

COLONIAL COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE

RECOMMENDATION

Object

Tomb panel, RV-179-1



Image: 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

Recommendation number

ID-2026-6

Date of recommendation

19 June 2026

The Colonial Collections Committee²
consisting of

Lilian Gonçalves-Ho Kang You (chair), Laura van Broekhoven, Remco Raben, Alicia Schrikker (members)

Secretariat

Jona Mooren, Liesbeth Ouwehand

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).

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.

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 the panel from a tomb, referred to in the application as 'Tomb panel' with inventory number RV-179-1 from the collection of the Dutch State, which is in the custody of the Wereldmuseum Leiden.

2. The object

The rectangular panel is made of grey sandstone and bears an Arab inscription in *thuluth*, a decorative cursive script. The inscription is twice the *shahada*, the Islamic profession of faith, followed in the first line by *salawat*, phrases invoking blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad. The panel does not state a date or the name of the deceased. Based on the style and material of the panel it is likely that it dates from the 16th or 17th century and comes from a royal tomb in Aceh. A ledge along the top of the panel suggests that it was part of a larger structure, probably a tomb. The panel has broken into two pieces, perhaps during transportation to the Netherlands or in storage at the depot.

The panel is registered at the Wereldmuseum Leiden under inventory number RV-179-1.

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.³ The policy vision is based on the Council for Culture report *Colonial Collection, a Recognition of Injustice*.⁴ 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.

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.

Then 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.

³ Policy vision, 29 January 2021, <https://committee.kolonialecollecties.nl/documents/2021/01/01/policy-vision-on-collections-from-a-colonial-context>

⁴ Report of 7 October 2020, <https://www.raadvoorcultuur.nl/documenten/adviezen/2021/01/22/colonial-collection-and-a-recognition-of-injustice>

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 panel 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 its 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 there are no addenda (*appendix 2*).

The Committee discussed the application for restitution and the report at a meeting on 6 February 2026. The provenance research 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 also issued a response to the contents of the provenance report; this is discussed 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 Mirjam Shatanawi in the context of PPROCE. The report forms an integral part of this recommendation.

The report records the following findings.

The panel was donated to 's Rijks Ethnografisch Museum (now Wereldmuseum Leiden) in 1877 by Herman Jacob van Nouhuys (1836-1920), who travelled to Aceh in his capacity as a captain in the merchant navy. He was in Pulau Breueh from August to October 1876 to deliver cargo and also visited the town of Banda Aceh. In 1877 Van Nouhuys wrote to advise the museum of the arrival of the tomb panel, which he had shipped to the Netherlands. He wrote that the panel was from 'the large grave of the sultans' in the *dalam* [the sultan's quarters] of Banda Aceh.⁵ He added that 'it was entirely in ruins'.⁶ Van Nouhuys furthermore asked the museum's director whether his identity as a donor could be kept anonymous in the event the removal of the panel 'would provoke comments from the government'.⁷

The *dalam* of Banda Aceh included several royal cemeteries. The Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL) captured the *dalam* in 1874 and turned it into a military base. In the process, valuables were confiscated by KNIL personnel, and various valuable items which came from the sultan's quarters and burial sites in Banda Aceh now reside in Dutch museums.

The provenance report describes the various burial sites of the *dalam* in Banda Aceh and seeks to trace the precise origin of the panel. Stylistic, material and technical research shows that the panel is from a cemetery dating from the 16th or 17th century. According to the provenance report, 19th-century descriptions suggest that this may have been Kandang Mas, the 17th-century cemetery which contained the tombs of Sultan Iskandar Muda (c. 1583-1636), his wife Putroe Phang, his daughter Sultana Taj ul-Alam Safiatuddin Syah and Sultan Iskandar Thani.⁸

A naval officer who arrived in Banda Aceh in 1875 wrote of this cemetery: 'Further afield one finds a cemetery on an elevated location that must be very old, because the gravestones have been entirely supplanted by waringin trees. Some top pieces of the graves are made from casted bronze and very beautifully decorated. The cemetery suffered tremendously from an earthquake. Most of the stones are mixed up and the walls are torn. The Acehnese consider it the most sacred place in the kraton. This was proven when a highly placed Acehnese, who came to offer his subjugation, requested first to visit this cemetery before touring the kraton. After his ablution, he went there, turned towards the east, bowed down, and prayed.'⁹

⁵ 'het groote graf der sultans'. Appendix 1, p. 4.

⁶ 'het geheel toch in een puinhoop verkeerd was'. Appendix 1, p. 4.

⁷ 'aanmerkingen van gouvernements wege'. Appendix 1, p. 4.

⁸ Appendix 1, p. 8.

⁹ 'Verder op komt men aan eene hooger gelegen begraafplaats, die zeker zeer oud moet zijn, daar de grafsteen geheel door de wortels der waringin's zijn verdrongen. Sommige topstukken der graven zijn van gegoten brons en zeer fraai bewerkt. Die begraafplaats heeft door eene aardbeving zeer veel geleden. De meeste steenen liggen er door elkander en de muren zijn gescheurd. Zij wordt door de Atjehers voor de meest geëerbiedigde plek in den kraton gehouden; hetgeen ook bleek, toen een hooge Atjeher, die zijne onderwerping kwam aanbieden, verzocht, om alvorens den kraton rondgeleid te worden, het eerst die begraafplaats te bezoeken. Na zich gereinigd te hebben ging hij er heen, keerde zich naar het Oosten, boog zich neder en deed zijn gebed.' Appendix 1, p. 7.

