22 ☆ ↶ ⋮

Dear Dr Sarul,

Thank you for your revised submission. I am following up on our previous email regarding contact details for your approving ethics committee.

We are requesting these due to a change in the start date of the ethics approval between revisions, specifically HELIYON-D-23-24599R6 and HELIYON-D-23-24599R7; therefore, as per our policy, we wish to verify the ethics approval with the approving committee.

The contact details provided on the ethics approval do not appear to be correct, returning as an undeliverable email address. Therefore, we would like to request that the authors provide a direct email address for the approving ethics committee and the listed ethics chair, Dr Nispul Khoir.

I would appreciate if you could respond to this query by Monday 20th May. Please note, the manuscript has been placed on hold whilst we verify the information provided.

Kind Regards,

Rachael Tucker PhD (she/her)
Scientific Editor, Heliyon
r.tucker@cell.com
125 London Wall, London, UK, EC2Y 5AP
<https://www.cell.com/heliyon/home>



Balasan penulis terkait email dari scientific editor Heliyon (14 Mei 2024)



sahrul sahrul <sahrul@uinsu.ac.id>
kepada Rachael ▾

Sel, 14 Mei 2024, 16.55 ☆ ↶ ⋮

Dear Dr. Tucker,

We apologize for any misunderstanding caused by our previous response to your request. We have now received the corrected version for ethics approval, including Dr. Nispul Khoir's direct email. We hope this letter is sufficient for the immediate finalization of your decision. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Best regards,

Sahrul

Satu lampiran • Dipindai dengan Gmail



Respon scientific editor Heliyon terkait balasan penulis (14 Mei 2024)



Tucker, Rachael (ELS-LOW) <r.tucker@cell.com>
kepada saya ▾

14 Mei 2024, 17:30 ☆ ↶ ⋮

Dear Dr. Sahrul,

Thank you for your prompt response and for providing the information required. We appreciate your cooperation and assistance in this matter.

We would like to kindly also ask for the corrected version of the LPPM Ethics Committee email address to ensure that all future correspondence reaches the correct destination.

We apologise for the delay in your manuscript processing, however, we hope you understand our commitment to upholding robust ethical standards in all our publications. It is for this reason we are seeking clarity on the discrepancy identified between revisions in the ethics approval dates.

We noticed that the dates were adjusted when our editor identified that the ethics approval appeared to have been obtained after the start of data collection. If you could shed light on this matter and provide an explanation, it would be most beneficial.

Once again, we appreciate your understanding and cooperation. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best regards,

Rachael Tucker PhD (she/her)
Scientific Editor, Heliyon
r.tucker@cell.com
125 London Wall, London, UK, EC2Y 5AP
<https://www.cell.com/heliyon/home>

Balasan penulis terkait respon scientific editor Heliyon (14 Mei 2024)



sahrul sahrul <sahrul@uinsu.ac.id>
kepada Rachael ▾

14 Mei 2024, 19:13 ☆ ↶ ⋮

Dear Dr. Rachael Tucker,

Thank you for your attention to detail and concern regarding the ethics approval dates for our manuscript, "Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra." We sincerely apologize for the confusion caused by the discrepancy in dates mentioned in the earlier ethics approval letter.

We understand that receiving proper ethics approval is crucial for publication in Heliyon, and we are committed to upholding robust ethical standards. We made a mistake by stating that we received the approval before data collection.

To clarify the situation:

- We can confirm that we received ethics approval for this study.
- We typically utilize Indonesian language ethics letters for our research.
- In this specific case, for publication in Heliyon, we negotiated with LPPM to obtain an English version of the ethics approval letter.
- Unfortunately, upon reviewing the initial English translation, we identified errors and requested corrections.
- Due to unforeseen technical difficulties, the official email address for the Ethics Committee became temporarily unavailable during this time.

Fortunately, we were able to directly contact Dr. Nispul Khoiri and Dr. Muhammad Irwan Padli Nasution, who promptly addressed our concerns and provided the corrected English ethics approval letter.

We understand the importance of transparency and apologize for any inconvenience caused by the miscommunication. We are happy to provide any further documentation you may require to confirm the ethics approval for this study.

Thank you again for your understanding and commitment to ethical research practices.

Respon scientific editor Heliyon terkait ethics approval certificate (14 Mei 2024)



Tucker, Rachael (ELS-LOW) <r.tucker@cell.com>
kepada saya ▾

Sel, 14 Mei 2024, 19:29 ☆ ↶ ⋮

Dear Dr Sahrul,

Thank you again for your prompt response and explanation as to the differing dates provided.

To assist us with this investigation, I would like to request a copy of the original ethics approval certificate (in Indonesian language).

Thank you again for your cooperation and patience whilst we verify this approval.

Kind Regards,

Rachael Tucker PhD (she/her)
Scientific Editor, Heliyon
r.tucker@cell.com
125 London Wall, London, UK, EC2Y 5AP
<https://www.cell.com/heliyon/home>



Scientific editor Heliyon memverifikasi ethics approval kepada LPPM UIN SU (14 Mei 2024)

On Tue, 14 May 2024 at 17:21, Tucker, Rachael (ELS-LOW) <r.tucker@cell.com> wrote:

Dear Dr Muhammad Irwan Padli Nasution,

I hope this message finds you well. My name is Rachael Tucker, and I am a Scientific Editor at Heliyon, a Cell Press journal.

We have been considering a manuscript reporting research from your institution and approved by the LPPM Ethics Committee, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, citing the ethics approval number: 0616615683. As part of our standard procedure, we undertake a thorough review of all submissions, including verification of any ethics approval.

However, during our review process, we identified an unusual discrepancy between revisions. We noticed a change in the ethics approval dates provided by the author, which has prompted us to seek your assistance in verifying the authenticity and validity of the approval.

We are committed to maintaining the integrity of academic research and adhering to ethical guidelines, and we strive to ensure that all published content meets these standards. Therefore, your support in verifying this ethics approval would be highly appreciated.

Thus, I would like to request the following details:

Please confirm the ethics approval number, project title and principal investigator.

Please confirm the date ethics approval was obtained. If possible, provision of the original ethics approval certificate, would be greatly appreciated.

We realize that this may require a certain level of discretion and appreciate your understanding in this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you need any additional information or have any queries.

We look forward to your prompt response.

Kind Regards,

Rachael Tucker PhD (she/her)
Scientific Editor, Heliyon
r.tucker@cell.com
125 London Wall, London, UK, EC2Y 5AP
<https://www.cell.com/heliyon/home>

Balasan dari LPPM UIN SU terkait verifikasi ethics approval (15 Mei 2024)



M. Irwan P. Nasution <irwannst@uinsu.ac.id>

kepada Rachael, saya ▾

Indonesia, May 15, 2024

Dear Rachael Tucker PhD.,

Many thanks for your email. Please inform you that the research project is true actually and refer to the attached file for the original ethics approval certificate for your reference. Sorry for any inconvenience caused.

Many thanks for your kind understanding.

Best regards

Muhammad Irwan Padli Nasution
Head of Research and Publications
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara
<https://sites.google.com/uinsu.ac.id/irwannst/home>

15 Mei 2024, 12.39 ☆ ↶ ⋮

Scientific editor Heliyon meminta untuk memverifikasi tanggal pada ethics approval (21 Mei 2024)

On Tue, 21 May 2024 at 18:55, Tucker, Rachael (ELS-LOW) <r.tucker@cell.com> wrote:

Dear Dr Muhammad Irwan Padli Nasution,

Thank you for this information, it is greatly appreciated.

Please could you confirm the date that ethics approval was granted? The ethics approval appears to provide the date of research but does not list the date that ethics approval was obtained.

Many thanks again for your assistance.

Kind Regards,

Ethics Committee Letter of Approval No. 0616615683

Project Title: *Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra*

Researcher: Dr. Sahrul

Affiliation:

*Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication,
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara*

Date: 1-February-2022 - 31-Oct-2022 | **Contract Number:** 328

Introduction

This letter confirms the approval of the ethical research proposal for the project titled "Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra" by Dr. Sahrul, affiliated with the Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program at *Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara*.

Approval for Research Methods

The Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved the proposed research methods, which include:

-) Interviews
-) Observations
-) Photo collection

Ethical Considerations

The committee commends the inclusion of the following ethical considerations in the research proposal:

-) **Informed Consent:**
 - o A process to obtain written informed consent from all participants before interviews, observations, and photo collection must be implemented.
 - o The consent form should explain the research purpose, data collection methods, potential risks and benefits of participation, confidentiality measures, and the right to withdraw from the study at any point.
-) **Confidentiality:**
 - o Measures to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants must be outlined. This includes anonymizing interview transcripts, observation notes, and photographs.
 - o Data storage protocols that protect participant privacy should be established.
-) **Respect for Cultural Sensitivities:**
 - o The research should be conducted with sensitivity to the cultural practices and beliefs of the Mandailing community regarding death and funerals.
 - o Permission should be sought from appropriate community authorities before commencing research activities.

Conditions of Approval

This approval is granted with the following conditions:

-) Any deviations from the approved research plan must be reported to the Ethics Committee for review and approval.
-) Unexpected ethical issues arising during the research must be reported to the Ethics Committee promptly.
-) A copy of the final research report summarizing the findings and addressing any ethical considerations must be submitted to the Ethics Committee upon completion of the project.

Contact Information

For any questions or concerns regarding ethical procedures, please contact the LPPM Ethics Committee, *Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara*, at lppm@uinsu.ac.id

Sincerely,
Chair, LPPM Ethics Committee
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara



Dr. Nispul Khoiri, M.Ag

KETERANGAN LOLOS Uji ETIK
No. 0616615683

Komite Etik Penelitian Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara dalam upaya melindungi hak asasi dan kesejahteraan responden/subjek penelitian, telah mengkaji dengan teliti protokol yang berjudul:

Menyingkap Norma dan Nilai dalam Ritual Zikir Batu Balancing Putih pada Upacara Kematian Masyarakat Kabupaten Madina, Sumatera Utara

Peneliti utama:
Dr. Sahrul

Nama Institusi:
Program Studi Komunikasi dan Penyiaran Islam – Fakultas Dakwah dan Komunikasi
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara

Lokasi Penelitian dan waktu:
Kabupaten Mandailing Natal, Provinsi Sumatra Utara
(01- Februari 2022 – 31 Oktober 2022) – No Kontrak : 328

Telah menyetujui protokol tersebut di berikut:

Informed Consent (Persetujuan Penelitian)

1. Diperlukan rencana yang jelas untuk mendapatkan informed consent tertulis dari semua peserta sebelum wawancara, observasi, dan pengumpulan foto.
2. Formulir persetujuan harus menjelaskan secara rinci:
 - a. Tujuan penelitian
 - b. Cara pengumpulan data
 - c. Potensi risiko dan manfaat dari partisipasi
 - d. Bagaimana kerahasiaan dijamin
 - e. Hak untuk menarik diri dari penelitian kapan saja

Kerahasiaan (Confidentiality)

1. Anda telah menguraikan langkah-langkah untuk melindungi anonimitas dan kerahasiaan peserta. Ini termasuk menganonimkan transkrip wawancara, catatan observasi, dan foto.
2. Protokol penyimpanan data yang melindungi privasi peserta harus dibuat.

Menghormati Sensitivitas Budaya (Respect for Cultural Sensitivities)

1. Anda berkomitmen untuk melakukan penelitian dengan sensitivitas terhadap praktik dan kepercayaan budaya masyarakat Mandailing terkait kematian dan pemakaman.
2. Ingatlah untuk meminta izin dari otoritas masyarakat yang sesuai sebelum memulai kegiatan penelitian.

Ketentuan Persetujuan

Persetujuan ini diberikan dengan ketentuan berikut:

1. Setiap perubahan pada rencana penelitian yang disetujui harus dilaporkan ke Komite Etik untuk ditinjau dan disetujui terlebih dahulu.
2. Laporkan setiap masalah etis yang tidak terduga yang muncul selama penelitian kepada Komite Etik segera.
3. Setelah proyek selesai, harap serahkan salinan laporan penelitian akhir yang merangkum temuan dan membahas semua pertimbangan etis yang ditemui.

Kontak lebih lanjut:

LPPM UIN SU – lp2m@uinsu.ac.id

Dr. Nispul Khoiri, M.Ag (niskulkhoiri@uinsu.ac.id)

Dr. Muhammad Irwan Padli Nasution, ST., MM, M.Kom (irwannst@uinsu.ac.id)



Komite Etik LPPM
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatra Utara
Ketua,

Dr. Nispul Khoiri, M.Ag

Balasan LPPM UIN SU terkait respon scientific editor (21 Mei 2024)



M. Irwan P. Nasution <irwannst@uinsu.ac.id>

kepada Rachael, bcc: saya ▾

21 Mei 2024, 23.28



Indonesia, May 21, 2024

Dear Rachael Tucker PhD.,

Many thanks for your email. Please inform you that after checking our document outbound archive the letter has been issued 01 February 2022. Sorry for any inconvenience caused.

Many thanks for your kind understanding.

Best regards

Muhammad Irwan Padli Nasution

Head of Research and Publications

Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara

<https://sites.google.com/uinsu.ac.id/irwannst/home>

Penulis menanyakan kembali revisi artikel ketujuh (21 Mei 2024)

From: Sahrul Sahrul

Date: Tuesday, May 21, 2024 10:24 PM GMT

Manuscript Number: HELIYON-D-23-24599R7

Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

Dr Sahrul Sahrul

Heliyon

Dear Editors,

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to inquire about the current status of my manuscript, titled "Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra," which was submitted under Manuscript Number: HELIYON-D-23-24599R7.

I understand the peer review process can be time-consuming and complex, and I greatly appreciate the effort and consideration given to my work. However, as it has been some time since my last communication, I would be grateful for any updates regarding the review status or any further actions required from my side.

Thank you very much for your time and assistance. I look forward to your response.

Kind regards,

Dr Sahrul Sahrul

Respon dari Author Support Global (22 Mei 2024)

Dear Dr Sahrul,

Thank you for contacting Elsevier Researcher Support.

I understand that you are requesting to expedite the review process of your submission. Upon checking, I can confirm that the manuscript HELIYON-D-23-24599R7 has been listed as "With Editor" since May 06, 2024.

Please allow me to extend our sincerest apologies for the delay and the inconvenience this has caused you; we know the importance of a speedy review and decision process to authors.

I wish to inform that I have escalated this matter to the Editorial team for further assistance and advice.

In the meantime, your utmost patience and understanding are highly appreciated.

If you need further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind Regards,


Darel Colorina

Researcher Support

ELSEVIER

- Visit the [Editor Guide to Editorial Manager](#) to access guided learning pathways, designed for each editor role, which include links to instructional videos and articles.
- Visit the [Author Guide to Editorial Manager](#) for a guided walkthrough of author key tasks, such as manuscript submission process and how to track your manuscript.
- Visit the [Reviewer Guide to Editorial Manager](#) for a guided walkthrough of reviewer key tasks.

Revisi artikel ketujuh (23 Mei 2024)






Heliyon

<em@editorialmanager.com>

kepada saya

Kam, 23 Mei 2024, 21:55



Ms. No.: HELIYON-D-23-24599R7

Title: Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

Journal: Heliyon

Dear Dr Sahrul,

Thank you for submitting your manuscript to Heliyon. We have now received all of the editor and reviewer comments on your recent submission to Heliyon. The reviewers have advised that your manuscript requires revisions prior to being considered for publication. We ask that you respond to each reviewer comment by either outlining how the criticism was addressed in the revised manuscript or by providing a rebuttal to the criticism. This should be carried out in a point-by-point fashion as illustrated here: <https://www.cell.com/heliyon/guide-for-authors#RevisionsTo> allow the editors and reviewers to easily assess your revised manuscript, we also ask that you upload a version of your manuscript highlighting any revisions made. You may wish to use Microsoft Word's Track Changes tool or, for LaTeX files, the latexdiff Perl script (<https://ctan.org/pkg/latexdiff>).

We also request you to ensure the following about data availability.

While first submitting your manuscript, you were asked two questions regarding data availability. The questions and your responses to them are as follows,

Additional Information

1. Sahrul Sahrul, Dr

Question	Response
<p>Data Availability</p> <p>Sharing research data helps other researchers evaluate your findings, build on your work and to increase trust in your article. We encourage all our authors to make as much of their data publicly available as reasonably possible. Please note that your response to the following questions regarding the public data availability and the reasons for potentially not making data available will be available alongside your article upon publication.</p> <p>Has data associated with your study been deposited into a publicly available repository?</p> <p>Please select why. Please note that this statement will be available alongside your article upon publication.</p> <p>as follow-up to "Data Availability"</p> <p>Sharing research data helps other researchers evaluate your findings, build on your work and to increase trust in your article. We encourage all our authors to make as much of their data publicly available as reasonably possible. Please note that your response to the following questions regarding the public data availability and the reasons for potentially not making data available will be available alongside your article upon publication.</p> <p>Has data associated with your study been deposited into a publicly available repository?</p> <p>"</p>	<p>No</p> <p>The data that has been used is confidential</p>

Please add these responses to the 'Data availability statement' section of your manuscript. If your manuscript doesn't contain a 'Data availability statement' section, please add one right before the 'References' section and then include these responses therein.

Furthermore, please note that Heliyon now uses a Numbered reference style. Please update the references in your manuscript accordingly, if necessary.

To submit your revised manuscript, please log in as an author at <https://www.editorialmanager.com/heliyon/>, and navigate to the "Submissions Needing Revision" folder under the Author Main Menu.

Please note that our ethics requirements are now updated. Please choose all applicable statements in our ethics declarations list (available here: <https://www.cell.com/heliyon/ethics>) and include them as a complete ethics statement in the declarations section at the end of your manuscript.

Your revision due date is Jun 06, 2024.

If you need additional time to address the concerns that came up in the review process, please let us know so we can discuss a plan for moving your paper forward.

I look forward to receiving your revised manuscript.

Research Elements (optional)

This journal encourages you to share research objects - including your raw data, methods, protocols, software, hardware and more – which support your original research article in a Research Elements journal. Research Elements are open access, multidisciplinary, peer-reviewed journals which make the objects associated with your research more discoverable, trustworthy and promote replicability and reproducibility. As open access journals, there may be an Article Publishing Charge if your paper is accepted for publication. Find out more about the Research Elements journals at https://www.elsevier.com/authors/tools-and-resources/research-elements-journals?dgcid=ec_em_research_elements_email.

Kind regards,

Rachael Tucker, PhD

Scientific Editor

Heliyon

Editor and Reviewer comments:

Please note that manuscripts with inadequate language quality will not be accepted in the journal. If editors and / or reviewers indicate that language revisions are required for your manuscript, we strongly encourage using a professional language editing service. Elsevier's Language Editing services provides professional and prompt editing of scientific language for research submissions (<https://webshop.elsevier.com/language-editing-services/language-editing/>). All manuscripts edited with Elsevier's Language Editing services are accompanied by a certificate that may be submitted to the journal as proof for language editing. Poor language may lead to rejection of your manuscript even at the revision stage.

Please see attached document for minor revisions. The manuscript requires grammatical editing in places. Please review the entire manuscript for language. Please ensure all photographs are anonymised (including image b in figure 3).

Respon jurnal Heliyon: Konfirmasi telah menerima naskah revisi artikel ketujuh (25 Mei 2024)

Confirming submission to Heliyon Eksternal Kotak Masuk x



Heliyon <em@editorialmanager.com>

Sab, 25 Mei 2024, 10:23 ☆ ↶ ⋮

kepada saya ▼

This is an automated message.

Manuscript Number: HELIYON-D-23-24599R8

Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

Dear Dr Sahrul,

We have received the above referenced revision of your manuscript at Heliyon. To track the status of your manuscript, please log in as an author at <https://www.editorialmanager.com/heliyon/>, and navigate to the "Revisions Being Processed" folder.

Kind regards,
Heliyon

More information and support

Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

--Manuscript Draft--

Manuscript Number:	HELIYON-D-23-24599R8
Article Type:	Original Research Article
Section/Category:	Social Sciences
Keywords:	death rituals; funeral traditions; Batu Qulhu; Mandailing community; norms and values
Manuscript Classifications:	140.190.110: Human Geography; 140.190.110.100: Cultural Geography; 140.190.130: Cultural Sociology; 140.190.140: Anthropology; 140.270: Religion
Corresponding Author:	Sahrul Sahrul, Dr State Islamic University of North Sumatra Medan, North Sumatra INDONESIA
First Author:	Sahrul Sahrul, Dr
Order of Authors:	Sahrul Sahrul, Dr
	Anang Widhi Nirwansyah, Dr
	Seyithan Demirdag, PhD
	Afrahul Fadhila Daulai, Dr
Abstract:	<p>Death and funeral rituals hold significant cultural and spiritual importance in traditional communities worldwide, including within the Islamic faith. This study focuses on exploring the unique funeral ritual known as Batu Qulhu in the Muslim Mandailing community. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes field observations and interviews with ulama and imams who have practical knowledge and understanding of this traditional ritual. The study reveals two origin stories of Batu Qulhu: one attributed to the first Imam in the Mandailing community and the other associated with elderly parents, ulama, and village malims (religious teachers) without specifying an individual source. Batu Qulhu refers to the white river stones utilized by the congregation during the ritual to count the number of prayers offered. The procession of this tradition follows a strict protocol, encompassing prayers, recitation of the Quran, and seeking forgiveness for the deceased and their family. The efficacy of Batu Qulhu serves as a testament to the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of cultural identity. While Batu Qulhu remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar cultural practices can be observed in other regions, highlighting the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and uphold cultural traditions as an integral part of identity and social cohesion.</p>
Opposed Reviewers:	
Additional Information:	
Question	Response
Publication ethics Please confirm that you have reviewed our guidelines for Ethics in Publishing as well as Heliyon's Ethics and Editorial Policies	I confirm

This piece of the submission is being sent via mail.

Title of the study involving human participant(s):

Author Name(s): *Dr. SAHRUL, M.A*

Institution(s): *Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication,
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UINSU)*

Date: *10 April 2024*

I, the undersigned author of the above-mentioned study, hereby declare the following:

1. I have obtained written informed consent from the participant(s) / patient(s) for the publication of this study, any accompanying data and images. Where consent was obtained from someone other than the participant(s) / patient(s), I confirm that this proxy was authorised to provide consent on the participant's / patient's behalf.
2. Where the participant(s) / patient(s) is/are a minor(s), we followed local laws on the age and circumstances under which they may consent for themselves. If they were not of legal age to consent, consent was obtained from an authorised proxy i.e., the parents or legal guardian(s). If the minor(s) has/have reasonable understanding of the informed consent and implications, signature (or assent, as appropriate) was also obtained from the minor(s).
3. Where the participant(s) / patient(s) provided consent themselves, I confirm that they had capacity to do so, and any mental or physical disabilities were taken into consideration in the process of informing and obtaining written informed consent.
4. Where the participant(s) / patient(s) has/have died, I confirm that the consent given still allows for publication.
5. I confirm that all content presented in this study, associated data and images have been deidentified and anonymized to the best possible extent.
6. The original signed and dated consent form is held by the treating institution or appropriate governing local / regional / national body and will be retained according to the policies and procedures of the institution or governing body.
7. The written informed consent form (please **do not** include with your submission) includes all relevant information pertinent to each participant / patient (such as the name, age, condition, medical history, diagnosis, and treatment)
8. The participant(s) / patient(s) / authorized proxy were fully informed of the purpose of this study, the potential risks and benefits of publication, and the consequence of disclosing their personal information.
9. The participant(s) / patient(s) or authorized proxy were given the opportunity to ask questions regarding publication of the study, had their questions answered fully and have consented to publish all associated data and images. In the case of clinical studies, the participant(s) / patient(s) or authorized proxy approved the final version of the manuscript.
10. The participant(s) / patient(s) or legal guardian(s) were informed that their consent and participation in the publication of this study is entirely voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw their consent at any time.
11. If this is a clinical study manuscript, I confirm that at least one of the authors of this paper was involved in the care of the participant(s) / patient(s).
12. I confirm that my article complies with the appropriate local / regional / national law on consent and privacy.

By signing this declaration form, I acknowledge that I have read and understood the information provided above, and I attest to the accuracy of this declaration. I understand that any false or misleading information may result in the rejection of the manuscript or other disciplinary actions.

As corresponding author, I hereby declare that I sign this document on behalf of all the authors of the above-mentioned study involving human participants.

Corresponding author's signature:	<i>Muhammad</i>
Date:	<i>10 April 2024</i>

Please submit this **Human Participant Declaration Form** along with the manuscript to the journal. **Note:** The written informed consent form must NOT be submitted with your manuscript but must be made available to the journal if specifically requested.

Please retain a copy of this declaration for your records.



KEMENTERIAN AGAMA REPUBLIK INDONESIA
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI SUMATERA UTARA MEDAN
LEMBAGA PENELITIAN DAN PENGABDIAN KEPADA MASYARAKAT
JL. William Iskandar Pasar V Medan Estate 20371 Telp. (061) 6615683-6622925 Fax. (061) 6615683

Ethics Committee Letter of Approval

No. 0616615683

Project Title: *Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra*

Researcher: Dr. Sahrul

Affiliation:

Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara

Date: 1-February-2022 - 31-Oct-2022 | **Contract Number:** 328

Introduction

This letter confirms the approval of the ethical research proposal for the project titled "Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra" by Dr. Sahrul, affiliated with the Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program at *Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara*.

Approval for Research Methods

The Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved the proposed research methods, which include:

-) Interviews
-) Observations
-) Photo collection

Ethical Considerations

The committee commends the inclusion of the following ethical considerations in the research proposal:

-) **Informed Consent:**
 - o A process to obtain written informed consent from all participants before interviews, observations, and photo collection must be implemented.
 - o The consent form should explain the research purpose, data collection methods, potential risks and benefits of participation, confidentiality measures, and the right to withdraw from the study at any point.
-) **Confidentiality:**
 - o Measures to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants must be outlined. This includes anonymizing interview transcripts, observation notes, and photographs.
 - o Data storage protocols that protect participant privacy should be established.
-) **Respect for Cultural Sensitivities:**
 - o The research should be conducted with sensitivity to the cultural practices and beliefs of the Mandailing community regarding death and funerals.
 - o Permission should be sought from appropriate community authorities before commencing research activities.

Conditions of Approval

This approval is granted with the following conditions:

-) Any deviations from the approved research plan must be reported to the Ethics Committee for review and approval.
-) Unexpected ethical issues arising during the research must be reported to the Ethics Committee promptly.
-) A copy of the final research report summarizing the findings and addressing any ethical considerations must be submitted to the Ethics Committee upon completion of the project.

Contact Information

For any questions or concerns regarding ethical procedures, please contact the LPPM Ethics Committee, *Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara*, at lppm@uinsu.ac.id



Sincerely,
Chair, LPPM Ethics Committee
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara

Dr. Nispul Khoiri, M.Ag

Declaration of interests

☒The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

☐The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests:

Cover Letter

Medan, 25 May 2024

Subject: Revision Manuscript Submission

Dear Editor-in-Chief,

Thank you for your previous feedback on my manuscript, "*Batu Qulhu – The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra*." I have carefully revised the article to address the reviewer's concerns, particularly regarding grammatical editing and anonymity in the figure 3b.

I believe the revised manuscript aligns well with Heliyon's focus on interdisciplinary research and will provide valuable insights into the diverse cultural practices within Muslim societies. I respectfully request your reconsideration for publication.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your response and am happy to discuss any further revisions or answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Sahrul

Dear Editor,

We are grateful for the reviewers' insightful feedback, especially regarding grammatical editing. We've revised the relevant section (line 73; line 276), delete 'meticulous' word in some sentences. Additionally, we've already added the date of the ethical approval letter (line 303) and delete information regarding participant 4 that previously offered by author.

Thank you.

Best,
Sahrul

***Batu Qulhu*—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra**

Sahrul^{1*}, Anang Widhi Nirwansyah², Seyithan Demirdag³, and Afrahul Fadhila Daulai⁴

¹ Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UINSU), Jl. Willem Iskandar Ps. V Medan Estate, Medan, 20371, Indonesia; sahrul@uinsu.ac.id

² Department of Geography Education, Faculty of Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, Banyumas, 53182, Indonesia; anangwidi@ump.ac.id

³ Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Education, Zonguldak Bulent Ecevit University, Zonguldak, 67100, Turkey; seyithandemirdag@gmail.com

⁴ Islamic Religious Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, Jl. Willem Iskandar Ps. V Medan Estate, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UINSU), Medan, 20371, Indonesia; afrahulfadhila@uinsu.ac.id

Correspondence: sahrul@uinsu.ac.id

Abstract: Death and funeral rituals hold significant cultural and spiritual importance in traditional communities worldwide, including within the Islamic faith. This study focuses on exploring the unique funeral ritual known as *Batu Qulhu* in the Muslim Mandailing community. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes field observations and interviews with ulama and imams who have practical knowledge and understanding of this traditional ritual. The study reveals two origin stories of *Batu Qulhu*: one attributed to the first Imam in the Mandailing community and the other associated with elderly-parents, ulama, and village *malims* (religious teachers) without specifying an individual source. *Batu Qulhu* refers to the white river stones utilized by the congregation during the ritual to count the number of prayers offered. The procession of this tradition follows a strict protocol, encompassing prayers, recitation of the Quran, and seeking forgiveness for the deceased and their family. The efficacy of *Batu Qulhu* serves as a testament to the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of cultural identity. While *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar cultural practices can be observed in other regions, highlighting the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and uphold cultural traditions as an integral part of identity and social cohesion.

Keywords: death rituals, funeral traditions, *Batu Qulhu*, Mandailing community, norms and values

1. Introduction

As a traditional aspect of culture, funeral practices serve as an initial stride towards fostering harmonious relations within multi-ethnic communities [1]. The manner in which individuals navigate the concept of death holds significance as it encompasses their cultural engagement and utilization, similar to how religion, an integral component of culture, provides a framework for comprehending, interpreting, and making sense of death, albeit without necessarily diminishing its inherent challenges for those experiencing grief [2]. Throughout various cultures, the commemoration of the deceased and the support offered to grieving

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families manifest through a multitude of ritualistic practices [3]. These rituals hold particular significance within religious frameworks as they are not only guided by religious doctrines but also serve as fundamental aspects of communal worship [4]. Within the Islamic tradition, the management of deceased bodies adheres to the teachings found in the Qur'an, specifically drawing attention to Surah Al Imran (QS 3:185). This verse underscores the universal nature of mortality, asserting that every individual is bound to experience death [5]. In his groundbreaking 1907 study, Robert Hertz skillfully intertwined three essential imperatives - moral, aesthetic, and sociological - to present a captivating conceptualization of death [6]. His intricate analysis portrays death as a profound transformative journey that transcends the boundaries of both the spiritual and physical realms.

In Indonesia, funeral rituals have been intricately intertwined with local cultural practices and ethnic traditions. Various communities, such as the Tana Toraja people [7], the traditional Javanese community [8,9], and the Balinese who perform the *ngaben* ceremony [10,11], express their funeral customs based on their specific cultural heritage. These burial practices and procedures provide profound insights into the community and society in which they are performed. In these traditions, feasts, animal sacrifices, and supplications are often conducted to honor the deceased and their family. Additionally, Islamic values and rituals significantly influence funeral practices across many regions in Indonesia. The practice of *tahlil* or *tahlilan*, which involves collective remembrance gatherings, is commonly observed [12], and the *azan* (call to prayer) is often performed during burial ceremonies [4]. Moreover, in certain regions of Sumatra, Islamic funeral practices have assimilated with local traditions. For example, the people of Minangkabau in Nagari Salayo incorporate the custom of placing attributes on the head of the deceased during the funeral procession [13]. While in Nagari Anduring, the Minang community also practices *bakayaik*, which takes place 100 days after someone's passing. *Bakayaik* vividly recounts the profound narrative of Prophet Muhammad pbuh¹, beginning with his miraculous birth and chronicling his relentless efforts to uphold the principles of Islam. This ceremonial tradition blends the eloquence of Arabic and Minang languages, creating a captivating linguistic tapestry that enhances the overall richness of the performance. In Aceh, the *reuhab* tradition involves decorating the deceased person's bedroom for 40 days [14]. These practices exemplify the dynamic interplay between Islamic influences and local cultural expressions in funeral rituals across Indonesia.

Throughout history, archaeological evidence of ancient burials reveals a persistent pattern: human societies, since their inception, have convened to form social bonds and articulate emotions and intentions in response to the phenomenon of death [15]. This ritual also promotes

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social cohesion in many communities practiced in various belief systems [16–18]. Despite this, there is no clear description on concept of social cohesion [19], for the purpose of this study, social cohesion is defined by the interconnectedness of social networks and the customs, bonds, and values that uphold their unity [20]. The idea of social cohesion traces back to Emile Durkheim's theory. He proposed the notion of mechanical solidarity in society, suggesting its presence through the strength of influential individuals [21]. Hence, social cohesion emerges from socio-spatial factors that influence individuals within specific locations, representing a reflection of the classification of spaces [22,23]. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct thorough research into the rituals and traditions of specific communities within their local contexts to better understand and extract the factors contributing to social cohesion. This approach allows for a more nuanced analysis, considering the unique cultural and social dynamics that shape cohesion within distinct groups. Further, the traditional ceremony holds facilitates religious and spiritual practices as well as strengthening social bond and sense of identity [24].

This study aims to ~~contribute~~ investigate ~~to the origin of Batu Oulhu~~ rituals, exploring its contemporary practices and norms based on the social cohesion and identity ~~the understanding of funeral traditions within the Muslim community in Sumatra, specifically focusing on the practice of Batu Oulhu remembrance~~ in the Mandailing community of North Sumatra. The funeral rituals in this community are deeply rooted in a rich tapestry of cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions. By exploring the *Batu Oulhu* remembrance ceremonies, this research seeks to shed light on the significance and intricacies of these rituals, offering valuable insights into the broader context of funeral traditions among Muslims in Sumatra. ~~The study addresses the historical aspect of the ritual, the procession in current societies, and finally the norms and values contained in this ritual.~~ Regarding the goals, the current article addresses the following research question ~~the research question, what is the historical background of Batu Oulhu in the Mandailing community? How do the practices surround Batu Oulhu manifest in present-day Mandailing Muslim society? What are the norms associated with Batu Oulhu within the Mandailing community based on social cohesion and identity?~~

1.1. Mandailing Ethnic: Historical Context

The origin of the word "*Mandailing*" is linked to the Munda people of India, who experienced defeat in a war against the Aryan people. The term "*Mandailing*" is derived from either "*Mandala Holing*" [25,26] or "*Mundailing*," referring to the refugees from Munda [27]. It is believed that the Munda people originally inhabited the northern regions of India before

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the arrival of the Aryans [28]. The historical interaction between the Aryans and the Munda people has been examined through linguistic evidence [29]. Due to pressure from the Aryans, the Munda people migrated southward within India [29–31], and this Aryan occupation of the Munda people occurred around 1200–1500–12500 BC [32]. Eventually, the displaced Munda people migrated to Southeast Asia [31], although the specific country of their migration is not specified. It is likely that some of them reached North Sumatra through the Barus Port in Central Tapanuli, which was an international port at that time. Referred to "*Negarakeragama*" book from 1365, which mentions the presence of the Mandailing as one of the most significant ethnic groups in the archipelago [25,33]. The names mentioned include Mandailing, Pane, and Padang Lawas. The mention of these names indicates that the name Mandailing has been known by outsiders since ancient dates. In addition, Tuanku Rao² suggests that the Mandailing people trace their origin back to the Bugis Makassar, who sailed to the Singkuang Port (now known as Natal), it is more commonly accepted that the Mandailing people are part of the Batak ethnic group.

The Mandailing community's ethnic origin is a subject of contention among scholars. While some argue that they are part of the Batak Toba ethnic group [34,35], this perspective faces opposition from Mandailing intellectuals and historians. However, an analysis of factors such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group [36,37]. To establish their identity as the Mandailing community, they refer to themselves as "*halak kita*" (referred to: our people) of South Tapanuli [38], rather than as "*halak batak*" (Batak people) [39,40]. Regarding religious affiliation, the majority of the contemporary Mandailing population follows Islam, with a minority of Christians found in specific locations like Pakantan in Upper Mandailing, Medan, and other cities in North Sumatra [25,41]. Before embracing Islam, the religious beliefs of the Mandailing people focused around ancestral spirits referred to as "*si pele begu*" [33], incorporating influences from Hinduism and Buddhism [42]. Recent field research conducted in the Mandailing region revealed remnants and artefacts associated with both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, particularly in the vicinity of Panyabungan within the Greater Mandailing area [43].

Padri wars has brought Islam to Mandailing around 1821 and the Dutch military breached and defeated this movement by 1835 [36,41,44]. The term '*pPadri*' has two possible origins. One explanation suggests that it stems from the Indonesian word '*padri*,' which referred to priests. It is important to emphasize that the notable figures associated with the Padri movement can be likened to 'Islamic priests' [45]. This movement emerged in the early 1800s as a

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reformist Islamic movement led by local scholars known as ulama. These ulama sought to purify and reform Islam in the region, criticizing what they perceived as syncretic practices and deviations from strict Islamic teachings [26,41]. They aimed to establish a more orthodox and conservative interpretation of Islam in Mandailing. Padri movement gained support from various segments of the population, including the rural communities, who were attracted to their message of religious purity and social justice [46]. The Padris' growing influence and power threatened the traditional rulers, known as penghulu, who feared losing their authority and control [41,45].

Before then, in the classical era, marked by the introduction of Hinduism preceding Islam into South Tapanuli, is substantiated by the presence of the Bahal temple in Portibi (now Padang Lawas), a relic of the Panai kingdom during the 12th and 13th centuries. Schnitger [47] documented that around 1000 AD, the Panai kingdom stood as the foremost realm of its time. Nevertheless, around 11th century, the Panai kingdom succumbed to Rajendrakola from India, an adherent of the Hindu faith. Despite the presence of Hindus within the Mandailing Sultanate, the Mandailing populace did not embrace Islam. This decision was influenced by the religion's veneration of numerous idols. Through a traditional lens, there exists a fusion of religion and culture, exemplified by customs such as *upah-upah*³ (gift) during weddings, rites marking childbirth, and housewarming ceremonies. Additionally, observances spanning 7, 40, 100, and 1000 days following the demise of parents are upheld.

The Mandailing Sultanate fell under the dominion of the Aru kingdom circa 1295 AD, spanning the 13th to 15th centuries AD. Subsequent to this period, the Pulungan kingdom emerged, followed by the ascendancy of the Nasution clan, which assumed control over the Mandailing Godang region (now Panyabungan), and the Lubis clan, which governed Mandailing Julu (now Kotanopan).

1.2. Mandailing Philosophy

The values of the Mandailing ethnic philosophy of life called *Poda Na Lima*. *Poda* means advice, *na* means ~~five~~^{which/that/is}, and *lima* means five. In short, *Poda Na Lima* consists of five pieces of advice, namely: i) *Paia Rohamu* (keeping your heart clean); ii) *Paia Pamatangmu* (keeping your body clean); iii) *Paia Parabitoanmu* (keeping your clothes clean); iv) *Paia Bagasmu* (keeping your house clean); and v) *Paia Pakaranganmu* (keeping your yard clean) [34,48]. These five values are still firmly held by the Mandailing community and the Mandailing ethnicity in Indonesia and around the world. Despite the Madina people's reputation for being religious, their daily social lives are intertwined with various cultural

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practices that are imbued with religious significance. These rituals, such as *marhaban* (*barzanzi*)⁴, the use of plain flour, and *upah-upah*⁵, are performed on joyful occasions such as weddings, recoveries from illness, and the attainment of new positions, as well as during significant life transitions such as the birth of a child and moving into a new home [38].

The Mandailing ethnic community has a value system, *Dalihan Na Tolu* which means a forum used to organize life in carrying out *olong* (affection) between *mora*, *kahanggi* and *anak boru* [34,35,49,50]. *Dalihan Na Tolu*, also referred to 'three stones' [37], is a cultural value, created by the Creator that guide Batakese attitude and behavior in the social lives and cultural relation [51]. The three stones encompass family, community, and spirituality. In Mandailing community, *Dalihan Na Tolu* principles are deeply intertwined with Islamic values and teachings. Mandailing Muslim communities incorporate these cultural principles into their daily lives, alongside their Islamic beliefs and practices [51,52]. This concept reinforces the importance of maintaining strong moral character, fostering harmonious relationships, and upholding social justice within the community [34,35,51].

2. Location Settings

The Mandailing Natal region, often abbreviated as *Madina*, is situated in North Sumatra Province, spanning approximately also shortly known as *Madina*, is located in North Sumatra Province and astronomically situated between 0°10' and 1°50' N and 98°10' and 100°10' E. This region is located on the west coast of Sumatra, has a 170 km coastline, and is home to 24 islands, though only 4 of these islands are inhabited. In 2021, *Madina* has a population of over 478,000 people, and has a total area of 6,134 km² [53]. Based on BPS-Statistics of Mandailing Natal Regency [53], during 2021, the predominant land use in this region comprises a mixed vegetation area, accounting for 39.15% or 252.57 hectares, while forested areas occupy 30.04% of the region, followed by palm oil plantations at 27.79%. Settlements in *Madina* cover 451.38 hectares (0.7%), while agriculture utilizes 2.17% of the land. Additionally, water bodies such as lakes and dams encompass 0.14% of the region's total area. This region is crossed by three river systems including Batang Pungkut, Batang Gadis, and Aek Pohan that represent upper, middle and lower part of the Batang Gadis watershed [54]. These rivers are beneficial for major population in *Madina* including for agriculture, plantation and industrial sectors. However, for years the rivers have also become threatened to illegal mining activities including sands, rocks and gold [55,56].

The majority of the population in *Madina*, around 95%, is Muslim, while the remaining 5% consists of Christians (including Catholics), Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of

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Confucianism. Madina has more than 800 mosques and 70 churches [57], to support the religious practices of its inhabitants, and the region is made up of 23 districts and over 370 villages. Muslim community in Madina, consisting of various ethnic groups, exhibits a rich diversity of cultural and religious practices. Mosques and Islamic schools, known as *madrasah*, hold a prominent position in shaping the religious and cultural life of the community. Furthermore, active participation in significant cultural and religious traditions, such as the celebration of two major Islamic holidays like *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*, is observed among the Muslim population. A strong emphasis on social responsibility and assisting those in need, in alignment with Islamic principles, is evident through the engagement of the Muslim community in charitable and community service activities. The local government plays a supportive role by implementing policies and providing necessary infrastructure to promote Islamic education [58].

3. Methodology

3.1. Design of the Research

This study adopts qualitative research design, employing combination of phenomenological and ethnographic approaches. Both methodologies are characterized by their exploratory nature, utilizing the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection [59]. -By intertwining the principles of phenomenological analysis and ethnography, this current study approach emphasizes a comprehensive exploration of human experiences within their natural settings. While phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of lived experiences, ethnography complements this by elucidating the cultural and social intricacies that contextualize these experiences within specific communities or groups. Additionally, they both underscore the importance of adopting a self-conscious approach to research, wherein researchers are attentive to their own perspectives, biases, and influences throughout the research process. It is worth to be noticed that tThe primary aim of qualitative research is to comprehend the distinctive characteristics and experiences of individual cases, rather than attempting to establish generalized patterns or trends [60]. This method emphasizes the comprehensive exploration of human behaviors and experiences as they unfold within natural settings [61,62]. Integral to this research is the integration of the subjects' knowledge with that of the researchers, which holds significant importance. This integration facilitates the recognition and documentation of outcomes from the local perspective inherent to the subjects themselves [7,63]. The current study employs an emic approach, which entails adopting the insider's perspective from within the culture where the research project is situated, as

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previously described in studies by [7,45,64–66]. By embracing an emic approach, the research acknowledges the critical importance of comprehending and interpreting the cultural context and subjective experiences of the subjects, thereby enriching both the research process and its findings.

3.2. Fieldwork and Subjects

The research employed an observational and interview-based approach to collect data. The researchers assumed the roles of both observers and interviewers. The observation phase focused on the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice in the study area, the activities of the Imam during the ritual, and the placement of stones in the graveyard after the final day of remembrance. For the interviews, a systematic process was followed to select appropriate sources. Initial contact with the informants was established through various means, such as phone calls, emails, and WhatsApp messages, to effectively arrange and conduct the interviews.

In prior ethnographic studies, a limited number of subjects were involved. For instance, two studies centered on the practices of anesthesia within two British hospital [67]. Similarly, Baan et al. [7] conducted research on funeral rituals in Toraja with only two informants, while Lee et al. [68] examined the experience of depression among Chinese individuals with a sample size of five informants. In accordance with the present study, data collection encompassed interviews with a total of eight carefully selected subjects, as detailed in Table 1. The age range of the informants in this study was 45-73 years old.

The selection process for these subjects adhered to specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Firstly, the informants were required to hold the roles of imams or leaders of the *Batu Qulhu* dhikr (or remembrance) during funeral ceremonies within the Mandailing community. Secondly, they were expected to possess a profound understanding of the norms and values associated with *Batu Qulhu*. Lastly, the informants needed to be Ulama or respected Islamic spiritual leaders within the local community. Proficiency in the Mandailing language was also a prerequisite for informant selection. To identify suitable subjects, consultations were conducted with local authorities, such as the Indonesian Council of Ulama (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*) in Madina, as well as prominent local figures.

Table 1

The current investigation involved the collection of data during a comprehensive six-month fieldwork period in 2022, specifically spanning from February to July. This fieldwork, which was coordinated by the first and second author, F.S. and A.F.D., extended over a total

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of 90 days. The study targeted five specifically chosen districts, selected from a larger pool of 23 districts in the designated study area (refer to Figure 1). The primary objective of the research was to obtain valuable insights into the cultural practices related to the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in the Madina region. The *Batu Qulhu* event occurring in July 2022 was meticulously observed and documented, employing a combination of photographs and videos for ~~meticulous~~ recording. Regarding the data collection process, individual interviews were conducted with each informant, with each session spanning approximately 2 hours. These interviews took place at mutually agreed locations, such as the informant's residence, school office, or the household of the deceased individual where the *Batu Qulhu* ritual took place. Thorough and ~~meticulous~~ rigorous recording of all pertinent information was undertaken for subsequent analysis purposes.

Figure 1

3.3. Data Analysis

The present study utilized a qualitative data analysis approach, encompassing three key stages: 1) data reduction; 2) data presentation; and 3) drawing conclusions. This analytical process unfolded iteratively throughout the research. Initially, during the early phases of data collection, the research maintained a broad and overarching focus, and the observations were comprehensive in nature. As the research progressed and the focus of the study became more apparent, the observations evolved to adopt a more structured approach, enabling the acquisition of specific and targeted data.

The data analysis commenced with data reduction, where the gathered information was streamlined and organized to facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Subsequently, the data were presented in a coherent and meaningful manner to facilitate effective interpretation. Finally, the study derived conclusions based on the analyzed data, allowing for the generation of valuable insights into the cultural practices surrounding the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina. Throughout the research, this qualitative data analysis process occurred in a cyclical manner, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the research topic and a nuanced understanding of the intricacies involved. By transitioning from broad and general observations to more structured and specific data collection, the study achieved a comprehensive and detailed exploration of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual's cultural significance and its relevance within the Mandailing community.

3.4. Ethical Consideration

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The present investigation was conducted under the auspices of Cluster Interdisciplinary Basic Research, adhering meticulously to stringent ethical guidelines. To ensure ethical compliance, the study received official approval from the Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) University of North Sumatera (UINSU) with the approval number: 0616615683, valid from 1 February 2022 to 31 October 2022. The utmost care was taken in handling the research data and records, which were securely stored on a password-protected computer housed within the Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, UINSU. Access to these records was strictly restricted to the authors.

In adherence to established ethical standards for data collection and publication, prior to their inclusion in the research, explicit informed consent was ~~meticulously~~ acquired from all eight subjects involved, thereby safeguarding their voluntary and informed engagement in the study. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, a coding system was employed, wherein each subject was allocated an initial "P" followed by pertinent demographic particulars, such as age and current profession. Moreover, all photographic materials featured in this investigation were obtained with written consent from all participants in the native *Bahasa* (Indonesian language), thereby emphasizing the paramount importance of respecting their autonomy and privacy throughout the research process. All participants provided written consent to participate, for the data to be published and for inclusion of photographs. All guests at the ritual provided written consent. Permission was sought from the family representative, who was briefed on the study's objectives, note-taking, and photography. This unwavering commitment to ethical principles serves to underscore the rigor and integrity of the present inquiry, facilitating an ethically sound exploration of the cultural practices pertaining to the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Origin of the Rituals

Based on the interview, it is mentioned that Syeikh Haji Mustafa Husein bin Husein Nasution bin Umar Nasution Al-Mandaili (or known as Syeikh Mustafa Husein) (1886-1955), is credited as the first Imam to introduce the practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance at funeral ceremonies. In the beginning, was named by *Batu Balancing* based on the color of the stone used in this ritual. This insight was derived from interviews conducted with P1 (65), an ulama, and P2 (52), a teacher at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Panyabungan. In addition, Syeikh

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Musthafa Husein is also founder of the *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB)⁶ or Purba Baru Islamic boarding school. The practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been preserved and perpetuated by his students, who have established recitation congregations in various locations such as mosques, prayer rooms, and *surau*⁷. Notably, the students and alumni of Musthafawiyah have played a significant role in its development and expansion beyond Madina region, with a presence in several other provinces across Indonesia. As the oldest *pesantren* (or boarding school) in North Sumatra, the influence of this practice extends widely, facilitated by the widespread distribution of its students and graduates.

