

COTTON BINDING OF THE QURAN FROM THE EAST COAST MALAY PENINSULA BEFORE 20TH CENTURY: A HISTORICAL STUDY

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Abstract

Cotton is a textile that received high demand throughout the world prior to the 20th century. In the 19th century, the cotton industry reached the Malay world through two routes, firstly via direct trade with India, which had taken place prior to the arrival of Western forces, and secondly, through the East India Company, which turned the colonies under its control into revolutionary markets for British industry. The objectives of this research are 1] to study the source of cotton cloth supplies in Patani and 2] to study the cotton cloth material and the designs used in the Qur'an bindings of Patani before the 20th century. The methodologies used in this study are library research for Patani's trade history and secondly, a critical observation method to analyse the cotton cloths found in a museum collection. A total of 150 Qur'an manuscript artefacts were used in this study. Each cotton cloth's design was analysed and divided into categories such as: coloured, striped or patterned with Indian or English influences; based on the motifs used. As results of this study, it was found that 1] the cotton that was used in the Qur'an bindings within this collection mainly came from India and Europe, based on the designs featured on the textile. 2] The cotton designs used in the Qur'an binding process are in line with Islamic principles and apply the concept of moderation to honour the Qur'an as the Sacred Book in their lives.

Key words: cotton cloth, India, binding, Quran, artefacts

Introduction

Areas categorised as the East Coast in this study comprises of three Malay states, namely Patani, Kelantan and Terengganu, which are located on the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula. These three states once possessed a strong government and Malay civilisation, before being officially separated through the Bangkok Agreement of 1909, whereby Patani was placed under the rule of Siam, while Kelantan and Terengganu were placed under British rule.¹ The Patani Dynasty and Cau Seri Wangsa Dynasty ruled from 1500-1688, while the Kelantan Dynasty in Patani ruled from 1688-1902.² In Kelantan, Islamic rule became known during the reign of Cik Siti Wan Kembang from 1548 to 1580 and the second phase was derived from the geneology of Long Yunus, which began in 1762 until today.³ In Terengganu, the earliest evidence of Islamic rule was recorded on an inscribed stone dated 1303. However, according to the *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, the ruling Islamic dynasty began with the appointment of Tun Zainal Abidin as the sultan in 1708, which was recognised by Patani after he visited Patani in 1688.⁴ Additionally, this area of research has a close connection to eastern and western trade activities, the spread of Islam and the development of learning in Southeast Asia, especially in the learning of the Quran. The position of the East Coast region along the coast facing the South China Sea, made it a suitable stopover for traders, especially ships from China on their way to Sumatra, India or ships from the West and the Malay Archipelago headed to China and Japan. The close relationship between Japan and Patani that was forged through trade was likened by John Saris as "twin siblings".⁵

Another important matter that must be highlighted here, is that the East Coast area referred to in this thesis, is not the same area in terms of boundaries, politics, economy and society as the East Coast area of today. The study area refers to the East Coast region prior to the 20th century/ 14th century Hijrah, whereby Patani was a Malay kingdom

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¹ Nik Anuar Nik Mahmud (2006), *Sejarah Perjuangan Melayu Patani 1785-1954*, Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, pp. 10 -121.

² Mohd. Zamberi A. Malek (1994), *Patani dalam Tamadun Melayu*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, pp. 20 -110.

³ Nik Hassan Shuhaimi Nik Abdul Rahman (2014), "Peranan dan Sumbangan Sultan Sultanah Dalam Pembangunan Negeri Kelantan: Tumpuan Khusus Kepada Beberapa Oran Sultan," in Zuliskandar Ramli (pnyt.), *Warisan Kelantan*, Kota Bharu: Perbadanan Muzium Negeri Kelantan, pp. 1-13.

⁴ Mohamaed Anwar Omar. Nik Anuar Nik Mahmud (2011), *Sejarah Kesultanan Terengganu 1708-2008*, Kuala Terengganu: Yayasan Diraja Sultan Mizan, pp. 20 -80.

⁵ Anderson. J. (1890), *English Intercourse with Siam in Seventeenth Century*, London: Kegan Paul Trench Trubner & Co. Ltd. Accessed December 10, 2014. <https://archive.org/details/englishintercou01andegoog>.

