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EDITORS AND COMPILERS:

Dr. Azahar Harun
Dr. Rosli Zakaria
Dr. Abd Rasid
Pn. Haslinda Abd Razak
Pn. Liza Marziana Mohammad Noh
En Nadzri Mohd Sharif
En. Shaleh Mohd Mujir
Pn Fatrisha Mohamed Yussof
Pn Anith Liyana Amin Nudin
Pn Ilinadia Jamil
Cik Fazlina Mohd Radzi
Cik Aidah Alias
Cik Nurkhazilah Idris

COVER DESIGN:

Norsharina Samsuri

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The Cotton Cloth Qur'an binding of the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula

Ros Mahwati Ahmad Zakaria^{1,*},

¹ Institut Alam dan Tamadun Melayu (ATMA), Univeriti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia

*corresponding author: rosmahwati@ukm.edu.my

Abstract— This study is to analyse the physical criterias of the cotton colth Qur'an binding of the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula. Cotton is a type of textile used as the East Coast Qur'an binding. It is also of good quality that received high demand throughout the world prior to the 20th century. Before the 20 century, the cotton industry reached the Malay world through two routes, firstly via direct trade from India that had taken place prior to the arrival of Western colonization and secondly, through the East India Company, which turned the colonies under its control into revolutionary markets for British industry. A total of 150 Quran manuscript artefacts were used in this study. Each cotton cloth design was analysed and divided into categories such as coloured, striped, patterns with Indian influence and English patterns, based on the motif used. The red covers of Qurans from the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula have been identified to use cotton cloth as the inner cover for manuscripts, which is known as the end paper. The pattern and colour used showcases the taste and exclusivity of the binding of Qurans with red leather covers from the East Coast. It is also one of the defining features of Qurans with red leather covers from the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula.

Author Keywords: Binding; Quran; Malay; Cotton Cloth.

1. INTRODUCTION

Areas categorised as the East Coast in this study comprises of three traditional Malay states, namely Patani, Kelantan and Terengganu that are located on the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula. These three states once possessed a strong government and Malay civilisation before being officially separated through the Bangkok Agreement of 1909 whereby Patani was placed under the rule of Siam, while Kelantan and Terengganu were placed under British rule [9]. The Patani Dynasty and Cau Seri Wangsa Dynasty ruled from 1500-1688, while the Kelantan Dynasty in Patani reign from 1688-1902 [8]. In Kelantan, Islamic rule became known since the rule of Cik Siti Wan Kembang from 1548 to 1580 and the second phase is derived from the geneology of Long Yunus that began in 1762 until today [10]. In Terengganu, the earliest evidence of Islamic rule was recorded on

an inscribed stone dated 1303 [5]. However, according to the *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, the ruling Islamic dynasty began with the appointment of Tun Zainal Abidin as the sultan in 1708, which was recognised by Patani after he visited Patani in 1688 [9].

Besides this, the area of research has a close connection to eastern and western trade activities, the spread of Islam and the development of learning in Southeast Asia, especially in the learning of the Quran. The position of the East Coast region along the coast facing the South China Sea made it a suitable stopover for sailors, especially ships from China on their way to Sumatra, India or ships from the West and the Malay Archipelago headed to China and Japan. The close relationship between Japan and Patani that was forged through trade was likened by John Saris as “twin siblings” [3].

Another important matter that must be highlighted here is that the East Coast area referred to in this article, is not the same area in terms of boundaries, politics, economy and society as the East Coast area of today. The study area refers to the East Coast region prior to the 20th century/ 14th century Hijrah, whereby Patani was a Malay kingdom that ruled Songkhla, Satun, Patani, Yala and Narathiwat. It is unlike the boundaries of the Patani region we know today. Meanwhile, Kelantan and Terengganu are the same today in general. Today, Kelantan Terengganu are in the boundary and rule of Malaysia. Pahang is not included in this study as only Qurans from the three earlier areas have been identified through Quran illumination studies prior to this.

Patani is the backbone of the grandeur of the East Coast region. After the fall of Melaka in 1511 to the Portuguese, Patani emerged to replace the great Melaka Sultanate in the same decade. Patani was at the peak of its glory when its administration encompassed Patani, Singgora to Patalung, Kelantan and Terengganu [8]. The Patani government at the time was known as “Great Patani” or “The Glorious Islamic Empire of Patani” [8]. Patani’s rule was at its zenith under the rule of four related female queens who ruled in succession until the 17th century.

Cotton cloth is one of the main trade goods in the East Coast. It is one of the export goods that received a high demand all around the world. Cotton threads are a type of fibre that is made from the cotton plant. There are several types of cotton plants that are grown commercially around the world besides in India, such as in Mexico, South Florida, South Africa, Pakistan and the Caribbean islands. Cotton cloth are among the textiles that have long been used by mankind as a material for making clothing, wrapping, tents, bags and other textile crafts since before the Common Era.

