

Provenance report regarding Katoenen jak met Arabische kalligrafie [Batik vest with Arabic calligraphy]

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 <p>Photo: <i>Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen.</i> Coll.no TM-5663-18</p>	Custodian	NMWW Tropenmuseum
	Current possessor	Dutch State
	Inventory number	TM-5663-18
	Material/technique	Cotton; batik
	Measurements	57 x 52 cm

Summary of findings

The Tropenmuseum purchased the batik vest in 1996 from Harmen Veldhuisen (1943-2020), a well-known collector and expert of batik textiles, who had acquired it at Christie’s Amsterdam in 1985. According to Veldhuisen, it was worn during the War of Independence (1945-1949). The research did not provide any information about the provenance prior to 1985 and therefore Veldhuisen’s claim cannot be confirmed. Since talismanic items were frequently worn during the battles of 1945-1949, it also cannot be excluded that this vest was used in this period.

Reconstruction provenance

After 1900- before 1985

Manufacture of batik vest

?-1985

Undisclosed owner

Catalogue *Fine Islamic, Indian, Himalayan, South-East Asian and Indonesian sculpture and works of art* 17 December 1985, Christie’s Amsterdam.

17-12-1985

Christie's Amsterdam *Fine Islamic, Indian, Himalayan, South-East Asian and Indonesian sculpture and works of art (auction)*.

Catalogue *Fine Islamic, Indian, Himalayan, South-East Asian and Indonesian sculpture and works of art 17 December 1985*, Christie's Amsterdam.

1985-1996

Harmen Veldhuisen

Notes Harmen Veldhuisen object 805. Unregistered archives Tropenmuseum.

1996-present

NMVW Tropenmuseum

Tropenmuseum, inventory card TM-5663-18, digitised in TMS.

Introduction and context

Batik vest TM-5663-18 from the Tropenmuseum collections has been selected for provenance research in the work package "The long decolonization" because the previous owner stated that the vest was worn during the War of Independence. Therefore, it may have been captured as war booty in the period 1945-1949. This question guides the provenance research on the vest.

Object information

This batik vest is a type of talismanic shirt. The use of talismanic shirts was historically known in certain parts of the Muslim world: in the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires (in particular at the courts), West Africa, and Southeast Asia.¹ In Indonesia, talismanic shirts are known to have been made in South Sulawesi, West Java, and Madura. The surface of the shirts was full of Islamic texts that imbued the garments with protective powers. Talismanic shirts were meant to be worn under clothing or under armour, when worn in battle. In Java they are known since at least the eighteenth century.²

This cotton shirt or vest is full of religious motifs made with batik technique. Both the front and back are filled with various Arabic texts written in a simple and sometimes even untidy *naskh* letter in a style called *batik kaligrafi* or *batik besurek*. Batik is made by women, and often the women who produced calligraphic batik copied the texts from another source. The texts are designed to give protection: the names of God, the prophet Muhammad and the Sunni caliphs, the Islamic declaration of faith (*shahada*, Bahasa Indonesia spelling: *syahadat*), and similar formulas, numbers, and words. Along the collar, a single word is repeated: *ha*, an abbreviation of God's name Allah, forming a Sufi meditation chant (*dhikr*). Below it, the names of the seven sleepers of Ephesus (*ashab al-kahf*) are written. Four winged-shaped or mountain emblems in white have text in black: the text

¹ Patricia Baker, *Islam and the Religious Arts* (London: Continuum, 2004), 217.

² Dr F. Haan, "De laatste der Mardijkers," *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde / Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 73, no. 1 (1917): 244, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-90001676>.

is a variation of the *shahada*. Symbols on the back of the vest give even more divine protection: four pairs of wings with the names of the four archangels surrounded by numbers, formulas and verses from the Qur'an. The numbers stand for letters and, in that way, they make up propitious words. The text along the bottom half is divided into compartments, each of which contains a word from the 112th chapter of the Qur'an (*surat al-ikhlas*): Say: He is Allah, the One and Only. Allah, the Eternal, Absolute. He begetteth not, nor is He begotten, and there is none like unto Him.³ The chapter is repeated several times. The texts and names were known for their mystical character, and also the colour combination of dark blue and white (*kelengan*) was said to have protective power.⁴

