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WeekENDER

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Editor: SHARIFAH INTAN



Silver covered bowl, 19th century, Kelantan. Collection: Pucuk Rebung Museum Gallery



Silver covered bowl, 19th century, Brunei. Collection: Pucuk Rebung Museum Gallery



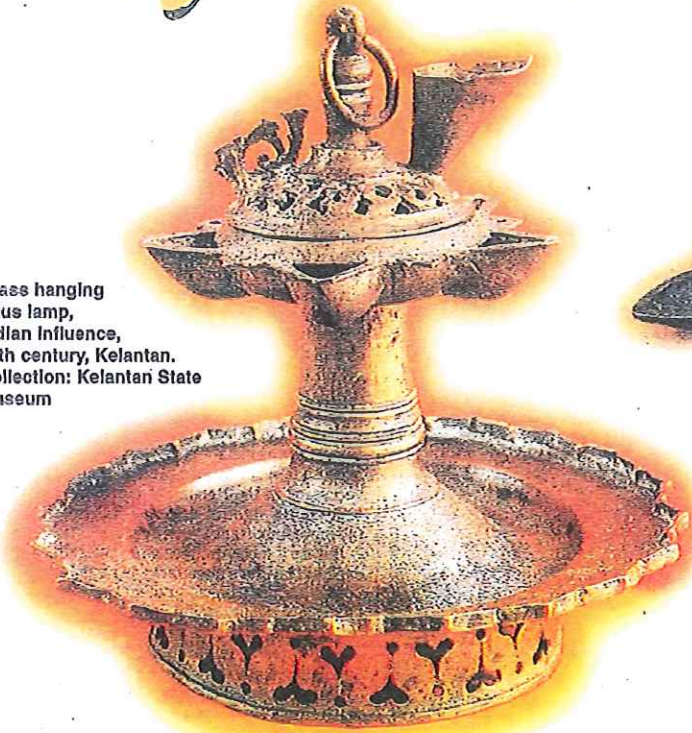
Silver and tortoise shell comb, 9th century, Kelantan. Collection: Pucuk Rebung Museum Gallery

Royal treasures

Comb repousse work with red gold under perforated border, Silver, gold and horn, Late 18th century, Brunei Darussalam. Collection: Pucuk Rebung Museum Gallery



Brass hanging lotus lamp, Indian influence, 19th century, Kelantan. Collection: Kelantan State Museum



Brass hanging lotus oil lamp, Early 19th century, Brunei Darussalam. Collection: Pucuk Rebung Museum Gallery

'A Glimpse of the Glory of the Brunei and Kelantan Sultanates', an exhibition currently holding sway at Istana Jahar and Istana Batu in Kota Baru, Kelantan, is a grand showcase of both Sultanates' works of art as well as an eye-opener for the affinity between them.

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By KEE HUA CHEE

Pictures courtesy of the Kelantan Royal Collection, Muzium Negeri Kelantan and Pucuk Rebung Gallery-Museum.

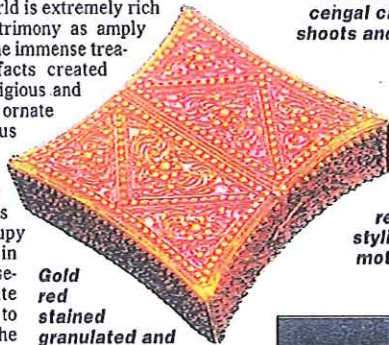
Glory of two kingdoms

THE Malay world is extremely rich in artistic patrimony as amply revealed by the immense treasury of artefacts created for ceremonial, religious and daily-usage. From ornate and ostentatious royal regalia to humble utensils, these lovingly handcrafted works of art now occupy pride of place in grand palaces, museums and private homes, testimony to the time when the Malays ruled over the vast archipelago and fabled Golden Chersonese.

Ever since Parameswara converted to Islam in the 15th century, the Malay Sultanates have flourished and today, there are nine Malaysian Sultanates in addition to the Brunei Sultanate. The Malay Sultans today continue their time-honoured role as head of Islam in their state, fountain of justice and mercy, protector of their people and custodian of a priceless heritage.

As the Kelantan and Brunei Sultanates are linked through marriage over the centuries and continue to be on the most cordial terms, the Raja Perempuan of Kelantan decided to highlight this unique relationship through an epochal exhibition, "A Glimpse of the Glory of the Kelantan and Brunei Sultanates".

With permission from the Sultan of Kelantan, rare pieces of the Royal Collection were taken out while Henry Bong from Pucuk Rebung Gallery-

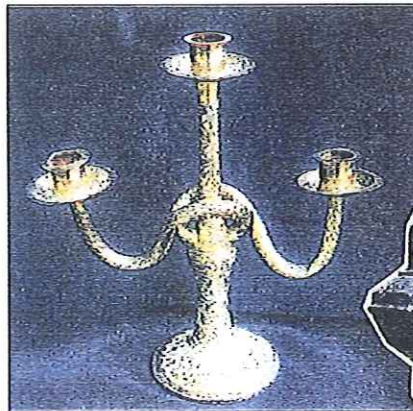


Gold red stained granulated and filigree tobacco box belonging to the late Raja Perempuan Zainab II; 20th century, Kelantan.