An alternative explanation, provided by P3 (73) an ulama, diverges slightly from the previous informant. He has pointed out that the tradition of using *Batu Qulhu* or *Batu Balancing*⁸ as a medium for remembrance was explained with a slight variation, focusing on the customs upheld by elderly parents, ulama, village *malims* (religious teachers), without mentioning any specific individual. It was a means to alleviate the sorrow experienced by the bereaved and served as a form of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends. In addition to the customary acts of attending funerals and observing mourning rituals, the strategies employed to alleviate the profound grief experienced by individuals extended further. These encompassed multifaceted practices such as providing emotional support, proffering words of guidance and solace to foster resilience and acceptance in the face of adversity. Moreover, individuals were invited to partake in collective prayer sessions, where the use of *Batu Qulhu* stones served as facilitative elements in creating a conducive environment for these spiritual gatherings. P3 further elucidated that this method, referred to as *alak na jolo martakziah*, involved family members, parents, spouses, children, relatives, and neighbors coming together for *tahlilan*.

“In the past people paid tribute to the homes of people who died; parents, wife, husband, children, siblings and neighbors are tahlilan, starting from reciting istighfar, al-Fatihah, tahlil, prayers and concluding selawat. To make the dhikr in congregation more solemn, they add media by using a Batu Balancing (white stone) within size of an adult's big toe or larger than that. In the past, the white stone was said to be a Batu Balancing, now it is better known as the Batu Qulhu”.

Batu Qulhu ritual refers to the use of certain stone as a means of carrying out dhikr worship. In general, this type of stone is typically known as white pebble. It should be noticed that most of these white pebbles are predominantly comprised of marble, a rock formation characterized by its crystallized carbonates and can easily be found in the riparian zone. Here, the family of the deceased person collect these stones from the nearest river. As mentioned in

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the interview, this ritual chooses approximately the size of an adult's thumb to enhance the solemnity of the remembrance (as can be seen in Figure 2a). During the interview P4 (65), emphasized that in the past, people paid homage to the homes of the deceased, engaging in *tahlilan* rituals that encompassed prayers and concluding with 'selawat' (see Figure 2b). To augment the collective remembrance, *Batu Qulhu*, the size of an adult's big toe or larger, was employed. Over time, the *Batu Balancing* came to be recognized as the *Batu Qulhu*.

Figure 2

The utilization of *Batu Qulhu* in death ceremonies is also underpinned by the geographical sequences. Firstly, the abundance of rivers in Madina, notably the Batang Gadis River, Batang Natal River, Aek Kalungan River and Angkola River, facilitated the easy availability of these stones in the past. Nowadays, these rivers also threatened by illegal gold mining activities [55], and tend to pollute due to its waste [56]. Secondly, these stones possess distinct characteristics that contribute to their suitability for the purpose at hand. They exhibit a white hue, imparting a visually soothing effect, while their cool and clean appearance further enhances their appeal. Third, these stones demonstrate resilience in withstanding the rigors of varying weather conditions, including heat, cold, and rainfall. Furthermore, the recitation of *Batu Qulhu* rituals is believed by the community to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave.

4.2. The Contemporary Practice of Batu Qulhu in the Mandailing Community

In the past, Islamic practices in Sumatra have exhibited influences from mystical and shamanistic traditions e.g., [69,70]. However, it is important to note that the religious activities associated with the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* are not influenced by shamanism, but rather stem solely from religious traditions previously followed by religious scholars, religious teachers, and traditional leaders. Currently, the contemporary practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been inherited and embraced by Muslim society in Madina. Based on interview with P4 (65), it is evident that in the past, the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance adhered to strict protocols as mentioned in the following statement.

"The tradition of recalling the Batu Qulhu was once a highly regulated practice. It required seeking consent from both the village leader and the syekh. Mastery of the 20 essential attributes of Allah was necessary, alongside the ability to read the Quran and comprehend its teachings. The stones themselves had to possess a pure white hue. The recitation of Qulhu would take place during evening gatherings, where all the stones present had to be utilized fully, leaving no remnants behind before the congregation dispersed".

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These procedures include the following: 1) the procession necessitated obtaining permission from the head of the village⁹ and *tuan guru*¹⁰ (or *kulifah*); 2) the ritual leader was required to commit to memory and comprehend the twenty obligatory attributes of God, encompassing *nafsiyah* (self-related attributes) nature, *salbiyah* (attributes related to existence) nature, *ma'ani* (abstract attributes of God) nature, and *maknawiyah* (the essential nature and prevalence of *ma'ani*) nature; 3) the officiating Imam was expected to possess proficiency in both written and spoken Arabic-Malay; 4) the Imam leading the remembrance was required to proficiently recite the Qur'an and comprehend its meaning; 5) the *Batu Qulhu* utilized in the ritual had to be of a white hue; and 6) the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* transpired during evening hours, and all the stones had to be completed within a single procession conducted in the presence of the congregation. Preceding the initiation of the ritual, it is customary for the priest to cleanse himself through the observance of ablution, mirroring the ritualistic cleansing process associated with prayer as mentioned by P7 (60).

Basically, this ritual has many similarities to *tahlilan* tradition especially in the context prayers and recitations. This practice generally has been carried out by many Nahdatul Ulama (NU) community in Sumatra [12,71]. However, in *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, there are five Imams that lead this procession with different assignment. These Imams are voluntarily appointed by the group and relatively flexible based on their own agreement. The priests then read several prayers that beneficial to seek forgiveness for the deceased, his/her family as well to congregation. The Imams also recite some verses from the Surat of the Quran (QS), and praise the God. In this *Batu Qulhu* ritual, the congregation are voluntarily attending the ritual without any formal invitation. The ritual is held in three consecutive days after the death, and organized by group manager, neighbors and the Imams, and commonly referred to *Serikat Tolong Menolong* (STM) or Union of Help. The Imams and the congregation are artfully arranged in a circular formation, tailored to the venue's conditions. This arrangement allows for the placement of stones in front of the congregation, effortlessly within reach for the worshippers' right hand. During the fieldwork in Panyabungan Kota district, it was noticed that there were more than 30 piles of stones in the congregation. As additional information that commonly they are sitting on the floor covered with *tikar* or mat, but some people also held the ritual with chairs. The priests hold the responsibility for overseeing the course of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual. The following Table 2 describes each Imams' responsibility in *Batu Qulhu* procession.

Table 2

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As presented in table 2 that the five Imams stone remembrance fulfill distinct roles during funeral rituals. The first Imam recites *wasilah*, invoking blessings upon the prophets, companions, scholars, and deceased parents. The second Imam performs *takhtim*, while the third recites dhikr tahlil. The fourth Imam recites selected verses from the Qur'an. The fifth priest concludes with a closing prayer and religious guidance, including expressions of gratitude to Allah SWT and salutations to Prophet Muhammad SAW, supplications for the forgiveness of the deceased's sins, and prayers for the widening of their grave. The sermon includes an oath regarding the deceased's parents, beseeching acceptance of their worship, forgiveness of sins, and enlargement of their grave. Additionally, the imam delivers a sermon during this ritual (text written in Mandailing and the translation can be read in Supplementary file).

The current study also reveals that *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Madina is held in three consecutive days where:

- In the day 1, the remembrance is taken where the Imam start the ceremony. In the first meeting, the priests wear neat clothes, wear caps, turbans and sarongs. Reflecting the figure of a religious expert and placing his position is a person who is highly respected in society. Their sitting position is arranged in a special place, different from the congregation in general. Here, the Imam will also read out the order of the *Batu Qulhu* procession.
- For day 2, similar to the preceding event, the order of events for the first night procession remains unchanged. Prior to commencing the remembrance ceremony, the 'Imam pembaca takhtim' provided an explanation that after the recitation of the *takhtim*, the congregation would engage in the dhikr of *Batu Qulhu*, and were kindly requested to maintain their positions until the conclusion of the event. However, in contrast to the previous occasion, on the second night of recitation, Qulhu stones are made available to facilitate the dhikr and are arranged in a stacked formation in front of the congregation. Subsequently, the Qulhu remembrance stones are accumulated in the same location. The prescribed procedure entails the recitation of QS 112: 1-3, followed by the selection of a single stone. For each subsequent repetition, an additional stone is selected, such that two stones are chosen for a two-time reading, three stones for a three-time reading, four stones for a four-time reading, and so forth, in accordance with established practice.
- In day 3, *Batu Qulhu* procession replicates the format observed on the second meeting. However, a notable distinction lies in the extended duration of the dhikr, necessitated by the requirement to recite the prayer over each stone in the presence of the congregation. It

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is imperative to sustain the continuity of the dhikr until its completion, without interruption. Subsequent to the remembrance, a collective prayer and *salawat* are gathered. The *Batu Qulhu* employed as aids for remembrance are carefully placed within plastic burlap bags or buckets (as can be seen in Figure 3a). The event concludes with a religious sermon or *tausiyah*, wherein expressions of gratitude are articulated on behalf of the congregation and the afflicted families. The content of the religious sermon encompasses themes such as death, the retribution of the grave, and serves as a reminder for individuals to perpetually prepare themselves and enhance their devotion before the arrival of death. This is because all living beings are destined to experience mortality (QS 3: 185), and its arrival cannot be postponed, even if one seeks refuge within a lofty and robust fortress (QS 4: 78).

In addition to the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, on the fourth day following an individual's passing, *Batu Qulhu* stones are transported to the cemetery and carefully positioned above the burial site, as illustrated in Figure 3b. The procedure involves the preparation of the grave bed, which includes the leveling ~~of~~off the ground in the designated area assigned for burial. Subsequently, these stones are poured in a manner that commences from the head of the deceased and extends towards their feet. Although typically performed by the bereaved family, this task can also be undertaken by others, such as neighbors or relatives. During the placement of the stones on the grave, it is customary to recite the phrase "*Bismillahi milata 'ala Rasulullah*," which translates to "In the name of Allah and in the religion of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh." The recitation performed during this act is identical to the prayer recitation conducted during the interment of the deceased's body. It is noteworthy that the selection of this specific recitation lacks a distinct foundational basis but rather originates from established tradition.

Figure 3

Presently, *Batu Qulhu* dhikr has undergone significant transformations over time, likely influenced by environmental factors, evolving understandings within the community, and technological advance, as well as societal changes. Presently, the implementation of the ritual varies across different areas of Madina. Traditionally, some individuals engage in the *Batu Qulhu* practice following the *Maghrib* prayer (after sunset) or around 6.30 pm – 7.00 pm local time and typically after the *Isya* prayer (7.30 pm – 8.00 pm), collectively performed at the mosque during evening as mentioned by P8 (55). Among adult women, it takes place in the evening preceding *Maghrib*, while among the male youth (*naposo bulung*) and female youth (*nauli bulung*), it occurs in the afternoon (after *Asr* or around 3.00 pm) as mentioned by P6

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(45). Adult male worshipers partake in this practice during the evening after the *Isya* prayer on the first, second, and third days following a person's demise. As mentioned earlier, the *Batu Qulhu* employed in this remembrance ritual is a stone recognized by the bereaved family, retrieved from the river. To ensure cleanliness, the stones are consistently washed and kept in a plastic sack or a large container. Nevertheless, owing to the evolving perspectives of individuals and the limited availability of such rocks in riverbeds, these stones are now obtainable from multiple outlets across the Madina region, as noted by P5 ~~However, due to the increasing flexibility of people's mindset and the scarcity of these rocks in rivers, the people can now be acquired from various stores in Madina region as mentioned by P5~~ (50):

“Batu Qulhu are taken from the river by the family, if they are dirty, they are cleaned. Now, Batu Qulhu are easy to get and are sold in flower shops and building material store”).

4.3. Aspect of Norms of *Batu Qulhu* ritual

The *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice, introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein, holds significant cultural value in the Mandailing community of Madina. This ritual utilizes white pebbles from nearby rivers for dhikr worship and to alleviate the suffering of the deceased in the grave. It has been preserved and perpetuated by Syeikh Mustafa Husein's students and alumni, who have established recitation congregations in the region. As the oldest pesantren in North Sumatra, the influence of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends widely beyond Madina, with its students and graduates playing a significant role in its development and expansion.

Equivalent cultural customs, such as the *tahlilan* tradition observed within the NU community in Sumatra, are also prevalent in Java under the same name. In Java, the Muslim community holds *tahlilan* remembrances on many occasions, a tradition historically introduced by the *Wali Songo* (The Nine Saints of Islam) [12]. ~~Similar cultural practices, like the *tahlilan* tradition among the NU community in Sumatra, can also be found.~~

Strict protocols surround the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance. Prior permission from village and religious leaders, referred to as *Tuan Guru*, is required. The officiating Imam must possess proficiency in Arabic-Malay language. These protocols ensure the solemnity and authenticity of the ritual, aligning with the importance placed on established rituals and cultural heritage. The *tahlilan* tradition within the NU community also follows specific rituals, emphasizing the shared values of upholding traditions and seeking solace in times of mourning. As previously mentioned, obtaining permission from both village and religious leaders is necessary, as indicated by P2 (52):

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'mangido izin Parjolo tu Tuan Guru' (English: Ask permission from *Tuan Guru* first). Commonly answered by the teacher with *'olo' silahken acara dilanjut* (English: Okay, please continue the ritual), *'marimom mau au'* (English: I will follow).

Batu Qulhu remembrance serves as a form of communal support, uniting family members, relatives, neighbors, and friends in times of sorrow. This fosters a sense of unity and solidarity within the Mandailing community, reflecting the value placed on collective resilience. Similar communal support can be found in other practices, such as the collective remembrance gatherings associated with the tahlilan tradition, reinforcing the cultural value of community bonds and support networks. The significance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends beyond its cultural and spiritual aspects. It represents a cherished cultural heritage embraced by the Muslim society in Madina, highlighting the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of identity. This ritual also plays crucial role in fostering social cohesion through different ways, including community participation, shared religious practices, as well transmission of values and traditions. This study also highlights solidarity aspect as other form of social cohesion in the societal level [20]. While specific to the Mandailing community, similar practices can be observed in other regions in Indonesia, especially in the traditional Islam community [4,72]. They are still-fulfilling the shared human need to honor the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and preserve cultural traditions as integral elements of identity and social cohesion. For a comprehensive overview of the norm aspects in the tradition of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community, please refer to Table 3.

Table 3

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ritual stands as a significant cultural and religious practice within the Mandailing community's funeral ceremonies. This tradition, which involves using stones for dhikr worship, holds deep historical and spiritual roots. While its origins can be traced back to Syeikh Mustafa Husein, who introduced the ritual, variations in accounts highlight the complex nature of its origin. Over time, the procession of *Batu Qulhu* has undergone modifications to streamline its organization, exemplifying the adaptive nature of cultural practices while maintaining their essence. Although *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar commemorative practices can be found in other regions. These rituals reflect the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, seeking solace through collective ceremonies, and preserving cultural traditions as integral components of identity and social cohesion. *Batu Qulhu* ritual serves as a testament to the rich

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cultural and religious heritage of the Mandailing community in North Sumatra, encapsulating collective mourning, spiritual devotion, and the preservation of cultural identity. By adhering to these rituals, individuals reaffirm their cultural identity and strengthen their sense of belonging within the community. Shared cultural practices during funeral ceremonies serve as markers of group identity, fostering a sense of solidarity among participants. As funeral ceremonies continue to play a pivotal role in communities worldwide, understanding and appreciating the significance of these rituals contributes to our broader knowledge of human beliefs, traditions, and the ways in which we commemorate and honor the departed. The employed methods in this study allows for an in-depth exploration of the cultural, social, and emotional dimensions surrounding funeral practices within specific communities. This approach provides nuanced insights into the significance, symbolism, and evolving meanings attributed to funeral rituals, thereby enriching scholarly discourse and bridging gaps in understanding of this complex phenomenon.

While this study presents a preliminary investigation into the *Batu Qulhu* ritual, it acknowledges certain limitations. The absence of historical documentation detailing the ritual within the Mandailing community necessitates a proposed historical approach through extensive literature review, drawing upon the writings of earlier ulama. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the limited number of informants and the specific observed processions may not fully capture the diverse procedural variations of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual across the entire Madina region. Recognizing the modifications made by different communities based on the guidance of their Imams or practical considerations further adds to the complexity of the ritual. Given these findings, the study recommends the cultural preservation and educational promotion of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual for the benefit of future generations. The creation of appropriate documentation, such as books and videos, accessible through various platforms including social media, can contribute to the wider dissemination of knowledge and understanding of the ritual. These efforts support the cultural preservation of the *Batu Qulhu* tradition and foster greater appreciation among the Mandailing community and beyond.

Declarations

~~CRedit authorship contribution statement~~Authors contribution statement

Sahrul: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data collection, Data interpretation, Writing - original draft, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Afratul Fadhlila Daulai:** Methodology, Data collection, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – Review and editing.

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Anang Widhi Nirwansyah; Data interpretation, Formal analysis, Writing – Review and editing, Visualization. **Sevithan Demirdag**; Writing – Review and editing, Validation, Resources.

~~Conceived and designed the experiments, S., A.F.D.; performed the experiments, S., A.F.D.; analyzed and interpreted the data, S., S.D., and A.W.N.; wrote the paper S., A.F.D.; A.W.N. and S.D. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.~~

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement

Data included in article/supplementary material/referenced in article.

Ethics Statement

This study was ethically reviewed and approved by Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) at the University of North Sumatera (UINSU) under approval number 0616615683. All participants, including those photographed, provided informed consent to participate in the study.

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Figures

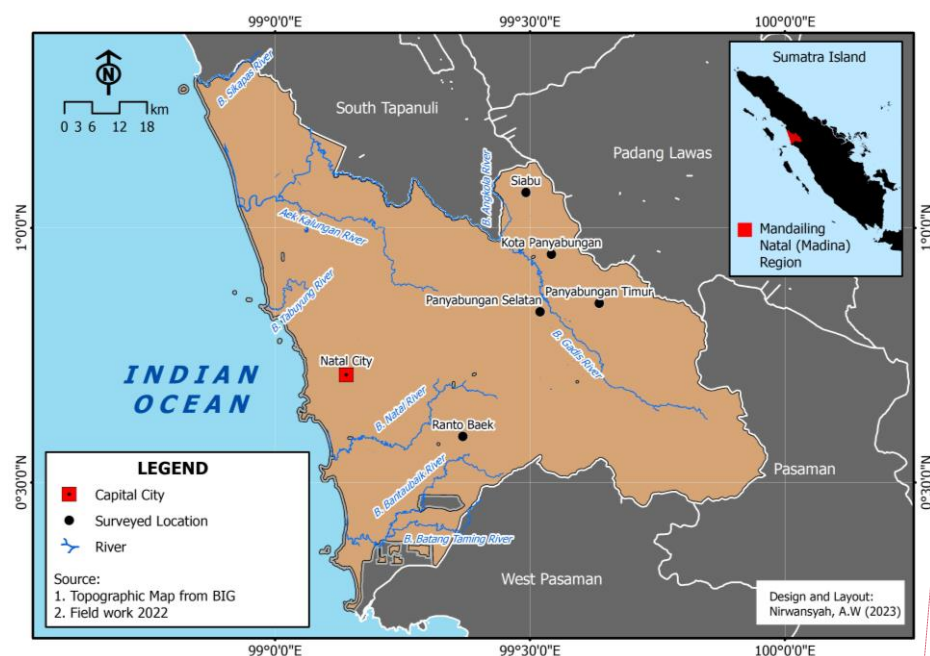


Figure 1. Area of the current research



Figure 2. a) White pebble collected for *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Mandailing, where each bucket contains 70 to 100 stones; and b) the congregation of the Mandailing Muslim community during this obituary ceremony. (Photography by Sahrul on 22 July 2022)



Figure 3. *Batu Qulhu* remembrance by adult male where a) the organizer has collected and kept the stones back into the plastic sack for fourth day of casting procession; and b) where *Batu Qulhu* is finally poured on the grave of deceased person. (photographs of the ritual [a] held at P4 residence on 22 July 2022; and [b] **white stone teeming in the day 3**) (taken by Sahrul)

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Table 1. Pseudonym of subjects' information in the current study

Informants	Initial	Age	Education Level	Occupation
1	P1	65	Bachelor degree	Teacher
2	P2	52	Bachelor degree	Teacher
3	P3	73	Bachelor degree	Ulama and local public figure
4	P4	65	Master degree	Public servant
5	P5	50	Master degree	Public servant
6	P6	45	Master degree	Teacher
7	P7	60	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Businessman
8	P8	55	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Teacher

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Table 2. Construction of each Imam and their task in *Batu Qulhu* procession

Imam	Local term	Assignment	Quran recitation
First Imam	<i>Imam pembaca silsilah</i>	– Reciting <i>istighfar</i> ¹¹ three times; Muhammad pbuh), his apostles, ulama and parents of the deceased person, all Muslim and the congregation	– QS 1: 1-6
Second Imam	<i>Imam pembaca takhtim</i>	– Reciting <i>takhtim</i> (known as "reading for the reward of the deceased" or "reciting for the benefit of the deceased")	– QS 112: 1-3 – QS 113: 1-5 – QS 114: 1-5 – QS 1: 1-7 – QS 2: 1-5; 255; 284-286 – QS 33: 56
Third Imam	<i>Imam pembaca tahlil</i>	– Reciting <i>tahlil</i> (compilation of dhikr) including: • <i>Istighfar</i> ;	

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- Reciting ‘afdhahu dzikri’ followed by First *syahadat tauhid*¹². The congregation then answer by ‘hayyun baqi’;
 - Reciting second *syahadat tauhid*. Then answered by the congregation with ‘hayyun maujud’;
 - Reciting the third *syahadat tauhid*. And answered by all attendance by ‘hayyum maqsud’.
- Finally, reciting *syahadat tauhid* together with the congregation 100 times. Here the congregation gradually loud their praise and at same time shaking the head

Fourth	<i>Imam pembaca</i>	– Reciting some verses from the Quran	– QS 2: 152-156
Imam	<i>Al Baqarah</i>	that contains concept and advise about calamities	– QS 67: 1-2

Fifth	<i>Imam pembaca</i>	– Reciting closing prayer, with the
Imam	<i>doa</i>	following structure:

- *Basmallah*¹³;
- Praise to the Creator and His messenger (Muhammad pbuh);
- Prayers for all Moslem (men and women);
- Prayers for the deceased person and the family;
- Prayers for attendance in the congregation;

Source: compiled based on interview with P1 (65)

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Table 3. Identified aspect of norms in the practice of *Batu Qulhu* Remembrance

Aspect of norm	Description
Preservation of traditions	The culture emphasizes the preservation and perpetuation of rituals and practices, such as the <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance, which was introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein and continued by his students and alumni. The students and graduates of Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding school play a significant role in preserving and expanding this practice.
Community support	The culture values community support during times of grief and mourning. The tradition of using <i>Batu Qulhu</i> serves as a means of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends, helping to alleviate sorrow and foster resilience.
Spiritual gatherings	Collective prayer sessions and remembrance gatherings are highly valued in the culture. The use of the stones during these gatherings creates a conducive environment for spiritual practices and collective remembrance.
Respect for the deceased	The culture emphasizes respect and care for the deceased. The ritual of collecting white pebbles, predominantly marble, from nearby rivers to be used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance shows reverence for the departed.
Connection to nature	The culture maintains a connection with nature, as the stones used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals are collected from rivers. The easy availability of these stones in the past and their resilience in varying weather conditions highlight the importance of nature in the culture.
Alleviation of suffering	The recitation of <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals is believed to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave. This demonstrates a value of compassion and empathy within the culture.

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¹ Peace be upon him
² Tuanku Rao is characterized as enigmatic figure and one of the two significant leaders of the Padri movement, shared this status alongside Imam Bonjol himself. Tuanku Rao's origins can be traced to *Huta na Godang* or *Huta Godang*, also known as *Tano Godang*, located in Mandailing Julu (Upper Mandailing) [25].

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- ³ *Upah-upah* refers to cultural practice or tradition of offering gifts or monetary compensation during significant events or ceremonies. The term "upah" itself can be translated as "wages" or "payment". *Upah-upah* is deeply rooted in the Mandailing culture and is often observed during various occasions such as weddings, funerals, or community gatherings.
- ⁴ The word *barzanji* is associated with the name of Syeikh Barzanji, a prominent scholar and Sufi poet from Kurdistan. His renowned work, titled "*Mawlid al-Barzanji*," is a poetic composition that narrates the birth and life of the Prophet Muhammad, often recited during religious gatherings and celebrations.
- ⁵ ~~*Upah-upah* refers to cultural practice or tradition of offering gifts or monetary compensation during significant events or ceremonies. The term "upah" itself can be translated as "wages" or "payment". *Upah-upah* is deeply rooted in the Mandailing culture and is often observed during various occasions such as weddings, funerals, or community gatherings.~~
- ⁶ *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB), was founded in 1912 by Syeikh Musthafa Husein Nasution. This Islamic boarding school is located in Purba Baru sub-district, Madina Regency, North Sumatra [73]. Further reference on this boarding school can be read in Khairurrijal [74].
- ⁷ Surau means a place of worship or a small mosque-like structure. The surau typically serves as a communal prayer space or a modest mosque, wherein Muslims congregate for congregational prayers, religious discourses, and other religious engagements.
- ⁸ Some community in Madina also use term of *Batu Bontar* to refer *Batu Qulhu*.
- ⁹ One crucial determinant is obtaining authorization from the village leader. The village head holds a position akin to that of a revered monarch, embodying nobility and commanding profound respect.
- ¹⁰ *Tuan guru* or teacher serves as a religious authority, serving as an exemplar and establishing a benchmark for societal norms through their words and actions. Additionally, they are often revered as sacred individuals known for their healing abilities, and they serve as a source of supplication for various needs such as well-being, sustenance, companionship, agricultural prosperity, and attainment of blessings.
- ¹¹ The act of attempting forgiveness from the Almighty God, commonly by saying 'astagfirullāhu
- ¹² The *syahadat tauhid* contains declaration of belief in the oneness of God Almighty
- ¹³ *Basmallah* is phrase mention to the God before beginning any action or speech. It spells 'Bismillahi rāḥmani rāḥim'. It means: in the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful.

1 ***Batu Qulhu*—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional**
2 **Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra**

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16 **Abstract:** Death and funeral rituals hold significant cultural and spiritual importance in traditional communities
17 worldwide, including within the Islamic faith. This study focuses on exploring the unique funeral ritual known as
18 *Batu Qulhu* in the Muslim Mandailing community. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes field
19 observations and interviews with ulama and imams who have practical knowledge and understanding of this
20 traditional ritual. The study reveals two origin stories of *Batu Qulhu*: one attributed to the first Imam in the
21 Mandailing community and the other associated with *elderly* parents, ulama, and village *malims* (religious
22 teachers) without specifying an individual source. *Batu Qulhu* refers to the white river stones utilized by the
23 congregation during the ritual to count the number of prayers offered. The procession of this tradition follows a
24 strict protocol, encompassing prayers, recitation of the Quran, and seeking forgiveness for the deceased and their
25 family. The efficacy of *Batu Qulhu* serves as a testament to the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the
26 preservation of cultural identity. While *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar
27 cultural practices can be observed in other regions, highlighting the universal human need to honor and remember
28 the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and uphold cultural traditions as an integral part of identity and
29 social cohesion.

30 **Keywords:** death rituals, funeral traditions, *Batu Qulhu*, Mandailing community, norms and values

31 **1. Introduction**

32 As a traditional aspect of culture, funeral practices serve as an initial stride towards
33 fostering harmonious relations within multi-ethnic communities [1]. The manner in which
34 individuals navigate the —concept of death holds significance as it encompasses their cultural
35 engagement and utilization, similar to how religion, an integral component of culture, provides
36 a framework for comprehending, interpreting, and making sense of death, albeit without
37 necessarily diminishing its inherent challenges for those experiencing grief [2]. Throughout
38 various cultures, the commemoration of the deceased and the support offered to grieving

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39 families manifest through a multitude of ritualistic practices [3]. These rituals hold particular
40 significance within religious frameworks as they are not only guided by religious doctrines but
41 also serve as fundamental aspects of communal worship [4]. Within the Islamic tradition, the
42 management of deceased bodies adheres to the teachings found in the Qur'an, specifically
43 drawing attention to Surah Al Imran (QS 3:185). This verse underscores the universal nature
44 of mortality, asserting that every individual is bound to experience death [5]. In his
45 groundbreaking 1907 study, Robert Hertz skillfully intertwined three essential imperatives -
46 moral, aesthetic, and sociological - to present a captivating conceptualization of death [6]. His
47 intricate analysis portrays death as a profound transformative journey that transcends the
48 boundaries of both the spiritual and physical realms.

49 In Indonesia, funeral rituals have been intricately intertwined with local cultural practices
50 and ethnic traditions. Various communities, such as the Tana Toraja people [7], the traditional
51 Javanese community [8,9], and the Balinese who perform the *ngaben* ceremony [10,11],
52 express their funeral customs based on their specific cultural heritage. These burial practices
53 and procedures provide profound insights into the community and society in which they are
54 performed. In these traditions, feasts, animal sacrifices, and supplications are often conducted
55 to honor the deceased and their family. Additionally, Islamic values and rituals significantly
56 influence funeral practices across many regions in Indonesia. The practice of *tahlil* or *tahlilan*,
57 which involves collective remembrance gatherings, is commonly observed [12], and the *azan*
58 (call to prayer) is often performed during burial ceremonies [4]. Moreover, in certain regions
59 of Sumatra, Islamic funeral practices have assimilated with local traditions. For example, the
60 people of Minangkabau in Nagari Salayo incorporate the custom of placing attributes on the
61 head of the deceased during the funeral procession [13]. While in Nagari Anduring, the Minang
62 community also practices *bakayaik*, which takes place 100 days after someone's passing.
63 *Bakayaik* vividly recounts the profound narrative of Prophet Muhammad pbuh¹, beginning with
64 his miraculous birth and chronicling his relentless efforts to uphold the principles of Islam.
65 This ceremonial tradition blends the eloquence of Arabic and Minang languages, creating a
66 captivating linguistic tapestry that enhances the overall richness of the performance. In Aceh,
67 the *reuhab* tradition involves decorating the deceased person's bedroom for 40 days [14]. These
68 practices exemplify the dynamic interplay between Islamic influences and local cultural
69 expressions in funeral rituals across Indonesia.

70 Throughout history, archaeological evidence of ancient burials reveals a persistent pattern:
71 human societies, since their inception, have convened to form social bonds and articulate
72 emotions and intentions in response to the phenomenon of death [15]. This ritual also promotes

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73 social cohesion in many communities practiced in various belief systems [16–18]. Despite this,
74 there is no clear description on concept of social cohesion [19], for the purpose of this study,
75 social cohesion is defined by the interconnectedness of social networks and the customs, bonds,
76 and values that uphold their unity [20]. The idea of social cohesion traces back to Emile
77 Durkheim's theory. He proposed the notion of mechanical solidarity in society, suggesting its
78 presence through the strength of influential individuals [21]. Hence, social cohesion emerges
79 from socio-spatial factors that influence individuals within specific locations, representing a
80 reflection of the classification of spaces [22,23]. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct thorough
81 research into the rituals and traditions of specific communities within their local contexts to
82 better understand and extract the factors contributing to social cohesion. This approach allows
83 for a more nuanced analysis, considering the unique cultural and social dynamics that shape
84 cohesion within distinct groups. Further, the traditional ceremony holds facilitates religious
85 and spiritual practices as well as strengthening social bond and sense of identity [24].

87 This study aims to ~~contribute~~ investigate to the origin of *Batu Oulhu* rituals, exploring its
88 contemporary practices and norms based on the social cohesion and identity the understanding
89 of funeral traditions within the Muslim community in Sumatra, specifically focusing on the
90 practice of *Batu Oulhu* remembrance in the Mandailing community of North Sumatra. The
91 funeral rituals in this community are deeply rooted in a rich tapestry of cultural, religious, and
92 philosophical traditions. By exploring the *Batu Oulhu* remembrance ceremonies, this research
93 seeks to shed light on the significance and intricacies of these rituals, offering valuable insights
94 into the broader context of funeral traditions among Muslims in Sumatra. ~~The study addresses~~
95 ~~the historical aspect of the ritual, the procession in current societies, and finally the norms and~~
96 ~~values contained in this ritual.~~ Regarding the goals, the current article addresses the following
97 research question the research question, what is the historical background of *Batu Oulhu* in the
98 Mandailing community? How do the practices surround *Batu Oulhu* manifest in present-day
99 Mandailing Muslim society? What are the norms associated with *Batu Oulhu* within the
100 Mandailing community based on social cohesion and identity?

101 1.1. Mandailing Ethnic: Historical Context

102 The origin of the word "*Mandailing*" is linked to the Munda people of India, who
103 experienced defeat in a war against the Aryan people. The term "*Mandailing*" is derived from
104 either "*Mandala Holing*" [25,26] or "*Mundailing*," referring to the refugees from Munda [27].
105 It is believed that the Munda people originally inhabited the northern regions of India before

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106 the arrival of the Aryans [28]. The historical interaction between the Aryans and the Munda
107 people has been examined through linguistic evidence [29]. Due to pressure from the Aryans,
108 the Munda people migrated southward within India [29–31], and this Aryan occupation of the
109 Munda people occurred around ~~1200~~1500-12500 BC [32]. Eventually, the displaced Munda
110 people migrated to Southeast Asia [31], although the specific country of their migration is not
111 specified. It is likely that some of them reached North Sumatra through the Barus Port in
112 Central Tapanuli, which was an international port at that time. Referred to "*Negarakeragama*"
113 book from 1365, which mentions the presence of the Mandailing as one of the most significant
114 ethnic groups in the archipelago [25,33]. The names mentioned include Mandailing, Pane, and
115 Padang Lawas. The mention of these names indicates that the name Mandailing has been
116 known by outsiders since ancient dates. In addition, Tuanku Rao² suggests that the Mandailing
117 people trace their origin back to the Bugis Makassar, who sailed to the Singkuang Port (now
118 known as Natal), it is more commonly accepted that the Mandailing people are part of the
119 Batak ethnic group.

120 The Mandailing community's ethnic origin is a subject of contention among scholars.
121 While some argue that they are part of the Batak Toba ethnic group [34,35], this perspective
122 faces opposition from Mandailing intellectuals and historians. However, an analysis of factors
123 such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the
124 Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group [36,37]. To
125 establish their identity as the Mandailing community, they refer to themselves as "*halak kita*"
126 (referred to: our people) of South Tapanuli [38], rather than as "*halak batak*" (Batak people)
127 [39,40]. Regarding religious affiliation, the majority of the contemporary Mandailing
128 population follows Islam, with a minority of Christians found in specific locations like
129 Pakantan in Upper Mandailing, Medan, and other cities in North Sumatra [25,41]. Before
130 embracing Islam, the religious beliefs of the Mandailing people focused around ancestral spirits
131 referred to as "*si pele begu*" [33], incorporating influences from Hinduism and Buddhism [42].
132 Recent field research conducted in the Mandailing region revealed remnants and artefacts
133 associated with both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, particularly in the vicinity of Panyabungan
134 within the Greater Mandailing area [43].

135 Padri wars has brought Islam to Mandailing around 1821 and the Dutch military breached
136 and defeated this movement by 1835 [36,41,44]. The term '*pPadri*' has two possible origins.
137 One explanation suggests that it stems from the Indonesian word '*padri*,' which referred to
138 priests. It is important to emphasize that the notable figures associated with the Padri movement
139 can be likened to 'Islamic priests' [45]. This movement emerged in the early 1800s as a

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140 reformist Islamic movement led by local scholars known as ulama. These ulama sought to
141 purify and reform Islam in the region, criticizing what they perceived as syncretic practices
142 and deviations from strict Islamic teachings [26,41]. They aimed to establish a more orthodox
143 and conservative interpretation of Islam in Mandailing. Padri movement gained support from
144 various segments of the population, including the rural communities, who were attracted to
145 their message of religious purity and social justice [46]. The Padris' growing influence and
146 power threatened the traditional rulers, known as penghulu, who feared losing their authority
147 and control [41,45].

148 Before then, in the classical era, marked by the introduction of Hinduism preceding Islam
149 into South Tapanuli, is substantiated by the presence of the Bahal temple in Portibi (now
150 Padang Lawas), a relic of the Panai kingdom during the 12th and 13th centuries. Schnitger [47]
151 documented that around 1000 AD, the Panai kingdom stood as the foremost realm of its time.
152 Nevertheless, around 11th century, the Panai kingdom succumbed to Rajendrakola from India,
153 an adherent of the Hindu faith. Despite the presence of Hindus within the Mandailing Sultanate,
154 the Mandailing populace did not embrace Islam. This decision was influenced by the religion's
155 reverence of numerous idols. Through a traditional lens, there exists a fusion of religion and
156 culture, exemplified by customs such as *upah-upah*³ (gift) during weddings, rites marking
157 childbirth, and housewarming ceremonies. Additionally, observances spanning 7, 40, 100, and
158 1000 days following the demise of parents are upheld.

159 The Mandailing Sultanate fell under the dominion of the Aru kingdom circa 1295 AD,
160 spanning the 13th to 15th centuries AD. Subsequent to this period, the Pulungan kingdom
161 emerged, followed by the ascendancy of the Nasution clan, which assumed control over the
162 Mandailing Godang region (now Panyabungan), and the Lubis clan, which governed
163 Mandailing Julu (now Kotanopan).

164 1.2. Mandailing Philosophy

165 The values of the Mandailing ethnic philosophy of life called *Poda Na Lima*. *Poda* means
166 advice, *na* means ~~five~~which/that/is, and *lima* means five. In short, *Poda Na Lima* consists of
167 five pieces of advice, namely: i) *Paias Rohamu* (keeping your heart clean); ii) *Paias*
168 *Pamatangmu* (keeping your body clean); iii) *Paias Parabitoimu* (keeping your clothes clean);
169 iv) *Paias Bagasmu* (keeping your house clean); and v) *Paias Pakaranganmu* (keeping your
170 yard clean) [34,48]. These five values are still firmly held by the Mandailing community and
171 the Mandailing ethnicity in Indonesia and around the world. Despite the Madina people's
172 reputation for being religious, their daily social lives are intertwined with various cultural

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practices that are imbued with religious significance. These rituals, such as *marhaban* (*barzanzi*)⁴, the use of plain flour, and *upah-upah*⁵, are performed on joyful occasions such as weddings, recoveries from illness, and the attainment of new positions, as well as during significant life transitions such as the birth of a child and moving into a new home [38].

The Mandailing ethnic community has a value system, *Dalihan Na Tolu* which means a forum used to organize life in carrying out *olong* (affection) between *mora*, *kahanggi* and *anak boru* [34,35,49,50]. *Dalihan Na Tolu*, also referred to ‘three stones’ [37], is a cultural value, created by the Creator that guide Batakese attitude and behavior in the social lives and cultural relation [51]. The three stones encompass family, community, and spirituality. In Mandailing community, *Dalihan Na Tolu* principles are deeply intertwined with Islamic values and teachings. Mandailing Muslim communities incorporate these cultural principles into their daily lives, alongside their Islamic beliefs and practices [51,52]. This concept reinforces the importance of maintaining strong moral character, fostering harmonious relationships, and upholding social justice within the community [34,35,51].

2. Location Settings

The Mandailing Natal region, often abbreviated as Madina, is situated in North Sumatra Province, spanning approximately also shortly known as Madina, is located in North Sumatra Province and astronomically situated between 0°10’ and 1°50’ N and 98°10’ and 100°10’ E. This region is located on the west coast of Sumatra, has a 170 km coastline, and is home to 24 islands, though only 4 of these islands are inhabited. In 2021, Madina has a population of over 478,000 people, and has a total area of 6,134 km² [53]. Based on BPS-Statistics of Mandailing Natal Regency [53], during 2021, the predominant land use in this region comprises a mixed vegetation area, accounting for 39.15% or 252.57 hectares, while forested areas occupy 30.04% of the region, followed by palm oil plantations at 27.79%. Settlements in Madina cover 451.38 hectares (0.7%), while agriculture utilizes 2.17% of the land. Additionally, water bodies such as lakes and dams encompass 0.14% of the region’s total area. This region is crossed by three river systems including Batang Pungkut, Batang Gadis, and Aek Pohan that represent upper, middle and lower part of the Batang Gadis watershed [54]. These rivers are beneficial for major population in Madina including for agriculture, plantation and industrial sectors. However, for years the rivers have also become threatened to illegal mining activities including sands, rocks and gold [55,56].

The majority of the population in Madina, around 95%, is Muslim, while the remaining 5% consists of Christians (including Catholics), Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of

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206 Confucianism. Madina has more than 800 mosques and 70 churches [57], to support the
207 religious practices of its inhabitants, and the region is made up of 23 districts and over 370
208 villages. Muslim community in Madina, consisting of various ethnic groups, exhibits a rich
209 diversity of cultural and religious practices. Mosques and Islamic schools, known as *madrasah*,
210 hold a prominent position in shaping the religious and cultural life of the community.
211 Furthermore, active participation in significant cultural and religious traditions, such as the
212 celebration of two major Islamic holidays like *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*, is observed among
213 the Muslim population. A strong emphasis on social responsibility and assisting those in need,
214 in alignment with Islamic principles, is evident through the engagement of the Muslim
215 community in charitable and community service activities. The local government plays a
216 supportive role by implementing policies and providing necessary infrastructure to promote
217 Islamic education [58].

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218 3. Methodology

219 3.1. Design of the Research

220 This study adopts qualitative research design, employing combination of
221 phenomenological and ethnographic approaches. Both methodologies are characterized by
222 their exploratory nature, utilizing the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection
223 [59]. -By intertwining the principles of phenomenological analysis and ethnography, this
224 current study approach emphasizes a comprehensive exploration of human experiences within
225 their natural settings. While phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of lived experiences,
226 ethnography complements this by elucidating the cultural and social intricacies that
227 contextualize these experiences within specific communities or groups. Additionally, they both
228 underscore the importance of adopting a self-conscious approach to research, wherein
229 researchers are attentive to their own perspectives, biases, and influences throughout the
230 research process. It is worth to be noticed that t
231 The primary aim of qualitative research is to
232 comprehend the distinctive characteristics and experiences of individual cases, rather than
233 attempting to establish generalized patterns or trends [60]. This method emphasizes the
234 comprehensive exploration of human behaviors and experiences as they unfold within natural
235 settings [61,62]. Integral to this research is the integration of the subjects' knowledge with that
236 of the researchers, which holds significant importance. This integration facilitates the
237 recognition and documentation of outcomes from the local perspective inherent to the subjects
238 themselves [7,63]. The current study employs an emic approach, which entails adopting the
insider's perspective from within the culture where the research project is situated, as

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239 previously described in studies by [7,45,64–66]. By embracing an emic approach, the research
240 acknowledges the critical importance of comprehending and interpreting the cultural context
241 and subjective experiences of the subjects, thereby enriching both the research process and its
242 findings.

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243 3.2. Fieldwork and Subjects

244 The research employed an observational and interview-based approach to collect data. The
245 researchers assumed the roles of both observers and interviewers. The observation phase
246 focused on the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice in the study area, the activities of the Imam
247 during the ritual, and the placement of stones in the graveyard after the final day of
248 remembrance. For the interviews, a systematic process was followed to select appropriate
249 sources. Initial contact with the informants was established through various means, such as
250 phone calls, emails, and WhatsApp messages, to effectively arrange and conduct the
251 interviews.

252 In prior ethnographic studies, a limited number of subjects were involved. For instance,
253 two studies centered on the practices of anesthesia within two British hospital [67]. Similarly,
254 Baan et al. [7] conducted research on funeral rituals in Toraja with only two informants, while
255 Lee et al. [68] examined the experience of depression among Chinese individuals with a sample
256 size of five informants. In accordance with the present study, data collection encompassed
257 interviews with a total of eight carefully selected subjects, as detailed in Table 1. The age range
258 of the informants in this study was 45-73 years old.

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259 The selection process for these subjects adhered to specific criteria relevant to the research
260 objectives. Firstly, the informants were required to hold the roles of imams or leaders of the
261 *Batu Qulhu* dhikr (or remembrance) during funeral ceremonies within the Mandailing
262 community. Secondly, they were expected to possess a profound understanding of the norms
263 and values associated with *Batu Qulhu*. Lastly, the informants needed to be Ulama or respected
264 Islamic spiritual leaders within the local community. Proficiency in the Mandailing language
265 was also a prerequisite for informant selection. To identify suitable subjects, consultations were
266 conducted with local authorities, such as the Indonesian Council of Ulama (*Majelis Ulama*
267 *Indonesia*) in Madina, as well as prominent local figures.

268 Table 1

269 The current investigation involved the collection of data during a comprehensive six-
270 month fieldwork period in 2022, specifically spanning from February to July. This fieldwork,
271 which was coordinated by the first and second author, F. S., and A.F.D., extended over a total

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272 of 90 days. The study targeted five specifically chosen districts, selected from a larger pool of
273 23 districts in the designated study area (refer to Figure 1). The primary objective of the
274 research was to obtain valuable insights into the cultural practices related to the *Batu Qulhu*
275 ritual within the Mandailing community in the Madina region. The *Batu Qulhu* event occurring
276 in July 2022 was meticulously observed and documented, employing a combination of
277 photographs and videos for ~~meticulous~~ recording. Regarding the data collection process,
278 individual interviews were conducted with each informant, with each session spanning
279 approximately 2 hours. These interviews took place at mutually agreed locations, such as the
280 informant's residence, school office, or the household of the deceased individual where the
281 *Batu Qulhu* ritual took place. Thorough and ~~meticulous~~ rigorous recording of all pertinent
282 information was undertaken for subsequent analysis purposes.

283 **Figure 1**

284 **3.3. Data Analysis**

285 The present study utilized a qualitative data analysis approach, encompassing three key
286 stages: 1) data reduction; 2) data presentation; and 3) drawing conclusions. This analytical
287 process unfolded iteratively throughout the research. Initially, during the early phases of data
288 collection, the research maintained a broad and overarching focus, and the observations were
289 comprehensive in nature. As the research progressed and the focus of the study became more
290 apparent, the observations evolved to adopt a more structured approach, enabling the
291 acquisition of specific and targeted data.

292 The data analysis commenced with data reduction, where the gathered information was
293 streamlined and organized to facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject matter.
294 Subsequently, the data were presented in a coherent and meaningful manner to facilitate
295 effective interpretation. Finally, the study derived conclusions based on the analyzed data,
296 allowing for the generation of valuable insights into the cultural practices surrounding the *Batu*
297 *Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina. Throughout the research, this
298 qualitative data analysis process occurred in a cyclical manner, ensuring a comprehensive
299 exploration of the research topic and a nuanced understanding of the intricacies involved. By
300 transitioning from broad and general observations to more structured and specific data
301 collection, the study achieved a comprehensive and detailed exploration of the *Batu Qulhu*
302 ritual's cultural significance and its relevance within the Mandailing community.

303 **3.4. Ethical Consideration**

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304 The present investigation was conducted under the auspices of Cluster Interdisciplinary
305 Basic Research, adhering meticulously to stringent ethical guidelines. To ensure ethical
306 compliance, the study received official approval from the Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian
307 Masyarakat (LPPM) University of North Sumatera (UINSU) with the approval number:
308 0616615683, valid from 1 February 2022 to 31 October 2022. The utmost care was taken in
309 handling the research data and records, which were securely stored on a password-protected
310 computer housed within the Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study
311 Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, UINSU. Access to these records
312 was strictly restricted to the authors.

313 In adherence to established ethical standards for data collection and publication, prior to
314 their inclusion in the research, explicit informed consent was ~~meticulously~~ acquired from all
315 eight subjects involved, thereby safeguarding their voluntary and informed engagement in the
316 study. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, a coding system was
317 employed, wherein each subject was allocated an initial "P" followed by pertinent demographic
318 particulars, such as age and current profession. Moreover, all photographic materials featured
319 in this investigation were obtained with written consent from all participants in the native
320 *Bahasa* (Indonesian language), thereby emphasizing the paramount importance of respecting
321 their autonomy and privacy throughout the research process. All participants provided written
322 consent to participate, for the data to be published and for inclusion of photographs. All guests
323 at the ritual provided written consent. Permission was sought from the family representative,
324 who was briefed on the study's objectives, note-taking, and photography. This unwavering
325 commitment to ethical principles serves to underscore the rigor and integrity of the present
326 inquiry, facilitating an ethically sound exploration of the cultural practices pertaining to the
327 *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina.

328 4. Findings and Discussion

329 4.1. Origin of the Rituals

330 Based on the interview, it is mentioned that Syeikh Haji Mustafa Husein bin Husein
331 Nasution bin Umar Nasution Al-Mandaili (or known as Syeikh Mustafa Husein) (1886-1955),
332 is credited as the first Imam to introduce the practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance at funeral
333 ceremonies. In the beginning, was named by *Batu Balancing* based on the color of the stone
334 used in this ritual. This insight was derived from interviews conducted with P1 (65), an ulama,
335 and P2 (52), a teacher at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Panyabungan. In addition, Syeikh

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336 Musthafa Husein is also founder of the *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru*
337 (PPMPB)⁶ or Purba Baru Islamic boarding school. The practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance
338 has been preserved and perpetuated by his students, who have established recitation
339 congregations in various locations such as mosques, prayer rooms, and *surau*⁷. Notably, the
340 students and alumni of Musthafawiyah have played a significant role in its development and
341 expansion beyond Madina region, with a presence in several other provinces across Indonesia.
342 As the oldest *pesantren* (or boarding school) in North Sumatra, the influence of this practice
343 extends widely, facilitated by the widespread distribution of its students and graduates.

344 An alternative explanation, provided by P3 (73) an ulama, diverges slightly from the
345 previous informant. He has pointed out that the tradition of using *Batu Qulhu* or *Batu*
346 *Balancing*⁸ as a medium for remembrance was explained with a slight variation, focusing on
347 the customs upheld by elderly parents, ulama, village *malims* (religious teachers), without
348 mentioning any specific individual. It was a means to alleviate the sorrow experienced by the
349 bereaved and served as a form of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends. In
350 addition to the customary acts of attending funerals and observing mourning rituals, the
351 strategies employed to alleviate the profound grief experienced by individuals extended further.
352 These encompassed multifaceted practices such as providing emotional support, proffering
353 words of guidance and solace to foster resilience and acceptance in the face of adversity.
354 Moreover, individuals were invited to partake in collective prayer sessions, where the use of
355 *Batu Qulhu* stones served as facilitative elements in creating a conducive environment for these
356 spiritual gatherings. P3 further elucidated that this method, referred to as *alak na jolo*
357 *martakziah*, involved family members, parents, spouses, children, relatives, and neighbors
358 coming together for *tahlilan*.

