

THE HISTORICAL BEDROCK OF HOLY QUR'ĀN'S MANUSCRIPT IN MALAYSIA: A STUDY ON ITS STYLE OF CALLIGRAPHY AND ILLUMINATION

ACHMAD YAFIK MURSYID

Department of Islamic History and Civilization, Academy of Islamic Studies, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Email: 22060791@siswa.um.edu.my

AIZAN BINTI ALI@ MAT ZIN, PHD

Associate Professor, Department of Islamic History and Civilization, Academy of Islamic Studies, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Email: aizan@um.edu.my

Received on: 15-10-22

Accepted on: 19-04-24

<https://doi.org/10.57144/hi.v47i3.965>

Abstract

The focus of this article is to examine the historical foundation of the Holy Qur'ān's manuscript in Malaysia, with specific attention to its calligraphic style and illumination. Islamic calligraphy and manuscript traditions hold significant importance within the Malaysian Muslim heritage. These traditions have been inherited and evolved over generations, with the earliest examples of Arabic calligraphy being found in the Holy Qur'an, commonly inscribed in a script known as Kufic. The historical roots of Islam are deeply intertwined with the Holy Qur'ān's manuscript, making it a primary source for understanding the advent of Islam. In this research, an extensive array of resources from the Islamic Art Museum Malaysia (IAMM) and the National Library of Malaysia (NLM) were utilised, alongside personal collections and secondary sources. Data analysis involved employing philological, comparative, deductive, and inductive methodologies. Through this approach, it was revealed that the production of Malay Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts has been significantly influenced by local creative input and intellectual contributions from regions such as Turkey, China, and Persia. The study particularly accentuates the diverse calligraphic and illumination techniques across different nations. Notably, manuscripts from the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia, specifically from Malacca and Johor, exhibit distinct

artistic qualities that set them apart from those originating from the east coast, including Kelantan and Terengganu. This underscores the prevalence of varied artistic expressions resulting from a broad spectrum of cultural interactions. The development of calligraphy and illumination methods in Malaysian Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts mirrors a wide range of artistic expressions, which are shaped by both local innovation and broader Islamic intellectual traditions.

Keywords: *Islamic History, Islamic art, Islamic Manuscript, Holy Quranic Manuscript, Malaysia*

Introduction

The prominence of Islam and its associated art in Southeast Asia, particularly in Malaysia (see Map 1), despite its geographical distance from the Arabian origin of Islam, is a significant area of study.¹ Malaysian Islamic art has been shaped by influences from various earlier Islamic art traditions, including those from the Ottoman, Indian, Persian, and African cultures. However, the specific impact of these traditions on the unique Malay identity in Islamic art remains a subject of limited research, particularly in the context of Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts in Southeast Asia and Malaysia.²

This study aims to analyse and investigate Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts preserved in the Islamic Art Museum Malaysia (IAMM) and National Library of Malaysia (NLM) to discern the extent of Malay cultural influence on Islamic art traditions.³ The goal is to uncover the intricate relationships between Malay identity and previous Holy Qur'an writing traditions by examining how Malaysian Muslims engaged with the Holy Qur'an through calligraphy, illumination, and material characteristics of these manuscripts. Comparing the distinct styles of Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts from different Malaysian regions, including the East Coast areas of Kelantan, Terengganu, and Borneo, to the West Coast Peninsular regions of Malacca, Johor, and Penang, allows for the identification of artistic expressions that reflect the fusion of Islamic values with local culture.

By investigating alternative perspectives beyond colonial views and highlighting Malaysia's significant role in shaping the diverse Holy Quranic textual styles across Southeast Asia, this study seeks to enhance understanding of Malaysia's historical contribution to the production of the Holy Qur'ān.

Preserved Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts in Malaysia shed light on the nuances of the local character and their connections to historical traditions. Varied calligraphy⁴ and illuminations highlight the interplay and cultural exchanges among diverse civilisations.⁵ Different calligraphy and illuminations draw attention to the intimate

relationships and great mobility among many cultures. While Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts from the West Coast Peninsular Malaysia show stylistic differences from those on the East Coast, they collectively reflect a unique Malay identity that sets them apart from the Holy Qur'ān's writing traditions in other regions. Malay identity represents the amalgamation of Islamic philosophy, language, indigenous culture, missionary activity, and the historical legacies of the archipelago's kingdoms.⁶ The Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts in Malaysia bear a unique Malay cultural legacy, setting them apart from the scriptural traditions of Morocco, Persia, Africa, and Turkey. The Malay identity is a confluence of Islamic philosophy, language, native culture, missionary endeavours, and the historical responsibilities of the archipelago's kingdoms. Recent scholarly insights, valuing non-colonial narratives, have shed light on the hitherto lesser-known history of Quranic manuscript production in Malaysia.⁷

The article presents a unique approach to gaining insights into the preservation of Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts in the NLM and IAMM. Analysing the calligraphy, illumination, and material composition of these manuscripts enhances understanding of Malaysian Muslims' interaction with the Holy Qur'ān's and their intended use of its reproduction. Overall, these manuscripts form the basis for showcasing the Malay heritage and its connections to historical traditions of Holy Quranic production. They also underscore Malaysia's role in the development of various Holy Quranic textual styles and highlight its position within the extensive literary network of the Holy Qur'ān, spanning from Arabia to Southeast Asia.

