



The Symbolic Meaning of River Stones in the Death Rituals of the Batu Brak Community, West Lampung Regency: An Analysis of the Sacred and the Profane

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Abstract

This study examines the use of stones in the funeral traditions of the Sukabumi Village community, Batu Brak Subdistrict, West Lampung Regency, focusing on their symbolic meanings, sacred and profane dimensions, and role in religious experiences and honoring the deceased. This research employed a qualitative design with a phenomenological approach. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews with three informants, and documentation during fieldwork conducted between June and August 2026. Data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, with source and technique triangulation used to strengthen the credibility of the findings. The results indicate that stones collected from nearby rivers serve as practical aids for *zikir*, *tahlilan*, and prayers for the deceased. Their significance extends beyond their physical function, reflecting customary continuity, collective identity, religious devotion, and social solidarity. The stones are understood as a *wasilah* (means) to support devotional practices rather than objects possessing independent supernatural power. The study demonstrates how local customs are integrated into religious life through shared intentions, inherited practices, and communal participation. However, the findings are specific to the local context and cannot be generalized to all Muslim communities. This research contributes to understanding the relationship between material objects, religious practices, and local funeral traditions.

Keywords: Stone Tradition, Funeral Rituals, Sacred and Profane, Religious Experience, Local Customs.

Introduction

Death is an integral part of human life and is interpreted differently according to the belief systems and cultural traditions of each society. These interpretations are reflected in death rituals, which extend beyond the treatment of the deceased to encompass religious beliefs, social relationships, and the transmission of cultural values. Zaluchu, for example, demonstrates that death rituals among the Nias people contribute to the preservation of traditional values while strengthening social order and community cohesion (Zaluchu, 2025). This suggests that death rituals constitute an important arena in which religious beliefs, customary practices, and collective identities are expressed and maintained.

In the performance of these rituals, material objects may acquire meanings that extend beyond their practical functions. Salma shows that objects used in the funeral rituals of the Sumpur Kudus community, including cloth, bamboo, umbrellas, and plants, embody affection for the deceased and transcendental values (Salma, 2021). Similarly, Duli et al explain that Simbuang, or menhirs, in the death rituals of Toraja nobility function as symbols associated with ancestral reverence (Duli et al., 2022). These studies demonstrate that ritual objects cannot

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be understood solely through their physical characteristics. Their significance emerges through the beliefs, practices, and interpretations developed within particular cultural contexts.

Death rituals also reveal the interaction between religious commitments and social traditions. Manan et al. demonstrate that funeral rituals among the Acehnese express religious hopes for blessings and forgiveness for the deceased while reinforcing kinship relationships and respect for bereaved families (Manan et al., 2024). Tripathi, through an examination of Hindu death rituals, further illustrates how experiences of the sacred are shaped by culturally situated ritual practices (Tripathi, 2022). In the Indonesian context, Maulana et al. examine the religious dimensions of Balinese Hindu death rituals (Maulana et al., 2022), while Permadi et al. demonstrate that ritual materials may simultaneously perform practical functions and embody sacred meanings (Permadi et al., 2025). Collectively, these studies indicate that the relationship between material objects, religious practices, and cultural traditions is dynamic rather than fixed.

Nevertheless, an important theoretical question remains concerning how material objects participate in the negotiation between formal religious teachings and locally inherited customs. This issue is particularly relevant in Muslim communities, where religious practices may be performed through culturally specific materials and customary procedures. Rather than assuming that religious orthodoxy and local tradition necessarily exist in opposition, their relationship needs to be examined through the ways communities interpret, adapt, and legitimize particular practices. The concept of *'urf*, referring to customary practices recognized within Islamic legal thought under particular conditions, provides one perspective for examining the relationship between local traditions and Islamic religious life. However, the presence of a customary practice does not automatically establish its status as an accepted form of *'urf* in Islamic jurisprudence. Its meaning and legitimacy must be understood in relation to the community's interpretations, religious understandings, and actual practices.

This theoretical problem becomes visible in the death-related traditions of Sukabumi Village, Batu Brak Subdistrict, West Lampung Regency, Indonesia. Based on preliminary interviews, members of the community collect small stones from a nearby river following a burial ceremony. The stones are cleaned and subsequently used as aids for counting *zikir* during *hadiyah* and *tahlilan* gatherings. Their use also forms part of the *ngattak batu* practice at the grave on the third or seventh day after burial. These practices demonstrate that an ordinary natural material becomes incorporated into a sequence of activities associated with Islamic remembrance, prayer, and the commemoration of the deceased. The stones' significance therefore cannot be explained exclusively by their availability or usefulness; it also requires attention to the religious and cultural contexts in which they are selected and used.

