

COLONIAL COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE

RECOMMENDATION

Objects Six wayang beber scrolls RV-360-5254, RV-360-5255, RV-360-5256, RV-360-5257, RV-360-5258 and RV-360-5259



Images: Wereldmuseum

Current owner The State of the Netherlands

Custodian Wereldmuseum Leiden

Application for restitution from The Republic of Indonesia represented by *Tim Repatriasi Objek Pemajuan Kebudayaan Dan Pengembalian Cagar Budaya Yang Berada Di Luar Wilayah Republik Indonesia Ke Dalam Wilayah Republik Indonesia*¹ (hereinafter referred to as: Tim Repatriasi)

Date of application for restitution 13 November 2025

¹ *Tim Repatriasi Objek Pemajuan Kebudayaan Dan Pengembalian Cagar Budaya Yang Berada Di Luar Wilayah Republik Indonesia Ke Dalam Wilayah Republik Indonesia* consists of Fadli Zon (adviser), Endah T.D. Retnoastuti (person responsible), Ismunandar (chair), Masyitoh Annisa Ramadhani Alkatiri, Anindita Kusuma Listya, Basuki Teguh Yuwono, Agus Aris Munandar, Oman Fathurahman, Bambang Sunarto, Suryadi, Ninie Susanti, Putu Supadma Rudana (members), Raden Usman Effendi (coordinator), Anton Wibisono, Andhini Widyasari, Khanifudin Malik, Fatwa Yulianto (secretary).

Recommendation number	ID-2026-5
Date of recommendation	19 June 2026
The Colonial Collections Committee ² consisting of	Lilian Gonçalves-Ho Kang You (chair), Laura van Broekhoven, Remco Raben, Alicia Schrikker (members)
Secretariat	Jona Mooren, Liesbeth Ouwehand

1. The application

On 13 November 2025 the Republic of Indonesia submitted an application to the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science for restitution of three wayang beber scrolls, referred to in the application as ‘Wayang beber scrolls’ with inventory numbers RV-360-5255, RV-360-5256 and RV-360-5257 from the collection of the Dutch State, which are in the custody of the Wereldmuseum Leiden. Tim Repatriasi requested that the wayang beber scrolls with inventory numbers RV-360-5254, RV-360-5258 and RV-360-5259 also be included in the recommendation.

2. The objects

The wayang beber scrolls are made of beaten tree bark paper, also known as *daluang* or *dluwang*. The images on the scrolls were painted using natural pigments. The bamboo sticks that were used to unroll the scrolls are slightly charred, as are the edges of the scrolls.³

Recent radiocarbon dating showed that the wayang beber scrolls were created between 1633 and 1669.⁴ The complete set consists of six wayang beber scrolls.

The scrolls are registered at the Wereldmuseum Leiden under inventory numbers RV-360-5254, RV-360-5255, RV-360-5256, RV-360-5257, RV-360-5258 and RV-360-5259.

3. The policy framework

The assessment of the application for restitution took place within the framework of the *Policy vision on collections from a colonial context* of the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science.⁵ The policy vision is based on the Council for Culture report *Colonial Collection, a Recognition of Injustice*.⁶ Applications for restitution of a cultural object may be made by states where the Netherlands exercised colonial rule or by countries that were colonised by other powers.

² The Advisory Committee on the Restitution of Cultural Objects from a Colonial Context (in short: the Colonial Collections Committee) was established by the Dutch State Secretary for Education, Culture and Science on 6 September 2022.

³ Appendix 1, p. 3.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Policy vision, 29 January 2021, <https://committee.kolonialecollecties.nl/documents/2021/01/01/policy-vision-on-collections-from-a-colonial-context>

⁶ Report of 7 October 2020, <https://www.raadvoorcultuur.nl/documenten/adviezen/2021/01/22/colonial-collection-and-a-recognition-of-injustice>

The assessment framework set out in the Policy vision can be summarised as follows:

First, the Colonial Collections Committee (hereinafter referred to as: the Committee) determines whether the provenance research is sufficient.

Next, the Committee establishes whether involuntary loss of possession occurred. To this end it assesses whether it can be established with a reasonable degree of certainty that a country where the Netherlands exercised colonial rule involuntarily lost possession of the cultural object whose restitution is requested and that the cultural object subsequently came into the possession of the Dutch State. If this is established to be the case, the Committee will recommend unconditional restitution of the cultural object.

If it cannot be established from the provenance history whether involuntary loss of possession occurred, and to the extent that the cultural objects in question are of particular cultural, historical or religious significance for the country of origin, then the Committee will consider the interests involved, whereby the importance of restitution for the country of origin shall be weighed against other relevant interests based on reasonableness and fairness.

Relevant interests may include the cultural importance of the cultural object to the country of origin, the communities involved both in the countries of origin and in the Netherlands, the significance to the Netherlands Collection, future storage conditions and public access. Objects may be significant for national and regional traditions as well as for the identity of a country, people, community or individual. A cultural object will often be of different importance to the Netherlands than to the country of origin. Colonial cultural objects in Dutch museums may also be of special significance to Dutch citizens with roots in the countries of origin.

If the object whose restitution is requested originates from a country formerly colonised by another power, then the Committee will similarly consider the interests involved, thereby weighing the importance of restitution for the country of origin against other relevant interests based on reasonableness and fairness. Rectifying injustice must, however, be the basic premise in this assessment. In such a case, whilst the Netherlands did not cause the injustice, as the current holder of the objects only it is in a position to rectify that injustice.

If the Committee recommends restitution to the applicant state then the transfer of title procedure for public collections shall be observed – in accordance with the Dutch Heritage Act and the *Policy vision on collections from a colonial context* of the Minister of Education, Culture and Science – and the Committee's recommendation shall also be regarded as a recommendation on the indispensability and irreplaceability of the object in the sense of article 4.18 of the Dutch Heritage Act.

4. The procedure

On 13 November 2025 the Republic of Indonesia submitted an application to the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science for restitution of the scrolls described under 1 above. On 18 December 2025 the Minister requested the Committee to advise on the restitution application.

In the context of the Pilot Project Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era (hereinafter to be referred to as: PPROCE) the custodian of the object commissioned research into the provenance history;

the report was published in 2022 (*appendix 1*). On 13 January 2026 the Committee asked the Wereldmuseum whether there were any amendments or addenda to the PPROCE report. The Wereldmuseum announced on 29 May 2026 that the conclusions of the PPROCE report are unchanged and that the provenance report applies to the complete set of six wayang beber scrolls (*appendix 2*).

The Committee discussed the application for restitution and the report at a meeting on 6 February 2026. The PPROCE report was shared with Tim Repatriasi. On 15 June 2026 Tim Repatriasi indicated that it had no further questions in relation to the provenance report (*appendix 3*). Tim Repatriasi requested that the complete set of six scrolls be included in the recommendation. Tim Repatriasi also issued a response to the contents of the provenance report; this is included in section 6.

After discussing the restitution application on 19 June 2026 the Committee resolved to recommend as stated below.

5. The provenance research

The provenance research was conducted by Klaas Stutje in the context of PPROCE. The provenance report forms an integral part of this recommendation.

The report records the following findings:

In November 1851 the assistant resident of Kebumen Adolph François Henry van de Poel (1816-1875) gifted the wayang beber scrolls to the Archaeologisch Cabinet der Hoogeschool, now the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden.⁷ The director of the Cabinet Conrad Leemans (1809-1893) subsequently sent the scrolls to the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities (hereinafter referred to as: KKZ) in March 1852.⁸ The KKZ was dissolved in 1883 and the collection was dispersed across various Dutch museums. The wayang beber scrolls were transferred to 's Rijks Ethnografisch Museum, now Wereldmuseum Leiden.⁹

Besides the wayang beber scrolls Van de Poel also collected other objects for the Archaeologisch Cabinet. Prior to the transfer of the scrolls to the KKZ Leemans wrote a letter to the minister of the Interior Johan Rudolph Thorbecke (1798-1872) on 10 January 1852, in which he said of Van de Poel that he would 'promote the interests of the Museum once he had returned in Java, and to collect and send antiquarian objects.'¹⁰

In his letter to Thorbecke, Leemans describes how Van de Poel obtained possession of the wayang beber scrolls, using slightly different wordings each time. For example he quotes Van de Poel as saying: 'I recently found in the dessa Sampang in the house of the guardian of the Pamambahans Sampang, a set of Wayang wrapped in a pisang leaf and drawn on tree bark paper, the colours and drawings of which also bear the markings of the art that used to exist on Java. The drawings have

⁷ Appendix 1, p. 4.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Appendix 1, pp. 3, 4.

