نبذة عن المصاحف القرآنية في عالم الملايو خلال القرنين الثامن عشر والتاسع عشر
من مجموعة متحف الآثار الإسلامية ماليزيا

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The 18th-19th centuries Qur’ans of the Malay World

For years Qur’ans produced in the Malay World were not studied, researched nor included in galleries and museums dedicated to the art and cultures of the Muslim World. The Malay World covers a vast area in Southeast Asia, including Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Southern Thailand. They are known as the Malay Archipelago and share similar culture, language, religion and much more. The archipelago was introduced to Islam as early as the 9th-10th centuries with the Muslim traders crossing the straits of Malacca on their way to China. The earliest evidence of Muslims living in the Malay lands are from several tombstones dated as early as the 10th-11th centuries.1 By the thirteenth century, the accelerating mode of the Islamization process in the Malay world took place, especially after the establishment of the first Muslim Kingdom in Samudera-Pasai. The Malay Sultans converted to Islam, leading the way to mass conversion, and in time the flourishing of court patronage.

For centuries, Islam depended heavily on oral recitations and Sufi teachings. Ibn Battuta travelled through the Straits of Malacca to Bengal and China during 1345/1346, and observed the Sultan, as being a Shafi’i Muslim, attending the recitations of the Qur’an and engage in discussions.2 Beyond doubt, the Qur’an Mushafs were cherished by the Malay royalty as well as theologians, yet their earliest production (up to the eighteenth century) may have been limited, or yet undiscovered. The earliest surviving Malay letter on paper dates to the sixteenth century.3 Among the letters known are the ones sent by Sultan Zainal Abidin from Samudera-Pasai Sultanate to the Representative of the King of Portugal, dating 1516,4 and the letter sent from the Sultan of Aceh to Queen Elizabeth I dating 1602.5 Yet, when it concerns Qur’ans, the dated Mushafs are very rare and we hope earlier Malay Qur’ans surface.6 This article will present five copies of the Holy Qur’an produced in the Malay World selected from the collection of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia. It will also attempt to discuss their stylistic features, as each Mushaf reveals a distinct decorative style popular within a region within the Malay World. In doing so, it will highlight the characteristics of each of these regional decorative styles, and trace possible influences and inspirations.

(Fig. 1) Map of Southeast Asia as published by J. Hondius. 1606-1623 CE. IAMM 2005.2.11.

(Fig. 2) The main entrance of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia.
The collection of handwritten Qur’ans at the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia (IAMM) comprises over 400 copies produced in various sizes and styles. They are produced in the most renowned ateliers of the Muslim world and range from the eighteenth century up to the nineteenth century. The Holy text is certainly one of IAMM’s most valued collections, and attention is paid to its safeguard and display. The Malay Quran’s date between eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when paper was available on the market, thus encouraging members of the society, as well as the religious community, to copy and commission. The desire to acquire one’s own copy of the Mushaf facilitated the production of the Qur’ans, yet due to the high cost of pigments, gilding and binding, it was limited to the wealthy and royalty.

There are few characteristic features that distinguish the Malay Qur’ans from other Mushafs. Among these features is the practice of decorating the central pages of the text; the first double page, the last double page, and the middle bi-folio of the Qur’an. Secondly, for each region within the Malay World a distinct regional style evolved revealing the decorative characteristics of each region. Among the most famous is styles based on distinctive artistic schools such as the Javanese, Terengganu, Patani and the Acehnese styles. The architecture of the folio highlights such regional differences based on visual analysis and comparative materials. Yet the main element in the Malay Qur’an design is the inclusion of a double frame surrounding the text box of the illuminated folios. The double frames are placed on the right and left folios and complement each other aesthetically, permitting the viewer to contemplate both folios as “one single unit rather than two separate pages.” Another feature of the Malay Qur’ans are the addition of arches surrounding the text block from three directions. The following section analyses the five selected Mushafs highlighting their regional characteristics while stressing that all five are under one decorative repertoire distinct to the Malay World.

**The Collection**

**Javanese Qur’an**

This nineteenth century Qur’an from Java, Indonesia, is an example of a finely-illuminated

(Fig. 3)
Java, Indonesia
19th century CE/ 13th century AH
IAMM 2010.7.1
This image shows the distinctive Javanese Qur’an decoration that adorns the first double page of the Qur’an containing Surat al-Fatihah (on the right-hand page) and the beginning of Surat al-Baqarah (on the left-hand page).

