

Physical Analysis of the 19th Century AD East Coast Red Quran Bindings

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Doi:10.5901/mjss.2016.v7n4p

Abstract

This research is to reveal the East Coast Malay Peninsula's Quran binding design and decoration. There are many varieties of materials, colours, techniques and designs used in the Malay Archipelago to decorate bookbinding, including the Quran. One of the famous Malay illuminated Qurans is known as the East Coast Quran style, which is designated to Terengganu and Kelantan, located in the East Coast area of the Malay Peninsula. This Quran binding style was mainly wrapped with red leather as their covers. This is why it is called red Quran bindings. The aim of this research is to develop a set, of which can be used as another method to identify the origin of the Quran production, besides the illumination styles. Unlike Qurans from Turkey and Persia, which were signed, Qurans in this area were not signed and it is difficult to identify their origins. This research applies a typological methodology to set a standard template for the designs and decorations. Kelantan and Terengganu were famously known as Islamic learning centres in this region in the 19th century and rich with traditional local arts and culture.

Keywords: Quran/bookbinding/Malay/ East Coast/ red leather/ decoration.

1. Introduction

Red Quran binding is a name given to one of the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula Quran styles known as the Terengganu style, as described by Gallop (2005) in her findings as the most beautiful illuminated Malay Quran. Red refers to the red tanned leather used to wrap the covers. The East Coast area refers to Kelantan and Terengganu, which were famously known as Islamic learning centres and where Islamic writings such as manuscripts including Qurans flourished. Kelantan and Terengganu were known as one of the trading ports for traders from China and the Malay Archipelago, who sailed the South China Sea. It was ruled by several Malay kingdoms, such as Malacca and Patani, including Siam before it came under Malaysia in 1909 until today.

The East Coast area of the Malay Peninsula was highly recognised as a cradle of local culture and art by the English officers and travellers who did their anthropological studies and government reports in the 19th and 20th centuries. According to a renowned woodcarver, Nik Rashideen, Patani owned the finest art while Terengganu has the finest artistry and Kelantan was in between (Gallop 2002). Miller (2010) added that if there was a society who was proud of their goldsmiths and other craftsmen, there is a possibility that they had a book binder who was also excellent in skills in comparisons with others. Terengganu and Kelantan were also known to the Dutch and British officers as learning centres and where they could get copies of Malay manuscripts. Therefore, it is not impossible that this area produced a hidden gem of bookbinding art in their history.

The aim of this research is to document and to analyse the 19th century AD red Quran binding, the tangible Islamic heritage of the East Coast area in the Malay Peninsula which is almost disremembered today. Islamic manuscripts production was one of the important marks in this area and it was a continuation of Islamic bookbinding styles and tradition from other Islamic regions. This beautiful Islamic art of the East Coast red Quran binding should be highlighted and shared to enrich the Malay manuscript history information. The art of the East Coast red Quran binding is not only about the Quran but simultaneously about the local designs and skills which make them different from others. The red Quran binding is one of the Quran bindings available in this area which was related to the royal Quran.

The first part of this research will trace the history of manuscript tradition in the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula, while the second part will examine the physical characteristics of the East Coast red Quran bindings, with reference to colour, layout and decoration.

2. Historical Background

Since centuries ago, the Quran has been essential to the Malay people. Some of the Quran copying centres in the Malay Archipelago were traced to Patani, Terengganu, Aceh, Riau, Padang, Palembang, Banten, Cirebon, Yogyakarta, Solo, Madura, Lombok, Sumbawa, Bima, Banjarmasin, Samarinda, Makassar, and places in the Moluccas, including Ternate (Ali 2015). Some of these areas were also known for its beautiful illuminated letters (Mu'jizah 2009).

Islam has been known in Terengganu since 14th century AD, as stated in the inscription on the Terengganu inscribed stone. It mentioned that the ruler of Terengganu at that time upheld Islamic law or *syariah* law. Therefore, the existence of the Quran in the society at that time is essential as it was the source of *syariah* law and Islamic teaching. Hence, the presence of the Quran with local decoration designs in the Malay world is undeniable. The illuminated Qurans were made under royal patronage. One of the most beautiful East Coast Qurans is called number 1998.1.3427 (Gallop 2005), which is believed as Sultan Baginda Omar's Quran (Nurul Iman et. al. 2006) and now under the custodianship of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, which is also bound with red leather binding. The Quran has been a symbol of fine Islamic cultural tradition in the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula.