¹⁰ 'na zijne [Van de Poels] terugkeer in Java de belangen van het Museum te bevorderen en oudheidkundige voorwerpen te verzamelen en te verzenden.' Appendix 1, p. 5.

been well preserved, but have hung over smoke.¹¹ *Pamambahan* is a reference to the princely title of *Panembahan*.¹²

Leemans also wrote: 'These Wajang scrolls come from the house of the guardian of the tomb of Panambahans Sampang in the dessa Sampang [...] where they are wrapped in pinang leaves, stored, found by mister Van de Poel and obtained in property.'¹³ Whilst the statements in Leemans' letter to Thorbecke differ in detail, the place name Sampang and the guardian are consistently repeated.¹⁴ A publication in the Dutch Government Gazette of 19 March 1852 confirms this: 'kept wrapped in pinang leaves by the guard of a cemetery, and were obtained in property by Mr van der Poel.'¹⁵

The provenance report states that wayang beber is a Javanese oral tradition that emerged in the 14th century in the Majapahit era. During a performance a *dalang* (storyteller and spiritual mediator), who was accompanied by a gamelan orchestra with rebab (a stringed instrument), would tell stories of Prince Panji Asmoro Bangun while unrolling the painted scrolls between two wooden sticks (*membeberkan*).¹⁶ It is clear from the aforementioned publication in de Staatscourant that it was known that such scrolls were at the time still being used for wayang beber performances: 'Because these or similar scrolls are still in use by the people of Java, and therefore belong more to the field of contemporary ethnology [than to antiquity], they are being transferred to the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden in The Hague.'¹⁷

According to the researchers Marina Pretković and Tea Škrinjarić, wayang beber was performed during Javanese cleansing (*ruwatan*) and healing rituals. They base this on a study into two comparable sets of wayang beber from the villages of Gedompol and Gelaran.¹⁸ The latter scrolls date from around five decades later than the Sampang scrolls. The handling and use of the scrolls was subject to strict rules and procedures, which for example stipulated the exact location and spatial orientation of the scrolls. The place where they were kept was guarded by a guardian family, and only the *dalang* was allowed to touch, open and recite the scrolls.¹⁹

The Dutch researcher and wayang expert Godard Arend Johannes Hazeu also mentioned these strict rules and rituals surrounding the use of wayang beber scrolls in articles published in 1904 and 1909. He wrote about the scrolls in Gelaran after attending a performance there in 1902.²⁰ Moreover Hazeu noted that the *dalang* would not allow the wayang beber scrolls to be sold, even in exchange

¹¹ 'Ik heb onlangs in de dessa Sampang in het huis van den bewaker des Pamambahans Sampang, een stel in een pisang blad gewikkelde en op papier van boombast geteekende Wayang gevonden, waarvan de kleuren zoo ook de teekeningen kenmerken dragen van de kunst die weleer op Java bestond, het geteekende is goed bewaard gebleven, maar heeft boven rook gehangen.' Appendix 1, p. 5, 6.

¹² Appendix 1, p. 6.

¹³ 'Deze Wajang bladen zijn afkomstig uit het huis van den bewaker van het graf des Panambahans Sampang in de dessa Sampang [...] waar zij in pinang bladeren gewikkeld, bewaard, door den heer Van de Poel gevonden en in eigendom verkregen.' Appendix 1, p. 5, 6.

¹⁴ Appendix 1, p. 5, 6.

¹⁵ 'bij den bewaker van eene begraafplaats in pinangbladen gewikkeld bewaard, door den heer van der Poel in eigendom verkregen.' Appendix 1, p. 5, 6.

¹⁶ Appendix 1, p. 2.

¹⁷ 'Daar deze schermen of soortgelijke thans nog bij de bevolking van Java in gebruik zijn, en dus meer tot het gebied der hedendaagsche land- en volkenkunde behooren, zijn zij aan het Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden te 's-Gravenhage overgegeven.' Appendix 1, p. 4.

¹⁸ Appendix 1, p. 8.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

for a substantial sum of money.²¹ Based on the aforementioned studies the provenance researcher concludes: ‘Even though these sources concern other wayang beber scrolls five decades after 1851, it seems unlikely that the wayang beber scrolls of Sampang were simply given away to A.F.H. van de Poel.’²²

6. Response from Tim Repatriasi

Tim Repatriasi emphasises the cultural and spiritual significance of the wayang beber scrolls: ‘In Javanese society, Wayang Beber is not a mere art object; it is a sacred heirloom (*pusaka*) of profound spiritual magnitude. Their value is intrinsic to the spiritual health of the community of Sampang.’²³ Tim Repatriasi confirms that the scrolls could not be sold voluntarily: ‘Javanese custom strictly prohibits the sale or transfer of such *pusaka* to outsiders, regardless of the sum offered. Consequently, the historical probability of a “voluntary” transfer is non-existent. The removal of these sacred objects involved a structural coercion of power or a covert act of seizure by colonial officials, rendering the original departure of this set from Sampang village illicit.’²⁴

7. Assessment of the restitution application

7.1 Admissibility of the application

First of all, the Committee examined whether the application by the Republic of Indonesia was admissible. The application for restitution was submitted by a state where the Netherlands exercised colonial rule. The Committee therefore concluded that the application is admissible.

7.2 Policy framework

The application for restitution concerns cultural objects from a colonial context. The application therefore falls within the scope of the restitution policy, and the *Policy vision on collections from a colonial context* is applicable.

7.3 The provenance research

In order to assess the application for restitution it is important to determine whether the provenance research is sufficient. The Committee is of the opinion that the research was conducted properly and provides sufficient information for a recommendation to be issued. Thorough source research was undertaken, and a critical evaluation was made of the existing information.

7.4 Substantial assessment

Next, the Committee assessed whether it is plausible that the loss of the cultural objects whose restitution is requested was involuntary. In this matter it considers as follows.

’s Rijks Ethnografisch Museum, now the Wereldmuseum Leiden, acquired possession of the wayang beber scrolls when the KKZ was dissolved in 1883. The KKZ received the objects in March 1852 via Conrad Leemans, director of the Archaeologisch Cabinet der Hoogeschool, now the National Museum of

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Appendix 3, p. 1.

²⁴ Appendix 3, p. 2.

Antiquities in Leiden. Prior to that, in November 1851, the wayang beber scrolls had been donated to the Archaeologisch Cabinet by A.F.H. van de Poel, the assistant resident van Kebumen.²⁵

It emerged from the provenance research that Leemans wrote a letter to Thorbecke on 10 January 1852 in which he mentioned notes from Van de Poel regarding the wayang beber scrolls. According to these, the latter had found the scrolls 'in the house of the guardian of the Pamambahans Sampang'.²⁶ This is confirmed in a publication in the Dutch Government Gazette of 19 March 1852: 'kept wrapped in pinang leaves by the guard of a cemetery, and were obtained in property by Mr van der Poel.'²⁷ The Committee gathers from the various statements, as they appear in the sources cited in the provenance report, that the wayang beber scrolls were kept by this guardian in Sampang.

Based on Van de Poel's statement that he 'found' the objects in the desa Sampang 'in the house of the guardian of the Pamambahans Sampang,' the Committee concludes that the objects belonged to somebody and were thus not *res nullius*. The provenance report does not show that Van de Poel was given permission to take the wayang beber scrolls away from Sampang.²⁸ Nor is there any evidence of purchase or any other form of transfer to Van de Poel.

