Pending
Malay Peninsula
20th century AD / 14th century AH
14.5 x 8 cm
1998.1.4280

The pending is an ornamental belt buckle worn mainly by royalty and aristocrats. This ogival example is decorated with filigree, granulation and set gems. The central inscription features the name “Allah” in granulation.
Medallion
Malay Archipelago
20th century AD / 148 century AH
5 cm (diameter)
1998.4295

Amulets are popular accessories in many parts of the Islamic world. This brass talisman is adorned with filigree and granulation. The inner circle contains a six-pointed star with the word “Allah” interspersed between the points.
Medallion
Malay Archipelago
20th century AD / 14th century AH
8 cm (diameter)
1998.1.4294

The central roundel contains a six-pointed star with the words “Allah” and “Muhammad” alternating between the points. The hole in the centre of this coin-shaped medallion was for stringing on a belt.
contains a six-pointed star with the words "nnad" alternating between the points. The hole in the medallion was for stringing on a belt.

Hairpins
Malay Peninsula
20th century AD / 14th century AH
10 cm - 12.5 cm (lengths)

Malay women were accustomed to fashioning their hair into chignons adorned with elaborate hairpins. These gold-plated silver hairpins (cucuk sanggul) are decorated with floriated filigree and granulated designs. Hairpins such as these could also serve as weapons of self-defence.
Earrings
Malay Peninsula
20th century AD / 14th century AH
3 x 2.5 cm
1998.1.4266

These stellar-patterned gold earrings (subang enas) are decorated with granulation and filigree. The fastener is adorned with circular loops. In the past, earrings of similar decoration were worn to indicate the virginity of a young woman.
Red gold earrings (subang emas) are latticework and filigree. The fastener is adorned with the virginsity of a young woman in the past, earrings of similar decoration were worn by the virginity of a young woman.

Dokoh
Malay Peninsula
20th century AD / 14th century AH
19 x 5.2 cm
1998.1.4253

The central element of this gold necklace is its pendant, inspired by the shape of a broad-fruit leaf (dawu sukun). Smaller decorative leaves and cylindrical amulet containers flank the central pendant. These elements are adorned with both filigree and granulation. It is further embellished with red staining, a popular practice within the Malay Archipelago.
Dokoh
Malay Peninsula
20th century AD / 14th century AH
40 x 10 cm
1988.1.4210

The dokoh is one of the oldest forms of jewellery worn by Malaya. This two-tiered silver necklace is adorned with repoussé and chased vegetal designs accompanied by bird and insect-like creatures. Diamond-shaped sheet-silver flanges accentuate the inverted triangular pendants.
The oldest forms of jewellery worn by Malay women are described in this text. A silver necklace is adorned with repoussé motifs, accompanied by bird and insect-like designs. The necklace includes sheet-silver flanges that accentuate the overall design.

Keronsang
Malay Peninsula
20th century AD / 14th century AH
4.5 x 3 cm / 3 x 3 cm
1998.1.4219

Prior to Western influence, brooches and other fasteners were used in place of buttons. Sets of three brooches or more were still commonly used to fasten the front of baju kebaya. The heart-shaped brooch, referred to as the keronsang ibu (mother brooch), is always worn at the very top followed by two or more circular brooches.
Bangle
Malay Peninsula
20th century AD / 14th century AH
18.5 cm (diameter)
1998.1.4261

This chunky gold bangle (gelang emas) is fashioned from gold sheet. It is adorned with filigree, granulation and geometric motifs made from cut gold tubes.
gle (gelang emas) is fashioned from gold with filigree, granulation and geometric gold tubes

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Ring
Malay Peninsula
20th century AD / 14th century AH
1.7 cm (diameter)
1998.1.4251

Finger rings (cincin emas) were often used at important lifecycle events. This gold ring has nine facets and is adorned with a chased fish-scale motif.
Caping
Malay Peninsula
19th - 20th century AD / 13th - 14th century AH
8 x 7.5 cm
2004.13.18

The caping is a heart-shaped disc worn by children, to guard their modesty. In this case, the interior is gold plated and adorned with chased and repoussé foliated designs
Anklets
Malay Peninsula
20th century AD / 14th century AH
10.5 x 10.5 cm
1998.1.4297

The Malays traditionally wore bracelets and anklets together in pairs. These gold anklets (gelang kaki) are made of embossed and chased gold sheet and are hollow inside.