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the use of Islamic talismanic texts in batik cloths was especially prevalent in Cirebon, western Java. These cloths were mainly worn as head scarves by village elders and *penghulu*, religious functionaries. Besides the protection that the texts offered, wearing these cloths also showed a person to be pious. The cloths were made both for local consumption and for export to Sumatra.⁵ Outside the sphere of batik, western Java and Madura had (and still have) a tradition of talismanic shirts that were made from cotton with handwritten or block printed protective texts.⁶ Such shirts were made by religious specialists like a *kyai* or *dukun*. The sleeveless shirts were worn in battle or other precarious situations and their function was that of an amulet or talisman. Those who wore them believed that by keeping these divine words close to their body, they would be protected against injury and death. This shirt seems to combine these two types of clothing, which is quite rare.

Talismanic shirts in batik fabric are also rare in museums; there is no other one, with the same design, in a public collection that is known to the author. The Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia has a cloth in exactly the same style of fabric as the Tropenmuseum shirt and also another talismanic batik jacket from Cirebon in a completely different style.⁷ Also important to note is the excellent condition of the vest; it seems unlikely to have been worn during battle, although it is not impossible.⁸

Provenance report

The vest was purchased in 1996 by the Tropenmuseum from Harmen Cornelis Veldhuisen (1943-2020), a well-known collector of batik textiles and other types of Indonesian art, such as woodwork, brass, and Yogyakarta silver. In 1969, he married Alit Djajasoebrata (b. 1935), curator of the Indonesian collections at the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam. Through his wife he became familiar with the textile art of batik and Veldhuisen started his private collection. Veldhuisen was known as an expert on batik and authored several books on the subject. At the time of his divorce, in 1996, he decided to sell half of his collection of batik textiles (1,544 items, series TM-5663) to the Tropenmuseum. Further sales of parts of his collection followed in 2006 (batik textiles and templates, series TM-6253 and TM-6273) and 2007 (Yogyakarta silver, TM-6300). Veldhuisen also sold objects to the Wereldmuseum in 1978 (batik), 1990 (brass), 1993 (brass, textiles) and 1996 (brass, woodwork).⁹

³ Translation based on 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī, *Holy Qur'ān: Text and Translation*, (Chatham: Wordsworth), 2000.

⁴ James Bennett, *Crescent Moon: Islamic Art & Civilisation in Southeast Asia* (Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2005), 285.

⁵ Mirjam Shatanawi, *Islam at the Tropenmuseum* (Arnhem: LM Publishers, 2014), 228–29.

⁶ Email Valentina Pantano, PhD researcher University of Naples, 26 June 2021.

⁷ Email Nurul Iman Rusdi (curator of the Islamic Arts Museum, Malaysia) to author, 21 June 2021.

⁸ The Wereldmuseum has a cloth that was proven to have been seized from fighters in 1945-1949 and is in a similarly good condition.

⁹ Information TMS collection system National Museum of World Cultures and Wereldmuseum.

At the sale of (half of) his batik collection in 1996, Veldhuisen provided a printout of the documentation from his own collection registration system for each item. The details on the print out of the batik vest disclose that Veldhuisen acquired the vest on 17 December 1985 at Christie's Amsterdam.¹⁰ On that day the auction *Fine Islamic, Indian, Himalayan, South-East Asian and Indonesian sculpture and works of art* was held.¹¹ Veldhuisen acquired two lots at the auction: the vest (lot 325) and a batik flag (lot 324, currently Tropenmuseum collection, TM-5663-1).¹² The flag is a copy of the royal banner of Cirebon, of which the original dates from 1776 and is now in the Textile Museum in Jakarta.¹³ The flag has Islamic texts, depictions of a calligram of a lion and the famous sword *zulfikar*. Like the vest, the flag has talismanic powers and was historically used in battle, among other more national purposes.