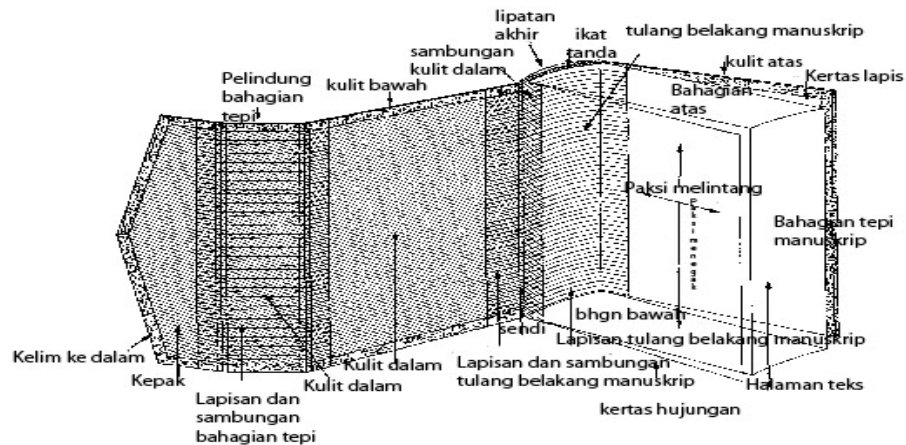
that ruled Songkhla, Satun, Patani, Yala and Narathiwat. It is unlike the boundaries of the Patani region we know today. Meanwhile, Kelantan and Terengganu are the same as they are today in general. Today, Kelantan and Terengganu are in the boundary and rule of Malaysia. Pahang is not included in this study as only Qur'ans from the three earlier areas have been identified through Qur'an illumination studies prior to this. Patani is the backbone of the grandeur of the East Coast region. After the fall of Melaka in 1511 to the Portuguese, Patani emerged to replace the great Melaka Sultanate in the same decade. Patani was at the peak of its glory when its administration encompassed Patani, Singgora to Patalung, Kelantan and Terengganu.⁶ The Patani government at the time was known as "Great Patani" or "The Glorious Islamic Empire of Patani".⁷ Patani's rule was at its zenith under the rule of four related female queens who ruled in succession until the 17th century.

Cotton cloth is one of the main commodities traded in the East Coast. It is also one of the export goods that received a high demand all around the world. Cotton threads are a type of fibre that is made from the cotton plant. There are several types of cotton plants that are grown commercially around the world besides in India, such as in Mexico, South Florida, South Africa, Pakistan and the Caribbean islands. Cotton cloths are among the textiles that have long been used by mankind as a material for making clothing, wrapping, tents, bags etc since before the Common Era. The Industrial Revolution in Britain caused an oversupply of cotton cloths in the market and caused the price of cotton cloths to fall. The Indian hand-made cotton cloth industry suffered a big impact in the 18th century and almost perished. However, Indian cotton cloth producers changed their production strategies to compete with the British East India Company, although not many could afford to buy mechanised looms and printing machines. Indian cotton cloths are renowned for their superior quality, bright colours and beautiful motifs. The same cotton cloths have been used as a material for the binding of red Qur'an covers from the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula in the 20th century.

Taxonomy of Qur'an Binding

The taxonomy of Qur'an binding is quite similar to the taxonomy of other book bindings. There are several basic styles in the Qur'an binding of the Islamic world, as shown in the drawing below Figure 1. Type A is still used today, while Type B it is mostly used for Qur'an bindings made from leather. Western book binders copied the design of Type B and applied it in their book bindings, both for hard binding and soft binding. The purpose of binding is to protect and to hold documents together for proper storage. Miller (2010) described binding as a process of attaching text pages together and protecting them. In Islamic art, the action of layering is considered as a technique to beautify something and in the case of Qur'an binding, cotton is used as a material and one of its functions is to beautify the appearance of the art form.⁸

Figure 1. The Taxonomy of Qur'an Binding in the Malay Language



⁶ Mohd. Zamberi A. Malek (1994), *Patani dalam Tamadun Melayu*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, pp. 20-110.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Al-Faruqi. Lois Lamy (1989), "Ornamentation in the Islamic Arts: Its functions and structures," *Jurnal Budaya*, Bil. 1, pp 186-198.