Later colonial sources also show that Kandang Mas cemetery was a special place which contained the tombs of several sultans. In 1879, i.e. after the panel had been shipped to the Netherlands by Van Nouhuys, the KNIL destroyed the cemetery to make way for buildings. In his memoirs, Karel van der Heijden (1825-1900), a KNIL commander and governor of Aceh, wrote about the ancient tombs that he removed. Letters from the assistant resident of Aceh Abraham Sol (1846-1935) show that a major incentive for destroying the cemeteries was the supposition that gold was to be found in the tombs: 'An issue that I'd rather not bring up, but which I must report in relation to a hint made by your Excellency, is the digging of Kandang Meuh, the grave of Sultan Iskandar Muda, the female Sultan Taj ul-Alam Safiatuddin Syah, Sultan Iskandar Thani, and others. Because of the gold leaf found there, thus far worth around 60,000 guilders, which clad the entirely perished coffins, perhaps there will be something in the papers about this. This banjir free zone inside the kraton is destined by the General for offices.'¹⁰ Governor-General Johan Wilhelm van Lansberge (1830-1903) seized on the destruction of the cemetery to accuse Van der Heijden of desecration and remove him from his post as governor of Aceh.¹¹

Following Indonesian independence the archaeological institute of Aceh demolished the colonial building and replaced it with a new tomb for Sultan Iskandar Muda.¹²

Nowadays the surviving ancient royal cemeteries in Banda Aceh are protected heritage.¹³

6. Response from Tim Repatriasi

Tim Repatriasi noted the value of the tomb panel: '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.' In its response Tim Repatriasi notes the importance of restitution of the panel 'to complete the narrative of Acehnese funerary craftsmanship and to restore the integrity of the Sultanate's lithic heritage.'¹⁴

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.

¹⁰ 'Eene zaak, welke ik liever niet aanroerde maar waarvan ik hier melding moet maken in verband met een anderen door Uwe Excellentie gegeven wenk, is het ontgraven der Kandang-Meug, het graf van Iskander Moeda en van de vrouwelijke Sultan Tadjoeah alam Safiatoeddin, Sultan Iskander Sani en anderen. Wegens het aldaar gevonden goudblad, tot dusver ter waarde van misschien F 60.000,-, waarmede de geheel vergane lijkkisten zijn bekleed geweest, zal er misschien wel wat over in de couranten komen. Deze bandjirvrije plek binnen den kraton is door de generaal bestemd voor het emplacement der kantoren.' Appendix 1, p. 9

¹¹ Appendix 1, p. 9.

¹² Appendix 1, p. 11.

¹³ Appendix 1, p. 2.

¹⁴ Appendix 3, p. 3.

7.2 Policy framework

The application for restitution concerns a cultural object 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. The provenance report provides sufficient information about the findspot and the circumstances under which the panel was removed.

7.4 Substantial assessment

Next, the Committee assessed whether it has been demonstrated with a reasonable degree of certainty that the loss of the cultural object whose restitution is requested was involuntary. In this matter it considers as follows.

The provenance research shows that the tomb panel with inventory number RV-179-1 was donated to 's Rijks Ethnografisch Museum (now Wereldmuseum Leiden) by Van Nouhuys in 1877. In a letter to the museum's director Van Nouhuys wrote that he had taken the panel from 'the large grave of the sultans' in the *dalam* of Banda Aceh given that 'it was entirely in ruins'. Van Nouhuys furthermore asked the museum's director whether his identity as a donor could be kept anonymous in the event the removal of the panel 'would provoke comments from the government.'¹⁵ The Committee concludes from this letter that Van Nouhuys was aware that permission was required to take the tomb panel and that he had not been granted such permission.

The Committee faced the question of whether the panel belonged to anyone at the time it was taken or whether it could be taken into possession without permission. The provenance report seeks to trace the precise origin of the panel. The *dalam* of Banda Aceh captured by the KNIL contained several royal cemeteries. The provenance report concludes that the tomb panel came from one of the 16th or 17th-century cemeteries in the *dalam* of Banda Aceh – probably Kandang Mas, which included the tombs of Sultan Iskandar Muda (c. 1583-1636), his wife Putroe Phang, his daughter Sultana Taj ul-Alam Safiatuddin Syah and Sultan Iskandar Thani.¹⁶ The Committee points to the sources cited in the provenance report regarding the significance of this burial site for the Acehnese population: 'The Acehnese consider it the most sacred place in the kraton. This was proven when a highly placed Acehnese, who came to offer his subjugation, requested first to visit this cemetery before touring the kraton. After his ablution, he went there, turned towards the east, bowed down, and prayed.'¹⁷ Tim Repatriasi pointed to the importance of restituting the tomb panel 'to complete the narrative of Acehnese funerary craftsmanship and to restore the integrity of the Sultanate's lithic heritage.'¹⁸

The Committee deduces from these sources that the tombs were and still remain of historic and religious significance to the Sultanate of Aceh and the Acehnese population. The Committee concludes

¹⁵ Appendix 1, p. 4.

¹⁶ Appendix 1, p. 8.

¹⁷ Appendix 1, p. 7.

¹⁸ Appendix 3, p. 3.

that the tombs belonged to descendants of the deceased or to the Acehnese community and were not allowed to be removed without permission. The removal of the panel constitutes a grave disregard of the rights and interests of the descendants of the deceased and the Acehnese community.

On the foregoing grounds the Committee concludes that Van Nouhuys removed the panel from an ancient burial site in Banda Aceh in 1877 without having permission to do so. The Committee emphasises the injustice caused to the descendants of the deceased and the Acehnese community by the removal of the tomb panel, given the historical and religious significance of the burial site.

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 possession of the tomb panel was involuntary and that this constituted an injustice to the descendants of the deceased and to the Acehnese community.

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 object 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 to the Republic of Indonesia of the tomb panel with inventory number RV-179-1.

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. Shatanawi, M. (2022) *Provenance report regarding Paneel van een graftombe [Tomb panel]* (PPROCE provenance reports no. 19), 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 Paneel van een graftombe [Tomb panel]

Shatanawi, Mirjam

2022

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

document license

Unspecified

[Link to publication in KNAW Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Shatanawi, M. (2022). *Provenance report regarding Paneel van een graftombe [Tomb panel]*. (PPOCE provenance reports; No. 19).

