


Provenance report regarding Flag (Vlag uit de voormalige Nederlandse koloniën)

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 <p><i>Photo: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (Inv.no. NG-MC-1889-84-4)</i></p>	Custodian	Rijksmuseum Amsterdam
	Current possessor	Dutch State
	Inventory number	NG-MC-1889-84-4
	Material/technique	Wool and linen
	Measurements	H: 230cm W: 490cm

Summary of findings

The museum's registered provenance of the flag as being part of the booty of Dutch admiral Jacob Pieter van Braam (1737-1803) seems to be incorrect. Based on its colour and badge, this is a flag from the sultanate of Sulu in what is nowadays the Philippines.

It was probably captured by a Dutch navy man somewhere in the nineteenth century.

Reconstruction provenance

? – 1848(?)

Flag in possession of the sultanate of Sulu.

1848 [or later]

Possibly captured by Dutch troops in the Sulu-archipelago.

Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 1459. Archive family Van Braam Houckgeest, inv.nr. 60. Manuscript with logbook.

? - until 1889

Flag is part of the 'model room' ("Marine Modellen-kamer") of the Dutch Ministry of Navy in the Hague.

Inventory card NG-MC-1889-84-4 Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

1889 - present

Part of the collection of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Inventory card NG-MC-1889-84-4 Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Introduction and context

This is a very large flag of almost 5 m wide and 2,3 m high. The flag is red with a discoloured blue vertical bar along the hoist. The hoist is decorated with white circles and red flowers. According to Paolo Paddeu, founder and member of the Philippine Vexillological Association, this might indicate the main territories belonging to the sultanate of Sulu.¹ To the right side (the Rijksmuseum website has accidentally displayed the flag upside down) is a large white badge: even though different opinions on this exist, it may well represent the door of the Kabaa in Mecca.²

Historical context: the Sulu Archipelago and the Dutch in the nineteenth century

The Sulu Archipelago is a collection of islands located between the island of Borneo and Kalimantan, Mindanao and Sulawesi's north coast. Today it is part of the southern Philippines. Over the nineteenth century the sultanate's political power grew. Sulu became a powerful commercial hub of slave trade in the area and also provided many seafarers a safe harbour in the area. The Dutch colonial authorities considered these seafarers to be pirates.³ Moreover, the Dutch felt threatened by other European imperial powers in the region, such as the British, Spanish, and French.

The Dutch feared that these empires would expand their power in the region. Furthermore, Sulu's trafficking in human beings from the Philippines into Indonesia, and the social disruption this caused in the area, caused friction between the European colonial states.⁴ The empires blamed each other for not controlling and dismantling the slave trade. This caused the Dutch to exercise more direct territorial control in what was for them a peripheral area and attempt to contain the piracy and slave trade.⁵

In 1848, the Dutch authorities sent two ships under the command of Andreas Charles van Braam Houckgeest (1800-1873) to Sulu with the order to "force the sultan to end the acts of piracy."⁶ In the morning of 23 April 1848, Dutch forces started bombarding the capital of the archipelago. At 10 o'clock in the morning they witnessed the ordinary flag of Sulu being replaced by "a red flag (probably their war flag), embroidered with the coat of arms in gold or silver."⁷ The hoist had a narrow white stripe with some blue in it.⁸ For three hours the city was under fire, destroying the market and killing the people that were present.⁹ Two Dutch lieutenants came ashore and burned

¹ Email from Paola Paddeu, 6 April 2021.

² There are different theories on the background of the flag, the flag representing the door of the Kabaa is one of them. See: [Historical Flags of Sulu Sultanate \(crwflags.com\)](https://www.crwflags.com) (accessed 2 December 2021).

³ Nicholas Tarling already questioned the use of the term 'piracy' in this historical-geographical context. Of course there was 'piracy' but we should realise the term is also very much connected to one's point of view and one's view of trading.

