

Toolkit: Textiles and Fashions from the Islamic World - 2021

TEXTILES FROM SOUTH EAST ASIA

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Among the varied textile traditions of Southeast Asia, many are practised in Islamic communities, especially in the maritime parts of the region. The techniques employed are often the same as those used by adherents to other religions, and the motifs may derive from other religious beliefs. However, some textiles are clearly Islamic in character, or are employed in specifically Islamic contexts.

Textiles made and costume worn by Malays are in keeping with Islamic cultural practices; the long tunic or *baju kurung*, and the wide shawls sometimes worn by women are examples. The metal-wrapped supplementary weft technique, *songket*, with which ceremonial silk cloths are decorated, is regarded by most Malays (within and beyond Malaysia) as quintessentially Malay [see 1973.411, 2012.86]. *Songket* is also woven by the Muslim Minangkabau of West Sumatra, but is also made in largely Hindu Bali.

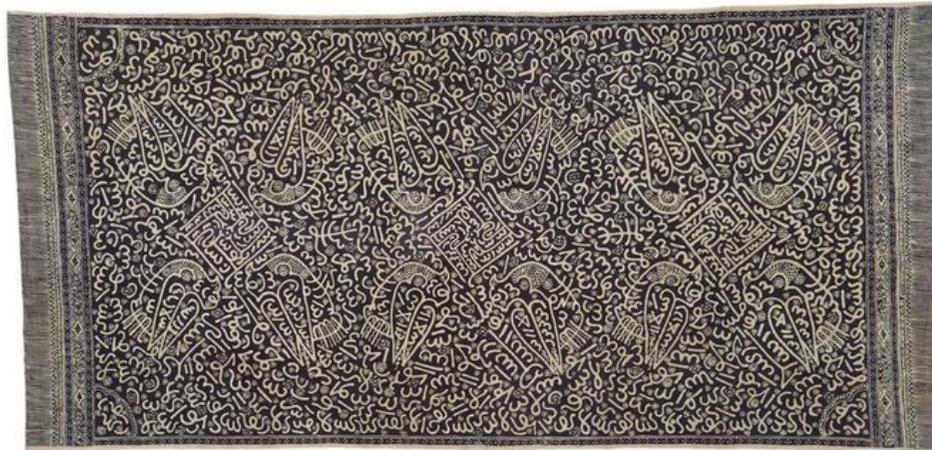
Batik, cloth decorated by reserving parts of the cloth with wax before dyeing, is strongly associated with Java, which has one of the largest populations of Muslims in the world. The technique may predate the introduction of Islam, however, and traditional designs sometimes make reference to non-Islamic traditions. The wings of the Garuda, for example, often feature in Central Javanese batik. But calligraphic batik cloths, embellished with phrases from the Qur'an [see 2003.1108], are clearly rooted in Islam.

Metal thread embroidery is a feature of the textiles made by many Islamic communities. It often takes the form of couchwork, where strips of metal are laid over some form of padding, often a shape made of paper or card. The gold, silver or alloy strips are supplemented with sequins and purls, often on a velvet or satin ground, producing a rich lustrous effect. This technique may be applied to cushion ends used to decorate a bridal bed or throne, or in name-giving ceremonies for infants, and wall hangings with Qur'anic inscriptions [see 2007.10, 2007.24, 2007.60.2, 2007.30].

One feature frequently found in the textiles in Southeast Asia is the ikat technique, whereby the warp or weft threads, and occasionally both, are tied before dyeing, to produce a thread with different colours along their lengths. When woven, these threads are arranged to form patterns in the finished cloth. Where the ikat patterning is in the warp, the cloths originate in non-Muslim communities from, for example, the eastern islands of Indonesia, inland parts of Borneo or northern Sumatra. Where the patterning is in the weft, the cloth is most likely from a Muslim coastal community [see 2012.86]. Weft ikat occurs especially in Malay societies; but also in Bali and in non-Muslim parts of mainland Southeast Asia.

Other textile techniques employed in Islamic textiles are the tying and dyeing of patterns into cloth, known in Indonesia as pelangi [2012.85], and the typical plain-woven check patterns of men's sarungs, often referred to as kain Bugis, after the Bugis people of Sulawesi [see 2008.626]. In the Southern Philippines the traditional silk Tausug man's head cloth is woven using the tapestry technique [see 2012.146].

2003.1108



Further Reading

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Siti Zainon Ismail 'The Art of Embroidery' in Othman, Dato' Haji Sulaiman. 1997. *The Crafts of Malaysia*. Singapore; Archipelago Press. Pages 139-146.

Siti Zaharah Abg. Hj. Husaini. 'Kain Songket and Selayah' in Chin, Lucas and Valerie Mashman. 1991. *Sarawak Cultural Legacy: a living tradition*. Kuching: Society Atelier Sarawak. Pages 91-106.



