Études interdisciplinaires sur le monde insulindien
Sous le patronage de l’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales

TIRÉ À PART

ARCHIPEL 72

2006

Publiées avec le concours du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique et de l’Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Paris
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ARCHIPEL 72

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2006

ISSN 0044-4613

ANNABEL TEH GALLOP AND ALI AKBAR
The Art of the Qur’an in Banten:
Calligraphy and Illumination

In all parts of the Malay world the finest Islamic manuscripts are copies
of the Qur’an, and the finest Qur’ans invariably boast the most lavish illumi-
nation. In the glorious double decorated frames located at certain key places
in the book can be read not only veneration for the text of the Divine
Revelation, but also the artistic traditions of the region, the skill and faith of
the artist, and the glory and piety of the patron. It is therefore surprising to
find one region of maritime Southeast Asia (Nusantara) where such a
prescription does not hold true. In the finest Qur’an manuscripts from
Banten – situated on the western end of Java, and site of a renowned Muslim
kingdom from the 16th to the early 19th century – illumination does not
appear to play a key role. In this article, all aspects of the art of the Qur’an in
Banten will be explored, in order to arrive at some understanding of the aes-
thetic principles and other factors that guided the production of Qur’an
manuscripts in Banten.

It must be stressed at the outset that those who approach this article hop-
ing for reflections on religion, culture and society in Banten will probably be
disappointed, for what follows is essentially limited to a codicological study

1. This paper is based on the studies of Banten manuscripts by Akbar (2004, 2005a, 2005b)
and Gallop (2005a). It is written jointly except for the section on calligraphy which is by
Akbar (translated from the Indonesian by Gallop) and that on Illumination which is by
Gallop. This article is dedicated to the memory of Yasin Hamid Safadi (d. 7 May 2000), for-
mer head of the Arabic section, the British Library; colleague, friend and mentor to Annabel
Gallop, and, through his writings on calligraphy, an inspiration to Ali Akbar.
of Qur’an manuscripts from Banten. But, as will be seen below, a detailed analysis of a wide range of extrinsic aspects of the manuscripts reveals an exceptional level of technical excellence in Qur’an manuscripts from Banten compared with those produced in other parts of Indonesia, particularly with respect to calligraphy. This suggests a level of Islamic connoisseurship, and a degree of acquaintance with the Indo-Persian Islamic book arts, which appears to be unique in Southeast Asia.

Qur’an manuscripts from Banten
Described and analysed in this article are 13 Qur’an manuscripts from Banten, mostly probably dating from the 18th century, comprising all the Banten Qur’ans known to the present writers. 12 are held in Indonesia, with seven in the National Library in Jakarta (Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia, henceforth PNRI) and five in various institutions in Banten itself. The remaining manuscript is held in the Netherlands, in the University Library in Leiden (Leiden Universiteitsbibliotheek, henceforth LUB). All the manuscripts are described in the Appendix.

Of the seven Qur’ans in the PNRI, five (A.50-54) are from the remnants of the royal library of Banten that was acquired by the Dutch Government and presented to the Bataviaasch Genootschap (the precursor of the PNRI) in 1835 (Veth 1857: 700).2 The other two Qur’ans (W.277-278) are from the collections of Hermann von de Wall (1807-1873), a prolific collector of Malay manuscripts, who acquired most of his manuscripts in Riau; von de Wall’s manuscripts were acquired by the Bataviaasch Genootschap in 1873. The single manuscript in the Netherlands—Cod.Or.5678, a volume containing just one jāz3 of the Qur’an—is from a collection of Banten manuscripts given to the LUB by C. Snouck Hurgronje in 1906. The five manuscripts in Banten are found at sites of religious and historical significance. Two Qur’ans are held in the Masjid Agung (Musaf A & B), two were on display in a case at the tomb of Maulana Yusuf4 (Musaf C & D), and the fifth is held at the tomb of Pangeran Mas5 (Musaf E). They are generally in poor condition. Some were only viewed on exhibition while in other cases the custodians were unwilling to allow the manuscripts to be handled for fear of damage; therefore, it has not always been possible to ascertain the completeness of the Qur’anic text or to provide full descriptions of these manuscripts. All codicological aspects of these 13 Qur’an manuscripts will be examined below, starting with the binding and then working inwards, through paper, page size and format to the mise-en-page or graphic layout of the text on the page, and on to calligraphy and illumination. Wherever relevant, comparisons will be made with Qur’an manuscripts from other parts of the Islamic world, and also with other Southeast Asian Qur’ans. These comparisons will help to show whether characteristic features of Banten manuscripts derive from the broader Islamic tradition, or whether they reflect a Nusantara style, or whether they are in fact unique to Banten. On the basis of this discussion, some conclusions will be drawn about the art of the Qur’an in Banten.

Bindings
In her pioneering study of bindings in Malay manuscripts, Marije Plomp drew attention to the “unusual beauty” of Banten bindings and their high quality, manufactured in fine, soft, dark reddish-brown leather (Plomp 1993: 579-81). In view of their royal pedigree, it is highly likely that some of the Banten Qur’ans presented here would also originally have had fine bindings. In the first catalogue of Arabic manuscripts of the Bataviaasch Genootschap published in 1873, one of the manuscripts, A.54, is said to be “bound in red leather” (corio rubro ligatis, Friedrich & van den Berg 1873: 64). Unfortunately, all the Qur’ans in the PNRI have since then been rebound in drab, modern (early 20th century?), library bindings of brown buckram, with no traces of their original bindings remaining. There is no information on the bindings of the Qur’ans held in Banten.

Only the Leiden manuscript (Cod.Or.5678), though in poor condition, has a fine binding of exactly the “Banten” type described by Plomp (Pl. 1). The full calf binding of high-quality soft maroon leather has a fore-edge and envelope flap. In the centre of the front and back covers is a distinctive large gilt almond-shaped medallion with scalloped edges, containing a swirling floral pattern. Above and below this medallion are two small bud-shaped ornaments. The inner rectangular panels containing these ornaments are bordered by a series of fillets enclosing a gilt rope border of s-shaped motifs.

2. There does not appear to be any published list of this royal library, which probably originally consisted of manuscripts in Arabic, Malay and Javanese. On the basis of catalogue descriptions and personal observation, the following 30 Arabic MSS, at least, are from this royal library: PNRI A.19, 29, 31, 45, 50-57, 60, 63, 67-69, 73, 76, 78-83, 98, 101, 105, 111, 117-8, 142-3, 146, 155, recorded dates in these MSS range from 1676 to 1803. Other Banten krsatin manuscripts are held in Leiden University Library, acquired from a variety of sources. What is needed is a study to ‘reconstruct’ the royal library of Banten, such as Drewes (1977: 199-214) and Iskandar (1980) have done for Palembang krsatin manuscripts.
3. One jāz is a thirtieth part of the text of the Qur’an. The plural form of the Arabic word jāz is ajāz, but in line with Indonesian practice, in this article the term jāz is used in both the singular and plural sense.
4. Second ruler of Banten (r. ca.1570-ca.1580); son of Maulana Hasanuddin and grandson of Sunan Gomong Jati (Guillot 1990: 10).
5. Pangeran Mas was said to have been an exile from Demak who persuaded Maulana Muhammad (3rd ruler of Banten, r. 1583-1596) to mount the expedition against Palembang on which he met his death (Kartodipo 2001: 35).
There are four deeply-indented gilt corner pieces containing floral motifs. In terms of foreign influences, Plomp (1993: 589) suggested that the central medallions and corner pieces on Banten bindings "not only resemble decorations on some sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Persian bindings, but can even be said to be identical with them".