1-shaped disc worn by children, to guard is case, the interior is gold plated and repoussé foliated designs
ARMS

Kris makers in Java
Arms
THE MYTHIC STATUS OF STEEL

It might seem that something is missing from the section of the exhibition titled “Arms”. What happened to the word “Armour”? In true Muslim-martial tradition, Malay warriors liked to travel and fight light. They preferred not to carry heavy swords, and they wore virtually no armour. Elsewhere in Islam, warriors wore a little bit more. History is filled with encounters between mobile Muslim forces and chunking European crusaders. In the Malay world, they took an even more cavalier approach. Non-Muslim tribal warriors of Southeast Asia might wear protective outfits made from leather or ant-eater scales. Muslim warriors preferred not to. A shield was as far they usually went, and even that defence was rare. Few examples have come down to us, although there are occasional written and pictorial accounts, including a detail from the map above and a drawing by François Danxc from 1669 which shows two shield-bearing Javanese soldiers who wear nothing but a cloth hat and a short sarong.¹

The Malay approach to arms was also characterised by the absence of firearms. Whilst almost every corner of the Islamic world made use of guns, in Southeast Asia their popularity was confined to cannon. These came in many shapes and sizes, without counting as a personal weapon. Muskets, rifles and handguns are rarely recorded. One of the few references is during the siege of Melaka by the Duke of Albuquerque in 1511, when the Sultan of Melaka’s forces used matchlocks. By the 19th century, firearms were more common but not venerated in the way that edged weapons had always been. Isabella Bird noted the existence of matchlocks and blunderbusses and that the Peninsular Malays made their own gunpowder and used cartridges made of cane. She also observed that spears had been more effective against enemy forces than these rudimentary guns.² Other sources on the
Arms
THE MYTHIC STATUS OF STEEL

subject of firearms include the genre of ‘pirate fiction’ that became popular in the late 19th century. A typical reference from G.A. Henty's *Among the Malay Pirates:* “[the captain] opened a case in which he kept presents intended for the chiefs, and took out a brace of handsome pistols, a powder flask and a bullet mould. The Malay messenger looked longingly at the pistols…”

Foreign visitors had as many romanticised views of the Malay world and its weaponry as the inhabitants themselves. One respect in which Henty was quite correct was when the pistol-deprived Malay messenger describes himself as being “krised up”. This is a verb that is seldom encountered in any language and yet it accurately sums up the Malay approach to warfare. The kris, as a noun, is so much a part of regional fact and folklore, it is inseparable from Southeast Asian history. The word has been used in Western sources for centuries, including the poetry of England's Lord Tennyson and Portugal’s Luis de Camoens. Examples of early kris exist in numerous European royal collections. In Islamic Southeast Asia they appear in every royal collection and remain part of the regalia in royal courts of Indonesia and Malaysia.

So much emphasis is placed on the importance of the kris, other types of weapon tend to be overlooked altogether. This is not solely because of the kris’ dominance in warfare and personal adornment; there is also its mystical role to be considered. Instances of the supernatural power of the kris are so common, it is impossible to go far into any Malay account of the occult without finding a reference to this distinctively shaped dagger. In amuletic form, its use is still common in the 21st century. Its influence was felt not only by those brought up in a culture immersed in kris lore. A commentator as impartial as Mubin Sheppard, founder of the National Museum of Malaysia, also vouched for its power when relating an episode from the Communist Emergency of the 1950s. In an attempt to steal a legendary kris from the Malay Peninsula town of Nanning, a terrorist succumbed to his first attack of vertigo and was arrested by the police. 4

In almost every case, the kris is there to save the day and serve the forces of righteousness. Occasionally, the confidence of its users is found to be misplaced. The 1857 edition of the *Journal of the Indian Archipelago* examined the case of a “very old and decrepit villager” in possession of a magic kris who attempted to kill a tiger that had been ravaging his neighbourhood. “The astonished beast immediately struck him down and would have killed him on the spot had not one of a band of youths who had followed at some distance behind the old man, shot it.”5 Such incidents are extremely rare in Malay literature, where the kris is a weapon closely linked to the Islamic as well as to vestiges of pre-Islamic superstition in the region. Its historical origins are hotly debated. Although the earliest examples are from the time when Islam swept through Southeast Asia, it is acknowledged that this is a weapon with a Hindu-Buddhist past. No representations of it have been found at the Javanese temple of Borobudur, constructed circa 8th century. By the 14th century, a dagger reminiscent of a kris is visible in a stone panel at the Hindu temple of Sukuh. 6

