In the early days, those who mastered religious knowledge were recognised as scholars and had an important position in society. Teachers and religious authorities were highly respected by the people. In the 15th century, some of the highest positions in the Melaka Sultanate were reserved for scholars, known as kadi and fakih. A number of Malay scholars travelled to cities such as Mecca, Medina and Baghdad to study Islam. Among them were Hamzah Fansuri from 16th century Sumatra and Sheikh Abdul Rauf al Singkeli from 17th century Aceh. When these individuals returned from their studies they were able to provide new insights into Islam for the Muslims of Southeast Asia and often founded schools. One example Ali al Fansuri, father of Sheikh Abdul Rauf, is known to have opened a school in Aceh during the 16th century. Most of the books used in these 'sekolah pondok' ('hut schools') were written in Arabic, or translated into Malay, by scholars who had studied in the Middle East.

Development of the Malay language

In Southeast Asia there are several languages that have been spoken by the different Malay peoples, depending on which area they lived in. Among the most important languages formerly used in the region are Sanskrit, Old Malay, Old Javanese, Old Balinese, Bugis and Siamese. Written languages have existed in the region area since the 4th century; among the earliest examples are stone pillars found in east Kalimantan, written in Sanskrit and dated to the second half of the 4th century AD. Scripts that were developed in the region include Champa, Bugis, Makasarese, Batak and kawi. From the 14th century to the early 15th century, the spread of Islam around the Malay region also contributed to the development of the Malay language and the invention of a new script, known as Jawi. The inscription mentioned above on the 'Batu bersuni Terengganu' (Terengganu Stone) is thought to be the earliest example of Jawi writing in the Malay world.

Jawi script

Arabic script

Cham script

Buginese script
The Malay language is highly flexible and has absorbed many words from other languages. Before Western intervention, words from Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian were common in Malay. After the arrival of the Europeans, words were also absorbed from the Dutch, Portuguese and English languages. Among the early arrivals were the following:

**Sanskrit:** raja, svinga, neraka, ralisia, rakissa and sentosa.

**Arabic:** Allah, sujuid, khidmat, masijel and name of the days of the week (Ksun, Selasa, Rabu, Khamis, Jumaat, Sabtu, Ahad).

**Persian:** dewan, istana, anggur, nafiri

**Written material and paper**

Written material is vital to reconstructing the history of Malay civilisation. Most of what has survived is in stone. Other materials, including wood and paper, have not fared well in Southeast Asia’s generally humid conditions. These less durable writing surfaces were, however, used extensively. One of the most popular was daun lontar — a fan-shaped leaf found commonly in the region. The technique of writing on these leaves is believed to have come from India, and the Malays appear to have learned from their Hindu forebears. Even after paper was introduced into the Malay world, the practice remained of writing on paper cut to the size of daun lontar. Leaves would be dried and cut into smaller pieces, sometimes linked to each other with thread, providing a material that could be hung on the wall.

Another medium used for writing by local scholars was daunang or kertas Jawa (Java paper). This originated from the bark of a tree called sith (Broussonetia papyrifera) in the Sundanese language. The bark or the pulp was taken out from the trunk and soaked in water for half an hour. After that, the pulp was hammered with a special instrument known locally as pannepeh. Then it was washed and dried in the sun. To make the surface smooth and fine, daunang was dried on a banana trunk and callendered with a shell. This material was used as a cloth for religious leaders before the arrival of Islam in the Malay world. After this time, it became used as paper for writing.

