

COLONIAL COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE

RECOMMENDATION

Objects

Gravestones – Batu Aceh RV-3600-590, RV-3600-591, RV-3600-592, RV-3600-593, RV-3600-594, RV-3600-595



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

Recommendation number

ID-2026-7

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).

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 (hereinafter referred to as: the Minister) for restitution of the gravestone referred to in the application as 'Batu Aceh' with inventory number RV-3600-594 from the collection of the Dutch State, which is in the custody of the Wereldmuseum. Tim Repatriasi requested that the gravestones with inventory numbers RV-3600-590, RV-3600-591, RV-3600-592, RV-3600-593 and RV-3600-595 also be included in the recommendation.

2. The objects

The gravestones are from Aceh. They are made of sandstone and bear calligraphic inscriptions in Arabic script. The inscriptions are generic texts, comparable to the *shahada*, the Islamic profession of faith.

The gravestones are registered at the Wereldmuseum under inventory numbers RV-3600-590, RV-3600-591, RV-3600-592, RV-3600-593, RV-3600-594 and RV-3600-595.

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

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 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>

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 – 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 gravestone 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 referred to as: PPROCE) the custodian of the objects commissioned research into the provenance history; the provenance report (*appendix 1*) was published in 2022. 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 also applies to the gravestones with inventory numbers RV-3600-589, RV-3600-590, RV-3600-591, RV-3600-592, RV-3600-593, RV-3600-595 and RV-3600-596 (*appendix 2*).

The Committee discussed the application for restitution and the provenance report at a meeting on 23 January 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 requested that the gravestones with inventory numbers RV-3600-590, RV-3600-591, RV-3600-592, RV-3600-593 and RV-3600-595 also be included in the recommendation. Tim Repatriasi is not seeking restitution of the gravestones with inventory numbers RV-3600-589 and RV-3600-596. Tim Repatriasi furthermore issued a response to the contents of the provenance report; this is covered 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 gravestones are known as *Batu Aceh* (Aceh stones). This type of gravestone originated in Cambay (Gujarat, India). The Sultanate of Aceh (1496–1903) started using sandstone for the local production of Gujarat-style gravestones and this led to the development of a distinctive Acehnese style. Batu Aceh were used for the tombs of prominent people, such as members of the sultan's family and other aristocrats.⁵ Men and women had differently shaped gravestones, with those for women having a winged shape.⁶

The gravestones came into the possession of George Nijpels (1859-1950) at some point between September 1901 and April 1902. Nijpels was an officer in the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL) and was stationed in Aceh for some time from September 1901.⁷

The gravestones are from Lhoknga (at the time Lho-Nga)⁸ and were removed in order to make way for a racecourse, which was taken into use in October 1901.⁹ In 1902 Nijpels shipped the gravestones to the Netherlands and gifted them to the Hoofdcursus, a military training institute in Kampen which managed a collection of ethnographic objects. Nijpels helped build the collection and as such was one of the most important contacts in the Netherlands East Indies.¹⁰

In correspondence with the Hoofdcursus in April 1902 Nijpels wrote the following about the gravestones:

'From Notary Meeters (sic) I received Acehnese clothes, from a burial mound, which had to be excavated to make way for the new racecourse, eight gravestones'

⁵ Appendix 1, p. 3.

⁶ Appendix 1, p. 4.

⁷ Appendix 1, pp. 6, 7.

⁸ The Commission uses the current spelling of place names.

⁹ Appendix 1, p. 8.

¹⁰ Appendix 1, p. 7.

‘I am sending you fresh evidence of my renewed ambition [...], Herein you will find 1. The gravestones [...] 4. several Acehese weapons, including a breech-loading carbine.’¹¹

With regard to the shipment of the gravestones to the Netherlands in 1902 Nijpels wrote to curator J.M. Somer on 27 October 1937: ‘Having left for Aceh shortly after, I remained active and sent the grave markers which are perhaps unique outside Aceh, having notified all the relevant authorities.’¹²

The provenance report notes that – as is customary – the inscriptions on the gravestones contain no historical information, such as the name of the deceased or date of death, meaning that it is impossible to trace which tombs they came from. The precise location of the cemetery is also unknown. The racecourse was only in use for a short period of time and as far as is known it is not marked on maps. No photographs of the racecourse were found during the research.¹³

In 1923 the collection was transferred from the Hoofdcursus in Kampen to the Ethnographic Museum of the Royal Netherlands Military Academy (KMA) in Breda. In 1956 the care of the KMA collection was handed over to the National Museum of Ethnology (now Wereldmuseum Leiden).¹⁴

The provenance report points to the importance of gravestones of this type and research into these: ‘Gravestones are among the oldest relics in Aceh from the Islamic period. Research into the gravestones began in the colonial period (late nineteenth century) and initially centred on the gravestones as a historical source for the history of Islam in Aceh. More recently (twenty-first century), there is also art historical research being conducted into the gravestones.’¹⁵ There is keen interest in Aceh in such gravestones from the Islamic period, as is evidenced for example by an association of volunteers who maintain the gravestones and lobby the government for their management and preservation.¹⁶

6. Response from Tim Repatriasi

Tim Repatriasi points to the value of the gravestones: ‘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.’¹⁷

Tim Repatriasi indicated that it is not seeking restitution of the gravestones with inventory numbers RV-3600-589 and RV-3600-596: ‘While it [RV-3600-596] 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.’¹⁸

¹¹ ‘Van Notaris meeters heb ik Atjehsche kleeren gekregen, van een grafheuvel, die ten behoeve der nieuwe renbaan afgegraven moest worden, een 8tal grafstenen’; ‘zend ik je een nieuw bewijs mijner herleefde ambitie [...], Daarin vind je 1. de grafstenen [...] 4. eenige Atjehse wapens, w.o. een achterlaadkarabijn.’