⁴ James Francis Warren, *The Sulu Zone, 1768-1898: the Dynamics of External Trade, Slavery, and Ethnicity in the Transformation of a Southeast Asian Maritime State* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2007), 164; Chung Ming Chin, "Revisiting the Political Economy and Ethnicity of the Sulu Sultanate and its Entanglement with the Seafaring World," in *Piracy and surreptitious activities in the Malay Archipelago and adjacent seas, 1600-1840*, ed. Y.H. Teddy Sim (Singapore: Springer, 2014), 121-140, 135; Anthony Reid, "Violence at Sea: unpacking "Piracy" in the Claims of States over Asian Seas," in *Elusive Pirates, Pervasive Smugglers: Violence and Clandestine Trade in the Greater China Seas*, ed. Robert J. Antony (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 15-27, 24.

⁵ K. Obidzinski, *Logging in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. The Historical Expedience of Illegality* (unpublished PhD-thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2003), 138.

⁶ "(...) den Sultan te dwingen een einde te maken aan den zeeroof in den archipel." F.E. Mulert, "Braam Houckgeest, Andreas Charles van," *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek*, eds. P.J. Blok and P.C. Molhuysen part 2 (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1912), 238-239, 238. https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/molh003nieu02_01/molh003nieu02_01_0563.php (accessed 2 December 2021).

⁷ Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 1459. Archive of the Van Braam Houckgeest family, inv.nr. 60. Manuscript with travel log to Sulu. "Ruim ten 10 uren werd de gewoone Soolosche vlag van het Sultans fort door eene rooie (waarschijnlijk hunne oorlogs vlag) van het zijde wapen in goud of zilver geborduurd voorzien, en aan de broeking eene smalle witte streep met blaauwe [unreadable] erin vervangen."

⁸ Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 1459. Archive of the Van Braam Houckgeest family, inv.nr. 60. Manuscript with travel log to Sulu.

⁹ J.F.G. Brumund, *Indiana: verzameling van stukken van onderscheiden aard, over landen, volken, oudheden en geschiedenis van den Indischen archipel* 2 volumes (Amsterdam: Van Kampen, 1853-1854), 142-143.

down the houses and boats of the people.¹⁰ The boats and weapons of some supposed pirates were captured. Also, several enslaved people were freed by the Dutch.¹¹

Lacking the capacity to impose law and order, this Dutch mission failed to have any effect in the long term. In the years that followed, the Dutch government chose to stand aside and silently witness how the area became subjected to Spain.¹² As a result “pirates from Sulu” continued to be a threat in Indonesian waters throughout the century.

Provenance report

The Rijksmuseum suggests in its documentation that flag NG-MC-1889-84-4 looks similar to the flags captured by Dutch admiral Jacob Pieter van Braam (1737-1803) in Melaka, Selangor, and Riau in 1784.¹³ This observation remains unsubstantiated, however, as will be explained below.

The flag NG-MC-1889-84-4 has visually been determined as a flag from Sulu. The most important Dutch mission to the Sulu Archipelago in the nineteenth century is the one of Van Braam Houckgeest in 1848, so there is a possibility that this is the flag mentioned in the archival documents that was taken during this battle. The flag in the Rijksmuseum broadly resembles the description given in contemporary sources on the Van Braam Houckgeest battle: a red flag, embroidered with the coat of arms in gold or silver and a hoist with a narrow white stripe with some blue in it.¹⁴

However, in 1977 art historian Marijke van den Brandhof believed this flag was captured in 1822 in Bone, in South-Sulawesi.¹⁵ This is a possibility as well. We know similar flags from Sulu suspected pirates have been captured by Dutch navy officers: for instance, in the first weeks of January 1863 a very similar flag was captured from a “pirate’s perahu” from Sulu¹⁶ by the Dutch navy ship *Madura* in Central-Sulawesi.¹⁷

The flag was donated to the Ministry of Navy, where there was a so-called ‘model room’ (“Marine Modellen-kamer”), at a still unknown moment by an unknown donator. Between 1883 and 1889 this collection was transferred from the Hague to the recently opened Rijksmuseum, specifically the Nederlandsch Museum voor Geschiedenis en Kunst.¹⁸ The flag, together with at least 13 other flags from the Indonesian/Malay archipelago, entered the Rijksmuseum in 1889.¹⁹ At another moment in that same year, more Asian flags from that same model room entered the Rijksmuseum.²⁰ It were the last transports from the Ministry of Navy to the Rijksmuseum. We cannot retrieve this specific

¹⁰ Ibidem, 143.