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the KNAW public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain.
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the KNAW public portal.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

E-mail address:

pure@knaw.nl

Provenance report regarding Paneel van een graftombe [Tomb Panel]

Mirjam Shatanawi

 <i>Photo: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll.no. RV-179-1</i>	Custodian	NMVB Tropenmuseum
	Current possessor	Dutch State
	Inventory number	RV-179-1
	Material/technique	Sandstone
	Measurements	33 x 54 x 7.5 cm

Summary of findings

Based on provenance research it is evident that the panel was removed in 1876 from one of the royal cemeteries in the sultan's quarter (*dalam*) in Banda Aceh, without permission from the colonial (military) authorities. Captain of the merchant navy Herman Jacob van Nouhuys (1836-1920) donated the panel to the 's Rijks Ethnographisch Museum (the current Museum Volkenkunde) in Leiden in 1877. The research did not reveal from which grave the panel originates, but it does lead into the direction of a grave or cemetery from the sixteenth or seventeenth century that no longer remains. This is likely to be Kandang Mas, which held the graves of Sultan Iskandar Muda (c. 1593-1636), his wife Putroe Phang, his daughter Sultana Taj ul-Alam Safiatuddin Syah, Sultan Iskandar Thani and several other members of their dynasty, and was destroyed by the KNIL (Dutch East Indies Army) in 1879.

Reconstruction provenance

Possibly sixteenth or seventeenth century-1876

One of the royal cemeteries in Banda Aceh

1876

H.J. van Nouhuys

NL-LdnRMV-A1-3-290, Archives of the Museum of Ethnology, letter H.J. van Nouhuys to Conrad Leemans, director of the Museum of Ethnology, 20 January 1877.

1877-present

's Rijks Ethnografisch Museum (today NMVW Museum Volkenkunde)

NL-LdnRMV-A1-3-290, Archives of the Museum of Ethnology, letter H.J. van Nouhuys to Conrad Leemans, director of the Museum of Ethnology, 20 January 1877.

Introduction and context

This sandstone panel was taken from one of royal cemeteries at the sultan's quarter (*dalam*) in Banda Aceh. It was removed from the cemetery by captain of the merchant navy Herman Jacob van Nouhuys (1836-1920) and gifted to the Museum Volkenkunde (Museum of Ethnology) in Leiden in 1877.

After the Dutch conquest of the *dalam* in 1874, it was converted into a military base. The KNIL officers and soldiers roamed the compound searching for valuables, and in the collections of Dutch museums more than 25 objects have been identified as originating from the *dalam*, including four tomb ornaments, all of them taken between 1874 and 1876 from the cemeteries within the *dalam*. In total there are 33 gravestones and tomb ornaments from Aceh in museum collections in the Netherlands (two in Museum Bronbeek, the rest in NMVW). Today the royal cemeteries of Banda Aceh are listed as (protected) heritage sites.¹

Object information

The rectangular panel is made of grey sandstone. Grey sandstone is associated with the earlier periods of Islamic graves in Aceh; according to historian Daniel Perret its use ended in the sixteenth century.² The calligraphic inscription in Arabic is divided over two lines and carved out from the sandstone.

لا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَمُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ
لا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَمُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ

¹ Cut Dewi. 2015. "Iconic Architectural Heritage in Banda Aceh: Remembering and Conservation in Post-Disaster Contexts." PhD diss., Canberra, Australian National University.

² Daniel Perret, "Some Reflections on Ancient Islamic Tombstones Known as Batu Aceh in the Malay World," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 35, no. 103 (2007): 317, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639810701677092>.

The inscription is twice the *shahada*, the Islamic declaration of faith, in the first line followed by *salawat*, praise to the Prophet Muhammad. The calligraphic style is *thuluth*, a monumental cursive script that is widely used as a decorative style in Islamic objects. The panel contains no historic information, such as the name of the deceased or a date, which makes it rather difficult to locate it historically. Inscriptions in calligraphic *thuluth* script can be found on gravestones and tombs in Banda Aceh from different periods, but especially the sixteenth century. Sandstone was used for all royal gravestones and tombs in Banda Aceh. It was also used for calligraphic panels in architectural buildings such as mosques.

The panel is broken in two pieces. This probably happened during transport from Aceh to the Netherlands or during storage at the museum, as Van Nouhuys does not mention any damage to the panel. However, the catalogue of the Museum Volkenkunde, published in 1912, already mentions that the panel is broken.³ The donor, H.J. van Nouhuys, called the object a “gravestone” (*grafsteen*) in his letter to the museum, which suggests that he thought to have a complete gravestone in his possession, rather than a piece of a tomb.

However, the back has a ledge on the horizontal side, which indicates that the panel was part of a larger structure, possibly a tomb, and the ledge was used to make it rest on another part of the structure.



Back of the panel (Photo by author)

Provenance report

The panel was donated to Museum Volkenkunde by captain of the merchant navy Herman Jacob van Nouhuys (1836-1920) in 1877. Van Nouhuys was a regular donor to the museum; between 1867 and 1877 he donated twenty objects, all of which he had brought to the Netherlands from his work-related travels to the Dutch East Indies. The panel RV-179-1 was his last donation, and in 1879 he quit his job as a captain.

³ Hendrik Willem Fischer, *Atjèh, Gajō- en Alaslanden (Sumatra I)* (Leiden: Brill, 1912), 197. <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:129408>

In February 1876 Van Nouhuys became captain of the cargo vessel *Europa* of the company J.R. Veder and sons in Rotterdam.⁴ In April 1876 the *Europa* went from Amsterdam to Newcastle, England, to get a cargo of 1,500 tons of coal to transport to Breueh Island (Poeloe Bras), Aceh.⁵ On 25 April the ship departed from Newcastle and it arrived on 14 August at Breueh Island.⁶ On 18 October, after offloading the cargo in Breueh, it arrived in Penang. In his memoir Van Nouhuys writes that he spent some time in Breueh, where his only company was the lighthouse keeper.⁷ In this period, he went twice to mainland Aceh, and once he went with an English ship along the Aceh coast to deliver cattle and food supplies ("vivres") to the various [Dutch] posts. So, in this period, between 14 August and early October 1876, he must have visited Banda Aceh, where he removed the panel. In January 1877 Van Nouhuys was still in Cilacap (Java) and he had received orders to go to Falmouth (England) and then to Le Havre (France), so he sent the panel with the cargo ship *Johanna en Margaretha* of captain H.G. Ruhaak to the Netherlands.⁸