The following text provides a new methodology for gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the Quranic manuscripts housed at the IAMM and NLM. Subsequent sections will evaluate previous research on Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts in Malaysia, focusing on the calligraphy, illumination, and material aspects of the manuscripts to achieve a deeper insight into the intentions and interactions of Malaysian Muslims in reproducing the Holy Qur'ān. By concentrating on Malaysia's unique Malay heritage and its connection to earlier traditions of Holy Quranic manuscript production, this article seeks to shed light on the country's participation in the extensive network of Holy Quranic manuscript production, spanning from Arabia to Southeast Asia. This examination aims to highlight Malaysia's distinctive position within the historical context of Islamic art, as well as to present rebuttals that challenge perspectives of colonial influence.



Map 1. Malaysia in Southeast Asian Map

Literature review

Islamic Art in Malaysia

In the study of Islam in Southeast Asia, a comprehensive examination of the historical and contemporary influence of Islam in the region reveals diverse dynamics. Southeast Asia has long served as a crucial crossroads for numerous global civilisations over a span exceeding two millennia, facilitating meaningful intercultural and interreligious exchanges.⁸ According to Hooker's research, the religious practices of indigenous cultures in this region have evolved based on the specific characteristics of the local population.⁹ Muhammad and Duderija underscore the variation in the interaction between culture and religion across different areas of Southeast Asia.¹⁰ This region has evolved into a diverse and well-established Islamic community. Countries such as Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia have a predominantly Muslim population, while other nations like the Philippines, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, and Singapore have a Muslim minority that holds sway.¹¹ Furthermore, Andaya observes that the diverse ethnic composition in the region reflects the propagation of Islam in Southeast Asia facilitated by the involvement of merchants, Sufi mystics, scholars, rulers, and even non-Muslims.¹² In his analysis, Azra underscores Islam's notable assimilation with indigenous customs in Southeast Asia. He underscores that this harmonious integration has been made possible by Islam's peaceful and non-coercive introduction to the region,

allowing its presence to evolve over centuries through cultural assimilation and acculturation.¹³

The prominence of Aljunied serves to emphasise the profound influence of Sufi merchants and scholars on the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia, a significance that even surpasses familial connections.¹⁴ The current Muslim population in Southeast Asia is estimated to exceed two hundred and forty million, positioning the region as home to one of the largest Muslim communities globally. With the ongoing trend of globalisation, it is anticipated that Islam will continue its trajectory of growth and maintain its status as the fastest-growing religion well into the 21st century.¹⁵ The examination of the intricate relationship between Islam and Southeast Asia showcases its historical foundations, contemporary relevance, and future prospects. This region has served as a significant backdrop for pivotal events, underscoring its global importance within the context of Islam. It is imperative to acknowledge that the study of Islam in Southeast Asia presents considerable unexplored potential for delving into realms beyond religious and legal dimensions, notably encompassing its diverse artistic heritage and educational aspects.

The portrayal of Islam in Southeast Asia accentuates the multifaceted nature of Islamic art within the region,¹⁶ with particular emphasis on Malaysia. Islamic art in Malaysia draws its historical underpinnings from the era of European colonisation that significantly impacted various Southeast Asian countries including Malaysia, as evidenced by Stockwell's research.¹⁷ The insights of Hamidon indicate that external influences have contributed to the development of a distinctive tradition in Islamic art within the region, particularly in Malaysia. This tradition is characterised by the amalgamation of three diverse cultural and artistic traditions: Islamic, Malay, and Western.¹⁸ The exploration of Islamic art's spiritual dimensions by Sulaiman Esa underscores its significance as a conduit for internal spiritual yearnings and as a representation of divine symbols within tangible forms. Consequently, it becomes apparent that the evolution and dynamism of Malaysian Islamic art are intrinsically linked to historical, ethnic, cultural, and religious influences.

The strong correlation between Malay Muslims and Islamic art has been evident since the establishment of the Sultanate of Malacca (1390-1511). This era witnessed a prolific production of manuscripts, with authors creating several seminal works such as *Hikayat*, *Sullalatus Salatin*, and the Holy Qur'ān.¹⁹ It continued, resulting in modern pieces such as *Taj Salatīn*.²⁰ In spite of the huge number of studies made regarding *Hikāyāt* and *Sulalatus Salatīn* manuscripts, few works dealing with Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts have been

published. Somewhat unfortunately, only a small number of scholars who looked into Malaysian Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts are Annabel T Gallop²¹ and Riswadi Azmi.²² Unfortunately, gaining access to Malay Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts was difficult until lately. A number of the identified Malay Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts reside outside Malaysia, namely, at the Rotterdam Museum²³ and the British Library.²⁴ The Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts in Malaysia are housed in various institutions, including the National Library, the Islamic Centre, the Asian Art Museum, IAMM, Nasyrul Holy Qur'ān Complex, and regional museums such as Malacca Al-Holy Qur'ān Museum, Pahang State Museum, and Terengganu Museum.

The diverse range of Malay Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts attests to their significant ties to major cultural and religious traditions. As per Hoogervorst, the Indian Ocean trade network, initially established for commerce, evolved into a conduit for cultural and religious exchange.²⁵ The evolution of Gujarat, China, and India as key players in the maritime trade within the Indian Ocean had a profound impact on the development of Malay culture, as evidenced by Tagliacozz. This transformation is reflected in the historical roles these regions played in shaping the trade dynamics and cultural exchanges that continue to resonate in the Malay cultural heritage.²⁶ Wilson asserted that the Ottoman Empire's governance of the region for over four centuries significantly influenced its cultural and religious landscape. This influence was particularly evident in the multilateral interactions facilitated by the Pan-Islamism network, notably during Abdul Hamid II's rule. These interactions, according to Wilson, played a crucial role in enabling various cultural and religious activities in the region.²⁷ Dzul Haimi Md. Zain posited that Malay ornate illuminations incorporate elements of Safavid aesthetic principles from Iran, as well as characteristic features of Mughal art from India.²⁸ The diverse traditions evident in Malaysian Muslim art highlight its foundation upon the richness of multiple cultural influences. However, a noticeable gap exists in the current research pertaining to the amalgamation of these traditions within the context of Islamic art in Malaysia.

