

Malay Traditional Woodcarving Artefacts in Nik Rashiddin's Personal Collection at Kandis, Kelantan

ZAWIYAH BABA

ABSTRACT

The special collection of traditional Malay woodcarving at Kandis Kelantan was the legacy of the late Nik Rashiddin Nik Hussein, master carver, collector and philosopher (1955 – 2002). He was well known particularly for the fine keris hilts of his later years as a carver, his quest for a Malay identity in woodcarving. The beautifully illustrated catalogue of the Spirit of Wood or Semangat Kayu exhibition held in Singapore, London and Kuala Lumpur from 2003 to 2005, highlighted Nik Rashiddin's work and was the first attempt to document artefacts in the collection. The ATMA UKM project documented and digitised Nik Rashiddin's collection of artefacts, a substantial part of the keris collection, as well as sketches, drawings, books and newspaper cuttings. In addition, a digital database was constructed to facilitate wider and easier access to the collection. An international seminar on Malay Woodcarving – the Legacy of Nik Rashiddin held on 24 -26 November 2008 at Kandis, Kelantan produced 18 working papers on Nik Rashiddin's collection and work and on Malay woodcarving in general.

Key words: Documentation, digitisation; Nik Rashiddin Nik Hussain, personal collections, Malay traditional woodcarving, artefacts, digital database, Institute of the Malay World & Civilisation (ATMA), Kandis Resource Centre

ABSTRAK

Koleksi khas mengenai seni ukir kayu tradisional Melayu di Kandis, Kelantan adalah warisan Allahyarham Nik Rashiddin Nik Hussein, pengukir tersohor, peraih ukiran kayu dan ahli falsafah (1955 – 2002). Beliau terkenal khususnya dengan ukiran-ukiran hulu keris yang halus dan indah dihasilkan pada tahun-tahun penghujung kerjaya beliau, dan juga kerana hasrat dan misi beliau mencari identiti Melayu dalam seni ukir kayu. Katalog dengan gambar hiasan indah yang diterbitkan untuk pameran Spirit of Wood atau Semangat Kayu yang diadakan di Singapura, London dan Kuala Lumpur dari tahun 2003 hingga 2005 merupakan usaha pertama mendokumen artifak dalam koleksi Nik Rashiddin. Projek ATMA UKM menyambung usaha ini dengan mendokumen dan mendigitalkan koleksi artifak, sebahagian koleksi keris, lukisan, buku dan keratan akhbar. Pangkalan data digital telah juga dibina untuk

meluaskan dan mempercepatkan akses kepada maklumat mengenai koleksi tersebut. Seminar antarabangsa mengenai Seni Ukir Kayu: Warisan Nik Rashiddin yang diadakan pada 24-26 November 2008 di Kandis, Kelantan telah menghasilkan 18 kertas kerja tentang hasil karya Nik Rashiddin dan seni ukir kayu Melayu amnya.

Kata kunci: Pendokumentasian; pendigitalan; Nik Rashiddin Nik Hussein; koleksi peribadi, seni ukir kayu Melayu, artifak, pangkalan data digital, Institut Alam & Tamadun Melayu (ATMA); Kandis Resource Centre

INTRODUCTION

The art of traditional Malay woodcarving is an important cultural heritage of the Malay civilisation that reflects the creativity and skill of the Malays in utilising local nature resource in producing not only works of art and beauty but also for day to day functional uses and purposes. Unlike stone and metals however, wood is much more susceptible to wear and tear and do not last as long as the other materials. Thus not much relics of wood remain from ancient civilisations to remind us of the artistic woodcarving skills of people in the ancient past. Examples of woodcarving as handicraft may be displayed in museums and some buildings adorned with woodcarving such as mosques and palaces may still be preserved. Although the traditional craft and skills of woodcarvers has survived to this day, especially in the East Coast, it is in danger of becoming a lost art and forgotten craft as master carvers still actively practicing their craft can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Very few young men or women at present are apprenticed to this craft as there is insufficient regular work at the existing workshops to maintain and sustain full-time and long-term development. There is an urgent need to inculcate and draw interest to this dying traditional art and to encourage more in-depth research into the craft itself. The personal collection of artefacts, drawings and other materials belonging to the late master carver Nik Rashiddin Nik Hussein in Kandis, Kelantan provides invaluable primary material for study and research into the Malay art of traditional woodcarving. The ATMA project in collaboration with Kandis Resource Centre is aimed at making information about traditional Malay woodcarving more widely accessible for research while at the same time sustaining and generating interest and appreciation in the art through the personel collection and the finest examples of traditional woodcarving from a master carver.