**Division into volumes**

A notable feature of the Banten Qur’an is the proportion of multi-volumed sets. Even if we disregard the naturally more voluminous Qur’ans with interlinear translations (A.51, with Malay translation, and A.54, with Javanese translation, are both in 5 volumes, and W.277, with Malay translation, is in 10 volumes), there are three other multi-volumed Qur’ans: A.52 and A.53 each comprises 10 volumes containing 3 juz’ each, while the Leiden manuscript is a single volume containing juz’ 25, implying that it originally formed part of a 30-volume set.

Multi-volume Qur’ans have been known in the Islamic world since the ninth century (Déroche 2003: 261), based either on practical considerations of size or on certain conventional divisions of the text into equal parts. Popular choices are divisions into two, four, seven, ten, and, most commonly, 30, reflecting the division of the text of the Qur’an into 30 parts of equal length (juz’), and facilitating the recitation of the Qur’an in its entirety in a 30-day month. Certain formats were preferred in certain places and at certain times: in more recent centuries division into four or seven volumes became less popular (Déroche 2003: 271), while in China, on the basis of known manuscripts, the 30-volume set appears to have been a more or less standard format for Qur’an manuscripts (Stanley 1999: 13).

In Southeast Asia, however, the single-volume Qur’an or mushaf is the norm, and very few multi-volume sets of line Qur’ans are known. In a survey of some 200 illuminated Qur’ans from Southeast Asia, only six other multi-volume sets have been encountered: three two-volume Qur’ans, from the southern Philippines, Selangor and Bone; a four-volume set from Pontianak; a 10-volume set from Java; and a 30-volume Qur’an from Patani. Of over 50 illuminated Qur’ans documented from Aceh, all are single-volume mushaf. Against this background, both the proportion of multi-volume sets from Banten, and the variety of modes of division, appear to be significant.

**Paper, page size and mise-en-page**

As far as can be ascertained, all the manuscripts are written on European laid paper except for A.50, which is written on Indian paper (discussed further below). When page size and mise-en-page are considered, however, the Qur’ans divide into two distinct groups.

The first group of six manuscripts is in "large folio" format. The Qur’ans in this group (A.52-54, Mushaf A, C & D) have page sizes ranging from 53 x 37 cm to 45 x 30 cm. Such large Qur’ans are rare in Southeast Asia, with similar-sized examples only known from the Brunei-Southern Philippines zone. All these Qur’ans have 17 lines per page, save for A.54, which has an interlinear Javanese translation; in this manuscript there are 9 lines of Arabic and 9 lines of Javanese, totalling 18 lines per page. The large folio Banten Qur’ans are associated with a distinctive style of page layout (Figs. 1-5; Pl.2). In these manuscripts, there are no ruled frames enclosing the text block, and the margins are very narrow, with the writing extending quite close to the edges of paper on all sides.

The absence of text frames is very unusual in Qur’ans from the Malay world, and even in most other contemporary Qur’an manuscripts of the 18th and 19th century. While ruled frames are rare in Malay Qur’ans, from the 14th century onwards they were increasingly used in Turkish and Iranian Qur’ans. In fact, the closest known parallel to the mise-en-page in these Banten Qur’ans is found in a Qur’an dated 1068 (1657/8), possibly from Syria, which has been described as illustrating "the survival into the 17th century of a pre-Ottoman tradition of book production, for it has many of the features of a rough manuscript, such as the lack of a ruled frame around the text" (Bayani, Contadini & Stanley 1999: 57-9). This Qur’an also shares other features common to the "large folio" group of Banten Qur’ans: it has 17 lines per page, unframed sūrah headings in red, and a full set of variant readings in the margins, but in folio size it is much smaller, measuring 28.2 x 19.6 cm.

There are also other, non-Qur’anic, Arabic manuscripts from the royal Banten library now held in the PNRI in this same large format, including four copies of the prayerbook Darā’il al-khayrāt (A.78-A.81). They seem to share the same principles of text layout: there are no text frames and minimal margins (Fig. 6). These non-Qur’anic manuscripts are less generously spaced, with about 23 lines per page.

The second group of seven Qur’ans (A.50-51, W.277-278, Cod.Or.5678, Mushaf B, E) is in a smaller "folio" format, with page sizes ranging from...
Fig. 1 - Beginning of Sūrah al-Maghidah, at the start of jāʾ 28, from the final volume of a 10-volume Qurʾān. The surah heading and the word Alḥadd are in red ink, and the margins contain variant readings (qād ʿī al-māḥ) arranged diagonally in a ‘zagzag’ pattern. PNR 1 A, 53k, pp. 1-2.

Fig. 2 - Beginning of jāʾ 25, from a 5-volume Qurʾān with interlinear translation in Javanese; the Arabic text is in red ink and the Javanese text is in black ink. PNR 1 A, 56r, pp. 1-2.

Fig. 3 - Qurʾān, showing the beginning of Sūrah al-Anʿām. Banten, Manjad Agung, Mushaf A.

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Fig. 4 – Qur’an, showing the beginning of Surah Qaf. Banten, Makam Maulana Yusuf, Mushaf C.

Fig. 5 – Qur’an, showing Sirah al-Ziyara to Sirah al-Fil. Banten, Makam Maulana Yusuf, Mushaf D.

Fig. 6 – Manuscript of Dadd’il al-khayriyya from Banten, with an illustration of the tombs of the Prophet, Abu Bakr and ‘Umar. The physical layout is very similar to some Banten Qur’ans, with large folios, no text frames, narrow margins and the word Allah rubricated in red ink. PNII A.80, pp. 5-6.
26.5 x 18 cm to 39 x 25 cm. This size is more typical for Qur'an from maritime Southeast Asia: Aceh Qur'ans generally have page sizes in the range of 28.5 x 20 cm to 34 x 23 cm, and Terengganu Qur'ans measure about 32 x 21 cm (although three large manuscripts of around 43 x 28 cm are known) while Patani Qur'ans are smaller, in “quarto” format, averaging 21 x 16 cm.

The page layout in these “folio” format Banten Qur'ans is also much more in line with other Qur'ans from Southeast Asia. In all the manuscripts apart from W.277, the Qur'anic text is enclosed within a series of ruled frames of different coloured inks, with relatively wide margins on the three outer sides, and a narrow inner margin along the gutter of the book (Figs. 7, 9; Pl. 8-13). The composition of the frames in each manuscript is given below (starting with the innermost band and moving outwards towards the edges of the page):

- PNRI A.50: red-black-yellow-black-black
- PNRI A.51: red-black-yellow-black
- PNRI W.278: red-black-yellow-black
- Mushaf E: red-black-yellow-black-black
- LUB Cod.Or.5678: red-black-yellow-black-black

Banten text frames can thus be described in general as a series of five ruled red-black-yellow-black-black lines, sometimes with a slight variation in the number of outer red or black lines. Such a pattern, while quite distinct, nonetheless conforms to a generic Nusantara model. For example, all Qur'ans from Aceh have either red-black-red-black text frames or, less commonly, red-red-black frames; while on the East Coast of the peninsula, two templates are encountered: a simpler black-black frame, or a more ornate black-thick yellow-black-black-red frame.