The use of pebbles raises a question that extends beyond the identification of a local tradition: how does a community negotiate the relationship between Islamic devotional practices and inherited material customs? The stones may function as practical aids in performing *zikir*, while their selection, preparation, and continued use are embedded in locally established ritual procedures. These dimensions should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of

syncretism, nor should the practice be assumed to represent a direct continuation of a pre-Islamic tradition. Instead, the relationship between Islamic religious commitments and local custom must be established empirically by examining the meanings attributed to the stones, the explanations provided by community members, and the ways the practice is understood within their religious and social lives.

This study consequently addresses a theoretical gap in the understanding of ritual materiality and religious-cultural negotiation. Previous studies have examined objects in death rituals as expressions of cultural identity, ancestral reverence, religious symbolism, and social cohesion (Duli et al., 2022) (Manan et al., 2024) (Salma, 2021). However, these perspectives leave room for further analysis of how an ordinary natural object becomes incorporated into an Islamic ritual setting and how its practical use interacts with locally transmitted customary meanings. The central problem is therefore not merely the limited documentation of pebble use in Sukabumi Village, but the relationship between material practices, Islamic devotional life, and the interpretation of local custom. Examining this relationship makes it possible to understand religious-cultural negotiation as a process through which communities assign meaning to ritual objects, maintain customary practices, and interpret their compatibility with their religious commitments.

To investigate this problem, the study examines the origins, collection, preparation, ritual use, and meanings of stones in the death-related traditions of the community in Sukabumi Village, Batu Brak Subdistrict, West Lampung Regency. Clifford Geertz's symbolic approach is used to interpret the meanings attached to the stones within the community's cultural system. Mircea Eliade's concepts of the sacred and the profane provide an analytical perspective for examining how ordinary material objects acquire significance within ritual contexts. Gerardus van der Leeuw's phenomenology of religion further supports an examination of the religious meanings and experiences expressed through the practice. These perspectives are employed to explore the relationship between materiality, religious devotion, and local custom without presupposing a historical continuity or a particular theological status that the empirical evidence has not established. Ultimately, this study seeks to explain how pebbles become meaningful within Islamic death rituals and what their use reveals about the negotiation between Islamic devotional practices and customary traditions in the everyday religious life of the Sukabumi Village community.

Literature Review

Clifford Geertz's Theory of Symbolic Interpretation

Clifford Geertz's theory of symbolic interpretation views culture as a system of meaning that is formed, maintained, and understood through symbols in social life. From this perspective, symbols do not merely function as signs that represent an object, but also serve as a medium for conveying a group's values, beliefs, and worldview. Therefore, culture must be understood through an interpretation of the meanings that people assign to their actions, objects, and social practices. Geertz's interpretive approach emphasizes cultural context as a crucial element in understanding religious phenomena.

Shonhaji explains Geertz's thoughts on the relationship between religion and Javanese culture, including the process by which local traditions encounter religions that develop within society (Shonhaji, 2010). Meanwhile, Tago and Shonhaji demonstrate that religion and society have a reciprocal relationship: religion influences social behavior, while local culture helps shape the community's expressions of religiosity (Tago & Shonhaji, 2013). Both studies are relevant for understanding that religious practices do not take place in a social space separate from culture. However, Geertz's ideas must also be applied critically to ensure that symbolic interpretations do not overlook the dimensions of religious teachings and the social context that influence a given practice (Tajdin, 2022).

In this study, the theory of symbolic interpretation is used to analyze the meaning of stones in the death-related traditions of the community in Sukabumi Village, Batu Brak Subdistrict, West Lampung Regency. Stones, which are physically natural objects, can acquire specific meanings when selected, cleansed, and used in a series of religious activities, such as zikir, hadiyah, tahlilan, and ngattak batu. The analysis does not stop at the practical functions of the stones but focuses on how the community explains, understands, and passes down their use. Through this perspective, the symbolic meanings of the stones are explored based on the community's views, ritual experiences, and the cultural and religious values associated with these practices.