Holy Qur'ān's Manuscripts and Cultural Heritage in Malaysia

Although there is a considerable amount of literature devoted to the Malaysian Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts,²⁹ this topic offers much room to continue exploring its facets. The study of Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts in Malaysia presents numerous unexplored dimensions that warrant scholarly attention. Addressing the historical and material culture elements of these manuscripts in the Malaysian context is essential for comprehending the Islamization process in the region. However, the scarcity of research on Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts in Malaysia can be attributed to several factors,

including the dispersion of collections across different countries, predominantly in Europe. This dispersion has directed research efforts towards a Europe-centric perspective. Additionally, a substantial research gap exists regarding the educational roots that facilitated the transmission of the Holy Qur'ān from the Arab region to Southeast Asia, hindering a comprehensive understanding of its trajectory. Therefore, further research in this area is imperative to address these knowledge gaps and enhance the study of Islamic manuscripts in Malaysia, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on the history of Islamization in the country.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that the significance of Holy Qur'ān's manuscript studies extends beyond Malaysia and encompasses global academic interest. While existing research predominantly focuses on the physical attributes and authenticity of Holy Qur'ān codices, the socio-political and cultural dimensions of these manuscripts warrant greater scholarly attention.³⁰ Most historical studies have primarily engaged Western scholars such as Theodore Noldeke, Alphonso Mingana, Luxemburg, and Nabia Abbot, with an emphasis on dating the revelation of the Holy Qur'ān based on manuscript analysis, leaving socio-political and cultural aspects relatively unexplored.

Therefore, a comprehensive examination of the historical and cultural dimensions of Holy Qur'ān manuscripts is essential to deepen our understanding of Islamization and enrich Islamic manuscript research in Malaysia, while also expanding the broader discourse on Holy Qur'ān's manuscript studies worldwide.³¹ However, Mingana³² and Luxenburg³³ utilised manuscript evidence to argue that the Holy Qur'ān was not written during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (The Final Prophet of Allah, Peace be Upon him, his Progeny and Companions).

The study of early Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts is a complex endeavour, facing challenges and employing different methods to establish authenticity and historical significance. Nabia Abbot confronted this approach, collecting early Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts to substantiate their authenticity. Similarly, the chronological analysis of early Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts based on physical evidence has become a significant trend in the field. Francois Deroche notably advocated for this approach, endeavouring to chronologically date the Holy Qur'ān from the time of the companions to the 10th century AD. This underscores the multifaceted nature of Holy Qur'ān's manuscript research, encompassing both physical and historical dimensions.³⁴ This project gained momentum and was later extended within The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art. As a result, numerous publications emerged, such as *"Holy Qur'ān of the 10th-16th centuries"* authored

by David James³⁵ and "*Holy Qur'ān of the 17th-19th centuries*" co-authored by Manijeh Bayani, Anna Contadini, and Tim Stanley.³⁶ Nasser D. Khalili's project focuses on the annotation of Holy Qur'ān from different time periods, serving as a strong foundation for subsequent studies from diverse perspectives and methodologies. This signifies a significant advancement in the scholarly examination of Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts from both physical Qur'ān manuscripts in Malaysia encompasses an analysis of the manuscript types found in the region. A.H. John³⁷ and Peter Riddell³⁸ have developed a typology for Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts and *tafsīr* in Southeast Asia. Additionally, codicological studies have gained prominence as an important trend in the research on Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts in Southeast Asia. Annabel T. Gallop³⁹ pioneered art studies by detecting various illumination patterns in Southeast Asian Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts housed in the British Library. Gallop contended that these patterns reflected the evolution of art and culture in Southeast Asia. Several scholars, including Edwin Wieringa,⁴⁰ Ali Akbar,⁴¹ Islah Gusmian,⁴² Ervan Nurtawab,⁴³ and Riswadi,⁴⁴ have derived inspiration from her theories. The focus of research in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines includes the artistic and textual aspects of Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts. The intricate nature of Malay manuscripts in Malaysian libraries and museums, along with the complexities of their distribution, highlights a significant need for further research in this area.

The study of Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts constitutes a pivotal element within Malaysia's global manuscript research community. Institutions such as the Islamic Art Museum Malaysia (IAMM) and Bahagian Hal Ehwal Islam (BAHEIS) have been instrumental in expanding their collections to encompass a diverse range of ancient manuscripts. BAHEIS, for instance, amassed approximately 3,600 manuscripts in Arabic, Malay, and other languages in the early 1980s as part of its commitment to the preservation of Islamic cultural heritage, with a notable contribution from the southern Thai provinces of Terengganu, Kelantan, and Patani. In this endeavour, the Patani scholar Wan Mohd Shaghir bin Haji Wan Abdullah played a significant role.⁴⁵ In 1984, the State Library of Malaysia established the Malay Manuscript Centre to acquire the manuscript collection previously owned by BAHEIS. Currently, the library curates approximately 4,700 manuscripts, including over 40 manuscripts related to the Holy Qur'ān.⁴⁶ In 1997, the establishment of the Islamic Art Museum Malaysia (IAMM) marked a pivotal effort towards the preservation of Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts. IAMM has since curated a collection exceeding 300 manuscripts, positioning it as the nation's largest repository of such invaluable artefacts.⁴⁷ Additionally, Malaysia's commitment to preserving these significant manuscripts and supporting scholarly research is evidenced by the extensive

collection of Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts housed in various state museums and libraries.