359 “In the past people paid tribute to the homes of people who died; parents, wife, husband,
360 children, siblings and neighbors are *tahlilan*, starting from reciting *istighfar*, *al-Fatihah*,
361 *tahlil*, prayers and concluding *selawat*. To make the *dhikr* in congregation more solemn,
362 they add media by using a *Batu Balancing* (white stone) within size of an adult's big toe
363 or larger than that. In the past, the white stone was said to be a *Batu Balancing*, now it is
364 better known as the *Batu Qulhu*”.

365 *Batu Qulhu* ritual refers to the use of certain stone as a means of carrying out *dhikr*
366 worship. In general, this type of stone is typically known as white pebble. It should be noticed
367 that most of these white pebbles are predominantly comprised of marble, a rock formation
368 characterized by its crystallized carbonates and can easily be found in the riparian zone. Here,
369 the family of the deceased person collect these stones from the nearest river. As mentioned in

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the interview, this ritual chooses approximately the size of an adult's thumb to enhance the solemnity of the remembrance (as can be seen in Figure 2a). During the interview P4 (65), emphasized that in the past, people paid homage to the homes of the deceased, engaging in *tahlilan* rituals that encompassed prayers and concluding with 'selawat' (see Figure 2b). To augment the collective remembrance, *Batu Qulhu*, the size of an adult's big toe or larger, was employed. Over time, the *Batu Balancing* came to be recognized as the *Batu Qulhu*.

Figure 2

The utilization of *Batu Qulhu* in death ceremonies is also underpinned by the geographical sequences. Firstly, the abundance of rivers in Madina, notably the Batang Gadis River, Batang Natal River, Aek Kalungan River and Angkola River, facilitated the easy availability of these stones in the past. Nowadays, these rivers also threatened by illegal gold mining activities [55], and tend to pollute due to its waste [56]. Secondly, these stones possess distinct characteristics that contribute to their suitability for the purpose at hand. They exhibit a white hue, imparting a visually soothing effect, while their cool and clean appearance further enhances their appeal. Third, these stones demonstrate resilience in withstanding the rigors of varying weather conditions, including heat, cold, and rainfall. Furthermore, the recitation of *Batu Qulhu* rituals is believed by the community to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave.

4.2. The Contemporary Practice of Batu Qulhu in the Mandailing Community

In the past, Islamic practices in Sumatra have exhibited influences from mystical and shamanistic traditions e.g., [69,70]. However, it is important to note that the religious activities associated with the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* are not influenced by shamanism, but rather stem solely from religious traditions previously followed by religious scholars, religious teachers, and traditional leaders. Currently, the contemporary practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been inherited and embraced by Muslim society in Madina. Based on interview with P4 (65), it is evident that in the past, the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance adhered to strict protocols as mentioned in the following statement.

"The tradition of recalling the Batu Qulhu was once a highly regulated practice. It required seeking consent from both the village leader and the syekh. Mastery of the 20 essential attributes of Allah was necessary, alongside the ability to read the Quran and comprehend its teachings. The stones themselves had to possess a pure white hue. The recitation of Qulhu would take place during evening gatherings, where all the stones present had to be utilized fully, leaving no remnants behind before the congregation dispersed".

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403 These procedures include the following: 1) the procession necessitated obtaining
404 permission from the head of the village⁹ and *tuan guru*¹⁰ (or *kulifah*); 2) the ritual leader was
405 required to commit to memory and comprehend the twenty obligatory attributes of God,
406 encompassing *nafsiyah* (self-related attributes) nature, *salbiyah* (attributes related to existence)
407 nature, *ma'ani* (abstract attributes of God) nature, and *maknawiyah* (the essential nature and
408 prevalence of *ma'ani*) nature; 3) the officiating Imam was expected to possess proficiency in
409 both written and spoken Arabic-Malay; 4) the Imam leading the remembrance was required to
410 proficiently recite the Qur'an and comprehend its meaning; 5) the *Batu Qulhu* utilized in the
411 ritual had to be of a white hue; and 6) the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* transpired during
412 evening hours, and all the stones had to be completed within a single procession conducted in
413 the presence of the congregation. Preceding the initiation of the ritual, it is customary for the
414 priest to cleanse himself through the observance of ablution, mirroring the ritualistic cleansing
415 process associated with prayer as mentioned by P7 (60).

416 Basically, this ritual has many similarities to *tahlilan* tradition especially in the context
417 prayers and recitations. This practice generally has been carried out by many Nahdatul Ulama
418 (NU) community in Sumatra [12,71]. However, in *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, there are five
419 Imams that lead this procession with different assignment. These Imams are voluntarily
420 appointed by the group and relatively flexible based on their own agreement. The priests then
421 read several prayers that beneficial to seek forgiveness for the deceased, his/her family as well
422 to congregation. The Imams also recite some verses from the Surat of the Quran (QS), and
423 praise the God. In this *Batu Qulhu* ritual, the congregation are voluntarily attending the ritual
424 without any formal invitation. The ritual is held in three consecutive days after the death, and
425 organized by group manager, neighbors and the Imams, and commonly referred to *Serikat*
426 *Tolong Menolong* (STM) or Union of Help. The Imams and the congregation are artfully
427 arranged in a circular formation, tailored to the venue's conditions. This arrangement allows
428 for the placement of stones in front of the congregation, effortlessly within reach for the
429 worshippers' right hand. During the fieldwork in Panyabungan Kota district, it was noticed that
430 there were more than 30 piles of stones in the congregation. As additional information that
431 commonly they are sitting on the floor covered with *tikar* or mat, but some people also held
432 the ritual with chairs. The priests hold the responsibility for overseeing the course of the *Batu*
433 *Qulhu* ritual. The following Table 2 describes each Imams' responsibility in *Batu Qulhu*
434 procession.

435 **Table 2**

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436 As presented in table 2 that the five Imams stone remembrance fulfill distinct roles during
437 funeral rituals. The first Imam recites *wasilah*, invoking blessings upon the prophets,
438 companions, scholars, and deceased parents. The second Imam performs *takhtim*, while the
439 third recites dhikr tahlil. The fourth Imam recites selected verses from the Qur'an. The fifth
440 priest concludes with a closing prayer and religious guidance, including expressions of
441 gratitude to Allah SWT and salutations to Prophet Muhammad SAW, supplications for the
442 forgiveness of the deceased's sins, and prayers for the widening of their grave. The sermon
443 includes an oath regarding the deceased's parents, beseeching acceptance of their worship,
444 forgiveness of sins, and enlargement of their grave. Additionally, the imam delivers a sermon
445 during this ritual (text written in Mandailing and the translation can be read in Supplementary
446 file).

447 The current study also reveals that *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Madina is held in three
448 ~~consecutive~~consecutive days where:

- 449 – In the day 1, the remembrance is taken where the Imam start the ceremony. In the first
450 meeting, the priests wear neat clothes, wear caps, turbans and sarongs. Reflecting the
451 figure of a religious expert and placing his position is a person who is highly respected in
452 society. Their sitting position is arranged in a special place, different from the congregation
453 in general. Here, the Imam will also read out the order of the *Batu Qulhu* procession.
- 454 – For day 2, similar to the preceding event, the order of events for the first night procession
455 remains unchanged. Prior to commencing the remembrance ceremony, the 'Imam pembaca
456 takhtim' provided an explanation that after the recitation of the *takhtim*, the congregation
457 would engage in the dhikr of *Batu Qulhu*, and were kindly requested to maintain their
458 positions until the conclusion of the event. However, in contrast to the previous occasion,
459 on the second night of recitation, Qulhu stones are made available to facilitate the dhikr
460 and are arranged in a stacked formation in front of the congregation. Subsequently, the
461 Qulhu remembrance stones are accumulated in the same location. The prescribed
462 procedure entails the recitation of QS 112: 1-3, followed by the selection of a single stone.
463 For each subsequent repetition, an additional stone is selected, such that two stones are
464 chosen for a two-time reading, three stones for a three-time reading, four stones for a four-
465 time reading, and so forth, in accordance with established practice.
- 466 – In day 3, *Batu Qulhu* procession replicates the format observed on the second meeting.
467 However, a notable distinction lies in the extended duration of the dhikr, necessitated by
468 the requirement to recite the prayer over each stone in the presence of the congregation. It

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is imperative to sustain the continuity of the dhikr until its completion, without interruption. Subsequent to the remembrance, a collective prayer and *salawat* are gathered. The *Batu Qulhu* employed as aids for remembrance are carefully placed within plastic burlap bags or buckets (as can be seen in Figure 3a). The event concludes with a religious sermon or *tausiyah*, wherein expressions of gratitude are articulated on behalf of the congregation and the afflicted families. The content of the religious sermon encompasses themes such as death, the retribution of the grave, and serves as a reminder for individuals to perpetually prepare themselves and enhance their devotion before the arrival of death. This is because all living beings are destined to experience mortality (QS 3: 185), and its arrival cannot be postponed, even if one seeks refuge within a lofty and robust fortress (QS 4: 78).

In addition to the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, on the fourth day following an individual's passing, *Batu Qulhu* stones are transported to the cemetery and carefully positioned above the burial site, as illustrated in Figure 3b. The procedure involves the preparation of the grave bed, which includes the leveling ~~of~~ the ground in the designated area assigned for burial. Subsequently, these stones are poured in a manner that commences from the head of the deceased and extends towards their feet. Although typically performed by the bereaved family, this task can also be undertaken by others, such as neighbors or relatives. During the placement of the stones on the grave, it is customary to recite the phrase "*Bismillahi milata 'ala Rasulullah*," which translates to "In the name of Allah and in the religion of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh." The recitation performed during this act is identical to the prayer recitation conducted during the interment of the deceased's body. It is noteworthy that the selection of this specific recitation lacks a distinct foundational basis but rather originates from established tradition.

Figure 3

Presently, *Batu Qulhu* dhikr has undergone significant transformations over time, likely influenced by environmental factors, evolving understandings within the community, and technological advance, as well as societal changes. Presently, the implementation of the ritual varies across different areas of Madina. Traditionally, some individuals engage in the *Batu Qulhu* practice following the *Maghrib* prayer (after sunset) or around 6.30 pm – 7.00 pm local time and typically after the *Isya* prayer (7.30 pm – 8.00 pm), collectively performed at the mosque during evening as mentioned by P8 (55). Among adult women, it takes place in the evening preceding *Maghrib*, while among the male youth (*naposo bulung*) and female youth (*nauli bulung*), it occurs in the afternoon (after *Asr* or around 3.00 pm) as mentioned by P6

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(45). Adult male worshipers partake in this practice during the evening after the *Isya* prayer on the first, second, and third days following a person's demise. As mentioned earlier, the *Batu Qulhu* employed in this remembrance ritual is a stone recognized by the bereaved family, retrieved from the river. To ensure cleanliness, the stones are consistently washed and kept in a plastic sack or a large container. Nevertheless, owing to the evolving perspectives of individuals and the limited availability of such rocks in riverbeds, these stones are now obtainable from multiple outlets across the Madina region, as noted by P5 ~~However, due to the increasing flexibility of people's mindset and the scarcity of these rocks in rivers, the people can now be acquired from various stores in Madina region as mentioned by P5~~ (50):

“*Batu Qulhu* are taken from the river by the family, if they are dirty, they are cleaned. Now, *Batu Qulhu* are easy to get and are sold in flower shops and building material store”).

4.3. Aspect of Norms of *Batu Qulhu* ritual

The *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice, introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein, holds significant cultural value in the Mandailing community of Madina. This ritual utilizes white pebbles from nearby rivers for dhikr worship and to alleviate the suffering of the deceased in the grave. It has been preserved and perpetuated by Syeikh Mustafa Husein's students and alumni, who have established recitation congregations in the region. As the oldest pesantren in North Sumatra, the influence of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends widely beyond Madina, with its students and graduates playing a significant role in its development and expansion.

Equivalent cultural customs, such as the *tahlilan* tradition observed within the NU community in Sumatra, are also prevalent in Java under the same name. In Java, the Muslim community holds *tahlilan* remembrances on many occasions, a tradition historically introduced by the *Wali Songo* (The Nine Saints of Islam) [12]. ~~Similar cultural practices, like the *tahlilan* tradition among the NU community in Sumatra, can also be found.~~

Strict protocols surround the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance. Prior permission from village and religious leaders, referred to as *Tuan Guru*, is required. The officiating Imam must possess proficiency in Arabic-Malay language. These protocols ensure the solemnity and authenticity of the ritual, aligning with the importance placed on established rituals and cultural heritage. The *tahlilan* tradition within the NU community also follows specific rituals, emphasizing the shared values of upholding traditions and seeking solace in times of mourning. As previously mentioned, obtaining permission from both village and religious leaders is necessary, as indicated by P2 (52):

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536 'mangido izin Parjolo tu Tuan Guru' (English: Ask permission from *Tuan Guru* first).
537 Commonly answered by the teacher with 'olo' *silahken acara dilanjut* (English: Okay, please
538 continue the ritual), 'marimom mau au' (English: I will follow).

539 *Batu Qulhu* remembrance serves as a form of communal support, uniting family members,
540 relatives, neighbors, and friends in times of sorrow. This fosters a sense of unity and solidarity
541 within the Mandailing community, reflecting the value placed on collective resilience. Similar
542 communal support can be found in other practices, such as the collective remembrance
543 gatherings associated with the tahlilan tradition, reinforcing the cultural value of community
544 bonds and support networks. The significance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends beyond its
545 cultural and spiritual aspects. It represents a cherished cultural heritage embraced by the
546 Muslim society in Madina, highlighting the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the
547 preservation of identity. This ritual also plays crucial role in fostering social cohesion through
548 different ways, including community participation, shared religious practices, as well
549 transmission of values and traditions. This study also highlights solidarity aspect as other form
550 of social cohesion in the societal level [20]. While specific to the Mandailing community,
551 similar practices can be observed in other regions in Indonesia, especially in the traditional
552 Islam community [4,72]. They are still-fulfilling the shared human need to honor the deceased,
553 find solace in collective rituals, and preserve cultural traditions as integral elements of identity
554 and social cohesion. For a comprehensive overview of the norm aspects in the tradition of *Batu*
555 *Qulhu* in the Mandailing community, please refer to Table 3.

556 **Table 3**

557 **5. Conclusion**

558 In conclusion, the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ritual stands as a significant cultural and
559 religious practice within the Mandailing community's funeral ceremonies. This tradition, which
560 involves using stones for dhikr worship, holds deep historical and spiritual roots. While its
561 origins can be traced back to Syekh Mustafa Husein, who introduced the ritual, variations in
562 accounts highlight the complex nature of its origin. Over time, the procession of *Batu Qulhu*
563 has undergone modifications to streamline its organization, exemplifying the adaptive nature
564 of cultural practices while maintaining their essence. Although *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is
565 specific to the Mandailing community, similar commemorative practices can be found in other
566 regions. These rituals reflect the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased,
567 seeking solace through collective ceremonies, and preserving cultural traditions as integral
568 components of identity and social cohesion. *Batu Qulhu* ritual serves as a testament to the rich

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cultural and religious heritage of the Mandailing community in North Sumatra, encapsulating collective mourning, spiritual devotion, and the preservation of cultural identity. By adhering to these rituals, individuals reaffirm their cultural identity and strengthen their sense of belonging within the community. Shared cultural practices during funeral ceremonies serve as markers of group identity, fostering a sense of solidarity among participants. As funeral ceremonies continue to play a pivotal role in communities worldwide, understanding and appreciating the significance of these rituals contributes to our broader knowledge of human beliefs, traditions, and the ways in which we commemorate and honor the departed. The employed methods in this study allows for an in-depth exploration of the cultural, social, and emotional dimensions surrounding funeral practices within specific communities. This approach provides nuanced insights into the significance, symbolism, and evolving meanings attributed to funeral rituals, thereby enriching scholarly discourse and bridging gaps in understanding of this complex phenomenon.

While this study presents a preliminary investigation into the *Batu Qulhu* ritual, it acknowledges certain limitations. The absence of historical documentation detailing the ritual within the Mandailing community necessitates a proposed historical approach through extensive literature review, drawing upon the writings of earlier ulama. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the limited number of informants and the specific observed processions may not fully capture the diverse procedural variations of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual across the entire Madina region. Recognizing the modifications made by different communities based on the guidance of their Imams or practical considerations further adds to the complexity of the ritual. Given these findings, the study recommends the cultural preservation and educational promotion of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual for the benefit of future generations. The creation of appropriate documentation, such as books and videos, accessible through various platforms including social media, can contribute to the wider dissemination of knowledge and understanding of the ritual. These efforts support the cultural preservation of the *Batu Qulhu* tradition and foster greater appreciation among the Mandailing community and beyond.

Declarations

~~CRedit authorship contribution statement~~Authors contribution statement

Sahrul: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data collection, Data interpretation, Writing - original draft, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Afratul Fadhlila Daulai:** Methodology, Data collection, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – Review and editing.

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603 **Anang Widhi Nirwansyah**; Data interpretation, Formal analysis, Writing – Review and
604 editing, Visualization. **Sevithan Demirdag**; Writing – Review and editing, Validation,
605 Resources.

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606 ~~Conceived and designed the experiments, S., A.F.D.; performed the experiments, S., A.F.D.;~~
607 ~~analyzed and interpreted the data, S., S.D., and A.W.N.; wrote the paper S., A.F.D.; A.W.N.~~
608 ~~and S.D. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.~~

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614 *Conflicts of Interest*

615 The authors declare no conflict of interest.

616 *Data availability statement*

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617 Data included in article/supplementary material/referenced in article.

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618 *Ethics Statement*

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619 This study was ethically reviewed and approved by Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian
620 Masyarakat (LPPM) at the University of North Sumatera (UINSU) under approval number
621 0616615683. All participants, including those photographed, provided informed consent to
622 participate in the study.

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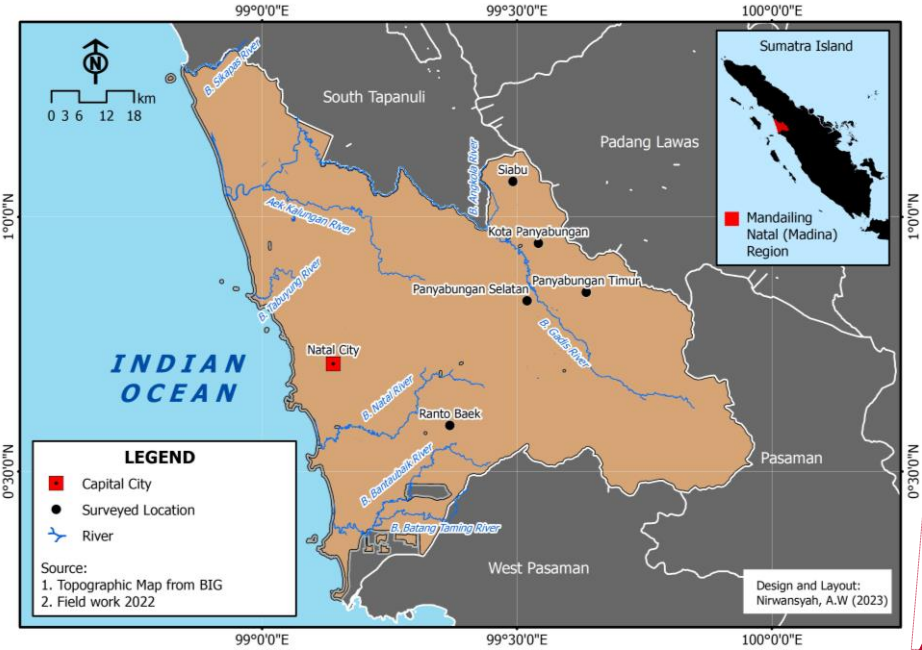
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846 **Figures**



848 **Figure 1.** Area of the current research



850 **Figure 2.** a) White pebble collected for *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Mandailing, where each bucket
851 contains 70 to 100 stones; and b) the congregation of the Mandailing Muslim community
852 during this obituary ceremony. (Photography by Sahrul on 22 July 2022)

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Figure 3. *Batu Qulhu* remembrance by adult male where a) the organizer has collected and kept the stones back into the plastic sack for fourth day of casting procession; and b) where *Batu Qulhu* is finally poured on the grave of deceased person. (photographs of the ritual [a] held at P4 residence on 22 July 2022; and [b] **white stone teeming in the day 3**) (taken by Sahrul)

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Table 1. Pseudonym of subjects' information in the current study

Informants	Initial	Age	Education Level	Occupation
1	P1	65	Bachelor degree	Teacher
2	P2	52	Bachelor degree	Teacher
3	P3	73	Bachelor degree	Ulama and local public figure
4	P4	65	Master degree	Public servant
5	P5	50	Master degree	Public servant
6	P6	45	Master degree	Teacher
7	P7	60	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Businessman
8	P8	55	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Teacher

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Table 2. Construction of each Imam and their task in *Batu Qulhu* procession

Imam	Local term	Assignment	Quran recitation
First Imam	<i>Imam pembaca silsilah</i>	– Reciting <i>istighfar</i> ¹¹ three times; – Reciting <i>wasilah</i> to nabi (propeth Muhammad pbuh), his appostles, ulama and parents of the deceased person, all Muslim and the congregation	– QS 1: 1-6
Second Imam	<i>Imam pembaca takhtim</i>	– Reciting <i>takhtim</i> (known as "reading for the reward of the deceased" or "reciting for the benefit of the deceased)	– QS 112: 1-3 – QS 113: 1-5 – QS 114: 1-5 – QS 1: 1-7 – QS 2: 1-5; 255; 284-286 – QS 33: 56
Third Imam	<i>Imam pembaca tahlil</i>	– Reciting <i>tahlil</i> (compilation of dhikr) including: • <i>Istighfar</i> ;	

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- Reciting ‘afdhalu dzikri’ followed by First *syahadat tauhid*¹². The congregation then answer by ‘hayyun baqi’;
 - Reciting second *syahadat tauhid*. Then answered by the congregation with ‘hayyun maujud’;
 - Reciting the third *syahadat tauhid*. And answered by all attendance by ‘hayyum maqsud’.
- Finally, reciting *syahadat tauhid* together with the congregation 100 times. Here the congregation gradually loud their praise and at same time shaking the head

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Fourth Imam pembaca – Reciting some verses from the Quran – QS 2: 152-156
 Imam Al Baqarah that contains concept and advise – QS 67: 1-2
 about calamities

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Fifth Imam pembaca – Reciting closing prayer, with the
 Imam doa following structure:

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- Basmallah¹³.
- Praise to the Creator and His messenger (Muhammad pbuh);
- Prayers for all Moslem (men and women);
- Prayers for the deceased person and the family;
- Prayers for attendance in the congregation;

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864 Source: compiled based on interview with P1 (65)

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Table 3. Identified aspect of norms in the practice of *Batu Qulhu* Remembrance

Aspect of norm	Description
Preservation of traditions	The culture emphasizes the preservation and perpetuation of rituals and practices, such as the <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance, which was introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein and continued by his students and alumni. The students and graduates of Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding school play a significant role in preserving and expanding this practice.
Community support	The culture values community support during times of grief and mourning. The tradition of using <i>Batu Qulhu</i> serves as a means of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends, helping to alleviate sorrow and foster resilience.
Spiritual gatherings	Collective prayer sessions and remembrance gatherings are highly valued in the culture. The use of the stones during these gatherings creates a conducive environment for spiritual practices and collective remembrance.
Respect for the deceased	The culture emphasizes respect and care for the deceased. The ritual of collecting white pebbles, predominantly marble, from nearby rivers to be used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance shows reverence for the departed.
Connection to nature	The culture maintains a connection with nature, as the stones used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals are collected from rivers. The easy availability of these stones in the past and their resilience in varying weather conditions highlight the importance of nature in the culture.
Alleviation of suffering	The recitation of <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals is believed to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave. This demonstrates a value of compassion and empathy within the culture.

¹ Peace be upon him
² Tuanku Rao is characterized as enigmatic figure and one of the two significant leaders of the Padri movement, shared this status alongside Imam Bonjol himself. Tuanku Rao's origins can be traced to *Huta na Godang* or *Huta Godang*, also known as *Tano Godang*, located in Mandailing Julu (Upper Mandailing) [25].

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³ *Upah-upah* refers to cultural practice or tradition of offering gifts or monetary compensation during significant events or ceremonies. The term "upah" itself can be translated as "wages" or "payment". *Upah-upah* is deeply rooted in the Mandailing culture and is often observed during various occasions such as weddings, funerals, or community gatherings.

⁴ The word *barzanji* is associated with the name of Syeikh Barzanji, a prominent scholar and Sufi poet from Kurdistan. His renowned work, titled "*Mawlid al-Barzanji*," is a poetic composition that narrates the birth and life of the Prophet Muhammad, often recited during religious gatherings and celebrations.

⁵ ~~*Upah-upah* refers to cultural practice or tradition of offering gifts or monetary compensation during significant events or ceremonies. The term "upah" itself can be translated as "wages" or "payment". *Upah-upah* is deeply rooted in the Mandailing culture and is often observed during various occasions such as weddings, funerals, or community gatherings.~~

⁶ *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB), was founded in 1912 by Syeikh Musthafa Husein Nasution. This Islamic boarding school is located in Purba Baru sub-district, Madina Regency, North Sumatra [73]. Further reference on this boarding school can be read in Khairurrijal [74].

⁷ Surau means a place of worship or a small mosque-like structure. The surau typically serves as a communal prayer space or a modest mosque, wherein Muslims congregate for congregational prayers, religious discourses, and other religious engagements.

⁸ Some community in Madina also use term of *Batu Bontar* to refer *Batu Qulhu*.

⁹ One crucial determinant is obtaining authorization from the village leader. The village head holds a position akin to that of a revered monarch, embodying nobility and commanding profound respect.

¹⁰ *Tuan guru* or teacher serves as a religious authority, serving as an exemplar and establishing a benchmark for societal norms through their words and actions. Additionally, they are often revered as sacred individuals known for their healing abilities, and they serve as a source of supplication for various needs such as well-being, sustenance, companionship, agricultural prosperity, and attainment of blessings.

¹¹ The act of attempting forgiveness from the Almighty God, commonly by saying 'astağfirullāhu

¹² The *syahadat tauhid* contains declaration of belief in the oneness of God Almighty

¹³ *Basmallah* is phrase mention to the God before beginning any action or speech. It spells 'Bismillahi rāḥmani rāḥim'. It means: in the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful.

Figures

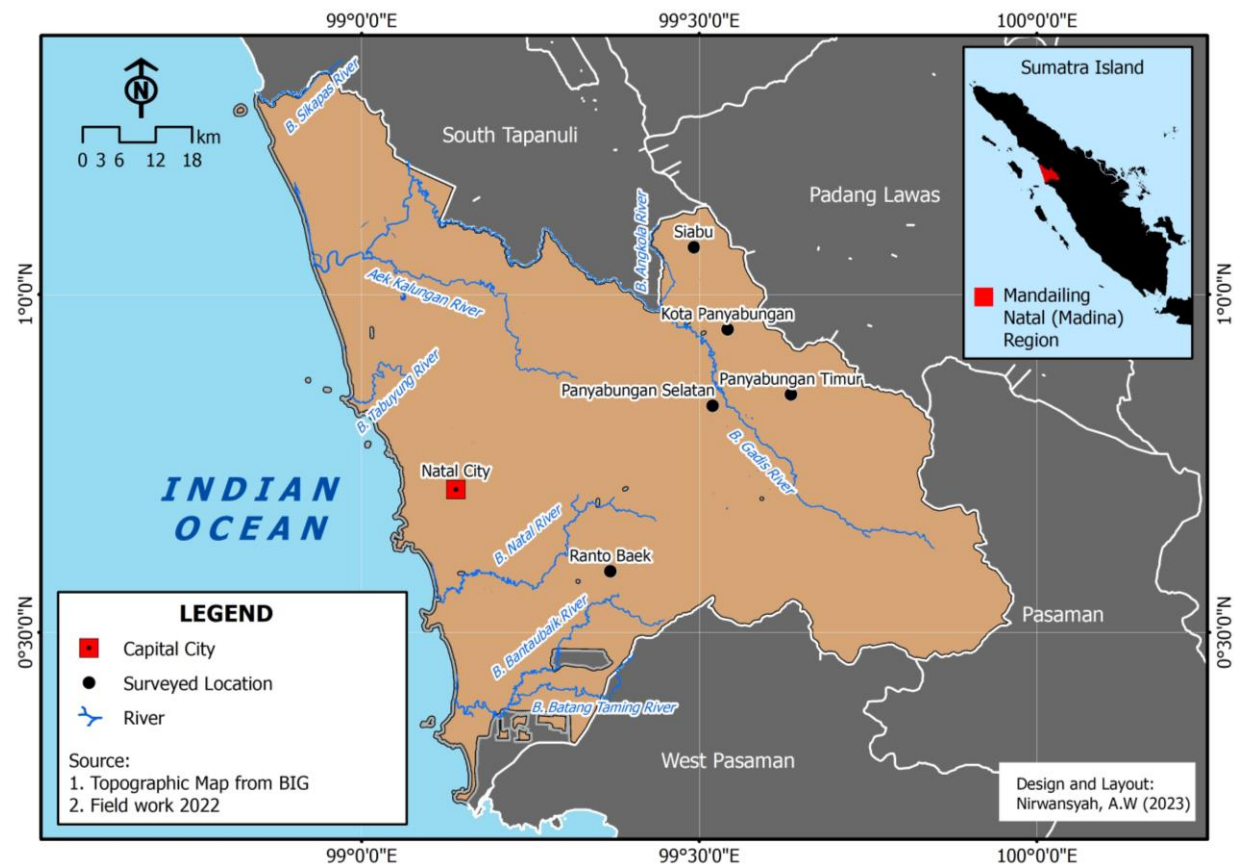


Figure 1. Area of the current research



Figure 2. a) White pebble collected for *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Mandailing, where each bucket contains 70 to 100 stones; and b) the congregation of the Mandailing Muslim community during this obituary ceremony. (Photography by Sahrul on 22 July 2022)



Figure 3. *Batu Qulhu* remembrance by adult male where a) the organizer has collected and kept the stones back into the plastic sack for fourth day of casting procession; and b) where *Batu Qulhu* is finally poured on the grave of deceased person. (photographs of the ritual [a] held at P4 residence on 22 July 2022; and [b] white stone teeming in the day 4) (taken by Sahrul)

1 **Table 1.** Pseudonym of subjects' information in the current study

Informants	Initial	Age	Education Level	Occupation
1	P1	65	Bachelor degree	Teacher
2	P2	52	Bachelor degree	Teacher
3	P3	73	Bachelor degree	Ulama and local public figure
4	P4	65	Master degree	Public servant
5	P5	50	Master degree	Public servant
6	P6	45	Master degree	Teacher
7	P7	60	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Businessman
8	P8	55	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Teacher

2

3 **Table 2.** Construction of each Imam and their task in *Batu Qulhu* procession

Imam	Local term	Assignment	Quran recitation
First Imam	<i>Imam pembaca silsilah</i>	– Reciting <i>istighfar</i> ¹ three times; – Reciting <i>wasilah</i> to nabi (propeth Muhammad pbuh), his appostles, ulama and parents of the deceased person, all moslem and the congregation	– QS 1: 1-6
Second Imam	<i>Imam pembaca takhtim</i>	– Reciting <i>takhtim</i> (known as "reading for the reward of the deceased" or "reciting for the benefit of the deceased)	– QS 112: 1-3 – QS 113: 1-5 – QS 114: 1-5 – QS 1: 1-7 – QS 2: 1-5; 255; 284-286 – QS 33: 56
Third Imam	<i>Imam pembaca tahlil</i>	– Reciting <i>tahlil</i> (compilation of dhikr) including: • <i>Istighfar</i> ;	

-
- Reciting ‘afdhalu dzikri’ followed by First *syahadat tauhid*². The congregation then answer by ‘hayyun baqi’;
 - Reciting second *syahadat tauhid*. Then answered by the congregation with ‘hayyun maujud’;
 - Reciting the third *syahadat tauhid*. And answered by all attendance by ‘hayyum maqsud’.
- Finally, reciting *syahadat tauhid* together with the congregation 100 times. Here the congregation gradually loud their praise and at same time shaking the head

Fourth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca Al Baqarah</i>	– Reciting some verses from the Quran that contains concept and advise about calamities	– QS 2: 152-156 – QS 67: 1-2
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Fifth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca doa</i>	– Reciting closing prayer, with the following structure:
------------	-------------------------	--

- *Basmallah*³;
- Praise to the Creator and His messenger (Muhammad pbuh);
- Prayers for all Moslem (men and women);
- Prayers for the deceased person and the family;
- Prayers for attendance in the congregation;

Source: compiled based on interview with P1 (65)

6 **Table 3.** Identified aspect of norms in the practice of *Batu Qulhu* Remembrance

Aspect of norm	Description
Preservation of traditions	The culture emphasizes the preservation and perpetuation of rituals and practices, such as the <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance, which was introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein and continued by his students and alumni. The students and graduates of Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding school play a significant role in preserving and expanding this practice.
Community support	The culture values community support during times of grief and mourning. The tradition of using <i>Batu Qulhu</i> serves as a means of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends, helping to alleviate sorrow and foster resilience.
Spiritual gatherings	Collective prayer sessions and remembrance gatherings are highly valued in the culture. The use of the stones during these gatherings creates a conducive environment for spiritual practices and collective remembrance.
Respect for the deceased	The culture emphasizes respect and care for the deceased. The ritual of collecting white pebbles, predominantly marble, from nearby rivers to be used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance shows reverence for the departed.
Connection to nature	The culture maintains a connection with nature, as the stones used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals are collected from rivers. The easy availability of these stones in the past and their resilience in varying weather conditions highlight the importance of nature in the culture.
Alleviation of suffering	The recitation of <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals is believed to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave. This demonstrates a value of compassion and empathy within the culture.

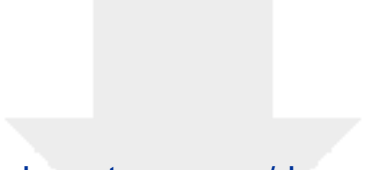
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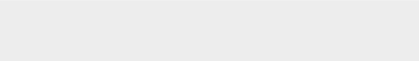
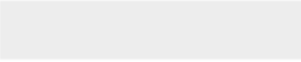
¹ The act of attempting forgiveness from the Almighty God, commonly by saying ‘astağfirullāhu

² The *syahadat tauhid* contains declaration of belief in the oneness of God Almighty

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Supplementary Material
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Supplementary Material

6-Supplementary-Material-Text-Discourse.docx



Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

--Manuscript Draft--

Manuscript Number:	HELIYON-D-23-24599R8
Article Type:	Original Research Article
Section/Category:	Social Sciences
Keywords:	death rituals; funeral traditions; Batu Qulhu; Mandailing community; norms and values
Manuscript Classifications:	140.190.110: Human Geography; 140.190.110.100: Cultural Geography; 140.190.130: Cultural Sociology; 140.190.140: Anthropology; 140.270: Religion
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Order of Authors:	Sahrul Sahrul, Dr
	Anang Widhi Nirwansyah, Dr
	Seyithan Demirdag, PhD
	Afrahul Fadhila Daulai, Dr
Abstract:	<p>Death and funeral rituals hold significant cultural and spiritual importance in traditional communities worldwide, including within the Islamic faith. This study focuses on exploring the unique funeral ritual known as Batu Qulhu in the Muslim Mandailing community. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes field observations and interviews with ulama and imams who have practical knowledge and understanding of this traditional ritual. The study reveals two origin stories of Batu Qulhu: one attributed to the first Imam in the Mandailing community and the other associated with elderly parents, ulama, and village malims (religious teachers) without specifying an individual source. Batu Qulhu refers to the white river stones utilized by the congregation during the ritual to count the number of prayers offered. The procession of this tradition follows a strict protocol, encompassing prayers, recitation of the Quran, and seeking forgiveness for the deceased and their family. The efficacy of Batu Qulhu serves as a testament to the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of cultural identity. While Batu Qulhu remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar cultural practices can be observed in other regions, highlighting the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and uphold cultural traditions as an integral part of identity and social cohesion.</p>
Opposed Reviewers:	
Additional Information:	
Question	Response
Publication ethics Please confirm that you have reviewed our guidelines for Ethics in Publishing as well as Heliyon's Ethics and Editorial Policies	I confirm

This piece of the submission is being sent via mail.

Title of the study involving human participant(s):

Author Name(s): *Dr. SAHRUL, M.A*

Institution(s): *Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication,
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UINSU)*

Date: *10 April 2024*

I, the undersigned author of the above-mentioned study, hereby declare the following:

1. I have obtained written informed consent from the participant(s) / patient(s) for the publication of this study, any accompanying data and images. Where consent was obtained from someone other than the participant(s) / patient(s), I confirm that this proxy was authorised to provide consent on the participant's / patient's behalf.
2. Where the participant(s) / patient(s) is/are a minor(s), we followed local laws on the age and circumstances under which they may consent for themselves. If they were not of legal age to consent, consent was obtained from an authorised proxy i.e., the parents or legal guardian(s). If the minor(s) has/have reasonable understanding of the informed consent and implications, signature (or assent, as appropriate) was also obtained from the minor(s).
3. Where the participant(s) / patient(s) provided consent themselves, I confirm that they had capacity to do so, and any mental or physical disabilities were taken into consideration in the process of informing and obtaining written informed consent.
4. Where the participant(s) / patient(s) has/have died, I confirm that the consent given still allows for publication.
5. I confirm that all content presented in this study, associated data and images have been deidentified and anonymized to the best possible extent.
6. The original signed and dated consent form is held by the treating institution or appropriate governing local / regional / national body and will be retained according to the policies and procedures of the institution or governing body.
7. The written informed consent form (please **do not** include with your submission) includes all relevant information pertinent to each participant / patient (such as the name, age, condition, medical history, diagnosis, and treatment)
8. The participant(s) / patient(s) / authorized proxy were fully informed of the purpose of this study, the potential risks and benefits of publication, and the consequence of disclosing their personal information.
9. The participant(s) / patient(s) or authorized proxy were given the opportunity to ask questions regarding publication of the study, had their questions answered fully and have consented to publish all associated data and images. In the case of clinical studies, the participant(s) / patient(s) or authorized proxy approved the final version of the manuscript.
10. The participant(s) / patient(s) or legal guardian(s) were informed that their consent and participation in the publication of this study is entirely voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw their consent at any time.
11. If this is a clinical study manuscript, I confirm that at least one of the authors of this paper was involved in the care of the participant(s) / patient(s).
12. I confirm that my article complies with the appropriate local / regional / national law on consent and privacy.

By signing this declaration form, I acknowledge that I have read and understood the information provided above, and I attest to the accuracy of this declaration. I understand that any false or misleading information may result in the rejection of the manuscript or other disciplinary actions.

As corresponding author, I hereby declare that I sign this document on behalf of all the authors of the above-mentioned study involving human participants.

Corresponding author's signature:	<i>Muhammad</i>
Date:	<i>10 April 2024</i>

Please submit this **Human Participant Declaration Form** along with the manuscript to the journal. **Note:** The written informed consent form must NOT be submitted with your manuscript but must be made available to the journal if specifically requested.

Please retain a copy of this declaration for your records.



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UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI SUMATERA UTARA MEDAN
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Ethics Committee Letter of Approval

No. 0616615683

Project Title: *Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra*

Researcher: Dr. Sahrul

Affiliation:

Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara

Date: 1-February-2022 - 31-Oct-2022 | **Contract Number:** 328

Introduction

This letter confirms the approval of the ethical research proposal for the project titled "Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra" by Dr. Sahrul, affiliated with the Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program at *Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara*.

Approval for Research Methods

The Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved the proposed research methods, which include:

-) Interviews
-) Observations
-) Photo collection

Ethical Considerations

The committee commends the inclusion of the following ethical considerations in the research proposal:

-) **Informed Consent:**
 - o A process to obtain written informed consent from all participants before interviews, observations, and photo collection must be implemented.
 - o The consent form should explain the research purpose, data collection methods, potential risks and benefits of participation, confidentiality measures, and the right to withdraw from the study at any point.
-) **Confidentiality:**
 - o Measures to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants must be outlined. This includes anonymizing interview transcripts, observation notes, and photographs.
 - o Data storage protocols that protect participant privacy should be established.
-) **Respect for Cultural Sensitivities:**
 - o The research should be conducted with sensitivity to the cultural practices and beliefs of the Mandailing community regarding death and funerals.
 - o Permission should be sought from appropriate community authorities before commencing research activities.

Conditions of Approval

This approval is granted with the following conditions:

-) Any deviations from the approved research plan must be reported to the Ethics Committee for review and approval.
-) Unexpected ethical issues arising during the research must be reported to the Ethics Committee promptly.
-) A copy of the final research report summarizing the findings and addressing any ethical considerations must be submitted to the Ethics Committee upon completion of the project.

Contact Information

For any questions or concerns regarding ethical procedures, please contact the LPPM Ethics Committee, *Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara*, at lppm@uinsu.ac.id



Sincerely,
Chair, LPPM Ethics Committee
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara

Dr. Nispul Khoiri, M.Ag

Declaration of interests

☒The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

☐The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests:

Cover Letter

Medan, 25 May 2024

Subject: Revision Manuscript Submission

Dear Editor-in-Chief,

Thank you for your previous feedback on my manuscript, "*Batu Qulhu – The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra*." I have carefully revised the article to address the reviewer's concerns, particularly regarding grammatical editing and anonymity in the figure 3b.

I believe the revised manuscript aligns well with Heliyon's focus on interdisciplinary research and will provide valuable insights into the diverse cultural practices within Muslim societies. I respectfully request your reconsideration for publication.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your response and am happy to discuss any further revisions or answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Sahrul

Dear Editor,

We are grateful for the reviewers' insightful feedback, especially regarding grammatical editing. We've revised the relevant section (line 73; line 276), delete 'meticulous' word in some sentences. Additionally, we've already added the date of the ethical approval letter (line 303) and delete information regarding participant 4 that previously offered by author.

Thank you.

Best,
Sahrul

***Batu Qulhu*—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra**

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Abstract: Death and funeral rituals hold significant cultural and spiritual importance in traditional communities worldwide, including within the Islamic faith. This study focuses on exploring the unique funeral ritual known as *Batu Qulhu* in the Muslim Mandailing community. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes field observations and interviews with ulama and imams who have practical knowledge and understanding of this traditional ritual. The study reveals two origin stories of *Batu Qulhu*: one attributed to the first Imam in the Mandailing community and the other associated with parents, ulama, and village *malims* (religious teachers) without specifying an individual source. *Batu Qulhu* refers to the white river stones utilized by the congregation during the ritual to count the number of prayers offered. The procession of this tradition follows a strict protocol, encompassing prayers, recitation of the Quran, and seeking forgiveness for the deceased and their family. The efficacy of *Batu Qulhu* serves as a testament to the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of cultural identity. While *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar cultural practices can be observed in other regions, highlighting the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and uphold cultural traditions as an integral part of identity and social cohesion.

Keywords: death rituals, funeral traditions, *Batu Qulhu*, Mandailing community, norms and values

1. Introduction

As a traditional aspect of culture, funeral practices serve as an initial stride towards fostering harmonious relations within multi-ethnic communities [1]. The manner in which individuals navigate the concept of death holds significance as it encompasses their cultural engagement and utilization, similar to how religion, an integral component of culture, provides a framework for comprehending, interpreting, and making sense of death, albeit without necessarily diminishing its inherent challenges for those experiencing grief [2]. Throughout various cultures, the commemoration of the deceased and the support offered to grieving

families manifest through a multitude of ritualistic practices [3]. These rituals hold particular significance within religious frameworks as they are not only guided by religious doctrines but also serve as fundamental aspects of communal worship [4]. Within the Islamic tradition, the management of deceased bodies adheres to the teachings found in the Qur'an, specifically drawing attention to Surah Al Imran (QS 3:185). This verse underscores the universal nature of mortality, asserting that every individual is bound to experience death [5]. In his groundbreaking 1907 study, Robert Hertz skillfully intertwined three essential imperatives - moral, aesthetic, and sociological - to present a captivating conceptualization of death [6]. His intricate analysis portrays death as a profound transformative journey that transcends the boundaries of both the spiritual and physical realms.

In Indonesia, funeral rituals have been intricately intertwined with local cultural practices and ethnic traditions. Various communities, such as the Tana Toraja people [7], the traditional Javanese community [8,9], and the Balinese who perform the *ngaben* ceremony [10,11], express their funeral customs based on their specific cultural heritage. These burial practices and procedures provide profound insights into the community and society in which they are performed. In these traditions, feasts, animal sacrifices, and supplications are often conducted to honor the deceased and their family. Additionally, Islamic values and rituals significantly influence funeral practices across many regions in Indonesia. The practice of *tahlil* or *tahlilan*, which involves collective remembrance gatherings, is commonly observed [12], and the *azan* (call to prayer) is often performed during burial ceremonies [4]. Moreover, in certain regions of Sumatra, Islamic funeral practices have assimilated with local traditions. For example, the people of Minangkabau in Nagari Salayo incorporate the custom of placing attributes on the head of the deceased during the funeral procession [13]. While in Nagari Anduring, the Minang community also practices *bakayaik*, which takes place 100 days after someone's passing. *Bakayaik* vividly recounts the profound narrative of Prophet Muhammad pbuh¹, beginning with his miraculous birth and chronicling his relentless efforts to uphold the principles of Islam. This ceremonial tradition blends the eloquence of Arabic and Minang languages, creating a captivating linguistic tapestry that enhances the overall richness of the performance. In Aceh, the *reuhab* tradition involves decorating the deceased person's bedroom for 40 days [14]. These practices exemplify the dynamic interplay between Islamic influences and local cultural expressions in funeral rituals across Indonesia.

Throughout history, archaeological evidence of ancient burials reveals a persistent pattern: human societies, since their inception, have convened to form social bonds and articulate emotions and intentions in response to the phenomenon of death [15]. This ritual also promotes

social cohesion in many communities practiced in various belief systems [16–18]. Despite this, there is no clear description on concept of social cohesion [19], for the purpose of this study, social cohesion is defined by the interconnectedness of social networks and the customs, bonds, and values that uphold their unity [20]. The idea of social cohesion traces back to Emile Durkheim's theory. He proposed the notion of mechanical solidarity in society, suggesting its presence through the strength of influential individuals [21]. Hence, social cohesion emerges from socio-spatial factors that influence individuals within specific locations, representing a reflection of the classification of spaces [22,23]. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct thorough research into the rituals and traditions of specific communities within their local contexts to better understand and extract the factors contributing to social cohesion. This approach allows for a more nuanced analysis, considering the unique cultural and social dynamics that shape cohesion within distinct groups. Further, the traditional ceremony holds facilitates religious and spiritual practices as well as strengthening social bond and sense of identity [24].

This study aims to investigate the origin of *Batu Qulhu* rituals, exploring its contemporary practices and norms based on the social cohesion and identity in the Mandailing community of North Sumatra. The funeral rituals in this community are deeply rooted in a rich tapestry of cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions. By exploring the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ceremonies, this research seeks to shed light on the significance and intricacies of these rituals, offering valuable insights into the broader context of funeral traditions among Muslims in Sumatra. Regarding to the goals, the current article addresses the following research question the research question, what is the historical background of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community? How do the practices surround *Batu Qulhu* manifest in present-day Mandailing Muslim society? What are the norms associated with *Batu Qulhu* within the Mandailing community based on social cohesion and identity?

1.1. Mandailing Ethnic: Historical Context

The origin of the word "*Mandailing*" is linked to the Munda people of India, who experienced defeat in a war against the Aryan people. The term "*Mandailing*" is derived from either "*Mandala Holing*" [25,26] or "*Mundailing*," referring to the refugees from Munda [27]. It is believed that the Munda people originally inhabited the northern regions of India before the arrival of the Aryans [28]. The historical interaction between the Aryans and the Munda people has been examined through linguistic evidence [29]. Due to pressure from the Aryans, the Munda people migrated southward within India [29–31], and this Aryan occupation of the Munda people occurred around 1500-1200 BC [32]. Eventually, the displaced Munda people

migrated to Southeast Asia [31], although the specific country of their migration is not specified. It is likely that some of them reached North Sumatra through the Barus Port in Central Tapanuli, which was an international port at that time. Referred to "*Negarakertagama*" book from 1365, which mentions the presence of the Mandailing as one of the most significant ethnic groups in the archipelago [25,33]. The names mentioned include Mandailing, Pane, and Padang Lawas. The mention of these names indicates that the name Mandailing has been known by outsiders since ancient dates. In addition, Tuanku Rao² suggests that the Mandailing people trace their origin back to the Bugis Makassar, who sailed to the Singkuang Port (now known as Natal), it is more commonly accepted that the Mandailing people are part of the Batak ethnic group.

The Mandailing community's ethnic origin is a subject of contention among scholars. While some argue that they are part of the Batak Toba ethnic group [34,35], this perspective faces opposition from Mandailing intellectuals and historians. However, an analysis of factors such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group [36,37]. To establish their identity as the Mandailing community, they refer to themselves as "*halak kita*" (referred to: our people) of South Tapanuli [38], rather than as "*halak batak*" (Batak people) [39,40]. Regarding religious affiliation, the majority of the contemporary Mandailing population follows Islam, with a minority of Christians found in specific locations like Pakantan in Upper Mandailing, Medan, and other cities in North Sumatra [25,41]. Before embracing Islam, the religious beliefs of the Mandailing people focused around ancestral spirits referred to as "*si pele begu*" [33], incorporating influences from Hinduism and Buddhism [42]. Recent field research conducted in the Mandailing region revealed remnants and artefacts associated with both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, particularly in the vicinity of Panyabungan within the Greater Mandailing area [43].