The Industrial Revolution in Britain caused an oversupply of cotton cloths in the market and caused the price of cotton cloths to fall. The Indian hand-made

cotton cloth industry suffered a big impact in the 18th century and almost perished. However, Indian cotton cloth producers changed their production strategy to compete with the British East India Company, although not many could afford to buy mechanised looms and printing machines [4]. Indian cotton cloths are renowned for their superior quality, bright colours and beautiful motifs. The same cotton cloths have been used as a material for the binding of red Quran covers from the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula in the 20th century.

2. COTTON TRADE IN THE EAST COAST AREA

Cotton cloths received high demand in this region due to the tropical climate, which is hot and humid all year-round. In this climate, cotton became the most suitable cloth for making clothes for both the masses, as well as the ruling class, according to the quality of cotton cloths they could afford. Besides being imported as processed cotton cloths that can be made straight into clothing, cotton threads and unprocessed cotton cloths were also needed in Southeast Asia to produce batik and for weaving.

Most cotton cloths were made in Gujerat. Gujerat is a region in India that has the largest cotton supply and cotton cloth industry in India. Gandhi [4] highlighted Marco Polo's notes on the production of cotton cloth in Gujerat when he visited Asia in 1290, whereby he recorded the cotton plants in Gujerat that could live for up to twenty years. This is befitting another of Gujerat's main function as a thriving port with a close trade relationship with Southeast Asia, China and Japan. Another renowned port city in Gujerat was Surat [11]. Cotton and silk cloths were main trade goods that were plied in Gujerat, besides steel, alum, brass, diamonds, rubes and crystals [11]. Gujerat was pioneered by Muslim traders and monopolised the Southeast Asian spice trade. Most Gujerati cotton cloths were traded in several Islamic regions such as Africa, Persia, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.

India had pioneered world trade in cotton cloths since the 17th century with beautiful and high-quality textiles. However, the glory of the Indian cotton cloth industry waned when Britain began to mass produce cotton in the 18th century following the Industrial Revolution. Britain did not have a cotton source. They bought cotton from India [6] through the British East India Company at low prices and made cotton cloths in Britain by machine that were labeled as Indian cloths. These cloths were sold back to India at higher prices.

The British, through the British East India Company, began a plan to monopolise Indian cotton trade in the 17th century. In 1615, Sir Thomas Roe presented the Decree of the King of England to Emperor Jahangir to establish a trade centre

and factory to produce cotton goods [13]. This foundation, which was put in place in the 17th century succeeded in affecting cotton and cotton cloth trade in India 200 years later. In the 19th century, India became the main consumer of British cotton textiles [13] and indirectly became the largest market for British cotton goods.

After the British East India Company took over the administration of the Malay Peninsula in 1824 and expanded its influence to the East Coast at the end of the 19th century, they became the new suppliers of processed cotton cloths in this region and offered lower prices. This is because, at the same time, the British East India Company had also monopolised the Indian cotton industry in the 19th century [13]. Although some local textile producers, especially batik makers, still brought cloths directly from India, they were not end goods but were raw materials such as threads and unprocessed cotton. According to Abdullah Munsyi in his journey to the East Coast area in 1838, cotton textiles and threads were available in Terengganu and Kelantan [1].

3. METHODS

A group of Qurans manuscripts with the East Coast illumination design are identified based on the previous researches as described by Gallop (2005), Dzul Haimi (2007) and Hasnira (2014). The 150 Qur'an manuscripts are collected from two institutions such as the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia and the Islamic Museum Malacca. The physical criterias of the Quran binding are carefully examined and catalogued particularly for this study. The datas are then divided into two typologies; the outside cloth cover and the inside cloth cover of the Qur'an binding. The outside cloth cover is where the cloth is used to wrap the manuscript on the outside of the binding while the inside cloth cover is where the cloth is used as a layer on the inside of the binding.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cotton cloth is an organic material made of plant fibres that are processed to become threads and woven into fabric. It is a suitable material for use in Quran bindings as it is natural and pure. In Islamic art, the materials used in the production of a Quran volume must be clean from any impurity. In Quran binding, cotton is used as a material and one if its function is to beautify the appearance of the art form [2]. In this function, among the techniques used is to layer. This technique is associated to the preparation of Islamic manuscript covers that were previously used, but the concept used is similar, whereby another material is used to cover the original material used as an art object. For example, enamel may be applied to ceramic, while wood may be inlaid with mother of pearl to decorate the art object. In this study, cotton cloth is used to decorate end papers and pages of quran manuscripts that have been bound.