¹¹ Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 1459. Archive of the Van Braam Houckgeest family, inv.nr. 60. Manuscript with travel log to Sulu, 27.

¹² M.P.H. Roessingh, *Dutch Relations with the Philippines: a Survey of Sources in the General State Archives, The Hague, the Netherland* (n.p. [1967]), 382-383.

¹³ See Rijksmuseum website inv.nr. NG-MC-1889-84-4: <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/collectie/NG-MC-1889-84-4/catalogus-entry> This information is derived from the registration of the flag in Adlib, the collection management system. The Van Braam-flags are stored in the National Military Museum in Soesterberg.

¹⁴ Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 1459. Archive of the Van Braam Houckgeest family, inv.nr. 60. Manuscript with travel log to Sulu.

¹⁵ Marijke van den Brandhof, *Vlaggen, vaandels & standaarden van het Rijksmuseum: een geïllustreerde catalogus* (Rijksmuseum: Amsterdam, 1977).

¹⁶ “Soloksche rooversprauw.” Caption by TM-3444-22. Dutch navy officer Diederijk Gerhard Engelbert Wolter Muller (1836-1916) draw a painting of the flag and wrote a caption.

¹⁷ Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen: TM-3444-22. Dutch navy officer Diederijk Gerhard Engelbert Wolter Muller (1836-1916) draw a painting of the flag.

¹⁸ Rijksmuseum. “Scheepsmodellen.” <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/rijksstudio/kunstwerken/scheepsmodellen> (accessed 1 December 2021).

¹⁹ Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv.nr. NG-MC-1889-84-1 t/m -14.

²⁰ See for instance Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv.nr. NG-MC-1889-83-25, NG-MC-1889-83-26 and NG-MC-1889-83-27.

flag on the transport lists, which seem to be incomplete.²¹ However, the flag's current inventory number points with certainty to this provenance.

We know for sure that Van Braam Houckgeest donated artefacts from Sulu to the Dutch Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden in 1865: a "kardoer case,"²² a powder horn and two pikes from two of the captured boats.²³ We also know his men captured a flag similar to the Rijksmuseum flag. However, we do not have certainty that Van Braam Houckgeest also donated this specific flag to the Dutch Ministry of Navy. And as already stated, more flags from Sulu were captured in this period. More research into the archives of the Dutch Ministry of Navy could possibly provide more details into the precise donor and precise moment of donation.²⁴

All foreign flags in the collection of the Ministry of Navy were trophies. Most of them were displayed in the eastern courtyard of the museum before the Second World War: "they were trophies of a glorious past," contemporary newspapers wrote.²⁵ The flag from Sulu is clearly discernible in photos of that courtyard from 1929: together with other flags from the Indonesian archipelago it adorned the walls in Amsterdam (see photo below).



Flag from Sulu in the courtyard of the Rijksmuseum, 1929.

Archive Rijksmuseum
Amsterdam, inv.no.
SSA-F-00323-1.

²¹ According to Jeroen ter Brugge, Rijksmuseum curator of maritime collections, some objects from the model room were stored in various locations and only administratively included in the model room-collection on the moment of transfer from The Hague to Amsterdam. Email Jeroen ter Brugge, 3 January 2022.

²² "Kardoerkoker." Perhaps from Kadur, a place on Pulau Laut in the Riau-archipelago? Or from 'cardeur,' carder, adj. carding? These objects are now part of the Museum Volkenkunde, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. The powder horn can is for instance: RV-360-5346-49.

²³ Rijksmuseum Archief, Noord-Hollands Archief, 476. Inv.nr. 856. Donations to the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden from non-European origin (scan 60).

²⁴ The so-called 'Verbalen,' accessed through the contemporary 'Indices,' could possibly provide more insight into the donation. See: National Archive The Hague, 2.12.01. Inventaris van het archief van het Ministerie van Marine: openbaar verbaal, 1813-1900.

²⁵ *Provinciale Overijsselsche en Zwolsche Courant*, 15 December, 1887.