NIK RASHIDDIN NIK HUSSEIN

Early Life

Nik Rashiddin Nik Hussein was one of Malaysia's most talented master carver and artist. Born in 1955 he was the eldest son and third child of a civil servant from Kota Bharu, Kelantan and his wife. According to his only brother Rashidde, who was his apprentice and confidante, as a schoolboy, Nik Rashiddin was not academically inclined and did not pay much attention to his studies. But he showed an extraordinarily keen interest in and talent for carving things from wood and would carve various objects upon request from his teachers and friends for a fee. It was this interest that he later chose to pursue despite his father's entreaties that he took up other 'realistic and promising business pursuits.' Nik Rashiddin apprenticed with established woodcarvers in Kelantan including Latif Long, one of Malaysia's most outstanding and successful carvers at the time. Nik Rashiddin was fortunate, as living in Kelantan provided easy access to woodcarving workshops and practitioners. He lived in an environment where woodcarving was a local tradition and thriving cottage industry. In the course of his apprenticeship and after starting out his own workshop, he frequently visited Pattani, Terengganu and Indonesia to see for himself and to learn the techniques, motifs and design of wood carvings, their history and special features as well as the various types and treatment of wood used. During these visits he would collect items which interest him for various reasons and would purchase them to use as referents and what he called his 'textbooks'. He apprenticed at Japara, Indonesia, a famous woodcarving centre, for two years to learn the finer points of woodcarving but returned to Kelantan as he did not want to be influenced by the Indonesian style of woodcarving. He was already conscious at the time of his need and deep desire to create wood carving motifs with a Malay identity.

Moving to Kandis

As he honed his expertise, Nik Rashiddin gradually moved away from carving large items like furniture and the carved bed heads and bed ends, tables and chairs and panels that he was once famous for as quite a lot of people owned some item of furniture made by him, to the smaller and finer items like the keris hilts and sheaths. This development can also be traced in his drawings and sketches. As he focused on carving keris hilts

for which he was renowned, the need for concentration and a peaceful environment became increasingly demanding. In one of the video interviews he gave, he confessed that he could no longer stand the noise, hustle and bustle of Kota Bharu, with people rushing to and fro for no apparent reason, and decided to move to a quieter place. He was fortunate to find the few acres of land in Kandis, near Bachok, Kelantan where he moved with his wife and very young children. Apart from its tranquillity and the sound of the waves from the nearby South China Sea, there was on the land that he acquired, an old Terengganu house complete with carved panels. It was by any means a very ideal and romantic setting for a master carver to work. However, Rosnawati, his wife, did confess that the first few years of their stay there were really tough as they had to live without basic modern amenities such as electricity and water. The well which provided them with water is still in use today and well looked after.

It was at the peaceful, tranquil and spacious rambling setting of Kandis that Nik Rashiddin produced his best and finest work, the keris Tajung, for which he is unmatched. According to Rosnawati, NIK Rashiddin produced 40 of the best keris hilts at Kandis. Rashiddee, his younger brother, who as his apprentice made the sheaths for the keris that Nik Rashiddin produced. Nik Rashiddee, who was very close to and idolised his 'Abe' was also the mediator between his brother and his father when communication became protracted due to their conflicting views on lifestyle and career choice. Towards his later years, however, with growing recognition for Nik Rashiddin's work, his father began to appreciate his son's extraordinary talent and to take pride in him. Nik Rashiddin was also fortunate that he met his '*jodoh*' in Rosnawati, who was then a lecturer in fine arts at the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) in Skudai, Johor. She met him on one of her frequent visits to Kota Bharu with her architecture students. They were married in Gombak, Kuala Lumpur and had their wedding receptions in Kuala Lumpur and Kota Bharu. The couple are blessed with four children, three girls and a boy, the youngest girl born shortly before her father died. In Rosnawati, Nik Rashiddin had a most able and loving partner and soul mate who believed in and understood his aspiration and mission, supported him in every way and now dedicates her self to continuing his mission to share and spread his knowledge and philosophy on traditional Malay woodcarving.

In search of a Malay identity

At Kandis, Nik Rashiddin intensified his search for a Malay identity in woodcarving motifs. He was frequented by visitors comprising academicians, students, researchers, keris collectors, journalists and others who have seen and appreciated his work. He spoke passionately and at length, sometimes into the wee hours of the morning, with visitors about this mission and his conviction, beliefs and concern for history and Malay culture and traditions. Based on his observations, studies and frequent visits to Pattani he was convinced that Malay cultural identity as reflected in wood carving artefacts, had its roots in the ancient kingdom of Langkasuka where Pattani is now located. Eddin Khoo (2003), co-writer of *Spirit of Wood* with Farish A. Noor recounted his interview with Nik Rashiddin about Langkasuka in the book. Although he could not always prove it, he was convinced that he could feel the connection between his art and Langkasuka. He frequently used a motif in his carvings which he identified as the Langkasuka motif, and which to him is the basis of Malay woodcarving motif. Farish A. Noor (2010) perhaps best described the enigma that was Nik Rashiddin:

Nik Rashiddin regarded himself as an artist of the old school, or the ancient school to be more precise. His work and his quest was not merely the perfection of his art and a demonstration of his skill as a woodcarver, but also to demonstrate a deeper point about our tenuous and fragile connection with history and the precariousness of our own identities and the ways with which we struggle to keep those identities intact.