In Qur'an manuscripts from all parts of the Islamic world it is common for the initial pages to be laid out differently from the rest of the text. In the Malay archipelago, whether or not the manuscript is illuminated, the initial two facing pages usually contain the Sūrat al-Fātiḥah on the right-hand page and the beginning of the Sūrat al-Baqarah on the left, in a text block of reduced size (Fig. 10, Pl.5). This is the case in three manuscripts (A.50, A.54, W.278), but cannot be ascertained for the five Qur'ans in Banten, which all lack the first pages; on the other hand, the opening pages of A.51 and W.277 have the same dimensions as the rest of the text, perhaps by virtue of their Malay translation. But in a significant break from Southeast Asian practice, the two opening pages of A.52 and A.53 contain only the Sūrat al-Fātiḥah. In A.52 the text is presented in the form of a diamond on both pages (Fig. 11) while in A.53 the text is in squares, and in both manuscripts the text blocks are surrounded by a calligraphic border of vari-
Fig. 8 – Beginning of a 10-volume Qur’an with interlinear Malay translation, showing part of Sūrah al-Fatīhah. PNRI W.277a, p. 1.

Fig. 9 – Qur’an, showing the beginning of Sūrah al-Ma’mūn; the margin on the right-hand page bears a magra’ sign. PNRI W.278.

Fig. 10 – Beginning of a Qur’an, showing Sūrah al-Fatīhah on the right-hand page and the start of Sūrah al-Baqā’arah on the left. PNRI W.278.
The Art of the Qur'an in Banten

Most Qur'an manuscripts use graphic devices to indicate the end of each verse (āyah). In the Banten Qur'āns there is clearly a tradition of yellow roundels outlined in black, although the use of gold roundels in two manuscripts (A.50 and A.52) suggests that yellow may have been chosen initially as a substitute for gold. W.277 differs here the verse markers are red circles. In two manuscripts, the roundels have been further embellished with petal-like dots of coloured ink around the perimeter — in A.50 the gold roundels each have four red and four green “petals”, and in A.54 the yellow roundels are adorned with three red and three yellow “petals” — while in A.52 only the very last verse of the Qur'an bears a “floral” marker (Pl. 4). Such floral verse markers are extremely unusual in Southeast Asian Qur'āns, where verse markers are almost always hollow circles or coloured roundels, although in Ottoman, Persian, Indian and Chinese Qur'āns verse markers are generally rosettes.

Calligraphy

Calligraphy in Qur'an manuscripts can be analysed in four main categories: a) the text of the Qur'an proper; b) sūrah headings; c) marginalia such as marks for textual divisions of the Qur'an, variant readings, recitation signs, translations and other notes; and d) supplementary texts preceding and following the Qur'ānic text, including prayers, colophons, ownership notes and other such writings. Each of these categories of text has its own special characteristics, requiring different calligraphic treatment, and in turn, the functional requirements of each category has helped to shape the skills of Qur'ānic scribes.

The text of the Qur'an

Throughout the Islamic world, by far the most common script used for the text of the Qur'an is Naskh, with other scripts being only rarely encountered. This choice can easily be understood, for Naskh is the most legible script, and the primary function of a Qur'an manuscript is to be read. Nonetheless, other scripts are also found, and apart from Kufic in the early period, Thuluth, Muhaqaq and Râhiânt have all been used over the cen-

13. For a 16th century Indian example, see Lings 1976: Pl.94; for an 18th-century example, see Bayani, Contadini & Stanley 1999: 218-9.
turies in many parts of the Islamic world. However, the use of these latter scripts appears to have been restricted to deluxe Qur’ans copied for royal patrons, for the writing of these scripts requires high levels of dedication and skill, as well as considerable amounts of time.

As far as is known at present, all Southeast Asian Qur’an manuscripts are written in Naskhi. In all but a few cases, the style of Naskhi found in Qur’ans throughout Nusantaraverse fairly basic. These forms of Naskhi are not “standard” Naskhi according to the prescriptions of the master calligraphers (khattat), but much freer versions of Naskhi, reflecting the styles and abilities of individual scribes. There are of course exceptions to this rule, and below we will look at the type of Naskhi found in Banten, which could be said to be in a class of its own.

The Naskhi found in Qur’ans from Banten is of a calligraphic quality not found in Qur’an manuscripts from any other region of Southeast Asia. On the basis of the Qur’an manuscripts analysed, it can truly be said that there is a “Banten style” of calligraphy. The writing of Naskhi appears to have been a subject of serious study in Banten, for not only is this “Banten Naskhi” found in various manuscripts currently held in different locations, but it has also been used consistently. This script is used not only for the text of the Qur’an, which in any case is normally accorded special care, but in one manuscript (A.54) it is also used for the Javanese translation. It is a great cause for regret that so little is known about the tradition of copying manuscripts in Banten in the past – for example, where the scriptoria were located and how they were run – for a common calligraphic thread can be seen in the surviving Banten Qur’ans, which testifies to the careful maintenance of a calligraphic tradition.

A study of these 13 Banten Qur’ans reveals two slightly different variants in the style of Banten Naskhi used (see Table 1). The script in A.50-51, W.277-278, Mushaf A and D, and Cod. Or.5678 is very similar, while that in the six other manuscripts – A.52-54, Mushaf B, C and E – is slightly different in style.

In the first group, the most prominent characteristic is the way in which the tails of the letters waw and ra' do not stretch simply downwards, but curve slightly upwards. Final dal and dhalt6 are drawn right from the top of their vertical stroke and not from the bottom, as is generally taught according to widespread rules of calligraphy. This feature is particularly associated with Naskhi in Persia and India. The shape of dal in its stand-alone form is unusual, and also resembles Persian Naskhi. Other distinctive characteristics are the way that the letter ha' in the construction ham resembles a half-

15. See al-Baghdādī 1968. This work on the rules of calligraphy is well regarded, and most Indonesian calligraphers use it as a standard reference.
16. Referred to as zal in Indonesian usage.

Table 1 – Difference between the letter forms of the two variants of Banten Naskhi
circle. This way of writing *ha* is common in Persian calligraphy, including in the *Ta’liq* script.\(^7\) Finally, the dot of final *dal* is often placed in the centre of its curve. Some of these characteristics can be seen in Table 1 and Fig. 12 below.

The similarity in letter shapes described above and seen in Fig. 12 illustrates the influence of Persian *Naskh* on Banten *Naskh*. There are naturally some differences; but in general the shape of the letter forms is comparable, and the source of influence is clear. The suggestion of Persian influence on Banten calligraphy is strengthened by the *Ta’liq* style of the Malay translations in A.51 and W.277. The influence of *Ta’liq*, which slopes to the right, can often be seen in Malay manuscripts written in Jawi script in Southeast Asia, albeit in a simplified form.