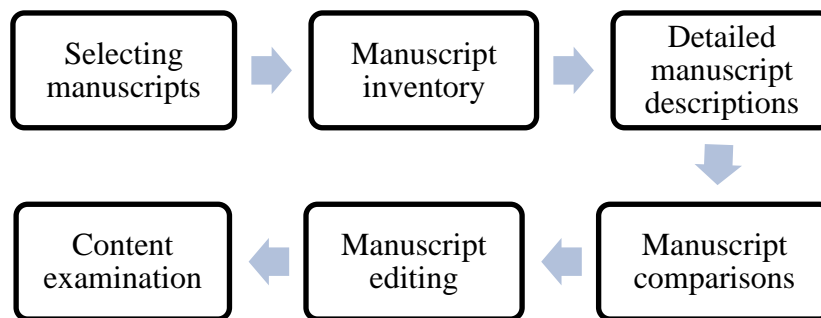
Methodology

Research Design

This study employs qualitative research methods, specifically library research, to investigate the historical provenance of Malay Qur'ān manuscripts in Malaysia and their interconnections with other regional traditions of Holy Qur'ān's inscription. Our primary sources comprise of Malay Qur'ān's manuscripts housed at the Islamic Art Museum Malaysia (IAMM) and the National Library of Malaysia (NLM).

Methods of Data Collection

The primary approach employed for data collection involved documentation. Our data collection process was systematically divided into six distinct phases, aligning with the methodology proposed by Mace (2015) and adopting a philological perspective.⁴⁸



The six steps in philological method (Table 1, Mace. 2015)

1. Manuscript Selection: Manuscripts classified as Malay Qur'ān's manuscripts were identified by consulting resources such as the IAMM and NLM catalogues.
2. Inventory: A thorough inventory of these manuscripts was conducted, specifically identifying those that meet the established requirements for Malay Qur'ān's manuscripts.
3. Detailed manuscript descriptions: The manuscripts were carefully recorded based on certain attributes, following the rules of codicology.⁴⁹
4. Manuscript comparison: The manuscripts were examined with the belief that there is a correlation between the writing practices of the Malay Qur'ān and those of other regions.

5. Manuscript Editing: The unique features seen in the Malay Qur'ān's manuscripts, such as the use of illumination, the skilful calligraphy, and the use of rasm, were methodically identified and recorded.
6. Content Examination: This study involved a comprehensive analysis of the features displayed by Malay Qur'ān's manuscripts, comparing them to those from other regions.

Methods of Data Analysis

In conducting data analysis, content analysis was employed. The initial phase involved a systematic examination of the manuscripts' illumination, calligraphy, and rasm. The objective of this analysis was to discern patterns and distinctive features that could shed light on the historical and cultural context of the manuscripts. The subsequent phase entailed the deductive, inductive, and comparative analysis⁵⁰ of the data in order to interpret the findings using historical and material culture theories.⁵¹

Discussions

Malaysia Collection of Holy Qur'ān's Manuscripts

The manuscripts of the Holy Qur'ān held at the National Library of Malaysia (NLM) and IAMM primarily comprise collections originating not only from the Southeast Asia region but also from other regions such as North Africa and the Middle East.⁵² The earliest fragments of the Holy Qur'ān displayed at The Holy Qur'ān and Manuscripts Gallery, IAMM, can be dated back to the 18th century.⁵³ The East Coast of the Malay Peninsula, according to records from the British Library, is recognised for producing exceptional the Holy Qur'ān manuscripts within Southeast Asia. This distinction is followed by Terengganu, known for its particularly lavish production of the Holy Qur'ān presently a part of Thailand.⁵⁴ The nation of Malaysia has an extensive historical legacy that encompasses the Malay Land, the sultanate of Johor Riau, and the Malay Kingdom of Pattani, which includes Kelantan and Terengganu prior to the Siamese invasion in 1786. Nevertheless, a notable portion of the existing collection of Quranic manuscripts is comparatively recent when contrasted with the historical timeline of Islamic kingdoms in Malaysia.

Although Islamic civilisation has been present in Malaysia since the 13th century,⁵⁵ no Holy Qur'ān's manuscript heritage from that period has been discovered to date. The discovered Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts at NLM (National Library of Malaysia) and IAMM (Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia) originate from the 18th to 19th centuries, representing diverse regional origins, including Kelantan, Terengganu, Melaka, Johor, Sabah, and Sarawak. These

manuscripts reflect the historically unique cultures of each region while collectively representing a heritage of the Malay World. They also depict the connection of the Malay World with earlier traditions globally. The study classifies these manuscripts into three categories based on colophon information and visual elements. Out of the ten studied manuscripts, only two are accompanied by colophons. Codicological similarities are noted among the manuscripts. However, some manuscripts are challenging to access due to severe damage, resulting in the exclusion of five manuscripts from each collection. The first group from NLM comprises seven single-volume Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts, each with distinct characteristics, primarily using European paper, except for two that use dluwang paper. The second group from IAMM consists of three single-volume Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts utilising European paper with distinctive watermarks, maintaining fifteen lines per page, except for one manuscript which has thirteen lines.