In this context the Committee also points to the recent publication by Pretković and Škrinjarić, cited in the provenance report, on wayang beber scrolls from Gedampol and Gelaran. Their analysis shows that wayang beber scrolls were used during Javanese cleansing and healing rituals. The keeping and handling of these objects was subject to precise rules and rituals for both the *dalang* and the guardian family.²⁹ These strict rules are confirmed in the study, cited in the provenance report, by researcher and wayang expert G.A.J. Hazeu regarding the set of wayang beber scrolls from Gelaran.³⁰ He issued several publications on wayang beber after attending a performance in Gelaran in 1902. He also stated that it was unacceptable for a *dalang* to sell wayang beber scrolls, even in exchange for a substantial sum of money.³¹ This is confirmed by Tim Repatriasi: 'The removal of these sacred objects involved a structural coercion of power or a covert act of seizure by colonial officials, rendering the original departure of this set from Sampang village illicit.'³²

The Committee concludes from the above publications and statement that wayang beber performances and the scrolls that accompany these held spiritual and cultural significance in Java. Based on these facts and circumstances the Committee deems it implausible that the wayang beber scrolls from Sampang which are the subject of this application for restitution were voluntarily relinquished or sold to Van de Poel by the guardian or the relevant *dalang*.

Conclusion

On the grounds of the facts and circumstances set out above the Committee is of the opinion that it is plausible that the loss of the wayang beber scrolls whose restitution is requested was involuntary and

²⁵ Appendix 1, pp. 3, 4.

²⁶ 'in het huis van den bewaker des Pamambahans Sampang'. Appendix 1, pp. 5, 6.

²⁷ 'bij den bewaker van eene begraafplaats in pinangbladen gewikkeld bewaard, door den heer van der Poel in eigendom verkregen.' Appendix 1, p. 6.

²⁸ Appendix 1, p. 5.

²⁹ Appendix 1, p. 8.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Appendix 3, p. 2.

that this constituted an injustice to the local population, also in view of the significance of the scrolls in Java.

The Committee was asked to advise on the application of article 4.18 of the Dutch Heritage Act in the event its recommendation means that the requested objects must be restituted. It is the opinion of the Committee that rectification of past injustice prevails in this case and that article 4.18 of the Heritage Act is therefore not applicable.

8. The recommendation

The Committee has assessed the application for restitution and recommends that the Minister proceed with the unconditional restitution of the six wayang beber scrolls with inventory numbers RV-360-5254, RV-360-5255, RV-360-5256, RV-360-5257, RV-360-5258 and RV-360-5259.

The Committee furthermore recommends that the metadata, such as archive material, correspondence and other contextual documentation, also be placed at the disposal of the Republic of Indonesia in the context of rectifying injustice.

This recommendation was adopted by the Colonial Collections Committee on 19 June 2026.

Chair

Secretariat

Lilian Gonçalves-Ho Kang You

Jona Mooren, Liesbeth Ouwehand

Appendices

1. Stutje, K. (2022) *Provenance report regarding Wayang bèbèr plaat [Wayan beber scrolls]* (PPROCE provenance reports no. 3). NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies.
2. Memorandum: Response to questions from the Colonial Collections Committee regarding PPROCE Reports no. 3, 18, 19, 22, and 23. (Wereldmuseum, 29 May 2026)
3. Response to the Colonial Collections Committee Regarding Provenance Reports and Repatriation Recommendations. (Tim Repatriasi, June 2026)



Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) KONINKLIJKE NEDERLANDSE AKADEMIE VAN WETENSCHAPPEN

Provenance report regarding Wayang bèbèr plaat [Wayan beber scrolls]

Stutje, Klaas

2022

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Provenance report regarding Wayang bèbèr plaat [Wayan beber scrolls]

Klaas Stutje

 <i>Photo: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll.no. RV-360-5255, 5256 and 5257</i>	Custodian	NMVW Museum Volkenkunde
	Current possessor	Dutch State
	Inventory number	RV-360-5255 RV-360-5256 RV-360-5257
	Material/technique	Paper; wood
	Size	70 x 283 cm 71 x 289 cm 71 x 275 cm

Summary of findings

These three *wayang beber* scrolls were created in the mid-seventeenth century and belong to a set of six scrolls (RV-360-5254 t/m 5259) in the collection of the NMVW Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden. They arrived in the museum in 1883 as part of the collection of the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden (KKZ). Correspondence in the archives of the Rijksmuseum voor Oudheden (RMO) and KKZ reveals that Adolph François Henry van de Poel (1816-1875), Assistant-Resident in Kebumen, in the residency of Bagelen on Java, donated the scrolls in 1851 to the Archaeologisch Cabinet der Hoogeschool. However, its director decided that the scrolls were better placed in the collection of KKZ. About the provenance of the scrolls, Van de Poel remarked that he had recently “found” them in the village Sampang in the house “of the guardian of the Pamambahans Sampang.” The Dutch sources at our disposal do not reveal who the *dalang* and scroll keepers were, nor the circumstances in which Van de Poel had obtained them. Based on contemporary and historical knowledge about similar *wayang beber* scrolls in Gedompol and Gelaran, it seems unlikely that the *wayang beber* scrolls of Sampang were simply given away to A.F.H. van de Poel.

Reconstruction provenance

Seventeenth century – [no date]

[...]

Saiful Bakhri, Isamu Sakamoto and Muhammad Nurul Fajri, 'Collaborative Efforts to Preserve Wayang Beber in Indonesia', 2018.

[no date] - [no date]

The guardian of a cemetery of the Panembahan in Sampang

NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter from the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet to the Minister of Interior Affairs, dated 10 January 1852.

[no date] - November 1851

A.F.H. van de Poel (1816-1875)

NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter from the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet to the Minister of Interior Affairs, dated 10 January 1852.

November 1851 - 2 March 1852

Archeologisch Cabinet der Hoogeschool

NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter from the director of the Museum voor Oudheden to the director of the KKZ, dated 2 March 1852.

2 March 1852 - 1883

Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden

Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde, inventory card series 360, no. 5254-5257.

1883 - today

Rijks Ethnografisch Museum (today NMVW Museum Volkenkunde)

Introduction and context

These three *wayang beber* scrolls belong to a set of six scrolls (RV-360-5254 t/m 5259) in the collection of the NMVW Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden. *Wayang beber* is a Javanese oral tradition, developed in the fourteenth century in the Majapahit era, in which a *dalang* (storyteller and spiritual mediator) tells a story about the legendary prince Panji Asmoro Bangun, accompanied by *gamelan* and *rebab* musical instruments. The *dalang* tells his story while unrolling (*membeberkan*), long painted scrolls between two wooden sticks depicting scenes from the Panji tales. In Javanese culture, the *wayang beber* scrolls are connected to the ancestral world and are only unpacked and used by the *dalang* with due observance of certain rituals and offerings.¹

¹ Marina Pretković and Tea Škrinjarić, 'Reviving Javanese Picture Scroll Theatre', *Etnološka Tribina* 40, vol. 47 (2017), 201-202.

Only some *wayang beber* experts seem aware of the existence of the set in Museum Volkenkunde.² It is one of three original *wayang beber* sets currently known. The other two are kept by families in the villages of Gedompol (Pacitan, East Java) and Gelaran (Wonosari, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta). The style of the *wayang beber* set in Leiden is more similar to the set in Gelaran than to the set in Gedompol, which has a more densely decorated background. On the basis of radiocarbon dating Saiful Bakhri, Isamu Sakamoto and Muhammad Nurul Fajri conclude that the scrolls in Leiden were created between 1633 and 1669, and are a few decades older than the scrolls in Gedompol (1690-1739) and Gelaran (1700-1735).³ Other *wayang beber* sets were created in the twentieth century.⁴

Wayang beber researchers Marina Pretković and Tea Škrinjarić write that the scrolls are made of “beaten tree bark paper named *daluang* (or *dluwang*, also known as *kertas* Ponogoro or Ponogoro paper), and are painted with colours composed of natural pigment powder (animal bones, tree bark or leaves) and glue.”⁵ The bamboo sticks that are used to unroll the scrolls are slightly charred, as are the edges of the scrolls. In 1852, Conrad Leemans (1809-1893), who was the director of the Archaeologisch Cabinet, speculated that these burn marks may have been the result of candles [“lichtjes”] used to illuminate the scene.⁶ Leemans numbered the scrolls from 1 to 6. According to Juynboll’s (1867-1945) catalogue of the Rijks Ethnografisch Museum, the Javanese text on the scroll number RV-360-5255 refers to the Javanese days of the week.⁷