The second style of Banten *Naskh* is that found in A.52, 53, 54 and Mshaf B. C and E. In fact, in terms of general characteristics this script does not differ greatly from that of the first group described above. There are many obvious similarities, but there are also some notable differences, primarily the way in which the tails of *wa*, *ra*’ and final *mim* are pulled downwards. This contrasts with the way in which the tails of the same letters in the group above are levelled off or pulled slightly upwards. This second style of Banten *Naskh* is quite close to *Muhaqqaq*, one of the main characteristics of which is the free-flow of the tails of the letters *wa*, *ra* and final *mim* (see Table 1 and Fig. 13). *Muhaqqaq* has been widely used over the centuries for copying Qur’ans, especially in India, Persia, Iraq and Egypt.

Banten *Naskh*, in its two variant forms – one reflecting the strong influence of Indo-Persian *Naskh*, and the other verging on *Muhaqqaq* – appears to have been used consistently for the copying of religious texts in Banten over a particular period, but it should be stressed that there do not appear to have been clear rules associated with the writing of this distinctive script. From an artistic point of view, there are no known examples of Banten *Naskh* which achieve a level of technical excellence which could be regarded as setting standards for that script, and which could therefore function as calligraphic exemplars. Consequently, further variations in writing Banten *Naskh* could and did occur, according to the skill and predilections of the scribe.

### Sūrah headings

*Sūrah* headings occupy a special position in Qur’ān manuscripts. In many cases scribes and artists paid special attention to *sūrah* headings, for fine *sūrah* headings were one of the key determinants of the quality of a Qur’ān

\(^7\) The *Ta’liq* script was developed by the Persians at the beginning of the 16th century during the reigns of Shīh ʿIsād II (1502–1524) and Shīh Tāhnāsp (1524–1576) (Safrādī 1978: 27).
manuscript. In Nusantara, artistic attention was focused on sārah headings set within illuminated frames, where a wide variety of calligraphic styles are encountered, for example “floral calligraphy” or the stylisation of certain letters such as ta’ marbata. The degree and nature of calligraphic stylisation depended on the ability and creativity of the scribe, who may have collaborated with the illuminator, or may even have been the artist himself.

Sārah headings in Banten Qur’ans do not conform to the general Nusantara tradition. A major difference is the general lack of illumination in Banten Qur’ans (discussed further below), with the consequent absence of special cartouches for sārah headings within the illuminated frames; and in those Banten Qur’ans without text frames, the sārah headings are not even set within simple ruled frames as is standard throughout Nusantara. All sārah headings in Banten Qur’an manuscripts are written in the same script as the body of the Qur’anic text. It can therefore be assumed that the sārah headings were written by the same scribe who wrote the Qur’anic text, and were written at the same time.

In line with general Nusantara practice, all the Banten Qur’ans give the number of verses in the sārah heading, but in five manuscripts further information is given. In A.50, 52-53, W.278 and Mushaf E, the line of the sārah headings contains the words dīyātuh (the number of verses in the chapter), kalimatuhu (words), hurufuhu (letters) and tarziyuhu (the order of revelation of these verses). However, the numerical coefficients of these quantifiers are not always noted in the sārah headings (Fig. 14).

Marginal texts

By marginal texts, we mean anything written in the blank spaces on the three outer sides of each page of text. In Qur’an manuscripts, marginalia usually consists of words marking textual divisions in the Qur’an such as juz’ (a 30th part of the Qur’an), hizb (a 60th part of the Qur’an), nisf (half of a juz’ or hizb), ruba’ (a quarter) and thunn (an eighth); sajdat, marking places for prostration; and ruku’, indicating places for genuflection; naqra’, indicating portions of the text selected for recitation; qira’at sab′ah, ‘seven readings’, the seven canonical variant readings of the Qur’an; recitation signs (tajwīd); catchwords; Qur’anic verses accidentally left out by the scribe; and other such notes. The attention that scribes paid to margins in Qur’an manuscripts varied greatly, and depended on the importance and purpose of the manuscript. The finer the manuscript, the more complete the marginal texts and the greater the care taken with their presentation. Conversely, in manuscripts produced in rural areas or in pesantren for practical purposes and everyday use, margins were treated very casually.

Probably the most important type of marginal texts in Qur’ans are the markers for juz’, hizb, nisf, ruba’ and thunn. Serving to indicate the impor-
tant divisions in the recitation of the Qur'an, these words are written in certain scripts such as Thuluth, or in special calligraphic compositions, and are beautifully ornamented. These marginal marks were crucial determinants of the artistic quality of a Qur'an manuscript, as the makers of the manuscript were fully aware, right from the very start of the production process. In modern printed Qur'ans in use in Indonesia, the fractional terms niṣf, ruḥu, and thamm refer to parts of hizb, but in manuscripts they tend to refer to parts of juz', and this is the case in the Banten Qur'ans. 18

The most important sign in the margin is the juz', dividing the Qur'an into 30 equal parts. This division aids the reciting of the complete Qur'an in 30 days. 19 Juz' signs are nearly always found in Qur'an manuscripts, however simple. In Nusantara Qur'ans, juz' signs are often presented in very elaborate forms, in the shape of illuminated medallions or other such designs, or are written in the form of eye-catching calligraphic compositions.

In the Banten Qur'ans, juz' markers are purely calligraphic, written in Thuluth in a relatively uniform rectangular composition (Fig. 15; Pl. 3). This form reflects the fact that Banten Qur'ans are rarely decorated, their artistic strength instead being their focus on script. These calligraphic compositions are finely constructed, and the scribes were evidently highly skilled. The rectangular form of the juz' markers makes full use of the vertical lines of alif and lam, with vocal marks and also small ornamental marks added for decorative effect to “fill in” the composition; in A.50 and W.278 the juz' markers use a more specifically tuğra-style script that emphasizes vertical lines. The juz' markers are written in red ink, or in gold (A.52), with a range of spatial alignments including upside-down forms, as can be seen in A.51 (Fig. 15b). There does not appear to be any firm convention as to whether the juz' marker is placed in the margin of the right-hand page or the left-hand page.

Two formulae are generally used, either al-juz' al-... min al-Qur'an al-"Azīm, "the ...th juz' of the Supreme Qur'an", or al-juz' al-... min al-Qur'an al-"Kartm, "the ...th juz' of the Noble Qur'an". Within each manuscript there is no consistency in the choice of formula, perhaps introducing variation for

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18. A systematic survey of the referentiality of the fractional terms niṣf, ruḥu, and thamm has not yet been undertaken, but the situation may vary in different regions and in different manuscripts. On the East Coast of the Malay peninsula, the term niṣf is invariably used to refer to half a juz' (i.e. a hizb), as can be ascertained by the occurrence in illuminated Qur'ans of niṣf markers every 10 pages, while juz' markers occur every 30 pages (see, for example, Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia 1998,1.3446). On the other hand, in a Qur'an manuscript with illumination akin to the "East Coast" style, but possibly from Riau (PNRI 4.47) there are marginal ornaments specifically labeled niṣf hizb.

variation’s sake, to keep the readers guessing. In A.51, apart from the two formulae above, two further variants are found: al-juz’ al-... min Kitāb Allāh al-A‘zīz, “the ...th juz’ of the Book of God, the Most Mighty One”, and al-juz’ al-... min Kitāb Allāh Ta‘ālā, “the ...th juz’” of the Book of God the Exalted”. Such variation is also encountered in other regions, and appears to be a characteristic of Nusantara Qur’ans.