(Warisan Seni Ukir Kayu Melayu 2010:12)

‘Spirit of Wood’ exhibition

Nik Rashiddin rose to international prominence with the first major exhibition on traditional Malay woodcarving entitled *Semangat Kayu* or the Spirit of Wood which was held at the Asian Civilisation Museum Singapore in 2003, the Brunei Gallery at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) London in 2004 and the National Museum, Kuala Lumpur in 2005. Before this he went with Norhaiza Nordin, his protégé and close friend, to museums in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands to broaden and test his knowledge on the Malay keris. Unfortunately Nik Rashiddin did not live to see the exhibition. He passed away not long after being diagnosed with lung cancer in 2002. He was however, involved with its

planning, saw the photography sessions by photographer David Loke and his team, provided details about the artefacts and captions for the exhibition catalogue entitled '*Spirit of Wood – the Malay Art of Woodcarving*'. This beautifully produced catalogue, an important legacy of the exhibition, was the first attempt to document the artefacts in Nik Rashiddin's collection which had been placed under the care of Kandis Resource Centre Sendirian Berhad, a company set up shortly before his death, specially to care for and preserve the artefacts and materials in the collection.

THE COLLECTION

Collecting Approach

Nik Rashiddin as observed by David Hankel, Curator of the Asian Civilisation Museum in Singapore, who knew him well, did not set out to collect artefacts in a systematic or thematic manner. He did not in other words intentionally plan a special collection on Malay woodcarving as perceived by those who tried to put together what he left behind. His approach was more business-like (Hankel 2010). He bought or acquired items which he considered interesting, not necessarily for its beauty or perfection, but for a particular characteristic or feature that it had, even though it was damaged or had imperfections. The artefacts he collected had a utility value and he bought and sold them as he saw fit. But his most important reason for acquiring them was, as he himself said (Nik Rashiddin Video interview, 2002), the fact that he regarded them as his 'textbooks' from which he learnt his art. Thus, despite his cavalier attitude towards collecting, Nik Rashiddin's collection provides an invaluable primary source of information about his work and his craft which merits in-depth study by practitioners, researchers and students of this art. This was in fact the main objective of the research project on *The Documentation and preservation of resources on traditional Malay wood carving* undertaken by Institute of the Malay World and Civilisation (ATMA), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia – to facilitate access to Nik Rashiddin's collection for research. Funded by the Research Universities Grant, the project was initially for a one-year period from January to December 2008, but was extended to June 2009.

Types of material in the collection

Nik Rashddin's collection consists of the following types of materials shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Types of materials in Nik Rashiddin's collection

Type of material	Number of Units
Artefacts	354 units
Keris	> 300 units
Drawings	254 units
Sketches	12 books
Books and printed materials	856 volumes
Photographs	>2000+ units
Newspaper cuttings	60 units
Manuscripts	3 units

In addition, in a store room and in the adjoining area to the main house, there are also substantial numbers, estimated to be hundreds of shaped wood-cuts, short wood lengths and wood planks from different varieties of wood including cengal, meranti and kemuning. Also in the collection are the carving tools, cutting tools, and sharpening stones used by the master-carver. As emphasised by Rosnawati (2008), daily routines of preparing and sharpening of tools before beginning the actual carving takes up almost 50 % of the effort involved in producing a carved object. Each tool is meticulously sharpened on the specially selected river stones of different shapes and composition. The work of carving itself, particularly small and detailed objects like keris hilts, needs full concentration, meticulousness and accuracy with good natural lighting. That is why carving is done during the day and can be done only for limited periods at a time.

Artefacts

While the rest of the materials in the collection are fairly homogenous, meaning they are of similar form and type, there is a wide variety of types and forms of artefacts which are categorised according to their uses or function (Zawiyah 2008) as shown in Table 2 below:

These artefacts are displayed in the gallery or kept in the museum of Kandis Resource Centre, Kandis, Bachok, Kelantan, while the bulk of the keris collection is kept at the *Kedai Keris* or Keris Shop at Pantai

Table 2. List of artefacts categorised by function

Category	Examples
Agricultural implements	<i>Kertuk, perunggul,</i>
Architectural implements	<i>Buah Buton, sesiku</i>
Carving Tools	Carving knives, hammer
Ceremonial	Betel-leaf set, gong stand
Fisherman's boxes for sea-fishing	Fisherman's box
Fishing Implements	Models of boats, paddle,
Furniture	Bed head and ends, cot
Kitchen tools	Coconut scraper, ladle
Musical instruments	Rebab
Panels	Carved panels & arches
Recreational	Bird Cage, Quail Trap
Religious	<i>Rehal</i> (book stand),
Weapons	Keris, spear, spear stand
Weaving implements	Weaving contraption

Cahaya Bulan in Kota Bharu owned by Rashiddee Nik Hussein. The total number of keris has never been counted but were documented as and when they were produced by Rashiddee. during fieldwork. The total number of keris documented for the project were 250 pieces. It must be noted that most of the artefacts in the collection were those collected by Nik Rashiddin and are not products of his own work. Only 24% of the artefacts documented were Nik Rashiddin's own work. The same goes for the keris collection. However enough examples of his work remain for the different types of artefacts and keris as testimony of the quality and finesse of his artistry.