Provenance report

According to the inventory cards of Museum Volkenkunde (today part of the National Museum of World Cultures), this set of six scrolls was originally in the possession of the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden (KKZ).⁸ This cabinet was established in 1816 by the Dutch King William I (1772-1843) to accommodate the old stadtholder’s collections. In the course of the nineteenth century, the collection grew considerably with historical and ethnographical objects from all parts of the world, mainly from Japan and China, but also from the Netherlands-Indies. In 1883, KKZ was disbanded and

² Cf. Walter Angst, *Wayang Indonesia, Die phantastische Welt des Indonesischen Figurentheaters* (Konstanz: Stadler Verlagsgesellschaft, 2007) 57-58; Mally Kant-Achilles; Friedrich Seltmann; Rüdiger Schumacher, *Wayang bèbèr das wiederentdeckte Bildrollen-Drama Zentral-Javas* (Stuttgart: Steiner 1990); Marianna Lis, “Contemporary Wayang Beber in Central Java,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 31-2 (2014) 505–523; Benedict Anderson, “The Last Picture Show: Wayang Beber,” in: *Proceedings of the Conference on Modern Indonesian Literature*, Jean Taylor et al., eds. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Center for SE Asian Studies, 1974) 33–81.

³ Saiful Bakhri, Isamu Sakamoto and Muhammad Nurul Fajri, “Collaborative Efforts to Preserve Wayang Beber in Indonesia,” conference paper for the 7 December 2018 symposium “Recent Advances in Barkcloth Conservation and Technical Analysis,” Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, United Kingdom.

⁴ Pretković and Škrinjarić, “Reviving Javanese Picture Scroll Theatre,” 200, 204. Three other story rolls in the collection of Volkenkunde have also been described as *wayang beber* sets, but were later identified as Balinese *ider-ider* story textiles. It concerns objects numbers RV-37-567, RV-37-567a and RV-37-693. Cf. H.H. Juynboll, *Catalogus van 's Rijks Ethnografisch Museum*, XIII Java, derde deel (Leiden: E.J. Brill 1918), p. 207-8.

⁵ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter of the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet, to the Minister of Interior Affairs, dated 10 January 1852; Pretković and Škrinjarić, “Reviving Javanese Picture Scroll Theatre,” 200n6, 206.

⁶ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. nr. 845, “Javaansche voorwerpen van lateren tijd” by Leemans.

⁷ Juynboll, *Catalogus van 's Rijks Ethnografisch Museum*, XIII, 208-209; NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, “Javaansche voorwerpen van lateren tijd” by Leemans.

⁸ Museum Volkenkunde, inventory card RV-360-5254 to RV-360-5257.

its collection was divided between various Dutch museums. The *wayang beber* scrolls were transferred to the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum, the predecessor of Museum Volkenkunde.

According to archival documents of the Rijksmuseum voor Oudheden (RMO) and KKZ, KKZ had acquired the scrolls on 2 March 1852. On that day, they were brought in from the Archaeologisch Cabinet der Hoogeschool, the old name of the Rijksmuseum voor Oudheden.⁹ This transfer was preceded by extensive correspondence between Leemans, the director of the Archaeologisch Cabinet, A.A. van de Kastele (1814-1893), who was the director of the KKZ, and J.R. Thorbecke (1798-1892), who was the Minister of Interior Affairs. This correspondence mainly concerned the question whether the *wayang beber* scrolls were part of a living tradition in Java or had disappeared, as some contemporary European authors had argued.¹⁰ If *wayang beber* ceremonies were still performed, the scrolls belonged to the field of ethnology, making KKZ the appropriate place of storage. If the tradition had died out, the scrolls would belong to the domain of archeology and antiquity and had to be placed in the Archaeologisch Cabinet. Director Leemans of the Archeologisch Cabinet, who managed the scrolls, consulted various experts, including professors Gz.J. Pijnappel (1822-1901) and T. Roorda (1801-1874), restorer T. Hooiberg (1809-1897), and an unnamed Javanese servant who was “very familiar with the [Javanese] interior.”¹¹ Even though Pijnappel and Roorda could not accurately date the *wayang beber* scrolls, they concluded that they “rather belong to the present time.”¹² According to the Javanese servant, such displays were still very common and he had attended them regularly.¹³ Therefore, Thorbecke decided on 15 January 1862, on the advice of Leemans, that the scrolls had to be transferred to the KKZ, with an attached invoice of fl. 36,42½ from Hooiberg for the restoration costs already incurred.¹⁴ The Dutch government gazette of 19 March 1852 stated: “Because these or similar scrolls are still in use by the people of Java, and therefore belong more to the field of contemporary ethnology [than to antiquity], they are being transferred to the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden in The Hague.”¹⁵

A.F.H. van de Poel

A report from Leemans to the Minister of Interior Affairs Thorbecke, dated 10 January 1852, shows how the Archaeologisch Cabinet had obtained the *wayang beber* scrolls before they were transferred to KKZ. In this report Leemans writes that he had received the scrolls in the second half of November 1851 from Adolph François Henry van de Poel, Assistant-Resident in Keboemen [Kebumen], in the

⁹ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter of the director of the Museum voor Oudheden, to the director of KKZ, dated 2 March 1852.

¹⁰ Most notably Thomas Stamford Raffles, *The history of Java*, Vol. 1 (London: J. Murray, 1830) 379; J.A. Wilkens, “Het Wajang verhaal Pregiwo,” *Tijdschrift voor Neërland’s Indië*, 8-2 (1846) 3.

¹¹ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter of the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet, to the Minister of Interior Affairs, dated 10 January 1852: een ‘vluggen en met het binnenland zeer bekenden’ Javaanse bediende.

¹² Archief Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (NL-LdnRMO), Verzonden brieven 1818-1906 (17.01.02-74), 1850-2, letter of Gz.J. Pijnappel to the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet, dated 5 December 1851: “meer tot de tegenwoordige tijd behooren.”

¹³ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter of the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet, to the Minister of Interior Affairs, dated 10 January 1852.

¹⁴ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter of the Minister of Interior Affairs, to the director of KKZ, dated 15 January 1852.

¹⁵ *Nederlandsche Staatscourant*, 19 maart 1852, p. 5: “Daar deze schermen of soortgelijke thans nog bij de bevolking van Java in gebruik zijn, en dus meer tot het gebied der hedendaagsche land- en volkenkunde behooren, zijn zij aan het Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden te 's-Gravenhage overgegeven.”

residency of Bagalen [Bagelen] on Java.¹⁶ Van de Poel donated the scrolls to the Archaeologisch Cabinet to be added to its collection or, if more appropriate, to one of the other national collections. Leemans also writes that he had first spoken with Van de Poel 11 to 12 years earlier, when the latter was on leave in the Netherlands. Leemans had asked Van de Poel “to promote the interests of the Museum once he had returned in Java, and to collect and send antiquarian objects.” Consequently, Van de Poel had already sent a few statues and bronze objects that he had bought at “public auctions.”¹⁷ Where possible, Van de Poel received compensation for the purchase and shipping costs incurred, but it also happened that not all costs could be compensated and that Van de Poel paid for the loss, which, according to Leemans, Van de Poel “gladly” did. Leemans therefore concluded the report with a plea to the minister to grant Van de Poel a “special recognition.”¹⁸ The RMO archive shows that Leemans and Van de Poel corresponded on a regular basis in the period between 1846 and 1875 about donations to the Archaeologisch Cabinet/RMO. These letters also show a growing personal bond between the two, with objects ending up in their respective private collections.¹⁹

Sampang

The report of 10 January 1852 is also insightful because it contains a full quote of Van de Poel by Leemans about the exact origin of the *wayang beber* scrolls. Van de Poel, in Leemans’ words, said: “I recently found in the dessa Sampang in the house of the guardian of the Pamambahans Sampang, a set of Wayang wrapped in a pisang leaf and drawn on tree bark paper, the colours and drawings of which also bear the markings of the art that used to exist on Java. The drawing has been well preserved, but has hung over smoke.”²⁰ In an abbreviated extract by Leemans of the report of 10 January 1852, Leemans writes: “These Wajang scrolls come from the house of the guardian of the tomb of Panambahans Sampang in the dessa Sampang (Assistent Residentie Keboemen?) where they

¹⁶ Adolf/Adolph François Henri/Henry van de Poel, also occurring in the sources as F.A.H. van de Poel and A.F.H. van der Poel, was a government official who between 1847 and 1873 had a career in the colonial service as ‘controleur eerste klasse’ in Bagelen, assistant-resident in Bonjonegoro and Kebumen, and as a resident in Kediri, Cheribon and Semarang. In 1853, as can be gathered from the *Almanak van Nederlandsch-Indië voor het jaar 1853*, he was awarded the French Légion d’Honneur and knight in the Order of the Netherlands Lion. In Semarang, he was also president of the Maatschappij tot Nut van t Algemeen (Society for Public Welfare). In 1873, Van de Poel returned to Europe.

