



Indonesian Carved Wooden Doors with Quranic Inscriptions

Central Java, Indonesia, 19th century

Carved, painted, and gilt teak

131cm high, 39cm wide

Stock no.: A5719

These carved doors were made in Java, an island in Indonesia and part of the Malay Archipelago. The

Central Javan cities of Jepara and Kudus were particularly renowned for their woodcarving.¹

Traditionally, Javanese woodcarving featured indigenous and Hindo-Buddhist motifs, such as swastikas and lotus flowers.² With the advent of Islam to the Malay archipelago, jasmine flowers and palmettes were introduced. Whilst traditional woodcarving had been unpainted, Islamic objects were often gilded and painted red.

The doors are intricately carved with floral decoration and inscribed within a large cartouche on each door are surah 110 (*al-Nasr* / 'The Divine Support') and surah 114 (*al-Nas* / 'Mankind'). There are clear similarities in colours and decorative motifs to Quranic manuscripts made in 19th-century Java (see, for example, accession no. [20117A33\(a&b\)](#) [view here](#)) in the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide).

Several related examples of Javanese woodwork were exhibited in the 2024/2025 exhibition *Oceans That Speak: Islam and the Emergence of the Malay World* in the Islamic Arts Museum (IAMM), Kuala Lumpur. including a Qur'an box and cover (accession no. 2017.5.12), a carved gebyok or room partition (accession no. 2024.3.2), and a chest on wheels ([view online here](#)). These are all dated to 19th-century

Java. A similar pair of doors is on display in the Malay Kingdoms gallery of the Muzium Negara (Malaysian National Museum) in Kuala Lumpur ([view online here](#)).³ A chest in the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore (accession no. [2011-03161 view here](#)) with similar calligraphic panels is attributed to Jepara and dated to the 19th century. A gamelan in the British Museum, London (accession no. As1859,1228.194.a [view here](#)) dated to c. 1800, is decorated with similar carved and gilt floral scrolls.

[1] Mohd Maidin, Siti Marina. *Oceans that Speak: Islam and the Emergence of the Malay World*. Kuala Lumpur: IAMM Publications, 2024. P. 374, cat. 129.

[2] Guide to the Islamic Art Galleries, Asian Civilisations Museum, retrieved online via https://www.nhb.gov.sg/acm/-/media/acm/acm2017/documents/content-guides/large-print-guides/large-print-guides_accessibility_islamic-art.ashx?la=en on 30.04.2025.

[3] Illustrated in Esseghir, Emna. 'The Islamic Art of Wood Carving', *Museum Volunteers JMM*, 19 September 2023. Retrieved online via <https://museumvolunteersjmm.com/2023/09/19/the-islamic-art-of-wood-carving/> on 30.04.2025.