Drawings and sketches

Unlike the artefacts, the sketches and drawings are entirely Nik Rashiddin's work and reflect his thought processes and artistic development as a traditional Malay wood carving artist, particularly in the earlier years when he was mostly making furniture and wood panels, as well other items specially requested by his clients. Before carving on the treated wood, he would trace the design from the paper onto the wood as a guide for the design to be carved. These drawings which were done on tracing paper can be used to trace development in Nik Rashiddin's design work and thus complement the artefact collection as a primary source of information. These drawings are mostly large-sized

Table 3. Categories of Nik Rashiddin's drawings

Category	Examples
Wood Panels	Arches for doors & windows
Motif	Floral motifs eg. <i>ketam guri</i>
Furniture	Carvings for tables, beds
Weapons	Keris blade and sheaths
Religion	<i>Mimbar</i> for mosque
Architecture	Fencing, wall corners
Ceremonies	Ceremonial bird, chariot
Recreational	Bird cages, quail trap
Miscellaneous	Logo, trophy, <i>wau</i> or kite

A1 paper or A3 and include designs for the categories or purposes shown in Table 3:

Some of his ideas for designs were sketched on to notebooks, sketchbooks or even loose drawing paper and appear to reflect his thought processes when embarking on a wood carving project. While some of these drawings are incomplete, there are also beautifully completed ones which are such gems to be found in the sketch books, reflecting perhaps his moods. Not all sketches are used for his carving projects and when used not necessarily the entire sketch is translated into woodcarving designs. The sketches seem to be more of a guide as to what he planned to carve. All sketches and drawings have been scanned and digitally photographed as well as indexed for inclusion in the wood carving database. However, more work needs to be done to improve the quality of index.

Books and printed materials

There are 856 books, probably more by now, and printed materials including seminar papers, reports and pamphlets catalogued from the small library of Kandis Resource Centre, mostly collected by Nik Rashiddin, and through Rosnawati's friends and network in academia. The books cover subjects such as wood carving, handicrafts, Malay culture and Malaysiana in general. There are also books and encyclopaedias on design in Thai and Indonesian. A good number of these books were received as gifts from friends and donors. The library collection has sufficient specialised books to support research on Malay woodcarving. Bibliographic data on all books have been entered into a WINISIS-based

template developed by the National Library of Malaysia, with the intention of merging this data with the artefacts database using the software FileMaker Pro Version 9. However this effort has not been successful due to technical hitches involving the software used and the data may need to be transferred to another software.

Slides and photographs

There is a considerable collection of slides, photographs which covers a significant part of the artefacts collection and keris which were taken for the “Spirit of Wood” book. These are some of the finest examples of photography taken by the photographer David Lok and his team from Kuala Lumpur. The slides and photographs were given inventory numbers and kept in albums. There are also slides and photographs of themes related to wood and woodcarving such as wooden grave markers, mosques, *istanas* or palaces, trees and carved wood panels. These slides and photographs have been digitised and may be used in the wood carving database developed for the project. There is a fairly large collection of photographs of Nik Rashiddin’s travels and visits overseas as well as family and personal photographs which are beginning to fade through time. The cost and time needed to restore these would be enormous and would have to be done selectively.

Newspaper Cuttings

A total of 60 newspaper cuttings of reports and interviews with Nik Rashiddin are also kept in the Kandis Library and have been scanned waiting to be indexed. These cuttings are still in reasonable condition and provide leads to significant events in Nik Rashiddin’s life and about Nik Din himself. News reports accompanied by photographs also provide leads to sources of photographs of Nik Rashiddin professionally taken by press photographers kept in newspaper libraries which may be a useful external source of photographs on Nik Rashiddin.

DOCUMENTATION

Artefacts are considered the most important item in Nik Rashiddin’s personal collection and are given priority in the documentation of the collection. The artefacts were first documented for the catalogue of the

“Spirit of Wood’ exhibition coordinated by Datin Waveney Jenkins with descriptions of artefacts by Nik Rashiddin Nik Hussein and Norhaiza Nordin. From Nik Rashiddin’s collection, one could say that the best of artefacts from Nik Rashiddin’s collection were displayed and captioned in the catalogue. Information on the type of artefact, its origin, age and carver are provided in the captions for the beautifully photographed artefacts by David Lok. The book also included some selected drawings and sketches by Nik Rashiddin and Norhaiza Nordin as illustrations of Malay woodcarving motifs. Apart from the artefacts, the book also highlights Nik Rashiddin’s passion and philosophy on traditional Malay wood carving including his quest for a Malay identity in wood carving motifs based on what he called the Langkasuka motif. The Kandis Resource Centre displays artefacts in their museum which is housed in the old Terengganu house in the compound and the gallery which is housed in the new building whose construction was partly funded by the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage.