¹⁷ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter of the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet, to the Minister of Interior Affairs, dated 10 January 1852; “na zijne terugkeer in Java de belangen van het Museum te bevorderen en oudheidkundige voorwerpen te verzamelen en te verzenden.”; “openbare veilingen.” In the museum’s information system we can indeed find objects that Van de Poel sold to RMO in the years 1846-47 and which were adopted by the Rijks Ethnografisch Museum: RV-1403-1846, -1853, -1854 and -1855. These objects all originated from the Dieng plateau.

¹⁸ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter from the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet to the Minister of Interior Affairs, dated 10 January 1852; “bijzondere erkenning.”

¹⁹ See for instance: NL-LdnRMO, Verzonden brieven 1818-1906 (17.01.02-78), 1861-1862, letter of A.F.H. van de Poel to the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet, dated 11 November 1862.

²⁰ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter of the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet, to the Minister of Interior Affairs, dated 10 January 1852: “Ik heb onlangs in de dessa Sampang in het huis van den bewaker des Pamambahans Sampang, een stel in een pisang blad gewikkelde en op papier van boombast geteekende Wayang gevonden, waarvan de kleuren zoo ook de teekeningen kenmerken dragen van de kunst die weleer op Java bestond, het geteekende is goed bewaard gebleven, maar heeft boven rook hangen.”

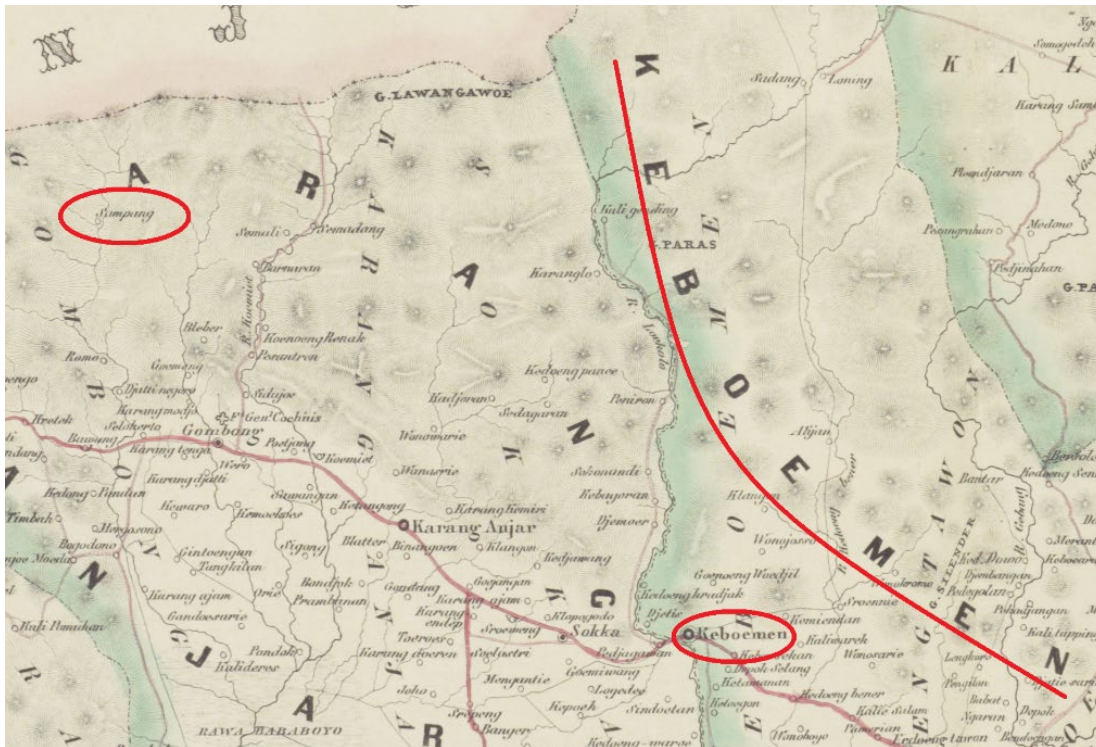
are wrapped in pinang leaves, stored, found by mister Van de Poel and obtained in property.”²¹ The Dutch government gazette of 19 March 1852, quoted earlier, stated that the scrolls were “kept wrapped in pinang leaves by the guard of a cemetery, and were obtained in property by Mr. van der Poel.”²²

The three sources seem unambiguous but differ in a number of important details. The first source is the most original of the three, but is a quote from Van de Poel by Leemans in which mistakes could have been made. According to the quote, the *wayang beber* scrolls were wrapped in *pisang* leaves (from the banana tree), the other two sources refer to *pinang* leaves (from the betel palm). They were either kept in the house of the guardian of the Panambahan of Sampang, or the house of the guardian of the tomb of the Panambahan of Sampang, or with the guardian of the cemetery (and not necessarily in his house). “Pamambahan” and “Panambahan” refer to the princely title of *Panembahan*: a position in the hierarchy of nobility above that of the *priyayi* but below that of the sultan. Finally, the village is called Sampang. Leemans wonders whether this village is in the Assistant-Residentie of Keboemen, but according to a detailed map from 1855 there was a village of the same name in the adjacent Assistant-Residentie Karang Anjar, also part of the Bagelen residency.²³ The comments that the *wayang beber* scrolls were “found and obtained in property” raise questions, and as yet no specification has been found of the nature of the acquisition by Van de Poel.

²¹ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, extract of the director of the Museum voor Oudheden, no date; “Deze Wajang bladen zijn afkomstig uit het huis van den bewaker van het graf des Panambahans Sampang in de dessa Sampang (Assistent Residentie Keboemen?) waar zij in pinang bladeren gewikkeld, bewaard, door den heer Van de Poel gevonden en in eigendom verkregen werden.”

²² Nederlandsche Staatscourant, 19 March 1852, p. 5; “bij den bewaker van eene begraafplaats in pinangbladen gewikkeld bewaard, door den heer van der Poel in eigendom verkregen werden.”

²³ P. Melvill van Carnbee, *Kaart van de residentie Bagelen, 1855*, (Batavia: Van Haren Noman & Kolff, 1853-1862). Sampang still exists in the Kecamatan Sempor, Kabupaten Kebumen, Jawa Tengah 54421, Indonesia.



Cut-out with Sampang and Keboemen, from a map of P. Melvill van Carnbee, *Kaart van de residentie Bagelen*, 1855 (Batavia: Van Haren Noman & Kolff, 1853-1862).