The qirā‘at sab‘ah, “seven readings” 20 – popularly known in Indonesia as qirā‘at tajjih – are found in five of the 13 Banten Qur’ans: A.50, A.52, A.53, A.54 and Mushaf E (see Figs. 1-2, 7; Pls. 2, 5), with a very detailed set being found in A.52-54. This shows that at the time of the copying of these Qur’ans in the 18th and 19th centuries, the science of Qur’anic readings was being studied in Banten and there were experts in this field. The type of calligraphy used for the qirā‘at sab‘ah varies. In A.50, the variant readings are written in Naskhī, as is the Qur’anic text, but the explanations are in a hand verging on Ta‘līq. In A.52, the variant readings are written in Naskhī as are the explanations, but without vocal marks. In this manuscript the variant readings are presented in a distinctive diagonal “zigzag” form. The same striking graphic layout is found in A.53 and A.54.

Also found in the margins of the Banten Qur’ans are catchwords, written on the lower-left corner of the verso of each folio, in small letters. Some use Naskhī as in the Qur’anic text, while others resemble Ta‘līq.

Supplementary texts

Supplementary texts such as prayers and colophons are not often found in Nusantara Qur’ans. In general, Qur’an manuscripts only contain the Qur’anic text; even prayers to be recited on the completion of the Qur’an (dau khatam al-Qur’ān) are rarely encountered.

A.50 contains an ownership statement at the beginning stating that the Qur’an belongs to the Sultan of Banten, Muhammad Aliuddin ibn Sultan Muhammad Arif, who bequeaths it to his children. This statement is written in a simple hand verging on Ta‘līq, with an ordinary pen (without a thin-thick nib), and appears to have been written quickly (Pl. 6).

A prayer for blessings on the Prophet is found at the end of Cod.Or.5678 (Pl. 13), but the Banten Qur’an with the fullest set of supplementary texts is A.53. In the first volume, A.53a, at the front before the start of the Qur’anic

Fig. 15 – Rectangular calligraphic juz’ markers from Banten Qur’an, written in Thuluth in red ink, some with black ink vocal marks, in a variety of spatial alignments. From (left to right): (a) P.WRI A.50; (b) A.51; (c) A.53; (d) W.278.

20. Qirā‘at sab‘ah are the seven variant readings of the Qur’an regarded as authentic, according to seven acknowledged authorities, namely: (1) Na‘īm b. ‘Abdurrāhāmīn, recorded by Qūṭīn and Waras; (2) Ibn Katūf, recorded by al-Bazzī and Qurqūbī; (3) Abū ‘Amr, recorded by ad-Darrī and as-Sanī; (4) Abūl-‘Abbās b. Abī al-Yahyā, recorded by Hāmid and Ibn Dazkīwā; (5) Abī ‘Abdallāh bin Abī ‘Abdallāh bin ‘Abdullāh bin Abī l-Harīrī, recorded by Abu ‘Amr and Abī ‘Abdullāh; (6) Abū ‘Abdul-Latīf b. Abī ‘Abdullāh bin Abī l-Harīrī, recorded by Hāmid and Abī ‘Abdullāh; (7) al-‘Askārī, recorded by Abu ‘Abdullāh bin Abī l-Harīrī, and ad-Darī. See Fathuni 1996: 6-10.
text, there is a list of the names of the imams of the seven readings and the letter codes assigned to their readings (Fig. 16). The list itself is written in Naskhi, but the title is written in a layered style in Naskhi verging on Thuluth. This style is highly unusual, for according to the rules of calligraphy, Naskhi is never written layered. On the final pages of this manuscript there are two prayers, firstly the prayer of Imam Nawawi on the completion of the Qur’an which occupies three pages, and secondly, a prayer to be read after reciting the Qur’an, which also fills three pages. These prayers are written in Naskhi, like the Qur’anic text. The translation of the prayers, in Javanese, is written in fine Ta’liq, with vocal marks.

When we analyse the scripts used for supplementary texts, the main texts found – in this case prayers – are always written in Naskhi, as is the text of the Qur’an. The choice of this script was presumably based on its ease of reading, as well as because Naskhi could be called the standard choice for the writing of texts in Arabic. On the other hand, the transliterations and colophons are written in a style verging on Ta’liq, for this style was commonly used in Banten for writing Jawi.

Calligraphic features of Banten Qur’ans

In the Banten Qur’ans we find a distinctive style of script which could be called ‘Banten Naskhi’, which exists in two variants. In the first, the tail of the waaw and ra’ is pulled upwards, as in Indo-Persian Naskhi, while in the second the tails of the waaw and ra’ are more similar to Muhaqqaq. In general, it can be said that both variants of Banten Naskhi were studied intensively in Banten, because both styles are found in a number of Qur’an manuscripts now held in a number of different locations, and both styles appear to have been used in a consistent and stable fashion. The Naskhi found in Banten Qur’ans was influenced by the traditions of Naskhi and Muhaqqaq in Persia and India, albeit realized to different standards.

Illumination

Illumination is a term that can be used very broadly to denote any decorative device, usually involving colours and/or metallic pigments, designed to enhance the appearance of a manuscript. Strictly speaking, this would include the coloured text frames and verse markers described above, and also the marginal calligraphic ‘in’ markers in A.52 which are written in gold ink. However, describing a manuscript as “illuminated” more usually implies the presence of substantial structural ornamental elements such as headpieces and decorated frames, or even marginal medallions. Only three of the Banten Qur’ans have major illuminated elements, and all three manuscripts are very different from each other.

A “ready-illuminated” Qur’an

The most impressive illuminated Qur’an is probably PNRI A.50, a single-volume Qur’an from the royal library of Banten, which bears on the first page the ownership inscription of Sultan Muhammad Alinuddin (r.1777-1802) (Pl. 6).

The most striking feature of this Qur’an is that every single page of this manuscript is illuminated, with floral motifs in gold covering the entire surface of the page, including both the margins and the text block (Pl. 5). This is very unusual, for one of the most characteristic features of Islamic manuscripts from Southeast Asia is that illumination is invariably used sparingly. In most illuminated manuscripts, decoration is concentrated on the opening page or double pages of the text, whereas the rest of the manuscript is completely unadorned. The finest decoration is encountered in Qur’an manuscripts, but even here illumination tends to be confined to double decorated frames surrounding certain key passages of the text, such as the beginning, end, and, sometimes, the middle of the text. Qur’an manuscripts may also contain smaller illuminated elements such as medallions to indicate textual divisions, and very occasionally suraic headings are embellished. But one convention generally adhered to in Southeast Asian manuscripts is that in all these cases illumination is confined to the margins of the page, and does not intrude into the textblock, onto the surface on which the text is written.

The situation is quite different with manuscripts from many other Islamic cultures. It is not uncommon to find Qur’an pages from Turkey, Iran and India which are illuminated on every single page, with the text set in cloudbands
of gold or even written on a solid gold ground. In literary works too – especially in the Persian tradition – every page of the text may be adorned with illumination or floral motifs. At first glance, therefore, the Banten Qur’an appears to have been strongly influenced by the book arts of the Islamic lands to the west.