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From this point onwards, the kris became a ubiquitous feature of Islamic societies throughout Southeast Asia. Few non-Muslims in the region adopted it, apart from the inhabitants of Bali. These Hindu devotees used exactly the same form of kris as their Muslim counterparts, distinguished only by the use of hilts that relished figural imagery. Other non-Muslim ethnic groupings of the region, including those in Borneo, Sumatra and Timor, seem not have fallen under the sway of the kris. On the whole, they preferred longer swords that could be used for cutting rather than stabbing. At the furthest extreme from the Muslim aesthetic were the Dayaks of Borneo, who used parangs ornamented with figural motifs and, where available, the hair of their slain opponents.7

The popularity of the kris among the newly converted Muslims of Southeast Asia is given a subversive slant by the great authority E.H. Hill, who saw it as an instrument for those whose allegiance to the new faith was superficial. Weapon makers were seen as the most likely to slide back into the old Hindu ways.8 Abu Bakar Pawanchee makes his contribution with a reference to the commission, in the 15th century, of a 'kris Majapahit' – a figural variety very much associated with pre-Islamic ways.9 In most cases, however, the development of the kris shows how effectively Islam had taken root in its new, Southeast Asian home. It was the hilt in particular that went through an iconoclastic evolution. In idol-worshipping times, the figures of Vishnu, Shiva and others from the Hindu pantheon predominated. These became "hidden under a carpet of arabesques, floral tapestries and geometric patterns."10 The most famous hilt of all, known as the 'Java Donan' ('Feverish Javanese') was transformed from a distinctly anthropomorphic design to an abstract bird-like figure that looks very distant from putative Hindu deities such as Garuda.

Although it is the blade of a kris that provides the mystical value, the hilt reveals more about its origins. This means not only its pre-Islamic past but also the variations between different parts of the Malay world. The difference between a Javanese, Sumatran and Peninsular kris is most visible in its hilt. The shapes into which they were carved give the best clue to their provenance, despite being complicated when they are paired with blades or sheaths from other locations. The most common form in Patani is the 'kris tajong', a vestigial face with a very long nose; in Java it is the 'kraton' type with an upright figure that no longer bears any resemblance to the Hindu deity it once was. The hilt material itself is less indicative of a kris' origins: wood, metal and ivory are found throughout the region, while more exotic substances, such as rhinoceros horn, hippopotamus teeth and hornbill casque, turn up less regularly.

No particular material was exclusive to any one part of the archipelago, although finding diamonds inlaid on a hilt would indicate origins in Java or Kalimantan. Some materials were reserved for the highest levels of society, including the use of gold in many places. Wood, despite its ubiquity in the region, was held in very high regard. Many types of tree have magical properties ascribed to them and need to be treated with considerable respect. The kayu bujan panas ('hot rain wood'), for example, was something found at the end of the rainbow – it can only be cut when there is rain and
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Important though the hilt is for identification, the quality of a kris is judged by its blade. In this respect they are like Japanese swords, antique examples of which are usually sold without their hilts or other fittings. From the historian’s point of view they have an advantage over the Malay equivalents as they are usually signed by a swordsmith. Kris are not. The latter are still remarkable examples of weaponry, forged in a manner similar to the greatest swords of the Islamic world. The first recognisable feature is the shape, which can be anything from straight to having up to 25 ‘waves’. In all cases the blade flares dramatically towards the hilt. Like the superbly damascened swords from elsewhere in Islam, the kris blade features a variety of patterns caused by the use of multiple iron types worked together. Nickel was another factor in creating the damascene effect, which differs from true damascening in that it is on the surface of the blade rather than under it. J.J. Meyer’s translation of a Javanese treatise on the subject lists 16 types of ‘panor’. The most prestigious of these relates to the Prophet Muhammad.12