Padri wars has brought Islam to Mandailing around 1821 and the Dutch military breached and defeated this movement by 1835 [36,41,44]. The term '*padri*' has two possible origins. One explanation suggests that it stems from the Indonesian word '*padri*,' which referred to priests. It is important to emphasize that the notable figures associated with the Padri movement can be likened to 'Islamic priests' [45]. This movement emerged in the early 1800s as a reformist Islamic movement led by local scholars known as ulama. These ulama sought to purify and reform Islam in the region, criticizing what they perceived as syncretic practices and deviations from strict Islamic teachings [26,41]. They aimed to establish a more orthodox and conservative interpretation of Islam in Mandailing. Padri movement gained support from

various segments of the population, including the rural communities, who were attracted to their message of religious purity and social justice [46]. The Padris' growing influence and power threatened the traditional rulers, known as penghulu, who feared losing their authority and control [41,45].

Before then, in the classical era, marked by the introduction of Hinduism preceding Islam into South Tapanuli, is substantiated by the presence of the Bahal temple in Portibi (now Padang Lawas), a relic of the Panai kingdom during the 12th and 13th centuries. Schnitger [47] documented that around 1000 AD, the Panai kingdom stood as the foremost realm of its time. Nevertheless, around 11th century, the Panai kingdom succumbed to Rajendrakola from India, an adherent of the Hindu faith. Despite the presence of Hindus within the Mandailing Sultanate, the Mandailing populace did not embrace Islam. This decision was influenced by the religion's veneration of numerous idols. Through a traditional lens, there exists a fusion of religion and culture, exemplified by customs such as *upah-upah*³ (gift) during weddings, rites marking childbirth, and housewarming ceremonies. Additionally, observances spanning 7, 40, 100, and 1000 days following the demise of parents are upheld.

The Mandailing Sultanate fell under the dominion of the Aru kingdom circa 1295 AD, spanning the 13th to 15th centuries AD. Subsequent to this period, the Pulungan kingdom emerged, followed by the ascendancy of the Nasution clan, which assumed control over the Mandailing Godang region (now Panyabungan), and the Lubis clan, which governed Mandailing Julu (now Kotanopan).

1.2. Mandailing Philosophy

The values of the Mandailing ethnic philosophy of life called *Poda Na Lima*. *Poda* means advice, *na* means which/that/is, and *lima* means five. In short, *Poda Na Lima* consists of five pieces of advice, namely: i) *Paias Rohamu* (keeping your heart clean); ii) *Paias Pamatangmu* (keeping your body clean); iii) *Paias Parabitonmu* (keeping your clothes clean); iv) *Paias Bagasmu* (keeping your house clean); and v) *Paias Pakaranganmu* (keeping your yard clean) [34,48]. These five values are still firmly held by the Mandailing community and the Mandailing ethnicity in Indonesia and around the world. Despite the Madina people's reputation for being religious, their daily social lives are intertwined with various cultural practices that are imbued with religious significance. These rituals, such as *marhaban* (*barzanzi*)⁴, the use of plain flour, and *upah-upah*, are performed on joyful occasions such as weddings, recoveries from illness, and the attainment of new positions, as well as during significant life transitions such as the birth of a child and moving into a new home [38].

The Mandailing ethnic community has a value system, *Dalihan Na Tolu* which means a forum used to organize life in carrying out *olong* (affection) between *mora*, *kahanggi* and *anak boru* [34,35,49,50]. *Dalihan Na Tolu*, also referred to ‘three stones’ [37], is a cultural value, created by the Creator that guide Bataknese attitude and behavior in the social lives and cultural relation [51]. The three stones encompass family, community, and spirituality. In Mandailing community, *Dalihan Na Tolu* principles are deeply intertwined with Islamic values and teachings. Mandailing Muslim communities incorporate these cultural principles into their daily lives, alongside their Islamic beliefs and practices [51,52]. This concept reinforces the importance of maintaining strong moral character, fostering harmonious relationships, and upholding social justice within the community [34,35,51].

2. Location Settings

The Mandailing Natal region, often abbreviated as Madina, is situated in North Sumatra Province, spanning approximately between 0°10’ and 1°50’ N and 98°10’ and 100°10’ E. This region is located on the west coast of Sumatra, has a 170 km coastline, and is home to 24 islands, though only 4 of these islands are inhabited. In 2021, Madina has a population of over 478,000 people, and has a total area of 6,134 km² [53]. Based on BPS-Statistics of Mandailing Natal Regency [53], during 2021, the predominant land use in this region comprises a mixed vegetation area, accounting for 39.15% or 252.57 hectares, while forested areas occupy 30.04% of the region, followed by palm oil plantations at 27.79%. Settlements in Madina cover 451.38 hectares (0.7%), while agriculture utilizes 2.17% of the land. Additionally, water bodies such as lakes and dams encompass 0.14% of the region's total area. This region is crossed by three river systems including Batang Pungkut, Batang Gadis, and Aek Pohan that represent upper, middle and lower part of the Batang Gadis watershed [54]. These rivers are beneficial for major population in Madina including for agriculture, plantation and industrial sectors. However, for years the rivers have also become threatened to illegal mining activities including sands, rocks and gold [55,56].

The majority of the population in Madina, around 95%, is Muslim, while the remaining 5% consists of Christians (including Catholics), Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of Confucianism. Madina has more than 800 mosques and 70 churches [57], to support the religious practices of its inhabitants, and the region is made up of 23 districts and over 370 villages. Muslim community in Madina, consisting of various ethnic groups, exhibits a rich diversity of cultural and religious practices. Mosques and Islamic schools, known as *madrasah*, hold a prominent position in shaping the religious and cultural life of the community.

Furthermore, active participation in significant cultural and religious traditions, such as the celebration of two major Islamic holidays like *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*, is observed among the Muslim population. A strong emphasis on social responsibility and assisting those in need, in alignment with Islamic principles, is evident through the engagement of the Muslim community in charitable and community service activities. The local government plays a supportive role by implementing policies and providing necessary infrastructure to promote Islamic education [58].

3. Methodology

3.1. Design of the Research

This study adopts qualitative research design, employing combination of phenomenological and ethnographic approaches. Both methodologies are characterized by their exploratory nature, utilizing the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection [59]. By intertwining the principles of phenomenological analysis and ethnography, this current study approach emphasizes a comprehensive exploration of human experiences within their natural settings. While phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of lived experiences, ethnography complements this by elucidating the cultural and social intricacies that contextualize these experiences within specific communities or groups. Additionally, they both underscore the importance of adopting a self-conscious approach to research, wherein researchers are attentive to their own perspectives, biases, and influences throughout the research process. It is worth to be noticed that the primary aim of qualitative research is to comprehend the distinctive characteristics and experiences of individual cases, rather than attempting to establish generalized patterns or trends [60]. This method emphasizes the comprehensive exploration of human behaviors and experiences as they unfold within natural settings [61,62]. Integral to this research is the integration of the subjects' knowledge with that of the researchers, which holds significant importance. This integration facilitates the recognition and documentation of outcomes from the local perspective inherent to the subjects themselves [7,63]. The current study employs an emic approach, which entails adopting the insider's perspective from within the culture where the research project is situated, as previously described in studies by [7,45,64–66]. By embracing an emic approach, the research acknowledges the critical importance of comprehending and interpreting the cultural context and subjective experiences of the subjects, thereby enriching both the research process and its findings.

3.2. Fieldwork and Subjects

The research employed an observational and interview-based approach to collect data. The researchers assumed the roles of both observers and interviewers. The observation phase focused on the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice in the study area, the activities of the Imam during the ritual, and the placement of stones in the graveyard after the final day of remembrance. For the interviews, a systematic process was followed to select appropriate sources. Initial contact with the informants was established through various means, such as phone calls, emails, and WhatsApp messages, to effectively arrange and conduct the interviews.

In prior ethnographic studies, a limited number of subjects were involved. For instance, two studies centered on the practices of anesthesia within two British hospital [67]. Similarly, Baan et al. [7] conducted research on funeral rituals in Toraja with only two informants, while Lee et al. [68] examined the experience of depression among Chinese individuals with a sample size of five informants. In accordance with the present study, data collection encompassed interviews with a total of eight carefully selected subjects, as detailed in Table 1. The age range of the informants in this study was 45-73 years old.

The selection process for these subjects adhered to specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Firstly, the informants were required to hold the roles of imams or leaders of the *Batu Qulhu* dhikr (or remembrance) during funeral ceremonies within the Mandailing community. Secondly, they were expected to possess a profound understanding of the norms and values associated with *Batu Qulhu*. Lastly, the informants needed to be Ulama or respected Islamic spiritual leaders within the local community. Proficiency in the Mandailing language was also a prerequisite for informant selection. To identify suitable subjects, consultations were conducted with local authorities, such as the Indonesian Council of Ulama (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*) in Madina, as well as prominent local figures.

Table 1

The current investigation involved the collection of data during a comprehensive six-month fieldwork period in 2022, specifically spanning from February to July. This fieldwork, which was coordinated by the first and second author, extended over a total of 90 days. The study targeted five specifically chosen districts, selected from a larger pool of 23 districts in the designated study area (refer to Figure 1). The primary objective of the research was to obtain valuable insights into the cultural practices related to the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in the Madina region. The *Batu Qulhu* event occurring in July 2022

was meticulously observed and documented, employing a combination of photographs and videos for recording. Regarding the data collection process, individual interviews were conducted with each informant, with each session spanning approximately 2 hours. These interviews took place at mutually agreed locations, such as the informant's residence, school office, or the household of the deceased individual where the *Batu Qulhu* ritual took place. Thorough and rigorous recording of all pertinent information was undertaken for subsequent analysis purposes.

Figure 1

3.3. Data Analysis

The present study utilized a qualitative data analysis approach, encompassing three key stages: 1) data reduction; 2) data presentation; and 3) drawing conclusions. This analytical process unfolded iteratively throughout the research. Initially, during the early phases of data collection, the research maintained a broad and overarching focus, and the observations were comprehensive in nature. As the research progressed and the focus of the study became more apparent, the observations evolved to adopt a more structured approach, enabling the acquisition of specific and targeted data.

The data analysis commenced with data reduction, where the gathered information was streamlined and organized to facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Subsequently, the data were presented in a coherent and meaningful manner to facilitate effective interpretation. Finally, the study derived conclusions based on the analyzed data, allowing for the generation of valuable insights into the cultural practices surrounding the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina. Throughout the research, this qualitative data analysis process occurred in a cyclical manner, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the research topic and a nuanced understanding of the intricacies involved. By transitioning from broad and general observations to more structured and specific data collection, the study achieved a comprehensive and detailed exploration of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual's cultural significance and its relevance within the Mandailing community.

3.4. Ethical Consideration

The present investigation was conducted under the auspices of Cluster Interdisciplinary Basic Research, adhering meticulously to stringent ethical guidelines. To ensure ethical compliance, the study received official approval from the Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) University of North Sumatera (UINSU) with the approval number:

0616615683, valid from 1-February-2022, to 31-October-2022. The utmost care was taken in handling the research data and records, which were securely stored on a password-protected computer housed within the Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, UINSU. Access to these records was strictly restricted to the authors.

In adherence to established ethical standards for data collection and publication, prior to their inclusion in the research, explicit informed consent was acquired from all eight subjects involved, thereby safeguarding their voluntary and informed engagement in the study. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, a coding system was employed, wherein each subject was allocated an initial "P" followed by pertinent demographic particulars, such as age and current profession. Moreover, all photographic materials featured in this investigation were obtained with written consent from all participants in the native *Bahasa* (Indonesian language), thereby emphasizing the paramount importance of respecting their autonomy and privacy throughout the research process. All participants provided written consent to participate, for the data to be published and for inclusion of photographs. All guests at the ritual provided written consent. Permission was sought from the family representative, who was briefed on the study's objectives, note-taking, and photography. This unwavering commitment to ethical principles serves to underscore the rigor and integrity of the present inquiry, facilitating an ethically sound exploration of the cultural practices pertaining to the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Origin of the Rituals

Based on the interview, it is mentioned that Syeikh Haji Mustafa Husein bin Husein Nasution bin Umar Nasution Al-Mandaili (or known as Syeikh Mustafa Husein) (1886-1955), is credited as the first Imam to introduce the practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance at funeral ceremonies. In the beginning, was named by *Batu Balancing* based on the color of the stone used in this ritual. This insight was derived from interviews conducted with P1 (65), an ulama, and P2 (52), a teacher at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Panyabungan. In addition, Syeikh Musthafa Husein is also founder of the *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB)⁶ or Purba Baru Islamic boarding school. The practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been preserved and perpetuated by his students, who have established recitation congregations in various locations such as mosques, prayer rooms, and *surau*⁷. Notably, the

students and alumni of Musthafawiyah have played a significant role in its development and expansion beyond Madina region, with a presence in several other provinces across Indonesia. As the oldest *pesantren* (or boarding school) in North Sumatra, the influence of this practice extends widely, facilitated by the widespread distribution of its students and graduates.

An alternative explanation, provided by P3 (73) an ulama, diverges slightly from the previous informant. He has pointed out that the tradition of using *Batu Qulhu* or *Batu Balancing*⁸ as a medium for remembrance was explained with a slight variation, focusing on the customs upheld by elderly parents, ulama, village *malims* (religious teachers), without mentioning any specific individual. It was a means to alleviate the sorrow experienced by the bereaved and served as a form of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends. In addition to the customary acts of attending funerals and observing mourning rituals, the strategies employed to alleviate the profound grief experienced by individuals extended further. These encompassed multifaceted practices such as providing emotional support, proffering words of guidance and solace to foster resilience and acceptance in the face of adversity. Moreover, individuals were invited to partake in collective prayer sessions, where the use of *Batu Qulhu* stones served as facilitative elements in creating a conducive environment for these spiritual gatherings. P3 further elucidated that this method, referred to as *alak na jolo martakziah*, involved family members, parents, spouses, children, relatives, and neighbors coming together for *tahlilan*.

“In the past people paid tribute to the homes of people who died; parents, wife, husband, children, siblings and neighbors are tahlilan, starting from reciting istighfar, al-Fatihah, tahlil, prayers and concluding selawat. To make the dhikr in congregation more solemn, they add media by using a Batu Balancing (white stone) within size of an adult's big toe or larger than that. In the past, the white stone was said to be a Batu Balancing, now it is better known as the Batu Qulhu”.

Batu Qulhu ritual refers to the use of certain stone as a means of carrying out dhikr worship. In general, this type of stone is typically known as white pebble. It should be noticed that most of these white pebbles are predominantly comprised of marble, a rock formation characterized by its crystallized carbonates and can easily be found in the riparian zone. Here, the family of the deceased person collect these stones from the nearest river. As mentioned in the interview, this ritual chooses approximately the size of an adult's thumb to enhance the solemnity of the remembrance (as can be seen in Figure 2a). During the interview P4 (65), emphasized that in the past, people paid homage to the homes of the deceased, engaging in *tahlilan* rituals that encompassed prayers and concluding with ‘*selawat*’ (see Figure 2b). To

augment the collective remembrance, *Batu Qulhu*, the size of an adult's big toe or larger, was employed. Over time, the *Batu Balancing* came to be recognized as the *Batu Qulhu*.

Figure 2

The utilization of *Batu Qulhu* in death ceremonies is also underpinned by the geographical sequences. Firstly, the abundance of rivers in Madina, notably the Batang Gadis River, Batang Natal River, Aek Kalungan River and Angkola River, facilitated the easy availability of these stones in the past. Nowadays, these rivers also threatened by illegal gold mining activities [55], and tend to pollute due to its waste [56]. Secondly, these stones possess distinct characteristics that contribute to their suitability for the purpose at hand. They exhibit a white hue, imparting a visually soothing effect, while their cool and clean appearance further enhances their appeal. Third, these stones demonstrate resilience in withstanding the rigors of varying weather conditions, including heat, cold, and rainfall. Furthermore, the recitation of *Batu Qulhu* rituals is believed by the community to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave.

4.2. The Contemporary Practice of Batu Qulhu in the Mandailing Community

In the past, Islamic practices in Sumatra have exhibited influences from mystical and shamanistic traditions e.g., [69,70]. However, it is important to note that the religious activities associated with the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* are not influenced by shamanism, but rather stem solely from religious traditions previously followed by religious scholars, religious teachers, and traditional leaders. Currently, the contemporary practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been inherited and embraced by Muslim society in Madina. Based on interview with P4 (65), it is evident that in the past, the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance adhered to strict protocols as mentioned in the following statement.

“The tradition of recalling the Batu Qulhu was once a highly regulated practice. It required seeking consent from both the village leader and the syekh. Mastery of the 20 essential attributes of Allah was necessary, alongside the ability to read the Quran and comprehend its teachings. The stones themselves had to possess a pure white hue. The recitation of Qulhu would take place during evening gatherings, where all the stones present had to be utilized fully, leaving no remnants behind before the congregation dispersed”.

These procedures include the following: 1) the procession necessitated obtaining permission from the head of the village⁹ and *tuan guru*¹⁰ (or *kulifah*); 2) the ritual leader was required to commit to memory and comprehend the twenty obligatory attributes of God, encompassing *nafsiyah* (self-related attributes) nature, *salbiyah* (attributes related to existence)

nature, *ma'ani* (abstract attributes of God) nature, and *maknawiyah* (the essential nature and prevalence of *ma'ani*) nature; 3) the officiating Imam was expected to possess proficiency in both written and spoken Arabic-Malay; 4) the Imam leading the remembrance was required to proficiently recite the Qur'an and comprehend its meaning; 5) the *Batu Qulhu* utilized in the ritual had to be of a white hue; and 6) the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* transpired during evening hours, and all the stones had to be completed within a single procession conducted in the presence of the congregation. Preceding the initiation of the ritual, it is customary for the priest to cleanse himself through the observance of ablution, mirroring the ritualistic cleansing process associated with prayer as mentioned by P7 (60).

Basically, this ritual has many similarities to *tahlilan* tradition especially in the context prayers and recitations. This practice generally has been carried out by many Nahdatul Ulama (NU) community in Sumatra [12,71]. However, in *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, there are five Imams that lead this procession with different assignment. These Imams are voluntarily appointed by the group and relatively flexible based on their own agreement. The priests then read several prayers that beneficial to seek forgiveness for the deceased, his/her family as well to congregation. The Imams also recite some verses from the Surat of the Quran (QS), and praise the God. In this *Batu Qulhu* ritual, the congregation are voluntarily attending the ritual without any formal invitation. The ritual is held in three consecutive days after the death, and organized by group manager, neighbors and the Imams, and commonly referred to *Serikat Tolong Menolong* (STM) or Union of Help. The Imams and the congregation are artfully arranged in a circular formation, tailored to the venue's conditions. This arrangement allows for the placement of stones in front of the congregation, effortlessly within reach for the worshippers' right hand. During the fieldwork in Panyabungan Kota district, it was noticed that there were more than 30 piles of stones in the congregation. As additional information that commonly they are sitting on the floor covered with *tikar* or mat, but some people also held the ritual with chairs. The priests hold the responsibility for overseeing the course of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual. The following Table 2 describes each Imams' responsibility in *Batu Qulhu* procession.

Table 2

As presented in table 2 that the five Imams stone remembrance fulfill distinct roles during funeral rituals. The first Imam recites *wasilah*, invoking blessings upon the prophets, companions, scholars, and deceased parents. The second Imam performs *takhtim*, while the third recites dhikr tahlil. The fourth Imam recites selected verses from the Qur'an. The fifth priest concludes with a closing prayer and religious guidance, including expressions of

gratitude to Allah SWT and salutations to Prophet Muhammad SAW, supplications for the forgiveness of the deceased's sins, and prayers for the widening of their grave. The sermon includes an oath regarding the deceased's parents, beseeching acceptance of their worship, forgiveness of sins, and enlargement of their grave. Additionally, the imam delivers a sermon during this ritual (text written in Mandailing and the translation can be read in Supplementary file).

The current study also reveals that *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Madina is held in three consecutive days where:

- In the day 1, the remembrance is taken where the Imam start the ceremony. In the first meeting, the priests wear neat clothes, wear caps, turbans and sarongs. Reflecting the figure of a religious expert and placing his position is a person who is highly respected in society. Their sitting position is arranged in a special place, different from the congregation in general. Here, the Imam will also read out the order of the *Batu Qulhu* procession.
- For day 2, similar to the preceding event, the order of events for the first night procession remains unchanged. Prior to commencing the remembrance ceremony, the 'Imam pembaca takhtim' provided an explanation that after the recitation of the *takhtim*, the congregation would engage in the dhikr of *Batu Qulhu*, and were kindly requested to maintain their positions until the conclusion of the event. However, in contrast to the previous occasion, on the second night of recitation, Qulhu stones are made available to facilitate the dhikr and are arranged in a stacked formation in front of the congregation. Subsequently, the Qulhu remembrance stones are accumulated in the same location. The prescribed procedure entails the recitation of QS 112: 1-3, followed by the selection of a single stone. For each subsequent repetition, an additional stone is selected, such that two stones are chosen for a two-time reading, three stones for a three-time reading, four stones for a four-time reading, and so forth, in accordance with established practice.
- In day 3, *Batu Qulhu* procession replicates the format observed on the second meeting. However, a notable distinction lies in the extended duration of the dhikr, necessitated by the requirement to recite the prayer over each stone in the presence of the congregation. It is imperative to sustain the continuity of the dhikr until its completion, without interruption. Subsequent to the remembrance, a collective prayer and *salawat* are gathered. The *Batu Qulhu* employed as aids for remembrance are carefully placed within plastic burlap bags or buckets (as can be seen in Figure 3a). The event concludes with a religious sermon or *tausiyah*, wherein expressions of gratitude are articulated on behalf of the

congregation and the afflicted families. The content of the religious sermon encompasses themes such as death, the retribution of the grave, and serves as a reminder for individuals to perpetually prepare themselves and enhance their devotion before the arrival of death. This is because all living beings are destined to experience mortality (QS 3: 185), and its arrival cannot be postponed, even if one seeks refuge within a lofty and robust fortress (QS 4: 78).

In addition to the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, on the fourth day following an individual's passing, *Batu Qulhu* stones are transported to the cemetery and carefully positioned above the burial site, as illustrated in Figure 3b. The procedure involves the preparation of the grave bed, which includes the leveling off the ground in the designated area assigned for burial. Subsequently, these stones are poured in a manner that commences from the head of the deceased and extends towards their feet. Although typically performed by the bereaved family, this task can also be undertaken by others, such as neighbors or relatives. During the placement of the stones on the grave, it is customary to recite the phrase "*Bismillahi milata 'ala Rasulullah*," which translates to "In the name of Allah and in the religion of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh." The recitation performed during this act is identical to the prayer recitation conducted during the interment of the deceased's body. It is noteworthy that the selection of this specific recitation lacks a distinct foundational basis but rather originates from established tradition.

Figure 3

Presently, *Batu Qulhu* dhikr has undergone significant transformations over time, likely influenced by environmental factors, evolving understandings within the community, and technological advance, as well as societal changes. Presently, the implementation of the ritual varies across different areas of Madina. Traditionally, some individuals engage in the *Batu Qulhu* practice following the *Maghrib* prayer (after sunset) or around 6.30 pm – 7.00 pm local time and typically after the *Isya* prayer (7.30 pm – 8.00 pm), collectively performed at the mosque during evening as mentioned by P8 (55). Among adult women, it takes place in the evening preceding *Maghrib*, while among the male youth (*naposo bulung*) and female youth (*nauli bulung*), it occurs in the afternoon (after *Asr* or around 3.00 pm) as mentioned by P6 (45). Adult male worshipers partake in this practice during the evening after the *Isya* prayer on the first, second, and third days following a person's demise. As mentioned earlier, the *Batu Qulhu* employed in this remembrance ritual is a stone recognized by the bereaved family, retrieved from the river. To ensure cleanliness, the stones are consistently washed and kept in a plastic sack or a large container. Nevertheless, owing to the evolving perspectives of

individuals and the limited availability of such rocks in riverbeds, these stones are now obtainable from multiple outlets across the Madina region, as noted by P5 (50):

“*Batu Qulhu* are taken from the river by the family, if they are dirty, they are cleaned. Now, *Batu Qulhu* are easy to get and are sold in flower shops and building material store”).

4.3. Aspect of Norms of *Batu Qulhu* ritual

The *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice, introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein, holds significant cultural value in the Mandailing community of Madina. This ritual utilizes white pebbles from nearby rivers for dhikr worship and to alleviate the suffering of the deceased in the grave. It has been preserved and perpetuated by Syeikh Mustafa Husein's students and alumni, who have established recitation congregations in the region. As the oldest pesantren in North Sumatra, the influence of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends widely beyond Madina, with its students and graduates playing a significant role in its development and expansion. Equivalent cultural customs, such as the *tahlilan* tradition observed within the NU community in Sumatra, are also prevalent in Java under the same name. In Java, the Muslim community holds *tahlilan* remembrances on many occasions, a tradition historically introduced by the *Wali Songo* (The Nine Saints of Islam) [12].

Strict protocols surround the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance. Prior permission from village and religious leaders, referred to as *Tuan Guru*, is required. The officiating Imam must possess proficiency in Arabic-Malay language. These protocols ensure the solemnity and authenticity of the ritual, aligning with the importance placed on established rituals and cultural heritage. The *tahlilan* tradition within the NU community also follows specific rituals, emphasizing the shared values of upholding traditions and seeking solace in times of mourning. As previously mentioned, obtaining permission from both village and religious leaders is necessary, as indicated by P2 (52):

‘*mangido izin Parjolo tu Tuan Guru*’ (English: Ask permission from *Tuan Guru* first). Commonly answered by the teacher with ‘*olo*’ *silahkan acara dilanjut* (English: Okay, please continue the ritual), ‘*marimom mau au*’ (English: I will follow).

Batu Qulhu remembrance serves as a form of communal support, uniting family members, relatives, neighbors, and friends in times of sorrow. This fosters a sense of unity and solidarity within the Mandailing community, reflecting the value placed on collective resilience. Similar communal support can be found in other practices, such as the collective remembrance gatherings associated with the *tahlilan* tradition, reinforcing the cultural value of community

bonds and support networks. The significance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends beyond its cultural and spiritual aspects. It represents a cherished cultural heritage embraced by the Muslim society in Madina, highlighting the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of identity. This ritual also plays crucial role in fostering social cohesion through different ways, including community participation, shared religious practices, as well transmission of values and traditions. This study also highlights solidarity aspect as other form of social cohesion in the societal level [20]. While specific to the Mandailing community, similar practices can be observed in other regions in Indonesia, especially in the traditional Islam community [4,72]. They are still fulfilling the shared human need to honor the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and preserve cultural traditions as integral elements of identity and social cohesion. For a comprehensive overview of the norm aspects in the tradition of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community, please refer to Table 3.

Table 3

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ritual stands as a significant cultural and religious practice within the Mandailing community's funeral ceremonies. This tradition, which involves using stones for dhikr worship, holds deep historical and spiritual roots. While its origins can be traced back to Syeikh Mustafa Husein, who introduced the ritual, variations in accounts highlight the complex nature of its origin. Over time, the procession of *Batu Qulhu* has undergone modifications to streamline its organization, exemplifying the adaptive nature of cultural practices while maintaining their essence. Although *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar commemorative practices can be found in other regions. These rituals reflect the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, seeking solace through collective ceremonies, and preserving cultural traditions as integral components of identity and social cohesion. *Batu Qulhu* ritual serves as a testament to the rich cultural and religious heritage of the Mandailing community in North Sumatra, encapsulating collective mourning, spiritual devotion, and the preservation of cultural identity. By adhering to these rituals, individuals reaffirm their cultural identity and strengthen their sense of belonging within the community. Shared cultural practices during funeral ceremonies serve as markers of group identity, fostering a sense of solidarity among participants. As funeral ceremonies continue to play a pivotal role in communities worldwide, understanding and appreciating the significance of these rituals contributes to our broader knowledge of human beliefs, traditions, and the ways in which we commemorate and honor the departed. The

employed methods in this study allows for an in-depth exploration of the cultural, social, and emotional dimensions surrounding funeral practices within specific communities. This approach provides nuanced insights into the significance, symbolism, and evolving meanings attributed to funeral rituals, thereby enriching scholarly discourse and bridging gaps in understanding of this complex phenomenon.

While this study presents a preliminary investigation into the *Batu Qulhu* ritual, it acknowledges certain limitations. The absence of historical documentation detailing the ritual within the Mandailing community necessitates a proposed historical approach through extensive literature review, drawing upon the writings of earlier ulama. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the limited number of informants and the specific observed processions may not fully capture the diverse procedural variations of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual across the entire Madina region. Recognizing the modifications made by different communities based on the guidance of their Imams or practical considerations further adds to the complexity of the ritual. Given these findings, the study recommends the cultural preservation and educational promotion of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual for the benefit of future generations. The creation of appropriate documentation, such as books and videos, accessible through various platforms including social media, can contribute to the wider dissemination of knowledge and understanding of the ritual. These efforts support the cultural preservation of the *Batu Qulhu* tradition and foster greater appreciation among the Mandailing community and beyond.

Declarations

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Sahrul: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data collection, Data interpretation, Writing - original draft, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Afrahul Fadhila Daulai:** Methodology, Data collection, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – Review and editing. **Anang Widhi Nirwansyah:** Data interpretation, Formal analysis, Writing – Review and editing, Visualization. **Seyithan Demirdag:** Writing – Review and editing, Validation, Resources.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement

Data included in article/supplementary material/referenced in article.

Ethics Statement

This study was ethically reviewed and approved by Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) at the University of North Sumatera (UINSU) under approval number 0616615683. All participants, including those photographed, provided informed consent to participate in the study.

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Figures

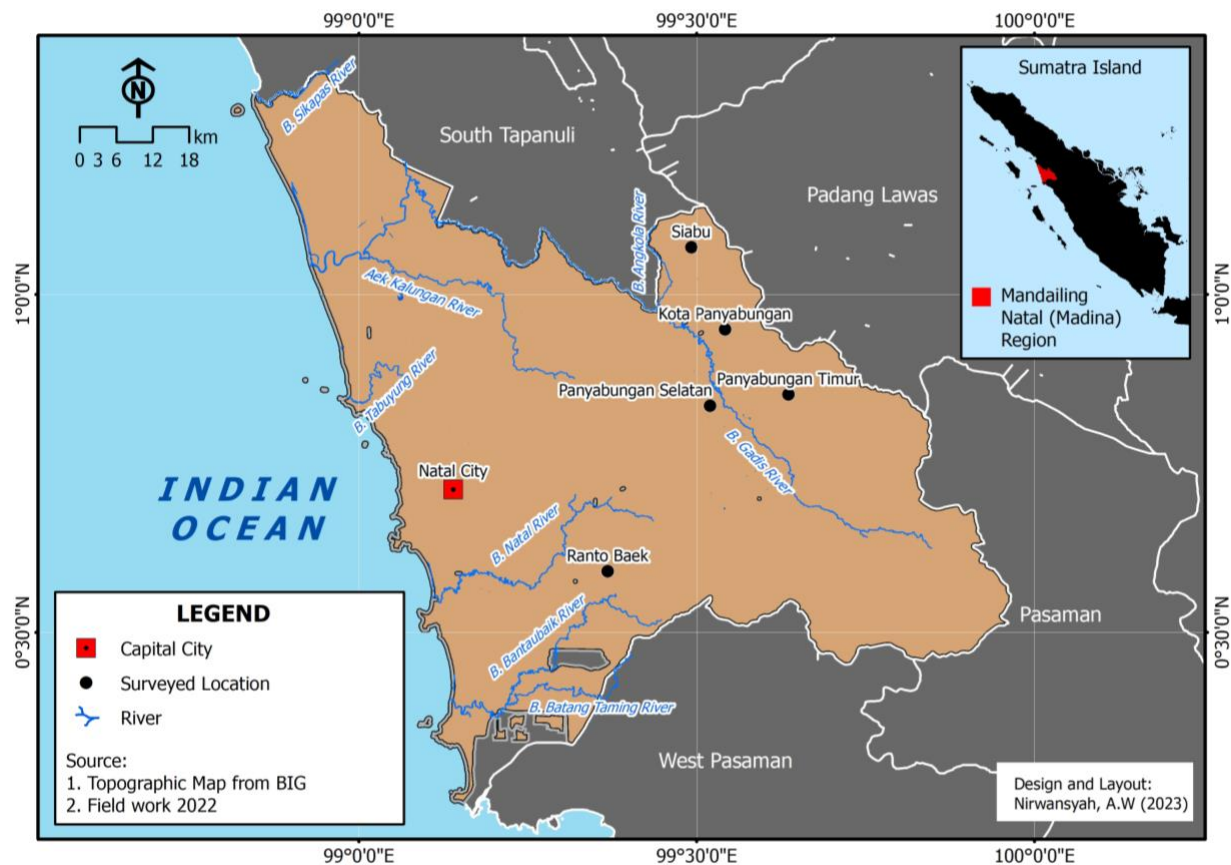


Figure 1. Area of the current research



Figure 2. a) White pebble collected for *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Mandailing, where each bucket contains 70 to 100 stones; and b) the congregation of the Mandailing Muslim community during this obituary ceremony. (Photography by Sahrul on 22 July 2022)



Figure 3. *Batu Qulhu* remembrance by adult male where a) the organizer has collected and kept the stones back into the plastic sack for fourth day of casting procession; and b) where *Batu Qulhu* is finally poured on the grave of deceased person. (photographs of the ritual [a] held at P4 residence on 22 July 2022; and [b] white stone teeming in the day 4) (taken by Sahrul)

Table 1. Pseudonym of subjects' information in the current study

Informants	Initial	Age	Education Level	Occupation
1	P1	65	Bachelor degree	Teacher
2	P2	52	Bachelor degree	Teacher
3	P3	73	Bachelor degree	Ulama and local public figure
4	P4	65	Master degree	Public servant
5	P5	50	Master degree	Public servant
6	P6	45	Master degree	Teacher
7	P7	60	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Businessman
8	P8	55	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Teacher

Table 2. Construction of each Imam and their task in *Batu Qulhu* procession

Imam	Local term	Assignment	Quran recitation
First Imam	<i>Imam pembaca silsilah</i>	– Reciting <i>istighfar</i> ¹¹ three times; – Reciting <i>wasilah</i> to nabi (propeth Muhammad pbuh), his appostles, ulama and parents of the deceased person, all Muslim and the congregation	– QS 1: 1-6
Second Imam	<i>Imam pembaca takhtim</i>	– Reciting <i>takhtim</i> (known as "reading for the reward of the deceased" or "reciting for the benefit of the deceased")	– QS 112: 1-3 – QS 113: 1-5 – QS 114: 1-5 – QS 1: 1-7 – QS 2: 1-5; 255; 284-286 – QS 33: 56
Third Imam	<i>Imam pembaca tahlil</i>	– Reciting <i>tahlil</i> (compilation of dhikr) including: • <i>Istighfar</i> ;	

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- Reciting ‘afdhalu dzikri’ followed by First *syahadat tauhid*¹². The congregation then answer by ‘hayyun baqi’;
 - Reciting second *syahadat tauhid*. Then answered by the congregation with ‘hayyun maujud’;
 - Reciting the third *syahadat tauhid*. And answered by all attendance by ‘hayyum maqsud’.
- Finally, reciting *syahadat tauhid* together with the congregation 100 times. Here the congregation gradually loud their praise and at same time shaking the head

Fourth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca Al Baqarah</i>	– Reciting some verses from the Quran that contains concept and advise about calamities	– QS 2: 152-156 – QS 67: 1-2
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Fifth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca doa</i>	– Reciting closing prayer, with the following structure:
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- *Basmallah*¹³;
- Praise to the Creator and His messenger (Muhammad pbuh);
- Prayers for all Moslem (men and women);
- Prayers for the deceased person and the family;
- Prayers for attendance in the congregation;

Source: compiled based on interview with P1 (65)

853 **Table 3.** Identified aspect of norms in the practice of *Batu Qulhu* Remembrance

Aspect of norm	Description
Preservation of traditions	The culture emphasizes the preservation and perpetuation of rituals and practices, such as the <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance, which was introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein and continued by his students and alumni. The students and graduates of Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding school play a significant role in preserving and expanding this practice.
Community support	The culture values community support during times of grief and mourning. The tradition of using <i>Batu Qulhu</i> serves as a means of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends, helping to alleviate sorrow and foster resilience.
Spiritual gatherings	Collective prayer sessions and remembrance gatherings are highly valued in the culture. The use of the stones during these gatherings creates a conducive environment for spiritual practices and collective remembrance.
Respect for the deceased	The culture emphasizes respect and care for the deceased. The ritual of collecting white pebbles, predominantly marble, from nearby rivers to be used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance shows reverence for the departed.
Connection to nature	The culture maintains a connection with nature, as the stones used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals are collected from rivers. The easy availability of these stones in the past and their resilience in varying weather conditions highlight the importance of nature in the culture.
Alleviation of suffering	The recitation of <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals is believed to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave. This demonstrates a value of compassion and empathy within the culture.

¹ Peace be upon him

² Tuanku Rao is characterized as enigmatic figure and one of the two significant leaders of the Padri movement, shared this status alongside Imam Bonjol himself. Tuanku Rao's origins can be traced to *Huta na Godang* or *Huta Godang*, also known as *Tano Godang*, located in Mandailing Julu (Upper Mandailing) [25].

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- ³ *Upah-upah* refers to cultural practice or tradition of offering gifts or monetary compensation during significant events or ceremonies. The term "upah" itself can be translated as "wages" or "payment". *Upah-upah* is deeply rooted in the Mandailing culture and is often observed during various occasions such as weddings, funerals, or community gatherings.
- ⁴ The word *barzanzi* is associated with the name of Syekh Barzanji, a prominent scholar and Sufi poet from Kurdistan. His renowned work, titled "*Mawlid al-Barzanji*," is a poetic composition that narrates the birth and life of the Prophet Muhammad, often recited during religious gatherings and celebrations.
- ⁶ *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB), was founded in 1912 by Syekh Musthafa Husein Nasution. This Islamic boarding school is located in Purba Baru sub-district, Madina Regency, North Sumatra [73]. Further reference on this boarding school can be read in Khairurrijal [74].
- ⁷ Surau means a place of worship or a small mosque-like structure. The surau typically serves as a communal prayer space or a modest mosque, wherein Muslims congregate for congregational prayers, religious discourses, and other religious engagements.
- ⁸ Some community in Madina also use term of *Batu Bontar* to refer *Batu Qulhu*.
- ⁹ One crucial determinant is obtaining authorization from the village leader. The village head holds a position akin to that of a revered monarch, embodying nobility and commanding profound respect.
- ¹⁰ *Tuan guru* or teacher serves as a religious authority, serving as an exemplar and establishing a benchmark for societal norms through their words and actions. Additionally, they are often revered as sacred individuals known for their healing abilities, and they serve as a source of supplication for various needs such as well-being, sustenance, companionship, agricultural prosperity, and attainment of blessings.
- ¹¹ The act of attempting forgiveness from the Almighty God, commonly by saying 'astagfirullāhu
- ¹² The *syahadat tauhid* contains declaration of belief in the oneness of God Almighty
- ¹³ *Basmallah* is phrase mention to the God before beginning any action or speech. It spells 'Bismillahi rāhmani rāhiim'. It means: in the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful.

Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

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Abstract: Death and funeral rituals hold significant cultural and spiritual importance in traditional communities worldwide, including within the Islamic faith. This study focuses on exploring the unique funeral ritual known as *Batu Qulhu* in the Muslim Mandailing community. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes field observations and interviews with ulama and imams who have practical knowledge and understanding of this traditional ritual. The study reveals two origin stories of *Batu Qulhu*: one attributed to the first Imam in the Mandailing community and the other associated with parents, ulama, and village *malims* (religious teachers) without specifying an individual source. *Batu Qulhu* refers to the white river stones utilized by the congregation during the ritual to count the number of prayers offered. The procession of this tradition follows a strict protocol, encompassing prayers, recitation of the Quran, and seeking forgiveness for the deceased and their family. The efficacy of *Batu Qulhu* serves as a testament to the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of cultural identity. While *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar cultural practices can be observed in other regions, highlighting the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and uphold cultural traditions as an integral part of identity and social cohesion.

Keywords: death rituals, funeral traditions, *Batu Qulhu*, Mandailing community, norms and values

1. Introduction

As a traditional aspect of culture, funeral practices serve as an initial stride towards fostering harmonious relations within multi-ethnic communities [1]. The manner in which individuals navigate the concept of death holds significance as it encompasses their cultural engagement and utilization, similar to how religion, an integral component of culture, provides a framework for comprehending, interpreting, and making sense of death, albeit without necessarily diminishing its inherent challenges for those experiencing grief [2]. Throughout various cultures, the commemoration of the deceased and the support offered to grieving

families manifest through a multitude of ritualistic practices [3]. These rituals hold particular significance within religious frameworks as they are not only guided by religious doctrines but also serve as fundamental aspects of communal worship [4]. Within the Islamic tradition, the management of deceased bodies adheres to the teachings found in the Qur'an, specifically drawing attention to Surah Al Imran (QS 3:185). This verse underscores the universal nature of mortality, asserting that every individual is bound to experience death [5]. In his groundbreaking 1907 study, Robert Hertz skillfully intertwined three essential imperatives - moral, aesthetic, and sociological - to present a captivating conceptualization of death [6]. His intricate analysis portrays death as a profound transformative journey that transcends the boundaries of both the spiritual and physical realms.

In Indonesia, funeral rituals have been intricately intertwined with local cultural practices and ethnic traditions. Various communities, such as the Tana Toraja people [7], the traditional Javanese community [8,9], and the Balinese who perform the *ngaben* ceremony [10,11], express their funeral customs based on their specific cultural heritage. These burial practices and procedures provide profound insights into the community and society in which they are performed. In these traditions, feasts, animal sacrifices, and supplications are often conducted to honor the deceased and their family. Additionally, Islamic values and rituals significantly influence funeral practices across many regions in Indonesia. The practice of *tahlil* or *tahlilan*, which involves collective remembrance gatherings, is commonly observed [12], and the *azan* (call to prayer) is often performed during burial ceremonies [4]. Moreover, in certain regions of Sumatra, Islamic funeral practices have assimilated with local traditions. For example, the people of Minangkabau in Nagari Salayo incorporate the custom of placing attributes on the head of the deceased during the funeral procession [13]. While in Nagari Anduring, the Minang community also practices *bakayaik*, which takes place 100 days after someone's passing. *Bakayaik* vividly recounts the profound narrative of Prophet Muhammad pbuh¹, beginning with his miraculous birth and chronicling his relentless efforts to uphold the principles of Islam. This ceremonial tradition blends the eloquence of Arabic and Minang languages, creating a captivating linguistic tapestry that enhances the overall richness of the performance. In Aceh, the *reuhab* tradition involves decorating the deceased person's bedroom for 40 days [14]. These practices exemplify the dynamic interplay between Islamic influences and local cultural expressions in funeral rituals across Indonesia.

Throughout history, archaeological evidence of ancient burials reveals a persistent pattern: human societies, since their inception, have convened to form social bonds and articulate emotions and intentions in response to the phenomenon of death [15]. This ritual also promotes

social cohesion in many communities practiced in various belief systems [16–18]. Despite this, there is no clear description on concept of social cohesion [19], for the purpose of this study, social cohesion is defined by the interconnectedness of social networks and the customs, bonds, and values that uphold their unity [20]. The idea of social cohesion traces back to Emile Durkheim's theory. He proposed the notion of mechanical solidarity in society, suggesting its presence through the strength of influential individuals [21]. Hence, social cohesion emerges from socio-spatial factors that influence individuals within specific locations, representing a reflection of the classification of spaces [22,23]. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct thorough research into the rituals and traditions of specific communities within their local contexts to better understand and extract the factors contributing to social cohesion. This approach allows for a more nuanced analysis, considering the unique cultural and social dynamics that shape cohesion within distinct groups. Further, the traditional ceremony holds facilitates religious and spiritual practices as well as strengthening social bond and sense of identity [24].

This study aims to investigate the origin of *Batu Qulhu* rituals, exploring its contemporary practices and norms based on the social cohesion and identity in the Mandailing community of North Sumatra. The funeral rituals in this community are deeply rooted in a rich tapestry of cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions. By exploring the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ceremonies, this research seeks to shed light on the significance and intricacies of these rituals, offering valuable insights into the broader context of funeral traditions among Muslims in Sumatra. Regarding to the goals, the current article addresses the following research question the research question, what is the historical background of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community? How do the practices surround *Batu Qulhu* manifest in present-day Mandailing Muslim society? What are the norms associated with *Batu Qulhu* within the Mandailing community based on social cohesion and identity?

1.1. Mandailing Ethnic: Historical Context

The origin of the word "*Mandailing*" is linked to the Munda people of India, who experienced defeat in a war against the Aryan people. The term "*Mandailing*" is derived from either "*Mandala Holing*" [25,26] or "*Mundailing*," referring to the refugees from Munda [27]. It is believed that the Munda people originally inhabited the northern regions of India before the arrival of the Aryans [28]. The historical interaction between the Aryans and the Munda people has been examined through linguistic evidence [29]. Due to pressure from the Aryans, the Munda people migrated southward within India [29–31], and this Aryan occupation of the Munda people occurred around 1500-1200 BC [32]. Eventually, the displaced Munda people

migrated to Southeast Asia [31], although the specific country of their migration is not specified. It is likely that some of them reached North Sumatra through the Barus Port in Central Tapanuli, which was an international port at that time. Referred to "*Negarakertagama*" book from 1365, which mentions the presence of the Mandailing as one of the most significant ethnic groups in the archipelago [25,33]. The names mentioned include Mandailing, Pane, and Padang Lawas. The mention of these names indicates that the name Mandailing has been known by outsiders since ancient dates. In addition, Tuanku Rao² suggests that the Mandailing people trace their origin back to the Bugis Makassar, who sailed to the Singkuang Port (now known as Natal), it is more commonly accepted that the Mandailing people are part of the Batak ethnic group.

The Mandailing community's ethnic origin is a subject of contention among scholars. While some argue that they are part of the Batak Toba ethnic group [34,35], this perspective faces opposition from Mandailing intellectuals and historians. However, an analysis of factors such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group [36,37]. To establish their identity as the Mandailing community, they refer to themselves as "*halak kita*" (referred to: our people) of South Tapanuli [38], rather than as "*halak batak*" (Batak people) [39,40]. Regarding religious affiliation, the majority of the contemporary Mandailing population follows Islam, with a minority of Christians found in specific locations like Pakantan in Upper Mandailing, Medan, and other cities in North Sumatra [25,41]. Before embracing Islam, the religious beliefs of the Mandailing people focused around ancestral spirits referred to as "*si pele begu*" [33], incorporating influences from Hinduism and Buddhism [42]. Recent field research conducted in the Mandailing region revealed remnants and artefacts associated with both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, particularly in the vicinity of Panyabungan within the Greater Mandailing area [43].

Padri wars has brought Islam to Mandailing around 1821 and the Dutch military breached and defeated this movement by 1835 [36,41,44]. The term '*padri*' has two possible origins. One explanation suggests that it stems from the Indonesian word '*padri*,' which referred to priests. It is important to emphasize that the notable figures associated with the Padri movement can be likened to 'Islamic priests' [45]. This movement emerged in the early 1800s as a reformist Islamic movement led by local scholars known as ulama. These ulama sought to purify and reform Islam in the region, criticizing what they perceived as syncretic practices and deviations from strict Islamic teachings [26,41]. They aimed to establish a more orthodox and conservative interpretation of Islam in Mandailing. Padri movement gained support from

various segments of the population, including the rural communities, who were attracted to their message of religious purity and social justice [46]. The Padris' growing influence and power threatened the traditional rulers, known as penghulu, who feared losing their authority and control [41,45].

Before then, in the classical era, marked by the introduction of Hinduism preceding Islam into South Tapanuli, is substantiated by the presence of the Bahal temple in Portibi (now Padang Lawas), a relic of the Panai kingdom during the 12th and 13th centuries. Schnitger [47] documented that around 1000 AD, the Panai kingdom stood as the foremost realm of its time. Nevertheless, around 11th century, the Panai kingdom succumbed to Rajendrakola from India, an adherent of the Hindu faith. Despite the presence of Hindus within the Mandailing Sultanate, the Mandailing populace did not embrace Islam. This decision was influenced by the religion's veneration of numerous idols. Through a traditional lens, there exists a fusion of religion and culture, exemplified by customs such as *upah-upah*³ (gift) during weddings, rites marking childbirth, and housewarming ceremonies. Additionally, observances spanning 7, 40, 100, and 1000 days following the demise of parents are upheld.

The Mandailing Sultanate fell under the dominion of the Aru kingdom circa 1295 AD, spanning the 13th to 15th centuries AD. Subsequent to this period, the Pulungan kingdom emerged, followed by the ascendancy of the Nasution clan, which assumed control over the Mandailing Godang region (now Panyabungan), and the Lubis clan, which governed Mandailing Julu (now Kotanopan).

1.2. Mandailing Philosophy

The values of the Mandailing ethnic philosophy of life called *Poda Na Lima*. *Poda* means advice, *na* means which/that/is, and *lima* means five. In short, *Poda Na Lima* consists of five pieces of advice, namely: i) *Paias Rohamu* (keeping your heart clean); ii) *Paias Pamatangmu* (keeping your body clean); iii) *Paias Parabitonmu* (keeping your clothes clean); iv) *Paias Bagasmu* (keeping your house clean); and v) *Paias Pakaranganmu* (keeping your yard clean) [34,48]. These five values are still firmly held by the Mandailing community and the Mandailing ethnicity in Indonesia and around the world. Despite the Madina people's reputation for being religious, their daily social lives are intertwined with various cultural practices that are imbued with religious significance. These rituals, such as *marhaban* (*barzanzi*)⁴, the use of plain flour, and *upah-upah*, are performed on joyful occasions such as weddings, recoveries from illness, and the attainment of new positions, as well as during significant life transitions such as the birth of a child and moving into a new home [38].