Yet on closer examination it becomes apparent that this Qur’an is not a ‘true’ illuminated manuscript in the sense of a book decorated either by the scribe himself or by his collaborator(s); rather, the Qur’an is written on paper which was already illuminated or gilded. This paper is recognizable as a type of gilded Indian paper usually referred to in early sources on Southeast Asia as ‘Surat’ paper, referring to its origin in Surat, in Gujarat, on the north-west coast of India. Such papers are very commonly encountered in the Malay world for use in diplomatic correspondence over a period of about 150 years, from the second half of the seventeenth century until the early nineteenth century (Pl. 7). About 50 letters on such paper have been documented, mostly written in Malay and Javanese. The majority are missives sent by the Dutch Governor-General in Batavia to rulers throughout Nusantara and even further afield, but examples from kings and ministers in Surakarta, Yogyakarta, Gorontalo and Banten, addressed to the Dutch authorities, have also been found. The earliest known examples are letters in Dutch from Governor-General Joan Maestuycker (in office 1654-1678) addressed, amongst others, to the Nawab Mir Jumla in Assam in 1663 (Boxer 1967: 79).

There are copious references to the circulation of this paper in Banten. In 1682, when the Dutch in Batavia wrote to both the old king (Sultan Abu al-Fath Abdul Fatah) of Banten and his son the young king (Sultan Abdul Kahar Abu al-Nasr), they chose “a gilded Surat paper” (Jones 1993: 489). A letter from Sultan Abdul Kahar Abu al-Nasr to King Charles II that same year is the earliest recorded example of the use of Surat paper for a letter from an Indonesian ruler; the paper has regularly spaced gold floral motifs on a ground of splattered gold and silver droplets. There is another Dutch reference to the use of “a piece of gilded writing paper from Surat” (eenig Soursats verguld schrijfpapier) for a letter to the Prince [of Banten] in 1721 (Jones 1993: 489), and in Leiden University Library there is a group of eight royal letters from the Sultan and ministers of Banten to the Dutch Governor-General dating from 1794 to 1808.

In 1808, the outgoing Governor of Java’s northeast coast remarked that rulers often asked for sheets of gold-rimmed Surat paper for important official decrees (Carey 1980: 2), but this may be one of the last references to the use of Surat paper. The British interleaving in Java (1811-1816) appears to have brought about a sea-change in official letter-writing practice, and from this time onwards, Surat papers are no longer found in use in Indonesia.

From the evidence of this body of letters, a wide variety of sizes and designs of Surat paper are known. The sheets range in size from 48 to 50 cm tall and from 22 to 35 cm wide. Typically, the sheets have a regular floral pattern scattered across the whole of one side of the sheet, and in many cases there is a decorated border along all four outside sides. Sometimes silver is used instead of gold, and in other cases the whole sheet is sprayed with droplets of gold or silver pigment; in these examples the silver has invariably tarnished to black. When this paper was used for a long letter, different sheets would be joined together along their narrow sides with glue to form a long scroll, with any borders trimmed in such a way that the resulting letter bore a single continuous rectangular border along the four outside sides.

There are indications that this type of Surat paper was designed primarily for use as letters, for the sheet was decorated on one side only, and would normally be viewed in “portrait” or vertical format, with the flowers in an upright position (Pl. 7). In the Banten Qur’an, however, each folio has been formed by gluing together two sheets of gilded Surat paper on their undecorated sides, yielding a double-thickness sheet of paper which is illuminated on both sides. Each double-thickness sheet was then folded in two to produce a bifolium of two folios or four pages, and groups of these bifolias were then sewn together in quires. In this Qur’an, the sheets are therefore used in a horizontal or landscape format, and the floral motifs appear to lie on their

21. For numerous examples see Bayani, Contadini and Stanley (1999).
22. On “Surat” paper see Jones 1993: 489. Although Surat did once produce paper (Sotiriou 1999: 70), there are relatively few references to paper being made in Surat itself, while Ahmedabad – located inland to the north – is acclaimed as a great source of paper, and there are late 17th-century records of a Surat paper company requisitioning paper from a company in Ahmedabad to meet export demands (Sotiriou 1999: 68). In 1658, the English East India Company despatched three ships to Banten carrying goods purchased in Ahmedabad (Gopal 1975: 63). Thus it is possible that the “Surat” paper known in Indonesia may take its name from its port of shipment, rather than necessarily place of manufacture.
23. PRO CO 7714/1, f.111, reproduced in Gallop & Arps 1991: 18 (wrongly described as a letter from the old king, Sultan Abu al-Fath Abdul Fatah).
sides (Pl. 5). A number of different illuminated designs are found in this Qur’an, and some pages have gilded borders while others do not.

Apart from the use of this gilded paper, there is no other significant illumination in this manuscript; in fact, in all other respects this Qur’an is very similar to W. 278, showing how a “plain” Qur’an could be transformed into an “illuminated” one simply by the choice of paper. But although no other examples of the use of gilded Surat paper in manuscript books are known in the Malay world, there are hints that may have been other Qur’ans in Banten copied on ready-gilded paper. In 1615, the Dutch factor Gerard Reynst wrote from Banten asking the VOC to send out (emphasis added):

“A dozen great books of large format ... half journals, half account-books. Also 1000 books of ordinary format, unlined, some folio and some quarto, bound in fine white parchment, gilt-edged, printed with ornamental foliage without figures, and some bound with red leather, all of best paper” (quoted in Reid 1988: 220).

The request for finely-bound high-quality unlined paper volumes decorated with non-figural ornamental designs strongly suggests that these volumes were intended for use within a formal Islamic context, such as for copying the Qur’an. The copying of Islamic manuscripts on imported decorated paper was certainly not a Banten innovation, for a number of 15th-century Persian manuscripts are copied on coloured Chinese paper speckled with gold or gilded with images of landscapes and flora and fauna. Most of these manuscripts contain literary works, but three Qur’ans are also known. A Qur’an from Persia or Central Asia, dated to ca. 1405-47, is copied on sheets of Chinese paper in a range of different colours, including yellow, purple, green and orange, flecked with specks of gold and occasionally with a few traces of gilded images, albeit never with figures (Roxburgh 2005: 228, 421).

A Qur’an with illuminated single headpieces
PNRI A.51 is a Qur’an manuscript with an interlinear fully vocalised Malay translation. The Qur’an is currently bound in five volumes each containing six juz', but may originally have constituted a 10-volume set, with each volume containing 3 juz’. The presentation of the first three juz’ appears to be unfinished as the text frames have not been added, but the start of juz’ 4 and every third juz’ thereafter up till juz’ 16 is adorned with a beautiful single headpiece.²⁶ Each of the five resulting headpieces is slightly different, although of similar compositional principles and sharing the same basic palette of sage green and gold.

²⁶. Such illumination was clearly planned for the starts of juz’ 19, 22, 25 and 28 (in vols. d and e), but the reserved spaces are blank.