The analysis reveals that the letter names in both Group One and Group Two maintain the sequence of Surah Al-Fātiḥa across the nine manuscripts. However, MSS 3596 deviates by commencing with Surah Al-Fatihah. The page margins specify the thirty divisions of the Holy Qur'ān represented by palmettes, with red inscriptions denoting the sixtieth division (*hizb*). Certain folios preceding the Holy Qur'ān's text may contain texts extolling virtues and offering guidance on recitation. Additionally, some manuscripts feature illuminated pages with chapter titles and selected verses, introducing a distinctive artistic element to the collection. The marginal glossa, present throughout the manuscripts, exhibit variant readings and Prophetic quotations in red and black script, adding an extra layer to the beauty and uniqueness of each manuscript.

From a visual standpoint, the manuscript displays three groups of illuminations that epitomise its rich cultural and artistic heritage. Firstly, there is the illumination adorned with the Terengganu motif, as described by Annabel T. Gallop. This motif comprises two levels, with the outer level displaying a curved shape following a square, adorned with floral decoration in the upper and lower corners. The inner level consists of three interconnected gates adorned with floral decoration. The dominant colours of gold, yellow, and red combine to create a lavish and beautiful aesthetic. Secondly, there is an illumination featuring motifs from the west coast of Malaysia and Sumatra. This motif, found predominantly in Sumatra, especially Aceh, has a single level—the inner level—comprising one gate on the side and two crowns above and below without any connection. Red and black colours prevail in this motif. Thirdly, there is a square motif resembling the previously mentioned motif. This motif, primarily found in the Brunei region, has a single level—the inner level—with a square frame shape and a dome. It also exhibits a

tower-like shape at the top on the right and left of the dome, dominated by brown and green colours.

The incorporation of these three types of illuminations yields a profound artistic beauty, symbolising a harmonious fusion of art from diverse regions and cultures. Based on these colophon and visual descriptions, Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts originating from Malaysia can be categorised into three main groups. Firstly, there is the Holy Qur'ān's manuscript heritage originating from the East Coast Malay regions, such as Kelantan and Terengganu. Secondly, the Holy Qur'ān manuscript heritage originating from the West Coast Malay regions, including Melaka and Johor. Thirdly, the Holy Qur'ān manuscript heritage originating from Borneo, encompassing Sabah and Sarawak, along with the Brunei Malay heritage.

The Style and History of Holy Qur'ān Manuscripts in Malaysia

The calligraphy employed in Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts in Malaysia can be classified into at least two distinct styles. Firstly, there is calligraphy closely aligned with the *naskhi* style, commonly used in Ottoman Holy Qur'ān.⁵⁶ This style is prevalent in Holy Qur'ān manuscripts originating from Terengganu, exemplified by IAMM.1998.1.3436. Secondly, there is calligraphy in the Malay style, as observed in MSS 3566. This calligraphic style possesses a unique visual appearance that seems to amalgamate various calligraphic rules. It is a fusion of *naskhi*, *sini*, and *muḥaqqaq* calligraphy, visually combining the density between letters seen in *naskhi* with curves reminiscent of *sini* and *muḥaqqaq*.⁵⁷ This calligraphic model suits the vertical *muṣḥaf* commonly found in the Malay World and is also present in many Islamic manuscripts employing Jawi writing.⁵⁸



Fig 1 *Naskhi* Script

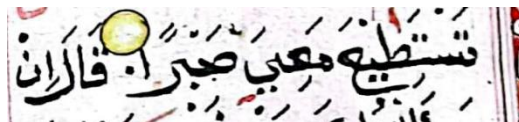


Fig 2 Malay Script



Fig 3 Sini Script

The presence of these two calligraphic styles in Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts in Malaysia signifies the transmission of Islamic traditions to the Malay World, facilitated through both maritime and overland connections from India to China and Central Asia.

The illuminations found in Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts in Malaysia can be categorised into three main groups. The first group consists of the East Coast Peninsular Malaysia, which includes Kelantan and Terengganu, and certain remnants from the Kingdom of Patani. The second group is the West Coast Peninsular Malaysia group, which comprises the heritage of Melaka, Johor, and remnants from the kingdoms in Sumatra. Lastly, there is the Borneo group originating from the island of Borneo, including Sabah, and featuring some remnants from Brunei.

The East Coast style illuminations can be observed in manuscripts MSS.3238 of the NLM collection and IAMM.1998.1.3436, IAMM.2012.13.6 of the IAMM collection. Both manuscripts display visual characteristics identical to those of Terengganu, with IAMM.1998.1.3436 even featuring a colophon indicating the place of its creation. According to Riswadi,⁵⁹ this manuscript was penned on 13 Sha'ban 1275 AH/18 March 1859 by Haji Ahmad in Kampung Manjilegi, a village in the Terengganu region. The illuminations in this group are characterised by the prevalent use of gold, yellow, and blue colours, with intricate floral forms adorning both the outer and inner levels. A distinctive feature of the Terengganu style is the utilisation of the oval window frame format at the margins.⁶⁰ The featured illuminations are strategically positioned at three key junctures: the start, midpoint, and conclusion. The inaugural illumination graces Surah Al-Fatihah and the commencement of Surah Al-Baqarah, while the central illumination adorns the opening of Surah Al-Isra'. The ultimate illumination embellishes Surah Al-Falaq and Surah An-Nass. The East Coast style prominently reflects the influence of the Patani style, incorporating architectural elements from the Langkasuka civilisation in Thailand.⁶¹

The West Coast style of illumination presents distinct visual characteristics compared to the East Coast style, as evidenced by the pieces with plate numbers MSS 3536 and MSS 3567 in the NLM

collection. This style is characterised by a single inner level featuring a gate on the side and two crowns above and below, without any interconnection. Red and black colours are prevalent in this motif, incorporating numerous suspended floral elements. In contrast to the East Coast style, where floral elements are encased within the frame, the West Coast style bears a closer resemblance to the Chinese Holy Qur'ān tradition.