Appendix 1, p. 7.

¹² ‘Kort nadien naar Atjeh vertrokken, bleef ik actief en verzond de grafteekens die buiten Atjeh misschien unique zijn, na alle betrokken autoriteiten hierin te hebben gekend.’ Appendix 1, p. 7.

¹³ Appendix 1, p. 8.

¹⁴ Appendix 1, p. 9.

¹⁵ Appendix 1, p. 3.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Appendix 3, p. 3.

¹⁸ Ibid.

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. The report provides sufficient points of reference about the source of the gravestones, their removal and their transfer to the Netherlands.

7.4 Substantial assessment

Next, the Committee assessed whether it is plausible that the loss of the gravestones was involuntary. In this matter it considers as follows.

The provenance research shows that Nijpels, an officer with the KNIL, gained possession of the gravestones at some point between September 1901 and April 1902. The gravestones came from Lhoknga and were removed from there in order to make way for a racecourse, which was taken into use at the end of 1901. Nijpels shipped the gravestones to the Netherlands in 1902 and gifted them to the military training institute the Hoofdcursus. The provenance research shows that Nijpels stated that ‘all the relevant authorities’ had been notified of the decision to ship the objects. What he meant by this is, however, unclear.¹⁹

The Committee faced the question of whether the gravestones belonged to anyone at the time of their removal or whether they could be taken into possession without permission.

Based on the provenance report it is not possible to establish who the gravestones belonged to at the time they were taken from Lhoknga or what their precise site of origin is. The inscriptions on the gravestones contain no historical information, such as the name of the deceased or date of death, and the precise location of the cemetery and the racecourse that was subsequently built there is unknown. Despite this, the Committee sees sufficient points of reference to assume that involuntary loss of possession occurred.

Given the nature and function of the gravestones the Committee considers it unlikely that the gravestones did not belong to anybody at the time of their removal and that they could be taken into possession without permission. It is plausible that the gravestones belonged to the descendants of the deceased or to the local Acehnese community.

¹⁹ ‘alle betrokken autoriteiten’. Appendix 1, p. 8.

According to the provenance report Nijpels shipped the gravestones after notifying all the relevant authorities. Nevertheless, it has in no way become plausible that the descendants of the deceased or the local Acehnese community to whom the gravestones belonged consented to the removal of the gravestones. Such consent is also improbable given the significance of the gravestones. Gravestones are among the oldest relics from Aceh from the Islamic period, and from the late 19th century the gravestones functioned as a historical source for research into the history of Islam in Aceh. The Batu Aceh were made for the tombs of prominent people, such as members of the sultan's family and other aristocrats, possibly also wealthy merchants.²⁰ Tim Repatriasi describes the value of the gravestones as follows: '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.'²¹

There is no proof of purchase by Nijpels or any other type of cession to him. Based on this it should be assumed that the loss of the gravestones was involuntary.

The Committee furthermore emphasises the injustice done to the descendants and the community by the removal of the gravestones, given their nature and special significance to the local Acehnese community.

Conclusion

On the foregoing grounds, as set out in the provenance report, the Committee is of the opinion that it is plausible that the gravestones whose restitution is requested were lost involuntarily 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 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 to the Republic of Indonesia of the gravestones RV-3600-590, RV-3600-591, RV-3600-592, RV-3600-593, RV-3600-594 and RV-3600-595 and that the metadata associated with the objects be placed at the disposal of the Republic of Indonesia.

²⁰ Appendix 1, p. 3.

²¹ Appendix 3, p. 3.

The Committee is furthermore of the opinion that the metadata, such as archive material, correspondence and other contextual documentation, should 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 Grafsteen [gravestone] Batu Aceh* (PPROCE provenance reports no. 23), 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 Grafsteen [gravestone] - Batu Aceh

Shatanawi, Mirjam

2022

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Provenance report regarding Grafsteen [*Gravestone*] – Batu Aceh

Mirjam Shatanawi

 <i>Photo: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll.no. RV-3600-594</i>	Custodian	NMVW Volkenkunde
	Current possessor	Dutch State
	Inventory number	RV-3600-594
	Material/technique	Sandstone
	Measurements	H 103.5 × W 27.5 × D 24 cm

Summary of findings

The research shows that this gravestone, along with seven others, was found in Great Aceh in 1901 by Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL) officer George Nijpels (1859-1950), who removed it and shipped it to the Netherlands. Nijpels applied for permission to do this from the (military) authorities in charge. The collection took place at the request of the Royal Netherlands Military Academy (KMA). Research in the archive, which also included documents from Nijpels, showed that the gravestones came from Lhoknga (formerly Lho-Nga) and that they were removed in order to construct a racecourse. The inscriptions on the gravestone contain no historical information, such as the name of the deceased or date of death, meaning that it is impossible to trace which graves they came from. This applies to all of the eight gravestones taken by Nijpels. The precise location of the cemetery is also unknown.