In a letter to the museum Van Nouhuys wrote that he took the panel from the "large grave of the sultans" (*het groote graf der sultans*) within the confines of the kraton (a more correct term would be *dalam*) or sultan's quarter.⁹ Van Nouhuys added that when he visited the kraton's cemetery it was entirely in ruins (*het geheel toch in een puinhoop verkeerd was*), so he took the panel hoping it would have value for the museum. In return he asked to be informed of the meaning of the inscription. Remarkably, Van Nouhuys also asked director Conrad Leemans of the Museum of Ethnology if he thought that the case (i.e. the fact that he took away the panel) would provoke comments from the government (*aanmerkingen van gouvernements wege*). In that case, Van Nouhuys would rather prefer to remain anonymous as a donor. On 28 June 1877 Leemans confirms the receipt of the panel and provides Van Nouhuys with the requested translation of the inscription, but remains silent on the thorny question.¹⁰

Identification of original location

In 1876, when Van Nouhuys took the panel, there were several cemeteries within the walls of the kraton (*dalam*). The *Beschrijving van den kraton van Groot-Atjeh*, published by the Ministry of Colonies in 1874, and the accompanying map list five different cemeteries.¹¹ So, which one was the "large grave of the sultans" mentioned by Van Nouhuys?

Three of the five cemeteries correspond with today's Kandang XII, Kandang Meuh, and Makam raja-raja dinasti Bugis (the cemetery of the rulers of the eighteenth-century Bugis dynasty). The Bugis cemetery holds the graves of Sultan Alauddin Ahmad Syah I (d. 1735) and his successor. Kandang Meuh currently holds the graves of Sultan Alauddin Mahmud Syah I (d. 1781) and his relatives, as well as the graves of Sultan Alauddin Ibrahim Mansur Syah (d. 1870) and his relatives. Kandang XII

⁴ Stichting Maritiem-Historische Database. "EUROPA - ID 16027." <https://www.marhisdata.nl/schip?id=16027>

⁵ H.J. van Nouhuys, *Herinneringen uit de eerste jaren van mijn zeemansloopbaan aan de hand van mijn datumlijst neergeschreven in 1919* (transcript). Collection Maritiem Museum Rotterdam, inv. no. H743.

⁶ "Zeetijdingen," *Het vaderland*, April 29, 1876, Dag edition, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB23:001400101:mpeg21:a00013>; "Zeetijdingen," *Het vaderland*, October 10, 1876, Dag edition, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB23:001402087:mpeg21:a00023>.

⁷ H.J. van Nouhuys, *Herinneringen uit de eerste jaren van mijn zeemansloopbaan aan de hand van mijn datumlijst neergeschreven in 1919* (transcript). Collection Maritiem Museum Rotterdam, inv. no. H743.

⁸ H.J. van Nouhuys, *Herinneringen uit de eerste jaren van mijn zeemansloopbaan aan de hand van mijn datumlijst neergeschreven in 1919* (transcript). Collection Maritiem Museum Rotterdam, inv. no. H743. Letter H.J. van Nouhuys to Conrad Leemans, 20 January 1877. Archives of the Museum of Ethnology, NL-LdnRMV-A1-3-290.

⁹ Letter H.J. van Nouhuys to Conrad Leemans, 20 January 1877. Archives of the Museum of Ethnology, NL-LdnRMV-A1-3-290.

¹⁰ Letter Conrad Leemans to H.J. van Nouhuys, 28 June 1877. Archives of the Museum of Ethnology, NL-LdnRMV-A1-3-156.

¹¹ *Beknopte beschrijving van den kraton van Groot-Atjeh en omstreken, alsmede van zijne verdedigingskracht en bewapening en van de merkwaardigheden daarin aangetroffen* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1874). <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:128865>

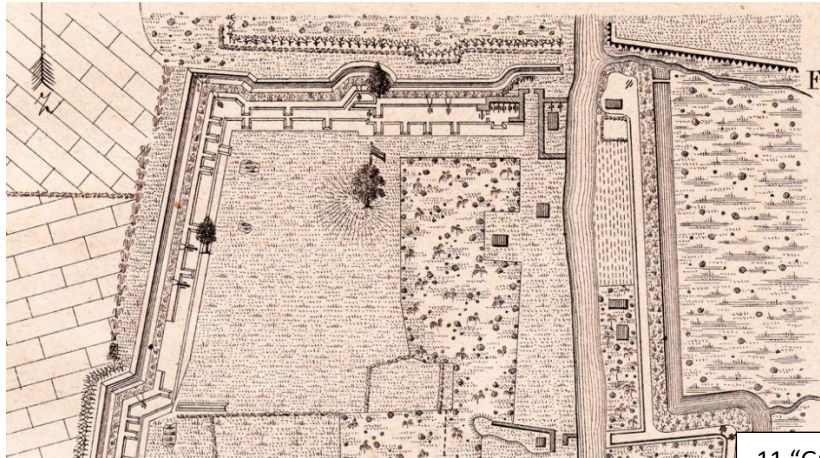
holds sixteenth-century graves, beginning with Sultan Ali Mughayat Syah (d. 1530). Besides the three cemeteries that still exist, the map with the *Beschrijving* depicts two cemeteries which today no longer remain.

The 1874 map identifies Kandang XII (on the left bank of the river) as the largest cemetery, but the *Beschrijving* only mentions in some detail Kandang Meuh and other cemeteries on the right bank of the river:

“On the right bank of the Krueng Daru are there are the graves of Sultan Ibrahim Alauddin Mansur Syah [sic], and the former rulers of the Aceh empire, as well as individuals who belonged to the ruling family.”¹²

The other remarks about the cemeteries in the *Beschrijving* are rather derogative; the graves are “derelict” and “devoid of royal splendour,” even though the only remarkable features of the kraton are the graves of the sultans “that feature stones resembling urns on top, and which are decorated with Arabic script.”