The Mandailing ethnic community has a value system, *Dalihan Na Tolu* which means a forum used to organize life in carrying out *olong* (affection) between *mora*, *kahanggi* and *anak boru* [34,35,49,50]. *Dalihan Na Tolu*, also referred to ‘three stones’ [37], is a cultural value, created by the Creator that guide Bataknese attitude and behavior in the social lives and cultural relation [51]. The three stones encompass family, community, and spirituality. In Mandailing community, *Dalihan Na Tolu* principles are deeply intertwined with Islamic values and teachings. Mandailing Muslim communities incorporate these cultural principles into their daily lives, alongside their Islamic beliefs and practices [51,52]. This concept reinforces the importance of maintaining strong moral character, fostering harmonious relationships, and upholding social justice within the community [34,35,51].

2. Location Settings

The Mandailing Natal region, often abbreviated as Madina, is situated in North Sumatra Province, spanning approximately between 0°10’ and 1°50’ N and 98°10’ and 100°10’ E. This region is located on the west coast of Sumatra, has a 170 km coastline, and is home to 24 islands, though only 4 of these islands are inhabited. In 2021, Madina has a population of over 478,000 people, and has a total area of 6,134 km² [53]. Based on BPS-Statistics of Mandailing Natal Regency [53], during 2021, the predominant land use in this region comprises a mixed vegetation area, accounting for 39.15% or 252.57 hectares, while forested areas occupy 30.04% of the region, followed by palm oil plantations at 27.79%. Settlements in Madina cover 451.38 hectares (0.7%), while agriculture utilizes 2.17% of the land. Additionally, water bodies such as lakes and dams encompass 0.14% of the region's total area. This region is crossed by three river systems including Batang Pungkut, Batang Gadis, and Aek Pohan that represent upper, middle and lower part of the Batang Gadis watershed [54]. These rivers are beneficial for major population in Madina including for agriculture, plantation and industrial sectors. However, for years the rivers have also become threatened to illegal mining activities including sands, rocks and gold [55,56].

The majority of the population in Madina, around 95%, is Muslim, while the remaining 5% consists of Christians (including Catholics), Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of Confucianism. Madina has more than 800 mosques and 70 churches [57], to support the religious practices of its inhabitants, and the region is made up of 23 districts and over 370 villages. Muslim community in Madina, consisting of various ethnic groups, exhibits a rich diversity of cultural and religious practices. Mosques and Islamic schools, known as *madrasah*, hold a prominent position in shaping the religious and cultural life of the community.

Furthermore, active participation in significant cultural and religious traditions, such as the celebration of two major Islamic holidays like *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*, is observed among the Muslim population. A strong emphasis on social responsibility and assisting those in need, in alignment with Islamic principles, is evident through the engagement of the Muslim community in charitable and community service activities. The local government plays a supportive role by implementing policies and providing necessary infrastructure to promote Islamic education [58].

3. Methodology

3.1. Design of the Research

This study adopts qualitative research design, employing combination of phenomenological and ethnographic approaches. Both methodologies are characterized by their exploratory nature, utilizing the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection [59]. By intertwining the principles of phenomenological analysis and ethnography, this current study approach emphasizes a comprehensive exploration of human experiences within their natural settings. While phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of lived experiences, ethnography complements this by elucidating the cultural and social intricacies that contextualize these experiences within specific communities or groups. Additionally, they both underscore the importance of adopting a self-conscious approach to research, wherein researchers are attentive to their own perspectives, biases, and influences throughout the research process. It is worth to be noticed that the primary aim of qualitative research is to comprehend the distinctive characteristics and experiences of individual cases, rather than attempting to establish generalized patterns or trends [60]. This method emphasizes the comprehensive exploration of human behaviors and experiences as they unfold within natural settings [61,62]. Integral to this research is the integration of the subjects' knowledge with that of the researchers, which holds significant importance. This integration facilitates the recognition and documentation of outcomes from the local perspective inherent to the subjects themselves [7,63]. The current study employs an emic approach, which entails adopting the insider's perspective from within the culture where the research project is situated, as previously described in studies by [7,45,64–66]. By embracing an emic approach, the research acknowledges the critical importance of comprehending and interpreting the cultural context and subjective experiences of the subjects, thereby enriching both the research process and its findings.

3.2. Fieldwork and Subjects

The research employed an observational and interview-based approach to collect data. The researchers assumed the roles of both observers and interviewers. The observation phase focused on the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice in the study area, the activities of the Imam during the ritual, and the placement of stones in the graveyard after the final day of remembrance. For the interviews, a systematic process was followed to select appropriate sources. Initial contact with the informants was established through various means, such as phone calls, emails, and WhatsApp messages, to effectively arrange and conduct the interviews.

In prior ethnographic studies, a limited number of subjects were involved. For instance, two studies centered on the practices of anesthesia within two British hospital [67]. Similarly, Baan et al. [7] conducted research on funeral rituals in Toraja with only two informants, while Lee et al. [68] examined the experience of depression among Chinese individuals with a sample size of five informants. In accordance with the present study, data collection encompassed interviews with a total of eight carefully selected subjects, as detailed in Table 1. The age range of the informants in this study was 45-73 years old.

The selection process for these subjects adhered to specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Firstly, the informants were required to hold the roles of imams or leaders of the *Batu Qulhu* dhikr (or remembrance) during funeral ceremonies within the Mandailing community. Secondly, they were expected to possess a profound understanding of the norms and values associated with *Batu Qulhu*. Lastly, the informants needed to be Ulama or respected Islamic spiritual leaders within the local community. Proficiency in the Mandailing language was also a prerequisite for informant selection. To identify suitable subjects, consultations were conducted with local authorities, such as the Indonesian Council of Ulama (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*) in Madina, as well as prominent local figures.

Table 1

The current investigation involved the collection of data during a comprehensive six-month fieldwork period in 2022, specifically spanning from February to July. This fieldwork, which was coordinated by the first and second author, extended over a total of 90 days. The study targeted five specifically chosen districts, selected from a larger pool of 23 districts in the designated study area (refer to Figure 1). The primary objective of the research was to obtain valuable insights into the cultural practices related to the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in the Madina region. The *Batu Qulhu* event occurring in July 2022

was meticulously observed and documented, employing a combination of photographs and videos for recording. Regarding the data collection process, individual interviews were conducted with each informant, with each session spanning approximately 2 hours. These interviews took place at mutually agreed locations, such as the informant's residence, school office, or the household of the deceased individual where the *Batu Qulhu* ritual took place. Thorough and rigorous recording of all pertinent information was undertaken for subsequent analysis purposes.

Figure 1

3.3. Data Analysis

The present study utilized a qualitative data analysis approach, encompassing three key stages: 1) data reduction; 2) data presentation; and 3) drawing conclusions. This analytical process unfolded iteratively throughout the research. Initially, during the early phases of data collection, the research maintained a broad and overarching focus, and the observations were comprehensive in nature. As the research progressed and the focus of the study became more apparent, the observations evolved to adopt a more structured approach, enabling the acquisition of specific and targeted data.

The data analysis commenced with data reduction, where the gathered information was streamlined and organized to facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Subsequently, the data were presented in a coherent and meaningful manner to facilitate effective interpretation. Finally, the study derived conclusions based on the analyzed data, allowing for the generation of valuable insights into the cultural practices surrounding the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina. Throughout the research, this qualitative data analysis process occurred in a cyclical manner, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the research topic and a nuanced understanding of the intricacies involved. By transitioning from broad and general observations to more structured and specific data collection, the study achieved a comprehensive and detailed exploration of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual's cultural significance and its relevance within the Mandailing community.

3.4. Ethical Consideration

The present investigation was conducted under the auspices of Cluster Interdisciplinary Basic Research, adhering meticulously to stringent ethical guidelines. To ensure ethical compliance, the study received official approval from the Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) University of North Sumatera (UINSU) with the approval number:

0616615683, valid from 1-February-2022, to 31-October-2022. The utmost care was taken in handling the research data and records, which were securely stored on a password-protected computer housed within the Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, UINSU. Access to these records was strictly restricted to the authors.

In adherence to established ethical standards for data collection and publication, prior to their inclusion in the research, explicit informed consent was acquired from all eight subjects involved, thereby safeguarding their voluntary and informed engagement in the study. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, a coding system was employed, wherein each subject was allocated an initial "P" followed by pertinent demographic particulars, such as age and current profession. Moreover, all photographic materials featured in this investigation were obtained with written consent from all participants in the native *Bahasa* (Indonesian language), thereby emphasizing the paramount importance of respecting their autonomy and privacy throughout the research process. All participants provided written consent to participate, for the data to be published and for inclusion of photographs. All guests at the ritual provided written consent. Permission was sought from the family representative, who was briefed on the study's objectives, note-taking, and photography. This unwavering commitment to ethical principles serves to underscore the rigor and integrity of the present inquiry, facilitating an ethically sound exploration of the cultural practices pertaining to the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Origin of the Rituals

Based on the interview, it is mentioned that Syeikh Haji Mustafa Husein bin Husein Nasution bin Umar Nasution Al-Mandaili (or known as Syeikh Mustafa Husein) (1886-1955), is credited as the first Imam to introduce the practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance at funeral ceremonies. In the beginning, was named by *Batu Balancing* based on the color of the stone used in this ritual. This insight was derived from interviews conducted with P1 (65), an ulama, and P2 (52), a teacher at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Panyabungan. In addition, Syeikh Musthafa Husein is also founder of the *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB)⁵ or Purba Baru Islamic boarding school. The practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been preserved and perpetuated by his students, who have established recitation congregations in various locations such as mosques, prayer rooms, and *surau*⁶. Notably, the

students and alumni of Musthafawiyah have played a significant role in its development and expansion beyond Madina region, with a presence in several other provinces across Indonesia. As the oldest *pesantren* (or boarding school) in North Sumatra, the influence of this practice extends widely, facilitated by the widespread distribution of its students and graduates.

An alternative explanation, provided by P3 (73) an ulama, diverges slightly from the previous informant. He has pointed out that the tradition of using *Batu Qulhu* or *Batu Balancing*⁷ as a medium for remembrance was explained with a slight variation, focusing on the customs upheld by elderly parents, ulama, village *malims* (religious teachers), without mentioning any specific individual. It was a means to alleviate the sorrow experienced by the bereaved and served as a form of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends. In addition to the customary acts of attending funerals and observing mourning rituals, the strategies employed to alleviate the profound grief experienced by individuals extended further. These encompassed multifaceted practices such as providing emotional support, proffering words of guidance and solace to foster resilience and acceptance in the face of adversity. Moreover, individuals were invited to partake in collective prayer sessions, where the use of *Batu Qulhu* stones served as facilitative elements in creating a conducive environment for these spiritual gatherings. P3 further elucidated that this method, referred to as *alak na jolo martakziah*, involved family members, parents, spouses, children, relatives, and neighbors coming together for *tahlilan*.

“In the past people paid tribute to the homes of people who died; parents, wife, husband, children, siblings and neighbors are tahlilan, starting from reciting istighfar, al-Fatihah, tahlil, prayers and concluding selawat. To make the dhikr in congregation more solemn, they add media by using a Batu Balancing (white stone) within size of an adult's big toe or larger than that. In the past, the white stone was said to be a Batu Balancing, now it is better known as the Batu Qulhu”.

Batu Qulhu ritual refers to the use of certain stone as a means of carrying out dhikr worship. In general, this type of stone is typically known as white pebble. It should be noticed that most of these white pebbles are predominantly comprised of marble, a rock formation characterized by its crystallized carbonates and can easily be found in the riparian zone. Here, the family of the deceased person collect these stones from the nearest river. As mentioned in the interview, this ritual chooses approximately the size of an adult's thumb to enhance the solemnity of the remembrance (as can be seen in Figure 2a). During the interview P4 (65), emphasized that in the past, people paid homage to the homes of the deceased, engaging in *tahlilan* rituals that encompassed prayers and concluding with ‘*selawat*’ (see Figure 2b). To

augment the collective remembrance, *Batu Qulhu*, the size of an adult's big toe or larger, was employed. Over time, the *Batu Balancing* came to be recognized as the *Batu Qulhu*.

Figure 2

The utilization of *Batu Qulhu* in death ceremonies is also underpinned by the geographical sequences. Firstly, the abundance of rivers in Madina, notably the Batang Gadis River, Batang Natal River, Aek Kalungan River and Angkola River, facilitated the easy availability of these stones in the past. Nowadays, these rivers also threatened by illegal gold mining activities [55], and tend to pollute due to its waste [56]. Secondly, these stones possess distinct characteristics that contribute to their suitability for the purpose at hand. They exhibit a white hue, imparting a visually soothing effect, while their cool and clean appearance further enhances their appeal. Third, these stones demonstrate resilience in withstanding the rigors of varying weather conditions, including heat, cold, and rainfall. Furthermore, the recitation of *Batu Qulhu* rituals is believed by the community to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave.

4.2. The Contemporary Practice of Batu Qulhu in the Mandailing Community

In the past, Islamic practices in Sumatra have exhibited influences from mystical and shamanistic traditions e.g., [69,70]. However, it is important to note that the religious activities associated with the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* are not influenced by shamanism, but rather stem solely from religious traditions previously followed by religious scholars, religious teachers, and traditional leaders. Currently, the contemporary practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been inherited and embraced by Muslim society in Madina. Based on interview with P4 (65), it is evident that in the past, the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance adhered to strict protocols as mentioned in the following statement.

“The tradition of recalling the Batu Qulhu was once a highly regulated practice. It required seeking consent from both the village leader and the syekh. Mastery of the 20 essential attributes of Allah was necessary, alongside the ability to read the Quran and comprehend its teachings. The stones themselves had to possess a pure white hue. The recitation of Qulhu would take place during evening gatherings, where all the stones present had to be utilized fully, leaving no remnants behind before the congregation dispersed”.

These procedures include the following: 1) the procession necessitated obtaining permission from the head of the village⁸ and *tuan guru*⁹ (or *kulifah*); 2) the ritual leader was required to commit to memory and comprehend the twenty obligatory attributes of God, encompassing *nafsiyah* (self-related attributes) nature, *salbiyah* (attributes related to existence)

nature, *ma'ani* (abstract attributes of God) nature, and *maknawiyah* (the essential nature and prevalence of *ma'ani*) nature; 3) the officiating Imam was expected to possess proficiency in both written and spoken Arabic-Malay; 4) the Imam leading the remembrance was required to proficiently recite the Qur'an and comprehend its meaning; 5) the *Batu Qulhu* utilized in the ritual had to be of a white hue; and 6) the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* transpired during evening hours, and all the stones had to be completed within a single procession conducted in the presence of the congregation. Preceding the initiation of the ritual, it is customary for the priest to cleanse himself through the observance of ablution, mirroring the ritualistic cleansing process associated with prayer as mentioned by P7 (60).

Basically, this ritual has many similarities to *tahlilan* tradition especially in the context prayers and recitations. This practice generally has been carried out by many Nahdatul Ulama (NU) community in Sumatra [12,71]. However, in *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, there are five Imams that lead this procession with different assignment. These Imams are voluntarily appointed by the group and relatively flexible based on their own agreement. The priests then read several prayers that beneficial to seek forgiveness for the deceased, his/her family as well to congregation. The Imams also recite some verses from the Surat of the Quran (QS), and praise the God. In this *Batu Qulhu* ritual, the congregation are voluntarily attending the ritual without any formal invitation. The ritual is held in three consecutive days after the death, and organized by group manager, neighbors and the Imams, and commonly referred to *Serikat Tolong Menolong* (STM) or Union of Help. The Imams and the congregation are artfully arranged in a circular formation, tailored to the venue's conditions. This arrangement allows for the placement of stones in front of the congregation, effortlessly within reach for the worshippers' right hand. During the fieldwork in Panyabungan Kota district, it was noticed that there were more than 30 piles of stones in the congregation. As additional information that commonly they are sitting on the floor covered with *tikar* or mat, but some people also held the ritual with chairs. The priests hold the responsibility for overseeing the course of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual. The following Table 2 describes each Imams' responsibility in *Batu Qulhu* procession.

Table 2

As presented in table 2 that the five Imams stone remembrance fulfill distinct roles during funeral rituals. The first Imam recites *wasilah*, invoking blessings upon the prophets, companions, scholars, and deceased parents. The second Imam performs *takhtim*, while the third recites dhikr tahlil. The fourth Imam recites selected verses from the Qur'an. The fifth priest concludes with a closing prayer and religious guidance, including expressions of

gratitude to Allah SWT and salutations to Prophet Muhammad SAW, supplications for the forgiveness of the deceased's sins, and prayers for the widening of their grave. The sermon includes an oath regarding the deceased's parents, beseeching acceptance of their worship, forgiveness of sins, and enlargement of their grave. Additionally, the imam delivers a sermon during this ritual (text written in Mandailing and the translation can be read in Supplementary file).

The current study also reveals that *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Madina is held in three consecutive days where:

- In the day 1, the remembrance is taken where the Imam start the ceremony. In the first meeting, the priests wear neat clothes, wear caps, turbans and sarongs. Reflecting the figure of a religious expert and placing his position is a person who is highly respected in society. Their sitting position is arranged in a special place, different from the congregation in general. Here, the Imam will also read out the order of the *Batu Qulhu* procession.
- For day 2, similar to the preceding event, the order of events for the first night procession remains unchanged. Prior to commencing the remembrance ceremony, the 'Imam pembaca takhtim' provided an explanation that after the recitation of the *takhtim*, the congregation would engage in the dhikr of *Batu Qulhu*, and were kindly requested to maintain their positions until the conclusion of the event. However, in contrast to the previous occasion, on the second night of recitation, Qulhu stones are made available to facilitate the dhikr and are arranged in a stacked formation in front of the congregation. Subsequently, the Qulhu remembrance stones are accumulated in the same location. The prescribed procedure entails the recitation of QS 112: 1-3, followed by the selection of a single stone. For each subsequent repetition, an additional stone is selected, such that two stones are chosen for a two-time reading, three stones for a three-time reading, four stones for a four-time reading, and so forth, in accordance with established practice.
- In day 3, *Batu Qulhu* procession replicates the format observed on the second meeting. However, a notable distinction lies in the extended duration of the dhikr, necessitated by the requirement to recite the prayer over each stone in the presence of the congregation. It is imperative to sustain the continuity of the dhikr until its completion, without interruption. Subsequent to the remembrance, a collective prayer and *salawat* are gathered. The *Batu Qulhu* employed as aids for remembrance are carefully placed within plastic burlap bags or buckets (as can be seen in Figure 3a). The event concludes with a religious sermon or *tausiyah*, wherein expressions of gratitude are articulated on behalf of the

469 congregation and the afflicted families. The content of the religious sermon encompasses
470 themes such as death, the retribution of the grave, and serves as a reminder for individuals
471 to perpetually prepare themselves and enhance their devotion before the arrival of death.
472 This is because all living beings are destined to experience mortality (QS 3: 185), and its
473 arrival cannot be postponed, even if one seeks refuge within a lofty and robust fortress (QS
474 4: 78).

475 In addition to the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, on the fourth day following an individual's
476 passing, *Batu Qulhu* stones are transported to the cemetery and carefully positioned above the
477 burial site, as illustrated in Figure 3b. The procedure involves the preparation of the grave bed,
478 which includes the leveling off the ground in the designated area assigned for burial.
479 Subsequently, these stones are poured in a manner that commences from the head of the
480 deceased and extends towards their feet. Although typically performed by the bereaved family,
481 this task can also be undertaken by others, such as neighbors or relatives. During the placement
482 of the stones on the grave, it is customary to recite the phrase "*Bismillahi milata 'ala*
483 *Rasulullah*," which translates to "In the name of Allah and in the religion of the Prophet
484 Muhammad pbuh." The recitation performed during this act is identical to the prayer recitation
485 conducted during the interment of the deceased's body. It is noteworthy that the selection of
486 this specific recitation lacks a distinct foundational basis but rather originates from established
487 tradition.

488 **Figure 3**

489 Presently, *Batu Qulhu* dhikr has undergone significant transformations over time, likely
490 influenced by environmental factors, evolving understandings within the community, and
491 technological advance, as well as societal changes. Presently, the implementation of the ritual
492 varies across different areas of Madina. Traditionally, some individuals engage in the *Batu*
493 *Qulhu* practice following the *Maghrib* prayer (after sunset) or around 6.30 pm – 7.00 pm local
494 time and typically after the *Isya* prayer (7.30 pm – 8.00 pm), collectively performed at the
495 mosque during evening as mentioned by P8 (55). Among adult women, it takes place in the
496 evening preceding *Maghrib*, while among the male youth (*naposo bulung*) and female youth
497 (*nauli bulung*), it occurs in the afternoon (after *Asr* or around 3.00 pm) as mentioned by P6
498 (45). Adult male worshipers partake in this practice during the evening after the *Isya* prayer on
499 the first, second, and third days following a person's demise. As mentioned earlier, the *Batu*
500 *Qulhu* employed in this remembrance ritual is a stone recognized by the bereaved family,
501 retrieved from the river. To ensure cleanliness, the stones are consistently washed and kept in
502 a plastic sack or a large container. Nevertheless, owing to the evolving perspectives of

individuals and the limited availability of such rocks in riverbeds, these stones are now obtainable from multiple outlets across the Madina region, as noted by P5 (50):

“*Batu Qulhu* are taken from the river by the family, if they are dirty, they are cleaned. Now, *Batu Qulhu* are easy to get and are sold in flower shops and building material store”).

4.3. Aspect of Norms of *Batu Qulhu* ritual

The *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice, introduced by Syekh Mustafa Husein, holds significant cultural value in the Mandailing community of Madina. This ritual utilizes white pebbles from nearby rivers for dhikr worship and to alleviate the suffering of the deceased in the grave. It has been preserved and perpetuated by Syekh Mustafa Husein's students and alumni, who have established recitation congregations in the region. As the oldest pesantren in North Sumatra, the influence of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends widely beyond Madina, with its students and graduates playing a significant role in its development and expansion. Equivalent cultural customs, such as the *tahlilan* tradition observed within the NU community in Sumatra, are also prevalent in Java under the same name. In Java, the Muslim community holds *tahlilan* remembrances on many occasions, a tradition historically introduced by the *Wali Songo* (The Nine Saints of Islam) [12].

Strict protocols surround the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance. Prior permission from village and religious leaders, referred to as *Tuan Guru*, is required. The officiating Imam must possess proficiency in Arabic-Malay language. These protocols ensure the solemnity and authenticity of the ritual, aligning with the importance placed on established rituals and cultural heritage. The *tahlilan* tradition within the NU community also follows specific rituals, emphasizing the shared values of upholding traditions and seeking solace in times of mourning. As previously mentioned, obtaining permission from both village and religious leaders is necessary, as indicated by P2 (52):

‘*mangido izin Parjolo tu Tuan Guru*’ (English: Ask permission from *Tuan Guru* first). Commonly answered by the teacher with ‘*olo*’ *silahkan acara dilanjut* (English: Okay, please continue the ritual), ‘*marimom mau au*’ (English: I will follow).

Batu Qulhu remembrance serves as a form of communal support, uniting family members, relatives, neighbors, and friends in times of sorrow. This fosters a sense of unity and solidarity within the Mandailing community, reflecting the value placed on collective resilience. Similar communal support can be found in other practices, such as the collective remembrance gatherings associated with the *tahlilan* tradition, reinforcing the cultural value of community

bonds and support networks. The significance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends beyond its cultural and spiritual aspects. It represents a cherished cultural heritage embraced by the Muslim society in Madina, highlighting the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of identity. This ritual also plays crucial role in fostering social cohesion through different ways, including community participation, shared religious practices, as well transmission of values and traditions. This study also highlights solidarity aspect as other form of social cohesion in the societal level [20]. While specific to the Mandailing community, similar practices can be observed in other regions in Indonesia, especially in the traditional Islam community [4,72]. They are still fulfilling the shared human need to honor the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and preserve cultural traditions as integral elements of identity and social cohesion. For a comprehensive overview of the norm aspects in the tradition of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community, please refer to Table 3.

Table 3

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ritual stands as a significant cultural and religious practice within the Mandailing community's funeral ceremonies. This tradition, which involves using stones for dhikr worship, holds deep historical and spiritual roots. While its origins can be traced back to Syeikh Mustafa Husein, who introduced the ritual, variations in accounts highlight the complex nature of its origin. Over time, the procession of *Batu Qulhu* has undergone modifications to streamline its organization, exemplifying the adaptive nature of cultural practices while maintaining their essence. Although *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar commemorative practices can be found in other regions. These rituals reflect the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, seeking solace through collective ceremonies, and preserving cultural traditions as integral components of identity and social cohesion. *Batu Qulhu* ritual serves as a testament to the rich cultural and religious heritage of the Mandailing community in North Sumatra, encapsulating collective mourning, spiritual devotion, and the preservation of cultural identity. By adhering to these rituals, individuals reaffirm their cultural identity and strengthen their sense of belonging within the community. Shared cultural practices during funeral ceremonies serve as markers of group identity, fostering a sense of solidarity among participants. As funeral ceremonies continue to play a pivotal role in communities worldwide, understanding and appreciating the significance of these rituals contributes to our broader knowledge of human beliefs, traditions, and the ways in which we commemorate and honor the departed. The

employed methods in this study allows for an in-depth exploration of the cultural, social, and emotional dimensions surrounding funeral practices within specific communities. This approach provides nuanced insights into the significance, symbolism, and evolving meanings attributed to funeral rituals, thereby enriching scholarly discourse and bridging gaps in understanding of this complex phenomenon.

While this study presents a preliminary investigation into the *Batu Qulhu* ritual, it acknowledges certain limitations. The absence of historical documentation detailing the ritual within the Mandailing community necessitates a proposed historical approach through extensive literature review, drawing upon the writings of earlier ulama. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the limited number of informants and the specific observed processions may not fully capture the diverse procedural variations of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual across the entire Madina region. Recognizing the modifications made by different communities based on the guidance of their Imams or practical considerations further adds to the complexity of the ritual. Given these findings, the study recommends the cultural preservation and educational promotion of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual for the benefit of future generations. The creation of appropriate documentation, such as books and videos, accessible through various platforms including social media, can contribute to the wider dissemination of knowledge and understanding of the ritual. These efforts support the cultural preservation of the *Batu Qulhu* tradition and foster greater appreciation among the Mandailing community and beyond.

Declarations

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Sahrul: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data collection, Data interpretation, Writing - original draft, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Afrahul Fadhila Daulai:** Methodology, Data collection, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – Review and editing. **Anang Widhi Nirwansyah:** Data interpretation, Formal analysis, Writing – Review and editing, Visualization. **Seyithan Demirdag:** Writing – Review and editing, Validation, Resources.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement

Data included in article/supplementary material/referenced in article.

Ethics Statement

This study was ethically reviewed and approved by Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) at the University of North Sumatera (UINSU) under approval number 0616615683. All participants, including those photographed, provided informed consent to participate in the study.

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Figures

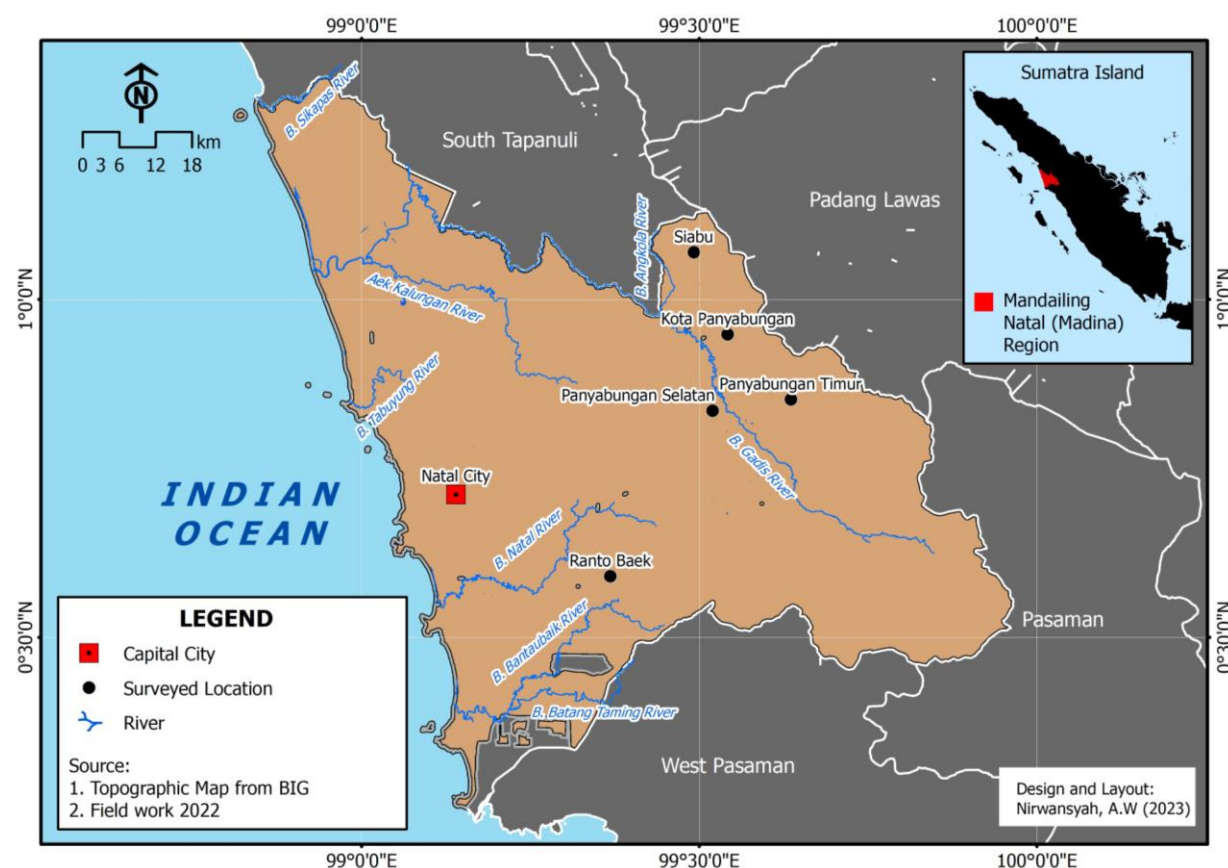


Figure 1. Area of the current research



Figure 2. a) White pebble collected for *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Mandailing, where each bucket contains 70 to 100 stones; and b) the congregation of the Mandailing Muslim community during this obituary ceremony. (Photography by Sahrul on 22 July 2022)



Figure 3. *Batu Qulhu* remembrance by adult male where a) the organizer has collected and kept the stones back into the plastic sack for fourth day of casting procession; and b) where *Batu Qulhu* is finally poured on the grave of deceased person. (photographs of the ritual [a] held at P4 residence on 22 July 2022; and [b] white stone teeming in the day 4) (taken by Sahrul)

848 **Table 1.** Pseudonym of subjects' information in the current study

Informants	Initial	Age	Education Level	Occupation
1	P1	65	Bachelor degree	Teacher
2	P2	52	Bachelor degree	Teacher
3	P3	73	Bachelor degree	Ulama and local public figure
4	P4	65	Master degree	Public servant
5	P5	50	Master degree	Public servant
6	P6	45	Master degree	Teacher
7	P7	60	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Businessman
8	P8	55	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Teacher

849

850 **Table 2.** Construction of each Imam and their task in *Batu Qulhu* procession

Imam	Local term	Assignment	Quran recitation
First Imam	<i>Imam pembaca silsilah</i>	– Reciting <i>istighfar</i> ¹⁰ three times; – Reciting <i>wasilah</i> to nabi (propeth Muhammad pbuh), his appostles, ulama and parents of the deceased person, all Muslim and the congregation	– QS 1: 1-6
Second Imam	<i>Imam pembaca takhtim</i>	– Reciting <i>takhtim</i> (known as "reading for the reward of the deceased" or "reciting for the benefit of the deceased")	– QS 112: 1-3 – QS 113: 1-5 – QS 114: 1-5 – QS 1: 1-7 – QS 2: 1-5; 255; 284-286 – QS 33: 56
Third Imam	<i>Imam pembaca tahlil</i>	– Reciting <i>tahlil</i> (compilation of dhikr) including: • <i>Istighfar</i> ;	

-
- Reciting ‘afdhalu dzikri’ followed by First *syahadat tauhid*¹¹. The congregation then answer by ‘hayyun baqi’;
 - Reciting second *syahadat tauhid*. Then answered by the congregation with ‘hayyun maujud’;
 - Reciting the third *syahadat tauhid*. And answered by all attendance by ‘hayyum maqsud’.
- Finally, reciting *syahadat tauhid* together with the congregation 100 times. Here the congregation gradually loud their praise and at same time shaking the head

Fourth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca Al Baqarah</i>	– Reciting some verses from the Quran that contains concept and advise about calamities	– QS 2: 152-156 – QS 67: 1-2
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Fifth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca doa</i>	– Reciting closing prayer, with the following structure:
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- *Basmallah*¹²;
- Praise to the Creator and His messenger (Muhammad pbuh);
- Prayers for all Moslem (men and women);
- Prayers for the deceased person and the family;
- Prayers for attendance in the congregation;

Table 3. Identified aspect of norms in the practice of *Batu Qulhu* Remembrance

Aspect of norm	Description
Preservation of traditions	The culture emphasizes the preservation and perpetuation of rituals and practices, such as the <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance, which was introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein and continued by his students and alumni. The students and graduates of Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding school play a significant role in preserving and expanding this practice.
Community support	The culture values community support during times of grief and mourning. The tradition of using <i>Batu Qulhu</i> serves as a means of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends, helping to alleviate sorrow and foster resilience.
Spiritual gatherings	Collective prayer sessions and remembrance gatherings are highly valued in the culture. The use of the stones during these gatherings creates a conducive environment for spiritual practices and collective remembrance.
Respect for the deceased	The culture emphasizes respect and care for the deceased. The ritual of collecting white pebbles, predominantly marble, from nearby rivers to be used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance shows reverence for the departed.
Connection to nature	The culture maintains a connection with nature, as the stones used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals are collected from rivers. The easy availability of these stones in the past and their resilience in varying weather conditions highlight the importance of nature in the culture.
Alleviation of suffering	The recitation of <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals is believed to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave. This demonstrates a value of compassion and empathy within the culture.

¹ Peace be upon him

² Tuanku Rao is characterized as enigmatic figure and one of the two significant leaders of the Padri movement, shared this status alongside Imam Bonjol himself. Tuanku Rao's origins can be traced to *Huta na Godang* or *Huta Godang*, also known as *Tano Godang*, located in Mandailing Julu (Upper Mandailing) [25].

-
- ³ *Upah-upah* refers to cultural practice or tradition of offering gifts or monetary compensation during significant events or ceremonies. The term "upah" itself can be translated as "wages" or "payment". *Upah-upah* is deeply rooted in the Mandailing culture and is often observed during various occasions such as weddings, funerals, or community gatherings.
- ⁴ The word *barzanzi* is associated with the name of Syekh Barzanji, a prominent scholar and Sufi poet from Kurdistan. His renowned work, titled "*Mawlid al-Barzanji*," is a poetic composition that narrates the birth and life of the Prophet Muhammad, often recited during religious gatherings and celebrations.
- ⁵ *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB), was founded in 1912 by Syekh Musthafa Husein Nasution. This Islamic boarding school is located in Purba Baru sub-district, Madina Regency, North Sumatra [73]. Further reference on this boarding school can be read in Khairurrijal [74].
- ⁶ Surau means a place of worship or a small mosque-like structure. The surau typically serves as a communal prayer space or a modest mosque, wherein Muslims congregate for congregational prayers, religious discourses, and other religious engagements.
- ⁷ Some community in Madina also use term of *Batu Bontar* to refer *Batu Qulhu*.
- ⁸ One crucial determinant is obtaining authorization from the village leader. The village head holds a position akin to that of a revered monarch, embodying nobility and commanding profound respect.
- ⁹ *Tuan guru* or teacher serves as a religious authority, serving as an exemplar and establishing a benchmark for societal norms through their words and actions. Additionally, they are often revered as sacred individuals known for their healing abilities, and they serve as a source of supplication for various needs such as well-being, sustenance, companionship, agricultural prosperity, and attainment of blessings.
- ¹⁰ The act of attempting forgiveness from the Almighty God, commonly by saying 'astagfirullāhu
- ¹¹ The *syahadat tauhid* contains declaration of belief in the oneness of God Almighty
- ¹² *Basmallah* is phrase mention to the God before beginning any action or speech. It spells 'Bismillahi rāhmani rāhiim'. It means: in the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful.

Figures

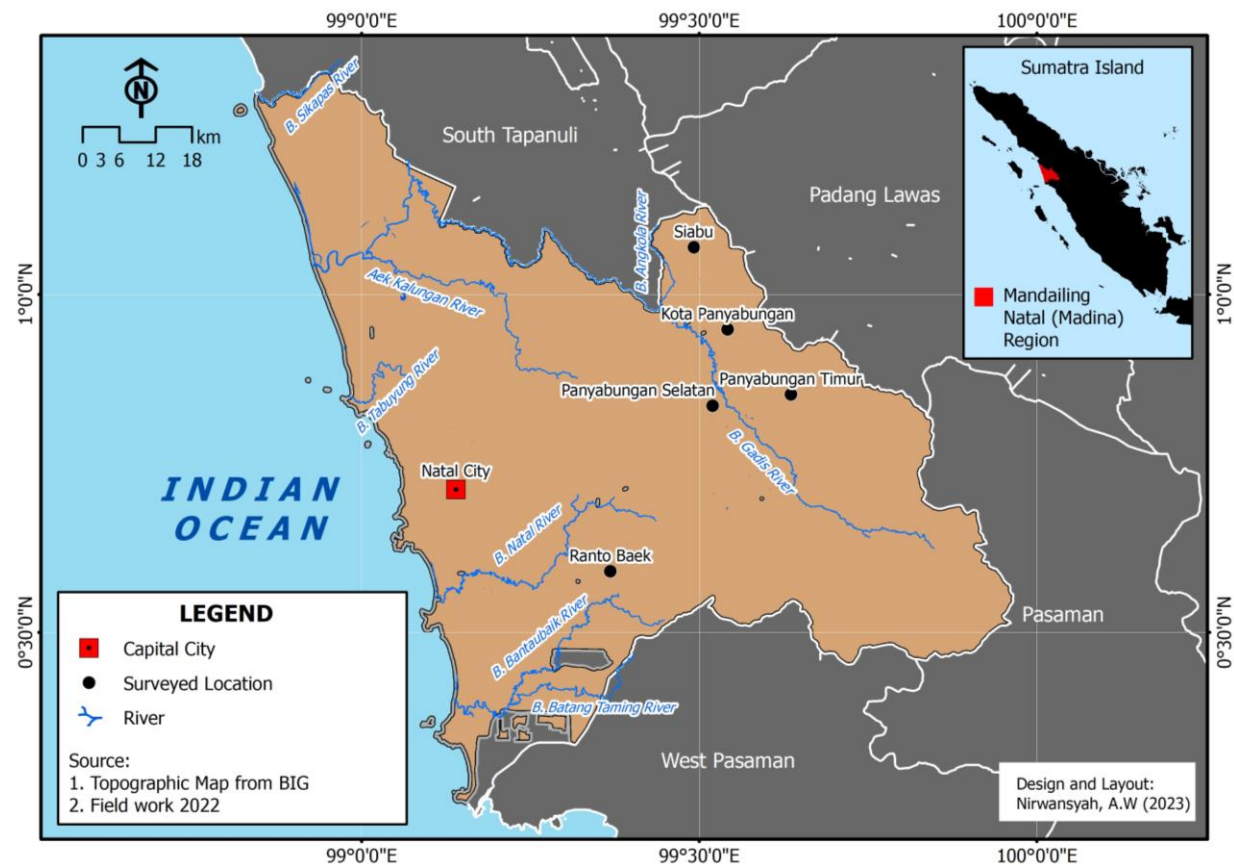


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2

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Source: compiled based on interview with P1 (65)

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Alleviation of suffering	The recitation of <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals is believed to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave. This demonstrates a value of compassion and empathy within the culture.

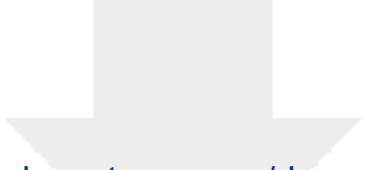
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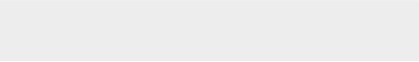
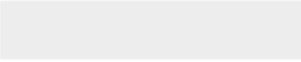
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Penulis menanyakan kembali revisi artikel kedelapan (5 Juni 2024)

From: Sahrul Sahrul

Date: Wednesday, June 05, 2024 10:28 AM GMT

Manuscript Number: HELIYON-D-23-24599R8

Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

Dr Sahrul Sahrul

Heliyon

Dear Editors,

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to inquire about the current status of my manuscript, titled "Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra," which was submitted under Manuscript Number: HELIYON-D-23-24599R7.

I understand the peer review process can be time-consuming and complex, and I greatly appreciate the effort and consideration given to my work. However, as it has been some time since my last communication, I would be grateful for any updates regarding the review status or any further actions required from my side.

Thank you very much for your time and assistance. I look forward to your response.

Kind regards,

Dr Sahrul Sahrul

Respon Heliyon: revisi artikel kedelapan (5 Juni 2024)



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Thank you for contacting us regarding on the status of your manuscript HELIYON-D-23-24599R8.

I understand the importance of a swift editorial decision, and work hard to ensure articles are reviewed quickly.

The Editor has now received sufficient reviews for making a decision on your paper. The Editor will be assessing your manuscript along with the reviewer comments and will submit a decision. You will be notified of the decision via email as soon as it is finalised.

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Revisi artikel kedelapan (14 Juni 2024)

Decision on submission HELIYON-D-23-24599R8 to Heliyon

Eksternal Kotak Masuk x




 



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Jum, 14 Jun 2024, 08.26

Ms. No.: HELIYON-D-23-24599R8
Title: Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra
Journal: Heliyon

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We have now received all of the editor and reviewer comments on your recent submission to Heliyon. Your paper will become acceptable for publication after implementation of minor formatting and/or administrative changes outlined below.

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If not already included, please add a 'Data availability statement' in your manuscript along with the name of the repository and the accession number if applicable. The statement should be located right before the 'References' section.

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Editorial Section Manager
Heliyon

Respon jurnal Heliyon: Konfirmasi telah menerima naskah revisi artikel kedelapan (16 Juni 2024)

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Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

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Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra --Manuscript Draft--

Manuscript Number:	HELIYON-D-23-24599R9
Article Type:	Original Research Article
Section/Category:	Social Sciences
Keywords:	death rituals; funeral traditions; Batu Qulhu; Mandailing community; norms and values
Manuscript Classifications:	140.190.110: Human Geography; 140.190.110.100: Cultural Geography; 140.190.130: Cultural Sociology; 140.190.140: Anthropology; 140.270: Religion
Corresponding Author:	Sahrul Sahrul, Dr State Islamic University of North Sumatra Medan, North Sumatra INDONESIA
First Author:	Sahrul Sahrul, Dr
Order of Authors:	Sahrul Sahrul, Dr Anang Widhi Nirwansyah, Dr Seyithan Demirdag, PhD Afrahul Fadhila Daulai, Dr
Abstract:	Death and funeral rituals hold significant cultural and spiritual importance in traditional communities worldwide, including within the Islamic faith. This study focuses on exploring the unique funeral ritual known as Batu Qulhu in the Muslim Mandailing community. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes field observations and interviews with ulama and imams who have practical knowledge and understanding of this traditional ritual. The study reveals two origin stories of Batu Qulhu: one attributed to the first Imam in the Mandailing community and the other associated with elderly parents, ulama, and village malims (religious teachers) without specifying an individual source. Batu Qulhu refers to the white river stones utilized by the congregation during the ritual to count the number of prayers offered. The procession of this tradition follows a strict protocol, encompassing prayers, recitation of the Quran, and seeking forgiveness for the deceased and their family. The efficacy of Batu Qulhu serves as a testament to the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of cultural identity. While Batu Qulhu remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar cultural practices can be observed in other regions, highlighting the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and uphold cultural traditions as an integral part of identity and social cohesion.
Opposed Reviewers:	
Additional Information:	
Question	Response
Publication ethics	I confirm
Please confirm that you have reviewed our guidelines for Ethics in Publishing as well as Heliyon's Ethics and Editorial Policies	

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Title of the study involving human participant(s):

Author Name(s): *Dr. SAHRUL, M.A*

Institution(s): *Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication,
Universiti Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UINSU)*

Date: *10 April 2024*

I, the undersigned author of the above-mentioned study, hereby declare the following:

1. I have obtained written informed consent from the participant(s) / patient(s) for the publication of this study, any accompanying data and images. Where consent was obtained from someone other than the participant(s) / patient(s), I confirm that this proxy was authorised to provide consent on the participant's / patient's behalf.
2. Where the participant(s) / patient(s) is/are a minor(s), we followed local laws on the age and circumstances under which they may consent for themselves. If they were not of legal age to consent, consent was obtained from an authorised proxy i.e., the parents or legal guardian(s). If the minor(s) has/have reasonable understanding of the informed consent and implications, signature (or assent, as appropriate) was also obtained from the minor(s).
3. Where the participant(s) / patient(s) provided consent themselves, I confirm that they had capacity to do so, and any mental or physical disabilities were taken into consideration in the process of informing and obtaining written informed consent.
4. Where the participant(s) / patient(s) has/have died, I confirm that the consent given still allows for publication.
5. I confirm that all content presented in this study, associated data and images have been deidentified and anonymized to the best possible extent.
6. The original signed and dated consent form is held by the treating institution or appropriate governing local / regional / national body and will be retained according to the policies and procedures of the institution or governing body.
7. The written informed consent form (please **do not** include with your submission) includes all relevant information pertinent to each participant / patient (such as the name, age, condition, medical history, diagnosis, and treatment)
8. The participant(s) / patient(s) / authorized proxy were fully informed of the purpose of this study, the potential risks and benefits of publication, and the consequence of disclosing their personal information.
9. The participant(s) / patient(s) or authorized proxy were given the opportunity to ask questions regarding publication of the study, had their questions answered fully and have consented to publish all associated data and images. In the case of clinical studies, the participant(s) / patient(s) or authorized proxy approved the final version of the manuscript.
10. The participant(s) / patient(s) or legal guardian(s) were informed that their consent and participation in the publication of this study is entirely voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw their consent at any time.
11. If this is a clinical study manuscript, I confirm that at least one of the authors of this paper was involved in the care of the participant(s) / patient(s).
12. I confirm that my article complies with the appropriate local / regional / national law on consent and privacy.

By signing this declaration form, I acknowledge that I have read and understood the information provided above, and I attest to the accuracy of this declaration. I understand that any false or misleading information may result in the rejection of the manuscript or other disciplinary actions.

As corresponding author, I hereby declare that I sign this document on behalf of all the authors of the above-mentioned study involving human participants.

Corresponding author's signature:	<i>Muq</i>
Date:	<i>10 April 2024</i>

Please submit this **Human Participant Declaration Form** along with the manuscript to the journal. **Note:** The written informed consent form must NOT be submitted with your manuscript but must be made available to the journal if specifically requested.

Please retain a copy of this declaration for your records.



KEMENTERIAN AGAMA REPUBLIK INDONESIA
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI SUMATERA UTARA MEDAN
LEMBAGA PENELITIAN DAN PENGABDIAN KEPADA MASYARAKAT
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Ethics Committee Letter of Approval

No. 0616615683

Project Title: *Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra*

Researcher: Dr. Sahrul

Affiliation:

Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara

Date: 1-February-2022 - 31-Oct-2022 | **Contract Number:** 328

Introduction

This letter confirms the approval of the ethical research proposal for the project titled "Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra" by Dr. Sahrul, affiliated with the Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program at *Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara*.

Approval for Research Methods

The Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved the proposed research methods, which include:

-) Interviews
-) Observations
-) Photo collection

Ethical Considerations

The committee commends the inclusion of the following ethical considerations in the research proposal:

-) **Informed Consent:**
 - o A process to obtain written informed consent from all participants before interviews, observations, and photo collection must be implemented.
 - o The consent form should explain the research purpose, data collection methods, potential risks and benefits of participation, confidentiality measures, and the right to withdraw from the study at any point.
-) **Confidentiality:**
 - o Measures to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants must be outlined. This includes anonymizing interview transcripts, observation notes, and photographs.
 - o Data storage protocols that protect participant privacy should be established.
-) **Respect for Cultural Sensitivities:**
 - o The research should be conducted with sensitivity to the cultural practices and beliefs of the Mandailing community regarding death and funerals.
 - o Permission should be sought from appropriate community authorities before commencing research activities.

Conditions of Approval

This approval is granted with the following conditions:

-) Any deviations from the approved research plan must be reported to the Ethics Committee for review and approval.
-) Unexpected ethical issues arising during the research must be reported to the Ethics Committee promptly.
-) A copy of the final research report summarizing the findings and addressing any ethical considerations must be submitted to the Ethics Committee upon completion of the project.

Contact Information

For any questions or concerns regarding ethical procedures, please contact the LPPM Ethics Committee, *Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara*, at lppm@uinsu.ac.id

Sincerely,
Chair, LPPM Ethics Committee
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara



Dr. Nispul Khoiri, M.Ag

Declaration of interests

☒The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

☐The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests:

Cover Letter

Medan, 25 May 2024

Subject: Revision Manuscript Submission

Dear Editor-in-Chief,

Thank you for your previous feedback on my manuscript, "*Batu Qulhu – The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra*." I have carefully revised the article to address the reviewer's concerns, particularly regarding grammatical editing and anonymity in the figure 3b.