Methodology

This is a fundamental research using two methods of qualitative studies, which are library research and critical observation. Library research is important as a background study on the following: 1] what is cotton cloth and its significance among sea traders, and 2] trade activities and trade relations between the East Coast and the other important ports of the world before the 20th century. The second methodology is a critical manuscript observation that analyses the cotton cloth materials used in the 150 Qur'an manuscripts in the collection of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia. In this critical observation, the cotton cloth of the Qur'an bindings were examined for their woven pattern and designs, such as decorative motifs and colours. Then, these results were grouped, based on the regional designs of the cotton productions to identify the origins of production, based on the information from library research. This is also known as a type and typology study, which is mostly used to collect empirical data.

History of the Cotton Cloth in the East Coast, Malay Peninsula

Cotton is obtained from the fruit of the cotton tree, which is scientifically known as *gossypium*. Cotton plants grow in tropic and sub-tropic areas all-year round. Its plant is a shrub that can reach the height of a tall tree. The cotton produced by this plant is in the form of soft, white clumps that are harvested in two ways, traditionally by hand, or with the modern method of using harvesting machines. An English sailor, Sir John Mandeville, who lived in the 14th century, described the discovery of cotton plants in India in his writing, as a plant that produced wool at the ends of its branches (Figure 2) because physically, cotton looks like balls of wool.

Figure 2. Cotton plant pictured by Mandeville



Cotton is a soft fiber that can be made into threads once it has been cleaned and spun. Cotton threads are then woven into cloth and can be patterned with a variety of colours and decorations after it has undergone a cleaning process to ensure it is suitable for colouring. Indian cotton cloths are made fully by hand. It is a main source of income for many villagers who have inherited cotton weaving and dyeing skills from generation to generation. In a record by a Chinese traveller named Mahuan, there are several types of cotton cloths of high quality from India, as follows: "Five or six kinds of fine cotton fabrics were manufactured, one of which valued pi-Chin was of very soft texture, 3 feet wide and 56 feet long. Another ginger-yellow fabric called Man-Cheti was also produced which was 4 feet wide and 50 feet long..."⁹

Cotton cloths are also patterned as the end process of cotton cloth production. One of the methods of decoration practised in India is printing. Textile decorators, mainly men, print cotton cloths with wood or metal blocks that have a variety of patterns on the body and ends of the cloth. The patterns on the wood or metal blocks are transferred to the cloth using wax, mordant or resin. It is quite similar to the technique of batik printing in the Malay world. In Indonesia, cloths like these were printed by men and called kain *chop* or *tjap* that is believed to originate from an Indian term.¹⁰

⁹ Gandhi. M.P. (1930), *The Indian Cotton Textile Industry- Its Past, Present And Future*, Calcutta: The Book Company LTD, pp. 25 – 95.

¹⁰ Lewis. Albert Buell (1924), *Javanese Batik Designs From Metal Stamps*, Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, pp. 1-24.

Wood and metal blocks that were used to decorate these cotton cloths were made with detail. It was an important industry that supported the textile making industry in India.¹¹ Wood blocks were made from a variety of woods according to region. Each block began as a motif drawn onto a piece of paper and placed onto a block of wood to be carved. Then, the block of wood is carved roughly, with a depth of three quarters of an inch. The carver will make several holes to the block so that the colours will soak into the entire block and there will be no air bubbles to damage the pattern.

The block patterns that decorated Indian cotton cloths had a style and shape all their own, particularly the paisley motif that is synonymous with Indian decorative arts in textiles, metal work and so on. The blocks made had various sizes as seen in picture 1, where the back of the block had several different sizes of metal stamps were used in the decoration of cotton cloths. There were blocks with different motif arrangements for the body and edges of the cloth. The body had small blocks with singular motifs, while larger motifs comprised of a composition of several motifs within it. For the edges of the cloth, there were several widths and sizes for thin materials. Most of the motifs comprised of leaves, scrolls, flowers and shrubs. At times, animal motifs such as birds or elephants were also used.