10cm 10cm

1973.411

Title: Malay skirt cloth

Material: Silk, with metal-wrapped supplementary weft

Place and date: Sarawak, Malaysia, late 19th or early 20th century

Dimensions: 2042 x 1072 mm

Accession number: 1973.411

Description: Red silk skirt cloth, an unstitched sarong, decorated with metal thread supplementary weft, in pristine condition. The tabby-woven red silk ground has a large gold-coloured centre panel, the 'kepala', with two opposed columns of triangular motifs. To either side are the triangular-shaped 'tumpal'. The main design field, or 'badan', has a pattern made up of foliate motifs, which runs diagonally, and three different geometric motifs arranged in half-drops. The method of patterning, known as 'songket', is achieved using continuous supplementary weft, worked in twill and block weaving, using gold-coloured metal-wrapped thread.

2012.86

Title: Malay skirt cloth

Material: Silk, with metal-wrapped supplementary weft

Place and date: Malaysia, late 19th or early 20th century

Dimensions: 1045 mm x 1050 mm

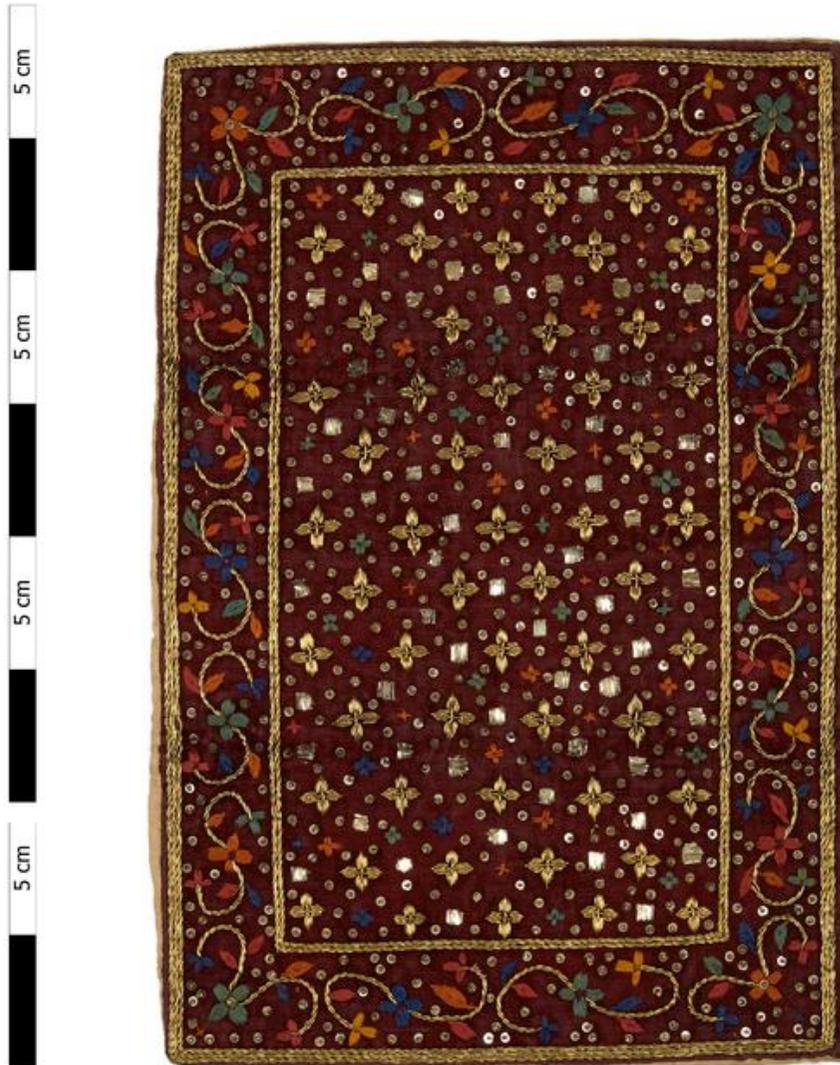
Accession number: 2012.86



Description Red silk tubeskirt, sarung, decorated with gold thread supplementary weft (songket) in the panel and borders, and **ikat** patterning in the main field, or badan. The ikat design consists of a lattice of diamond shapes, each enclosing a four-petalled rosette. The motifs have been created by tying the weft threads before dyebaths of blue and yellow, reserving them from the effect of the last red dyebath. The main panel, or kepala, is elaborately decorated with a regular pattern of abstract vegetal forms in a symmetrical arrangement to each side of the vertical axis, made with metal-wrapped thread. A border along the top and bottom of the skirt echoes the designs of the main panel.



2007.10.1



Title: Baby cover

Material: velvet, metal thread, sequins

Place and date: Palembang, Sumatra, Indonesia, early 20th century

Dimensions: 385mm x 260mm; 250mm x 100mm

Accession number: 2007.10

Description: Two piece cover for infant. One piece covers the forehead of the child and is a rectangular piece of red velvet embroidered in the centrefield with silk yarns in orange and with sequins and quatrefoil motifs made of purls. Central lozenge with similar decoration and also some stylised Arabic script, reading on right 'There is no God but Allah', with the message in mirror image on the left. A border containing square motifs of couched metal strip (kelingkam) alternating with orange and green quatrefoil embroidered motifs in silk yarn between straight lines of couched twined metal wrapped thread. Backed with a lining of floral chintz.