I believe the revised manuscript aligns well with Heliyon's focus on interdisciplinary research and will provide valuable insights into the diverse cultural practices within Muslim societies. I respectfully request your reconsideration for publication.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your response and am happy to discuss any further revisions or answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Sahrul

Dear Editor,

We are grateful for the reviewers' insightful feedback, especially regarding a designator (asterisk) in the author group. We've revised minor part in the author information (line 3) and footnote page 1 (highlighted in yellow).

Thank you.

Best,
Sahrul

Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

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Abstract: Death and funeral rituals hold significant cultural and spiritual importance in traditional communities worldwide, including within the Islamic faith. This study focuses on exploring the unique funeral ritual known as *Batu Qulhu* in the Muslim Mandailing community. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes field observations and interviews with ulama and imams who have practical knowledge and understanding of this traditional ritual. The study reveals two origin stories of *Batu Qulhu*: one attributed to the first Imam in the Mandailing community and the other associated with parents, ulama, and village *malims* (religious teachers) without specifying an individual source. *Batu Qulhu* refers to the white river stones utilized by the congregation during the ritual to count the number of prayers offered. The procession of this tradition follows a strict protocol, encompassing prayers, recitation of the Quran, and seeking forgiveness for the deceased and their family. The efficacy of *Batu Qulhu* serves as a testament to the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of cultural identity. While *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar cultural practices can be observed in other regions, highlighting the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and uphold cultural traditions as an integral part of identity and social cohesion.

Keywords: death rituals, funeral traditions, *Batu Qulhu*, Mandailing community, norms and values

1. Introduction

As a traditional aspect of culture, funeral practices serve as an initial stride towards fostering harmonious relations within multi-ethnic communities [1]. The manner in which individuals navigate the concept of death holds significance as it encompasses their cultural engagement and utilization, similar to how religion, an integral component of culture, provides a framework for comprehending, interpreting, and making sense of death, albeit without necessarily diminishing its inherent challenges for those experiencing grief [2]. Throughout

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various cultures, the commemoration of the deceased and the support offered to grieving families manifest through a multitude of ritualistic practices [3]. These rituals hold particular significance within religious frameworks as they are not only guided by religious doctrines but also serve as fundamental aspects of communal worship [4]. Within the Islamic tradition, the management of deceased bodies adheres to the teachings found in the Qur'an, specifically drawing attention to Surah Al Imran (QS 3:185). This verse underscores the universal nature of mortality, asserting that every individual is bound to experience death [5]. In his groundbreaking 1907 study, Robert Hertz skillfully intertwined three essential imperatives - moral, aesthetic, and sociological - to present a captivating conceptualization of death [6]. His intricate analysis portrays death as a profound transformative journey that transcends the boundaries of both the spiritual and physical realms.

In Indonesia, funeral rituals have been intricately intertwined with local cultural practices and ethnic traditions. Various communities, such as the Tana Toraja people [7], the traditional Javanese community [8,9], and the Balinese who perform the *ngaben* ceremony [10,11], express their funeral customs based on their specific cultural heritage. These burial practices and procedures provide profound insights into the community and society in which they are performed. In these traditions, feasts, animal sacrifices, and supplications are often conducted to honor the deceased and their family. Additionally, Islamic values and rituals significantly influence funeral practices across many regions in Indonesia. The practice of *tahlil* or *tahlilan*, which involves collective remembrance gatherings, is commonly observed [12], and the *azan* (call to prayer) is often performed during burial ceremonies [4]. Moreover, in certain regions of Sumatra, Islamic funeral practices have assimilated with local traditions. For example, the people of Minangkabau in Nagari Salayo incorporate the custom of placing attributes on the head of the deceased during the funeral procession [13]. While in Nagari Anduring, the Minang community also practices *bakayaik*, which takes place 100 days after someone's passing. *Bakayaik* vividly recounts the profound narrative of Prophet Muhammad pbuh¹, beginning with his miraculous birth and chronicling his relentless efforts to uphold the principles of Islam. This ceremonial tradition blends the eloquence of Arabic and Minang languages, creating a captivating linguistic tapestry that enhances the overall richness of the performance. In Aceh, the *reuhab* tradition involves decorating the deceased person's bedroom for 40 days [14]. These practices exemplify the dynamic interplay between Islamic influences and local cultural expressions in funeral rituals across Indonesia.

Throughout history, archaeological evidence of ancient burials reveals a persistent pattern: human societies, since their inception, have convened to form social bonds and articulate

emotions and intentions in response to the phenomenon of death [15]. This ritual also promotes social cohesion in many communities practiced in various belief systems [16–18]. Despite this, there is no clear description on concept of social cohesion [19], for the purpose of this study, social cohesion is defined by the interconnectedness of social networks and the customs, bonds, and values that uphold their unity [20]. The idea of social cohesion traces back to Emile Durkheim's theory. He proposed the notion of mechanical solidarity in society, suggesting its presence through the strength of influential individuals [21]. Hence, social cohesion emerges from socio-spatial factors that influence individuals within specific locations, representing a reflection of the classification of spaces [22,23]. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct thorough research into the rituals and traditions of specific communities within their local contexts to better understand and extract the factors contributing to social cohesion. This approach allows for a more nuanced analysis, considering the unique cultural and social dynamics that shape cohesion within distinct groups. Further, the traditional ceremony holds facilitates religious and spiritual practices as well as strengthening social bond and sense of identity [24].

This study aims to investigate the origin of *Batu Qulhu* rituals, exploring its contemporary practices and norms based on the social cohesion and identity in the Mandailing community of North Sumatra. The funeral rituals in this community are deeply rooted in a rich tapestry of cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions. By exploring the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ceremonies, this research seeks to shed light on the significance and intricacies of these rituals, offering valuable insights into the broader context of funeral traditions among Muslims in Sumatra. Regarding to the goals, the current article addresses the following research question the research question, what is the historical background of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community? How do the practices surround *Batu Qulhu* manifest in present-day Mandailing Muslim society? What are the norms associated with *Batu Qulhu* within the Mandailing community based on social cohesion and identity?

1.1. Mandailing Ethnic: Historical Context

The origin of the word "*Mandailing*" is linked to the Munda people of India, who experienced defeat in a war against the Aryan people. The term "*Mandailing*" is derived from either "*Mandala Holing*" [25,26] or "*Mundailing*," referring to the refugees from Munda [27]. It is believed that the Munda people originally inhabited the northern regions of India before the arrival of the Aryans [28]. The historical interaction between the Aryans and the Munda people has been examined through linguistic evidence [29]. Due to pressure from the Aryans, the Munda people migrated southward within India [29–31], and this Aryan occupation of the

Munda people occurred around 1500-1200 BC [32]. Eventually, the displaced Munda people migrated to Southeast Asia [31], although the specific country of their migration is not specified. It is likely that some of them reached North Sumatra through the Barus Port in Central Tapanuli, which was an international port at that time. Referred to "*Negarakertagama*" book from 1365, which mentions the presence of the Mandailing as one of the most significant ethnic groups in the archipelago [25,33]. The names mentioned include Mandailing, Pane, and Padang Lawas. The mention of these names indicates that the name Mandailing has been known by outsiders since ancient dates. In addition, Tuanku Rao² suggests that the Mandailing people trace their origin back to the Bugis Makassar, who sailed to the Singkuang Port (now known as Natal), it is more commonly accepted that the Mandailing people are part of the Batak ethnic group.

The Mandailing community's ethnic origin is a subject of contention among scholars. While some argue that they are part of the Batak Toba ethnic group [34,35], this perspective faces opposition from Mandailing intellectuals and historians. However, an analysis of factors such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group [36,37]. To establish their identity as the Mandailing community, they refer to themselves as "*halak kita*" (referred to: our people) of South Tapanuli [38], rather than as "*halak batak*" (Batak people) [39,40]. Regarding religious affiliation, the majority of the contemporary Mandailing population follows Islam, with a minority of Christians found in specific locations like Pakantan in Upper Mandailing, Medan, and other cities in North Sumatra [25,41]. Before embracing Islam, the religious beliefs of the Mandailing people focused around ancestral spirits referred to as "*si pele begu*" [33], incorporating influences from Hinduism and Buddhism [42]. Recent field research conducted in the Mandailing region revealed remnants and artefacts associated with both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, particularly in the vicinity of Panyabungan within the Greater Mandailing area [43].

Padri wars has brought Islam to Mandailing around 1821 and the Dutch military breached and defeated this movement by 1835 [36,41,44]. The term '*padri*' has two possible origins. One explanation suggests that it stems from the Indonesian word '*padri*,' which referred to priests. It is important to emphasize that the notable figures associated with the Padri movement can be likened to 'Islamic priests' [45]. This movement emerged in the early 1800s as a reformist Islamic movement led by local scholars known as ulama. These ulama sought to purify and reform Islam in the region, criticizing what they perceived as syncretic practices and deviations from strict Islamic teachings [26,41]. They aimed to establish a more orthodox and

conservative interpretation of Islam in Mandailing. Padri movement gained support from various segments of the population, including the rural communities, who were attracted to their message of religious purity and social justice [46]. The Padris' growing influence and power threatened the traditional rulers, known as penghulu, who feared losing their authority and control [41,45].

Before then, in the classical era, marked by the introduction of Hinduism preceding Islam into South Tapanuli, is substantiated by the presence of the Bahal temple in Portibi (now Padang Lawas), a relic of the Panai kingdom during the 12th and 13th centuries. Schnitger [47] documented that around 1000 AD, the Panai kingdom stood as the foremost realm of its time. Nevertheless, around 11th century, the Panai kingdom succumbed to Rajendrakola from India, an adherent of the Hindu faith. Despite the presence of Hindus within the Mandailing Sultanate, the Mandailing populace did not embrace Islam. This decision was influenced by the religion's veneration of numerous idols. Through a traditional lens, there exists a fusion of religion and culture, exemplified by customs such as *upah-upah*³ (gift) during weddings, rites marking childbirth, and housewarming ceremonies. Additionally, observances spanning 7, 40, 100, and 1000 days following the demise of parents are upheld.

The Mandailing Sultanate fell under the dominion of the Aru kingdom circa 1295 AD, spanning the 13th to 15th centuries AD. Subsequent to this period, the Pulungan kingdom emerged, followed by the ascendancy of the Nasution clan, which assumed control over the Mandailing Godang region (now Panyabungan), and the Lubis clan, which governed Mandailing Julu (now Kotanopan).

1.2. Mandailing Philosophy

The values of the Mandailing ethnic philosophy of life called *Poda Na Lima*. *Poda* means advice, *na* means which/that/is, and *lima* means five. In short, *Poda Na Lima* consists of five pieces of advice, namely: i) *Paia Rohamu* (keeping your heart clean); ii) *Paia Pamatangmu* (keeping your body clean); iii) *Paia Parabitonmu* (keeping your clothes clean); iv) *Paia Bagasmu* (keeping your house clean); and v) *Paia Pakaranganmu* (keeping your yard clean) [34,48]. These five values are still firmly held by the Mandailing community and the Mandailing ethnicity in Indonesia and around the world. Despite the Madina people's reputation for being religious, their daily social lives are intertwined with various cultural practices that are imbued with religious significance. These rituals, such as *marhaban* (*barzanzi*)⁴, the use of plain flour, and *upah-upah*, are performed on joyful occasions such as

weddings, recoveries from illness, and the attainment of new positions, as well as during significant life transitions such as the birth of a child and moving into a new home [38].

The Mandailing ethnic community has a value system, *Dalihan Na Tolu* which means a forum used to organize life in carrying out *olong* (affection) between *mora*, *kahanggi* and *anak boru* [34,35,49,50]. *Dalihan Na Tolu*, also referred to ‘three stones’ [37], is a cultural value, created by the Creator that guide Bataknese attitude and behavior in the social lives and cultural relation [51]. The three stones encompass family, community, and spirituality. In Mandailing community, *Dalihan Na Tolu* principles are deeply intertwined with Islamic values and teachings. Mandailing Muslim communities incorporate these cultural principles into their daily lives, alongside their Islamic beliefs and practices [51,52]. This concept reinforces the importance of maintaining strong moral character, fostering harmonious relationships, and upholding social justice within the community [34,35,51].

2. Location Settings

The Mandailing Natal region, often abbreviated as Madina, is situated in North Sumatra Province, spanning approximately between 0°10’ and 1°50’ N and 98°10’ and 100°10’ E. This region is located on the west coast of Sumatra, has a 170 km coastline, and is home to 24 islands, though only 4 of these islands are inhabited. In 2021, Madina has a population of over 478,000 people, and has a total area of 6,134 km² [53]. Based on BPS-Statistics of Mandailing Natal Regency [53], during 2021, the predominant land use in this region comprises a mixed vegetation area, accounting for 39.15% or 252.57 hectares, while forested areas occupy 30.04% of the region, followed by palm oil plantations at 27.79%. Settlements in Madina cover 451.38 hectares (0.7%), while agriculture utilizes 2.17% of the land. Additionally, water bodies such as lakes and dams encompass 0.14% of the region's total area. This region is crossed by three river systems including Batang Pungkut, Batang Gadis, and Aek Pohan that represent upper, middle and lower part of the Batang Gadis watershed [54]. These rivers are beneficial for major population in Madina including for agriculture, plantation and industrial sectors. However, for years the rivers have also become threatened to illegal mining activities including sands, rocks and gold [55,56].

The majority of the population in Madina, around 95%, is Muslim, while the remaining 5% consists of Christians (including Catholics), Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of Confucianism. Madina has more than 800 mosques and 70 churches [57], to support the religious practices of its inhabitants, and the region is made up of 23 districts and over 370 villages. Muslim community in Madina, consisting of various ethnic groups, exhibits a rich

diversity of cultural and religious practices. Mosques and Islamic schools, known as *madrasah*, hold a prominent position in shaping the religious and cultural life of the community. Furthermore, active participation in significant cultural and religious traditions, such as the celebration of two major Islamic holidays like *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*, is observed among the Muslim population. A strong emphasis on social responsibility and assisting those in need, in alignment with Islamic principles, is evident through the engagement of the Muslim community in charitable and community service activities. The local government plays a supportive role by implementing policies and providing necessary infrastructure to promote Islamic education [58].

3. Methodology

3.1. Design of the Research

This study adopts qualitative research design, employing combination of phenomenological and ethnographic approaches. Both methodologies are characterized by their exploratory nature, utilizing the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection [59]. By intertwining the principles of phenomenological analysis and ethnography, this current study approach emphasizes a comprehensive exploration of human experiences within their natural settings. While phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of lived experiences, ethnography complements this by elucidating the cultural and social intricacies that contextualize these experiences within specific communities or groups. Additionally, they both underscore the importance of adopting a self-conscious approach to research, wherein researchers are attentive to their own perspectives, biases, and influences throughout the research process. It is worth to be noticed that the primary aim of qualitative research is to comprehend the distinctive characteristics and experiences of individual cases, rather than attempting to establish generalized patterns or trends [60]. This method emphasizes the comprehensive exploration of human behaviors and experiences as they unfold within natural settings [61,62]. Integral to this research is the integration of the subjects' knowledge with that of the researchers, which holds significant importance. This integration facilitates the recognition and documentation of outcomes from the local perspective inherent to the subjects themselves [7,63]. The current study employs an emic approach, which entails adopting the insider's perspective from within the culture where the research project is situated, as previously described in studies by [7,45,64–66]. By embracing an emic approach, the research acknowledges the critical importance of comprehending and interpreting the cultural context

and subjective experiences of the subjects, thereby enriching both the research process and its findings.

3.2. Fieldwork and Subjects

The research employed an observational and interview-based approach to collect data. The researchers assumed the roles of both observers and interviewers. The observation phase focused on the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice in the study area, the activities of the Imam during the ritual, and the placement of stones in the graveyard after the final day of remembrance. For the interviews, a systematic process was followed to select appropriate sources. Initial contact with the informants was established through various means, such as phone calls, emails, and WhatsApp messages, to effectively arrange and conduct the interviews.

In prior ethnographic studies, a limited number of subjects were involved. For instance, two studies centered on the practices of anesthesia within two British hospital [67]. Similarly, Baan et al. [7] conducted research on funeral rituals in Toraja with only two informants, while Lee et al. [68] examined the experience of depression among Chinese individuals with a sample size of five informants. In accordance with the present study, data collection encompassed interviews with a total of eight carefully selected subjects, as detailed in Table 1. The age range of the informants in this study was 45-73 years old.

The selection process for these subjects adhered to specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Firstly, the informants were required to hold the roles of imams or leaders of the *Batu Qulhu* dhikr (or remembrance) during funeral ceremonies within the Mandailing community. Secondly, they were expected to possess a profound understanding of the norms and values associated with *Batu Qulhu*. Lastly, the informants needed to be Ulama or respected Islamic spiritual leaders within the local community. Proficiency in the Mandailing language was also a prerequisite for informant selection. To identify suitable subjects, consultations were conducted with local authorities, such as the Indonesian Council of Ulama (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*) in Madina, as well as prominent local figures.

Table 1

The current investigation involved the collection of data during a comprehensive six-month fieldwork period in 2022, specifically spanning from February to July. This fieldwork, which was coordinated by the first and second author, extended over a total of 90 days. The study targeted five specifically chosen districts, selected from a larger pool of 23 districts in the designated study area (refer to Figure 1). The primary objective of the research was to

obtain valuable insights into the cultural practices related to the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in the Madina region. The *Batu Qulhu* event occurring in July 2022 was meticulously observed and documented, employing a combination of photographs and videos for recording. Regarding the data collection process, individual interviews were conducted with each informant, with each session spanning approximately 2 hours. These interviews took place at mutually agreed locations, such as the informant's residence, school office, or the household of the deceased individual where the *Batu Qulhu* ritual took place. Thorough and rigorous recording of all pertinent information was undertaken for subsequent analysis purposes.

Figure 1

3.3. Data Analysis

The present study utilized a qualitative data analysis approach, encompassing three key stages: 1) data reduction; 2) data presentation; and 3) drawing conclusions. This analytical process unfolded iteratively throughout the research. Initially, during the early phases of data collection, the research maintained a broad and overarching focus, and the observations were comprehensive in nature. As the research progressed and the focus of the study became more apparent, the observations evolved to adopt a more structured approach, enabling the acquisition of specific and targeted data.

The data analysis commenced with data reduction, where the gathered information was streamlined and organized to facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Subsequently, the data were presented in a coherent and meaningful manner to facilitate effective interpretation. Finally, the study derived conclusions based on the analyzed data, allowing for the generation of valuable insights into the cultural practices surrounding the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina. Throughout the research, this qualitative data analysis process occurred in a cyclical manner, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the research topic and a nuanced understanding of the intricacies involved. By transitioning from broad and general observations to more structured and specific data collection, the study achieved a comprehensive and detailed exploration of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual's cultural significance and its relevance within the Mandailing community.

3.4. Ethical Consideration

The present investigation was conducted under the auspices of Cluster Interdisciplinary Basic Research, adhering meticulously to stringent ethical guidelines. To ensure ethical

compliance, the study received official approval from the Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) University of North Sumatera (UINSU) with the approval number: 0616615683, valid from 1-February-2022, to 31-October-2022. The utmost care was taken in handling the research data and records, which were securely stored on a password-protected computer housed within the Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, UINSU. Access to these records was strictly restricted to the authors.

In adherence to established ethical standards for data collection and publication, prior to their inclusion in the research, explicit informed consent was acquired from all eight subjects involved, thereby safeguarding their voluntary and informed engagement in the study. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, a coding system was employed, wherein each subject was allocated an initial "P" followed by pertinent demographic particulars, such as age and current profession. Moreover, all photographic materials featured in this investigation were obtained with written consent from all participants in the native *Bahasa* (Indonesian language), thereby emphasizing the paramount importance of respecting their autonomy and privacy throughout the research process. All participants provided written consent to participate, for the data to be published and for inclusion of photographs. All guests at the ritual provided written consent. Permission was sought from the family representative, who was briefed on the study's objectives, note-taking, and photography. This unwavering commitment to ethical principles serves to underscore the rigor and integrity of the present inquiry, facilitating an ethically sound exploration of the cultural practices pertaining to the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Origin of the Rituals

Based on the interview, it is mentioned that Syeikh Haji Mustafa Husein bin Husein Nasution bin Umar Nasution Al-Mandaili (or known as Syeikh Mustafa Husein) (1886-1955), is credited as the first Imam to introduce the practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance at funeral ceremonies. In the beginning, was named by *Batu Balancing* based on the color of the stone used in this ritual. This insight was derived from interviews conducted with P1 (65), an ulama, and P2 (52), a teacher at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Panyabungan. In addition, Syeikh Musthafa Husein is also founder of the *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB)⁵ or Purba Baru Islamic boarding school. The practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance

has been preserved and perpetuated by his students, who have established recitation congregations in various locations such as mosques, prayer rooms, and *surau*⁶. Notably, the students and alumni of Musthafawiyah have played a significant role in its development and expansion beyond Madina region, with a presence in several other provinces across Indonesia. As the oldest *pesantren* (or boarding school) in North Sumatra, the influence of this practice extends widely, facilitated by the widespread distribution of its students and graduates.

An alternative explanation, provided by P3 (73) an ulama, diverges slightly from the previous informant. He has pointed out that the tradition of using *Batu Qulhu* or *Batu Balancing*⁷ as a medium for remembrance was explained with a slight variation, focusing on the customs upheld by elderly parents, ulama, village *malims* (religious teachers), without mentioning any specific individual. It was a means to alleviate the sorrow experienced by the bereaved and served as a form of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends. In addition to the customary acts of attending funerals and observing mourning rituals, the strategies employed to alleviate the profound grief experienced by individuals extended further. These encompassed multifaceted practices such as providing emotional support, proffering words of guidance and solace to foster resilience and acceptance in the face of adversity. Moreover, individuals were invited to partake in collective prayer sessions, where the use of *Batu Qulhu* stones served as facilitative elements in creating a conducive environment for these spiritual gatherings. P3 further elucidated that this method, referred to as *alak na jolo martakziah*, involved family members, parents, spouses, children, relatives, and neighbors coming together for *tahlilan*.

“In the past people paid tribute to the homes of people who died; parents, wife, husband, children, siblings and neighbors are tahlilan, starting from reciting istighfar, al-Fatihah, tahlil, prayers and concluding selawat. To make the dhikr in congregation more solemn, they add media by using a Batu Balancing (white stone) within size of an adult's big toe or larger than that. In the past, the white stone was said to be a Batu Balancing, now it is better known as the Batu Qulhu”.

Batu Qulhu ritual refers to the use of certain stone as a means of carrying out dhikr worship. In general, this type of stone is typically known as white pebble. It should be noticed that most of these white pebbles are predominantly comprised of marble, a rock formation characterized by its crystallized carbonates and can easily be found in the riparian zone. Here, the family of the deceased person collect these stones from the nearest river. As mentioned in the interview, this ritual chooses approximately the size of an adult's thumb to enhance the solemnity of the remembrance (as can be seen in Figure 2a). During the interview P4 (65),

emphasized that in the past, people paid homage to the homes of the deceased, engaging in *tahlilan* rituals that encompassed prayers and concluding with ‘*selawat*’ (see Figure 2b). To augment the collective remembrance, *Batu Qulhu*, the size of an adult's big toe or larger, was employed. Over time, the *Batu Balancing* came to be recognized as the *Batu Qulhu*.

Figure 2

The utilization of *Batu Qulhu* in death ceremonies is also underpinned by the geographical sequences. Firstly, the abundance of rivers in Madina, notably the Batang Gadis River, Batang Natal River, Aek Kalungan River and Angkola River, facilitated the easy availability of these stones in the past. Nowadays, these rivers also threatened by illegal gold mining activities [55], and tend to pollute due to its waste [56]. Secondly, these stones possess distinct characteristics that contribute to their suitability for the purpose at hand. They exhibit a white hue, imparting a visually soothing effect, while their cool and clean appearance further enhances their appeal. Third, these stones demonstrate resilience in withstanding the rigors of varying weather conditions, including heat, cold, and rainfall. Furthermore, the recitation of *Batu Qulhu* rituals is believed by the community to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave.

4.2. The Contemporary Practice of Batu Qulhu in the Mandailing Community

In the past, Islamic practices in Sumatra have exhibited influences from mystical and shamanistic traditions e.g., [69,70]. However, it is important to note that the religious activities associated with the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* are not influenced by shamanism, but rather stem solely from religious traditions previously followed by religious scholars, religious teachers, and traditional leaders. Currently, the contemporary practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been inherited and embraced by Muslim society in Madina. Based on interview with P4 (65), it is evident that in the past, the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance adhered to strict protocols as mentioned in the following statement.

“The tradition of recalling the Batu Qulhu was once a highly regulated practice. It required seeking consent from both the village leader and the syekh. Mastery of the 20 essential attributes of Allah was necessary, alongside the ability to read the Quran and comprehend its teachings. The stones themselves had to possess a pure white hue. The recitation of Qulhu would take place during evening gatherings, where all the stones present had to be utilized fully, leaving no remnants behind before the congregation dispersed”.

These procedures include the following: 1) the procession necessitated obtaining permission from the head of the village⁸ and *tuan guru*⁹ (or *kulifah*); 2) the ritual leader was

required to commit to memory and comprehend the twenty obligatory attributes of God, encompassing *nafsiyah* (self-related attributes) nature, *salbiyah* (attributes related to existence) nature, *ma'ani* (abstract attributes of God) nature, and *maknawiyah* (the essential nature and prevalence of *ma'ani*) nature; 3) the officiating Imam was expected to possess proficiency in both written and spoken Arabic-Malay; 4) the Imam leading the remembrance was required to proficiently recite the Qur'an and comprehend its meaning; 5) the *Batu Qulhu* utilized in the ritual had to be of a white hue; and 6) the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* transpired during evening hours, and all the stones had to be completed within a single procession conducted in the presence of the congregation. Preceding the initiation of the ritual, it is customary for the priest to cleanse himself through the observance of ablution, mirroring the ritualistic cleansing process associated with prayer as mentioned by P7 (60).

Basically, this ritual has many similarities to *tahlilan* tradition especially in the context prayers and recitations. This practice generally has been carried out by many Nahdatul Ulama (NU) community in Sumatra [12,71]. However, in *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, there are five Imams that lead this procession with different assignment. These Imams are voluntarily appointed by the group and relatively flexible based on their own agreement. The priests then read several prayers that beneficial to seek forgiveness for the deceased, his/her family as well to congregation. The Imams also recite some verses from the Surat of the Quran (QS), and praise the God. In this *Batu Qulhu* ritual, the congregation are voluntarily attending the ritual without any formal invitation. The ritual is held in three consecutive days after the death, and organized by group manager, neighbors and the Imams, and commonly referred to *Serikat Tolong Menolong* (STM) or Union of Help. The Imams and the congregation are artfully arranged in a circular formation, tailored to the venue's conditions. This arrangement allows for the placement of stones in front of the congregation, effortlessly within reach for the worshippers' right hand. During the fieldwork in Panyabungan Kota district, it was noticed that there were more than 30 piles of stones in the congregation. As additional information that commonly they are sitting on the floor covered with *tikar* or mat, but some people also held the ritual with chairs. The priests hold the responsibility for overseeing the course of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual. The following Table 2 describes each Imams' responsibility in *Batu Qulhu* procession.

Table 2

As presented in table 2 that the five Imams stone remembrance fulfill distinct roles during funeral rituals. The first Imam recites *wasilah*, invoking blessings upon the prophets, companions, scholars, and deceased parents. The second Imam performs *takhtim*, while the

third recites dhikr tahlil. The fourth Imam recites selected verses from the Qur'an. The fifth priest concludes with a closing prayer and religious guidance, including expressions of gratitude to Allah SWT and salutations to Prophet Muhammad SAW, supplications for the forgiveness of the deceased's sins, and prayers for the widening of their grave. The sermon includes an oath regarding the deceased's parents, beseeching acceptance of their worship, forgiveness of sins, and enlargement of their grave. Additionally, the imam delivers a sermon during this ritual (text written in Mandailing and the translation can be read in Supplementary file).

The current study also reveals that *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Madina is held in three consecutive days where:

- In the day 1, the remembrance is taken where the Imam start the ceremony. In the first meeting, the priests wear neat clothes, wear caps, turbans and sarongs. Reflecting the figure of a religious expert and placing his position is a person who is highly respected in society. Their sitting position is arranged in a special place, different from the congregation in general. Here, the Imam will also read out the order of the *Batu Qulhu* procession.
- For day 2, similar to the preceding event, the order of events for the first night procession remains unchanged. Prior to commencing the remembrance ceremony, the 'Imam pembaca takhtim' provided an explanation that after the recitation of the *takhtim*, the congregation would engage in the dhikr of *Batu Qulhu*, and were kindly requested to maintain their positions until the conclusion of the event. However, in contrast to the previous occasion, on the second night of recitation, Qulhu stones are made available to facilitate the dhikr and are arranged in a stacked formation in front of the congregation. Subsequently, the Qulhu remembrance stones are accumulated in the same location. The prescribed procedure entails the recitation of QS 112: 1-3, followed by the selection of a single stone. For each subsequent repetition, an additional stone is selected, such that two stones are chosen for a two-time reading, three stones for a three-time reading, four stones for a four-time reading, and so forth, in accordance with established practice.
- In day 3, *Batu Qulhu* procession replicates the format observed on the second meeting. However, a notable distinction lies in the extended duration of the dhikr, necessitated by the requirement to recite the prayer over each stone in the presence of the congregation. It is imperative to sustain the continuity of the dhikr until its completion, without interruption. Subsequent to the remembrance, a collective prayer and *salawat* are gathered. The *Batu Qulhu* employed as aids for remembrance are carefully placed within plastic

burlap bags or buckets (as can be seen in Figure 3a). The event concludes with a religious sermon or *tausiyah*, wherein expressions of gratitude are articulated on behalf of the congregation and the afflicted families. The content of the religious sermon encompasses themes such as death, the retribution of the grave, and serves as a reminder for individuals to perpetually prepare themselves and enhance their devotion before the arrival of death. This is because all living beings are destined to experience mortality (QS 3: 185), and its arrival cannot be postponed, even if one seeks refuge within a lofty and robust fortress (QS 4: 78).

In addition to the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, on the fourth day following an individual's passing, *Batu Qulhu* stones are transported to the cemetery and carefully positioned above the burial site, as illustrated in Figure 3b. The procedure involves the preparation of the grave bed, which includes the leveling off the ground in the designated area assigned for burial. Subsequently, these stones are poured in a manner that commences from the head of the deceased and extends towards their feet. Although typically performed by the bereaved family, this task can also be undertaken by others, such as neighbors or relatives. During the placement of the stones on the grave, it is customary to recite the phrase "*Bismillahi milata 'ala Rasulullah*," which translates to "In the name of Allah and in the religion of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh." The recitation performed during this act is identical to the prayer recitation conducted during the interment of the deceased's body. It is noteworthy that the selection of this specific recitation lacks a distinct foundational basis but rather originates from established tradition.

Figure 3

Presently, *Batu Qulhu* dhikr has undergone significant transformations over time, likely influenced by environmental factors, evolving understandings within the community, and technological advance, as well as societal changes. Presently, the implementation of the ritual varies across different areas of Madina. Traditionally, some individuals engage in the *Batu Qulhu* practice following the *Maghrib* prayer (after sunset) or around 6.30 pm – 7.00 pm local time and typically after the *Isya* prayer (7.30 pm – 8.00 pm), collectively performed at the mosque during evening as mentioned by P8 (55). Among adult women, it takes place in the evening preceding *Maghrib*, while among the male youth (*naposo bulung*) and female youth (*nauli bulung*), it occurs in the afternoon (after *Asr* or around 3.00 pm) as mentioned by P6 (45). Adult male worshipers partake in this practice during the evening after the *Isya* prayer on the first, second, and third days following a person's demise. As mentioned earlier, the *Batu Qulhu* employed in this remembrance ritual is a stone recognized by the bereaved family,

retrieved from the river. To ensure cleanliness, the stones are consistently washed and kept in a plastic sack or a large container. Nevertheless, owing to the evolving perspectives of individuals and the limited availability of such rocks in riverbeds, these stones are now obtainable from multiple outlets across the Madina region, as noted by P5 (50):

“*Batu Qulhu are taken from the river by the family, if they are dirty, they are cleaned. Now, Batu Qulhu are easy to get and are sold in flower shops and building material store*”).

4.3. Aspect of Norms of *Batu Qulhu* ritual

The *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice, introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein, holds significant cultural value in the Mandailing community of Madina. This ritual utilizes white pebbles from nearby rivers for dhikr worship and to alleviate the suffering of the deceased in the grave. It has been preserved and perpetuated by Syeikh Mustafa Husein's students and alumni, who have established recitation congregations in the region. As the oldest pesantren in North Sumatra, the influence of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends widely beyond Madina, with its students and graduates playing a significant role in its development and expansion. Equivalent cultural customs, such as the *tahlilan* tradition observed within the NU community in Sumatra, are also prevalent in Java under the same name. In Java, the Muslim community holds *tahlilan* remembrances on many occasions, a tradition historically introduced by the *Wali Songo* (The Nine Saints of Islam) [12].

Strict protocols surround the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance. Prior permission from village and religious leaders, referred to as *Tuan Guru*, is required. The officiating Imam must possess proficiency in Arabic-Malay language. These protocols ensure the solemnity and authenticity of the ritual, aligning with the importance placed on established rituals and cultural heritage. The *tahlilan* tradition within the NU community also follows specific rituals, emphasizing the shared values of upholding traditions and seeking solace in times of mourning. As previously mentioned, obtaining permission from both village and religious leaders is necessary, as indicated by P2 (52):

‘*mangido izin Parjolo tu Tuan Guru*’ (English: Ask permission from *Tuan Guru* first). Commonly answered by the teacher with ‘*olo’ silahken acara dilanjut*’ (English: Okay, please continue the ritual), ‘*marimom mau au*’ (English: I will follow).

Batu Qulhu remembrance serves as a form of communal support, uniting family members, relatives, neighbors, and friends in times of sorrow. This fosters a sense of unity and solidarity within the Mandailing community, reflecting the value placed on collective resilience. Similar

communal support can be found in other practices, such as the collective remembrance gatherings associated with the tahlilan tradition, reinforcing the cultural value of community bonds and support networks. The significance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends beyond its cultural and spiritual aspects. It represents a cherished cultural heritage embraced by the Muslim society in Madina, highlighting the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of identity. This ritual also plays crucial role in fostering social cohesion through different ways, including community participation, shared religious practices, as well transmission of values and traditions. This study also highlights solidarity aspect as other form of social cohesion in the societal level [20]. While specific to the Mandailing community, similar practices can be observed in other regions in Indonesia, especially in the traditional Islam community [4,72]. They are still fulfilling the shared human need to honor the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and preserve cultural traditions as integral elements of identity and social cohesion. For a comprehensive overview of the norm aspects in the tradition of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community, please refer to Table 3.

Table 3

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ritual stands as a significant cultural and religious practice within the Mandailing community's funeral ceremonies. This tradition, which involves using stones for dhikr worship, holds deep historical and spiritual roots. While its origins can be traced back to Syeikh Mustafa Husein, who introduced the ritual, variations in accounts highlight the complex nature of its origin. Over time, the procession of *Batu Qulhu* has undergone modifications to streamline its organization, exemplifying the adaptive nature of cultural practices while maintaining their essence. Although *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar commemorative practices can be found in other regions. These rituals reflect the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, seeking solace through collective ceremonies, and preserving cultural traditions as integral components of identity and social cohesion. *Batu Qulhu* ritual serves as a testament to the rich cultural and religious heritage of the Mandailing community in North Sumatra, encapsulating collective mourning, spiritual devotion, and the preservation of cultural identity. By adhering to these rituals, individuals reaffirm their cultural identity and strengthen their sense of belonging within the community. Shared cultural practices during funeral ceremonies serve as markers of group identity, fostering a sense of solidarity among participants. As funeral ceremonies continue to play a pivotal role in communities worldwide, understanding and

appreciating the significance of these rituals contributes to our broader knowledge of human beliefs, traditions, and the ways in which we commemorate and honor the departed. The employed methods in this study allows for an in-depth exploration of the cultural, social, and emotional dimensions surrounding funeral practices within specific communities. This approach provides nuanced insights into the significance, symbolism, and evolving meanings attributed to funeral rituals, thereby enriching scholarly discourse and bridging gaps in understanding of this complex phenomenon.

While this study presents a preliminary investigation into the *Batu Qulhu* ritual, it acknowledges certain limitations. The absence of historical documentation detailing the ritual within the Mandailing community necessitates a proposed historical approach through extensive literature review, drawing upon the writings of earlier ulama. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the limited number of informants and the specific observed processions may not fully capture the diverse procedural variations of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual across the entire Madina region. Recognizing the modifications made by different communities based on the guidance of their Imams or practical considerations further adds to the complexity of the ritual. Given these findings, the study recommends the cultural preservation and educational promotion of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual for the benefit of future generations. The creation of appropriate documentation, such as books and videos, accessible through various platforms including social media, can contribute to the wider dissemination of knowledge and understanding of the ritual. These efforts support the cultural preservation of the *Batu Qulhu* tradition and foster greater appreciation among the Mandailing community and beyond.

Declarations

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Sahrul: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data collection, Data interpretation, Writing - original draft, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Afrahul Fadhila Daulai:** Methodology, Data collection, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – Review and editing. **Anang Widhi Nirwansyah:** Data interpretation, Formal analysis, Writing – Review and editing, Visualization. **Seyithan Demirdag:** Writing – Review and editing, Validation, Resources.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement

Data included in article/supplementary material/referenced in article.

Ethics Statement

This study was ethically reviewed and approved by Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) at the University of North Sumatera (UINSU) under approval number 0616615683. All participants, including those photographed, provided informed consent to participate in the study.

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Figures

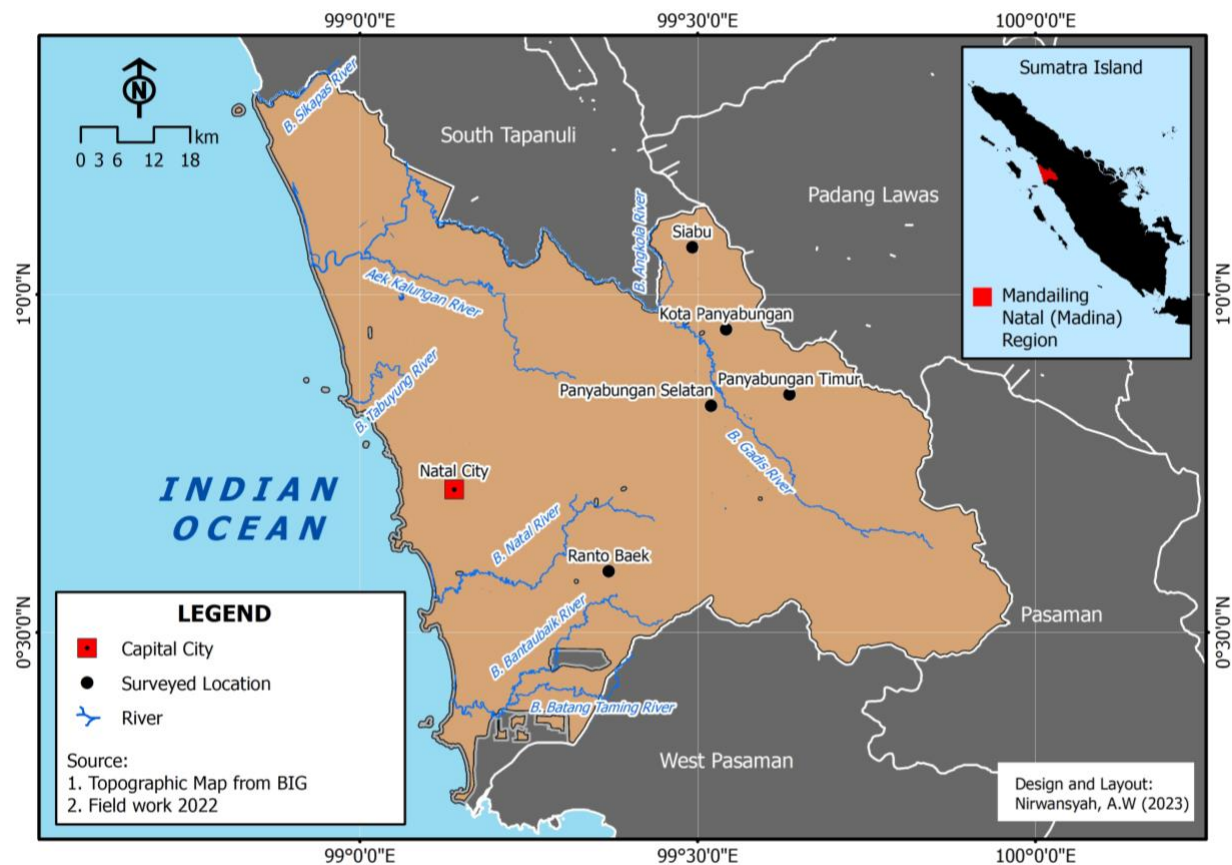


Figure 1. Area of the current research



Figure 2. a) White pebble collected for *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Mandailing, where each bucket contains 70 to 100 stones; and b) the congregation of the Mandailing Muslim community during this obituary ceremony. (Photography by Sahrul on 22 July 2022)



Figure 3. *Batu Qulhu* remembrance by adult male where a) the organizer has collected and kept the stones back into the plastic sack for fourth day of casting procession; and b) where *Batu Qulhu* is finally poured on the grave of deceased person. (photographs of the ritual [a] held at P4 residence on 22 July 2022; and [b] white stone teeming in the day 4) (taken by Sahrul)

Table 1. Pseudonym of subjects' information in the current study

Informants	Initial	Age	Education Level	Occupation
1	P1	65	Bachelor degree	Teacher
2	P2	52	Bachelor degree	Teacher
3	P3	73	Bachelor degree	Ulama and local public figure
4	P4	65	Master degree	Public servant
5	P5	50	Master degree	Public servant
6	P6	45	Master degree	Teacher
7	P7	60	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Businessman
8	P8	55	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Teacher

Table 2. Construction of each Imam and their task in *Batu Qulhu* procession

Imam	Local term	Assignment	Quran recitation
First Imam	<i>Imam pembaca silsilah</i>	– Reciting <i>istighfar</i> ¹⁰ three times; – Reciting <i>wasilah</i> to nabi (propeth Muhammad pbuh), his appostles, ulama and parents of the deceased person, all Muslim and the congregation	– QS 1: 1-6
Second Imam	<i>Imam pembaca takhtim</i>	– Reciting <i>takhtim</i> (known as "reading for the reward of the deceased" or "reciting for the benefit of the deceased")	– QS 112: 1-3 – QS 113: 1-5 – QS 114: 1-5 – QS 1: 1-7 – QS 2: 1-5; 255; 284-286 – QS 33: 56
Third Imam	<i>Imam pembaca tahlil</i>	– Reciting <i>tahlil</i> (compilation of dhikr) including: • <i>Istighfar</i> ;	

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- Reciting ‘afdhalu dzikri’ followed by First *syahadat tauhid*¹¹. The congregation then answer by ‘hayyun baqi’;
 - Reciting second *syahadat tauhid*. Then answered by the congregation with ‘hayyun maujud’;
 - Reciting the third *syahadat tauhid*. And answered by all attendance by ‘hayyum maqsud’.
- Finally, reciting *syahadat tauhid* together with the congregation 100 times. Here the congregation gradually loud their praise and at same time shaking the head

Fourth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca Al Baqarah</i>	– Reciting some verses from the Quran that contains concept and advise about calamities	– QS 2: 152-156 – QS 67: 1-2
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Fifth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca doa</i>	– Reciting closing prayer, with the following structure:
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- *Basmallah*¹²;
- Praise to the Creator and His messenger (Muhammad pbuh);
- Prayers for all Moslem (men and women);
- Prayers for the deceased person and the family;
- Prayers for attendance in the congregation;

Source: compiled based on interview with P1 (65)

852 **Table 3.** Identified aspect of norms in the practice of *Batu Qulhu* Remembrance

Aspect of norm	Description
Preservation of traditions	The culture emphasizes the preservation and perpetuation of rituals and practices, such as the <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance, which was introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein and continued by his students and alumni. The students and graduates of Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding school play a significant role in preserving and expanding this practice.
Community support	The culture values community support during times of grief and mourning. The tradition of using <i>Batu Qulhu</i> serves as a means of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends, helping to alleviate sorrow and foster resilience.
Spiritual gatherings	Collective prayer sessions and remembrance gatherings are highly valued in the culture. The use of the stones during these gatherings creates a conducive environment for spiritual practices and collective remembrance.
Respect for the deceased	The culture emphasizes respect and care for the deceased. The ritual of collecting white pebbles, predominantly marble, from nearby rivers to be used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance shows reverence for the departed.
Connection to nature	The culture maintains a connection with nature, as the stones used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals are collected from rivers. The easy availability of these stones in the past and their resilience in varying weather conditions highlight the importance of nature in the culture.
Alleviation of suffering	The recitation of <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals is believed to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave. This demonstrates a value of compassion and empathy within the culture.

¹ Peace be upon him

² Tuanku Rao is characterized as enigmatic figure and one of the two significant leaders of the Padri movement, shared this status alongside Imam Bonjol himself. Tuanku Rao's origins can be traced to *Huta na Godang* or *Huta Godang*, also known as *Tano Godang*, located in Mandailing Julu (Upper Mandailing) [25].

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- ³ *Upah-upah* refers to cultural practice or tradition of offering gifts or monetary compensation during significant events or ceremonies. The term "upah" itself can be translated as "wages" or "payment". *Upah-upah* is deeply rooted in the Mandailing culture and is often observed during various occasions such as weddings, funerals, or community gatherings.
- ⁴ The word *barzanzi* is associated with the name of Syeikh Barzanji, a prominent scholar and Sufi poet from Kurdistan. His renowned work, titled "*Mawlid al-Barzanji*," is a poetic composition that narrates the birth and life of the Prophet Muhammad, often recited during religious gatherings and celebrations.
- ⁵ *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB), was founded in 1912 by Syeikh Musthafa Husein Nasution. This Islamic boarding school is located in Purba Baru sub-district, Madina Regency, North Sumatra [73]. Further reference on this boarding school can be read in Khairurrijal [74].
- ⁶ Surau means a place of worship or a small mosque-like structure. The surau typically serves as a communal prayer space or a modest mosque, wherein Muslims congregate for congregational prayers, religious discourses, and other religious engagements.
- ⁷ Some community in Madina also use term of *Batu Bontar* to refer *Batu Qulhu*.
- ⁸ One crucial determinant is obtaining authorization from the village leader. The village head holds a position akin to that of a revered monarch, embodying nobility and commanding profound respect.
- ⁹ *Tuan guru* or teacher serves as a religious authority, serving as an exemplar and establishing a benchmark for societal norms through their words and actions. Additionally, they are often revered as sacred individuals known for their healing abilities, and they serve as a source of supplication for various needs such as well-being, sustenance, companionship, agricultural prosperity, and attainment of blessings.
- ¹⁰ The act of attempting forgiveness from the Almighty God, commonly by saying 'astagfirullāhu
- ¹¹ The *syahadat tauhid* contains declaration of belief in the oneness of God Almighty
- ¹² *Basmallah* is phrase mention to the God before beginning any action or speech. It spells 'Bismillahi rāhmani rāhiim'. It means: in the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful.

Batu Qulhu—The Stone of Death: Harmonizing Traditional Funerals in the Mandailing Community of North Sumatra

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Abstract: Death and funeral rituals hold significant cultural and spiritual importance in traditional communities worldwide, including within the Islamic faith. This study focuses on exploring the unique funeral ritual known as *Batu Qulhu* in the Muslim Mandailing community. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes field observations and interviews with ulama and imams who have practical knowledge and understanding of this traditional ritual. The study reveals two origin stories of *Batu Qulhu*: one attributed to the first Imam in the Mandailing community and the other associated with parents, ulama, and village *malims* (religious teachers) without specifying an individual source. *Batu Qulhu* refers to the white river stones utilized by the congregation during the ritual to count the number of prayers offered. The procession of this tradition follows a strict protocol, encompassing prayers, recitation of the Quran, and seeking forgiveness for the deceased and their family. The efficacy of *Batu Qulhu* serves as a testament to the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of cultural identity. While *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar cultural practices can be observed in other regions, highlighting the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and uphold cultural traditions as an integral part of identity and social cohesion.

Keywords: death rituals, funeral traditions, *Batu Qulhu*, Mandailing community, norms and values

1. Introduction

As a traditional aspect of culture, funeral practices serve as an initial stride towards fostering harmonious relations within multi-ethnic communities [1]. The manner in which individuals navigate the concept of death holds significance as it encompasses their cultural engagement and utilization, similar to how religion, an integral component of culture, provides a framework for comprehending, interpreting, and making sense of death, albeit without necessarily diminishing its inherent challenges for those experiencing grief [2]. Throughout

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various cultures, the commemoration of the deceased and the support offered to grieving families manifest through a multitude of ritualistic practices [3]. These rituals hold particular significance within religious frameworks as they are not only guided by religious doctrines but also serve as fundamental aspects of communal worship [4]. Within the Islamic tradition, the management of deceased bodies adheres to the teachings found in the Qur'an, specifically drawing attention to Surah Al Imran (QS 3:185). This verse underscores the universal nature of mortality, asserting that every individual is bound to experience death [5]. In his groundbreaking 1907 study, Robert Hertz skillfully intertwined three essential imperatives - moral, aesthetic, and sociological - to present a captivating conceptualization of death [6]. His intricate analysis portrays death as a profound transformative journey that transcends the boundaries of both the spiritual and physical realms.