Email contact with Christie's did not result in disclosure of the name of the consignor. Christie's archives are closed for a 50-year period from the sale date and, therefore, Christie's cannot divulge the name of the 1985 consignor. Data protection regulations (GDPR) also limit the disclosure of consignor information beyond this 50-year period. However, notes in the catalogue kept at the Christie's headquarters show that both lots 324 and 325 were listed in the "Various Properties" section of the 1985 catalogue. Next to both is a handwritten note "638 f", referring to the consignor (or buyer). According to Christie's, it seems very probable that both lots were from the same consignment as both have similar notes attached.¹⁴ Harmen Veldhuisen's ex-wife does not have information about the provenance of the vest.¹⁵

In Veldhuisen's collection registration system the vest is described (in English) as "worn in battle. Used during pol. actions" and the flag as "to use in battle. Used during pol. actions."¹⁶ With the last two words Veldhuisen is referring to the *politioenele acties*, the Dutch term for the military campaign during the Indonesian National Revolution. It is unclear on which sources he based this information. Perhaps he knew the consignor and received more information about the lots. Or perhaps he misinterpreted the information about the flag and the vest provided by the auction catalogue. The description of the flag in the catalogue is: "A Javanese cotton batik flag, the indigo field with Arabic script. 190 cm long. This flag is said to have been used by a freedom fighter in the late fifties until his arrest in 1960." The description of the vest is: "A Javanese cotton batik jacket, the indigo field decorated with Arabic script, 54 cm long. This kind of jacket is said to have been worn in battle and supposed to protect the wearer from being wounded by bullets." So, neither description mentions the revolution or the *politioenele acties*. Still, Veldhuisen's attribution of the vest to the *politioenele acties* was reproduced in several of the museum's publications.¹⁷

¹⁰ Harmen Veldhuisen object registration, inv. no. 805. Unregistered collection archives Tropenmuseum.

¹¹ Catalogue *Fine Islamic, Indian, Himalayan, South-East Asian and Indonesian sculpture and works of art 17 December 1985*, Christie's Amsterdam.

¹² Harmen Veldhuisen object registration, inv. no. 800 and 805. Unregistered collection archives Tropenmuseum.

¹³ Farouk Yahya, "Calligrams of the Lion of 'Alī in Southeast Asia," in *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice*, ed. Liana Saif et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 483–88, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004426979_012.

¹⁴ Email Andrea Lehmann (senior Researcher and Associate Director Restitution at Christie's) to author, 3 June 2021.

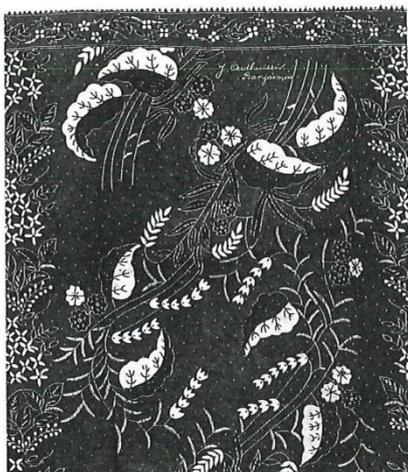
¹⁵ Email Mrs. A. Djajasoebrata to author, 23 June 2021.

¹⁶ Harmen Veldhuisen object registration, inv. no. 800 and 805. Unregistered collection archives Tropenmuseum.

¹⁷ Itie van Hout, *Batik: Drawn in Wax: 200 Years of Batik Art from Indonesia in the Tropenmuseum Collection* (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2001), 134; Shatanawi, *Islam at the Tropenmuseum*, 228.

Various Properties

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323 A Javanese silk batik slendang, the beige field decorated with scattered flowers, 280 x 45 cm; and a cotton batik sarong, 238 x 94 cm (2)

f 300-400

324 A Javanese cotton batik flag, the indigo field with white Arabic script, 190 cm long

NOTE:

This flag is said to have been used by a freedom fighter in the late fifties until his arrest in 1960

f 250-450

325 A Javanese cotton batik jacket, the indigo field decorated with Arabic script, 54 cm long

NOTE:

This kind of jacket is said to have been worn in battle and supposed to protect the wearer from being wounded by bullets

The catalogue information about the flag mentions a freedom fighter in the late fifties and his arrest in 1960, and thus refers to events taking place after Indonesia's independence. Perhaps it can be connected to one of the resistance movements against the Sukarno regime, such as Darul Islam, which endeavoured for an Islamic state, and PPRI (*Pemerintah Revolusioner Republik Indonesia*).¹⁸ The iconography of the flag, the national flag of the Cirebon Sultanate in the eighteenth century, in that case, points to a resistance movement that felt allied to the West Java kingdoms. Yet, without the name of the freedom fighter or the movement to which s/he belonged, the provenance of the flag remains unclear. In any case, apart from Veldhuisen's notes, there are no indications that the flag is connected to the period of Dutch colonial rule or the 1945-1949 revolution.