The ATMA Project

The ATMA project to investigate and preserve Nik Rashiddin’s Collection at the Kandis Resource Centre as a primary resource for research on a Malay traditional woodcarving involved various stages of implementation as follows:

- A. Creating an inventory for the collection
 - (i) Taking stock of the types and volume of materials in the collection
 - (ii) Retrieving, sorting, moving and cleaning of artefacts, drawings, books, sketch books, newspaper cuttings and photographs.
 - (iii) Creating an inventory of artefacts and other materials in the collection

- B. Data gathering
 - (i) Designing template for data gathering
 - (ii) Selecting software for database creation
 - (iii) Data collection

- C. Digitisation and database construction
 - (i) Digitisation of materials in the collection
 - (ii) Collection of data
 - (iv) Database construction, testing and launch

- (v) Integration of wood carving database in ATMA's malaycivilization.com portal

D. International seminar

- (i) *International Seminar on Malay Woodcarving; the Legacy of Nik Rashiddin*, Villa Daniella Beach Resort, Kandis, 24-26 November 2009.
- (ii) *Seminar Alam Melayu: Menjejaki Langkasuka*, Institut Alam Dan Tamadun Melayu, 2 Jun, 2009.

E. Publication

- (i) Book on *Warisan Seni Ukir Melayu: Malay Wood Carving Heritage*

Creating an inventory for the collection

Visits to Kandis were made in mid and late 2007 to assess the types of material in the Kandis Resource Centre. It proved a challenging effort as the materials are scattered and not arranged or kept in a haphazard manner. Quite often the materials were covered with dust and needed to be dusted and cleaned. Kandis which is located by the sea is very hot and humid and any physical activity will lead to discomfort and perspiration very quickly. The type and volume of materials were noted for use in the preparation of the proposal for the research project on investigation and preservation of the special collection on traditional Malay wood carving. Almost all the artefacts were dusty, even if they were kept in boxes or in display cases. Apart from the easy accumulation of dust due to the large windows and air vents and carvings with 'tebok' teknik above the widows, the salty wind from the nearby sea also creates a sort of sticky grime on the wooden floors of the old house and exposed carvings. In order to create an inventory for each item, the artefacts had to be cleaned and dusted, earlier markings located, then a silver patch had to be carefully painted on in the shape of small rectangles for the new inventory number to be written on. This had to be done in a discreet location, usually at the bottom of the artefact.

The drawings which had been done on butter paper had been kept folded as they were large and had to be opened and dusted with care so as not to damage those frayed at the folds. The smaller drawings were scanned while the larger ones were digitally photographed and assigned a category and inventory number. Before photography the creases had

to be smoothened so that they would not appear in the photographs. As the drawings were done in pencil, most were very faint and do not appear in the photographs. So all the drawings were provided with backing so that they appear darker in the digital photograph and could be digitally enhanced when time permits. Special containers for architect's drawings were purchased as storage for the drawings so that they could be stored rolled up instead of folded according to their assigned categories. Newspaper cuttings had a similar problem with folds and yellowing newsprint paper but were more manageable as they were smaller in size and can fit into standard-sized scanners and folders.

The books in the collection had to be sorted out from other printed material and various locations in the main house and transferred to the library in the new building. The books were catalogued by two research assistants who attended a basic cataloguing course at the National Library of Malaysia. Bibliographic data for 856 books, the total in the Kandis collection, were input onto a cataloguing template developed by the National Library based on the WINISIS integrated library system software which was distributed gratis by UNESCO. However, the books still need to be subject classified. Additional funding would have to be obtained to recruit two Research Assistants and a special fieldwork arranged to accomplish this. There are three manuscripts of the al-Quran at Kandis beautifully illuminated and still intact but already in varying stages of decay as they are exposed to sunlight, dust and indiscriminate handling. These are strongly recommended for fumigation and treatment for conservation at the National Library or the National Archives as soon as possible.

The large collection of shaped wood cuts, wood panels and large wood planks are a valuable resource and are noted. However, constraints of time and human resource meant that it was not possible to include them under the purview of the project. The Nik Rashiddin Academy which has now been formally approved will include a workshop for carvers and will certainly put this invaluable resource to good use.