Mircea Eliade's Theory of the Sacred and the Profane

Mircea Eliade explains religious life through the distinction between the sacred and the profane. The sacred relates to the experience of something considered to possess special religious qualities, while the profane refers to everyday life that is not specifically situated within the framework of sacred experience. This distinction is not determined solely by the physical form of an object but is related to the way humans experience, understand, and assign a specific significance to it. Thus, ordinary objects in daily life can acquire religious meaning when placed within the context of religious practice.

Yahyaoui's study underscores the relevance of Eliade's thought in understanding the relationship between the sacred and the profane, as well as the role of religious experience in the construction of meaning (Yahyaoui, 2022). In line with this, Theo discusses Eliade's ideas regarding the restoration of sanctity and the tension between the sacred and the profane in human life (Theo, 2022). Both of these studies show that the concepts of the sacred and the profane can be used to examine how humans distinguish, experience, and assign specific meanings to elements of daily life. Nevertheless, the designation of an object as sacred must be based on evidence regarding the religious experiences and understandings of the community, not merely on the object's presence in a ritual.

In the context of this study, the theories of the sacred and the profane are used to examine the transformation of stones from natural objects commonly found near rivers into objects used in death-related traditions. The analysis focuses on how the community understands the processes of collecting, cleansing, using, and placing stones in ritual activities. The profane meaning can be examined through the material function of stones as natural objects and tools in the performance of specific activities, while the sacred dimension is explored through beliefs, religious experiences, and the specific meanings that the community

tangibly ascribes to their use. Thus, this theory helps explain the relationship between the material function of stones and their potential religious dimensions without assuming that the stones themselves possess sacred power.

Gerardus van der Leeuw's Phenomenology of Religion

Gerardus van der Leeuw's phenomenology of religion seeks to understand religious phenomena through the ways in which they manifest themselves and are experienced by the people who practice them. This approach focuses on religious experience, ritual acts, the objects used, and the meanings that emerge in people's relationship with that which is understood to have religious significance. In his work *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, van der Leeuw developed a phenomenological approach to examining various forms and manifestations of religion by focusing on human experience and the ways in which people respond to phenomena considered to be religiously meaningful.

Tuckett revisits van der Leeuw's phenomenological approach and emphasizes the importance of accurately understanding his conceptual framework in the study of religion (Tuckett, 2016). This phenomenological approach can be used to avoid premature judgments regarding a religious practice, as researchers first seek to understand how that practice is carried out and interpreted by its practitioners. In practice, an understanding of informants' experiences must still be accompanied by contextual analysis and a critical stance, so that descriptions of religious experiences are not immediately taken as proof of the theological truth of a belief.

In this study, the phenomenology of religion is used to understand the meaning of honoring the deceased as reflected in the use of stones in the death-related traditions of the community in Sukabumi Village. The focus is on the experiences of families and community members in participating in a series of rituals, their interpretations of the use of stones, and the values of respect they express through these actions. Through interviews, observations, and documentation, the study examines how stones are understood in relation to prayers, zikir, tahlilan, and activities at gravesites. This approach allows the researcher to describe the community's religious experiences from their own perspectives without first assuming that these practices are a continuation of past beliefs or a form of syncretism.

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to understand how community members experience and interpret the use of stones in death-related traditions in Sukabumi Village, Batu Brak Subdistrict, West Lampung Regency, Indonesia. The phenomenological approach was used to explore participants' lived experiences and interpretations of the practice within its religious and cultural context (Harahap & Murhayati, 2025). The study focused on how stones acquire meaning through their use in local death-related rituals and how community members understand their significance.

Fieldwork was conducted from June to August 2026, covering both preliminary research and the main research phase. Data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Three informants were purposively selected based on their knowledge of and involvement in local death traditions: Ahmad Sodri, a religious figure; Suhadi, a traditional leader; and Madrisad, a community leader. During the three-month

fieldwork period, the researcher directly observed three *ngattak batu* rituals associated with three separate deaths in the community. The observations revealed that the three rituals followed the same general sequence of activities. The researcher documented the preparation and use of stones, the stages of the ritual, participants' involvement, and the cultural and religious meanings associated with the practice. In-depth interviews and documentation were used to complement the observations and clarify how community members understood the role of stones in these death-related traditions.

Data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary materials were organized to identify recurring patterns concerning the functions, uses, and meanings of stones in death-related traditions. The credibility of the findings was strengthened through source triangulation by comparing information obtained from the three informants and technique triangulation by examining the consistency of interview accounts, observations, and documentation.