The sources are also unclear about the history of the *wayang beber* scrolls before Van de Poel got hold of them. Regarding the question whether the scrolls belonged to the sphere of archeology or ethnology, Van de Poel, Leemans, Van de Kastelee, and Thorbecke were more interested in the age of the scrolls than in their previous owners. Van de Poel and Leemans assumed that the scrolls had “quite a considerable age,” pointing at the damaged condition of the scrolls and what was known in the literature of the time.²⁴ Pijnappel, on the other hand, concluded: “With regards to the age of these pieces there may be other evidence contradicting it, but we have no reason to not believe that they couldn’t have been made long ago. Such antiques belong more to the present day. Furthermore, it must be very obvious that these pieces have nothing to do with *wayang beber*.”²⁵ It is not known what Pijnappel based this conclusion on. Based on radiocarbon dating, present-day experts Saiful Bakhri, Isamu Sakamoto, and Muhammad Nurul Fajri conclude that the scrolls were created between 1633 and 1669.²⁶ This early dating makes it possible to relate the *wayang beber* set in Leiden to the history of the other two original *wayang beber* sets in Gelaran and Gedompol. Benedict Anderson speculated that these sets originated from the Mataram court and ended up in

²⁴ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter of the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet, to the Minister of Interior Affairs, dated 10 January 1852; “eenen betrekkelijk vrij aanmerkelijken ouderdom.”

²⁵ NL-LdnRMO, Verzonden brieven 1818-1906 (17.01.02-74), 1850-2, letter of Gz.J. Pijnappel to the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet, dated 5 December 1851: “Wat den ouderdom dier stukken betreft mogen er andere bewijzen tegen zijn, maar ons is geen reden bekend waarom wij het er niet voor houden zouden dat zij niet lang geleden kunnen vervaardigd zijn. Dergelijke antiquiteiten behooren meer tot de tegenwoordige tijd. En verder moet het te duidelijk zijn, dat deze stukken met de wajang bèbèr wel niets te maken zullen hebben.”

²⁶ Saiful Bakhri, Isamu Sakamoto and Muhammad Nurul Fajri, “Collaborative Efforts to Preserve Wayang Beber in Indonesia,” conference paper for the 7 December 2018 symposium “Recent Advances in Barkcloth Conservation and Technical Analysis,” Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, United Kingdom.

the respective villages either as a reward for a special service rendered to the sultan or in the context of political turmoil. About the other sets, Anderson stated that “it is inconceivable that they were made in the village” because of their beauty and sophisticated composition.²⁷

The Dutch sources at our disposal do not reveal what role the Leiden scrolls played at the cemetery or with the guard of Sampang, who were the *dalang* and scroll keepers, and under what circumstances Van de Poel obtained them. According to anthropologists Pretković and Škrinjarić, the *wayang beber* scrolls in the villages of Gedompol and Gelaran were not used in funeral ceremonies, but in Javanese purification (*ruwatan*) and healing rituals. They underline the strict traditional rules and procedures determining how and when the scrolls were to be approached, used, interpreted, and safeguarded. Even though the scrolls had communal importance, they were guarded in a special room by guardian families and only the *dalang* could touch, open, and recite the scrolls. Even the location and spatial orientation of the scrolls were subject to strict rules. Within the guardian families, the scrolls were passed on between male descendants.²⁸ The strict adherence to rules and rituals was also observed by the Dutch professor and wayang expert, G.A.J. Hazeu, when he visited a *wayang beber* performance in Gelaran in 1902. The sale of these scrolls, Hazeu mentioned, was out of the question, even when the *dalang* was offered a considerable sum of money.²⁹ Even though these sources concern other *wayang beber* scrolls five decades after 1851, it seems unlikely that the *wayang beber* scrolls of Sampang were simply given away to A.F.H. van de Poel.

Suggestions for further research

Further analysis by Indonesian *wayang beber* experts, in comparison to the scrolls in Gelaran and Gedompol, may result in alternative insights in the social, cultural, and spiritual role of these scrolls in the local society. A local and oral history project in the village of Sampang may bring a better understanding of the historical context in the 1850s and later memory by descendants. Finally, archival research in the Residentie-archives that are held by *Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia* may contain cultural analyses of the region.

²⁷ Anderson, “The Last Picture Show,” 40.

²⁸ Pretković and Škrinjarić, “Reviving Javanese Picture Scroll Theatre,” 208-112; Correspondence of the author with Pretković and Škrinjarić, April 2021.

²⁹ G.A.J. Hazeu, “Eine „Wayang Beber“ Vorstellung in Jogjakarta,” *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie* 16 (Leipzig 1904) 128-135, there 135; see also R. A. Kern, “De Wajang-beber van Patjitan,” *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land en Volkenkunde* 51 (1909) 338-356.

Memorandum

Topic: Response to questions from the Colonial Collections Committee regarding PPROCE
Reports no. 3, 18, 19, 22, and 23

Date: 29 May 2026

Author: François Janse van Rensburg

Summary

This memorandum responds to the questions by the Colonial Collections Committee sent to Wereldmuseum director Wayne Modest on 19 May 2026. The museum was sent the following questions:

Does the PPROCE report on the objects listed below reflect the current status of the investigation? Do the other object numbers mentioned in the report share the same provenance history as the object in question?

This concerns the provenance reports for:

- Three wayang beber panels RV-360-5255 - 5257. [PPROCE Report 3](#) states that these panels are part of a set of six scrolls in total: RV-360-5254 through 5259.
- Quran manuscript TM-1482-1, [PPROCE Report 18](#).
- Panel from a tomb RV-179-1: [PPROCE Report 19](#) refers to twenty-five objects originating from the Sultanate of Aceh, including four tomb panels that were removed from cemeteries between 1874 and 1876.
- Manuscript Hikayat Makkah Madinah RV-163-48d. [PPROCE Report 22](#) refers to sixty other objects collected by Semmelink and lists the inventory numbers of four manuscripts from the Sultanate of Aceh, namely RV-163-48a- d.
- Aceh gravestone (Batu Aceh) RV-3600-594. The [PPROCE report 23](#) refers to a total of eight gravestones from Aceh: RV-3600-589 - 596.

Process

i) Marjolein van Asdonck, the Wereldmuseum curator for Indonesia, and Mirjam Shatanawi, the author of four of the five reports, were consulted to determine if the reports were still up to date. Furthermore, the reports were checked against the museum's database, and where relevant, the museum's archive as well as secondary literature. We conclude that the findings of the reports still reflect the current understanding of the objects. Mirjam Shatanawi mentioned new sources related to PPROCE Report 19, but these do not change its conclusions.

ii) For questions 1, 4, and 5, the additional objects share the same provenance as the primary object(s) discussed in each report. For question 4, there is also a question about a larger group of 60 objects collected by the donor. Here we concluded that this would require substantial further research. For question 2, the report mentions other looted Qurans in Dutch public collections but confirms that this Quran is the only one of those looted during the events described in the report. Question 3 concerns gravestones and grave ornaments from Aceh. Currently, no definitive answer is possible: the report concerns the provenance of one object only. It mentions the existence of other gravestones and grave ornaments from Aceh in the collections of the Wereldmuseum and Museum Bronbeek. However, these objects have a different provenance from the one described in the report. Furthermore, the list of objects mentioned by Shatanawi is a work in progress. Locating all such objects and determining their provenance would require a dedicated research project.

Response to Questions

1. PPROCE Report 3

Question: *Three wayang beber panels RV-360-5255 - 5257. [PPROCE Report 3](#) states that these panels are part of a set of six scrolls in total: RV-360-5254 through 5259.*

PPROCE Report 3 was written by Klaas Stutje in 2022. The report concerns three *wayang beber* panels, numbered RV-360-5255 to RV-360-5257. Stutje states that these three panels form part of a series of six panels (RV-360-5254 to RV-360-5259) with the same provenance: all six were originally donated by Adolph François Henry van de Poel, a Dutch colonial official.

All evidence in the museum's archive and database supports this. All six panels are in the same collection, being the series RV-360. This series is made up of objects transferred from the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden to Wereldmuseum Leiden¹ in 1883.² The panels are registered with consecutive inventory numbers. They were already grouped together, with the same provenance information in the original inventory book dating to ca. 1878–1883.³ They were described together in the catalogue of the museum in 1914.⁴ The panels are visibly similar in size, shape, and general appearance. The 1914 catalogue suggests that several panels are continuations of scenes depicted in previous panels.⁵

On the Wereldmuseum's database, all six panels have the same provenance. Their provenance is as follows:

- 1851: Donated by Adolph François Henry van de Poel to Rijksmuseum van Oudheden
- 1852: Transfer from Rijksmuseum van Oudheden to Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden
- 1883: Transfer from Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden to Wereldmuseum Leiden

Based on this information, it can be concluded that Stutje's report represents the museum's current understanding of these objects and that the provenance and conclusions of PPROCE Report 3 applies to all six panels.