In the collection of East Coast Qurans, there are two methods of binding that uses cotton cloths, either as an outer cover or inner cover decoration and end paper. Most of the cotton cloths used on the outer cover is unpatterned, which is most commonly used on Patani Qurans. Meanwhile, coloured and patterned cloths are used an inner covers and end papers in red Qurans of the East Coast [12].

Cotton cloths used as the outer cover of Patani Quran bindings employ coloured cotton, usually brown or dark blue that is pasted with an adhesive on the entire manuscript binding. The fabric used on the outer cover of Patani Quran manuscripts are similar to coloured or patterned pellicat as mentioned by Maxwell [7]. The cotton Pellicat patterns that are mainly used are red and white (Figure 2). Meanwhile, dark blue and brown are favoured in the manuscript covers of Patani Qurans (Figure 3). For Patani Quran manuscript collections, there are no inner layers of textiles like there is in red Quran manuscript covers from the East Coast.



Figure 2: Pellicat design on cotton cloth used as a Quran manuscript cover from Patani. IAMM 1998.1.3498.



Figure 3: Brown cotton cloth used as a Quran manuscript cover from Patani. IAMM 1998.1.3484.

Coloured or patterned Indian cotton cloths were used in the binding of red Qurans as end papers or doublures. This section is located inside the cover of red Qurans from the East Coast. The cloth used mostly are coloured or patterned, but some are white. The Indian cotton cloths used in binding were taken from the body or centre of the cloth, as there were no edge patterns on the cloths used. This shows the possibility that the cloths were cut from very long yardage material. They are cut according to the size of red Quran manuscripts. This is because there are Quran covers that have two types of cotton cloth of different patterns or colours that are used as doublures and end papers that are placed side by side. The selection of cotton cloth patterns was also important in the binding of red Quran covers, as it is the Holy Book of Muslims and there is a prohibition on the use of figures.

In the process of preparing the cotton cloths for binding, each Quran manuscript requires four pieces of cotton cloth. Three pieces of cloth are cut to the size of the manuscript, while another is cut wider than the rest as it includes the size of the back cover, side cover and flap. These cloths are pasted to the inner cover and end paper of the manuscript as a decoration for Quran bindings (Figure 4).



Figure 4 The doublure and end paper

Cotton cloths that were applied to manuscript covers must be weighed down with heavy items so that they will dry flat and the paper will not be warped after it has dried. If this occurs, problems will arise, especially in causing the end papers to tear or become damaged. Although the task of pasting together paper and cotton cloth seems simple, it requires a lot of skill so that the result is neat and appealing.

The Indian cotton cloths recorded in this study comprises of two patterns. The first is floral patterns that have a Western style, particularly roses. Various styles of roses were found in this study. Some patterns feature flower buds, either large or small, and others are arranged in bouquets. The scattered flowers used have

a similarity to the patterns used on cotton cloths in 19th century Britain (Figure 5). The second is a pattern with an Indian style, such as the paisley, and an arrangement that is similar to the patterns typically used by cotton cloth printers in India. (Figure 6). The colour used on cotton cloths with these patterns are brighter as compared to patterns used on the former pattern. It is interesting to note that to date, no identical patterns of cotton cloth have been found in the making of red Quran manuscripts from the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula.



Figure 5 English rose pattern used on a red Quran manuscript cover. IAMM 1998.1.3462.



Figure 6 Indian pattern used on a red Quran manuscript cover. IAMM 1998.1.3616

The patterns recorded in this study shows that the cotton cloths that were chosen to bind the red Qurans of the East Coast are the preference of the upper echelon who prefer luxury and imported goods, including textiles. The array of patterns found show the taste of the upper class, like the palace courtiers, who can afford to pay for pricey cloths of top quality and beauty that were made in India or England. It also proves that Indian motifs are a main choice in the cotton cloth market and at the same time, English patterns were used by the Muslim community.

5. CONCLUSION

Cotton is a trade product and art object that is significant in the history of art since before the Common Era until today. Indian cotton cloth has transcended time, eras, political boundaries and religion in terms of how it is used due to its quality and beauty that has attracted the attention of artisans to use cotton cloths in the production of clothing and art items. The use of natural plant-based materials, from the making of threads to the making of dyes, was perhaps an important criterium in the selection of cotton cloth as one of the materials for making manuscript covers and book bindings of Qurans from the East Coast, which are the Holy Book of Muslims. Floral patterns became the main preference to beautify Quran manuscript covers of the East Coast. The use of cotton cloth in the binding of red Qurans of the East Coast is a special feature of this region. The cotton cloths used are not only important in terms of uniformity of manuscript cover decorations, but it also strengthens the end papers so that it will protect the other pages. This also symbolises the skill in adapting imported materials in the making of local Islamic art.

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