Provenance timeline

Sixteenth century - early eighteenth century

Manufacture of gravestone

After Sixteenth century – before 1901

Cemetery in Lho-Nga

Postcard from George Nijpels to Hoofdcursus Kampen], 12 April 1902. Not found in the Justinus van Nassau Museum / Royal Netherlands Military Academy archive. Transcribed by Pauljac Verhoeven in 1997-1999.

1901

George Nijpels

Postcard from George Nijpels to Hoofdcursus Kampen, 12 April 1902. Not found in the Justinus van Nassau Museum / Royal Netherlands Military Academy archive. Transcribed by Pauljac Verhoeven in 1997-1999.

1902

Shipped from Aceh to the Netherlands by George Nijpels.

Letter from George Nijpels to J.M. Somer, 27 October 1937. Unnumbered archive of Justinus van Nassau Museum / Royal Netherlands Military Academy.

1902-1923

Hoofdcursus [officer training school] of the Royal Netherlands Military Academy in Kampen

NL-LdnRMV, Justinus van Nassau archive A16, inv. no. 1, inventory book of Justinus van Nassau Museum / Royal Netherlands Military Academy.

1923-1956

Ethnographic Museum of the Royal Netherlands Military Academy in Breda

NL-LdnRMV, Justinus van Nassau Museum archive A16, inv. no. 1, inventory book of Justinus van Nassau Museum / Royal Netherlands Military Academy.

J.M. Somer, *Gids voor den bezoeker van het Ethnografisch Museum te Breda, Kasteelplein 13* (Breda: Ethnographic Museum, 1940), 8.

1956-present

's Rijks Ethnografisch Museum (today NMVW Volkenkunde)

National Museum of World Cultures (NMVW), inventory card for object RV-3600-594, digitalised in TMS.

Introduction and context

This gravestone belongs to a series of eight gravestones from Aceh (RV-3600-589 to 596, inclusive) in the collection of the 's Rijks Ethnografisch Museum (National Museum of Ethnology) in Leiden. Provenance information is only included on the inventory cards of two of the gravestones, and at the start of the research it was uncertain whether the eight gravestones had the same provenance history. Of RV-3600-594 it was known only that the object had come from the collection of the Royal Netherlands Military Academy (KMA) in Breda. The gravestone is one of the objects selected by the National Museum of World Cultures (NMVW) for research under the Pilot Project Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era (PPOCE).

Gravestones are among the oldest relics in Aceh from the Islamic period. Research into the gravestones began in the colonial period (late nineteenth century) and initially centred on the gravestones as a historical source for the history of Islam in Aceh. More recently (twenty-first century), there is also art historical research being conducted into the gravestones. There is keen interest in such gravestones in Aceh, as is evidenced for example by an association of volunteers who maintain the gravestones and lobby the government for their management and preservation. Aceh still has thousands of gravestones in situ. Only a small number of gravestones are in museums in the Netherlands and Indonesia: the gravestones are heavy and transferring them was a considerable operation for private collectors of objects from Aceh. As far as is known, there are 33 Acehnese gravestones and tomb ornaments in Dutch collections (including two in Museum Bronbeek, and the remainder at NMVW). Nineteen of these stones were collected by Willem Stammeshaus and eight by George Nijpels.

Object information

Gravestone RV-3600-594 is made of yellow sandstone and has a curved shape. The top, middle, and foot all bear calligraphic inscriptions in Arabic script. The texts are written in panels, including the central panel which contains four lines of text. The inscriptions on the gravestone contain no historical information, such as the name of the deceased or the date of death, to indicate the date of the stone or the location of the cemetery. They are generic texts, similar to the *shahada*, the Islamic profession of faith. The texts are poorly legible due to weathering of the sandstone. The gravestone features vegetal motifs and spirals on all four sides. On one side, a large piece has broken off the foot.

This type of gravestone is known as *batu Aceh* (Aceh stones) and dates back to gravestones from Cambay (Gujarat, India). During the Samudera Pasai Sultanate (thirteenth century) in North Aceh, these marble gravestones were imported from Gujarat for the graves of the sultan's family. The subsequent Aceh Sultanate (1496–1903), whose capital was Kuta Raja (present-day Banda Aceh), started to see the use of sandstone for the local manufacture of Gujarat-style gravestones. This led to the development of a distinctive Acehnese style.¹