The Collection
Javanese Qur’an
Codicological info:
Size of folio: 335 x 210 mm
Material: European paper with watermark
Number of folios: 402 and one flyleaf
Script style: Naskh in black ink
Verse marker: Red roundel with black dot at the center
Other markers: Juz’, ’ayn, niṣf, hizb, rub’ and thumn
Illumination: Two pages of opening and middle sections
Binding: Brown leather with gilt-stamped central medallion and pendants, four corner-pieces and framed borders.
Mushaf with two decorated double-folios. The first decorated pages highlight the beginning of the Qur’an, while the second double folios highlight the middle of the Qur’an. The first illuminated double frame surrounds Surat al Fatihah and on the facing folio, the first few verses of Surat al Baqarah, while the second illuminated double folios stress the importance of the first few verses of Surat al Kahf.

The illuminated folios highlight the double frames which display important decorative features particularly pertinent to Java. Among the notable highlights of the structural composition of the decorated pages in Javanese Qur’ans is the inclination to use straight vertical and horizontal lines, together with multiple triangle arches around the frame. Another decorative element is the Banji pattern, which is believed to be derived from the interwoven canes used in domestic architecture and mat weaving. The second set of decorated frames highlights the popular vegetal intertwined scroll motif filling the three arches. The color palette is vibrant red, yellow, green and blues.

The text represents the Malay calligraphy style with its rounded letters, and excessive use of articulations. The text reflects a calligrapher who is not very competent in the Arabic language, thus some words were missing and added at a later phase, while others were tightened to fit the available space. The Muslims of Southeast Asia adopted the Arabic script to their local (Malay) language as early as the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It gradually became the lingua franca, and the language for learning religious studies. The Jawi script, as it came to be known, developed from the Arabic alphabet with the addition of five new

(Fig. 4) The second set of double decorated pages that marks the beginning of Surat al-Kahf. IAMM 2010.7.1

(Fig. 5) A page from a manuscript from the 19th-century Malay Peninsula on Tawheed. This particular page contains the attributes of Allah. The text in red contains the attributes of Allah in Arabic, while the text in black, arranged diagonally, is in the commentaries in Malay Jawi script. IAMM 1998.1.664.
consonants (p, ch, ng, g, and ny) that existing in the Malay language. Yet despite the early adaptation of the Arabic alphabet, the number of literate scribes were limited, and a tendency towards sending young students to the Hijaz to learn the Arabic language and the art of calligraphy was evident in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. 

Among the most elaborate Qur’ans produced in the Malay World are those inscribed and illuminated in and around Terengganu. This Qur’an has an illuminated double folio at the beginning of the manuscript, at the middle and at the end. The illuminated decoration is based on the double frames, yet here the frames are made of multiple arches on each side of the text box, while an outer frame is formed to surround the entire folio. The framed arches surrounding the text box display arches joined together to form a continuously undulating border, with a series of chili pepper fringes adorning the frame, usually are in an alternating red and green.

The important marginal text highlights the manner in which the Qur’an is to be recited. It is a secondary text on ‘qiraat’ based on specific style, popular in Terengganu. The marginal text is written in a more cursive manner, while the Qur’an is written in the more classical Naskh with regional

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(Fig. 6)
Terengganu, Malay Peninsula
IAMM 2012.13.6
Double decorated pages, placed at the beginning of the Qur’an, contain Surat al-Fatihah and the first five verses of Surat al-Baqarah. The marginal text in smaller size highlights various styles of Qiraat, the Qur’anic recitation.
Codicological info
Size of folio: 320 x 209 mm
Material: European paper
Number of folios: 317 and eight flyleaves
Script style: Naskh in black ink for the main text, Riqa’a in black with red highlights for the marginal notes.
Verse marker: Gold circles, outlined in red.
Illumination: First, middle and last double-decorated pages.
Binding: Maroon leather with gold-stamped central medallion, pendants within a dynamic square border, and corner-pieces, the doublure is covered with textile decorated with floral scrolls; the endpapers are decorated with flowers and leaves.

(Fig. 7) The phrases ‘walyatalattaf’, in the middle of the right-hand page, was made larger in size and highlighted in gold as it marks the center. The mirrored phrase on the left-hand page, ‘wasbir nafsak’, has similar treatment. IAMM 2012.13.6
Malay script style, which is directly derived from the mainland Muslim world.

The Terengganu Qur’an is with decoration in the middle of the Mushaf, yet unlike other regions in the Malay World, it counted the words of the Qur’an and highlighted the word that exists as the exact middle of the text. The words here are ‘walyatalattaf’ and ‘wasbir nafsak’ on the facing page, which is part of Surat al Kahf. The specific word is thus illuminated and enlarged to emphasize it in the page.