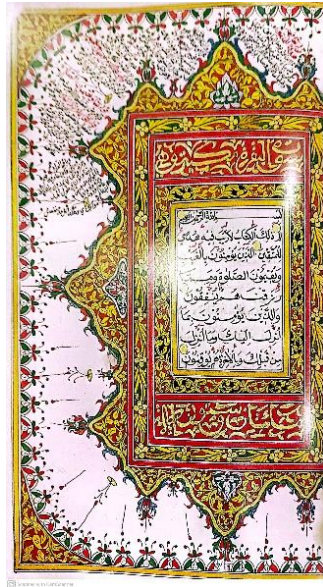


Fig 4 Al-Holy Qur'ān Terengganu
IAMM.2012.13.6

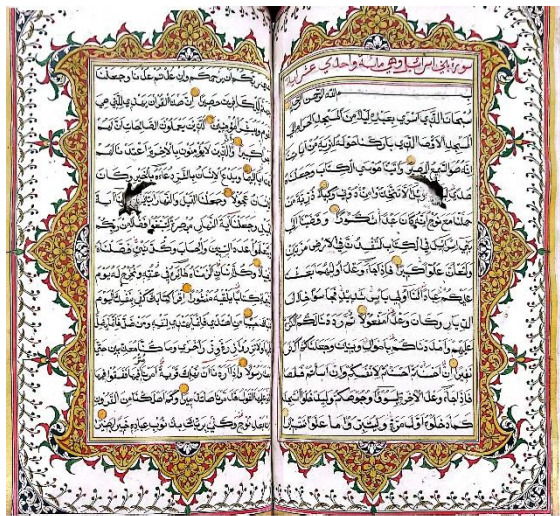


Fig 5 Al-Holy Qur'ān Terengganu
MSS.3238

The Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts in this style typically do not utilise the stringed verse system that is characteristic of the East Coast style. While both manuscripts lack a colophon, they share commonalities in illumination with the *fiqh* manuscript titled "*Ṣiraṭ-i-Mustaqīm*," bearing the code MSS 3426, written in Ramadan 1144 AH/February 1732 AD. Historical inquiries suggest that the Holy Qur'ān manuscripts were produced around the same time as the *fiqh* manuscript, despite the absence of a colophon in the manuscripts. The illuminations in this manuscript, following the customary tradition in the Malay world, are positioned in three locations.⁶² However, what sets this style apart is the central illumination on Surah Al-Kahf, with red ink emphasis on the 75th verse: "قَالَ أَمْ أَفْلَلَكْ" (He said, "Did I not tell you that you can never bear with me patiently?")⁶³. This style of illuminations is also found in Sumatra, particularly in Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts from Aceh

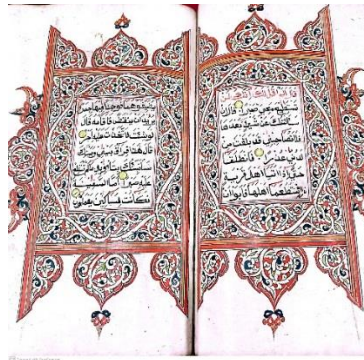


Fig 6 West Coast Malay Al-Holy Qur'ān
MSS 3536

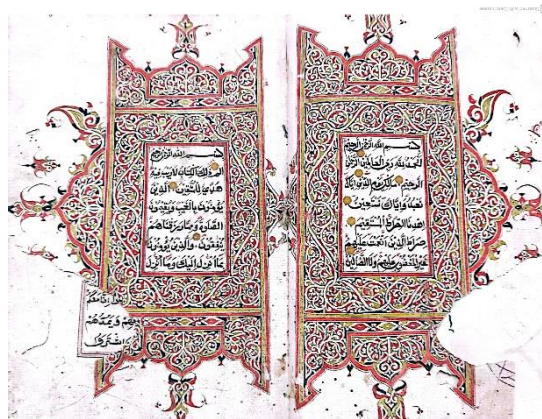


Fig 7 West Coast Malay Al-Holy Qur'ān
MSS 3567

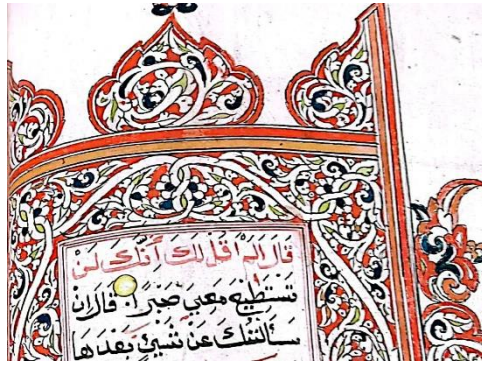


Fig 8
Middle Illumination
MSS 3566



Fig 9
Colophon Kitab *Širāt-i-Mustaqīm*
MSS 3426

The Borneo style illuminations are characterised by distinct visual elements, notably featuring a dominant rectangular structure accompanied by a dome and two tower-like figures on either side of the dome. This particular style is evident in MSS 3592 from the NLM collection and is notably scarce in Malaysian manuscripts. The predominant use of green and brown hues further accentuates the region's uniqueness, in contrast to the prevalent yellow and gold shades of the East Coast and the red and black tones of the West Coast. Although floral motifs are incorporated into this style of illumination, they are specifically integrated into the framework associated with the shape of the two towers.