¹ For simplicity's sake, in this document I use the contemporary names 'Wereldmuseum Leiden', 'Wereldmuseum Amsterdam' and other contemporary museum names in Dutch without translation.

² The Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden was a Dutch public museum located in Den Haag, operating from 1816-1883. Following its closure, its contents were divided between several Dutch museums with the Wereldmuseum Leiden and Rijksmuseum Amsterdam being the largest recipients.

³ From the Wereldmuseum Leiden's archive, NL-LdnRMV-A3-16: 'Series 360' (part I), p. 286 (img. 292).

⁴ Juynboll, H.H. 1914. *Katalog der Ethnographischen Reichsmuseums, Band XIII, Java, dritter teil*, pp. 208-209.

⁵ Juynboll (1914) believed that the narrative on RV-360-5255 continues on RV-360-5256, and likely on to RV-360-5257 as well.

2. PPROCE Report 18

Question: *Quran manuscript TM-1482-1, [PPROCE Report 18](#).*

PPROCE Report 18 was written by Mirjam Shatanawi in 2022. It concerns the Quran manuscript numbered TM-1482-1, which was donated by Karel Willem Gisolf, a Dutch colonial official, to the Wereldmuseum Amsterdam in 1941. According to the donor, the Quran was looted in August 1896.

The provenance of the Quran manuscript was already known at the time of acquisition and is described on the inventory card. Since its publication, Shatanawi's report has been used to expand the information on the museum's database: it is cited directly on the database entry for the Quran manuscript, which also incorporates a summary of the report in the 'collection history' field. Therefore, Shatanawi's report represents the current understanding of the museum about the Quran manuscript.

While Shatanawi mentions at least three other looted Qurans in Dutch public collections, the report confirms this is the only one of those looted during the events described in the report. Furthermore, the Quran manuscript is the only object in the series TM-1482 and the only object donated to the Wereldmuseum by Gisolf. Therefore, the provenance and conclusions of the report apply only to this Quran manuscript.

3. PPROCE Report 19

Question: *Panel from a tomb RV-179-1: [PPROCE Report 19](#) refers to twenty-five objects originating from the Sultanate of Aceh, including four tomb panels that were removed from cemeteries between 1874 and 1876.*

PPROCE Report 19 was written by Mirjam Shatanawi in 2022. It discusses the provenance of RV-179-1, a panel from a tomb donated to Wereldmuseum Leiden by Herman Jacob van Nouhuys in 1877.

In the report, Shatanawi notes that she has identified 25 objects in Dutch museums originating from the *dalam* (Sultan's quarter) in Banda Aceh, including four tomb ornaments (not panels as stated in the question). In total, she has identified 33 gravestones and tomb ornaments from Aceh. Of these 33, two are kept at Museum Bronbeek, while the rest are at the Wereldmuseum.

Mirjam Shatanawi was contacted for more information, and she states that the report is up to date,⁶ but that the numbers are a work in progress. In trying to replicate these figures, we found that there are also several ambiguous objects that could potentially be gravestones and tomb ornaments from Aceh as well. RV-179-1 is the only object from Aceh donated to the museum by Van Nouhuys. All the other gravestones and tomb ornaments from Aceh⁷ came into the museum via other donors or sellers. This means that the findings of PPROCE Report 19 apply only to RV-179-1.

A full accounting for all objects looted from Aceh, or looted from this specific location, or from the period 1874–1876, would require a substantial amount of additional research by the museum, which would go well beyond the scope of the above report.

⁶ Shatanawi also cites these numbers in a more recent publication, see Shatanawi, M. 2025. *Legacies of Colonialism in Museum Collections*, p. 39. When contacted, Shatanawi mentioned finding some new sources since then, but they do not change the conclusion of the report.

⁷ Or potentially from Aceh, as at least one object is in the unnumbered series of objects without provenance.

4. PPROCE Report 22

Question: *Manuscript Hikayat Makkah Madinah RV-163-48d. [PPROCE Report 22](#) refers to sixty other objects collected by Semmelink and lists the inventory numbers of four manuscripts from the Sultanate of Aceh, namely RV-163-48a - d.*

PPROCE Report 22 was written by Mirjam Shatanawi in 2022 and concerns a manuscript numbered RV-163-48d donated to the Wereldmuseum Leiden by Jan Semmelink, a Dutch medical officer, in 1874.

Semmelink was a prolific collector and sent hundreds of objects to the Wereldmuseum, predominantly from different parts of Indonesia, but also other parts of South and Southeast Asia. The series RV-163 consists of objects from Aceh. They were sent to the museum in three crates along with a list of objects.⁸ This list likely refers to other series donated by Semmelink as well, such as RV-148.⁹ The series RV-163 consists of 59 entries¹⁰ numbered RV-163-1 to RV-163-55, with RV-163-48 being sub-divided into four numbers: RV-163-48a, -48b, -48c, and -48d. Of the 59 registered numbers, 13 are now marked as missing or destroyed.

Regarding the more than sixty other objects mentioned by Shatanawi, at this moment it is not certain if the conclusions of PPROCE Report 22 can be applied to the entire series RV-163: it is not yet known if they all share the same provenance, and if they do, other series such as RV-148 may also be implicated. It is also not known how many objects there are, only that there are more than 61 in total. Finally, the museum would have to search for the missing objects.¹¹ Therefore, a full understanding of all the objects donated by Semmelink, or all the objects from Semmelink originating in Aceh, would require substantial further research.

However, all four manuscripts or documents registered under RV-163-48 do share the same provenance. According to their inventory cards, they were ‘found in the residence of the Sultan.’ This is also confirmed in Shatanawi’s report. This means that the conclusions of PPROCE Report 22 applies to all four texts and that the report represents the museum’s current understanding of those objects. The titles and descriptions below are from the museum’s database, translated into English.

- RV-163-48a:
 - o Title: Document
 - o Description: A story about a Sultan Djalîl.
- RV-163-48b:
 - o Title: Document
 - o Description: Regulations on import and export duties, issued by Sultan Ala ad-Din Jauhar al-‘Alam Shah of Aceh (1795-1823).
- RV-163-48c:
 - o Title: Document
 - o Description: Four pages of a Malay hikayat with Ratu (or Prabu) Sangsari, Ratu (Sotja Windu?), Macharadja Ikan, Nun Wati.

⁸ See NL-LdnRMV-A1-2-144/146 in the Wereldmuseum archive.

⁹ Semmelink lists 61 objects or groups of objects shipped in two of the crates, while another crate contains various objects which are only briefly described. This means more than 61 objects were dispatched to the museum.

¹⁰ Some numbers contain more than one object, e.g. RV-163-35 consists of a group of six bullets.

¹¹ Generally, objects marked as missing are lost or destroyed, however missing objects are sometimes located as the result of research.

- RV-163-48d (described in the report)

In addition, the series contains one more text, RV-163-47.

- RV-163-47:
 - o Title: Book
 - o Description: This book contains prayers in Arabic with translations in Malay.

This book has a different provenance. On the inventory card, its origins are given as ‘found in the Kampong Penajoeng’. It is also not mentioned in Shatanawi’s report. This means that it may have a different provenance from the four texts above. Until further research has been done, the conclusions of PPROCE Report 22 do not apply to this object.

5. PPROCE Report 23

Question: *Aceh gravestone (Batu Aceh) RV-3600-594. The [PPROCE report 23](#) refers to a total of eight gravestones from Aceh: RV-3600-589 - 596.*

PPROCE Report 23 was written by Mirjam Shatanawi in 2022 and concerns the gravestone RV-3600-594 from Aceh, donated to the museum of the Hoofdcursus Kampen¹² by George Nijpels, a Dutch military officer, in 1901.

Before this report, the provenance of only two of the gravestones was known to the museum. This was based on provenance information written on the inventory cards. Shatanawi found evidence in the archives of the ethnographic museum of the Royal Netherlands Military Academy, which later merged with Wereldmuseum Leiden, that all eight gravestones share the same provenance history.