Data gathering

Before designing the template for data collection, the types of data to be collected, how the data is to be obtained are determined. The book '*Spirit of wood*' provides a good source of reference for type of information which needs to be elicited about the artefacts, particularly the captions for each photograph. The template designed for data collection of artefacts

Table 4. Data fields for artefacts and examples of data collected

Data field	Example
Inventori number	Number assigned to stock
Previous reference number	Earlier number assigned
Type of artefact	Ornamental, religious
Creator/carver	Craftsman or carver
Year created	When it was first created
Place of origin	Where it was made
Ownership	First owner
Measurements	Height, Width
Features/characteristics	Distinguishing features
Type of wood	Cengal, kemuning
Pattern	Overall design
Motif	Ketam guri, lotus
Technique	Relief
Materials used with carving	Copper, silver, ivory, gold
Finishing	Natural, painted, varnish
Function	Weaving, fishing
History	Owned by royalty, etc.
Condition	Perfect, damaged,
Other special features	Distinctive mark of creator
Original Price / Value	Price when acquired
Current Price / Value	Current selling price

include a wide range of fields shown in Table 4 with examples of data collected for each field:

Information about each artefact was based on the memory and knowledge of the owners as they did not keep written records about each item. The late Nik Rashiddin himself probably knew each piece intimately and could probably relate the story about where each piece was found and how it was acquired, and their value and price. Data gathering for the project had to rely on information provided by Puan Rosnawati Othman, the late Nik Rashiddin's wife for the artefacts collection, and his brother Rashiddee for the keris collection. Understandably, Puan Rosnawati was not able to provide all details of artefacts acquired before her marriage to Nik Rashiddin, such as price and history and these fields were left blank for most of the artefacts. Data about the Keris however was more complete as Rashiddee was able to recall although sometimes with some difficulty most details about each keris. At the request of the owners and for security reasons, location of artefacts was subsequently omitted from the data fields. In reviewing

the data after data collection was completed, it was found necessary to fill gaps in the data collected and also to verify the information provided from memory recall and personal knowledge. A cross-referencing technique was employed where data on artefacts gathered from Puan Rosnawati for artefacts would be cross-referenced with Rashiddee and data gathered from Rashiddee for the Keris collection would be cross-referenced with Norhaiza Nordin. A set of print-outs of data about artefacts and another set for keris was provided to Rashiddee and Norhaiza to work on and both completed the task as required. It was found that through cross-referencing, more information was elicited about the. This exercise lent more credibility to the data for artefacts and keris for the project. Accuracy of terms used was referenced with published works about Malay wood carving including A. Halim Nasir's (1987) *Traditional Malay Woodcarving* and *Spirit of Wood* (2003) catalogue.

From the data collected, it is possible to construct a profile of the collection in respect of the types of wood used for certain types of carvings, for example cengal for the bed heads and panelling, kemuning for keris and angšana for the kitchen tools. Apart from the types of wood, the motifs used on carved items which include *ketam guri*, *tampuk manggis*, *pucuk rebung*, *lotus* can also be studied. The different woodcarving techniques such as *tebuk tembus*, *tebuk tembus bersilat*, the ages of the artefact and their history could further be analysed to reveal more information. Even the data fields which had to be left blank as no information was available may also provide information on gaps in the knowledge about these artefacts.

DIGITISATION AND DATABASE CONSTRUCTION

One of the outcomes envisaged from the project is a digital database on Malay wood carving. No such database is known to exist in the Malay world although there are known personal collections on Malay Wood Carving. The *Spirit of Wood* has done a lot to promote Malay wood carving in the international arena but local artists and carvers may not have access to the book as it is in English and relatively expensive to buy. The galleries and museums while open to researchers, lecturers and students can be viewed on site only. Thus a database which allows remote access is highly desirable and would facilitate information seeking about Malay wood carving as well as generate interest in research on Malay wood carving. A digital database of primary material on Malay wood

carving would make available at the touch of a button details and images of artefacts as well as drawings.

Data collection of data for the project took into consideration the construction of a digital database. A template based on the software selected, Filemaker Pro 9 for the database was specially designed to include the fields required for data collection as listed in the section on data gathering. Digital images were created for all artefacts through digital photography by a photographer specially recruited from the Publications Centre of UKM. Several images were created for each artefact, not only from different angles but also under varying lighting conditions and background. The results of the photography show that photographing artefacts and still objects require a high degree of professionalism and only about half of the photos taken can be considered of good enough quality for inclusion in the database. Organising the photographs and linking them to the data was also in reality quite a challenge, not from the technical aspect which was quite easily achieved, but ensuring the right photograph for the data. While this has been reasonably achieved for the artefacts, it proved to be more difficult for the keris due to lack of access and unfamiliarity with the subject. Ding, Norasillah and Rashidde (2010) describes the development and documentation of Nik Rashiddin's keris collection, its strength and