Terengganu was the center of Islamic education in the Malay Archipelago as early as the eighteenth century. Under the patronage of Sultan Baginda Omar (1838–1876) an active manuscript atelier flourished, with the production of several royal Qurans, as well as with the Al Aidarus brothers copying two royal Dala’il al Khayrat manuscripts and producing original commentaries. It is also known that in Terengganu, A hut–style educational institution (Pondok) resembling one in Masjid al-Haram in Mecca was founded by a local named Sheikh Abd al-Malik bin Abdullah in Pulau Manis village, Terengganu as soon as he returned from Mecca, to encourage the teachings of the Quran.

Patani Qur’an

Among the most elaborate illuminations are those of Patani, Southern Thailand. This Qur’an dating to the nineteenth century demonstrates in its illuminated bi-folios an intricate special arrangement comprising the side arches and a rectangular frame surrounding the text box. The Patani style shows three distinctive arches, one on each side of the text box, usually unattached, creating a balanced composition. There is also a tendency to emphasize the side arch with two more tendrils forming a chili pepper motif. In many cases, the Patani color palette includes black, not only as an outline marker but as a filler of background.

The selected Patani Qur’an is a royal production. It is illuminated with gold on red background, the degree of detail and the finesse of the calligraphy indicates the existence of an organized scriptorium. Among the main problems facing the survival of Malay written text is the degradation of its folios due to the use of Iron gall ink which corrodes the written texts. Iron gall inks was introduced to the Malay World in the nineteenth century. Due to the presence of iron as an ingredient, the folios with writings are all crushed and in bad condition.

(Fig. 8)
Patani, Southern Thailand
19th century CE/13th century AH
IAMM 1998.1.3500
The decorated opening pages of the Qur’an from the 19th century Patani.
Codicological info
Size of folio: 220 x 180 mm
Material: European laid paper
Number of folios: 348 and 16 flyleaves
Script style: Naskh in black ink, and red ink for Surat headings.
Verse marker: Gold circles, outlined in black.
Other markers: Nisf, Hizb, and Rub'.
Illumination: Double decorated pages at the front, and double finispieces without text.
Binding: Red woven cloth, lined with rawhide.
(Fig. 9) This decorative unit is placed on the margin that marks the rub' (quarter) section of the Patani Qur’an. IAMM 1998.1.3500

(Fig. 10) Aceh, Indonesia
19th century CE/13th century AH
IAMM 1998.1.3454
The decorated pages mark Surat al Kahf, verses 67-77.
Codicological info
Size of folio: 325 x 220 mm
Material: European laid paper
Number of folios: 447
Script style: Naskh in black ink
Verse marker: Yellow circles with black outline
Other markers: Plain red text marking rub’, thumn, nisf
Illumination: Double decorated pages marking the middle of Surat al Kahf.
Binding: Archival cover.

Aceh Qur’an

Acehnese Qur’an have a distinctive style of illumination, it tends to be dense and much more prominent than the text box. The text box of the first bi-folios are usually smaller in size than the rest of the manuscript. The common illumination makes use of two straight rectangular columns demarcating the design, and provides an architectural form to the overall appearance of the folios. Enhancing the rectangular vertical columns are plaited or twisted rope motif. This design is known as Boengong poeta talloe doea and appears in other media as
metal and woodwork." This design is distinctive of Acehnese illuminated manuscripts. The color palate of the Aceh Qur’an relies on the use of black and red as fillers, while in reverse forms the actual design of the intertwining foliage. The arches, on the other hand, tend to form lobed domes.

In this particular Qur’an, the outer vertical arch is flanked by two wings which are large in size and forms foliate tendrils. As for the calligraphy, a tendency to draw certain letters with an acute angle prevails. Letters such as Ha, kha, jim demonstrate exaggerated angles, adding to the variations of the Malay Naskh script style. Furthermore, the middle of the Quran is the start of the sixteenth juz, marking the exact midpoint of the text.

Aceh rose to power in the sixteenth century after the fall of Melacca to the Portuguese in 1511, to become the most powerful Sultanate in Southeast Asia. Illumination is known to have been used in letters, such as those to the King of England King James I, sent by Sultan Iskandar Muda in 1615. The capital of Aceh (Dar as-Salam) under Sultan Alauddin Ri’ayat Syah’s reign (1589–1604) witnessed the Sufi scholar Hamzah Fansuri. Several known scholars, such as Nuruddin al Raniri, Abdul Rauf of Singkel and his pupil Baba Daud (Teungku di Leupeu) are part of an active Ulama group in Aceh who were known to form the scribes of the Sultan and produce commentaries, as well as engage in the teachings of Islam.