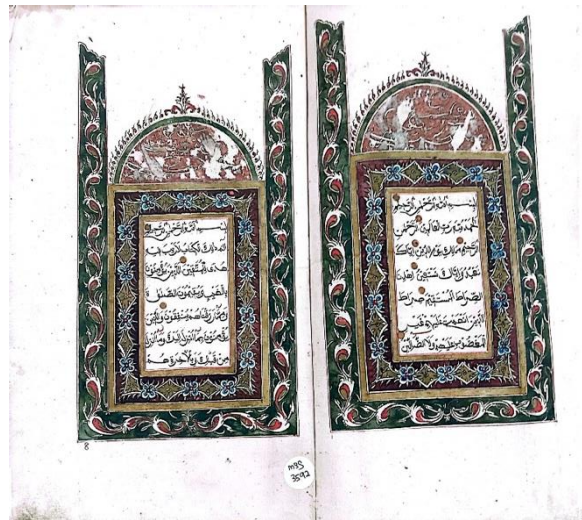


Fig 10 Borneo Style Holy Qur'ān
MSS 3592

Findings

Bridging Regions: Networking Across Malay World

The Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts in Malaysia can be categorised into three distinct groups, each influenced by the visual traditions of the major regions of Terengganu, Johor, and Sabah. These regions showcase diverse visual traditions, contributing to a distinctive artistic richness in the Holy Qur'ān manuscripts. For instance, the illuminated designs found in MSS 3238 and IAMM.1998.1.3436 are closely aligned with the tradition of Terengganu and the eastern coastal regions of Malaysia, including Kelantan and Patani in Thailand. This tradition may have been influenced by Patani, as the Sultanates of Terengganu and Kelantan were established later than the 15th-century Sultanate of Patani. According to Annabel, the unique illuminated Islamic manuscript style from Terengganu, Kelantan, and Patani reflects a regional identity deeply rooted in the historical influence of Langkasuka, a kingdom that thrived on the Thai-Malay isthmus until the 15th century. This distinct artistic tradition not only represents cultural continuity but also signifies a heritage associated with Langkasuka, as recognised by craftsmen such as Nik Rashiddin Haji Nik Hussein.⁶⁴

The East Coast region of Malaysia, which includes sixteenth-century Melaka and Johor, exhibits an adaptation of traditions from the sixteenth-century Sultanate of Aceh (Pasai) and the kingdoms of

Sumatra, such as Kampar and Indragiri. Visual similarities between Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts from Johor and Melaka and those from Aceh suggest a substantial influence from the region.

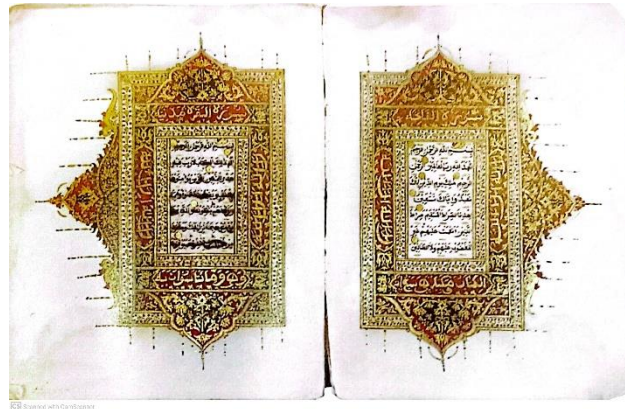


Fig 11 Holy Qur'ān From Patani

The Sultanate of Malacca has played a significant role in the development of Islam in Southeast Asia. It emerged as a key hub for trade and commerce in the early 15th century AD, surpassing the kingdom of Samudera Pasai. However, Malacca's prominence was short-lived as it was successfully conquered by the Portuguese in 1511. Subsequently, Aceh became an important Islamic centre, attracting Muslim intellectuals and thinkers. The interaction between Pasai-Melaka and Aceh led to a cultural amalgamation between the kingdoms. Furthermore, the influence of the Brunei region is evident in the Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts of Sabah and Sarawak. The Sultanate of Brunei in the 15th century left a profound legacy in the form of Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts, extending its influence to the Mindanao region of the Philippines, facilitating connections and artistic exchanges that define the diverse and culturally rich Holy Qur'ān manuscript traditions in Malaysia.

The Connection of Malay Holy Qur'ān's Manuscripts with Persian, Ottoman, and Chinese Traditions

In the 16th century, the Strait of Malacca became a crucial thoroughfare for trade in the Asian region, facilitating extensive cultural interactions that extended beyond the confines of Malaysian tradition. Notably, Turkey (Ottoman), Persia, and even China contributed significantly to shaping the intricate cultural landscape of the area.⁶⁵ The strategic location of the Strait of Malacca fuelled robust trade activities, enabling the influx of diverse cultural

influences into the region. Additionally, the overland route connecting to China and Central Asia played a significant role in the dissemination of Islamic traditions in Malaysia. Notably, Melaka and Sumatra exhibit visual elements reminiscent of the rugged Chinese form of the Holy Qur'ān, fused with indigenous cultural adaptations. It is noteworthy that the calligraphy in this region deviated from the prevailing *naskhi* script commonly observed in the calligraphy of the Holy Qur'ān during that era. In contrast, a separate style of calligraphy known as Malay calligraphy⁶⁶ emerged, expertly incorporating aspects from several traditions, including *muḥaqqaq* from Persia and *naskhi* from China. This fusion of influences is visible in the distinct visual qualities of the Qur'ān in Melaka and Sumatra, as demonstrated by the usage of Malay calligraphy.