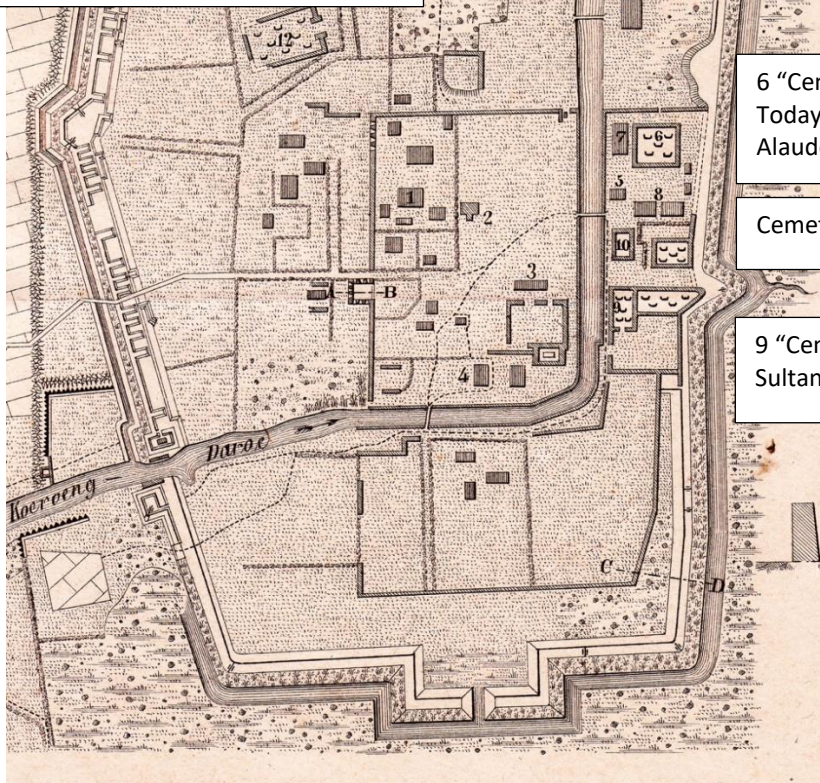
¹² *Beknopte beschrijving van den kraton van Groot-Atjeh en omstreken, alsmede van zijne verdedigingskracht en bewapening en van de merkwaardigheden daarin aangetroffen*, 6.



Map in *Beknopte beschrijving van den kraton van Groot-Atjeh en omstreken* (1874).

12 "cemetery of individuals belonging to the entourage of the Sultan" Today: Kandang XII

11 "Grave of Panglima Muda" This is in the vicinity of today's makam raja raja dinasti Bugis



6 "Cemetery of Sultan Ibrahim and his two children" Today: Kandang Meuh with the grave of Sultan Alauddin Ibrahim Mansur Syah (d. 1870)

Cemetery without name or number.

9 "Cemetery of the former rulers" Today: new tomb of Sultan Iskandar Muda, built after 1952

Verklaring der nummers en teekens.

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 1 Woonhuis van den Sultan. | Bosch. |
| 2 Kruithuis. | Kampong. |
| 3 Raadhuis. | Moeras. |
| 4 Huis van den ouden Sjabander. | Suikerrietvelden. |
| 5 Kantoor van den Sultan. | Rijstvelden. |
| 6 Begraafplaats van den Sultan Ibrahim en zijne twee kinderen. | Steenen huizen en muren. |
| 7 Eetzaal van den ouden Sultan. | Bamboeren huizen. |
| 8 Huis van Soetjoet Rida en hare volgelingen. | Inlandsche graven. |
| 9 Begraafplaats van vroegere vorsten. | Levende paggers. |
| 10 Mesigit. | Verhakkingen. van bamboe doeri. |
| 11 Graf van Panglima Moeda. | Wegen en voetpaden. |
| 12 Begraafplaats van personen, behorende tot de omgeving van den Sultan. | Inlandsche versterkingen. |
| | Loopgraven. |
| | Tegel. |

It is clear that the Dutch misunderstood some aspects of the cemeteries. The map with the *Beschrijving* describes Kandang XII as “the burial place of individuals belonging to the entourage of the Sultan” (*personen behoorende tot de omgeving van den Sultan*). The same wording is used in the map reproduced in Jan van Swieten’s *De waarheid over onze vestiging in Atjeh* (1879).¹³ In reality, it contained the graves of the sultans of the sixteenth-century dynasty that founded the Aceh Darussalam sultanate, starting with Sultan Ali Mughayat Syah (d. 1530) and his sons.¹⁴ Another map, first published in 1874, lists Kandang XII as the “royal graves” (*vorstengraven*) and Kandang Meuh as “cemetery of the Sultans” (*begraafplaats der sultans*).¹⁵ The three other cemeteries are indicated twice as “cemetery” and the third as “graves.”

So, what do colonial sources tell us about the two cemeteries that no longer remain, and what happened to them? Just after the conquest of the dalam in January 1874, an anonymous navy officer sent a letter with his eyewitness account to the Dutch newspaper *Amsterdamsche Courant*, including a description of several of the cemeteries.¹⁶ He describes a chapel-like mosque (*missigit*) located on a slight elevation and adjacent to a bronze clock (the *cakra donya* that in 1915 was moved to the terrain of the Aceh Museum), hanging from a tree. He then describes another cemetery:

“We also arrive at a cemetery that without doubt must be very old, because the roots of waringin trees have entirely overgrown the gravestones. Some of the gravemarkers are made from casted bronze and very beautiful. It is only regretful that the entire cemetery seems to be destroyed by an earthquake. Everything is mixed up and the walls are torn. It is refreshingly cool in there and from here one has a beautiful view on the kraton.”¹⁷

Navy officer Johan Korndörffer (1829-1882) who arrived in Banda Aceh in 1875, gives a similar description:¹⁸

“Further afield one finds a cemetery on an elevated location that must be very old, because the gravestones have been entirely supplanted by waringin trees. Some top pieces of the graves are made from casted bronze and very beautifully decorated. The cemetery suffered tremendously from an earthquake. Most of the stones are mixed up and the walls are torn. The Acehnese consider it the most sacred place in the kraton. This was proven when a highly placed Acehnese, who came to offer his subjugation, requested first to visit this cemetery before touring the kraton. After his ablution, he went there, turned towards the east, bowed down, and prayed.”¹⁹

¹³ J. van Swieten, *De waarheid over onze vestiging in Atjeh* (Zaltbommel: Joh. Noman en Zoon, 1879).