Kelantan and Terengganu owned a very close history and cultural identity. Inter-marriage between these two states and royal patronage opened the possibility for culture to integrate with each other. The inhabitants were mostly Malay Muslims. From textile production, metal works, wood carvings and Islamic writings, both states were masters in these arts. Besides artistry skills, they also upheld the same values, such as Islamic principles in their daily life. Art is always seen as an artist's manifestation of their inner spirit of belief and faith. Life, lifestyle and philosophy of a society are symbolically embodied in the artwork produced by them (Syed Ahmad Jamal 1979). In Malay, there is a word 'budaya,' which is literally translated as the original idea, where 'bu' means original and 'daya' means idea, thought, inspiration, creation or innovation (Khairuddin et. al 2014). Producing artworks used in people's lives is a part of culture and that is why the works is unique to that particular people. The same goes with the bindings of the East Coast Quran, where it embraced the culture of a Muslim people who produced and used it.

The foundation of Islamic culture in every Muslim community is the Quran, where it is placed as a source of inspiration and creativity. Reaction and reflection of theology or aesthetic is for Muslims to ponder on how to be involved directly in a process of culture establishment around them (Hamdy 2000). This is important due to the certainty that not all Malay are Muslims and not every Muslim is Malay in this region. But Malay and Muslim are like a synonym, where those who converted to Islam are called Malay in the Malay Peninsula until today. On the other hand, art produced by the Malays are not automatically called Islamic art other than the Quran, and it has been concealed from other Islamic art discussions for a long time. This might have happened due to the absence of major Islamic dynasties unlike the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal in the other continents, even though there were several strong Malay Islamic Kingdoms such as Aceh, Pasai and Malacca before the 15th century AD.

Islamic art influences from other Islamic regions, such as Turkey, Persia and India, were visible as luxury items in the Malay region especially in manuscript traditions where the formatting, calligraphy and illustration layout were similar with other Islamic manuscripts from other regions. Plomp (1993) had uncovered book cover designs from Indonesian manuscript collections stored in the *Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* (KITLV) and Leiden University Library. Most of the bindings in these collections are made from leather and blind stamped decoration. In her research, she found Persian influence in the book binding designs, but did not mention anything about the existence of red leather binding.

Furthermore, the existence of red leather Quran bindings are hardly mentioned in Malay manuscript research as a short general description. Wan Ali (1987) described red leather binding with gold decoration in the National Library of Malaysia as the best Malay book binding. Gallop and Ali (2006) did cite a record done by Friedrich & Van den Berg's research in 1873, where he mentioned an Arabic manuscript in Indonesia bound in red leather binding. Due to all these information, 24 Quran manuscripts were traced from different institutions and collections. These Qurans were illuminated in the East Coast Quran style and bound in red leather bindings. The institutions are the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia (IAMM), the Terengganu State Museum (TSM), the Pahang State Museum (PSM), the Islamic Museum Malacca (MIM), the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP), the National Museum of Malaysia (NMM) and The Asian Civilisation Museum (ACM), Singapore.

3. Method

Information on Malay Quran collected are then analysed by using a qualitative method, empirical grounded construction of types and typologies theory. In this theory, it is more open and flexible way in analysing data by using multiple

methods, yet controlled by four stages of data analysis procedure in formulating the type and typology (Kluge 2000). However, applying grounded theory in art research, general information could be also been described as general characteristic. The four controlling stages are general knowledge or characteristic, sampling, data collection and lastly, analysis. In this case, the information on the East Coast illuminated Malay Qurans was sorted according to the standard physical characteristics, which are bound in red leather with gilded stamped decoration (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The East Coast red Quran cover with gilded decoration.

Studies on the characteristics of the Malay Quran was developed with research done by Dzulhaimi (1999), Gallop (2005) and Hasnira (2014). These studies have identified the characteristics of the East Coast Quran illuminations, such as the architectural element of the Malay roof known as *tebar layar* and Malay carving designs. *Tebar layar* is a triangle shape mainly placed at the roof of the Malay traditional palaces and houses. In the East Coast Quran illumination pages, the *tebar layar* are placed on the top, left and right sides and below the text frames. According to Gallop (2005), the East Coast Quran owned distinctive regional characteristics, which are different from other Malay regions such as Patani, Sulawesi and Aceh. This is the main medium of classification used to identify the origin of the Malay Quran in the absence of the colophon of the manuscript, which consists of information on the copier, illuminator and owner of the Malay Quran. With or without gilded pages, the manuscripts with these characteristics are grouped together as East Coast Qurans in this research (Figure 2). This is because some of the illuminators replaced the gold colour with yellow colour, which is also associated with Malay royalty.



Figure 2: The East Coast Quran with illuminated opening pages.

Besides the illuminated pages, 2 other descriptions are bound with red leather and decorated with gilded hot stamps (Table 1). The matching Qurans were identified and grouped together as a sample. After the samples were collected, another physical characteristic was identified. The East Coast Quran inside covers were wrapped with printed cotton textile, known as end papers (Figure 3). There are varieties of designs in polychrome colours are recorded. All of the designs are floral motifs with Indian and English style. The textile was glued on the paste board cover thoroughly.