The tradition of the Persian Holy Qur'ān is characterised by intricate gold and green illuminations and *muḥaqqaq* calligraphy, which collectively contribute to its distinctive visual and linguistic⁶⁷ characteristics. This tradition, which thrived during the Safavid era, exerted influence over regions including Afghanistan, India, and even China. The transmission of this tradition to the Malay Islamic tradition could have occurred through either maritime or terrestrial channels, considering the history of their interactions.⁶⁸ The influence and adaptation of the Persian Holy Qur'ān tradition with respect to Malay Islam is evident in the parallels between the Holy Qur'ān of Borneo and those of China and Persia. Notably, a common visual motif featuring a dome at the top, adorned with minarets on the right and left sides, is observed. Furthermore, the artistic elements of the Bornean Qur'ān complement the Persian Qur'ān's characteristic green tint. This convergence of visual and textual aspects serves as a testament to the cross-cultural exchange that transcended geographical boundaries, highlighting the influential nature of the Persian Holy Qur'ān tradition within Malay Islam.

The 15th century marked a significant period for Holy Qur'ān writing in the Ottoman Empire, leaving a profound influence on the tradition. A well-recognised adage in Ottoman culture, "Kur'an Mekke'de indi. Misir'da Okundu, Istanbul'da Yazildi," emphasising the importance of the Ottoman Holy Qur'ān writing tradition. The distinctive features of the Ottoman Holy Qur'ān include the use of illumination with squares and Turkish carpet motifs. Notably, the surah is often denoted as "Surah Al-Fatiha" rather than "Surah Fatiha." Furthermore, the Ottoman Empire has employed the stringed verse system since the 16th century.⁶⁹ The systematic arrangement of the conclusion of each verse on every page is a significant feature of this system.

The standardisation of the Ottoman Holy Qur'ān to 15 lines per page in the 15th century replaced the previous format of 17 lines

per page. Notably, the Terengganu Holy Qur'ān adheres to these standards, signifying the influence of the Ottoman tradition. However, the Terengganu Holy Qur'ān is distinctive in its incorporation of local elements in its production. The harmonious integration of Ottoman and indigenous characteristics in the Terengganu Holy Qur'ān captures both external influence and regional identity, reflecting the dynamic nature of the manuscript.

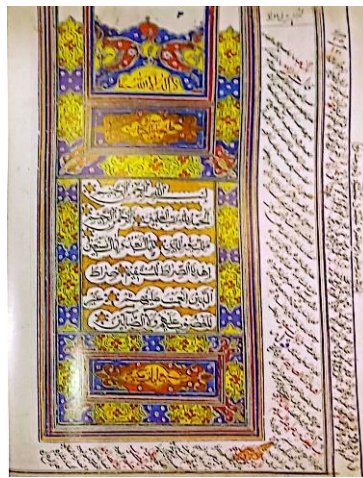


Fig 12 Persian Holy Qur'ān



Fig 13 Chinese Holy Qur'ān

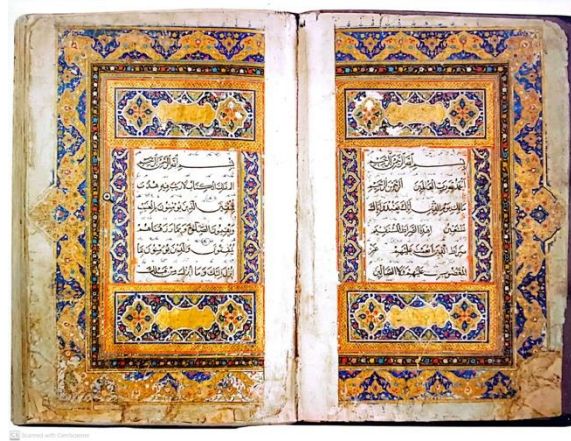


Fig 14 Ottoman Qur'ān

Conclusion

Through a thorough analysis of available manuscripts in Malaysia, this study provides new insights into the cultural and historical significance of the Holy Qur'ān within the Malay World. The Malay historical manuscripts, housed in Malaysia's State Library (NLM) and Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia (IAMM), originate from various regions, including Kelantan, Terengganu, Melaka, Johor, Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei. A detailed classification of these manuscripts into East Coast, West Coast, and Borneo styles based on visual and colophon features emphasises the diverse artistic traditions prevalent across different regions.

The examination of the Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts reveals not only their aesthetic appeal but also the profound connections between the Malay World and other global cultures. The creative diversity of the text is enhanced by the incorporation of various calligraphic styles unique to Malay Qur'ān's manuscripts, some of which reflect *Naskhi* style while also incorporating distinct Malay idioms. Furthermore, the inclusion of elements from Borneo, Terengganu, and the West Coast signifies a holistic approach to creative expression, showcasing the interdependence of various regional civilisations.

This research enriches our understanding of Malay Qur'ān's manuscripts by shedding light on the intricate connections between Islam and the Malay world. It delves into concepts from Persian, Ottoman, and Chinese Qur'ān's manuscripts, illustrating the links between global civilisations and localised developments in the creative history of the Malay people. However, this study acknowledges certain limitations. The exclusive focus on

manuscripts from the 18th to the 19th centuries results in a knowledge gap regarding earlier periods of Islamic civilisation in Malaysia. Additionally, the research scope is restricted by the damage that has caused the absence of specific manuscripts. To overcome these limitations, future studies should explore earlier historical periods, utilise advanced technology to restore damaged manuscripts, and conduct comparative analyses with Holy Qur'ān's manuscripts from neighbouring regions.

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