The analysis was guided by three complementary theoretical perspectives. Clifford Geertz's symbolic interpretation was used to examine the cultural meanings attributed to stones within the community's symbolic system. Mircea Eliade's concepts of the sacred and the profane were applied to explore how ordinary stones acquire particular significance within ritual contexts. Gerardus van der Leeuw's phenomenology of religion informed the analysis of religious experiences and the meanings associated with honoring the deceased. These perspectives served as analytical frameworks for interpreting the empirical data rather than as separate research methods. Their combined application enabled the study to examine the relationship between material objects, religious practices, and local customs without presupposing a historical connection between contemporary stone use and earlier megalithic traditions.

Results and Discussion

Stones as Symbols in the Funeral Traditions of the Sukabumi Village Community, Batu Brak Subdistrict, West Lampung Regency

The use of stones in the death traditions of Sukabumi Village, Batu Brak Subdistrict, West Lampung Regency, represents a customary practice in which material objects are incorporated into a sequence of Islamic devotional activities and inherited local traditions. Based on field observations conducted from June to August 2026, the practice involved collecting stones from a nearby river, cleaning them, using them to count *zikir* recitations, and incorporating them into the *ngattak batu* activity near the grave. The researcher observed three separate death-related events during this period, and the general sequence of the practice was consistent across the three occasions. These observations indicate that the use of stones is not an isolated action but a recognizable component of the community's funeral tradition.

Ahmad Sodri, a religious figure interviewed on 7 August 2026, explained the use of stones by relating it to religious narratives concerning material objects and graves: *"Regarding its origins, the use of objects in death traditions is associated with the account of the Prophet Muhammad when he passed by two graves. At that time, the Prophet took a fresh palm frond, divided it into two parts, and placed one part on each grave."* Ahmad's explanation illustrates how a religious narrative informs his understanding of the local practice. Nevertheless, the

account should be treated as the informant's interpretation rather than evidence that the contemporary use of stones originated directly from the prophetic incident involving palm fronds. The two practices involve different materials and actions, and a historical connection between them has not been established by the present fieldwork.

The customary dimension of the practice is further explained by Madrisad, a community leader interviewed on 22 August 2026: *"The use of stones has existed since the time of our elders. The community today is essentially continuing what earlier generations practiced."* This account identifies intergenerational transmission as an important element in maintaining the tradition. The continued use of stones reflects the community's recognition of an inherited practice and its place within collective responses to death. The meaning of the stones therefore extends beyond their physical characteristics to include the customary knowledge associated with their selection and use.

Suhadi, a traditional leader interviewed on 14 August 2026, similarly emphasized the relationship between customary continuity and spiritual values: *"Maintaining the use of stones therefore also means preserving customary traditions and sustaining spiritual values that have long existed within the community."* Suhadi's explanation suggests that the practice is maintained not merely because it has been repeated over time, but also because community members associate it with inherited values. However, the persistence of a tradition does not automatically establish the historical origin of its symbols. In this case, the interviews support the interpretation of stones as part of contemporary collective memory, but they do not establish that the practice derives from prehistoric megalithic stone veneration.

These findings can be analyzed through Clifford Geertz's symbolic interpretation, which approaches culture as a system of meanings expressed through symbols and socially shared practices. From this perspective, the stones in Sukabumi Village can be understood as material symbols whose significance is shaped by the community's repeated actions and interpretations. Their collection, preparation, use during devotional activities, and placement near the grave reproduce a recognizable customary sequence. The stones consequently represent not only a practical object but also the continuity of a tradition associated with death, remembrance, and communal participation.

This interpretation is consistent with Romi and Purwanto's study of death rituals in Baduy society, which demonstrates that ritual symbols express a community's understanding of death and the relationship between the living and the deceased (Romi & Purwanto, 2022). Similarly, Rahman, Setiyani, and AlGayyar explain that symbols embedded in local traditions can transmit cultural, social, and spiritual values while contributing to collective identity and social cohesion (Rahman et al., 2024). Although these studies examine different cultural settings, they support the analytical proposition that the meaning of a ritual object cannot be determined solely by its physical form; its significance must also be examined through the practices and understandings associated with it.