After a cotton cloth has been printed with the desired motif, according to the creativity of the printer, it will be dyed. Not all Indian cloths are patterned, but they are coloured according to client requests. Among the dyes used are derived from plants like flowers, leaves, roots and wood that grew near the homes of the Indian weavers and cotton cloth makers. As an example, blue was extracted from the indigo plant or *indigofera tinctoria* and red was extracted from the root of the madder plant. The colours produced are from organic materials and they are bright and long-lasting. These materials were not only used to make one colour, but various tones and colour groups from dark to light just by using varying concentrations.¹² Cotton cloths are harder to dye as compared to other textiles like silk or satin.

Decorated cotton cloths were not only used as clothing, but also as shawls, wall decorations, bags, tents and for manuscript binding. Cotton cloths were considered luxury goods in Europe prior to the Industrial Revolution.

Most cotton cloths were made in Gujerat. Gujerat is a region in India that has the largest cotton supply and cotton cloth industry in India. Gandhi (1930) highlighted Marco Polo's notes on the production of cotton cloth in Gujerat when he visited Asia in 1290, whereby he noted the cotton plants in Gujerat that could live for up to twenty years. This is befitting another of Gujerat's main function as a thriving port with a close trade relationship with Southeast Asia, China and Japan. Another renowned port city in Gujerat was Surat.¹³ Cotton and silk cloths were the main trade goods that were plied in Gujerat, besides steel, alum, brass, diamonds, rubies and crystals.¹⁴ Gujerat was pioneered by Muslim traders and monopolised the Southeast Asian spice trade. Most Gujerati cotton cloths were traded in several Islamic regions such as Africa, Persia, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.

India had pioneered world trade in cotton cloths since the 17th century with beautiful and high-quality textiles. However, the glory of the Indian cotton cloth industry waned when Britain began to mass produce cotton in the 18th century, following the Industrial Revolution. Britain did not have a cotton source. They bought cotton from India¹⁵ through the British East India Company at low prices and made cotton cloths in Britain by machine that were labeled as Indian cloths. These cloths were sold back to India at higher prices.

The British, through the British East India Company, began a plan to monopolise Indian cotton trade in the 17th century. In 1615, Sir Thomas Roe presented the Decree of the King of England to Emperor Jahangir to establish a trade centre and factory to produce cotton goods.¹⁶ This foundation, which was put in place in the 17th century succeeded in affecting cotton and cotton cloth trade in India 200 years later. In the 19th century, India became the main consumer of British cotton textiles¹⁷ and indirectly became the largest market for British cotton goods.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Gokhale S.B., Tatiya A.U., Bakliwal S.R., Fursule R.A. (2004), Natural Dye Yielding Plants in India. *Natural Product Radiance*, pp. 228-234.

¹³ Parveen. Sagufta (2014), Surt: As a major port – town of Gujarat and its Trade History, *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol 15, no. 5, pp. 69-73.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Logan. Frenise A. (1958). India—Britain's Substitute for American Cotton, 1861–1865. *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 472–476.

¹⁶ Santhanam. V. Sundaram V. (1997), "Agri-History of Cotton in India- An Overview," in *Agri-History*, Vol 1, no. 4, pp. 235-251.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Cotton cloths received high demand in this region due to the tropical climate, which is hot and humid all year-round. In this climate, cotton became the most suitable cloth for making clothes for both the masses, as well as the ruling class, according to the quality of cotton cloths they could afford. Besides being imported as processed cotton cloths that can be made straight into clothing, cotton threads and unprocessed cotton cloths were also needed in Southeast Asia to produce batik and for weaving.