The information about the vest in the auction catalogue is less specific. It just reads that the vest "is said to have been worn in battle." So, did fighters wear talismanic shirts of this type during the revolution? There are several sources giving evidence that fighters of the Islamic militias, as well as those of the Indonesian armed forces, frequently made use of protective rituals and amulets, believing that they would protect them, or even render them invulnerable.¹⁹ Such amulets ranged from a small slip of paper issued by local 'ulama (Islamic scholars), sometimes wrapped in a belt around the waist, to a strip of fabric worn across the forehead into battle, to an heirloom *keris* dagger, blessed by an Islamic leader and imbued with power.²⁰ The observations in the literature are supported by material evidence. The National Archives in The Hague, NIOD Institute in Amsterdam, and the National Archive of the Republic of Indonesia (ANRI) in Jakarta contain several amulets that were used by Indonesian fighters in the period 1945-1949.²¹ These amulets range from printed talisman scrolls and formulas scribbled on small pieces of paper to cotton sleeve or head bands and

¹⁸ Wikipedia. 20201. "Darul Islam rebellion," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darul_Islam_rebellion and "Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutionary_Government_of_the_Republic_of_Indonesia

¹⁹ Kevin W. Fogg, *Indonesia's Islamic Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 79–93; Jean-Marc de Grave, 'Javanese Kanuragan Ritual Initiation: A Means to Socialize by Acquiring Invulnerability, Authority, and Spiritual Improvement', *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 58, no. 1 (2014): 47–66.

²⁰ Kevin W. Fogg, 'Decolonization and Religion: Islamic Arguments for Indonesian Independence', *Leidschrift* 31, no. 3 (2016): 119.

²¹ National Archives/Netherlands Forces Intelligence Service (NEFIS) and Central Military Intelligence Service (CMI) in the Dutch East Indies inv. nos. 3512/3585/3898/4746. NIOD 417 Collectie Voorwerpen Nederlands-Indië inv. no. 2. National Archive of the Republic of Indonesia RB7, Marzuki Arifin, 1945–1984, inv. no. 366. For the latter items see also Fogg *Indonesia's Islamic Revolution*, 86.

amulet belts worn around the waist. The collections of several museums in the Netherlands (but not the National Museum of World Cultures), also contain such amulets that were seized in 1945-1949. The Islamic texts on the amulets are Qur'anic verses (e.g. *ayat al-kursi*) or entire chapters, mystical letters, the *shahada*, the names of the four rightly guided caliphs, and Islamic formulas such as the *hawqala*, the *basmala* and various *salawat* (salutations upon the Prophet). Some reference a Sufi worldview through invocations of Sufi masters like 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (1077-1166). Others are related to the *debus* invulnerability rituals as practiced in Banten and Cirebon. Another type are Islamic slogans related to the political movements of the revolution. In fact, most of the Islamic texts on the amulets (if legible) are texts that were widely used for protection on all kinds of objects.

None of the items used in 1945-49 and kept in the archives or museums concerns a batik vest like the one in the Tropenmuseum collection. The textile items are usually made from cheap cotton on which Islamic texts are written with pen, block printed, or painted. Usually, they are of more modest appearance and simpler techniques were used for their production, and rarely batik.²² The production of a batik vest, like this one, takes longer (two weeks minimum) and seems to be a rather cumbersome process to obtain protective gear during war time. In addition, there was an enormous shortage of cotton during the war.²³ However, it cannot be excluded that a (perhaps older) batik vest was worn for purposes of protection in the period 1945-1949. The texts on the vest do not reveal a purpose more specific than protection, and revolutionary fighters used protective gear of all kinds. It is also possible, however, that the vest comes from the same source as the flag and was seized after Indonesian Independence. What argues against these assumptions is the excellent condition of the garment, which makes it improbable (but not impossible) that the vest was used in battle. The research did not provide any information about the provenance beyond 1985.

²² Fogg, 87.

²³ William Frederick, "The Appearance of Revolution: Cloth, Uniforms, and the Pemuda Style in East Java, 1945-1949," in *Outward Appearances: Dressing State and Society in Indonesia*, ed. Henk Schulte Nordholt (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1997), 199–248.