In Sukabumi Village, the symbolic significance of stones is closely related to their role in devotional activities. Ahmad Sodri clarified that the stones are not the ultimate focus of the ritual: *"Besides serving as a counting aid, the stones are regarded as a wasilah, or means that assists the performance of devotional acts. The stones are therefore not the primary purpose of the ritual and are not objects that possess power in themselves."* This statement provides an important qualification to the symbolic interpretation. The stones have a recognizable place within the customary ritual, but the religious figure explicitly describes them as an instrumental

means rather than independent sources of supernatural power. Their significance is therefore associated with the activities in which they are used and the meanings the community attributes to those activities. This distinction prevents the analysis from assuming that the presence of a material object in a ritual necessarily indicates the worship of that object or a belief in its independent spiritual efficacy.

The selection of stones also reflects practical considerations. Madrisad explained: “*Besides being easy to find, stones are selected because they do not deteriorate easily and are durable.*” This explanation shows that the practice is shaped partly by the availability and physical durability of the material. The stones are obtained from the surrounding environment because they are accessible and suitable for repeated handling. Their practical usefulness forms one dimension of the practice, while their continued incorporation into funeral activities gives them a culturally recognizable role. These dimensions are complementary rather than contradictory: a material object can be selected for practical reasons and subsequently acquire symbolic significance through repeated social and religious use.

The relationship between Islamic devotional activities and inherited custom is another important dimension of the findings. In Sukabumi Village, the stones are used during *zikir* and *tahlilan* and subsequently incorporated into *ngattak batu*. This sequence places the material object within a local religious setting, while the explanations of the informants indicate that the practice is also maintained as an inherited custom. Mahendra, Asmawi, and Al Hakim’s study of the *beras kafarat* tradition in Kerinci similarly illustrates how a death-related custom can carry religious and social significance within a local Muslim community (Mahendra et al., 2025). Such comparisons show the importance of examining how local practices are understood and maintained within their specific social and religious contexts, rather than presuming that all customary elements have the same theological status.

The concept of ‘*urf*’ can help frame this relationship, provided that it is used carefully. In Islamic jurisprudence, ‘*urf*’ refers to recognized custom that may be considered in legal reasoning under particular conditions. The existence of a customary practice does not automatically establish its legal validity. In the present case, the observations and interviews demonstrate that the use of stones is maintained alongside Islamic devotional activities. They do not, by themselves, establish a definitive jurisprudential ruling on *ngattak batu*. The practice should therefore be understood empirically as a local custom performed within an Islamic devotional setting, while questions about its legal status require a separate analysis of relevant jurisprudential principles and evidence.

Overall, the findings show that stones in the death traditions of Sukabumi Village possess interconnected practical, symbolic, and customary dimensions. Their physical availability and durability explain part of their selection, while their repeated use in devotional activities and their transmission across generations give them a recognizable cultural meaning. Through Geertz’s symbolic perspective, the stones can be interpreted as material expressions of collective memory and customary continuity. At the same time, the informants’ explanations indicate that the stones are understood by the religious leader as a *wasilah*, rather than as objects possessing independent power. The findings therefore support an interpretation of *ngattak batu* as a locally meaningful customary practice embedded in Islamic devotional life, without assuming an unverified historical connection to prehistoric megalithic traditions.

The Sacred and Profane Dimensions of Stone Use in the Funeral Traditions of the Sukabumi Village Community, Batu Brak Subdistrict, West Lampung Regency

The use of stones in the funeral traditions of the Sukabumi Village community demonstrates the interaction between sacred religious activities and profane aspects of everyday life. Based on field observations conducted during three funeral-related events between June and August 2026, stones were collected from a nearby river, cleaned, and prepared for use during zikir, tahlilan, and prayers dedicated to deceased individuals. The practice reveals that the stones have both practical functions and religious significance within the community. Their everyday material characteristics make them accessible and durable, while their use during devotional activities connects them to the community's religious experiences.

From the perspective of the sacred and the profane, these two dimensions can be distinguished by the context in which the stones are used. The profane dimension relates to the stones as ordinary natural objects that can be found in the surrounding environment, collected, washed, and used as practical tools. The sacred dimension emerges from the religious activities accompanying their use, particularly zikir, prayer, and tahlilan. Therefore, the stones are not inherently sacred objects; rather, their significance is shaped by the religious context and the meanings attributed to them by the community.