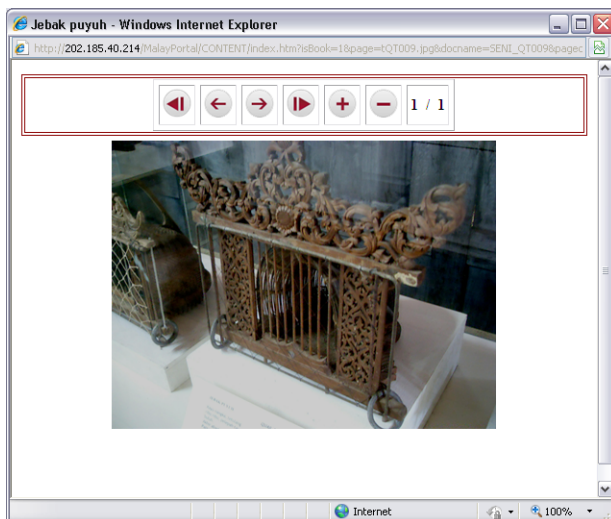


Photo 1. Screenshot of interface in the database

uniqueness. The construction of the database has been discussed in some detail by Mohd. Suhaimi Umar, Rizal Yusof and Supyan Hussin (Mohd. Suhaimi et al. 2010). Screenshots of the interface for artefacts in the database are shown in photographs 1 and 2.

The stand alone database on artefacts have been successfully migrated into a central repository in uploaded onto ATMA's Malay civilization portal which can be reached at the new URL address www.malaycivilization.ukm.my. The portal which is being transformed under a roll-out project funded by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI) is scheduled for completion in December 2010.

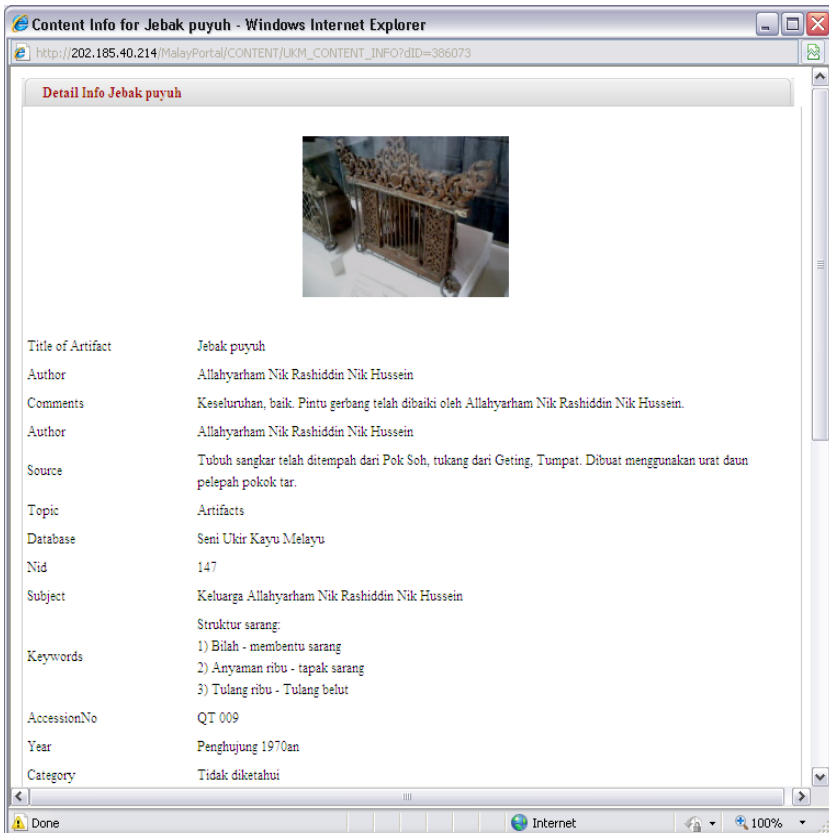


Photo 2. Screenshot of details of images of artefact

SEMINARS

An international seminar on *The Malay Art of Wood carving: Legacy of Nik Rashiddin* was held in Kandis from 24-26 November 2008 as part of the research activity for the research team to present their progress report on the project as well for invited speakers to provide further input on Malay traditional wood carving based on their background and specialisation. Eighteen papers were presented at the seminar by the project team members as well as invited speakers from Malaysia including Dato' Nik Hassan Shuhaimi Nik Abdul Rahman, Deputy Director, ATMA as well as abroad which included Datin Waveney Jenkins, Chairman of Kandis Resource Centre, Dr. Annabel Teh Gallop from the British Library, David Henkel, Curator, Asian Civilisation Museum, Singapore and Dr. Farish A. Noor, Senior Fellow, RSIS Institute, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, who delivered the keynote address. There were 5 papers on Nik Rashiddin and his work and three specifically on his personal collection, two on the digitisation of the collection and one on the construction of a digital database based on his collection. The rest of the papers cover various aspects of woodcarving including motifs, woodcarving as decorative items, marketing of woodcarving products and woodcarving as an industry. Another seminar entitled *Seminar Alam Melayu: Menjejaki Langkasuka* was held at ATMA in June 2009 to explore further the Langkasuka theme in Malay history and wood carving. Three papers by Dato' Dr. Adi Taha, former Director-General, Department of Museums and Antiquity, Zamberi Abdul Malek, independent researcher, and Rosnawati Othman of Kandis Resource Centre were significant contributions to the literature.