<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKIT03:000157425>

¹⁴ Ludvik Kalus and Claude Guillot, “Bayt al-rijāl: premier cimetièr royal du sultanat d’Aceh [Épigraphie islamique d’Aceh 4],” *Archipel* 80, no. 1 (2010): 211–55, <https://doi.org/10.3406/arch.2010.4180>.

¹⁵ G. J. Thieme, Gijsbert Brandt Hooijer, and J. de Roos, *Platte grond van den Kraton [Kotaradja] in den toestand op 24 januari*, [1874] 1896.

¹⁶ *De Tijd: godsdienstig-staatkundig dagblad*, April 6, 1874, Dag edition, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010263630>.

¹⁷ “Verder komen we nog aan een begraafplaats, die zeker zeer oud moet zijn, daar ook hier de grafsteenen geheel door de wortels der waringin-boomen verdrongen zijn. Sommige der grafteekens zijn van gegoten brons en zeer fraai. Slechts is het jammer, dat de geheele grafplaats door een aardbeving verwoest schijnt. Alles toch ligt door elkander en de muren zijn gescheurd. ‘t Is daar verkwikkend koel, en men heeft er een schoon gezicht op den kraton.”

¹⁸ Johan Jacob Korndörffer, “Rapport van den kapitein der 1ste klasse bij het korps Mariniers J. J. Korndörffer, aan Zijne Excellentie den Minister van Marine, over de reis van Nederland via Batavia naar Atjeh, enz.,” in *Mededeelingen betreffende het Zeewezen*, vol. 20 (’s Gravenhage: De Gebroeders van Cleef, 1877), 17. https://books.google.nl/books/about/Mededeelingen_betreffende_het_Zeewezen.html

¹⁹ “Verder op komt men aan eene hooger gelegen begraafplaats, die zeker zeer oud moet zijn, daar de grafsteenen geheel door de wortels der waringin’s zijn verdrongen. Sommige topstukken der graven zijn van gegoten brons en zeer fraai bewerkt. Die begraafplaats heeft door eene aardbeving zeer veel geleden. De meeste steenen liggen er door elkander en de muren zijn gescheurd. Zij wordt door de Atjehers voor de meest geëerbiedigde plek in den kraton gehouden; hetgeen ook bleek, toen een hooge Atjeher, die zijne onderwerping kwam aanbieden, verzocht, om alvorens den kraton rondgeleid te worden, het eerst die begraafplaats te bezoeken. Na zich gereinigd te hebben ging hij er heen, keerde zich naar het Oosten, boog zich neder en deed zijn gebed.”

These descriptions match Van Nouhuys's remark of the cemetery in which he found the panel being entirely in ruins (*het geheel toch in een puinhoop verkeerd was*). But which location do the navy officers describe? Kandang XII was situated on a slight elevation, also called the *grootte hill* (large hill),²⁰ and photographs show it as surrounded by waringin trees.²¹ Of interest are also the mentioned bronze gravemarkers, as bronze was indeed used for the markers on sixteenth-century graves at Kandang XII.²² However, waringin trees grew everywhere on the terrain and bronze seems to have been used well into the seventeenth century.²³ Colonial-period photographs of Kandang XII also do not show "everything mixed up" and most of the tombs seem more or less intact. Therefore, it is well possible that the navy officers' accounts describe a seventeenth-century cemetery, indicated on the map as no. 9 "Cemetery of the former rulers," which today no longer exists. This burial site named Kandang Mas contained the graves of Sultan Iskandar Muda (c. 1583-1636), who was credited with bringing the Aceh Darussalam sultanate to the peak of its power, and members of his dynasty. According the Acehnese chronicle *Bustan al-Salatin* (completed around 1642), the tombs were overlaid with gold and inlaid with gemstones (this was all gone by 1874), with the largest one reserved for Sultan Iskandar Muda.²⁴ It was destroyed in early 1879 by the KNIL.

From 1874 onward the *dalam* served for years as a military base for the Dutch East Indies Army (KNIL). In his memoir, KNIL commander Karel van der Heijden (1826-1900) writes that in the period when the KNIL converted the kraton into a military base, many graves (inclusive of human remains) inside the compound were cleared, as the kraton was "littered with them" (*als 't ware overdekt*).²⁵ The clearing included a large *kramat* (Islamic sacred space, usually a grave) at the west side. In 1879 he removed "very old graves" (*zeer oud grafgesteente*) of individuals who were, according to Van der Heijden, not revered or even known.²⁶ The graves, situated on the east side, were at least 300 years old, and the human remains inside pulverized when they were dug up.²⁷ Abraham Sol (1846-1935), who worked as assistant resident in Aceh at the time, identified these graves as belonging to Sultan Iskandar Muda, his wife Putroe Phang, his daughter Sultana Taj ul-Alam Safiatuddin Syah, Sultan Iskandar Thani and several others.²⁸ The space was used to build administrative and military buildings.

From the correspondence between Sol and Governor General Johan Wilhelm van Lansberge (1830-1903), whose permission was sought to clear the graves, it is evident that a major incentive was the rumour that gold was buried inside the graves.²⁹ On 29 October 1878 Sol wrote: "after the answer

²⁰ Een Officier van het Nederlands-Indisch Leger in actieven dienst, *De Atjeh-Onlusten in 1896* (Rotterdam: Nijgh & van Ditmar, 1896), 8. <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:129763>

²¹ Sultangraven voor een waringinboom te Koetaradja, Collection Leiden University Library, inv. no. KITLV 116418. <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:823704> This photograph seems to be older than the date given on the website (1891).