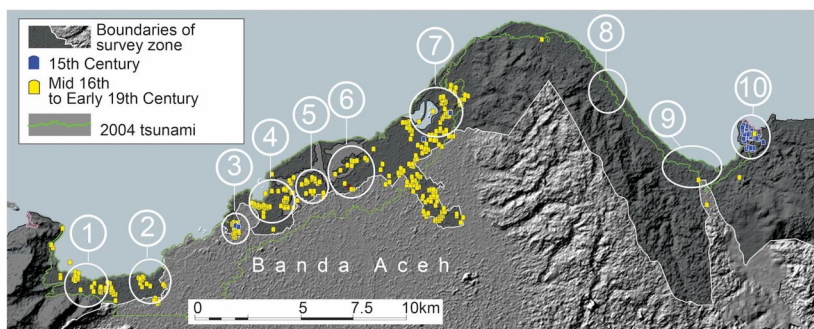
The batu Aceh were used for the graves of prominent people, such as members of the sultan's family and other aristocrats, possibly also prosperous merchants. The graves either had a single gravestone at the head end or else the grave consisted of a cenotaph with identical gravestones at the head and foot end, with the deceased buried in the ground underneath. Men and women had differently shaped gravestones, with stones for women having a winged shape. It is therefore clear that gravestone RV-3600-594 was used for a man's grave. Batu Aceh were made in vast numbers, and thousands have survived.

The shape of the batu Aceh consists of three parts: an upper part (head or crown), a middle part, and the base (foot). The ornamentation on the stones features shapes including mountains, lotuses and other flowers, vegetal motifs, and cobwebs. In many cases, the stones bear Arabic calligraphic inscriptions in various styles of script. In the case of most of the gravestones, including this one, these are generic inscriptions from the *shahada* (Islamic profession of faith) or texts from the Koran, or even pseudo-inscriptions. Various typologies have been created based on the form and ornamentation of the batu Aceh. A recent typology has been done by the French historian Daniel Perret, who dates

¹ Daniel Perret, 'Some Reflections on Ancient Islamic Gravestones Known as Batu Aceh in the Malay World', *Indonesia and the Malay World* 35, no. 103 (2007): 313–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639810701677092>.

gravestone RV-3600-594 in the collection of the National Museum of Ethnology as sixteenth century-early eighteenth century, the period in which this type of gravestone was made.² More specific dating is not possible, in his view.

The yellow sandstone for the gravestones came mainly from the islands of Pulau Breueh and Pulau Batee, to the northwest of Aceh. The stones were processed in Meuraksa, a subdistrict of Banda Aceh.³ Gravestones of yellow sandstone are found in various parts of Great Aceh, but primarily in Banda Aceh and the surrounding area.⁴ A survey along 40 kilometres of the coastline of North Aceh in 2015-2017 found 5,800 gravestones.⁵ The majority of these had generic inscriptions, with only relatively few having specific inscriptions including name and date.



Recent survey of gravestones on the north coast of Aceh.⁶

The current research found that the eight gravestones in the museum depot had been labelled incorrectly; as a result, the object photos in TMS had also been switched. In addition, two of the eight gravestones, which had been registered as missing, were found under different object numbers (RV-03-394 and RV-03-395). The photo of the researched gravestone RV-3600-594 had previously been assigned to RV-3600-592.

Provenance report

History from 1896 to 1923

The gravestone is from the collection of the Royal Netherlands Military Academy (KMA) in Breda. From 1905 this training institute amassed and curated a collection of Indonesian objects to use in the instruction of soldiers being sent out to Indonesia.⁷ The collection was displayed in a dedicated museum. In addition to the KMA in Breda, there was another military training institute, which was based in Kampen and operated under the name *Hoofdcursus* (main training school). The Hoofdcursus in Kampen started a collection of objects in 1900, which was transferred to the KMA in Breda in 1923 because the training course in Kampen was being disbanded. In 1956 the care of the KMA collection was handed over to the National Museum of Ethnology.

² Email from Daniel Perret, 5 October 2020.

³ Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, *The Achehnese*, vol. I (Leiden; London: Late E.J. Brill; Luzac & Co., 1906), 431.

⁴ Perret, "Some Reflections on Ancient Islamic Gravestones Known as Batu Aceh in the Malay World," 317.

⁵ Patrick Daly et al., "Archaeological Evidence That a Late 14th-Century Tsunami Devastated the Coast of Northern Sumatra and Redirected History," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116, no. 24 (2019): 11679–86, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1902241116>.

⁶ Daly et al.

⁷ S.H. Spoor, "Het Ethnografisch Museum van de Koninklijke Militaire Academie en den voormaligen Hoofdcursus te Breda," *Indische Gids* 60 (1938): 328–32.

One important source for research into this gravestone is the archive of the Ethnographic Museum of the KMA, which is housed in the National Museum of Ethnology.⁸ The archive is ordered but not inventoried. In addition, the research saw the retrieval of part of the archive which the museum had forgotten existed; this part is not numbered and does not currently belong to the registered archive. The deficient information regarding the archive meant that the research took longer than expected.

The gravestone belongs to a series of eight gravestones from Aceh (RV-3600-589 to 596, inclusive). The 'spat number' of the gravestone is 4859f; the other gravestones in the series are numbered 4859a to g (they are RV-3600-589 to 595, inclusive) and 4883 (RV-3600-596).⁹ 'Spat numbers' were introduced by Claas Spat (1865-1931), who was in charge of the KMA collection in Breda from 1905 to 1921. The KMA/Justinus van Nassau register lists object inv. no. 4859 as '*steen en grafmonument*' [stone grave monument].¹⁰ A loose page in a different inventory book states that (spat) numbers 4668 to 5099 had come from the Hoofdcursus.¹¹ This means that within the KMA collection the gravestone, like the other seven gravestones in this series, had come from the Hoofdcursus in Kampen. Neither the KMA nor the Ethnographic Museum of the KMA in Breda produced annual reports before the 1950s.¹² While there are some commemorative books that mention a number of gifts, none of these include ethnographic objects. The Hoofdcursus in Kampen did produce annual reports (known as yearbooks); in 1901 these also began to devote a chapter to the ethnographic collection.