Traders from China and the Arab world had contacts with Southeast Asia long before the arrival of Islam. Paper already existed and was produced by the Chinese and the Arab Muslims at that time. In the Malay world, paper was considered an expensive luxury item, presented to rulers in order to establish further trade or political relations. After the introduction of Islam, its use became more widespread. The need for Qur’ans and other Islamic written works created extensive demand for paper. The supply from the 17th century onwards came from Europe, mostly from France and Italy. Holland and Britain, being the main Western powers in the Malay world, brought paper to their domain. This was mainly handmade, with the mill’s watermark—a simple logo of the company and the signature of the owner. The most common watermark found in the IAMM Malay manuscript collection features an emblem of a crescent with human features. In addition to paper from Europe,
there were products from China and Japan, although these were thinner and lighter than their European counterparts.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{Watermarks from European paper mills}

By the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, writing had become a more widespread activity in Southeast Asia. The reason for this growth was the expansion of religious scholarship and an increasing interest in translations from Arabic and Persian into the Malay language. There was also an element of patriotic feeling on the part of peoples who were being colonised. During the 17\textsuperscript{th} century the Portuguese were in Malacca, Holland was in Java, and the British were already in Batavia. One consequence would have been a proliferation of the written correspondence that seems to be an inevitable part of colonial administration.
It has been said that any analysis of Malay manuscript art should start with a preface that illumination is infrequent, and that the great majority of Malay manuscripts are plain and without decoration. Although the study of Malay manuscripts is well established and has been undertaken for some time, the focus has been almost entirely on the contents. Much less attention has been paid to the design elements. Published studies of Malay manuscript art are very few, and references to illumination or the decoration of Malay texts are even fewer. The study of Malay manuscripts illumination is still in its infancy. Despite this, in the studies that have been conducted so far, there is a sense of unity in style that makes it possible to identify a Qur’an as being from Southeast Asia.

There is a base against which typically Southeast Asian motifs and styles can be compared. From the extensive collection of Qur’ans housed at the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, it is clear that although different styles typify each part of the region, there exists a thread of unity amongst them all. For example, the rosettes and whorls found in Ottoman, Persian, Indian and Chinese Qur’ans are seldom seen in the Malay World.

While Southeast Asian manuscript art is definitely grounded in universal Islamic book-illumination principles, such as avoiding figural representation, it has at the same time taken on a flavour of its own. The usual arabesques and geometric designs are now complemented with vernacular vegetal and floral motifs, like the clove flower. Qur’ans from other Islamic lands may use floral motifs as well, but the choice of flower would have been different. Within this uniqueness of a Southeast Asian style, as opposed to a broader ‘Islamic’ style, we can see regional differences suggesting that within the unity there is room for diversity and variations on a theme. A brief comparison of manuscripts below aims to show examples of design elements characteristic of four main categories within Southeast Asia. The first of these categories includes Qur’ans from the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula. The second category covers Aceh, while the third concerns Java. The last category is the Philippines-Mindanao region. However, before focusing on the regional classifications, it is worthwhile approaching this study from a formalistic point of view. By examining the formal elements of a Qur’an, such as juz’ markers, surah headings, marginal ornaments, muqarn’ markers and frames, it is possible to suggest a uniquely Southeast Asian style.

The purpose of the juz’ marker is to divide Qur’anic text into 30 equal sections, and in Southeast Asia this is the most common marginal decoration. More attention is lavished on the juz’ than on the hizb (60th part of a Qur’an), the rih’ (quarter mark) or the thumm (the eighth mark). The
start of a new juz’ is usually highlighted in red ink in the text. This is not customary in other parts of the Islamic world. The juz’ markers in Java are particularly distinct, being outside the vertical frames. On the right-hand side are the words ‘al-juz’ and on the left-hand side are either the number of the juz’ or the words ‘of the Holy Qur’an’. Some of the most visually appealing juz’ markers are those from East Coast manuscripts. These are usually a circle from which motifs of floral and vegetal designs reach upwards and downwards.

Equally distinctive to Southeast Asia is the manner in which surah headings appear. In almost all regional Qur’ans, the text appears in black ink with the surah headings in red. Sometimes, these red headings are juxtaposed with the last words of the final ayah (verse) of the preceding surah. Though this emphasis may appear elsewhere in Islam, especially in Mughal and African Qur’ans, it is far more prevalent in Southeast Asia. More typically Southeast Asian is for the final words of the preceding ayah to be situated in the middle of the cartouche that holds the surah heading. In effect, this produces an interesting red-black-red composition in the cartouche, with the text of the ayah written in black flanked by the surah heading written in red.

