Tombuk lada with wood and silver sheath
Sumatra
19th century AD / 13th century AH
37 x 9 cm
1998.1.3908

This tombuk lada (‘pepper crusher’) dagger is equipped with a characteristically imposing ivory butt. The wood and silver sheath is unusually lavish, embellished with 17th century gold coins from Aceh.
Badek with silver scabbard
Malay Peninsula or Sumatra
19th century AD / 136th century AH
40 x 8 cm
1998.1.3911

The badek dagger was used for cutting rather than stabbing. The blade is sharpened on one side only and is occasionally inscribed with calligraphy. This example has no inscriptions on the blade, but the sheath has been incised with the words “Allah” and “Muhammad.”
Clover with wood sheath
Borneo or Mindanao
19th century AD / 13th century AH
60 x 9 cm
1998.13906

The Muslim origins of this distinctive regional weapon are confirmed by the presence of an inscription taken from the Qur’an (Chapter 61, Verse 13). An identical weapon is illustrated in H. Ling Roth’s The Natives of Sarawak and British North Borneo (1896).
Tambuk lada with wood and ivory sheath
Malay Archipelago
19th - 20th century AD / 13th - 14th century AH
20 x 5 cm
2004.13.10

Tambuk lada are among the easiest Malay weapons to conceal and have been traditionally associated with women. They were especially popular in the Malay Peninsular state of Negeri Sembilan. The ivory parrot head of this example suggests origins in Sumatra.

of this distinctive regional weapon are ever present. An inscription taken from the 1, Verse 13). An identical weapon is mentioned in Roth's The Natives of Sarawak and Borneo (1896).
Spears were one of the most important parts of the Malay warrior's arsenal. Few were as finely decorated as this spear head inlaid in silver. It would doubtless have been used by members of a ruler's retinue.
Sixth century AH

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Sickle
Madura
19th - 20th century AD / 13th - 14th century AH
40 x 4 cm
1988.1.3896

Sickle-shaped blades are an important part of Madurese culture and are often imbued with mystical properties. In this example, the words "Allah" and "Muhammad" are used repeatedly, alongside numbers and five-pointed stars.
WOODWORK

A Malay house in Sumatra
Woodwork
SACRED CARVES

The tropical forests of Southeast Asia have traditionally provided a rich source of material for the region's inhabitants. Hot and humid conditions encourage an abundance of flora, including hardwood trees such as teak, meranti and keruing. Many types of timber are unique to the Malay world and have been exported to other areas for centuries. Since the first settled communities in Southeast Asia, these beautifully grained woods have provided the necessary building material. Complex palaces and modest dwellings alike rose up from the ground on strong, wooden beams, preventing dampness from seeping into the structure. The lace-like ventilation panels (sing angin) made from finely carved wood in fully pierced or carved style allow air to flow freely through the house, while filtering out the glare of the midday sun.

In addition to buildings constructed from timber, Malay households were equipped with wood tools and utensils. Finely crafted and beautiful embellishments on food containers, ladles, and serving spoons elevated these works from a utilitarian state to become cherished objects in a domestic setting. During more prosperous periods, highly ornamental objects were produced. These included the rebab, a stringed instrument which forms part of the ensemble for the performance of Malay puppet shows and dances, and intricate bird traps (jekas pasu). The Malay art of woodcarving draws inspiration from its natural surroundings. A plethora of motifs shaped after plants, creepers, and tropical flowers became part of the carving's design repertoire. The graceful twists and turns of the sukur bayung motif reminds us of slat (the Malay art of self-defence). Translated as 'windblown tendrils', the leaf opening outward then curving under alludes to the Malay ethos that emphasises humility in one's personal conduct. The seemingly
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As of woodcarving draws inspiration from its natural surroundings. A plethora of r plants, creepers, and tropical flowers became part of the carving's design ul twists and turns of the salak bayung motif reminds us of silat (the Malay art instead as 'windblown tendrils', the leaf opening outward then curving under ry ethos that emphasises humility in one's personal conduct. 1 The seemingly haphazard appearance of the interlacing vegetal motifs is actually guided by a principle of restraint and compassion that underlies the traditional art of woodcarving, as well as the cultural norms (adat budaya) of Malay society. The underlying Malay aesthetic can be seen as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tiubul berpunca</th>
<th>Growing from a source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Punca penuh takia</td>
<td>A source full of secrets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiubul tidak menanjak kawan</td>
<td>Growing without piercing a friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menanjat tidak memantau kawan</td>
<td>Climbing without clinging to a rival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tetapi mendingkar penuh mesra</td>
<td>But intertwining with grace and friendliness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The widespread acceptance of Islam left an indelible mark on Malay woodcarving. The geometrical and symmetrical elements in Islamic decorative art lend a structural framework for the exuberant representation of Southeast Asia's tropical vegetation. The spread of Islam also introduced Arabic calligraphy to the Malay world. Muslims were taught early on to recite from the Qur'an, which was written in the Arabic script. These sacred verses, alongside the names of God, the Prophet Muhammad, and his companions, were often featured in the Islamic arts of the region. In the IAMM collection, Arabic inscriptions can be found on a wide variety of objects, including carved wood panels used as wall decorations. Transcribed onto panels, the sanctified Arabic calligraphy echoes the interlacing and intertwining patterns of the floral and foliage motif. These were hung above doorways and adorned the walls of mosques, palaces and private dwellings. The manifestation of sacred words in a physical space serves to remind the faithful of the oneness of God and to affirm the glory of His greatness.