In Indonesia, funeral rituals have been intricately intertwined with local cultural practices and ethnic traditions. Various communities, such as the Tana Toraja people [7], the traditional Javanese community [8,9], and the Balinese who perform the *ngaben* ceremony [10,11], express their funeral customs based on their specific cultural heritage. These burial practices and procedures provide profound insights into the community and society in which they are performed. In these traditions, feasts, animal sacrifices, and supplications are often conducted to honor the deceased and their family. Additionally, Islamic values and rituals significantly influence funeral practices across many regions in Indonesia. The practice of *tahlil* or *tahlilan*, which involves collective remembrance gatherings, is commonly observed [12], and the *azan* (call to prayer) is often performed during burial ceremonies [4]. Moreover, in certain regions of Sumatra, Islamic funeral practices have assimilated with local traditions. For example, the people of Minangkabau in Nagari Salayo incorporate the custom of placing attributes on the head of the deceased during the funeral procession [13]. While in Nagari Anduring, the Minang community also practices *bakayaik*, which takes place 100 days after someone's passing. *Bakayaik* vividly recounts the profound narrative of Prophet Muhammad pbuh¹, beginning with his miraculous birth and chronicling his relentless efforts to uphold the principles of Islam. This ceremonial tradition blends the eloquence of Arabic and Minang languages, creating a captivating linguistic tapestry that enhances the overall richness of the performance. In Aceh, the *reuhab* tradition involves decorating the deceased person's bedroom for 40 days [14]. These practices exemplify the dynamic interplay between Islamic influences and local cultural expressions in funeral rituals across Indonesia.

Throughout history, archaeological evidence of ancient burials reveals a persistent pattern: human societies, since their inception, have convened to form social bonds and articulate

emotions and intentions in response to the phenomenon of death [15]. This ritual also promotes social cohesion in many communities practiced in various belief systems [16–18]. Despite this, there is no clear description on concept of social cohesion [19], for the purpose of this study, social cohesion is defined by the interconnectedness of social networks and the customs, bonds, and values that uphold their unity [20]. The idea of social cohesion traces back to Emile Durkheim's theory. He proposed the notion of mechanical solidarity in society, suggesting its presence through the strength of influential individuals [21]. Hence, social cohesion emerges from socio-spatial factors that influence individuals within specific locations, representing a reflection of the classification of spaces [22,23]. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct thorough research into the rituals and traditions of specific communities within their local contexts to better understand and extract the factors contributing to social cohesion. This approach allows for a more nuanced analysis, considering the unique cultural and social dynamics that shape cohesion within distinct groups. Further, the traditional ceremony holds facilitates religious and spiritual practices as well as strengthening social bond and sense of identity [24].

This study aims to investigate the origin of *Batu Qulhu* rituals, exploring its contemporary practices and norms based on the social cohesion and identity in the Mandailing community of North Sumatra. The funeral rituals in this community are deeply rooted in a rich tapestry of cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions. By exploring the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ceremonies, this research seeks to shed light on the significance and intricacies of these rituals, offering valuable insights into the broader context of funeral traditions among Muslims in Sumatra. Regarding to the goals, the current article addresses the following research question the research question, what is the historical background of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community? How do the practices surround *Batu Qulhu* manifest in present-day Mandailing Muslim society? What are the norms associated with *Batu Qulhu* within the Mandailing community based on social cohesion and identity?

1.1. Mandailing Ethnic: Historical Context

The origin of the word "*Mandailing*" is linked to the Munda people of India, who experienced defeat in a war against the Aryan people. The term "*Mandailing*" is derived from either "*Mandala Holing*" [25,26] or "*Mundailing*," referring to the refugees from Munda [27]. It is believed that the Munda people originally inhabited the northern regions of India before the arrival of the Aryans [28]. The historical interaction between the Aryans and the Munda people has been examined through linguistic evidence [29]. Due to pressure from the Aryans, the Munda people migrated southward within India [29–31], and this Aryan occupation of the

Munda people occurred around 1500-1200 BC [32]. Eventually, the displaced Munda people migrated to Southeast Asia [31], although the specific country of their migration is not specified. It is likely that some of them reached North Sumatra through the Barus Port in Central Tapanuli, which was an international port at that time. Referred to "*Negarakertagama*" book from 1365, which mentions the presence of the Mandailing as one of the most significant ethnic groups in the archipelago [25,33]. The names mentioned include Mandailing, Pane, and Padang Lawas. The mention of these names indicates that the name Mandailing has been known by outsiders since ancient dates. In addition, Tuanku Rao² suggests that the Mandailing people trace their origin back to the Bugis Makassar, who sailed to the Singkuang Port (now known as Natal), it is more commonly accepted that the Mandailing people are part of the Batak ethnic group.

The Mandailing community's ethnic origin is a subject of contention among scholars. While some argue that they are part of the Batak Toba ethnic group [34,35], this perspective faces opposition from Mandailing intellectuals and historians. However, an analysis of factors such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group [36,37]. To establish their identity as the Mandailing community, they refer to themselves as "*halak kita*" (referred to: our people) of South Tapanuli [38], rather than as "*halak batak*" (Batak people) [39,40]. Regarding religious affiliation, the majority of the contemporary Mandailing population follows Islam, with a minority of Christians found in specific locations like Pakantan in Upper Mandailing, Medan, and other cities in North Sumatra [25,41]. Before embracing Islam, the religious beliefs of the Mandailing people focused around ancestral spirits referred to as "*si pele begu*" [33], incorporating influences from Hinduism and Buddhism [42]. Recent field research conducted in the Mandailing region revealed remnants and artefacts associated with both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, particularly in the vicinity of Panyabungan within the Greater Mandailing area [43].

Padri wars has brought Islam to Mandailing around 1821 and the Dutch military breached and defeated this movement by 1835 [36,41,44]. The term '*padri*' has two possible origins. One explanation suggests that it stems from the Indonesian word '*padri*,' which referred to priests. It is important to emphasize that the notable figures associated with the Padri movement can be likened to 'Islamic priests' [45]. This movement emerged in the early 1800s as a reformist Islamic movement led by local scholars known as ulama. These ulama sought to purify and reform Islam in the region, criticizing what they perceived as syncretic practices and deviations from strict Islamic teachings [26,41]. They aimed to establish a more orthodox and

conservative interpretation of Islam in Mandailing. Padri movement gained support from various segments of the population, including the rural communities, who were attracted to their message of religious purity and social justice [46]. The Padris' growing influence and power threatened the traditional rulers, known as penghulu, who feared losing their authority and control [41,45].

Before then, in the classical era, marked by the introduction of Hinduism preceding Islam into South Tapanuli, is substantiated by the presence of the Bahal temple in Portibi (now Padang Lawas), a relic of the Panai kingdom during the 12th and 13th centuries. Schnitger [47] documented that around 1000 AD, the Panai kingdom stood as the foremost realm of its time. Nevertheless, around 11th century, the Panai kingdom succumbed to Rajendrakola from India, an adherent of the Hindu faith. Despite the presence of Hindus within the Mandailing Sultanate, the Mandailing populace did not embrace Islam. This decision was influenced by the religion's veneration of numerous idols. Through a traditional lens, there exists a fusion of religion and culture, exemplified by customs such as *upah-upah*³ (gift) during weddings, rites marking childbirth, and housewarming ceremonies. Additionally, observances spanning 7, 40, 100, and 1000 days following the demise of parents are upheld.

The Mandailing Sultanate fell under the dominion of the Aru kingdom circa 1295 AD, spanning the 13th to 15th centuries AD. Subsequent to this period, the Pulungan kingdom emerged, followed by the ascendancy of the Nasution clan, which assumed control over the Mandailing Godang region (now Panyabungan), and the Lubis clan, which governed Mandailing Julu (now Kotanopan).

1.2. Mandailing Philosophy

The values of the Mandailing ethnic philosophy of life called *Poda Na Lima*. *Poda* means advice, *na* means which/that/is, and *lima* means five. In short, *Poda Na Lima* consists of five pieces of advice, namely: i) *Paia Rohamu* (keeping your heart clean); ii) *Paia Pamatangmu* (keeping your body clean); iii) *Paia Parabitoimu* (keeping your clothes clean); iv) *Paia Bagasimu* (keeping your house clean); and v) *Paia Pakaranganmu* (keeping your yard clean) [34,48]. These five values are still firmly held by the Mandailing community and the Mandailing ethnicity in Indonesia and around the world. Despite the Madina people's reputation for being religious, their daily social lives are intertwined with various cultural practices that are imbued with religious significance. These rituals, such as *marhaban* (*barzanzi*)⁴, the use of plain flour, and *upah-upah*, are performed on joyful occasions such as

weddings, recoveries from illness, and the attainment of new positions, as well as during significant life transitions such as the birth of a child and moving into a new home [38].

The Mandailing ethnic community has a value system, *Dalihan Na Tolu* which means a forum used to organize life in carrying out *olong* (affection) between *mora*, *kahanggi* and *anak boru* [34,35,49,50]. *Dalihan Na Tolu*, also referred to ‘three stones’ [37], is a cultural value, created by the Creator that guide Bataknese attitude and behavior in the social lives and cultural relation [51]. The three stones encompass family, community, and spirituality. In Mandailing community, *Dalihan Na Tolu* principles are deeply intertwined with Islamic values and teachings. Mandailing Muslim communities incorporate these cultural principles into their daily lives, alongside their Islamic beliefs and practices [51,52]. This concept reinforces the importance of maintaining strong moral character, fostering harmonious relationships, and upholding social justice within the community [34,35,51].

2. Location Settings

The Mandailing Natal region, often abbreviated as Madina, is situated in North Sumatra Province, spanning approximately between 0°10’ and 1°50’ N and 98°10’ and 100°10’ E. This region is located on the west coast of Sumatra, has a 170 km coastline, and is home to 24 islands, though only 4 of these islands are inhabited. In 2021, Madina has a population of over 478,000 people, and has a total area of 6,134 km² [53]. Based on BPS-Statistics of Mandailing Natal Regency [53], during 2021, the predominant land use in this region comprises a mixed vegetation area, accounting for 39.15% or 252.57 hectares, while forested areas occupy 30.04% of the region, followed by palm oil plantations at 27.79%. Settlements in Madina cover 451.38 hectares (0.7%), while agriculture utilizes 2.17% of the land. Additionally, water bodies such as lakes and dams encompass 0.14% of the region's total area. This region is crossed by three river systems including Batang Pungkut, Batang Gadis, and Aek Pohan that represent upper, middle and lower part of the Batang Gadis watershed [54]. These rivers are beneficial for major population in Madina including for agriculture, plantation and industrial sectors. However, for years the rivers have also become threatened to illegal mining activities including sands, rocks and gold [55,56].

The majority of the population in Madina, around 95%, is Muslim, while the remaining 5% consists of Christians (including Catholics), Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of Confucianism. Madina has more than 800 mosques and 70 churches [57], to support the religious practices of its inhabitants, and the region is made up of 23 districts and over 370 villages. Muslim community in Madina, consisting of various ethnic groups, exhibits a rich

diversity of cultural and religious practices. Mosques and Islamic schools, known as *madrasah*, hold a prominent position in shaping the religious and cultural life of the community. Furthermore, active participation in significant cultural and religious traditions, such as the celebration of two major Islamic holidays like *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*, is observed among the Muslim population. A strong emphasis on social responsibility and assisting those in need, in alignment with Islamic principles, is evident through the engagement of the Muslim community in charitable and community service activities. The local government plays a supportive role by implementing policies and providing necessary infrastructure to promote Islamic education [58].

3. Methodology

3.1. Design of the Research

This study adopts qualitative research design, employing combination of phenomenological and ethnographic approaches. Both methodologies are characterized by their exploratory nature, utilizing the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection [59]. By intertwining the principles of phenomenological analysis and ethnography, this current study approach emphasizes a comprehensive exploration of human experiences within their natural settings. While phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of lived experiences, ethnography complements this by elucidating the cultural and social intricacies that contextualize these experiences within specific communities or groups. Additionally, they both underscore the importance of adopting a self-conscious approach to research, wherein researchers are attentive to their own perspectives, biases, and influences throughout the research process. It is worth to be noticed that the primary aim of qualitative research is to comprehend the distinctive characteristics and experiences of individual cases, rather than attempting to establish generalized patterns or trends [60]. This method emphasizes the comprehensive exploration of human behaviors and experiences as they unfold within natural settings [61,62]. Integral to this research is the integration of the subjects' knowledge with that of the researchers, which holds significant importance. This integration facilitates the recognition and documentation of outcomes from the local perspective inherent to the subjects themselves [7,63]. The current study employs an emic approach, which entails adopting the insider's perspective from within the culture where the research project is situated, as previously described in studies by [7,45,64–66]. By embracing an emic approach, the research acknowledges the critical importance of comprehending and interpreting the cultural context

and subjective experiences of the subjects, thereby enriching both the research process and its findings.

3.2. Fieldwork and Subjects

The research employed an observational and interview-based approach to collect data. The researchers assumed the roles of both observers and interviewers. The observation phase focused on the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice in the study area, the activities of the Imam during the ritual, and the placement of stones in the graveyard after the final day of remembrance. For the interviews, a systematic process was followed to select appropriate sources. Initial contact with the informants was established through various means, such as phone calls, emails, and WhatsApp messages, to effectively arrange and conduct the interviews.

In prior ethnographic studies, a limited number of subjects were involved. For instance, two studies centered on the practices of anesthesia within two British hospital [67]. Similarly, Baan et al. [7] conducted research on funeral rituals in Toraja with only two informants, while Lee et al. [68] examined the experience of depression among Chinese individuals with a sample size of five informants. In accordance with the present study, data collection encompassed interviews with a total of eight carefully selected subjects, as detailed in Table 1. The age range of the informants in this study was 45-73 years old.

The selection process for these subjects adhered to specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Firstly, the informants were required to hold the roles of imams or leaders of the *Batu Qulhu* dhikr (or remembrance) during funeral ceremonies within the Mandailing community. Secondly, they were expected to possess a profound understanding of the norms and values associated with *Batu Qulhu*. Lastly, the informants needed to be Ulama or respected Islamic spiritual leaders within the local community. Proficiency in the Mandailing language was also a prerequisite for informant selection. To identify suitable subjects, consultations were conducted with local authorities, such as the Indonesian Council of Ulama (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*) in Madina, as well as prominent local figures.

Table 1

The current investigation involved the collection of data during a comprehensive six-month fieldwork period in 2022, specifically spanning from February to July. This fieldwork, which was coordinated by the first and second author, extended over a total of 90 days. The study targeted five specifically chosen districts, selected from a larger pool of 23 districts in the designated study area (refer to Figure 1). The primary objective of the research was to

obtain valuable insights into the cultural practices related to the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in the Madina region. The *Batu Qulhu* event occurring in July 2022 was meticulously observed and documented, employing a combination of photographs and videos for recording. Regarding the data collection process, individual interviews were conducted with each informant, with each session spanning approximately 2 hours. These interviews took place at mutually agreed locations, such as the informant's residence, school office, or the household of the deceased individual where the *Batu Qulhu* ritual took place. Thorough and rigorous recording of all pertinent information was undertaken for subsequent analysis purposes.

Figure 1

3.3. Data Analysis

The present study utilized a qualitative data analysis approach, encompassing three key stages: 1) data reduction; 2) data presentation; and 3) drawing conclusions. This analytical process unfolded iteratively throughout the research. Initially, during the early phases of data collection, the research maintained a broad and overarching focus, and the observations were comprehensive in nature. As the research progressed and the focus of the study became more apparent, the observations evolved to adopt a more structured approach, enabling the acquisition of specific and targeted data.

The data analysis commenced with data reduction, where the gathered information was streamlined and organized to facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Subsequently, the data were presented in a coherent and meaningful manner to facilitate effective interpretation. Finally, the study derived conclusions based on the analyzed data, allowing for the generation of valuable insights into the cultural practices surrounding the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina. Throughout the research, this qualitative data analysis process occurred in a cyclical manner, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the research topic and a nuanced understanding of the intricacies involved. By transitioning from broad and general observations to more structured and specific data collection, the study achieved a comprehensive and detailed exploration of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual's cultural significance and its relevance within the Mandailing community.

3.4. Ethical Consideration

The present investigation was conducted under the auspices of Cluster Interdisciplinary Basic Research, adhering meticulously to stringent ethical guidelines. To ensure ethical

compliance, the study received official approval from the Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) University of North Sumatera (UINSU) with the approval number: 0616615683, valid from 1-February-2022, to 31-October-2022. The utmost care was taken in handling the research data and records, which were securely stored on a password-protected computer housed within the Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, UINSU. Access to these records was strictly restricted to the authors.

In adherence to established ethical standards for data collection and publication, prior to their inclusion in the research, explicit informed consent was acquired from all eight subjects involved, thereby safeguarding their voluntary and informed engagement in the study. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, a coding system was employed, wherein each subject was allocated an initial "P" followed by pertinent demographic particulars, such as age and current profession. Moreover, all photographic materials featured in this investigation were obtained with written consent from all participants in the native *Bahasa* (Indonesian language), thereby emphasizing the paramount importance of respecting their autonomy and privacy throughout the research process. All participants provided written consent to participate, for the data to be published and for inclusion of photographs. All guests at the ritual provided written consent. Permission was sought from the family representative, who was briefed on the study's objectives, note-taking, and photography. This unwavering commitment to ethical principles serves to underscore the rigor and integrity of the present inquiry, facilitating an ethically sound exploration of the cultural practices pertaining to the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Origin of the Rituals

Based on the interview, it is mentioned that Syeikh Haji Mustafa Husein bin Husein Nasution bin Umar Nasution Al-Mandaili (or known as Syeikh Mustafa Husein) (1886-1955), is credited as the first Imam to introduce the practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance at funeral ceremonies. In the beginning, was named by *Batu Balancing* based on the color of the stone used in this ritual. This insight was derived from interviews conducted with P1 (65), an ulama, and P2 (52), a teacher at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Panyabungan. In addition, Syeikh Musthafa Husein is also founder of the *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB)⁵ or Purba Baru Islamic boarding school. The practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance

has been preserved and perpetuated by his students, who have established recitation congregations in various locations such as mosques, prayer rooms, and *surau*⁶. Notably, the students and alumni of Musthafawiyah have played a significant role in its development and expansion beyond Madina region, with a presence in several other provinces across Indonesia. As the oldest *pesantren* (or boarding school) in North Sumatra, the influence of this practice extends widely, facilitated by the widespread distribution of its students and graduates.

An alternative explanation, provided by P3 (73) an ulama, diverges slightly from the previous informant. He has pointed out that the tradition of using *Batu Qulhu* or *Batu Balancing*⁷ as a medium for remembrance was explained with a slight variation, focusing on the customs upheld by elderly parents, ulama, village *malims* (religious teachers), without mentioning any specific individual. It was a means to alleviate the sorrow experienced by the bereaved and served as a form of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends. In addition to the customary acts of attending funerals and observing mourning rituals, the strategies employed to alleviate the profound grief experienced by individuals extended further. These encompassed multifaceted practices such as providing emotional support, proffering words of guidance and solace to foster resilience and acceptance in the face of adversity. Moreover, individuals were invited to partake in collective prayer sessions, where the use of *Batu Qulhu* stones served as facilitative elements in creating a conducive environment for these spiritual gatherings. P3 further elucidated that this method, referred to as *alak na jolo martakziah*, involved family members, parents, spouses, children, relatives, and neighbors coming together for *tahlilan*.

“In the past people paid tribute to the homes of people who died; parents, wife, husband, children, siblings and neighbors are tahlilan, starting from reciting istighfar, al-Fatihah, tahlil, prayers and concluding selawat. To make the dhikr in congregation more solemn, they add media by using a Batu Balancing (white stone) within size of an adult's big toe or larger than that. In the past, the white stone was said to be a Batu Balancing, now it is better known as the Batu Qulhu”.

Batu Qulhu ritual refers to the use of certain stone as a means of carrying out dhikr worship. In general, this type of stone is typically known as white pebble. It should be noticed that most of these white pebbles are predominantly comprised of marble, a rock formation characterized by its crystallized carbonates and can easily be found in the riparian zone. Here, the family of the deceased person collect these stones from the nearest river. As mentioned in the interview, this ritual chooses approximately the size of an adult's thumb to enhance the solemnity of the remembrance (as can be seen in Figure 2a). During the interview P4 (65),

emphasized that in the past, people paid homage to the homes of the deceased, engaging in *tahlilan* rituals that encompassed prayers and concluding with ‘*selawat*’ (see Figure 2b). To augment the collective remembrance, *Batu Qulhu*, the size of an adult's big toe or larger, was employed. Over time, the *Batu Balancing* came to be recognized as the *Batu Qulhu*.

Figure 2

The utilization of *Batu Qulhu* in death ceremonies is also underpinned by the geographical sequences. Firstly, the abundance of rivers in Madina, notably the Batang Gadis River, Batang Natal River, Aek Kalungan River and Angkola River, facilitated the easy availability of these stones in the past. Nowadays, these rivers also threatened by illegal gold mining activities [55], and tend to pollute due to its waste [56]. Secondly, these stones possess distinct characteristics that contribute to their suitability for the purpose at hand. They exhibit a white hue, imparting a visually soothing effect, while their cool and clean appearance further enhances their appeal. Third, these stones demonstrate resilience in withstanding the rigors of varying weather conditions, including heat, cold, and rainfall. Furthermore, the recitation of *Batu Qulhu* rituals is believed by the community to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave.

4.2. The Contemporary Practice of Batu Qulhu in the Mandailing Community

In the past, Islamic practices in Sumatra have exhibited influences from mystical and shamanistic traditions e.g., [69,70]. However, it is important to note that the religious activities associated with the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* are not influenced by shamanism, but rather stem solely from religious traditions previously followed by religious scholars, religious teachers, and traditional leaders. Currently, the contemporary practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been inherited and embraced by Muslim society in Madina. Based on interview with P4 (65), it is evident that in the past, the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance adhered to strict protocols as mentioned in the following statement.

“The tradition of recalling the Batu Qulhu was once a highly regulated practice. It required seeking consent from both the village leader and the syekh. Mastery of the 20 essential attributes of Allah was necessary, alongside the ability to read the Quran and comprehend its teachings. The stones themselves had to possess a pure white hue. The recitation of Qulhu would take place during evening gatherings, where all the stones present had to be utilized fully, leaving no remnants behind before the congregation dispersed”.

These procedures include the following: 1) the procession necessitated obtaining permission from the head of the village⁸ and *tuan guru*⁹ (or *kulifah*); 2) the ritual leader was

required to commit to memory and comprehend the twenty obligatory attributes of God, encompassing *nafsiyah* (self-related attributes) nature, *salbiyah* (attributes related to existence) nature, *ma'ani* (abstract attributes of God) nature, and *maknawiyah* (the essential nature and prevalence of *ma'ani*) nature; 3) the officiating Imam was expected to possess proficiency in both written and spoken Arabic-Malay; 4) the Imam leading the remembrance was required to proficiently recite the Qur'an and comprehend its meaning; 5) the *Batu Qulhu* utilized in the ritual had to be of a white hue; and 6) the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* transpired during evening hours, and all the stones had to be completed within a single procession conducted in the presence of the congregation. Preceding the initiation of the ritual, it is customary for the priest to cleanse himself through the observance of ablution, mirroring the ritualistic cleansing process associated with prayer as mentioned by P7 (60).

Basically, this ritual has many similarities to *tahlilan* tradition especially in the context prayers and recitations. This practice generally has been carried out by many Nahdatul Ulama (NU) community in Sumatra [12,71]. However, in *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, there are five Imams that lead this procession with different assignment. These Imams are voluntarily appointed by the group and relatively flexible based on their own agreement. The priests then read several prayers that beneficial to seek forgiveness for the deceased, his/her family as well to congregation. The Imams also recite some verses from the Surat of the Quran (QS), and praise the God. In this *Batu Qulhu* ritual, the congregation are voluntarily attending the ritual without any formal invitation. The ritual is held in three consecutive days after the death, and organized by group manager, neighbors and the Imams, and commonly referred to *Serikat Tolong Menolong* (STM) or Union of Help. The Imams and the congregation are artfully arranged in a circular formation, tailored to the venue's conditions. This arrangement allows for the placement of stones in front of the congregation, effortlessly within reach for the worshippers' right hand. During the fieldwork in Panyabungan Kota district, it was noticed that there were more than 30 piles of stones in the congregation. As additional information that commonly they are sitting on the floor covered with *tikar* or mat, but some people also held the ritual with chairs. The priests hold the responsibility for overseeing the course of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual. The following Table 2 describes each Imams' responsibility in *Batu Qulhu* procession.

Table 2

As presented in table 2 that the five Imams stone remembrance fulfill distinct roles during funeral rituals. The first Imam recites *wasilah*, invoking blessings upon the prophets, companions, scholars, and deceased parents. The second Imam performs *takhtim*, while the

third recites dhikr tahlil. The fourth Imam recites selected verses from the Qur'an. The fifth priest concludes with a closing prayer and religious guidance, including expressions of gratitude to Allah SWT and salutations to Prophet Muhammad SAW, supplications for the forgiveness of the deceased's sins, and prayers for the widening of their grave. The sermon includes an oath regarding the deceased's parents, beseeching acceptance of their worship, forgiveness of sins, and enlargement of their grave. Additionally, the imam delivers a sermon during this ritual (text written in Mandailing and the translation can be read in Supplementary file).

The current study also reveals that *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Madina is held in three consecutive days where:

- In the day 1, the remembrance is taken where the Imam start the ceremony. In the first meeting, the priests wear neat clothes, wear caps, turbans and sarongs. Reflecting the figure of a religious expert and placing his position is a person who is highly respected in society. Their sitting position is arranged in a special place, different from the congregation in general. Here, the Imam will also read out the order of the *Batu Qulhu* procession.
- For day 2, similar to the preceding event, the order of events for the first night procession remains unchanged. Prior to commencing the remembrance ceremony, the 'Imam pembaca takhtim' provided an explanation that after the recitation of the *takhtim*, the congregation would engage in the dhikr of *Batu Qulhu*, and were kindly requested to maintain their positions until the conclusion of the event. However, in contrast to the previous occasion, on the second night of recitation, Qulhu stones are made available to facilitate the dhikr and are arranged in a stacked formation in front of the congregation. Subsequently, the Qulhu remembrance stones are accumulated in the same location. The prescribed procedure entails the recitation of QS 112: 1-3, followed by the selection of a single stone. For each subsequent repetition, an additional stone is selected, such that two stones are chosen for a two-time reading, three stones for a three-time reading, four stones for a four-time reading, and so forth, in accordance with established practice.
- In day 3, *Batu Qulhu* procession replicates the format observed on the second meeting. However, a notable distinction lies in the extended duration of the dhikr, necessitated by the requirement to recite the prayer over each stone in the presence of the congregation. It is imperative to sustain the continuity of the dhikr until its completion, without interruption. Subsequent to the remembrance, a collective prayer and *salawat* are gathered. The *Batu Qulhu* employed as aids for remembrance are carefully placed within plastic

burlap bags or buckets (as can be seen in Figure 3a). The event concludes with a religious sermon or *tausiyah*, wherein expressions of gratitude are articulated on behalf of the congregation and the afflicted families. The content of the religious sermon encompasses themes such as death, the retribution of the grave, and serves as a reminder for individuals to perpetually prepare themselves and enhance their devotion before the arrival of death. This is because all living beings are destined to experience mortality (QS 3: 185), and its arrival cannot be postponed, even if one seeks refuge within a lofty and robust fortress (QS 4: 78).

In addition to the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, on the fourth day following an individual's passing, *Batu Qulhu* stones are transported to the cemetery and carefully positioned above the burial site, as illustrated in Figure 3b. The procedure involves the preparation of the grave bed, which includes the leveling off the ground in the designated area assigned for burial. Subsequently, these stones are poured in a manner that commences from the head of the deceased and extends towards their feet. Although typically performed by the bereaved family, this task can also be undertaken by others, such as neighbors or relatives. During the placement of the stones on the grave, it is customary to recite the phrase "*Bismillahi milata 'ala Rasulullah*," which translates to "In the name of Allah and in the religion of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh." The recitation performed during this act is identical to the prayer recitation conducted during the interment of the deceased's body. It is noteworthy that the selection of this specific recitation lacks a distinct foundational basis but rather originates from established tradition.

Figure 3

Presently, *Batu Qulhu* dhikr has undergone significant transformations over time, likely influenced by environmental factors, evolving understandings within the community, and technological advance, as well as societal changes. Presently, the implementation of the ritual varies across different areas of Madina. Traditionally, some individuals engage in the *Batu Qulhu* practice following the *Maghrib* prayer (after sunset) or around 6.30 pm – 7.00 pm local time and typically after the *Isya* prayer (7.30 pm – 8.00 pm), collectively performed at the mosque during evening as mentioned by P8 (55). Among adult women, it takes place in the evening preceding *Maghrib*, while among the male youth (*naposo bulung*) and female youth (*nauli bulung*), it occurs in the afternoon (after *Asr* or around 3.00 pm) as mentioned by P6 (45). Adult male worshipers partake in this practice during the evening after the *Isya* prayer on the first, second, and third days following a person's demise. As mentioned earlier, the *Batu Qulhu* employed in this remembrance ritual is a stone recognized by the bereaved family,

retrieved from the river. To ensure cleanliness, the stones are consistently washed and kept in a plastic sack or a large container. Nevertheless, owing to the evolving perspectives of individuals and the limited availability of such rocks in riverbeds, these stones are now obtainable from multiple outlets across the Madina region, as noted by P5 (50):

“Batu Qulhu are taken from the river by the family, if they are dirty, they are cleaned. Now, Batu Qulhu are easy to get and are sold in flower shops and building material store”).

4.3. Aspect of Norms of Batu Qulhu ritual

The *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice, introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein, holds significant cultural value in the Mandailing community of Madina. This ritual utilizes white pebbles from nearby rivers for dhikr worship and to alleviate the suffering of the deceased in the grave. It has been preserved and perpetuated by Syeikh Mustafa Husein's students and alumni, who have established recitation congregations in the region. As the oldest pesantren in North Sumatra, the influence of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends widely beyond Madina, with its students and graduates playing a significant role in its development and expansion. Equivalent cultural customs, such as the *tahlilan* tradition observed within the NU community in Sumatra, are also prevalent in Java under the same name. In Java, the Muslim community holds *tahlilan* remembrances on many occasions, a tradition historically introduced by the *Wali Songo* (The Nine Saints of Islam) [12].

Strict protocols surround the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance. Prior permission from village and religious leaders, referred to as *Tuan Guru*, is required. The officiating Imam must possess proficiency in Arabic-Malay language. These protocols ensure the solemnity and authenticity of the ritual, aligning with the importance placed on established rituals and cultural heritage. The *tahlilan* tradition within the NU community also follows specific rituals, emphasizing the shared values of upholding traditions and seeking solace in times of mourning. As previously mentioned, obtaining permission from both village and religious leaders is necessary, as indicated by P2 (52):

‘mangido izin Parjolo tu Tuan Guru’ (English: Ask permission from *Tuan Guru* first). Commonly answered by the teacher with *‘olo’ silahken acara dilanjut* (English: Okay, please continue the ritual), *‘marimom mau au’* (English: I will follow).

Batu Qulhu remembrance serves as a form of communal support, uniting family members, relatives, neighbors, and friends in times of sorrow. This fosters a sense of unity and solidarity within the Mandailing community, reflecting the value placed on collective resilience. Similar

communal support can be found in other practices, such as the collective remembrance gatherings associated with the tahlilan tradition, reinforcing the cultural value of community bonds and support networks. The significance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends beyond its cultural and spiritual aspects. It represents a cherished cultural heritage embraced by the Muslim society in Madina, highlighting the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of identity. This ritual also plays crucial role in fostering social cohesion through different ways, including community participation, shared religious practices, as well transmission of values and traditions. This study also highlights solidarity aspect as other form of social cohesion in the societal level [20]. While specific to the Mandailing community, similar practices can be observed in other regions in Indonesia, especially in the traditional Islam community [4,72]. They are still fulfilling the shared human need to honor the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and preserve cultural traditions as integral elements of identity and social cohesion. For a comprehensive overview of the norm aspects in the tradition of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community, please refer to Table 3.

Table 3

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ritual stands as a significant cultural and religious practice within the Mandailing community's funeral ceremonies. This tradition, which involves using stones for dhikr worship, holds deep historical and spiritual roots. While its origins can be traced back to Syekh Mustafa Husein, who introduced the ritual, variations in accounts highlight the complex nature of its origin. Over time, the procession of *Batu Qulhu* has undergone modifications to streamline its organization, exemplifying the adaptive nature of cultural practices while maintaining their essence. Although *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar commemorative practices can be found in other regions. These rituals reflect the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, seeking solace through collective ceremonies, and preserving cultural traditions as integral components of identity and social cohesion. *Batu Qulhu* ritual serves as a testament to the rich cultural and religious heritage of the Mandailing community in North Sumatra, encapsulating collective mourning, spiritual devotion, and the preservation of cultural identity. By adhering to these rituals, individuals reaffirm their cultural identity and strengthen their sense of belonging within the community. Shared cultural practices during funeral ceremonies serve as markers of group identity, fostering a sense of solidarity among participants. As funeral ceremonies continue to play a pivotal role in communities worldwide, understanding and

appreciating the significance of these rituals contributes to our broader knowledge of human beliefs, traditions, and the ways in which we commemorate and honor the departed. The employed methods in this study allows for an in-depth exploration of the cultural, social, and emotional dimensions surrounding funeral practices within specific communities. This approach provides nuanced insights into the significance, symbolism, and evolving meanings attributed to funeral rituals, thereby enriching scholarly discourse and bridging gaps in understanding of this complex phenomenon.

While this study presents a preliminary investigation into the *Batu Qulhu* ritual, it acknowledges certain limitations. The absence of historical documentation detailing the ritual within the Mandailing community necessitates a proposed historical approach through extensive literature review, drawing upon the writings of earlier ulama. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the limited number of informants and the specific observed processions may not fully capture the diverse procedural variations of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual across the entire Madina region. Recognizing the modifications made by different communities based on the guidance of their Imams or practical considerations further adds to the complexity of the ritual. Given these findings, the study recommends the cultural preservation and educational promotion of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual for the benefit of future generations. The creation of appropriate documentation, such as books and videos, accessible through various platforms including social media, can contribute to the wider dissemination of knowledge and understanding of the ritual. These efforts support the cultural preservation of the *Batu Qulhu* tradition and foster greater appreciation among the Mandailing community and beyond.

Declarations

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Sahrul: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data collection, Data interpretation, Writing - original draft, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Afrahul Fadhila Daulai:** Methodology, Data collection, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – Review and editing. **Anang Widhi Nirwansyah:** Data interpretation, Formal analysis, Writing – Review and editing, Visualization. **Seyithan Demirdag:** Writing – Review and editing, Validation, Resources.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement

Data included in article/supplementary material/referenced in article.

Ethics Statement

This study was ethically reviewed and approved by Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) at the University of North Sumatera (UINSU) under approval number 0616615683. All participants, including those photographed, provided informed consent to participate in the study.

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Figures

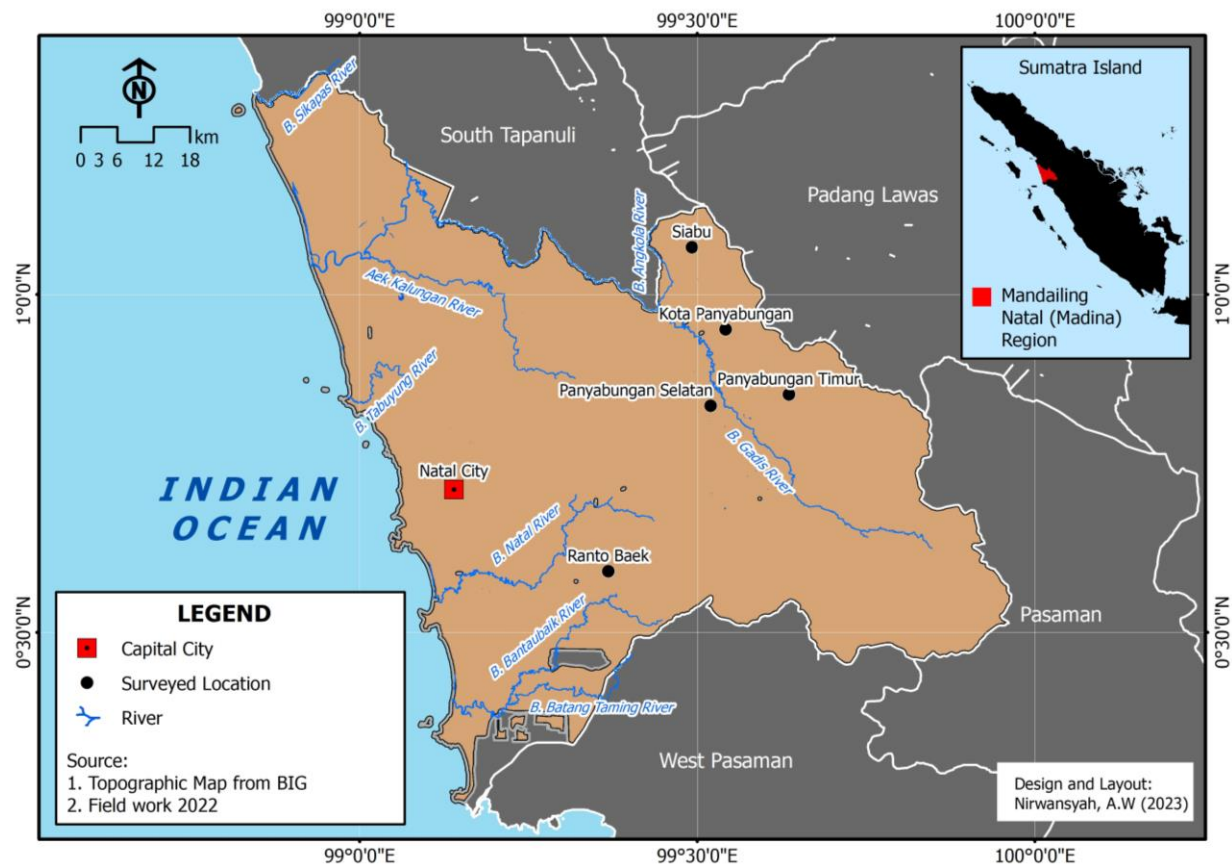


Figure 1. Area of the current research



Figure 2. a) White pebble collected for *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Mandailing, where each bucket contains 70 to 100 stones; and b) the congregation of the Mandailing Muslim community during this obituary ceremony. (Photography by Sahrul on 22 July 2022)



Figure 3. *Batu Qulhu* remembrance by adult male where a) the organizer has collected and kept the stones back into the plastic sack for fourth day of casting procession; and b) where *Batu Qulhu* is finally poured on the grave of deceased person. (photographs of the ritual [a] held at P4 residence on 22 July 2022; and [b] white stone teeming in the day 4) (taken by Sahrul)

847 **Table 1.** Pseudonym of subjects' information in the current study

Informants	Initial	Age	Education Level	Occupation
1	P1	65	Bachelor degree	Teacher
2	P2	52	Bachelor degree	Teacher
3	P3	73	Bachelor degree	Ulama and local public figure
4	P4	65	Master degree	Public servant
5	P5	50	Master degree	Public servant
6	P6	45	Master degree	Teacher
7	P7	60	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Businessman
8	P8	55	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Teacher

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849 **Table 2.** Construction of each Imam and their task in *Batu Qulhu* procession

Imam	Local term	Assignment	Quran recitation
First Imam	<i>Imam pembaca silsilah</i>	– Reciting <i>istighfar</i> ¹⁰ three times; – Reciting <i>wasilah</i> to nabi (propeth Muhammad pbuh), his appostles, ulama and parents of the deceased person, all Muslim and the congregation	– QS 1: 1-6
Second Imam	<i>Imam pembaca takhtim</i>	– Reciting <i>takhtim</i> (known as "reading for the reward of the deceased" or "reciting for the benefit of the deceased")	– QS 112: 1-3 – QS 113: 1-5 – QS 114: 1-5 – QS 1: 1-7 – QS 2: 1-5; 255; 284-286 – QS 33: 56
Third Imam	<i>Imam pembaca tahlil</i>	– Reciting <i>tahlil</i> (compilation of dhikr) including: • <i>Istighfar</i> ;	

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- Reciting ‘afdhalu dzikri’ followed by First *syahadat tauhid*¹¹. The congregation then answer by ‘hayyun baqi’;
 - Reciting second *syahadat tauhid*. Then answered by the congregation with ‘hayyun maujud’;
 - Reciting the third *syahadat tauhid*. And answered by all attendance by ‘hayyum maqsud’.
- Finally, reciting *syahadat tauhid* together with the congregation 100 times. Here the congregation gradually loud their praise and at same time shaking the head

Fourth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca Al Baqarah</i>	– Reciting some verses from the Quran that contains concept and advise about calamities	– QS 2: 152-156 – QS 67: 1-2
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Fifth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca doa</i>	– Reciting closing prayer, with the following structure:
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- *Basmallah*¹²;
- Praise to the Creator and His messenger (Muhammad pbuh);
- Prayers for all Moslem (men and women);
- Prayers for the deceased person and the family;
- Prayers for attendance in the congregation;

Table 3. Identified aspect of norms in the practice of *Batu Qulhu* Remembrance

Aspect of norm	Description
Preservation of traditions	The culture emphasizes the preservation and perpetuation of rituals and practices, such as the <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance, which was introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein and continued by his students and alumni. The students and graduates of Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding school play a significant role in preserving and expanding this practice.
Community support	The culture values community support during times of grief and mourning. The tradition of using <i>Batu Qulhu</i> serves as a means of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends, helping to alleviate sorrow and foster resilience.
Spiritual gatherings	Collective prayer sessions and remembrance gatherings are highly valued in the culture. The use of the stones during these gatherings creates a conducive environment for spiritual practices and collective remembrance.
Respect for the deceased	The culture emphasizes respect and care for the deceased. The ritual of collecting white pebbles, predominantly marble, from nearby rivers to be used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance shows reverence for the departed.
Connection to nature	The culture maintains a connection with nature, as the stones used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals are collected from rivers. The easy availability of these stones in the past and their resilience in varying weather conditions highlight the importance of nature in the culture.
Alleviation of suffering	The recitation of <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals is believed to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave. This demonstrates a value of compassion and empathy within the culture.

¹ Peace be upon him
² Tuanku Rao is characterized as enigmatic figure and one of the two significant leaders of the Padri movement, shared this status alongside Imam Bonjol himself. Tuanku Rao's origins can be traced to *Huta na Godang* or *Huta Godang*, also known as *Tano Godang*, located in Mandailing Julu (Upper Mandailing) [25].

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- ³ *Upah-upah* refers to cultural practice or tradition of offering gifts or monetary compensation during significant events or ceremonies. The term "upah" itself can be translated as "wages" or "payment". *Upah-upah* is deeply rooted in the Mandailing culture and is often observed during various occasions such as weddings, funerals, or community gatherings.
- ⁴ The word *barzanzi* is associated with the name of Syekh Barzanji, a prominent scholar and Sufi poet from Kurdistan. His renowned work, titled "*Mawlid al-Barzanji*," is a poetic composition that narrates the birth and life of the Prophet Muhammad, often recited during religious gatherings and celebrations.
- ⁵ *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB), was founded in 1912 by Syekh Musthafa Husein Nasution. This Islamic boarding school is located in Purba Baru sub-district, Madina Regency, North Sumatra [73]. Further reference on this boarding school can be read in Khairurrijal [74].
- ⁶ Surau means a place of worship or a small mosque-like structure. The surau typically serves as a communal prayer space or a modest mosque, wherein Muslims congregate for congregational prayers, religious discourses, and other religious engagements.
- ⁷ Some community in Madina also use term of *Batu Bontar* to refer *Batu Qulhu*.
- ⁸ One crucial determinant is obtaining authorization from the village leader. The village head holds a position akin to that of a revered monarch, embodying nobility and commanding profound respect.
- ⁹ *Tuan guru* or teacher serves as a religious authority, serving as an exemplar and establishing a benchmark for societal norms through their words and actions. Additionally, they are often revered as sacred individuals known for their healing abilities, and they serve as a source of supplication for various needs such as well-being, sustenance, companionship, agricultural prosperity, and attainment of blessings.
- ¹⁰ The act of attempting forgiveness from the Almighty God, commonly by saying 'astagfirullāhu
- ¹¹ The *syahadat tauhid* contains declaration of belief in the oneness of God Almighty
- ¹² *Basmallah* is phrase mention to the God before beginning any action or speech. It spells 'Bismillahi rāhmani rāhiim'. It means: in the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful.

Figures

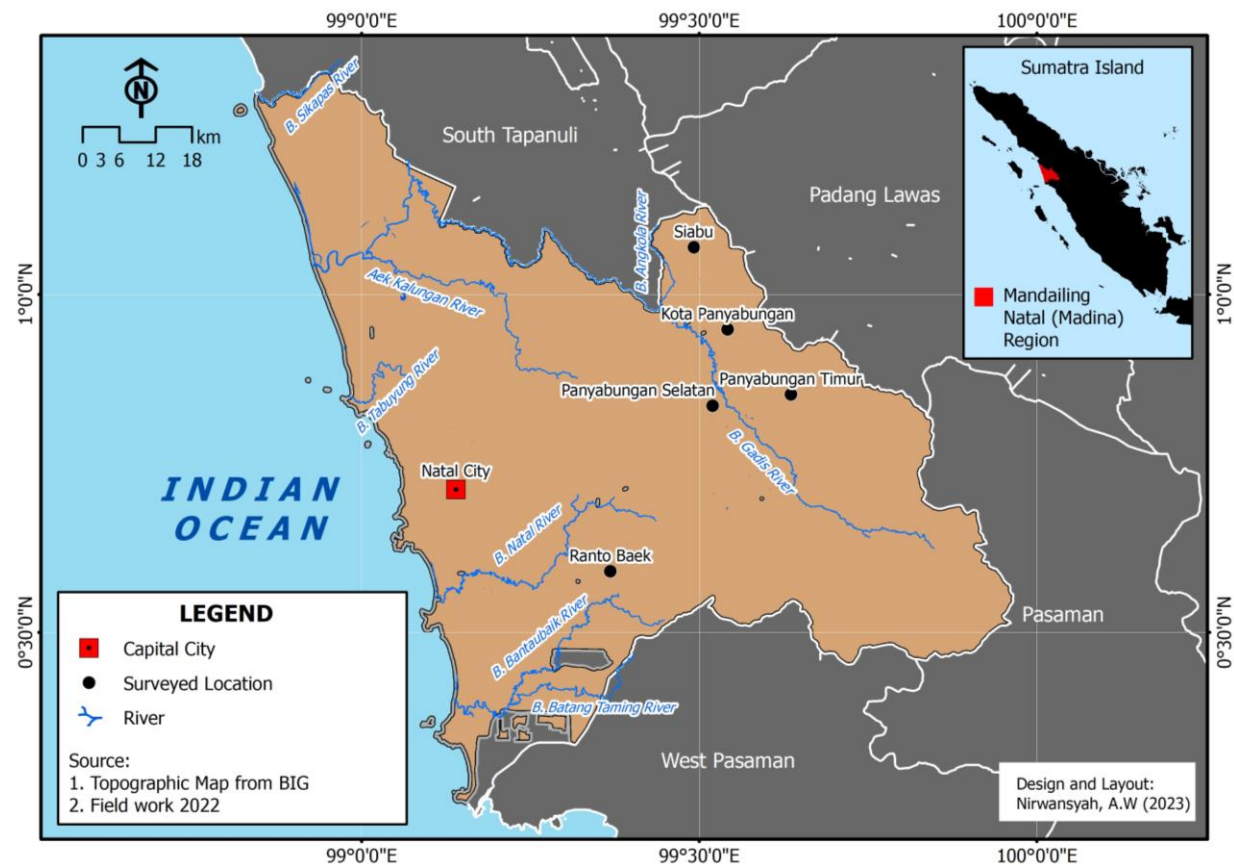


Figure 1. Area of the current research



Figure 2. a) White pebble collected for *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Mandailing, where each bucket contains 70 to 100 stones; and b) the congregation of the Mandailing Muslim community during this obituary ceremony. (Photography by Sahrul on 22 July 2022)



Figure 3. *Batu Qulhu* remembrance by adult male where a) the organizer has collected and kept the stones back into the plastic sack for fourth day of casting procession; and b) where *Batu Qulhu* is finally poured on the grave of deceased person. (photographs of the ritual [a] held at P4 residence on 22 July 2022; and [b] white stone teeming in the day 4) (taken by Sahrul)

1 **Table 1.** Pseudonym of subjects' information in the current study

Informants	Initial	Age	Education Level	Occupation
1	P1	65	Bachelor degree	Teacher
2	P2	52	Bachelor degree	Teacher
3	P3	73	Bachelor degree	Ulama and local public figure
4	P4	65	Master degree	Public servant
5	P5	50	Master degree	Public servant
6	P6	45	Master degree	Teacher
7	P7	60	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Businessman
8	P8	55	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Teacher

2

3 **Table 2.** Construction of each Imam and their task in *Batu Qulhu* procession

Imam	Local term	Assignment	Quran recitation
First Imam	<i>Imam pembaca silsilah</i>	– Reciting <i>istighfar</i> ¹ three times; – Reciting <i>wasilah</i> to nabi (propeth Muhammad pbuh), his appostles, ulama and parents of the deceased person, all moslem and the congregation	– QS 1: 1-6
Second Imam	<i>Imam pembaca takhtim</i>	– Reciting <i>takhtim</i> (known as "reading for the reward of the deceased" or "reciting for the benefit of the deceased)	– QS 112: 1-3 – QS 113: 1-5 – QS 114: 1-5 – QS 1: 1-7 – QS 2: 1-5; 255; 284-286 – QS 33: 56
Third Imam	<i>Imam pembaca tahlil</i>	– Reciting <i>tahlil</i> (compilation of dhikr) including: • <i>Istighfar</i> ;	

-
- Reciting ‘afdhalu dzikri’ followed by First *syahadat tauhid*². The congregation then answer by ‘hayyun baqi’;
 - Reciting second *syahadat tauhid*. Then answered by the congregation with ‘hayyun maujud’;
 - Reciting the third *syahadat tauhid*. And answered by all attendance by ‘hayyum maqsud’.
- Finally, reciting *syahadat tauhid* together with the congregation 100 times. Here the congregation gradually loud their praise and at same time shaking the head

Fourth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca Al Baqarah</i>	– Reciting some verses from the Quran that contains concept and advise about calamities	– QS 2: 152-156 – QS 67: 1-2
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Fifth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca doa</i>	– Reciting closing prayer, with the following structure:
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- *Basmallah*³;
- Praise to the Creator and His messenger (Muhammad pbuh);
- Prayers for all Moslem (men and women);
- Prayers for the deceased person and the family;
- Prayers for attendance in the congregation;

6 **Table 3.** Identified aspect of norms in the practice of *Batu Qulhu* Remembrance

Aspect of norm	Description
Preservation of traditions	The culture emphasizes the preservation and perpetuation of rituals and practices, such as the <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance, which was introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein and continued by his students and alumni. The students and graduates of Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding school play a significant role in preserving and expanding this practice.
Community support	The culture values community support during times of grief and mourning. The tradition of using <i>Batu Qulhu</i> serves as a means of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends, helping to alleviate sorrow and foster resilience.
Spiritual gatherings	Collective prayer sessions and remembrance gatherings are highly valued in the culture. The use of the stones during these gatherings creates a conducive environment for spiritual practices and collective remembrance.
Respect for the deceased	The culture emphasizes respect and care for the deceased. The ritual of collecting white pebbles, predominantly marble, from nearby rivers to be used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance shows reverence for the departed.
Connection to nature	The culture maintains a connection with nature, as the stones used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals are collected from rivers. The easy availability of these stones in the past and their resilience in varying weather conditions highlight the importance of nature in the culture.
Alleviation of suffering	The recitation of <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals is believed to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave. This demonstrates a value of compassion and empathy within the culture.