After the British East India Company took over the administration of the Malay Peninsula in 1824 and expanded its influence to the East Coast at the end of the 19th century, they became the new suppliers of processed cotton cloths in this region and offered lower prices. At the same time, the British East India Company had also monopolised the Indian cotton industry in the 19th century.¹⁸ Although some local textile producers, especially batik makers, still bought cloths directly from India, they were not end goods, but were raw materials such as threads and unprocessed cotton. According to Abdullah Munshi in his journey to the East Coast area in 1838, cotton textiles and threads were available in Terengganu and Kelantan.¹⁹

Because Indian cotton cloths forged a name with its own quality, patterns and colours, Britain's cotton industry also used decorative motifs that were similar to Indian prints. However, as they were mass produced in factories, their quality could not rival the traditional hand-woven cloths of India. Therefore, several different qualities of cotton cloths were sold in the Malay Peninsula due to the situation above. High-quality cotton cloths had a high and even thread count. In the British Museum, there is an instruction letter from the British East India Company to its trade representatives in the East, especially the Malay world. The letter is part of a collection of manuscripts known as the "*Cottonian manuscript*".²⁰ The letter is undated, but it is estimated that it was written in the early 17th century. In the letter, Indian cotton cloths were called "*Indian cloth*". It was identified by the British East India Company in their trade mission as an Indian trade commodity that was imported in large numbers by the people of the Malay world. Among the ports with Indian cloths were Patani, which was known as Patania in the letter. Besides Indian cloth, coloured and woven Pellicatt and Bengalia cloths were also mentioned. These cloths were said to be of very high quality and make.

Cotton cloths made in Britain were produced with a wood-block printing method that decorated the cloth up till the 19th century. The cotton cloths were then made in a new technique using decorative pattern printers known as rollers made of brass.²¹ Joseph-Marie Jacquard (1752-1834) was the person who invented a mechanised loom that printed patterned textiles in huge quantities. This invention was a great advantage to the textile manufacturer when the chintz style phenomena took over Europe in textile industry.

Analysis of the Cotton Cloths Used in East Coast Qur'an Binding

Design and Technique of the Binding

In the collection of East Coast Qur'ans examined in this research, the use of cotton cloths are seen in two ways, firstly, as an outer layer and secondly, as an inner layer. There are two types of Qur'an bindings in the collection, which are different in size and cut, as shown in Figure 3 below. The cotton is used as an outer layer for the type A and it is used as an inner cover layer for type B.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Abdullah Abdul Kadir Munshi (1965), *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah*, Singapura: Malaysia Publications Limited.

²⁰ Maxwell, W.G. (1909), A Letter Of Instruction From The East Indian Company To Its Agent, Circa 1614. *Journal Straits Branch Royal Asiatic Society*, No 54, pp. 63-98.

²¹ Watt, Melinda (2000), "Nineteenth-Century European Textile Production," in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accessed October 10, 2004, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/txtn/hd_txtn.htm .

Figure 3. Design of the Qur'an Binding



In this collection of East Coast Qur'ans, there are two methods of binding that uses cotton cloths, either as an outer cover or inner cover decoration and end paper. Most of the cotton cloths used on the outer cover is unpatterned, and the most commonly used type on Patani Qur'ans is type A. For Patani Qur'an manuscript collections, there is no inner layer of textile like there is in red Qur'an manuscript covers from the East Coast (Figure 4). Meanwhile, coloured and patterned cloths are used as an inner cover, called end papers, for red Qur'ans of the East Coast²² or type B. In both types, the cotton cloths were cut according to the size of the text folios and layered directly on the pasteboard with glue.

Briefly, the binding technique used for type A is one piece of cloth that was used to wrap the whole binding surface, including the spine and the back cover. This technique must be done carefully with precise measurements, to avoid any damage in the next stage, when the cover is attached to the text folios. There are a few folios where the cotton cloth was not layered onto pasteboard, but directly bound or attached to the text folio as shown below (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Cotton Cloth Cover Without Pasteboard MKIM 1998.1.3432



Colours and Design of the Cotton Cloth

Cotton cloths used as the outer cover of Patani Qur'an bindings employ coloured cotton, usually brown or dark blue. The fabric used on the outer cover of Patani Qur'an manuscripts are similar to coloured or patterned pellicat as mentioned by Maxwell (1909).

²² Ros Mahwati Ahmad Zakaria & Zuliskandar Ramli (2018), "The Study On The Nineteenth-Century AD East Coast Red Qur'an Bindings," in Mohd Rohaizat Abdul Wahab, Ros Mahwati Ahmad Zakaria, Muhlis Hadrawi & Zuliskandar Ramli (Editors), *Selected Topics On Archaeology, History And Culture In The Malay World*, Singapura: Springer, pp. 189-200.