In 2022, provenance researcher Tom Quist added the following information to all eight of the gravestones on the museum's database (translated to English):

This gravestone was found in 1901 in Lhoknga (Aceh Besar) along with seven other gravestones (RV-3600-589 to 595) by G. Nijpels (1859-1950), an officer in the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL). With the permission of the Dutch colonial administration in Aceh, Nijpels had the gravestones removed and shipped to the Netherlands. The collection took place at the request of the Hoofdcursus in Kampen, where the gravestones were included in the ethnographic collection in 1902. After the closure of the Hoofdcursus in 1923, the gravestones were transferred to the Ethnographic Museum of the Royal Military Academy in Breda. In 1956, this collection was acquired by the Museum Volkenkunde. Provenance research has shown that the gravestones in Lhoknga were removed to make way for a horse racing track. However, the location of this racetrack and the original burial site is unknown. It is also unclear from which graves the stones originate and who the deceased are.

As of 2022, the museum's database attributes all eight gravestones to George Nijpels. This means that the provenance and conclusions from PPROCE 23 represents the museum's current understanding of these objects and applies to all eight gravestones.

¹² The Hoofdcursus Kampen was an officer training school within the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL). It had its own ethnographic museum.

Response to the Colonial Collections Committee Regarding Provenance Reports and Repatriation Recommendations (June 2026)

To: The Colonial Collections Committee (CCC)

From: Ismunandar, Chair of the Indonesian Repatriation Expert Panel (Tim Repatriasi)

Date: June 15, 2026

Subject: Formal Evaluation of Provenance Reports and Recommendations for Cultural Restitution

1. Formal Response and Statement of Intent

This response represents a critical milestone in the ongoing bilateral cooperation between the Republic of Indonesia and the Kingdom of the Netherlands regarding cultural restitution. Tim Repatriasi formally acknowledges receipt of the Colonial Collections Committee (CCC) letter dated June 4, 2026. This dialogue serves as a vital instrument of restorative justice, bridging the gap between colonial history and a future defined by mutual respect.

On behalf of the Government of Indonesia, we extend our sincere appreciation to the CCC and the Wereldmuseum for their transparency in submitting the five primary provenance reports (Pproce-reports) concerning the Wayang Beber scrolls, the Quran of Teuku Umar, the Acehese Tomb Panel, the *Hikayat Makkah Madinah* manuscript, and the Batu Aceh collection. These reports provide the necessary baseline for our comprehensive evaluation.

The purpose of this document is to provide Tim Repatriasi's evidence-based evaluation of the submitted provenance research and to issue final, definitive recommendations for the physical and legal return of these assets. The technical annexes that follow substantiate our requirements, ensuring that the repatriation process honours both the historical record and the living spiritual significance of these objects.

2. Annex I: Evaluation and Recommendations for the Wayang Beber Scrolls

Cultural and Spiritual Significance

In Javanese society, Wayang Beber is not a mere art object; it is a sacred heirloom (*pusaka*) of profound spiritual magnitude. These scrolls are intimately linked to the ancestral realm and remain central to *ruwatan* (exorcism) and healing rituals. Traditionally, the scrolls may only be opened by a *dalang* (puppeteer) under strict ritual conditions. Their value is intrinsic to the spiritual health of the community of Sampang. Scientifically, radiocarbon dating has confirmed that these scrolls date between 1669 and 1933, establishing them as the oldest recorded set of Wayang Beber in existence — surpassing even the renowned sets in Gedompol and Gelaran.

Critique of Acquisition and Evidence of Coercion

The colonial narrative surrounding the acquisition of these scrolls by A.F.H. van de Poel in 1851 is historically untenable. The archive obfuscates the reality of seizure through the

sanitised nomenclature of "discovery" and "personal possession" at the home of the tomb keeper (*Panembahan*) in Sampang. Javanese custom strictly prohibits the sale or transfer of such *pusaka* to outsiders, regardless of the sum offered. Consequently, the historical probability of a "voluntary" transfer is non-existent. The removal of these sacred objects involved a structural coercion of power or a covert act of seizure by colonial officials, rendering the original departure of this set from Sampang village illicit.

Final Recommendation for Wayang Beber

Tim Repatriasi issues the following requirements for the restitution of this collection:

- **Unconditional Repatriation:** We agree and request the full physical and legal return of the complete set of six scrolls (Inventory numbers RV-360-5254 through RV-360-5259).
- **Collaborative Research:** A joint project must be established to conduct oral history research in Sampang and archival deep-dives at the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia (ANRI).
- **Knowledge Transfer:** The return process must include high-resolution digitalisation and specialised conservation training to ensure the longevity of these 17th-century artefacts.

3. Annex II: Evaluation and Recommendations for Acehnese Manuscripts (Hikayat and Quran)

3.1 Quran

We agree and have no further comments regarding the provenance of Teuku Umar's Qur'an.

3.2 Hikayat

Strategic Philological Importance

The requested manuscripts are primary pillars of Indonesian philology, preserving the intellectual and religious history of the Sultanate of Aceh.

Philological Justification (RV-163-48d)

The manuscript of the *Syair Mekah dan Madinah* (identified in the report as "*Hikayat Makkah Madinah*") is of paramount importance. As established by the benchmark work of Suryadi (2013), this manuscript is distinct from the version held at SOAS University of London and remains untransliterated. Its return provides a unique opportunity for Indonesian philologists to perform the first-ever transliteration of this specific text. Furthermore, Tim Repatriasi formally accepts the CCC's proposal to include the three additional documents — RV-163-48a, RV-163-48b (Sultan Ala ad-Din Jauhar al-'Alam Shah regulations), and RV-163-48c — in this repatriation recommendation.

Correction of Records and Formal Inquiries

- **Institutional Location:** We formally request the CCC to update its records: the related manuscripts mentioned as being at the Museum Nasional Indonesia have been transferred to the Perpustakaan Nasional (National Library).
- **Transparency Regarding "The Dalam":** The provenance reports reference objects "originating from the *dalam* palace," including additional manuscripts and books. Tim Repatriasi demands full transparency on whether other manuscripts or lithographs from this specific provenance exist within the Dutch national collection.

Collaborative Mandate

We also request high-resolution digitalisation must be an integral part of the physical return process to facilitate ongoing joint philological research.

4. Annex III: Evaluation and Recommendations for Acehnese Funerary Heritage

Typological and Historical Context

The Batu Aceh represent the peak of Islamic funerary culture, reflecting the artistic and social evolution of the Sultanate of Aceh from the 16th to the 19th centuries.

Evaluation of the Tomb Panel (RV-179-1)

The Tomb Panel (RV-179-1) is identified as a core object for return. Given its inclusion in the five primary provenance reports, its physical and legal return is required to complete the narrative of Acehnese funerary craftsmanship and to restore the integrity of the Sultanate's lithic heritage.

Prioritised Tombstones for Repatriation

Inventory Number	Justification for Prioritisation
RV-3600-590	Superior state of preservation compared to RV-3600-589; lacks the substantial base damage found in the latter.
RV-3600-595	Exceptional 16th-century specimen; features a rare four-panel inscription configuration on the shaft and remains highly legible.
RV-3600-593	Significant 17th-century monument; demonstrates high structural completeness, including a multi-tiered crown.
RV-3600-594	Rare typological variation with four inscribed panels; possesses high communicative and epigraphic value.
RV-3600-591	Exhibits highly refined artistic quality and elegant proportions, serving as a masterwork of Acehnese stone-carving.

Strategic Retention Recommendation

Tim Repatriasi recommends that RV-3600-596 remain at the Wereldmuseum. While it possesses a complete structure, its significant surface deterioration and cracks pose a high risk during transport. More importantly, we believe it will strengthen our joint stewardship of shared heritage.

5. Procedural Conclusion and Closing

The repatriation of these objects is not a mere logistical transfer but a vital instrument for strengthening bilateral relations based on transparency and mutual respect.

Ismunandar

Chair of Tim Repatriasi Indonesia

CC:

- Director General of Diplomacy, Promotion, and Cultural Cooperation
- Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia to the Kingdom of the Netherlands
- Director of Cultural Diplomacy
- Director of Europe I, Ministry of Foreign Affairs