The inventory books of the Hoofdcursus Kampen are also held in the archive of the Ethnographic Museum of the KMA in the National Museum of Ethnology.¹³ The inventory of the Hoofdcursus is organised by region (with dedicated sections for various regions), subdivided according to the 12-group system.¹⁴ The Hoofdcursus initially followed its own numbering system, based on function (i.e. objects with the same function were assigned the same serial number). In addition to object information, the inventory books also contain information on provenance and acquisition. The volume *Atjeh met de Gajoe en Alaslanden* [Aceh with the Gayo and Alas Lands] lists the gravestones under group XII with inv. nos. 7/1-7 as "*manlijke grafstenen*" [male gravestones] and 7/8 as "*vrouwelijke grafsteen*" [female gravestone], and states the provenance as Great Aceh. According to this inventory book, all eight gravestones were acquired from "Kapt. Der Gen. Staf G. Nijpels"¹⁵ [Captain of the General Staff G. Nijpels].

The inventory card for RV-3600-594 in TMS does not include any information on acquisition; that is only the case for the inventory cards for RV-3600-589 and 590 (spat numbers 4859a/b, Hoofdcursus numbers 7/1 and 7/2); according to the cards those gravestones were acquired from "Kapt. Der Gen. Staf J. Nijpels" [Captain of the General Staff G. Nijpels]. The name J. Nijpels on the (typed) cards is incorrect; according to the database of officers' names, there was only an officer named G. Nijpels during this period.¹⁶ The KNIL service records in the National Archives of the Netherlands confirm that

⁸ NL-LdnRMV, Justinus van Nassau archive A16.

⁹ National Museum of World Cultures, inventory cards RV-3600-589/594, digitalised in TMS.

¹⁰ NL-LdnRMV, Justinus van Nassau archive A16, inv. no. 17, register of Justinus van Nassau Museum / Royal Netherlands Military Academy.

¹¹ NL-LdnRMV, Justinus van Nassau archive A16, without inv. no., register of Justinus van Nassau Museum / Royal Netherlands Military Academy. This book of acquisitions was compiled by Sjoerd Nauta in 1949.

¹² Verbal report from Stan Wulffaert, chairman of the historical collection of the KMA, 11 Sept. 2020.

¹³ NL-LdnRMV, Justinus van Nassau archive A16, inv. nos. 6/7 and 14/15, inventory book of Hoofdcursus Kampen / Royal Netherlands Military Academy.

¹⁴ This was a classification system based on function used by various ethnographic museums.

¹⁵ NL-LdnRMV, Justinus van Nassau archive A16, inv. no. 14, inventory book of Hoofdcursus Kampen / Royal Netherlands Military Academy.

¹⁶ Nederlands Militair Erfgoed [Dutch military heritage website], nlme.nl. Database of information from the Nationaal Militair Museum and the Nederlandse Defensie Academie [Netherlands Defence Academy] (formerly KMA).

this was George Nijpels (1859-1950).¹⁷ The *Nederlandsche Staatscourant* [official gazette] of 9 December 1902 mentions a gift from G. Nijpels, captain of the General Staff, to the Hoofdcursus of (*"eene collectie wapens en eene collectie voorwerpen tot huishoudelijk gebruik"*) [a collection of weapons and a collection of objects for domestic use].¹⁸

The Hoofdcursus yearbook describes the gift as follows: *"deze oudleerling, aan wien de verzameling reeds zooveel dankt, zond tal van voorwerpen van Atjeh, t.w. potten en pannen, huisraad, wapenen, grafstenen, vlecht- en borduurwerk, te veel om op te noemen, terwijl door zijn bemiddeling Notaris Meeter te Koeta Radja een mooie collectie zijden kleedingstukken schonk."*¹⁹ *Neemt men daarbij in aanmerking dat genoemde kapitein binnen één jaar tijds twee maal werd gewond, dan mag men zijne toewijding zeker eenig noemen"*²⁰ [This alumnus, to whom the collection is already so much indebted, sent numerous items from Aceh, namely pots and pans, household goods, weapons, gravestones, wickerwork and embroidery, too much to mention, while Notary Meeter in Koeta Radja sent a beautiful collection of silk garments thanks to his mediation. Considering, furthermore, that this captain was wounded twice within the space of one year, then his dedication may certainly be said to be unique]. The RV-3600 series (the KMA collection) cannot be accessed by provenance (*"ex-collectie"* ['ex collection']) in TMS; only objects found by chance during previous research are linked to George Nijpels. In addition to the two gravestones, these are two cannons (RV-3600-599 and 609, both with spat number 4861) and a bed canopy (RV-3600-607, spat number 4858), but there are definitely more objects which were gifted by Nijpels in 1902.²¹