Another important feature of regional Qur’ans is the maqra’ marker, used in the margins to indicate text divisions selected for recitation. These markers are encountered in Qur’ans from the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Banten, Pontianak and Java. Although common to these parts of the Malay world, they are not found in Qur’ans from other Islamic lands. In Southeast Asia, group recitation of certain parts of the Qur’an was a more common method of reading and understanding those passages. According to tradition in Indonesia, certain surahs would be read aloud by a hafiz or in a group. In the case where the hafiz reads aloud, the followers may at times recite back. The maqra’ markers commonly found in Indonesian Qur’ans are significant and read aloud during certain ceremonies such as circumcision, wedding ceremonies or commemoration of the dead. One more significant feature of Southeast Asian Qur’ans is decorated frames. The text of each page is usually outlined with a number of lined frames, and the manner in which frames are lined gives an indication of regional origins. Livelier to look at are those that indicate the beginning, middle and end of the Qur’an.

The practical application of the Southeast Asian stylistic elements discussed above is visible in Qur’ans from the four regional groups represented at the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia. Although the production of Qur’ans in Southeast Asia dates from the late 13th century, the earliest extant examples are from the 16th century. These are exceptionally rare. Most of the manuscripts from the Malay world that exist today are from the 19th century onwards.
QR’ANS FROM TERENGGANU AND PATANI

The East Coast of the Malay Peninsula provided one of the most refined styles of Malay manuscript illumination, particularly in the states of Terengganu and Kelantan and the southern Thai region of Patani. While Qur’ans from the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula have distinctive characteristics, it is still not easy to identify the significant features of East Coast Qur’ans as a group. In focusing on samples from Terengganu and Patani, it is possible to see at least two of the most characteristic features of illumination from the East Coast. The first of these is a border running along the exterior edges of a double-page beginning. The particular attributes of this border are that it is curved at the corners and sometimes reflects the curvy edges of the embellished frame surrounding the text block. The design that fills the space between the edge of the decorative frame and the border of the page has been likened to the design of stalagmites and stalactites.

Another feature of East Coast manuscripts is the delicate ornamental frames with wave-like decoration. On a full-page frame, these waves may appear on all three margins or only on the fore-edge margin. The waves come in various sizes and take on the shape of vegetal garlands, small petals or designs that look like buds. A further distinction with East Coast manuscripts is most evident in Qur’ans from Patani. This feature is an ‘interlocking wave’ created by two interlocking lines that create the arch, and are at times topped off by an ogival dome. It is usually seen on the vertical side of an illuminated frame found on double pages.

The IAMM collection contains one East Coast Qur’an that is conspicuously atypical. Hand written during the reign of Sultan Zainal Abidin of Terengganu, the design of the Qur’an suggests the artist was of foreign origin. Though the Sultan Zainal Abidin Qur’an may have been created in the Malay World, there is a distinct difference in the illumination. A pronounced use of lapis lazuli blue coupled with the non-Southeast Asian choice of floral and vegetal decorations bring to mind the Middle East. Also atypical of Southeast Asian Qur’ans are the protruding ribbon-like ends that reach out from the three perimeters of the frame.
Qur’an
Patani, Southern Thailand
19th century AD / 13th century AH
22 x 18 cm
1998.1.3500

The spatial arrangement of this example is typical of Qur’ans from Patani. The use of gold also forms an important part of Qur’anic illumination in Patani, as it does in most parts of Southeast Asia, including the Malay Peninsula, Java, southern Kalimantan and Sulawesi.
This Qur'an from Patani, Southern Thailand, is typical of Qur'ans of gold also forming an important part of the Malay Peninsula, Java, southern Sumatra, and the Philippines. It was written by a calligrapher named in the Shahadah (profession of faith) which is dated 13th century AH. The page measures 21 x 16 cm and is held under the accession number 1998.1.3505.