²² Several Dutch sources mention bronze elements on graves. For the use of bronze and gold on sixteenth and seventeenth century graves, see Kalus and Guillot, "Bayt al-rijâl," 212-13.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Kalus and Guillot, "Bayt al-rijâl," 213; R.A. Hoesein Djajadiningrat, "De ceremonie van het 'poela batèë' op het graf van Soeltan Iskandar II van Atjeh (1636-1641)," *Tijdschrift voor Indische taal-, land- en volkenkunde* 69 (1929): 106.

²⁵ Karel van der Heijden, *Memorie van den luitenant-generaal K. van der Heijden naar aanleiding van het voorgevallene op 18 nov. 1881 in de tweede kamer der staten-generaal* ('s-Gravenhage: Stemberg, 1882), 107. <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKIT03:000157574>

²⁶ Van der Heijden, *Memorie van den Luitenant-General K[arel] van der Heijden naar aanleiding van het voorgevallene op 18 Nov. 1881 in de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal*, 36. Governor General van Lansberge accused Van der Heijden of desecration.

²⁷ Van der Heijden, 182.

²⁸ Letter A. Sol to J.W. van Lansberge, 24 January 1879. National Archives/Van Lansberge family 2.21.103 inv. no. 138. See also Kreemer, *Atjeh: algemeen samenvattend overzicht van land en volk van Atjeh en onderhoorigheden I* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1922), 53. <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB02B:000000164>

²⁹ Letters A. Sol to J.W. van Lansberge, 1878-1879. National Archives/Van Lansberge family 2.21.103 inv. no. 138.

from your Excellency I have made preparations to obtain the gold buried in the kraton.”³⁰ This is followed up on 24 January 1879.³¹

“An issue that I’d rather not bring up, but which I must report in relation to a hint made by your Excellency, is the digging of Kandang Meuh,³² the grave of Sultan Iskandar Muda, the female Sultan Taj ul-Alam Safiatuddin Syah, Sultan Iskandar Thani, and others. Because of the gold leaf found there, thus far worth around 60,000 guilders, which clad the entirely perished coffins,³³ perhaps there will be something in the papers about this. This banjir [flood] free zone inside the kraton is destined by the General [i.e. Van der Heijden] for offices. [...] About Kandang Mas it must be mentioned that in past times the kraton was several times in the power of [the Portuguese?] and they took the gilding from the heavy stone monuments. That these ornaments were entirely gilded and the coffins clad with gold leaf and suasa probably resulted in the story of coffins made from solid gold and suasa and gold buried inside to the value of 20 *bakars* (60 *pikals*), which was copied in Valentijn’s work.³⁴ Meanwhile, according to Teuku Kali, a whole lot of golden rings must have been deposited under the grave of Putroe Phang, Iskandar Muda’s wife, for whom the entire impressive kandang originally was made, and they [the golden rings] still have to appear.”

According to Sol, the location was needed to avoid having to to elevate other land(*ten einde het kostbare ophoogen van andere terreinen te vermijden*).³⁵ From this remark it is evident that Kandang Mas was situated on an elevation, exactly as described in the navy officers’ accounts.

From the correspondence between Sol and Van Lansberge, it is evident that the Governor General was regularly informed about the progress. Yet, Van Der Heijden and Van Lansberge were embroiled in a power struggle. The Governor General took this opportunity to accuse Van der Heijden of desecration of the graves, and removed him from his position as Governor of Aceh. This prompted Van der Heijden to write a response in defense of his actions.³⁶

Unfortunately, the graves at Kandang Mas were not the only graves that were cleared and, after the destruction by the KNIL, none of the seventeenth-century graves at the former *dalam* remained. Therefore, there is no contemporary visual material to compare the panel at Museum Volkenkunde with any remaining tombs. An examination of the largest repositories of colonial photography of the Dutch East Indies, the National Museum of World Cultures and the KITLV images, presents us with

³⁰ “na het van uwe Excellentie bekomen antwoord heb ik voorbereidingen getroffen om het begraven goud in den kraton magtig te worden.”

³¹ “Eene zaak, welke ik liever niet aanroerde maar waarvan ik hier melding moet maken in verband met een anderen door Uwe Excellentie gegeven wenk, is het ontgraven der Kandang-Meug, het graf van Iskander Moeda en van de vrouwelijke Sultan Tadjoeah alam Safiatoeddin, Sultan Iskander Sani en anderen. Wegens het aldaar gevonden goudblad, tot dusver ter waarde van misschien F 60.000,-, waarmede de geheel vergane lijkisten zijn bekleed geweest, zal er misschien wel wat over in de couranten komen. Deze bandjirvrije plek binnen den kraton is door de generaal bestemd voor het emplacement der kantoren. [...] Van de Kandang Mas valt nog dit te vermelden dat in vroegere tijd de kraton meermaals in de magt der [onleesbaar, Portugens?] is geweest en toen door hen het verguldsel van de zware steenen grafmonumenten is afgenomen. Het geheel verguld zijn dezer ornamenten en het bekleden van de lijkisten met goudblad en soewasa, heeft waarschijnlijk aanleiding gegeven tot het in Valentijn’s werk overgenomen verhaal van geheel gouden en soeasa lijkisten en van medebegraven goud ter waarde van 20 bakars (60 pikals). Intusschen moeten volgens Toekoe Kali onder het graf van Poetri Pahang, de vrouw van Iskander Moeda, voor wie de geheele ontzagelijke kandang oorspronkelijk gemaakt is, eene menigte gouden ringen gedeponeerde, die dan nog voor den dag moeten komen.”

³² In his letters, Sol conflates Kandang Meuh with Kandang Mas.