Table 1: General knowledge or characteristics of the East Coast red Quran bindings

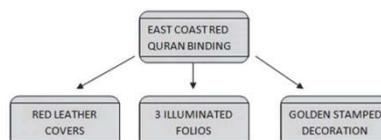




Figure 3: Printed cotton textiles on the inside Quran cover.

The East Coast Qurans were basically between 32- 33 cm in height x 22- 23cm in width x 7cm in thickness. The largest Quran measured 48 cm x 23cm x7 cm, which is labeled as 1998.1.3427 in the custody of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia. The cover is the most fragile part for the Quran. Most of the Qurans recorded have a few problems with the covers, such as loose joints, missing flaps, missing gilded decoration, tears and total removal after conservation. Like other Quran covers, the East Coast Quran covers also have a flap attached to the back cover. The flap is cut like an envelope cover shape.

Then further physical examinations were done to record more data for the analysis. Each selected Quran was examined physically to build the type and typology of the East Coast to ensure they are from the same group as listed in *Table 2* below.

Table 2: Physical characteristics check list

No. Institution	Acquisition number	3 Illuminated section (front, middle and end)	Red leather covers	Gold stamp decoration	Textile end papers
1. Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia	MKIM 2012.15.36	/	/	/	/
2. Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia	MKIM 1998.1.3427	/	/	/	/
3. Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia	MKIM 1998.1.3436	/	/	/	/
4. Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia	MKIM 1998.1.3444	/	/	/	/
5. Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia	MKIM 1998.1.3462	/	/	/	/
6. Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia	MKIM 1998.1.3537	/	/	/	/
7. Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia	MKIM 1998.1.3615	/	/	/	/
8. Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia	MKIM 1998.1.3616	/	/	/	/
9. Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia	MKIM 1998.1.3654	/	/	/	/
10. Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia	MKIM 1998.1.3655	/	/	/	/
11. Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia	MKIM 1998.1.3656	/	/	/	/
12. Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia	MKIM 1998.1.3598	/	/	/	/
13. Terengganu State Museum	LMNTE 2002.1	/	/	/	/
14. Terengganu State Museum	LMNTE 91.1	/	/	/	/
15. Terengganu State Museum	LMNTE 2007.1	/	/	/	/
16. Terengganu State Museum	LMNTE M95.2	/	/	/	/
17. Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka	DBP 79	/	/	/	/
18. National Museum Malaysia	MSN 32.1993	/	/	/	/
19. National Museum Malaysia	MSN E651.1975.U1.6	/	/	/	/
20. Islamic Museum Malacca	PMM 885.01.U1.56	/	/	/	/
21. Pahang State Museum	LMNP	/	/	/	/
22. Asian Civilization Museum	ACM 2009-01709	/	/	/	/
23. National Library Jakarta	Image contributor Ali Akbar	/	/	/	/
24. Personal collection	En Norhaiza	/	/	/	/

4. Result and Discussion

Decoration is one of the main characteristics in the East Coast Quran. The decorations were made by using a blind stamping technique, where gold colour papers were used to highlight the decoration motifs. Traditionally, the blind stamping technique was made by using metal stamped and hand pressure. According to Miller (2013), the metal stamped could be applied with or without heat. The pressure could leave a black mark as if it is bruised on the leather. Plomp (1993) added that in Indonesia, the stamping technique was done by damping the leather before it was stamped. This

would make the leather smooth and offered a good surface for pressed stamping and produced beautiful embossed decoration impressions on the leather.

Similar gilded decorations were placed on the front and back covers of the manuscript. The design is in a rectangular shape, in the same size with the covers. Basically, the four corners are decorated with "L" shape decoration panels and a big medallion as the centre. There are two types of papers used for the gilded section. First is gold-coloured paper with a white surface on the back and the second paper is most probably a gold paper which does not have a white surface at the back and is very thin. Through an examination under a microscope (Olympus U-TV1X-2) with 100x magnification, fibrous materials were seen from the samples and this is to confirm that the gilded decoration is paper (Figure 4).

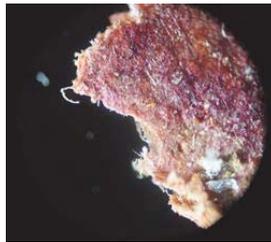


Figure 4: Fibrous material detail image under microscope Olympus U-TV1X-2. (100x magnification).

Besides the rectangular size, the "L" shape corner decorations and centre medallion, from 24 copies of Quran examined, there are 5 types of layout designs used by the binders for the East Coast Quran. It ranges from a simple arrangement to a full arrangement, with number 1 for the simplest and 5 for the full decoration. Each type is given a label as P1 until P5 (Figure 5).