Illustrated in this article is the headpiece found at the start of juz’ 13, at the start of the third volume, A.51c (Pls. 8-9). It consists of a large central five-lobed ogival arch, flanked by two small three-lobed half-arches, set upon a rectangular base. From the cusp of the main arch protrudes a trident-like finial in green ink. The ground of the main arch and the two half-arches is sage green, but the main arch encloses a smaller three-lobed ogival arch in gold. Throughout all the arches, there is delicate foliate and floral scrollwork, with the stems and leaves in gold and the flowers and buds in pale blue sometimes dotted with green, all outlined in black ink. The arches are outlined (from the inner to the outer layer) in red (but this appears to have originally been the undercoat to a layer of metallic blue, of which only a few tarnished fragments remain), maroon and green. The rectangular base panel is of gold stippled with dots made by a sharp implement, on top of which a strapwork pattern has been drawn in black ink. The panel is fully enclosed by a thin gold border and a slightly thicker blue border filled with a pattern of dots. The vertical frames of the blue border are extended upwards to flank the arches, and, with the text frames, reach the top edge of the page.

There are a number of features which make this illuminated headpiece unusual in the context of manuscript decoration in the Malay world. The sage-green pigment, which is applied in a thick and smooth coat, is a very unusual colour, and the delicacy of the gold scrollwork and strapwork is remarkable. The surface of the gold is exceptionally smooth, an effect rarely encountered in this region, where gold on manuscripts is usually more grainy. Overall, the quality of the design and execution of this headpiece surpasses that usually encountered in Southeast Asian manuscripts. And yet the overall aesthetic composition of the double-page spread lacks balance, for the headpiece appears too small and delicate relative to the size of the bold and dynamic script of the Qur’anic text and even the marginal calligraphic juz’ marker.

It is not only the colours and quality of the illumination which make this Qur’an exceptional: the choice of illuminated format – the single headpiece – is itself highly unusual in a Malay-world context. Although elaborately, the pieces are often found as the major decorative element in contemporaneous Persian and Indian Qur’ans,²⁷ when Southeast Asian Qur’an manuscripts are illuminated, they tend to be adorned with the most sumptuous device in the repertoire of the manuscript artist: a decorated double frame around the text block of two facing pages, symmetrical about the horizontal axis and about the gutter of the book. Single or double headpieces, conversely, are most commonly found in non-Qur’anic manuscripts that are proportionately smaller and less opulent, or in small manuscripts containing selections from the Qur’an. Single headpieces have been found in two Qur’ans decorated in

²⁷. For many examples see Bayani, Contadini & Stanley 1999.
the “Sulawesi diaspora” style – one from Bone dated 1821 and one held in Ternate – but in both these manuscripts the major illuminated features are two or three sets of impressive double decorated frames, with the single headpieces functioning as minor decorative devices for less prominent parts of the text. This Banten Qur’an is the only illuminated Southeast Asian Qur’an known which is adorned solely with single headpieces.

A Qur’an with illuminated double frames

LUB Cod.Or.5678, which contains juz’ 25 of the Qur’an, is the sole surviving volume of what is probably the only known 30-volume illuminated Southeast Asian Qur’an.

The manuscript is adorned with a sumptuous decorated double frame on the first two pages (Pls. 11-12). The small text block is surrounded by a rectangular border with a gold ground on which are a number of discrete vegetal scrolls in black ink, bearing at their centre a four-petalled red flower, with leaves and buds at either end. Within this border, at top and bottom, are cartouches with an inscription in gold against a dark green ground dotted with black. The inscription reads: al-juz’ al-khamis/wa-al-‘ashrin/min al-Qur’an/al- ‘azim, “the twenty-fifth juz’ of the Supreme Qur’an”. This gold border is bounded by a thin red frame, emerging from which on the three outer sides of the text block are multi-lobed arches with a lobed ogival dome, bordered in lines of red, gold, green and pale blue, with each band of colour outlined in black ink. At the centre of each arch is a gold almond-shaped lozenge filled with dots, carats and crosses in black and ochre. The ground of the arches is a pale blue pigment which has apparently degraded and is now uneven in colour, with gold foliate scrollwork outlined in black issuing from the central lozenge. The arches rest against a wide rectangular border on the three outer sides, filled with a gold ground dotted with black on which further delicate floral and foliate arabesques are drawn, and this border is bounded by a thin green frame. On the inner side of the text block, there is a thin green panel with a continuous gold vine. On both pages, the inner vertical boundary of the decorated frame is a yellow border within double-ruled black lines, and this is extended upwards and downwards to the edge of the paper.

30. Based on the assumption that the other 29 volumes were illuminated similarly; this is a reasonable surmise as the 25th juz’ of the Qur’an is not usually singled out for special reverence, such as is sometimes shown to the first and final juz’.

Here too are a number of features rarely encountered in Southeast Asian Islamic illumination, such as the lavish use of gold as the ground on which further decoration is layered, and the unusual shade of the pale blue pigment. Another noteworthy element is the inner vertical yellow border reaching to the top and bottom edges of the pages, like a “pivot” upon which the decorated frames are supported. This is a standard structural feature in the composition of double frames in many illuminated Ottoman, Persian and Indian Qur’ans, but is alien to the Malay tradition. In Southeast Asia, such pivots have only so far been encountered in Islamic manuscripts with atypical illumination, for example at the beginning of the Taj al-Salatin in the British Library (Or.13295), copied in Penang in 1824 (reproduced in Gallop 1994: 15). It is perhaps significant that this initial double frame, which shows strong Ottoman or Indian influence in its palette of blue and gold and the cloudbands surrounding each line of text, has two such pivots attached to the inner margins, but the double frame at the end of the manuscript, which is executed in a decidedly local idiom and has been characterised as a possible example of a “Penang” style of illumination, does not have pivots. Pivots can also be seen in a finely illuminated royal Surakarta Qur’an dated 1799, in which, astonishingly, a variety of European printers’ ornaments appear to have been utilised to create the outer border of the otherwise hand-decorated frames (Kumar & McGlynn 1996: 35).

Finally, in Cod.Or.5678 too there is a perception of a lack of proportion in the composition. One of the key features of the finest illuminated manuscripts from the Malay archipelago is the striking impact of the crockelated and highly-coloured arches and borders of the decorated frame juxtaposed against the plain white or cream ground of the margins. In this manuscript, the sumptuous illuminated frames, the tips of which reach right to the outer edges of the paper, appear almost too heavy for the pages, and would have benefitted from a wider expanse of white paper around the edges. But since this manuscript bears an original Banten binding, the cramped appearance of the frames cannot be attributed to injudicious trimming of the pages at some later date.

A non-Qur’anic illuminated manuscript from Banten

As so few illuminated manuscripts have been identified, it may be worth considering the only other example of Banten illumination known: a single headpiece in a Malay manuscript of Hikayat Iskandar Zulkarnain, dated 1713 (LUB Cod.Or.1970).

31. Again, for many examples see Bayani, Contadini and Stanley 1999.
32. The manuscript is relatively plain, with 392 pages of Dutch laid paper measuring 31.5 x 20 cm. According to the colophon, the copy was finished on 10 Ramadan 1125 (Saturday 30
The only decorative feature in this manuscript is a fine headpiece on the first page of the text (Pls. 14–15). It consists of a central multi-lobed arch flanked by two half-arches. The arches are outlined in a series of coloured bands: red, pink, yellow, white, pale green and black. In the centre of the main arch is a bulb-shaped lozenge, and half of such a lozenge can also be discerned in the centre of the two half-arches. The background colour which fills the arches is a dense lavender grey, on which is drawn a delicate green meandering vine with leafy fronds and various flowers in variegated colours of red, pink and white. From the peaks, troughs and mid-points of the lobed arches extend upwards decorative finials drawn in black ink, which, like all the black-ink elements in this manuscript are now severely degraded.