Reams have been written about the nature of ‘panor’ and its significance. Almost no emphasis has been given to calligraphic inscriptions, another fascinating aspect of the kris and related weapons. This innovation, which is entirely in keeping with weapons from other parts of the Islamic world, existed in a different form before the advent of Islam. Previously, blades had iconographic images. After the new faith’s arrival, the Word of God was incorporated to drastic effect on kris and, more often, to larger bladed weapons. In the IAMM collection there are examples of three main types of calligraphic decoration: inscribed, engraved and inlaid with silver. Records exist of the purpose that these weapons were put to. In one case, at the end of the 19th century, during the ‘Pahang Disturbances’ the Muslim holy man Ungku Sayid sent warriors off to battle the foreigners with parangs that had been inscribed by him with verses from the Qur’an.13

Not all inscriptions had such an immediate prospect of use. Most served a ceremonial purpose, as did the majority of Malay weapons. Well-attired Muslims throughout the region would carry weapons as a matter of course, and women were by no means excluded from this. They were likely to use a smaller dagger than the kris, known as a tambuk lada (‘pepper crusher’), especially the more diminutive versions of this graceful accessory. At the larger extreme, there were many weapons
of sword-like proportions used within the Malay world. When these take the form of an extra-long and very thin kris, it is possible that they served as an implement of execution. Inserted vertically between the collar bone, this was one of Asia’s more humane methods of capital punishment. Swords used for cutting rather than stabbing were more popular in areas such as Lombok and the southern Philippines. Passions can run almost as high with these weapons as with kris. Fat-bladed, wavy kris derivatives from Borneo are one of a number of types to have been called “monstrosities” by early 20th century authorities like G.C.G. Williams.14

Spears are another neglected area of the Malay armourer’s expertise. Their ceremonial importance is inescapable when looking at drawings or early photographs of royal life in the region. They also served a more serious purpose, although it is doubtful that the most painstakingly crafted examples would ever have seen action. A silver-inlaid spearhead, in the IAMM collection, must have been a prized item. Any weapon made of high-quality iron or steel was revered in the region, especially in Java, where supplies of iron ore have always been negligible. This reverence continued into the Islamic era. More remarkable was the metal’s spiritual transformation. Weapons that had previously been associated with Hinduism acquired an entirely new religious identity, as is made clear in the *Hikayat Awang Sulon Muda*:

> And at the point the sacred letters
> Symbol of the name of Allah
> Alif Lam greet the dying...
> Of no common steel ‘twas fashioned
> Forged of fragments of the metal
> Used for the bolt of God’s Kaabah...

As might be expected, it is a kris that is being hymned in these verses. Equally typical of the transformation of Southeast Asia from Hinduism to Islam is that the weapon in question belongs to the wayang kulit character Sri Rama.
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Kris with gold sheath
Minangkabau, Sumatra  
18th - 19th century AD / 12th - 13th century AH  
48 x 17 cm
1998.1.3927

With its gold hilt and sheaf, this kris would almost certainly 
have had a royal patron. The sheaf is inscribed with a clear 
religious message: "I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, 
I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. Guide 
us to the pathway"
Kris with wood and silver scabbard
Malay Peninsula or Sumatra
19th century AD / 13th century AH
65 x 14 cm
1998.1.3922

Sumatra produced a large number of kris panjang ('long kris'). The purpose of these would have been more ceremonial than practical as the kris is a weapon designed for fighting in confined spaces.
Silver scabbard

Lambrada

12th century AH

Kris with wood and brass sheath

Malay Archipelago

18th - 19th century AD / 12th - 13th century AH

47 x 14 cm

1988.1.3928

Not all kris blades were created with the classic lok (wave) outline, although the distinctive flaring towards the hilt is an essential feature. The ivory jason demam ('Feuerish Jawanes') hilt is highly anthropomorphic, rather than being the abstracted form...
Sword with wood and silver scabbard
Lombok
19th century AD / 13th century AH
66 x 9 cm
1998.1.3905

The swords of Lombok, an island to the east of Bali, are more substantial weapons than those favoured in the more westerly parts of the archipelago. The blade is large and flat enough for extensive inlaid inscriptions from the Qur’an (Chapter 2, Verse 255)