2007.10.2

5 cm



2007.24



Title: Food cover, tudung

Material: cotton, metal-thread

Place and date: Bandar Lampung, Sumatra, Indonesia. Early 20th century

Dimensions: 565mm x 565mm

Accession number: 2007.24

Description: Cover for a presentation tray, tudung saji, in gold couchwork and embroidery. The central square is of red woollen cloth, with a wide border of blue cloth surrounding it. The couched design in the red central square has a square band set at right angles to it, and within that a smaller square frame parallel to the sides of the cover. The decorative designs between the bands are of abstract vegetal forms in gold-wrapped threads, the couchwork stitches in regular patterns adding a textured impression to the work. Within the blue border, as well as abstract vegetal forms there is a row of swastika motifs, and there are sequins applied in the spaces all over the cover. Lined in cream cotton cloth.

2007.60.2

Title: Cushion end, kampek

Material: velvet, cotton, metal thread, sequins, textile

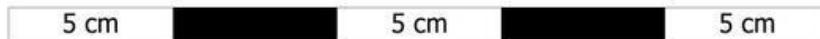
Place and date: Jambi, Sumatra, Indonesia

Dimensions: 140 mm x 220 mm x 170 mm

Accession number: 2007.60.2



Description: One of a pair of couchwork cushion ends (kampek) with 'nona' flower motif on a red velvet ground. Design has central plant motif with stem from which a nona flower emerges vertically. Two further nona flower motifs to left and right above and below, reaching into the corners of the main panel. These motifs worked in metal -wrapped thread and twined purls. Sequins in spaces between the leaves and flowers. This main panel surrounded by a border with two straight edges, the outer one scalloped on the inner edge, worked in raised couched metal strips to either side of a pattern made of alternating single sequins and leaf shapes made of purls. The cushion end is machine sewn onto a shape made of three pieces of green velvet sewn together which would have fitted over the end of a rectangular cushion. The green velvet is lined with pale yellow cotton fabric printed with a variety of discrete rosette patterns in a symmetrical pattern.



2007.60.2



2007.60.2

2012.85



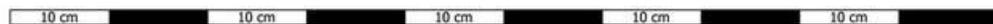
Material: silk

Place and date: Malaysia, first half of 20th century

Dimensions: 1100 mm x 1045 mm

Accession number: 2012.85

Description: Green pelangi silk skirt cloth, sarung. Formed of a wide length of silk fabric first dyed yellow before patterns were stitched into it. Some small simple elements appear to have been reserved in wax. The cloth was then dyed green, and the stitching and wax then removed, leaving a design in yellow on a green ground. The ends of the cloth were then stitched together neatly by hand with black thread. The design for the main body is of simple shapes arranged regularly into diamond shapes or bays with a four-pointed star shape at the centre of each. A curvilinear design within two dotted lines forms a border at top and bottom of the cloth. The rest of the design consists of a panel known as the head, or kepala, formed of two vertical rows of opposing triangles between two rectangular panels. Within each triangle and panel is a schematic vegetal design.



2007.30

Title: wall hanging

Material: velvet, metal

Place and date: Aceh, Sumatra, late 20th century

Dimensions: 1220mm x 650mm

Accession number: 2007.30



Description: Rectangular wall hanging of black velvet onto which motifs are couched in gold-coloured metal strips and embellished with sequins. The central area is filled with a text from the Qur'an, the 'ayat kursi', or 'throne verse', the 255th verse (ayah) of the second chapter (sura) of Al Qur'an in Arabic script, contained within a cartouche formed of waves within a double scalloped border. At each corner is a large foliate motif encircling a circular motif in each of which is a phrase in Arabic. The hanging is surrounded by an inner border of wave shapes and an outer scrolling foliate one, which has a break in it at top centre.



2012.146



Title: Tausug man's headcloth; pis siyabit

Material: cotton

Place and date: Philippines, 20th century

Dimensions: 1060 mm x 1027 mm

Accession number: 2012.146

Description: Square man's cotton headcloth, pis siyabit, woven in one piece, with a geometric pattern achieved in tapestry technique with commercial yarns of yellow, red, orange, green, blue and cream. The design is of an all over pattern of interlocking shapes which could be interpreted at stars, diamonds or stylised rosettes, framed within a series of borders, also of geometric forms. A four-pointed motif at each corner. The headcloth is hemmed on all four sides, which are trimmed with a strip of cream crochet work.

2008.626



Title: Bugis man's skirt cloth

Material: artificial silk

Place and date: Sulawesi, Indonesia

Dimensions: 1362 mm x 1090 mm

Accession number: 2008.626

Description Man's check tubular skirt cloth, sarung, artificial silk, chiefly red, black and white. It is formed of two separate lengths of cloth arranged one above the other and stitched together along the selvedge. The resulting rectangle has then been stitched along the vertical edge to form a tube. The pattern is achieved simply by arranging warp threads in stripes on the loom, and weaving in similar bands across the width. The 'kepala' or 'head' of the skirt is indicated by introducing narrower bands across the weft than are made in the main body of the skirt during the weaving of this part.

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