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## FROM CAUCASIA TO SOUTHEAST ASIA: DĀGHISTĀNI QUR'ĀNS AND THE ISLAMIC MANUSCRIPT TRADITION IN BRUNEI AND THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES. I

### Introduction

Over the past few years a study of the art of the Islamic book in Southeast Asia, with a particular focus on Qur'ān manuscripts, has revealed a number of distinctive artistic schools. The common denominator of each school is a strong sense of regional identity, with particular styles of manuscript illumination associated with, for example, Aceh at the northern tip of Sumatra, and the states of Terengganu, Kelantan and Patani on the East Coast of the Malay peninsula. While in the case of both these schools the main arena of artistic activity was quite naturally on their home territories, by itself location appears not to have been a critical factor, for manuscripts illuminated in the Acehnese and East Coast styles are known to have been produced in the late 19th century in Makka, home to large communities of scholars from Southeast Asia [1].

The identification of these regionally-defined artistic schools is based primarily on an artistic analysis of the decorated double frames which are the obvious focus of any study of Qur'ānic illumination, but it also depends on a host of other features of the manuscript. These might be decorative or at least essentially graphic, such as the composition of ruled text borders, the shape and colour of *āyāt* markers and decorated *sūra* headings, and the ornamental marginal text markers. But the regional

identity of a Qur'ān manuscript also appears to influence codicological features such as size, paper, format, bindings, layout of text and script, as well as theological preferences for the inclusion in the margin of variant readings (*qira'āt*), and the choice and placement of textual division markers. All these features can assist in determining the origin of a Qur'ān manuscript when identification cannot easily be made solely on artistic grounds.

Despite the plethora of regional artistic schools in Southeast Asia, there is nonetheless an overarching sense of "Malayness" about all these Qur'āns, whether from Sumatra, Java or Sulawesi, which serves to distinguish them immediately from illuminated Qur'ān manuscripts from other Islamic regions such as Turkey, India and Iran, let alone the Maghrib or China. Prominent differences range from a Malay preference for pinnacled arches on the three outer sides of decorated frames compared to the essentially rectangular outlines of illuminated frames found elsewhere, to a palette dominated by red and yellow rather than blue and gold. "Internal" differences include the ubiquitous use of round *āyāt* markers in the Malay world rather than the rosettes and whorls typical of Mamlūk, Ottoman, Indo-Persian and even Chinese Qur'āns.

### An Unusual Group of Qur'āns from Southeast Asia [2]

The picture painted above of a recognizable "Malay" style of Qur'ānic art is complicated by a small number of Qur'ān manuscripts which have come to light over the past decade and which can be associated with Brunei and the southern islands of the Philippines. Brunei was once one of the greatest Malay sultanates in the archipelago, and at its zenith in the early 16th century its hegemony extended over most of the northern half of Borneo and part of the Philippines, reaching the islands of Sulu and Mindanao. While this region thus has a definite cultural

and historical coherence, it is equally firmly networked into the wider Malay world, and it therefore comes as some surprise to find that Qur'ān manuscripts from this region are in many aspects at variance with almost all other Southeast Asian Qur'āns.

The group in question consists of 14 Qur'ān manuscripts, most of which first appeared in the sale rooms of London auction houses, while one is held in the Muzium Negara (National Museum) of Malaysia. Six have colophons or ownership statements in Arabic which locate