Figure 5. Collage of the Cotton Designs Used as the Patani Qur'an Binding



Figure 6. Brown Cotton Cloth Used as a Qur'an Manuscript Cover from Patani. IAMM 1998.1.3484



Coloured or patterned Indian cotton cloths were used in the binding of red Qur'ans as end papers or doublures. This section is located inside the cover of red Qur'ans from the East Coast. The cloth used mostly are coloured or patterned, but some are white. The Indian cotton cloths used in binding were taken from the body or centre of the cloth, as there were no edge patterns on the cloths used. This shows the possibility that the cloths were cut from very long yardage material. They are cut according to the size of red Qur'an manuscripts. This is because there are Qur'an covers that have two types of cotton cloths of different patterns or colours that are used as doublures and end papers that are placed side by side. The selection of cotton cloth patterns was also important in the binding of red Qur'an covers, as it is the Holy Book of Muslims and there is a prohibition on the use of figures.

In the process of preparing the cotton cloths for binding, each Qur'an manuscript requires four pieces of cotton cloth. Three pieces of cloth are cut to the size of the manuscript, while another is cut wider than the rest, as it includes the size of the back cover, side cover and flap. These cloths are pasted to the inner cover and end paper of the manuscript as a decoration for Qur'an bindings.

Cotton cloths that were applied to manuscript covers must be weighed down with heavy items, so that they will dry flat and the paper will not be warped after it has dried. If this occurs, problems will arise, especially in causing the end papers to tear or become damaged. Although the task of pasting together paper and cotton cloth seems simple, it requires a lot of skill so that the result is neat and appealing.

The Indian cotton cloths recorded in this study comprises of two patterns. The first is floral patterns that have a Western style, particularly roses. Various styles of roses were found in this study. Some patterns feature flower buds, either large or small, and others are arranged in bouquets. The scattered flowers used have a similarity to the patterns used on cotton cloths in 19th century Britain (Figure 7). The second is a pattern with an Indian style, such as the paisley, and an arrangement that is similar to the patterns typically used by cotton cloth printers in India. (Figure 8). The colour used on cotton cloths with these patterns are brighter as compared to patterns used on the former pattern. It is interesting to note that to date, no identical patterns of cotton cloth have been found in the making of red Qur'an manuscripts from the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula.

Figure 7. English Rose Pattern Used on a Red Quran Manuscript Cover. IAMM 1998.1.3462



Figure 8. Indian Pattern Used on a Red Quran Manuscript Cover. IAMM 1998.1.3616



The patterns recorded in this study shows that the cotton cloths that were chosen to bind the red Qur'ans of the East Coast are the preference of the upper echelon who prefer luxury and imported goods, including textiles. The array of patterns found show the taste of the upper class, like the palace courtiers, who can afford to pay for costly cloths of top quality and beauty that were made in India or England. It also proves that Indian motifs are a main choice in the cotton cloth market and at the same time, English patterns were used by the Muslim community.

Conclusion

Qur'an binding is the first part of the Qur'an that could be seen by the people. Different from other Islamic regions, which used leather as a main material for their bindings, the East Coast Qur'an binders chose to use cotton cloth as their main material. The maritime trade in this area contributed to a good supply of cotton cloths with good quality, which are vibrant in colour and stable.

Indian cotton is a trade product and art object that is significant in the history of art since before the Common Era until today. Indian cotton cloth has transcended time, eras, political boundaries and religion in terms of how it is used due to its quality and beauty that has attracted the attention of artisans to use cotton cloths in the production of clothing and art items. The use of natural plant-based materials, from the making of threads to the making of dyes, was perhaps an important criterium in the selection of cotton cloth as one of the materials for making manuscript covers and book bindings of Qur'ans from the East Coast, which are the Holy Book of Muslims.

Floral patterns became the main preference to beautify Qur'an manuscript covers of the East Coast. The use of cotton cloth in the binding of red Qur'ans of the East Coast is a special feature of this region. The cotton cloths used are not only important in terms of uniformity of manuscript cover decorations, but it also strengthens the end papers so that it will protect the other pages. This also symbolises the skill in adapting imported materials in the making of local Islamic art.

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