This understanding is consistent with the findings of Huda et al., who examined the sawur tradition in Islamic funeral practices through Émile Durkheim's theory of the sacred and the profane (Huda et al., 2023). Their study demonstrates how elements used in funeral rituals become associated with religious values through their participation in prayer, charitable intentions, and customary practices. Similarly, the use of stones in Sukabumi Village illustrates how an ordinary material object can become part of a religious practice without necessarily being regarded as possessing supernatural power in itself.

This distinction is also reflected in the explanation provided by Ahmad Sodri, a religious figure in the village, who stated: *"The stones themselves are not considered to possess power. They are not objects that can provide benefits through their own power. The stones are only a wasilah, a means that helps people perform devotional acts, particularly by counting zikir."* This statement indicates that the community distinguishes between the physical object and the religious act performed with its assistance. The stone serves as a practical medium for counting devotional recitations, while the spiritual purpose remains directed toward Allah SWT. Its significance therefore lies not in the stone's material substance alone, but in the intention, prayer, and devotional practice associated with it.

The sacred dimension is further demonstrated by the social relationships formed through funeral rituals. Suhadi, a traditional leader, explained: *"Regarding sacredness, the community places greater emphasis on the activities and spiritual values accompanying the use of the stones. The stones are used when people perform tahlilan, zikir, and prayers for the deceased."* The statement emphasizes that sacredness is associated with the religious activities and intentions surrounding the stones rather than with the objects themselves. Funeral rituals also create opportunities for relatives and community members to gather, assist the bereaved family, and participate in collective prayer. Research by Manan et al, on Islamic burial rituals in Aceh similarly found that funeral practices can express religious devotion, respect for bereaved families, the affirmation of local customs, and the strengthening of kinship relationships (Manan et al., 2024). Although the cultural context differs, this comparison helps explain how funeral rituals may unite spiritual commitments with social responsibilities.

The profane dimension can also be observed in the practical reasons for selecting stones. Madrisad, a community leader, explained: *"Besides being easy to find, stones are*

selected because they do not deteriorate easily and are durable.” This explanation shows that the choice of stones is influenced by their availability and physical characteristics. Such considerations belong to everyday practical life and demonstrate that customary religious practices are not separated from material needs. Instead, the community uses readily available natural resources to support its devotional activities. The practical function of stones and their religious significance therefore coexist within the same tradition.

Furthermore, the sacred and profane dimensions are connected through the community’s collective participation. When stones are used during tahlilan, zikir, and prayers for the deceased, an ordinary object becomes integrated into a meaningful religious setting. Nevertheless, this transformation should not be interpreted as proof that the stones acquire independent supernatural power. Rather, it reflects how community members assign religious significance to an object through intention, repeated practice, and shared understandings. Research on death rituals and social relationships also emphasizes that collective mourning practices can reinforce social ties and a sense of belonging among participants (Prickett & Timmermans, 2022).

Based on the findings, the sacred and profane dimensions of stone use in Sukabumi Village are interconnected rather than mutually exclusive. The stones remain ordinary natural objects in their material form, but their use within devotional activities gives them a particular religious and social significance. The sacred dimension is expressed through prayer, zikir, tahlilan, and the intention to honor the deceased, whereas the profane dimension is reflected in the stones’ availability, durability, and practical use. This interpretation demonstrates how the community integrates religious devotion, local customs, and everyday material resources into its funeral traditions.

Religious Experiences and Honoring the Deceased

The use of stones in the funeral traditions of the Sukabumi Village community reflects religious experiences through which people express devotion, remembrance, and respect for deceased family members. Based on observations and interviews conducted between June and August 2026, the use of stones forms part of a series of religious activities, including zikir, tahlilan, and collective prayers for the deceased. These activities demonstrate that the tradition is not merely a customary procedure but also a setting in which community members express their religious commitments and maintain emotional and social connections with those who have passed away.

For the community, honoring the deceased is primarily expressed through prayer and devotional acts rather than through the stone itself. Ahmad Sodri, a local religious figure, explained: *“The essential elements are prayer, zikir, devotional acts, and the community’s intention directed toward Allah for the person who has died.”* This statement indicates that the religious meaning of the tradition is grounded in the community’s intention to pray for the deceased. The stones function as a practical medium that assists the performance of devotional activities, while the spiritual purpose remains directed toward Allah SWT. Consequently, the practice should be understood through the religious experiences and intentions of its participants, rather than by assuming that the stones themselves possess spiritual power.