³³ The burial of Sultan Iskandar Thani and the coffins used are mentioned in the Acehese chronicle *Bustan al-Salat* as well as Dutch historical sources, see Djajadiningrat, “De ceremonie van het ‘poela batèè’ op het graf van Soeltan Iskandar II van Atjeh (1636-1641).”

³⁴ He is referring to the publication from 1726 by François Valentijn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, vervattende een naaukeurige en uitvoerige verhandeling van Nederlands mogentheyd in die gewesten, benevens eene wydlustige beschryvinge der Moluccos, Amboina, Banda, Timor, en Solor, Java, en alle de eylanden onder dezelve landbestieringen behoorende: het Nederlands comptoir op Suratte, en de levens der groote Mogols; als ook een keurlyke verhandeling van 't wezentlykste, dat men behoort te weten van Choromandel, Pegu, Arracan, Bengale, Mocha, Persien, Malacca, Sumatra, Ceylon, Malabar, Celebes of Macassar, China, Japan, Tayouan of Formosa, Tonkin, Cambodia, Siam, Borneo, Bali, Kaap der Goede Hoop en van Mauritius*.

³⁵ Letter A. Sol to J.W. van Lansberge, 24 January 1879. National Archives/Van Lansberge family 2.21.103 inv. no. 138.

³⁶ Van der Heijden, *Memorie van den luitenant-generaal K. van der Heijden naar aanleiding van het voorgevallene op 18 nov. 1881 in de tweede kamer der staten-generaal*, 182–85. See also letter K. van der Heijden to J.W. van Lansberge, 20 February 1879. National Archives/Van Lansberge family 2.21.103 inv. no. 129.

two images of the area. An 1874 drawing shows the *cakra donya* (no. 10 on the map) and behind it a walled cemetery surrounded by waringin trees, which according to the draughtsman (a French soldier) is the cemetery of the holy men (*cimetière des marabouts*). This is the cemetery without name or number on the 1874 map.



Frederic Pierre (1840-1875), *Cimetière des Marabouts et Kiosque-Mosquée* (ce dernier est actuellement la résidence de Mr. le Colonel van Peel, command[an]t en chef l'armée d'Atjeh), 1874. Photograph of original drawing (part of a set of drawings that were donated to Governor General van Lansberge in 1874). Collection Leiden University Library, inv. no. KITLV 36C313. <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:855451>

A photograph shows tombs in the area where the *cakra donya* was located in December 1915, just before it was relocated to the terrain of the Aceh Museum. This photo shows location no. 9 on the map, in the vicinity of the current tomb of Sultan Iskander Muda, and depicts several then recently constructed royal tombs.



Christiaan Staargaard (1885-1951), The *cakra donya* and royal tombs, 20 December 1915. Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen (Tropenmuseum), inv. no. TM-60042757. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/240460>

From the visual evidence (maps and images), it seems that most of the graves indicated on the 1874 map in this particular area were cleared during the early years of the Dutch occupation of the area. In later days, colonial government buildings, including the governor's office and Bureau Burgerlijke Openbare Werken or B.O.W., were erected on the location of Kandang Mas. After independence the B.O.W. office building was torn down and replaced with the current tomb of Sultan Iskandar Muda. The resurrection of the tomb was supervised by Lembaga Purbakala, the archaeological society of Aceh, after Pocut Meurah (before 1860-1955), widow of Sultan Alauddin Mahmud Syah II (c. 1854-1874), had indicated the correct location in 1952.³⁷

Art historical analysis

Unfortunately, all seventeenth-century graves inside the former *dalam* have been destroyed by the KNIL, and no close-up images of the seventeenth-century cemeteries have been found during this research. Therefore, no comparison can be made with graves from that period. None of the colonial-period images of any of the cemeteries feature panels like the one at Museum Volkenkunde as decorative elements on the graves. The sixteenth-century tombs at Kandang XII do not feature similar panels, nor do they provide spaces where such a panel could be attached. These tombs, however, are decorated with friezes in *thuluth* script, similar to that on the panel, whereas the nineteenth-century graves are decorated with simpler *jawi* script.



G.R. Lambert & Co., Friezes with *thuluth* script on the tomb of Sultan Alauddin Ri'ayat Syah al-Kahar (d. 1571), located at Kandang XII (detail), 1885-1895. Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen (Tropenmuseum), inv. no. TM-60022777. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/30541>

³⁷ "Kranslegging," *Het nieuwsblad voor Sumatra*, 27 December 1952, Dag edition; "Restauratie van grafmonumenten," *Het nieuwsblad voor Sumatra*, 18 December 1952. <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010476814:mpeg21:a0041>
<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010476808:mpeg21:a0056>
<http://disbudpar.acehprov.go.id/makam-sultan-iskandar-muda>



Woodbury & Page, Friezes with *jawi* script on the tomb of Sultan Alauddin Ibrahim Mansur Syah, d. 1870 (detail), 1875-1885. Collection Leiden University Library, inv. no. KITLV 111819. <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:817645>

Of course, another possibility is that the panel was found in a cemetery, yet originates from another location, such as the adjacent mosque. Sandstone panels with calligraphic inscriptions in *thuluth* script were used in architectural structures, such as mosques, during the period of the Aceh Darussalam Sultanate.³⁸

In conclusion, it is not clear from which grave the panel originates, but Van Nouhuys's remark about the cemetery in which he found the panel being the large royal cemetery which was entirely in ruins leads into the direction of Kandang Mas. Stylistically the *thuluth* style of the panel belongs more to the sixteenth century than to later periods, although the style differs from the graves at Kandang XII.³⁹ The material of grey sandstone is associated with the sixteenth century. Therefore, also the art historical analysis points in the direction of a sixteenth or seventeenth century grave that no longer remains.

³⁸ Sandstone panel from the *mihrab* (prayer niche) in a mosque near Banda Aceh, sixteenth-eighteenth centuries. Collection National Museum of World Cultures (Tropenmuseum), inv. no. TM-674-859. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/177661>

³⁹ Email message Prof. Ludvik Kalus to author, 20 October 2020.

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 Acehese 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