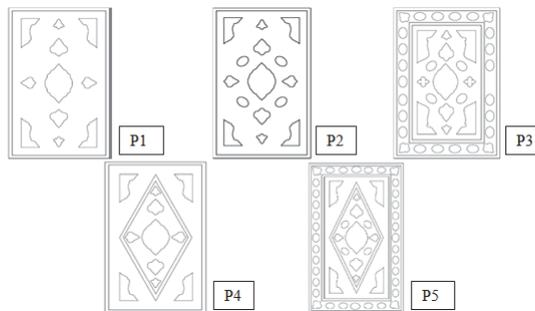


Figure 5: Five types of layout designs used as decoration of the east coast Qur'an cover.

These five types of layout designs are then compared with the layout design of the Ottoman, Persian and Mughal Quran covers to see the similarity and differences. Yes, there are few similarities in three sections border, four corners and centre parts. These layouts also have the same layout design with the concept of a garden used by the Persian carpet weaver. Due to the rectangular shape of the Quran cover and the carpet, Niewöhner (2004) makes a conclusion that the layout of book binding and carpets are matched because of their shape. This is not fully true, because the layout design is flexible and it could also fit into a square shape. As an addition, Reza (1997) mentioned that decoration dominated by floral motif should not be called as floral motif, but a garden is the best reference. The garden is the whole layout design, but the term floral motif is still necessary to analyse the type of flowers in the garden.

Like a normal garden, there are various types of plants and flowers arranged in a specific manner. The central medallion in the layout and the four corner decoration panels are fully decorated with intertwined floral and foliate designs, which is also known as arabesque in Islamic art. A simple floral motif is used as fillers around the central medallion or the central garden and in between the inner and the outer frames. There are six different flower designs, but all are with four petals. The designs are label as F1 until F6 (Figure 6).

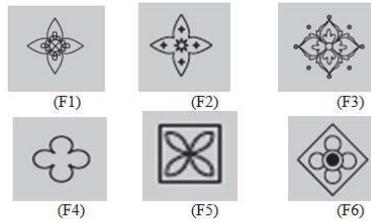


Figure 6: Six flower designs with four petals used on the east coast red Quran cover.

Besides floral decoration, there is calligraphy motif used on the cover. Made from the same technique as the floral designs, embossed stamped with gilded decoration. The calligraphy motif is an excerpt taken from one of the Quranic verses, surah al-Waqiah (The Inevitable), verse number 79 which means "None touch it except the purified." (Figure 7).



Figure 7: The calligraphy motif on the East Coast red Quran binding.

The calligraphic stamp decorates the side edge of the Quran cover, which is connected with the flap on the left. This section is to protect the folios and at the same time, the flap is used as a book marker for the readers to continue their recitation.

In general, the decoration of the East Coast red Quran cover owes its identity in the layout design of its cover. The embellishment also functions as a symbolic reminder for the Muslims to clean themselves and take their ablutions before they hold the Quran. This is not exclusive to the East coast red Quran cover, since it is also found on Qurans from the Mughal Dynasty. Today, this tradition is no longer in practice for Quran cover design.

5. Implications of the Research

1. This research makes a comprehensive collection of empirical data related to the East Coast red Quran collection in Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore.
2. The results of this research can be used by the museums professionals and art researchers to identify the Malay Quran collection.
3. The findings identified in this research are useful to future researcher to enhance the East Coast Quran.

6. Conclusion

The East Coast Quran cover is one of the artistic heritage that belonged to the East Coast area of the Malay Peninsula. The history and the artistic skills of the Muslims in this area are undeniable, especially in the 19th century AD. This is a hidden gem in history, where most of its production traces are buried with history. The existing Qurans are mostly not in good condition and properly recorded. This cultural material will soon disappear when the original cover of the East Coast Quran deteriorates and need to be replaced through conservation treatment to save the manuscript. Even though the whole production process of the covers is similar with that of other Quran covers in other Islamic countries, the design and decoration, as shown in P1 until P5, are interesting and unique. The cultural transmission from other Islamic countries to the East Coast area is not impossible due to its role as a trading port and Islamic teaching center, especially at the end of 19th century towards the 20th century. There is a unity in the design of the bindings, but variety in the decoration of the Quran covers. This finding is important as an extension of the Islamic art development of the world in the 19th century AD, where most of the major dynasties are at the edge of their existence. It is also significant to the country and the East coast area, specifically in enhancing the contribution of Islam in the development of this area.

7. Acknowledgement

1. Research Grant number DPP-2015-068 (National University of Malaysia)
2. Friedrich Zink, Ramlah Ngaten, Fauziah Hashim, Malia Musa and Rafidah Bahari from Conservation Department, Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia.

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