Decorative techniques in Southeast Asia differ from many other parts of the Islamic world. In those regions where wood is scarce, ornamentation would usually entail inlaying tiny pieces of wood veneer in a mosaic-like pattern onto the surface of the object. More luxurious items would include precious materials such as mother-of-pearl, ivory or tortoiseshell. In Southeast Asia, where the supply of wood is plentiful, designs were carved directly out of blocks of solid wood. Patterns were either flat — their intricate outline defined by the negative space carved out of the wood in an open-work technique called the tebuk tenas — or carved in relief through the tebuk silat technique to emphasise the tracery of veins and fibres in the composition. A combination of the two techniques is called the tebuk tenas silat. 3 The combined techniques of relief and open-work carving were often used on decorative wall panels, window railings, and elaborate gates made for the higher echelons of society. Pierced-through carvings provide ventilation and allow soft light to permeate the living space. This carving technique requires highly skilled craftsmen, as the design had to be cut out from a piece of board or plank, before the shape is finely carved to produce the two-dimensional appearance. The intricacy, workmanship and artistry required of the master carvers to produce the
tēbak tenus silat technique meant that only the affluent could afford to commission these elaborate pieces of art.

Wood objects are often left unpainted, as the Malay community traditionally prefers the natural pattern and subtle colouration of the wood to show through. In the past, a good kemuning was thought to be more valuable than gold. The wood is still used to make kris sheaths and hilts, the deep yellow colour of the wood complementing the gold brocade of songket cloth. It may take weeks or even months for a woodcarver to search for this type of wood, and even then, there would be much deliberation before the felling of the kemuning tree. Other woods, such as cengal or teak, are favoured for their strength, durability and resistance to insect infestation. The wood is carved into luxurious furniture or employed in the construction of bridges and houses. The objects are generally left unpainted, revealing their rich and natural dark colouring. Nevertheless, the Malay world has produced a number of carvings that were treated with paint, which is perhaps a more recent phenomenon for Muslim craftsmen who used colour to enhance the aesthetic value of their works.
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Prayer screen
19th century AD / 13th century AH
Sumatra
143.5 x 95 cm
1998.1.4357

This cengal-wood prayer screen was formerly owned by a
member of the Jambi royal family. It is inscribed with two
calligraphic roundels containing verses from the Qur’anic
chapters Surah Ya’sin and Surah al-Imran in Thuluth script on
the front and back of the screen.
Qur’an box
19th century AD / 13th century AH
Malay Peninsula
42.5 x 28 x 6.5cm
1998.14363

Special boxes to house the Qur’an are a tradition in most parts of the Islamic world. In the Malay world, they were often carved and gilded, as in this example with cloud scrolls and motifs of climbing bean tendrils and wild violets. It is inscribed with a prayer seeking Allah’s assistance in the quest for knowledge.
Qur'an box
19th century AD / 13th century AH
Malay Peninsula
35 x 29 x 5 cm
1998.I.4364

Made from the durable ceoual wood, this Qur'an box is adorned with carved inscriptions and geometric and floral motifs in low relief. It is painted in gold on each carving with a background painted in red, green and blue. The cover is carved with the Basmallah ("Allah the Most Compassionate and Merciful") and an excerpt from the Qur'an (Surah Al-Baqarah).
Wood chests were a useful repository for clothing and other valuables. This example, made from ceylon wood, incorporates a small box for storing jewellery. It is carved with Qur'anic verses from the Surah Al-Nisa and Surah Al-A'laq and a set of prayers.