An interesting feature of the end page of this Qur'an is the way in which the embellishments around the text are fully contained within the outermost line border.
Qur’an
Patani, Southern Thailand
19th century AD / 13th century AH
21 x 18.5 cm
1998.1.3463

In typically Southeast Asian style, this Qur’an has a composition that relies on triangular forms. In this example, the shape on each page comes close to the definitive Islamic design of an octagon created by two squares.
East Asian style, this Qur'an has a
composition of triangular forms. In this example, the
marriage close to the definitive Islamic design
by two squares

Qur'an
Terengganu, Malay Peninsula
19th century
32 x 20 cm
1998.1.3444

East Coast manuscripts use a broad range of colours in their
illuminations, the main hues being red, yellow and a special
powder blue
Qur’an
Terengganu, Malay Peninsula
19th century AD / 13th century AH
43 x 28 cm
1998.1.3427

It is believed that this Qur’an was copied for the Sultan of Terengganu, Sultan Zainal Abidin II (1793-1808). This example is exceptionally lavish with the use of gold, a material that was traditionally reserved for royal patronage.
Qur’an
Terengganu, Malay Peninsula
19th century AD / 13th century AH
27 x 16 cm
1998.1.3483

In addition to the elegant borders running along the outer edges of double-page openings, many Southeast Asian Qur’ans are characterised by the wispy effect of wave-like decorations topping off the arches around the text block.
The decorative motifs that embellish the Qur'an of Southeast Asia are unique to this region. This design is distinctive to Terengganu, following the pattern of 1998.1.3444.
QUR’ANS FROM ACEH

In the IAMM example of a Qur’an from Aceh, the writing in the text block is smaller than the writing in the rest of the manuscript, as is the case with almost every illuminated Qur’an throughout Southeast Asia. Around the text block are a series of rectangular borders. The boundaries of these are extended up and down in the shape of two columns that stretch above and below the boundaries of the text block – a very Acehnese feature.²

The arches above and below a text block are often presented in the form of lobed ogival domes. In general, there can exist many variants in the arch shapes, some even take a triangular shape. However, in this example, the arches above and below the text block are not so pronounced. There is a hint of an arch, but the full concave shape is forgone and the arch’s lines are stretched into an undulating line that stretches horizontally to meet the columns. What this example shows is that although the extended borders are in the typical Acehnese style, and one of the arches is in a standard style, the top and bottom arches are a deviation from the norm. This manuscript may be classified in the category of a typical Aceh style, but within that category there is room for individuality as the unique touch of the top and bottom arches indicates. In addition, it is very common to find the colours red, black and white in Acehnese Qur’ans.
QUR'ANS FROM ACEH

Example of a Qur'an from Aceh, the writing in the text block is smaller than the of the manuscript, as is the case with almost every illuminated Qur'an throughout round the text block are a series of rectangular borders. The boundaries of these down in the shape of two columns that stretch above and below the boundaries a very Acehnese feature. Above and below a text block are often presented in the form of lobed ogival, there can exist many variants in the arch shapes, some even take a triangular this example, the arches above and below the text block are not so pronounced. n arch, but the full concave shape is forgone and the arch's lines are stretched into that stretches horizontally to meet the columns. What this example shows is that ded borders are in the typical Acehnese style, and one of the arches is in a standard ottom arches are a deviation from the norm. This manuscript may be classified in typical Aceh style, but within that category there is room for individuality as the te top and bottom arches indicates. In addition, it is very common to find the ind white in Acehnese Qur'ans.

Qur'an
Aceh
19th century AD / 13th century AH
32.5 x 22 cm
1998.1.3454

Acehnese Qur'ans tend to use red, yellow and black more than other colours. The chief decorative features are left in reserved white and have considerable presence in contrast to the coloured background.