The Mindanao Qur’an

The Mindanao Qur’an is an example of the production of the Holy book in southern Philippines, in the Mindanao Island, which is one of seven Islands of the Philippines that embraced Islam for centuries. The Island is home to the Muslim community known as the Moro who themselves are an agglomeration of different tribes.

For years, the Muslims in the Philippines relied heavily on the manuscripts sent through the Malay World. In several cases, the Mindanao Qur’an included interlinear translation in the Malay Jawi language. According to Gallop, ‘Malay was the language of trade, diplomacy and Islam throughout maritime Southeast Asia’. Furthermore, letter from Sultan of Sulu and Maguindanao in the eighteenth century, was written in the Malay language.
This Qur’an is signed and dated 1299 AH/1882 CE. The scribe is known as محمد بن حجيو دبير التكاجي Muhammad bin Haju Dubair Al Kanjaqi. The colophon adds that it was copied in the archipelago in the city of Mandaue, which is in the province of Cebu in the Philippines. According to historical sources, the Scholar Muhammad bin Haju Dubair al Kanjaqi (whose name is a Chinese/Japanese affiliation) was mentioned in the Daghistani manuscript حل العصور عن علماء العصور to the world خليل القُرُوشِي الداغستاني.

Although the manuscript has a colophon, yet it is always important to look into the stylistic analysis to compare the design of the decorated folios with other dated and signed manuscripts. In this case, the Philippine Qur’an is not similar to any available Mindanao manuscript, we have seen so far, which may pose a question, and which leads to a search for additional Mindanao Qur’ans to be digitized, in the near future.

The importance of the manuscript lies in the distinct arrangement of illumination. The first illuminated bi-folios contains Surat al-Fatihah. The first Surat is spread along the two pages. The style of the pages emphasizes the Master, the ruling of the page. Each page has strict borders and a line demarcating the text space, thus each page is divided into five lines of writing. The calligraphy indicates a professional and confident hand. The verse marks are of reddish dots. The added colophon, on the other hand, was not part of the page style, thus no space was left for a colophon. The apparent text was added by a local hand. Although this style of colophon is common in Qur’an Mushafs, however, it does not necessarily indicate that the manuscript was actually copied in the Philippines, yet its connection to the Philippines may be because it was found there or brought there by perhaps the mentioned scholar.

Conclusion

In spite of the fact that there is a lack of published Qur’ans from the Malay World, yet this category of manuscripts represents a distinctive group with visible precise characteristics. The Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, in its efforts to raise awareness of these manuscripts, attempts to publish, digitize and make the manuscripts available for scholarly research. The Malay Qur’ans represent a vivid culture with organized scriptorium and avid patronage. The main source of inspiration springs from the knowledge generated in Mecca and Medina (the Hejaz) by Malay scholars, as well as Arab scholars, who resided in the Malay World. Beyond doubt, other cultures such as the Indian subcontinent and China played a vital role in the formation of the Malay style.

For the decorative repertoire, the Malay designs represent and reflect local popular designs. Such decorative repertoire springs from crafts popular and accepted by the local community. The choice of colors also reflects the local preference of red, black and gold, while the white is the uncolored space on the reverse. This concept is similar to the treatment of white on Batik-dyed textiles, where white composes the design through the use of wax covering the surface, which appears later as white. Batik, cane weaving and wood carvings are three of the main crafts of the Malay World. They set the tone of design and local preference.

We hope that in due time, many Qur’an Mushafs from the Malay World are made available and are accurately identified, in order to shed more light on the life and culture of the Malay World during the 14th–18th centuries.
Notes


6. There is a tendency not to sign and date Qur’ans in the early days of the Muslim Empires, as the manuscript should only include the word of God and credit should not be given to a calligrapher nor an illuminator.


12. The Museum possesses a personal letter drafted by Abd al-Rahman bin Muhammad Saman, a Malay scholar from Kelantan, who drafted the letter during his stay in Pontianak (an Indonesian province in the West Kalimantan) who was to study in the Hijaz the art of Ottoman calligraphy under his Master Ibrahim bin Wudd al-Khuslusi from Pulau Sumbawa (now Nusa Tenggara), Java.


15. ‘Al Mukhtar Al Masun Fi A’lam Al Qurun’ Al-Aydarus (d. 1878).

16. https://www.academia.edu/26482840/Works by Terengganu’s Scholars of the 19th Century in Dignifying the Study of Islamic Knowledge Based on the al-Qur’an.