Reports and Publications

Reports of the proceedings of both seminars were compiled and submitted to ATMA, UKM Centre for Research Management and Innovation (CRIM) and the Ministry of Higher Education. A book entitled *Warisan Seni Ukir Kayu Melayu = Legacy of the Art of Malay Woodcarving* based on the papers presented at the conference in Kandis was published in 2010 as product of the research conducted in Kandis and an important contribution to the literature on the Malay art of woodcarving. More articles on various aspects of the research have also been published by individual members of the research team thus adding significantly to the body of literature on Malay woodcarving. Rosnawati Othman's tenure

as *Sarjana Tamu* (Guest Scholar) with the Institute of the Malay World and Civilisation (ATMA) also produced a report on the biography of the late Nik Rashiddin which will be published when funds become available. These publications serve to disseminate new and additional information about Nik Rashiddin and his collection in particular and Malay woodcarving in general and are invaluable sources of information for further research.

FURTHER RESEARCH

The ATMA project involved the collection of one master carver, the late Nik Rashiddin Nik Hussein. To obtain a more complete picture of the art of Malay woodcarving in Malaysia, collections of other master carvers should be documented for comparative study. Well-known carvers such as Abdul Latif Long, who owns Kelantan Wood Carving in Kota Baharu, has a large fairly well-kept collection of artefacts, drawings and newspaper cuttings, but which have not been documented. Latif Long was one of the earliest woodcarvers to produce woodcarving for commercial buildings apart from *istanas* or palaces. Selected pieces of the best work from his workshop are displayed in the gallery of the large and well-maintained workshop. During a visit to the Kelantan Wood Carving workshop near Kota Bharu in early 2009, the writer was informed by Latif Long that he was undertaking the documentation of his large collection of artefacts, drawings and newspaper cuttings with the help of his son, who has a UiTM Diploma In Architecture. Latif Long has a well documented inventory of all the woodcarving projects he had been commissioned to undertake including the Bank Bumiputera headquarters building in Jalan Melaka, Kuala Lumpur. Rather sceptical and apprehensive of outsiders gaining intimate knowledge of his collection, due to crippling thefts from his collection in the past, Latif Long has declined offers of assistance to document his work. His career as a carver and the woodcarving business has been the subject of a UKM students dissertation. Wan Mustapha Wan Su, popularly known as Wan Po also runs a busy workshop which he inherited from his father and has an impressive gallery which displays some of the best of his woodcarving works. As someone who constantly seeks innovation in his work, Wan Po 's drawings are sketched and cut out from thin wood veneer which are hung in a closet in his workshop, instead of butter paper like most carvers. Both he and Abdul Latif Long comes from a long line of woodcarvers. Norhaiza Nordin once an apprentice, then close friend of Nik Rashiddin, and today

one of Malaysia's master carver in his own right, is actively documenting his own work. He is assisted by his able wife Yati, who has undergone training in documentation of artefacts at the Penang State Museum. His best work is highlighted in a special publication on *Ukiran Kayu: Warisan Melayu* (2009) or woodcarving motifs published by the Malaysia Handicraft Development Corporation. Still in his early forties, Norhaiza is sought after for special woodcarving assignments and runs a workshop near his home, Sri Bakawali, itself an inspiring testimony of the best of Malaysia's East Coast's woodcarving legacy.

CONCLUSION

The documentation of Nik Rashiddin's collection under the ATMA research project had taken stock and provided an inventory of the artefact, keris, drawings, sketches, books and newspaper cuttings in the collection. This provides a record and reference of each artefact available in the collection. The digital database of the collection of artefacts provides images and descriptions about each artefact which can be quickly and easily retrieved. The database also allow for searching and sorting through multiple access points for various aspects of the artefact. This facilitates research on Malay traditional woodcarving. Analysis of the data collected about the artefacts in the collection will provide an interesting study of woodcarving such as the types of wood used, the motifs, techniques, finishes, other materials used with the artefacts. The publication of papers on Nik Rashiddin and his collection as well as other related topics on woodcarving, complements the database and provide invaluable additional materials for research. The documentation of collections of other master carvers mentioned in the paper is recommended to provide a broader base of data for comparative study.

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Zawiyah Baba, Ph.D.
Felo Penyelidik Utama
Institut Alam dan Tamadun Melayu (ATMA)
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
43600 UKM, Bangi, Selangor, MALAYSIA.
Tel. 03 89213252; 0122329549
E-mail: z.baba@ukm.my / zawiyah@gmail.com