George Nijpels (born Maastricht 1859 - died The Hague 1950) was an officer in the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL).²² He started his career in the Dutch Army in 1877, serving for six years before transferring to the KNIL. His first tour of the Dutch East Indies was in 1884. He distinguished himself in battles in Aceh and was made a Knight in the Military Willems Order. From 1889 to 1891 he was seconded to the Hogere Krijgsschool [Higher Military School] and from 1891 he was a teacher at the KMA. In 1896 he applied to serve in Aceh again.²³ This was initially denied but in December 1896 he set sail for the Dutch East Indies, after all. He was stationed with the General Staff in Batavia and it was September 1901 before he eventually left for Aceh.²⁴ In 1902, he returned to the Netherlands after being wounded. Two years later he was granted an honourable discharge from the KNIL on account of his injuries.²⁵ During the First World War he was once again mobilised in the Dutch Army (1914-1919), rising to the rank of major general (1940, titular).

Having reached the Dutch East Indies, in 1900 George Nijpels met Hendrik Theodorus van IJsseldijk (1862-1916), the upcoming curator of the collection of the Hoofdcursus in Kampen.²⁶ Van IJsseldijk

¹⁷ NL-HaNA, War / Service records of Royal Dutch Army officers, 2.13.04, inv.no. 407/410/629/675/678.

¹⁸ *Nederlandsche Staatscourant* [official gazette of the Netherlands], 9 December 1902.

<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB08:000177725:mpeg21:a0008>

¹⁹ Ydo Meeter (?-1913). Nationaal archief. "2.10.36.22 Inventaris van het archief van het Ministerie van Koloniën: Stamboeken Burgerlijke Ambtenaren, 1836-1936." https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/2.10.36.22/invnr/947/file/NL-HaNA_2.10.36.22_947_0265

²⁰ *Jaarboekje van den hoofdcursus te Kampen* (Kampen: Ph. Zalsman, 1903), 184.

²¹ National Museum of World Cultures, inventory cards RV-3600-589/590/599/607/609, digitalised in TMS.

²² NL-HaNA, War / Service records of Royal Dutch Army officers, 2.13.04, inv.no. 407/410/629/675/678.

²³ "Atjeh," *Het nieuws van den dag: kleine courant*, 6 May 1896, Morning edition, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010092405>.

²⁴ "Passagiers," *Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 13 September 1901, Morning edition, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010133026:mpeg21:a0006>.

²⁵ Extract from the military record of G. Nijpels. Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie, Koloniale eeuw Nederlands-Indië [Netherlands Institute for Military History, Colonial era in Dutch East Indies] (1814-1941), 543, inv. no. 72.

²⁶ Spoor, "Het Ethnografisch Museum van de Koninklijke Militaire Academie en den voormaligen Hoofdcursus te Breda," 330. Letter from George Nijpels to J.M. Somer, 27 October 1937. Unnumbered archive of Museum Justinus van Nassau Museum / Royal Netherlands Military Academy.

asked him to collect objects.²⁷ Van IJsseldijk subsequently headed for the Netherlands and took a job as teacher at the Hoofdcursus, where he started a collection of ethnographic objects in order to better prepare recruits for their duties with the KNIL. Visual instruction in regional geography and ethnography held an important place in his educational view, and Nijpels was one of the main contacts in the Dutch East Indies who were to help him build the collection. The KMA archive contains little correspondence from the Hoofdcursus and I found no correspondence regarding Nijpels' assignment or the gift of the gravestone in 1902.²⁸ The inventory card for RV-3600-594 refers to an 'enveloppe' [envelope]; this was not found in the archive.

This correspondence did exist, according to Pauljac Verhoeven, who transcribed parts of the correspondence in the period 1997-1999.²⁹ His notes read as follows:

14. Postcard from Nijpels, 12 April 1902

"[] *Van Notaris meeters heb ik Atjehsche kleeren gekregen, van een grafheuvel, die ten behoeve der nieuwe renbaan afgegraven moest worden, een 8tal grafstenen, []*" [[] From Notary Meeters (sic) I received Acehnese clothes, from a burial mound, which had to be excavated to make way for the new racecourse, eight gravestones, []]

13, letter from Nijpels, K.R. 30 April 1902:

"[] *zend ik je een nieuw bewijs mijner herleefde ambitie [], Daarin vind je 1. de grafstenen [] 4. eenige Atjehse wapens, w.o. een achterlaadkarabijn. (Niet alle wapens zijn ingepakt, de 3 mooie, nieuwe kocht ik op vendutie, ik weet nog niet precies wat ze kosten andere oudere zijn bij abuis niet mee ingepakt, ik zend ze dus later)* [[] I am sending you fresh evidence of my renewed ambition [], Herein you will find 1. The gravestones [] 4. several Acehnese weapons, including a breech-loading carbine. (Not all of the weapons have been packed up, the three new fine ones I bought at public auction, I am not yet sure of their exact price other older ones were not packed up along with the others by mistake, so I will send these later)]

The archive was found to contain correspondence about the gravestones from a later period. On 27 October 1937 George Nijpels wrote to curator J.M. Somer:

"*Zoo kon ik, toen ik op inspectie der pradjoeirts (soldaten) in Bantam was, daar de instrumenten bijeenbrengen gebruikt voor de inlandsche zijde-nijverheid. Overigens zond ik ethnografica van meer gewone aard. Kort nadien naar Atjeh vertrokken, bleef ik actief en verzond de grafteekens die buiten Atjeh misschien unique zijn, na alle betrokken autoriteiten hierin te hebben gekend. Tot hetgeen ik zond behoorde ook een Atjehsche vlag met Arabisch opschrift, waarvan mij destijds de beteekenis is medegedeeld*"³⁰ [During my inspection of the *pradjoeirts* (soldiers) in Bantam, I was therefore able to collect the tools used in the local silk industry. Incidentally, I sent ethnographica of a more ordinary nature. Having left for Aceh shortly after, I remained active and sent the grave markers which are perhaps unique outside Aceh, having notified all the relevant authorities. Amongst the items which I sent was an Acehnese flag with Arabic writing, the meaning of which was imparted to me at the time.]

It is clear from the quote that the gravestones were made available to Nijpels not long after his arrival in Aceh; this must have been between September 1901 and April 1902. He does not write who granted him permission to take the stones, but the research showed that civil governor P.A.H. Heldens was involved. It is noteworthy that he says that he notified "*alle betrokken autoriteiten*" [all the relevant

²⁷ Marie-Antoinette Willemsen, *Volkenkunde in Breda: van Indische verzameling tot Rijksmuseum Justinus van Nassau en de Vereniging voor Volkenkunde* (Breda: Bureau Cultureel Erfgoed, Directie Ruimtelijke Ontwikkeling, Gemeente Breda, 2011), 16.

²⁸ NL-LdnRMV, Justinus van Nassau archive A16, inv. no. 36, correspondence from Ethnographic Museum of the Royal Netherlands Military Academy.

²⁹ Email from Pauljac Verhoeven (head of Museum Bronbeek), 21 January 2021.

³⁰ Letter from George Nijpels to J.M. Somer, 27 October 1937. Unnumbered archive of Justinus van Nassau Museum / Royal Netherlands Military Academy. The letter is also cited in Willemsen, 2011, 16.

authorities] in the decision to ship the gravestones to the Netherlands. We can only guess as to what he means by this; in any case they must have included the army command (in the period 1897-1904 J.B. van Heutsz was military and civil governor of Aceh) and possibly also the Bataviaasch Genootschap [Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences].³¹ With the government's support the Batavian Society sought to secure for itself as many of the items as possible which had been collected by government officials, including military personnel.³² The personal archive of J.B. van Heutsz is held in the National Archives of the Netherlands but contains no correspondence from 1901-1902.³³

In his postcard Nijpels reports that the gravestones are from Lho-Nga (present-day Lhoknga). The Hoofdcursus inventory book states the provenance as "Groot-Atjeh" [Great Aceh]. This was a department under the Dutch administrative system to which Lho-Nga did indeed belong.

Nijpels further reports that the gravestones were moved in order to construct a racecourse. A racecourse was indeed taken into use in Lhoknga in October 1901.³⁴ According to Henri Damsté, this racecourse was an initiative of Louis Constant Westenek (1872-1930), a controller in Great Aceh and a great lover of horse racing.³⁵ But Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje reports that the initiator was a civil governor who he describes as "*een groot paardenliefhebber onder de officieren*" [a great horse-lover among the officers] as well as the founder of Renvereening Atjeh [the Aceh horse-racing club].³⁶ The Regeeringsalmanak (government almanac) of 1901 shows that Petrus Antonius Hubertus Heldens (1861-1934) was the aforementioned civil governor in Lhoknga at that time.³⁷ Heldens was married to Maria Lena van Heutsz, daughter of J.B. van Heutsz, the governor of Aceh. In the absence of a wealthy European population in Aceh, Van Heutsz decided to finance the racecourse largely from funds which had been earmarked for the road network.³⁸ In addition, Acehnese officials were also persuaded against their will to contribute to the racing club.³⁹ The racecourse was not a success and was hardly used at all. In 1902 Westenek took the initiative to build a new racecourse, this time in Kuta Radja (present-day Banda Aceh).⁴⁰

The eight gravestones taken by Nijpels have different shapes. Two are shaped similarly to RV-3600-594 but have slightly different ornamentation. None of the gravestones has inscriptions containing historical information. Despite the stylistic differences, the eight gravestones could have come from the same location; it is not unusual for a cemetery to have gravestones of different types.⁴¹ Because the racecourse was only in use for such a short period of time, it is difficult to trace its location. As far as is known, the racecourse is not marked on maps and no photographs of it were found during this research.

³¹ The minutes of the Bataviaasch Genootschap for the period 1901-1902 make no mention of any correspondence with Nijpels.

³² Pieter ter Keurs, "Collecting in the Colony," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 37, no. 108 (2009): 154, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639810902979321>.

³³ Nationaal archief. "2.21.008.79 Inventaris van het archief van J.B. van Heutsz, 1882-1935." <https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/2.21.008.79>

³⁴ "Atjeh," *Bataviaasch nieuwsblad*, 19 November 1901, Morning edition, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:011032403:mpeg21:a0059>.

³⁵ H.T. Damsté, *Louis Constant Westenek (2 februari 1872-2 mei 1930)*, undated.