A related perspective can be found in Khodijah and Monang’s phenomenological study of Qur’anic recitation at a cemetery in Bireuen, Aceh (Khodijah & Monang, 2025). Their research explains that reciting the Qur’an in a death-related setting is understood not only as an

expression of respect for the deceased but also as a way of strengthening social solidarity, Islamic identity, and values associated with amal jariyah and ukhuwah. Although their research examines Qur'anic recitation rather than the use of stones, it offers a relevant comparison for understanding how religious practices surrounding death become meaningful through participants' lived experiences and interpretations.

The experience of honoring the deceased is also inseparable from the participation of family members and the wider community. Suhadi, a traditional leader, stated: *"The use of stones also demonstrates the strong social relationship between families and the community. When someone dies, extended family members and the wider community gather for tahlilan, zikir, and prayer."* This account illustrates how religious devotion is experienced collectively. The gathering provides an opportunity for relatives and neighbors to support the bereaved family, participate in prayer, and reaffirm their relationships with one another. The tradition therefore connects a vertical religious dimension—the relationship between people and Allah SWT—with a horizontal social dimension involving care, solidarity, and mutual assistance.

Research by Macpal et al. on the Pia Sisa death rituals of the Islam Masade community in Sangihe, North Sulawesi, similarly identifies the honoring of the deceased and the strengthening of social solidarity as important functions of funeral-related practices (Macpal et al., 2025). The study also shows how religious elements and local cultural forms interact in shaping a community's distinctive ritual practices. This comparison suggests that local death traditions can serve as contexts in which religious expression and communal identity reinforce one another, although the specific beliefs and practices of each community remain distinct.

The continuity of the tradition also contributes to the community's understanding of respect for the deceased. Madrisad, a community leader, explained: *"The main values involved are togetherness and respect for the deceased. When someone dies, the family and community gather, help one another, and jointly carry out activities that have become customary since earlier times."* This statement shows that honoring the deceased is not limited to a single ritual action. It is also expressed through collective participation, practical assistance, and the continuation of practices regarded as meaningful by earlier generations. The tradition enables the community to maintain a sense of continuity while responding to bereavement through shared religious and social activities.

A further comparison is provided by Manan et al., whose ethnographic study of Islamic burial rituals in Aceh found that funeral practices express hopes for divine blessing and forgiveness for the deceased, respect for bereaved families, affirmation of local customs, and the consolidation of kinship relationships (Manan et al., 2024). These findings are relevant to the Sukabumi case because they demonstrate how funeral traditions can combine religious intentions with social responsibilities. However, they do not establish that the two communities share identical ritual meanings; the interpretation of the stone tradition must remain grounded in the field data collected in Sukabumi Village.

Overall, the use of stones in the funeral traditions of Sukabumi Village provides a means through which religious experience, respect for the deceased, and social solidarity are expressed together. The community's accounts emphasize prayer, zikir, collective participation, and the intention to honor those who have died. The stones support the practice, but the central religious meaning lies in the devotional acts and the relationships sustained through them. The tradition can therefore be understood as a locally situated expression of religious remembrance in which customary practice, personal intention, and communal

responsibility intersect.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the use of stones in the funeral traditions of the Sukabumi Village community, Batu Brak Subdistrict, West Lampung Regency, represents a local practice that integrates religious devotion, customary continuity, and social solidarity. Based on observations and interviews with three informants, the stones are collected from a nearby river, cleaned, and used as practical aids during *zikir*, *tahlilan*, and prayers for the deceased. The findings reveal three interconnected dimensions: stones function as symbols of inherited customs and collective identity; their use reflects the coexistence of sacred and profane dimensions, as ordinary natural objects become part of religious activities without being regarded as possessing independent supernatural power; and the tradition provides a means of expressing religious experiences and honoring the deceased through prayer, remembrance, mutual assistance, and communal participation. The stones are understood as a *wasilah* (means) that supports devotional practices, while the central religious purpose remains the worship of Allah SWT and prayers for the deceased. These findings demonstrate how local customs can become integrated into religious life through community intentions and repeated practices. However, because the research was conducted in one village with three informants and three observed funeral-related events, the findings are context-specific and cannot be generalized to all Muslim communities. Further research could compare similar traditions across different regions and examine how local funeral customs are understood in relation to Islamic teachings, particularly the concept of *'urf*.

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