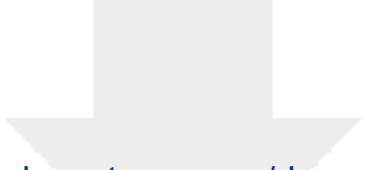
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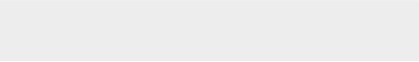
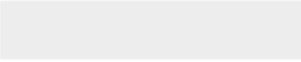
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² The *syahadat tauhid* contains declaration of belief in the oneness of God Almighty

³ *Basmallah* is phrase mention to the God before beginning any action or speech. It spells ‘Bismillahi rāhmani rāhiim’. It means: in the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful.



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Research article



Batu Qulhu—The stone of death: Harmonizing traditional funerals in the Mandailing community of North Sumatra

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ABSTRACT

Death and funeral rituals hold significant cultural and spiritual importance in traditional communities worldwide, including within the Islamic faith. This study focuses on exploring the unique funeral ritual known as *Batu Qulhu* in the Muslim Mandailing community. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes field observations and interviews with ulama and imams who have practical knowledge and understanding of this traditional ritual. The study reveals two origin stories of *Batu Qulhu*: one attributed to the first Imam in the Mandailing community and the other associated with parents, ulama, and village *malims* (religious teachers) without specifying an individual source. *Batu Qulhu* refers to the white river stones utilized by the congregation during the ritual to count the number of prayers offered. The procession of this tradition follows a strict protocol, encompassing prayers, recitation of the Quran, and seeking forgiveness for the deceased and their family. The efficacy of *Batu Qulhu* serves as a testament to the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of cultural identity. While *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar cultural practices can be observed in other regions, highlighting the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and uphold cultural traditions as an integral part of identity and social cohesion.

1. Introduction

As a traditional aspect of culture, funeral practices serve as an initial stride towards fostering harmonious relations within multi-ethnic communities [1]. The manner in which individuals navigate the concept of death holds significance as it encompasses their cultural engagement and utilization, similar to how religion, an integral component of culture, provides a framework for comprehending, interpreting, and making sense of death, albeit without necessarily diminishing its inherent challenges for those experiencing

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grief [2]. Throughout various cultures, the commemoration of the deceased and the support offered to grieving families manifest through a multitude of ritualistic practices [3]. These rituals hold particular significance within religious frameworks as they are not only guided by religious doctrines but also serve as fundamental aspects of communal worship [4]. Within the Islamic tradition, the management of deceased bodies adheres to the teachings found in the Qur'an, specifically drawing attention to Surah Al Imran (QS 3:185). This verse underscores the universal nature of mortality, asserting that every individual is bound to experience death [5]. In his groundbreaking 1907 study, Robert Hertz skillfully intertwined three essential imperatives - moral, aesthetic, and sociological - to present a captivating conceptualization of death [6]. His intricate analysis portrays death as a profound transformative journey that transcends the boundaries of both the spiritual and physical realms.

In Indonesia, funeral rituals have been intricately intertwined with local cultural practices and ethnic traditions. Various communities, such as the Tana Toraja people [7], the traditional Javanese community [8,9], and the Balinese who perform the *ngaben* ceremony [10,11], express their funeral customs based on their specific cultural heritage. These burial practices and procedures provide profound insights into the community and society in which they are performed. In these traditions, feasts, animal sacrifices, and supplications are often conducted to honor the deceased and their family. Additionally, Islamic values and rituals significantly influence funeral practices across many regions in Indonesia. The practice of *tahlil* or *tahlilan*, which involves collective remembrance gatherings, is commonly observed [12], and the *azan* (call to prayer) is often performed during burial ceremonies [4]. Moreover, in certain regions of Sumatra, Islamic funeral practices have assimilated with local traditions. For example, the people of Minangkabau in Nagari Salayo incorporate the custom of placing attributes on the head of the deceased during the funeral procession [13]. While in Nagari Anduring, the Minang community also practices *bakayaik*, which takes place 100 days after someone's passing. *Bakayaik* vividly recounts the profound narrative of Prophet Muhammad pbuh,¹ beginning with his miraculous birth and chronicling his relentless efforts to uphold the principles of Islam. This ceremonial tradition blends the eloquence of Arabic and Minang languages, creating a captivating linguistic tapestry that enhances the overall richness of the performance. In Aceh, the *reuhab* tradition involves decorating the deceased person's bedroom for 40 days [14]. These practices exemplify the dynamic interplay between Islamic influences and local cultural expressions in funeral rituals across Indonesia.

Throughout history, archaeological evidence of ancient burials reveals a persistent pattern: human societies, since their inception, have convened to form social bonds and articulate emotions and intentions in response to the phenomenon of death [15]. This ritual also promotes social cohesion in many communities practiced in various belief systems [16–18]. Despite this, there is no clear description on concept of social cohesion [19], for the purpose of this study, social cohesion is defined by the interconnectedness of social networks and the customs, bonds, and values that uphold their unity [20]. The idea of social cohesion traces back to Emile Durkheim's theory. He proposed the notion of mechanical solidarity in society, suggesting its presence through the strength of influential individuals [21]. Hence, social cohesion emerges from socio-spatial factors that influence individuals within specific locations, representing a reflection of the classification of spaces [22,23]. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct thorough research into the rituals and traditions of specific communities within their local contexts to better understand and extract the factors contributing to social cohesion. This approach allows for a more nuanced analysis, considering the unique cultural and social dynamics that shape cohesion within distinct groups. Further, the traditional ceremony holds facilitates religious and spiritual practices as well as strengthening social bond and sense of identity [24].

This study aims to investigate the origin of *Batu Qulhu* rituals, exploring its contemporary practices and norms based on the social cohesion and identity in the Mandailing community of North Sumatra. The funeral rituals in this community are deeply rooted in a rich tapestry of cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions. By exploring the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ceremonies, this research seeks to shed light on the significance and intricacies of these rituals, offering valuable insights into the broader context of funeral traditions among Muslims in Sumatra. Regarding the goals, the current article addresses the following research question the research question, what is the historical background of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community? How do the practices surround *Batu Qulhu* manifest in present-day Mandailing Muslim society? What are the norms associated with *Batu Qulhu* within the Mandailing community based on social cohesion and identity?

1.1. Mandailing ethnic: historical context

The origin of the word "Mandailing" is linked to the Munda people of India, who experienced defeat in a war against the Aryan people. The term "Mandailing" is derived from either "Mandala Holing" [25,26] or "Mundailing," referring to the refugees from Munda [27]. It is believed that the Munda people originally inhabited the northern regions of India before the arrival of the Aryans [28]. The historical interaction between the Aryans and the Munda people has been examined through linguistic evidence [29]. Due to pressure from the Aryans, the Munda people migrated southward within India [29–31], and this Aryan occupation of the Munda people occurred around 1500-1200 BCE [32]. Eventually, the displaced Munda people migrated to Southeast Asia [31], although the specific country of their migration is not specified. It is likely that some of them reached North Sumatra through the Barus Port in Central Tapanuli, which was an international port at that time. Referred to "Ngarakertagama" book from 1365, which mentions the presence of the Mandailing as one of the most significant ethnic groups in the archipelago [25,33]. The names mentioned include Mandailing,

¹ Peace be upon him.

Pane, and Padang Lawas. The mention of these names indicates that the name Mandailing has been known by outsiders since ancient dates. In addition, Tuanku Rao² suggests that the Mandailing people trace their origin back to the Bugis Makassar, who sailed to the Singkuang Port (now known as Natal), it is more commonly accepted that the Mandailing people are part of the Batak ethnic group.

The Mandailing community's ethnic origin is a subject of contention among scholars. While some argue that they are part of the Batak Toba ethnic group [34,35], this perspective faces opposition from Mandailing intellectuals and historians. However, an analysis of factors such as skin color, language, clan structure, and genealogy support the assertion that the Mandailing community is indeed a component of the broader Batak ethnic group [36,37]. To establish their identity as the Mandailing community, they refer to themselves as "*halak kita*" (referred to: our people) of South Tapanuli [38], rather than as "*halak batak*" (Batak people) [39,40]. Regarding religious affiliation, the majority of the contemporary Mandailing population follows Islam, with a minority of Christians found in specific locations like Pakantan in Upper Mandailing, Medan, and other cities in North Sumatra [25,41]. Before embracing Islam, the religious beliefs of the Mandailing people focused around ancestral spirits referred to as "*si pele begu*" [33], incorporating influences from Hinduism and Buddhism [42]. Recent field research conducted in the Mandailing region revealed remnants and artefacts associated with both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, particularly in the vicinity of Panyabungan within the Greater Mandailing area [43].

Padri wars has brought Islam to Mandailing around 1821 and the Dutch military breached and defeated this movement by 1835 [36,41,44]. The term '*padri*' has two possible origins. One explanation suggests that it stems from the Indonesian word '*padri*,' which referred to priests. It is important to emphasize that the notable figures associated with the Padri movement can be likened to 'Islamic priests' [45]. This movement emerged in the early 1800s as a reformist Islamic movement led by local scholars known as ulama. These ulama sought to purify and reform Islam in the region, criticizing what they perceived as syncretic practices and deviations from strict Islamic teachings [26,41]. They aimed to establish a more orthodox and conservative interpretation of Islam in Mandailing. Padri movement gained support from various segments of the population, including the rural communities, who were attracted to their message of religious purity and social justice [46]. The Padris' growing influence and power threatened the traditional rulers, known as penghulu, who feared losing their authority and control [41,45].

Before then, in the classical era, marked by the introduction of Hinduism preceding Islam into South Tapanuli, is substantiated by the presence of the Bahal temple in Portibi (now Padang Lawas), a relic of the Panai kingdom during the 12th and 13th centuries. Schnitger [47] documented that around 1000 AD, the Panai kingdom stood as the foremost realm of its time. Nevertheless, around 11th century, the Panai kingdom succumbed to Rajendrakola from India, an adherent of the Hindu faith. Despite the presence of Hindus within the Mandailing Sultanate, the Mandailing populace did not embrace Islam. This decision was influenced by the religion's veneration of numerous idols. Through a traditional lens, there exists a fusion of religion and culture, exemplified by customs such as *upah-upah*³ (gift) during weddings, rites marking childbirth, and housewarming ceremonies. Additionally, observances spanning 7, 40, 100, and 1000 days following the demise of parents are upheld.

The Mandailing Sultanate fell under the dominion of the Aru kingdom circa 1295 AD, spanning the 13th to 15th centuries AD. Subsequent to this period, the Pulungan kingdom emerged, followed by the ascendancy of the Nasution clan, which assumed control over the Mandailing Godang region (now Panyabungan), and the Lubis clan, which governed Mandailing Julu (now Kotanopan).

1.2. Mandailing philosophy

The values of the Mandailing ethnic philosophy of life called *Poda Na Lima*. *Poda* means advice, *na* means which/that/is, and *lima* means five. In short, *Poda Na Lima* consists of five pieces of advice, namely: i) *Paia Rohamu* (keeping your heart clean); ii) *Paia Pamatangmu* (keeping your body clean); iii) *Paia Parabitoimu* (keeping your clothes clean); iv) *Paia Bagasmu* (keeping your house clean); and v) *Paia Pakaranganmu* (keeping your yard clean) [34,48]. These five values are still firmly held by the Mandailing community and the Mandailing ethnicity in Indonesia and around the world. Despite the Madina people's reputation for being religious, their daily social lives are intertwined with various cultural practices that are imbued with religious significance. These rituals, such as *marhaban* (*barzanzi*),⁴ the use of plain flour, and *upah-upah*, are performed on joyful occasions such as weddings, recoveries from illness, and the attainment of new positions, as well as during significant life transitions such as the birth of a child and moving into a new home [38].

The Mandailing ethnic community has a value system, *Daliha Na Tolu* which means a forum used to organize life in carrying out *olong* (affection) between *mora*, *kahanggi* and *anak boru* [34,35,49,50]. *Daliha Na Tolu*, also referred to 'three stones' [37], is a cultural value, created by the Creator that guide Batakese attitude and behavior in the social lives and cultural relation [51]. The three stones encompass family, community, and spirituality. In Mandailing community, *Daliha Na Tolu* principles are deeply intertwined with

² Tuanku Rao is characterized as enigmatic figure and one of the two significant leaders of the Padri movement, shared this status alongside Imam Bonjol himself. Tuanku Rao's origins can be traced to *Huta na Godang* or *Huta Godang*, also known as *Tano Godang*, located in Mandailing Julu (Upper Mandailing) [25].

³ *Upah-upah* refers to cultural practice or tradition of offering gifts or monetary compensation during significant events or ceremonies. The term "upah" itself can be translated as "wages" or "payment". *Upah-upah* is deeply rooted in the Mandailing culture and is often observed during various occasions such as weddings, funerals, or community gatherings.

⁴ The word *barzanzi* is associated with the name of Syekh Barzanji, a prominent scholar and Sufi poet from Kurdistan. His renowned work, titled "*Mawlid al-Barzanji*," is a poetic composition that narrates the birth and life of the Prophet Muhammad, often recited during religious gatherings and celebrations.

Islamic values and teachings. Mandailing Muslim communities incorporate these cultural principles into their daily lives, alongside their Islamic beliefs and practices [51,52]. This concept reinforces the importance of maintaining strong moral character, fostering harmonious relationships, and upholding social justice within the community [34,35,51].

2. Location settings

The Mandailing Natal region, often abbreviated as Madina, is situated in North Sumatra Province, spanning approximately between 0°10' and 1°50' N and 98°10' and 100°10' E. This region is located on the west coast of Sumatra, has a 170 km coastline, and is home to 24 islands, though only 4 of these islands are inhabited. In 2021, Madina has a population of over 478,000 people, and has a total area of 6134 km² [53]. Based on BPS-Statistics of Mandailing Natal Regency [53], during 2021, the predominant land use in this region comprises a mixed vegetation area, accounting for 39.15 % or 252.57 ha, while forested areas occupy 30.04 % of the region, followed by palm oil plantations at 27.79 %. Settlements in Madina cover 451.38 ha (0.7 %), while agriculture utilizes 2.17 % of the land. Additionally, water bodies such as lakes and dams encompass 0.14 % of the region's total area. This region is crossed by three river systems including Batang Pungkut, Batang Gadis, and Aek Pohan that represent upper, middle and lower part of the Batang Gadis watershed [54]. These rivers are beneficial for major population in Madina including for agriculture, plantation and industrial sectors. However, for years the rivers have also become threatened to illegal mining activities including sands, rocks and gold [55,56].

The majority of the population in Madina, around 95 %, is Muslim, while the remaining 5 % consists of Christians (including Catholics), Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of Confucianism. Madina has more than 800 mosques and 70 churches [57], to support the religious practices of its inhabitants, and the region is made up of 23 districts and over 370 villages. Muslim community in Madina, consisting of various ethnic groups, exhibits a rich diversity of cultural and religious practices. Mosques and Islamic schools, known as *madrrasah*, hold a prominent position in shaping the religious and cultural life of the community. Furthermore, active participation in significant cultural and religious traditions, such as the celebration of two major Islamic holidays like *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*, is observed among the Muslim population. A strong emphasis on social responsibility and assisting those in need, in alignment with Islamic principles, is evident through the engagement of the Muslim community in charitable and community service activities. The local government plays a supportive role by implementing policies and providing necessary infrastructure to promote Islamic education [58].

3. Methodology

3.1. Design of the research

This study adopts qualitative research design, employing combination of phenomenological and ethnographic approaches. Both methodologies are characterized by their exploratory nature, utilizing the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection [59]. By intertwining the principles of phenomenological analysis and ethnography, this current study approach emphasizes a comprehensive exploration of human experiences within their natural settings. While phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of lived experiences, ethnography complements this by elucidating the cultural and social intricacies that contextualize these experiences within specific communities or groups. Additionally, they both underscore the importance of adopting a self-conscious approach to research, wherein researchers are attentive to their own perspectives, biases, and influences throughout the research process. It is worth to be noticed that the primary aim of qualitative research is to comprehend the distinctive characteristics and experiences of individual cases, rather than attempting to establish generalized patterns or trends [60]. This method emphasizes the comprehensive exploration of human behaviors and experiences as they unfold within natural settings [61,62]. Integral to this research is the integration of the subjects' knowledge with that of the researchers, which holds significant importance. This integration facilitates the recognition and documentation of outcomes from the local perspective inherent to the subjects themselves [7,63]. The current study employs an emic approach, which entails adopting the insider's perspective from within the culture where the research project is situated, as previously described in studies by Refs. [7,45,64–66]. By embracing an emic approach, the research acknowledges the critical importance of comprehending and interpreting the cultural context and subjective experiences of the subjects, thereby enriching both the research process and its findings.

Table 1

Pseudonym of subjects' information in the current study.

Informants	Initial	Age	Education Level	Occupation
1	P1	65	Bachelor degree	Teacher
2	P2	52	Bachelor degree	Teacher
3	P3	73	Bachelor degree	Ulama and local public figure
4	P4	65	Master degree	Public servant
5	P5	50	Master degree	Public servant
6	P6	45	Master degree	Teacher
7	P7	60	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Businessman
8	P8	55	Senior high school and <i>pesantren</i>	Teacher

3.2. Fieldwork and subjects

The research employed an observational and interview-based approach to collect data. The researchers assumed the roles of both observers and interviewers. The observation phase focused on the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice in the study area, the activities of the Imam during the ritual, and the placement of stones in the graveyard after the final day of remembrance. For the interviews, a systematic process was followed to select appropriate sources. Initial contact with the informants was established through various means, such as phone calls, emails, and WhatsApp messages, to effectively arrange and conduct the interviews.

In prior ethnographic studies, a limited number of subjects were involved. For instance, two studies centered on the practices of anesthesia within two British hospital [67]. Similarly, Baan et al. [7] conducted research on funeral rituals in Toraja with only two informants, while Lee et al. [68] examined the experience of depression among Chinese individuals with a sample size of five informants. In accordance with the present study, data collection encompassed interviews with a total of eight carefully selected subjects, as detailed in Table 1. The age range of the informants in this study was 45–73 years old.

The selection process for these subjects adhered to specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Firstly, the informants were required to hold the roles of imams or leaders of the *Batu Qulhu* dhikr (or remembrance) during funeral ceremonies within the Mandailing community. Secondly, they were expected to possess a profound understanding of the norms and values associated with *Batu Qulhu*. Lastly, the informants needed to be Ulama or respected Islamic spiritual leaders within the local community. Proficiency in the Mandailing language was also a prerequisite for informant selection. To identify suitable subjects, consultations were conducted with local authorities, such as the Indonesian Council of Ulama (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*) in Madina, as well as prominent local figures.

The current investigation involved the collection of data during a comprehensive six-month fieldwork period in 2022, specifically spanning from February to July. This fieldwork, which was coordinated by the first and second author, extended over a total of 90 days. The study targeted five specifically chosen districts, selected from a larger pool of 23 districts in the designated study area (refer to Fig. 1). The primary objective of the research was to obtain valuable insights into the cultural practices related to the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in the Madina region. The *Batu Qulhu* event occurring in July 2022 was meticulously observed and documented, employing a combination of photographs and videos for recording. Regarding the data collection process, individual interviews were conducted with each informant, with each session spanning approximately 2 h. These interviews took place at mutually agreed locations, such as the informant's residence, school office, or the household of the deceased individual where the *Batu Qulhu* ritual took place. Thorough and rigorous recording of all pertinent information was undertaken for subsequent analysis purposes.

3.3. Data analysis

The present study utilized a qualitative data analysis approach, encompassing three key stages: 1) data reduction; 2) data presentation; and 3) drawing conclusions. This analytical process unfolded iteratively throughout the research. Initially, during the early phases of data collection, the research maintained a broad and overarching focus, and the observations were comprehensive in nature. As the research progressed and the focus of the study became more apparent, the observations evolved to adopt a more structured approach, enabling the acquisition of specific and targeted data.

The data analysis commenced with data reduction, where the gathered information was streamlined and organized to facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Subsequently, the data were presented in a coherent and meaningful manner to facilitate effective interpretation. Finally, the study derived conclusions based on the analyzed data, allowing for the generation of valuable insights into the cultural practices surrounding the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina. Throughout the research, this qualitative data analysis process occurred in a cyclical manner, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the research topic and a nuanced understanding of the intricacies involved. By transitioning from broad and general observations to more structured and specific data collection, the study achieved a comprehensive and detailed exploration of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual's cultural significance and its relevance within the Mandailing community.

3.4. Ethical consideration

The present investigation was conducted under the auspices of Cluster Interdisciplinary Basic Research, adhering meticulously to stringent ethical guidelines. To ensure ethical compliance, the study received official approval from the Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) University of North Sumatera (UINSU) with the approval number: 0616615683, valid from 1-February-2022, to 31-October-2022. The utmost care was taken in handling the research data and records, which were securely stored on a password-protected computer housed within the Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program, Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, UINSU. Access to these records was strictly restricted to the authors.

In adherence to established ethical standards for data collection and publication, prior to their inclusion in the research, explicit informed consent was acquired from all eight subjects involved, thereby safeguarding their voluntary and informed engagement in the study. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, a coding system was employed, wherein each subject was allocated an initial "P" followed by pertinent demographic particulars, such as age and current profession. Moreover, all photographic materials featured in this investigation were obtained with written consent from all participants in the native *Bahasa* (Indonesian language), thereby emphasizing the paramount importance of respecting their autonomy and privacy throughout the research process. All participants provided written consent to participate, for the data to be published and for inclusion of photographs. All guests at the ritual provided written consent. Permission was sought from the family representative, who was briefed on the study's objectives, note-

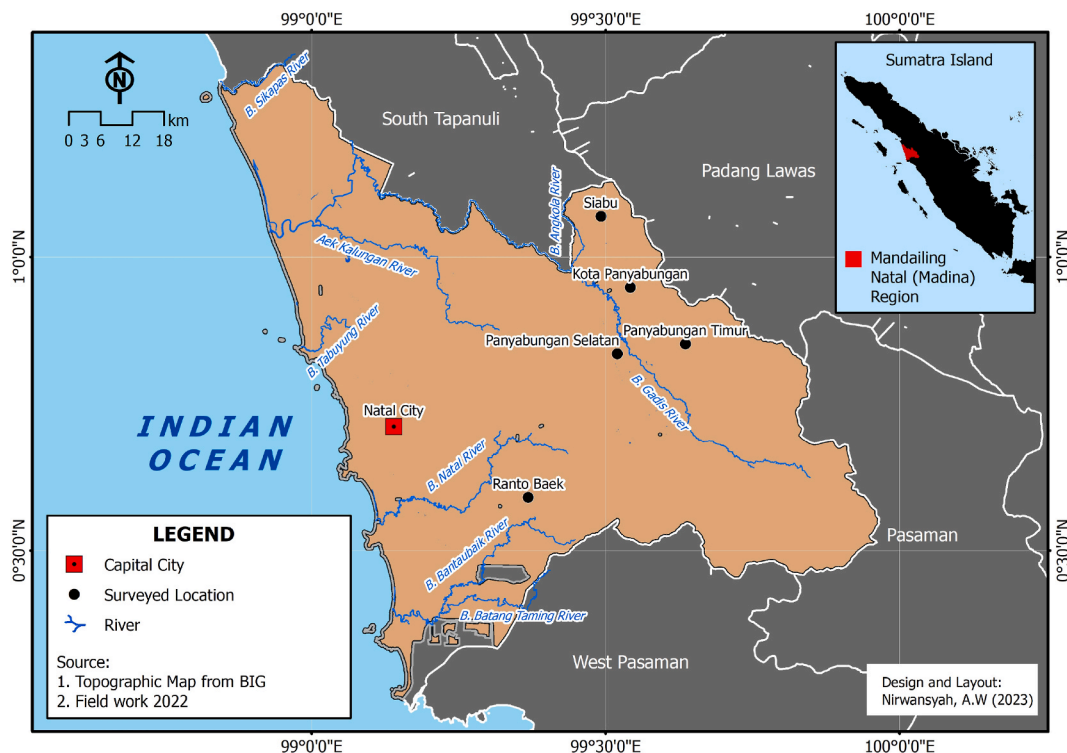


Fig. 1. Area of the current research.

taking, and photography. This unwavering commitment to ethical principles serves to underscore the rigor and integrity of the present inquiry, facilitating an ethically sound exploration of the cultural practices pertaining to the *Batu Qulhu* ritual within the Mandailing community in Madina.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Origin of the rituals

Based on the interview, it is mentioned that Syeikh Haji Mustafa Husein bin Husein Nasution bin Umar Nasution Al-Mandaili (or known as Syeikh Mustafa Husein) (1886–1955), is credited as the first Imam to introduce the practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance at funeral ceremonies. In the beginning, was named by *Batu Balancing* based on the color of the stone used in this ritual. This insight was derived from interviews conducted with P1 (65), an ulama, and P2 (52), a teacher at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Panyabungan. In addition, Syeikh Musthafa Husein is also founder of the *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB)⁵ or Purba Baru Islamic boarding school. The practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been preserved and perpetuated by his students, who have established recitation congregations in various locations such as mosques, prayer rooms, and *surau*.⁶ Notably, the students and alumni of Musthafawiyah have played a significant role in its development and expansion beyond Madina region, with a presence in several other provinces across Indonesia. As the oldest *pesantren* (or boarding school) in North Sumatra, the influence of this practice extends widely, facilitated by the widespread distribution of its students and graduates.

An alternative explanation, provided by P3 (73) an ulama, diverges slightly from the previous informant. He has pointed out that the tradition of using *Batu Qulhu* or *Batu Balancing*⁷ as a medium for remembrance was explained with a slight variation, focusing on the customs upheld by elderly parents, ulama, village *malims* (religious teachers), without mentioning any specific individual. It was a means to alleviate the sorrow experienced by the bereaved and served as a form of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends. In addition to the customary acts of attending funerals and observing mourning rituals, the strategies employed to alleviate the profound grief experienced by individuals extended further. These encompassed multifaceted practices such as providing emotional

⁵ *Pondok Pesantren Musthafawiyah Purba Baru* (PPMPB), was founded in 1912 by Syeikh Musthafa Husein Nasution. This Islamic boarding school is located in Purba Baru sub-district, Madina Regency, North Sumatra [73]. Further reference on this boarding school can be read in Khairurrijal [74].

⁶ *Surau* means a place of worship or a small mosque-like structure. The *surau* typically serves as a communal prayer space or a modest mosque, wherein Muslims congregate for congregational prayers, religious discourses, and other religious engagements.

⁷ Some community in Madina also use term of *Batu Bontar* to refer *Batu Qulhu*.

support, proffering words of guidance and solace to foster resilience and acceptance in the face of adversity. Moreover, individuals were invited to partake in collective prayer sessions, where the use of *Batu Qulhu* stones served as facilitative elements in creating a conducive environment for these spiritual gatherings. P3 further elucidated that this method, referred to as *alak na jolo martakziah*, involved family members, parents, spouses, children, relatives, and neighbors coming together for *tahlilan*.

“In the past people paid tribute to the homes of people who died; parents, wife, husband, children, siblings and neighbors are tahlilan, starting from reciting istighfar, al-Fatihah, tahlil, prayers and concluding selawat. To make the dhikr in congregation more solemn, they add media by using a Batu Balancing (white stone) within size of an adult’s big toe or larger than that. In the past, the white stone was said to be a Batu Balancing, now it is better known as the Batu Qulhu”.

Batu Qulhu ritual refers to the use of certain stone as a means of carrying out dhikr worship. In general, this type of stone is typically known as white pebble. It should be noticed that most of these white pebbles are predominantly comprised of marble, a rock formation characterized by its crystallized carbonates and can easily be found in the riparian zone. Here, the family of the deceased person collect these stones from the nearest river. As mentioned in the interview, this ritual chooses approximately the size of an adult’s thumb to enhance the solemnity of the remembrance (as can be seen in Fig. 2a). During the interview P4 (65), emphasized that in the past, people paid homage to the homes of the deceased, engaging in *tahlilan* rituals that encompassed prayers and concluding with ‘selawat’ (see Fig. 2b). To augment the collective remembrance, *Batu Qulhu*, the size of an adult’s big toe or larger, was employed. Over time, the *Batu Balancing* came to be recognized as the *Batu Qulhu*.

The utilization of *Batu Qulhu* in death ceremonies is also underpinned by the geographical sequences. Firstly, the abundance of rivers in Madina, notably the Batang Gadis River, Batang Natal River, Aek Kalungan River and Angkola River, facilitated the easy availability of these stones in the past. Nowadays, these rivers also threatened by illegal gold mining activities [55], and tend to pollute due to its waste [56]. Secondly, these stones possess distinct characteristics that contribute to their suitability for the purpose at hand. They exhibit a white hue, imparting a visually soothing effect, while their cool and clean appearance further enhances their appeal. Third, these stones demonstrate resilience in withstanding the rigors of varying weather conditions, including heat, cold, and rainfall. Furthermore, the recitation of *Batu Qulhu* rituals is believed by the community to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave.

4.2. The contemporary practice of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community

In the past, Islamic practices in Sumatra have exhibited influences from mystical and shamanistic traditions e.g., Refs. [69,70]. However, it is important to note that the religious activities associated with the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* are not influenced by shamanism, but rather stem solely from religious traditions previously followed by religious scholars, religious teachers, and traditional leaders. Currently, the contemporary practice of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance has been inherited and embraced by Muslim society in Madina. Based on interview with P4 (65), it is evident that in the past, the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance adhered to strict protocols as mentioned in the following statement.

“The tradition of recalling the Batu Qulhu was once a highly regulated practice. It required seeking consent from both the village leader and the syekh. Mastery of the 20 essential attributes of Allah was necessary, alongside the ability to read the Quran and comprehend its teachings. The stones themselves had to possess a pure white hue. The recitation of Qulhu would take place during evening gatherings, where all the stones present had to be utilized fully, leaving no remnants behind before the congregation dispersed”.

These procedures include the following: 1) the procession necessitated obtaining permission from the head of the village⁸ and *tuan guru*⁹ (or *kulifah*); 2) the ritual leader was required to commit to memory and comprehend the twenty obligatory attributes of God, encompassing *nafsiyah* (self-related attributes) nature, *salbiyah* (attributes related to existence) nature, *ma’ani* (abstract attributes of God) nature, and *maknawiyah* (the essential nature and prevalence of *ma’ani*) nature; 3) the officiating Imam was expected to possess proficiency in both written and spoken Arabic-Malay; 4) the Imam leading the remembrance was required to proficiently recite the Qur’an and comprehend its meaning; 5) the *Batu Qulhu* utilized in the ritual had to be of a white hue; and 6) the remembrance of *Batu Qulhu* transpired during evening hours, and all the stones had to be completed within a single procession conducted in the presence of the congregation. Preceding the initiation of the ritual, it is customary for the priest to cleanse himself through the observance of ablution, mirroring the ritualistic cleansing process associated with prayer as mentioned by P7 (60).

Basically, this ritual has many similarities to *tahlilan* tradition especially in the context prayers and recitations. This practice generally has been carried out by many Nahdatul Ulama (NU) community in Sumatra [12,71]. However, in *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, there are five Imams that lead this procession with different assignment. These Imams are voluntarily appointed by the group and relatively flexible based on their own agreement. The priests then read several prayers that beneficial to seek forgiveness for the deceased, his/her family as well to congregation. The Imams also recite some verses from the Surat of the Quran (QS), and praise the God. In this *Batu Qulhu* ritual, the congregation are voluntarily attending the ritual without any formal invitation. The ritual is held in

⁸ One crucial determinant is obtaining authorization from the village leader. The village head holds a position akin to that of a revered monarch, embodying nobility and commanding profound respect.

⁹ *Tuan guru* or teacher serves as a religious authority, serving as an exemplar and establishing a benchmark for societal norms through their words and actions. Additionally, they are often revered as sacred individuals known for their healing abilities, and they serve as a source of supplication for various needs such as well-being, sustenance, companionship, agricultural prosperity, and attainment of blessings.



Fig. 2. a) White pebble collected for *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Mandailing, where each bucket contains 70 to 100 stones; and b) the congregation of the Mandailing Muslim community during this obituary ceremony. (Photography by Sahrul on July 22, 2022).

three consecutive days after the death, and organized by group manager, neighbors and the Imams, and commonly referred to *Serikat Tolong Menolong* (STM) or Union of Help. The Imams and the congregation are artfully arranged in a circular formation, tailored to the venue's conditions. This arrangement allows for the placement of stones in front of the congregation, effortlessly within reach for the worshippers' right hand. During the fieldwork in Panyabungan Kota district, it was noticed that there were more than 30 piles of stones in the congregation. As additional information that commonly they are sitting on the floor covered with *tikar* or mat, but some people also held the ritual with chairs. The priests hold the responsibility for overseeing the course of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual. The following Table 2 describes each Imams' responsibility in *Batu Qulhu* procession.

As presented in Table 2 that the five Imams stone remembrance fulfill distinct roles during funeral rituals. The first Imam recites *wasilah*, invoking blessings upon the prophets, companions, scholars, and deceased parents. The second Imam performs *takhtim*, while the third recites *dhikr tahlil*. The fourth Imam recites selected verses from the Qur'an. The fifth priest concludes with a closing prayer and religious guidance, including expressions of gratitude to Allah SWT and salutations to Prophet Muhammad SAW, supplications for the forgiveness of the deceased's sins, and prayers for the widening of their grave. The sermon includes an oath regarding the deceased's parents, beseeching acceptance of their worship, forgiveness of sins, and enlargement of their grave. Additionally, the imam delivers a sermon during this ritual (text written in Mandailing and the translation can be read in Supplementary file).

The current study also reveals that *Batu Qulhu* ritual in Madina is held in three consecutive days where.

- In the day 1, the remembrance is taken where the Imam start the ceremony. In the first meeting, the priests wear neat clothes, wear caps, turbans and sarongs. Reflecting the figure of a religious expert and placing his position is a person who is highly respected in society. Their sitting position is arranged in a special place, different from the congregation in general. Here, the Imam will also read out the order of the *Batu Qulhu* procession.
- For day 2, similar to the preceding event, the order of events for the first night procession remains unchanged. Prior to commencing the remembrance ceremony, the 'Imam pembaca takhtim' provided an explanation that after the recitation of the *takhtim*, the congregation would engage in the *dhikr* of *Batu Qulhu*, and were kindly requested to maintain their positions until the conclusion of the event. However, in contrast to the previous occasion, on the second night of recitation, *Qulhu* stones are made available to facilitate the *dhikr* and are arranged in a stacked formation in front of the congregation. Subsequently, the *Qulhu* remembrance stones are accumulated in the same location. The prescribed procedure entails the recitation of QS 112: 1–3, followed by the selection of a single stone. For each subsequent repetition, an additional stone is selected, such that two stones are chosen for a two-time reading, three stones for a three-time reading, four stones for a four-time reading, and so forth, in accordance with established practice.
- In day 3, *Batu Qulhu* procession replicates the format observed on the second meeting. However, a notable distinction lies in the extended duration of the *dhikr*, necessitated by the requirement to recite the prayer over each stone in the presence of the congregation. It is imperative to sustain the continuity of the *dhikr* until its completion, without interruption. Subsequent to the remembrance, a collective prayer and *salawat* are gathered. The *Batu Qulhu* employed as aids for remembrance are carefully placed within plastic burlap bags or buckets (as can be seen in Fig. 3a). The event concludes with a religious sermon or *tausiyyah*, wherein expressions of gratitude are articulated on behalf of the congregation and the afflicted families. The content of the religious sermon encompasses themes such as death, the retribution of the grave, and serves as a reminder for individuals to perpetually prepare themselves and enhance their devotion before the arrival of death. This is because all living beings are destined to experience mortality (QS 3: 185), and its arrival cannot be postponed, even if one seeks refuge within a lofty and robust fortress (QS 4: 78).

In addition to the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance, on the fourth day following an individual's passing, *Batu Qulhu* stones are transported to the cemetery and carefully positioned above the burial site, as illustrated in Fig. 3b. The procedure involves the preparation of the grave bed, which includes the leveling off the ground in the designated area assigned for burial. Subsequently, these stones are poured in a manner that commences from the head of the deceased and extends towards their feet. Although typically performed by the

Table 2Construction of each Imam and their task in *Batu Qulhu* procession.

Imam	Local term	Assignment	Quran recitation
First Imam	<i>Imam pembaca silsilah</i>	– Reciting <i>istighfar</i> ^a three times; – Reciting <i>wasilah</i> to nabi (prophet Muhammad pbuh), his appostles, ulama and parents of the deceased person, all Muslim and the congregation	– QS 1: 1-6
Second Imam	<i>Imam pembaca takhtim</i>	– Reciting <i>takhtim</i> (known as “reading for the reward of the deceased” or “reciting for the benefit of the deceased)	– QS 112: 1-3 – QS 113: 1-5 – QS 114: 1-5 – QS 1: 1-7 – QS 2: 1–5; 255; 284-286 – QS 33: 56
Third Imam	<i>Imam pembaca tahlil</i>	– Reciting <i>tahlil</i> (compilation of dhikr) including: • <i>Istighfar</i> ; • Reciting ‘ <i>afdhahu dzikri</i> ’ followed by First <i>syahadat tauhid</i> ^b . The congregation then answer by ‘ <i>hayyun baqi</i> ’; • Reciting second <i>syahadat tauhid</i> . Then answered by the congregation with ‘ <i>hayyun maujud</i> ’; • Reciting the third <i>syahadat tauhid</i> . And answered by all attendance by ‘ <i>hayyun maqsud</i> ’. – Finally, reciting <i>syahadat tauhid</i> together with the congregation 100 times. Here the congregation gradually loud their praise and at same time shaking the head	
Fourth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca Al Baqarah</i>	– Reciting some verses from the Quran that contains concept and advise about calamities	– QS 2: 152-156 – QS 67: 1-2
Fifth Imam	<i>Imam pembaca doa</i>	– Reciting closing prayer, with the following structure: • <i>Basmallah</i> ^c ; • Praise to the Creator and His messenger (Muhammad pbuh); • Prayers for all Moslem (men and women); • Prayers for the deceased person and the family; • Prayers for attendance in the congregation;	

^a The act of attempting forgiveness from the Almighty God, commonly by saying ‘*astağfirullāhu*’.

^b The *syahadat tauhid* contains declaration of belief in the oneness of God Almighty.

^c *Basmallah* is phrase mention to the God before beginning any action or speech. It spells ‘*Bismillahi rāḥmani rāḥim*’. It means: in the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful.

Source: compiled based on interview with P1 (65)



Fig. 3. *Batu Qulhu* remembrance by adult male where a) the organizer has collected and kept the stones back into the plastic sack for fourth day of casting procession; and b) where *Batu Qulhu* is finally poured on the grave of deceased person. (photographs of the ritual [a] held at P4 residence on July 22, 2022; and [b] white stone teeming in the day 4) (taken by Sahrul).

bereaved family, this task can also be undertaken by others, such as neighbors or relatives. During the placement of the stones on the grave, it is customary to recite the phrase “*Bismillahi milata ‘ala Rasulullah*,” which translates to “In the name of Allah and in the religion of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh.” The recitation performed during this act is identical to the prayer recitation conducted during the interment of the deceased’s body. It is noteworthy that the selection of this specific recitation lacks a distinct foundational basis but rather originates from established tradition.

Presently, *Batu Qulhu* dhikr has undergone significant transformations over time, likely influenced by environmental factors, evolving understandings within the community, and technological advance, as well as societal changes. Presently, the implementation of the ritual varies across different areas of Madina. Traditionally, some individuals engage in the *Batu Qulhu* practice following the *Maghrib* prayer (after sunset) or around 6.30 p.m.–7.00 p.m. local time and typically after the *Isya* prayer (7.30 p.m.–8.00 p.m.), collectively performed at the mosque during evening as mentioned by P8 (55). Among adult women, it takes place in the evening preceding *Maghrib*, while among the male youth (*naposo bulung*) and female youth (*nauli bulung*), it occurs in the afternoon (after *Asr* or

around 3.00 p.m.) as mentioned by P6 (45). Adult male worshipers partake in this practice during the evening after the *Isya* prayer on the first, second, and third days following a person’s demise. As mentioned earlier, the *Batu Qulhu* employed in this remembrance ritual is a stone recognized by the bereaved family, retrieved from the river. To ensure cleanliness, the stones are consistently washed and kept in a plastic sack or a large container. Nevertheless, owing to the evolving perspectives of individuals and the limited availability of such rocks in riverbeds, these stones are now obtainable from multiple outlets across the Madina region, as noted by P5 (50):

“*Batu Qulhu* are taken from the river by the family, if they are dirty, they are cleaned. Now, *Batu Qulhu* are easy to get and are sold in flower shops and building material store”).

4.3. Aspect of norms of *Batu Qulhu* ritual

The *Batu Qulhu* remembrance practice, introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein, holds significant cultural value in the Mandailing community of Madina. This ritual utilizes white pebbles from nearby rivers for dhikr worship and to alleviate the suffering of the deceased in the grave. It has been preserved and perpetuated by Syeikh Mustafa Husein’s students and alumni, who have established recitation congregations in the region. As the oldest pesantren in North Sumatra, the influence of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends widely beyond Madina, with its students and graduates playing a significant role in its development and expansion. Equivalent cultural customs, such as the *tahlilan* tradition observed within the NU community in Sumatra, are also prevalent in Java under the same name. In Java, the Muslim community holds *tahlilan* remembrances on many occasions, a tradition historically introduced by the *Wali Songo* (The Nine Saints of Islam) [12].

Strict protocols surround the observance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance. Prior permission from village and religious leaders, referred to as *Tuan Guru*, is required. The officiating Imam must possess proficiency in Arabic-Malay language. These protocols ensure the solemnity and authenticity of the ritual, aligning with the importance placed on established rituals and cultural heritage. The *tahlilan* tradition within the NU community also follows specific rituals, emphasizing the shared values of upholding traditions and seeking solace in times of mourning. As previously mentioned, obtaining permission from both village and religious leaders is necessary, as indicated by P2 (52):

‘*mangido izin Parjolo tu Tuan Guru*’ (English: Ask permission from *Tuan Guru* first). Commonly answered by the teacher with ‘*olo silahken acara dilanjut*’ (English: Okay, please continue the ritual), ‘*marimom mau au*’ (English: I will follow).

Batu Qulhu remembrance serves as a form of communal support, uniting family members, relatives, neighbors, and friends in times of sorrow. This fosters a sense of unity and solidarity within the Mandailing community, reflecting the value placed on collective resilience. Similar communal support can be found in other practices, such as the collective remembrance gatherings associated with the *tahlilan* tradition, reinforcing the cultural value of community bonds and support networks. The significance of *Batu Qulhu* remembrance extends beyond its cultural and spiritual aspects. It represents a cherished cultural heritage embraced by the Muslim society in Madina, highlighting the cultural values of spirituality, tradition, and the preservation of identity. This ritual also plays crucial role in fostering social cohesion through different ways, including community participation, shared religious practices, as well transmission of values and traditions. This study also highlights solidarity aspect as other form of social cohesion in the societal level [20]. While specific to the Mandailing community, similar practices can be observed in other regions in Indonesia, especially in the traditional Islam community [4,72]. They are still fulfilling the shared human need to honor the deceased, find solace in collective rituals, and preserve cultural traditions as integral elements of identity and social cohesion. For a comprehensive overview of the norm aspects in the tradition of *Batu Qulhu* in the Mandailing community, please refer to Table 3.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Batu Qulhu* remembrance ritual stands as a significant cultural and religious practice within the Mandailing community’s funeral ceremonies. This tradition, which involves using stones for dhikr worship, holds deep historical and spiritual

Table 3
Identified aspect of norms in the practice of *Batu Qulhu* Remembrance.

Aspect of norm	Description
Preservation of traditions	The culture emphasizes the preservation and perpetuation of rituals and practices, such as the <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance, which was introduced by Syeikh Mustafa Husein and continued by his students and alumni. The students and graduates of Musthafawiyah Islamic boarding school play a significant role in preserving and expanding this practice.
Community support	The culture values community support during times of grief and mourning. The tradition of using <i>Batu Qulhu</i> serves as a means of support from family, relatives, neighbors, and friends, helping to alleviate sorrow and foster resilience.
Spiritual gatherings	Collective prayer sessions and remembrance gatherings are highly valued in the culture. The use of the stones during these gatherings creates a conducive environment for spiritual practices and collective remembrance.
Respect for the deceased	The culture emphasizes respect and care for the deceased. The ritual of collecting white pebbles, predominantly marble, from nearby rivers to be used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> remembrance shows reverence for the departed.
Connection to nature	The culture maintains a connection with nature, as the stones used in <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals are collected from rivers. The easy availability of these stones in the past and their resilience in varying weather conditions highlight the importance of nature in the culture.
Alleviation of suffering	The recitation of <i>Batu Qulhu</i> rituals is believed to alleviate the suffering endured by the deceased in the grave. This demonstrates a value of compassion and empathy within the culture.

roots. While its origins can be traced back to Syekh Mustafa Husein, who introduced the ritual, variations in accounts highlight the complex nature of its origin. Over time, the procession of *Batu Qulhu* has undergone modifications to streamline its organization, exemplifying the adaptive nature of cultural practices while maintaining their essence. Although *Batu Qulhu* remembrance is specific to the Mandailing community, similar commemorative practices can be found in other regions. These rituals reflect the universal human need to honor and remember the deceased, seeking solace through collective ceremonies, and preserving cultural traditions as integral components of identity and social cohesion. *Batu Qulhu* ritual serves as a testament to the rich cultural and religious heritage of the Mandailing community in North Sumatra, encapsulating collective mourning, spiritual devotion, and the preservation of cultural identity. By adhering to these rituals, individuals reaffirm their cultural identity and strengthen their sense of belonging within the community. Shared cultural practices during funeral ceremonies serve as markers of group identity, fostering a sense of solidarity among participants. As funeral ceremonies continue to play a pivotal role in communities worldwide, understanding and appreciating the significance of these rituals contributes to our broader knowledge of human beliefs, traditions, and the ways in which we commemorate and honor the departed. The employed methods in this study allows for an in-depth exploration of the cultural, social, and emotional dimensions surrounding funeral practices within specific communities. This approach provides nuanced insights into the significance, symbolism, and evolving meanings attributed to funeral rituals, thereby enriching scholarly discourse and bridging gaps in understanding of this complex phenomenon.

While this study presents a preliminary investigation into the *Batu Qulhu* ritual, it acknowledges certain limitations. The absence of historical documentation detailing the ritual within the Mandailing community necessitates a proposed historical approach through extensive literature review, drawing upon the writings of earlier ulama. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the limited number of informants and the specific observed processions may not fully capture the diverse procedural variations of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual across the entire Madina region. Recognizing the modifications made by different communities based on the guidance of their Imams or practical considerations further adds to the complexity of the ritual. Given these findings, the study recommends the cultural preservation and educational promotion of the *Batu Qulhu* ritual for the benefit of future generations. The creation of appropriate documentation, such as books and videos, accessible through various platforms including social media, can contribute to the wider dissemination of knowledge and understanding of the ritual. These efforts support the cultural preservation of the *Batu Qulhu* tradition and foster greater appreciation among the Mandailing community and beyond.

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Data availability statement

Data included in article/supplementary material/referenced in article.

Ethics statement

This study was ethically reviewed and approved by Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) at the University of North Sumatera (UINSU) under approval number 0616615683. All participants, including those photographed, provided informed consent to participate in the study.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Sahrul: Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Anang Widhi Nirwansyah:** Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Software, Formal analysis. **Seyithan Demirdag:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Resources. **Afrahul Fadhila Daulai:** Writing – review & editing, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e33363>.

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