³⁶ Emile Gobée and Cornelis Adriaanse, eds., *Ambtelijke adviezen van C. Snouck Hurgronje 1889-1936*, vol. 1 (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1957), 339. Letter from C. Snouck Hurgronje to J.B. van Heutsz, 2 October 1903.

³⁷ *Regeeringsalmanak Voor Nederlandsch-Indie* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1901), 223, https://digital.staatsbibliotheek-berlin.de/werkansicht?PPN=PPN75220758X&PHYSID=PHYS_0023&DMDID=DMDLOG_0001.

³⁸ Gobée and Adriaanse, *Ambtelijke adviezen van C. Snouck Hurgronje 1889-1936*, 1:339-41.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Kees van Dijk, 'Atjeeërs houden niet van paarden: de paardenrenbaan in Azië', in *Het verre gezicht: politieke en culturele relaties tussen Nederland en Azië, Afrika en Amerika. Opstellen aangeboden aan Prof. Dr Leonard Blussé*, ed. J. Lindblad and A. Schrikker (Franeker: Van Wijnen, 2011), 301-16; Damsté, *Louis Constant Westenek (2 februari 1872-2 mei 1930)*; Gobée and Adriaanse, *Ambtelijke adviezen van C. Snouck Hurgronje 1889-1936*, 1:340.

⁴¹ See for example the cemetery in Pande, just outside Banda Aceh. Archnet.org. "Kandang Aceh." <https://archnet.org/sites/4006>.

Archive documents of George Nijpels are also held in the Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie [Netherlands Institute for Military History].⁴² These include a diary for the period 1897-1902, during which he served as an officer in Aceh. The diary contains a wealth of political and military details, but little personal information. This is connected to the position that Nijpels held: according to his service record, he worked for the General Staff in Batavia from 1897 to 1901.⁴³ As such he concerned himself, from a distance, with events in Aceh and wrote reports which were based on reports by others. No information about the collection of objects or visits to cemeteries was found in the diary. There are occasional remarks about material culture; for example, on 15 September 1899 Nijpels wrote that gold had been found close to “Sikaenjoeng in de Aloeë Patjikan.” In 1901, by which time he had been posted to Aceh, he described how the residents of six houses were chased out of their homes because the KNIL wanted to establish a bivouac there: “zij lieten keukengerei, bakjes en potjes en eeuwige voorraden achter, maar droegen overigens kleeding, huisraad, sieraden weg. Niemand had geen pakje” [they left behind kitchen utensils, bowls and jars and endless supplies, but otherwise took with them clothing, household goods, jewellery. No one was without a package]. It is noteworthy that Nijpels seldom mentions the capture of weapons, something that must have happened frequently and was usually recorded in patrol reports. Probably the captured weapons were not among the matters reported at General Staff level. George Nijpels himself had a substantial weapon collection, which he gifted to the KMA in 1937, and the gift in 1902 also comprised weapons.⁴⁴

History after 1923

After the collection was transferred from the Hoofdcursus in Kampen in 1923, the gravestones ended up in Breda, where they went on display. The visitor's guide of 1926 mentions a display of objects from Northern Sumatra in the vestibule, including “langs de muur en in de gang eenige uit Groot-Atjeh afkomstige grafsteen, w.o. één onvoltooid”⁴⁵ [along the wall and in the corridor are several gravestones from Great Aceh, one of which is unfinished]. In 1940 at least three of the eight gravestones were placed in the garden of the Ethnographic Museum of the KMA in Breda.⁴⁶ Photographs from 1960 show this arrangement, meaning that the stones were in the garden for at least 20 years.⁴⁷ In 1956 the curation of the KMA collection was handed over to the National Museum of Ethnology. Initially, the collection remained in Breda and the National Museum of Ethnology also took over the management of the museum, which was renamed the Museum Justinus van Nassau. In the end this museum in Breda had to close its doors in 1993 and the ethnographic collection was transferred to Leiden.

⁴² Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie, Koloniale eeuw Nederlands-Indië [Netherlands Institute for Military History, Colonial era in Dutch East Indies] (1814-1941), 543, inv. no. 72.

⁴³ NL-HaNA, War / Service records of Royal Dutch Army officers, 2.13.04, inv.no. 407/410/629/675/678.

⁴⁴ NL-LdnRMV, Justinus van Nassau archive A16, inv. no. 36, correspondence from the Ethnographic Museum of the Royal Netherlands Military Academy. A.o. photograph of Nijpels' weapon collection Collection of the National Museum of World Cultures inv. no. RV-11996-2.

⁴⁵ Koninklijke Militaire Academie, *Leidraad voor den bezoeker van het ethnografisch museum van de Koninklijke Militaire Academie en den hoofdcursus* (Breda: De Koninklijke Militaire Academie, 1926), 4.

⁴⁶ J.M. Somer, *Gids voor den bezoeker van het Ethnografisch Museum te Breda, Kasteelplein 13* (Breda: Ethnografisch Museum, 1940), 8.

⁴⁷ Collection of the National Museum of World Cultures, inv. nos. RV-12127-21/22/23.



*Gravestones from the Nijpels gift (RV-3600-592 and 596) in the garden of the museum of the KMA, 1960.
Collection of the National Museum of World Cultures, inv. no. RV-12127-22.*

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