The technique of layering colours upon a solid pigment base is quite uncommon in Malay-world manuscripts, where each element of the decoration is usually coloured separately and the pigments do not overlap each other. Also rare is the use of white pigment, as in Malay-world manuscripts white is normally incorporated into illumination by leaving uncoloured or "reserved" the background of the white paper on which the decoration is etched. Another unusual feature of this manuscript is the lack of connection between the headpiece and the text below. When headpieces are found in Malay-world manuscripts, the text below is usually (albeit not always) bounded by text frames, the vertical borders of which are extended upwards beyond the start of the text towards the top of the page, and these extended borders serve to enclose the headpiece. In this Banten manuscript, however, there are no text frames, and the headpiece floats, unattached – and above a strangely wide empty space – above the text, giving a slightly disconnected feel to the composition.

Is there a “Banten” style of manuscript illumination?

Two earlier studies of regional styles of Islamic manuscript illumination in Southeast Asia have focused on manuscripts from Aceh (Gallop 2004) and from the East Coast of the Malay peninsula (Gallop 2005b). In each study the same methodology was employed: a substantial corpus of illuminated manuscripts known to be from each region was identified, and the decorated elements were then analysed. Thereafter, the studies all but wrote themselves, for in both regions a "critical mass" of manuscripts displayed a remarkable conformity to certain architectural structures, palette preferences and ornamental motifs, enabling the identification of an "Acehnese", "Terengganu" and "Pati" style of illumination. The same technique was also used to identify a "Sulawesi diaspora" style of Qur’an illumination, associated with areas of strong Bugis-Makasar influence throughout the Malay archipelago (Gallop 2005c: 164–7).

The situation in Banten is very different. The three illuminated manuscripts (A.51, Cod.Or.5678, Col. Or.970) do not share a preferred format or the type of characteristics which helped define the regional schools mentioned above, and each in their own way is atypical for an illuminated manuscript from the Malay world. Nonetheless, using a different set of criteria, certain commonalities can be identified. Thus, all three manuscripts share an exceptional level of craftsmanship in the execution of the illumination, and the palette is consistently unusual, with colours such as sage green, lavender grey, pale blue, and white which are rarely encountered in Southeast Asian illumination. Perhaps most intriguingly, there is a persistent sense of aesthetic imbalance in the incorporation of the decorated elements into the overall composition of the double-page spread.

These comments combine to build a picture of Banten as a cosmopolitan state familiar with trends in manuscript illumination in the broader Islamic world, and with the wealth, royal patronage and technical skills to produce exquisite examples of illumination, but without an established tradition of doing so.

The art of the Qur’an in Banten

The most striking common feature of the 13 Banten Qur’ans under consideration is their script: they all share a highly distinctive style of Naskhī, which can be called “Banten Naskhī”. Such uniformity in the script of the Qur’ānic text is not found in the Qur’ān manuscripts of any other region of Nusantara.

On further analysis, the 13 Qur’ans fall into two broad groups, most easily delineated by size (see Table 2). The first group, of “large folio” Qur’ans measuring at least 45 cm in height, is the more consistent: all six manuscripts share a very distinctive mise-en-page, with no text frames and narrow margins. There is no illumination and, calligraphically, this group is associated with the variant of Banten Naskhī strongly influenced by Mubaqqaq.

The second group of smaller, “folio” sized Qur’ans averaging around 32 cm in height, is more varied in appearance. In terms of size and page layout they are more similar to other Southeast Asian Qur’ans, with a series of ruled coloured text frames and wider margins. Illumination is applied in an essentially exploratory fashion, yielding some beautiful but ultimately isolated works of Southeast Asian Islamic manuscript art. This group is linked with the variant of Banten Naskhī more influenced by Indo-Persian Naskhī.

September 1713), and on the fly-leaf the name of the owner is given as ‘Umūr bin Saḥāb Baḥari (Wieringa 1998: 198). The seal which accompanies the ownership note appears to read ‘Umūr bin Ḥusayn Baḥārī ‘alā lāhi Allāḥ ‘alā ‘Umūr, son of Ḥusayn Baḥārī ... may God’s mercy be upon him’. The binding of this manuscript is one of four in Leiden University Library categorised by Plomp (1993: 579) as in the Banten style.

Archipel 72, Paris, 2006
But there is also a host of features which occurs across both groups of manuscripts and can be regarded as characteristically “Banten”. Apart from the general use of “Banten Naskhī”, other common features include verse markers of yellow roundels outlined in black; marginal rectangular calligraphic compositions indicating the start of a juz’; the presence in the sīraḥ headings of the quantifiers for the number of verses, letters and words in each chapter and their order of revelation, without necessarily stating the accompanying numerical coefficients; and the highlighting of the word Allah in red.

The existence of two stylistic groups of Banten Qur’ans is intriguing. So far studies of the art of the Islamic book in different parts of the Malay archipelago have only identified a single regional style of illumination in each area, for example, in Aceh and on the East Coast of the Malay peninsula. Although there are certainly manuscripts in each region which do not conform to the artistic school so identified, they have not been documented in sufficient numbers to be regarded as constituting another school of the same region. One major factor may be chronology: nearly all the Aceh and East Coast manuscripts documented date from the 19th century, and the artistic styles identified may not necessarily hold true for preceding centuries.

The Banten Qur’ans described here can be assumed to date mainly from the 18th century. They are thus earlier than most of the other manuscripts studied, and this factor may account for some of the persistent differences noted above between Banten Qur’ans and those from other parts of Southeast Asia. In particular, it may have a bearing on the degree of Indo-Persian influence evident in the bindings, calligraphy and illumination of Banten manuscripts, to an extent not found in Islamic manuscripts from other parts of Southeast Asia. For example, the writing of the word Allah in red is particularly associated with Indian Qur’ans from the Sultanimate period onwards, and the calligraphic rectangular marginal juz’ markers recall the tughras of the Mughal emperors. All these features recall Banten’s role as a vibrant cosmopolitan entrepôt until 1682, with particularly strong trading links to Gujarat,33 and its continued role as a centre of Islamic learning into the 19th century.

This discussion of chronology naturally raises the question of whether the two groups of Banten manuscripts described above may represent different time periods. However, the answer is almost certainly negative, because of

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33. There are many references to trade between Banten and Gujarat, and to the presence of Gujarati merchants in Banten (Gopal 1975: 62-64). In 1642, the English in Banten sent back on an English ship to Surat a Gujarati tailor described as a “quarrelsome old knave” but asked for a replacement to be sent out to Banten—confirmation of the presence of at least one type of Gujarati artisan in Banten in the 17th century (Gopal 1975: 62). In 1672, the ruler of Banten had his own agent in Surat, a rich Parsi, and in 1678 two ships belonging to the king of Banten were temporarily detained in Surat by the Dutch (Gopal 1975: 63).