ABOVE: Detail of Kacapuri - side of grave structure; cengal carved with plant shoots and sacred verses; 18th century, Kelantan.



RIGHT: Detail of Malay gilt wood panel from Old Brunei; very refined work with stylised 'awan larat' motif; 19th century, Brunei.



ABOVE: Candle stand; silver, English influence; Kelantan 1966.

RIGHT: Brass oil lamp; 19th century, Sarawak (under the rule of Brunei).

LEFT: Covered bronze jar with Malay dragon and phoenix, topped by a chillin on cover; Malay masterpiece inspired by heirloom Ming Chinese trade ceramics; 17th century, Brunei.



Silver Tetradym coin of Alexandra the Great, an ancestor of the Royal Brunei sultans; approx. 350 BCE, Asia Minor.

Museum of Kuala Lumpur was asked to be guest curator to assist Abdullah Abdul Ghani from the Kelantan Museum Board.

The shared heritage of these two Sultanates are held in two historic palaces: Istana Jahar, built in 1887 and now Royal Ceremonies and Customs Museum, and Istana Batu, home of the Kelantan Royal Family until 1961 and now The Royal Museum.

Kelantan, the most cultural and artistic state in Malaysia, was already renowned in the 5th Century when the Chinese Annals referred to it as "Ho-lo-tan" and later in the 6th century as "Tan-Tan". At its zenith, Kelantan's sphere of influence reached Champa and is the only state to have two female rulers. The acclaimed Che Siti Wan Kembang whose wise rule and beauty were so far-reaching, Arab traders paid homage in her court by conferring on her the title "Che". Her two pet deer today form part of Kelantan's emblem. Her adopted daughter Puteri Saa'don also reigned during the Golden Age of Kelantan.

Across the South China Sea, Brunei's first Sultan, Mohammad Shah, converted to Islam in the 14th century.

At its peak, the Brunei Sultanate encompassed Borneo all the way to Manila. In 1890, the Limbang River was ceded to Sarawak, cutting Brunei into two and reducing it to a mere 5,763sq m. The discovery of oil in 1906 laid the foundations to Brunei's current prosperity under the aegis of the present Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah who ascended the throne in 1967.

About 200 artefacts have been assembled for this seminal exhibition: six from Istana Batu, 10 from the Royal Kelantan Palace Collection, 35 from Kelantan Museum and 146 from Pucuk Rebung whose collection is reputed to be the finest in private hands. "The exhibition shows the

Rich past of Kelantan and Brunei

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ABOVE: Kain Telepok Kelantan; early 20th century, Kelantan.

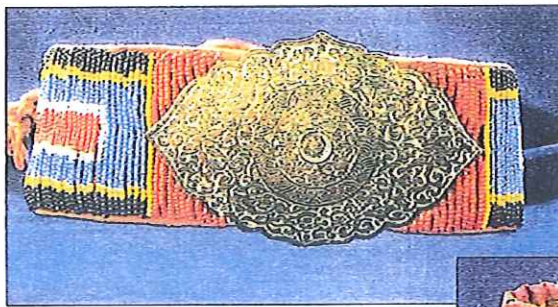


RIGHT: Iban loin cloth; early 20th century, Borneo.

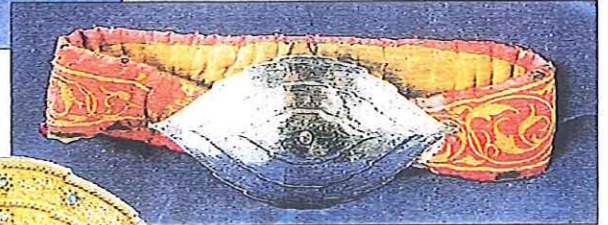
glory of Islam, the artistic talents of Kelantanese and Bruneian craftsmen, the evolution of materials, motifs and style through the centuries and the common links caused by trade and commerce," explains Bong. "Certain designs and motifs are repeated throughout the Malay world despite being separated by thousands of miles like the *naga* and *petalawati*, floral and leaf motifs and, of course, verses from the Holy Koran."

The Raja Perempuan of Kelantan and The Crown Prince of Kelantan accompanied the Sultan of Brunei and his two Royal Consorts to the opening of the exhibition. The Sultan of Brunei instantly recognised artefacts from Brunei, pointing them to the Raja Perempuan. He was particularly bemused when Henry Bong revealed a "tapak sirih" (betel nut set) had once belonged to his father, the late Sultan Haji Sir Omar Ali Saifuddin. Said Bong, "I told His Majesty our family was proud to be able to purchase it some 35 years ago when Istana Brunei in Kuching was closed. The Sultan is a learned art lover and even explained certain pieces to his hosts, the Raja Perempuan and Tengku Mahkota."

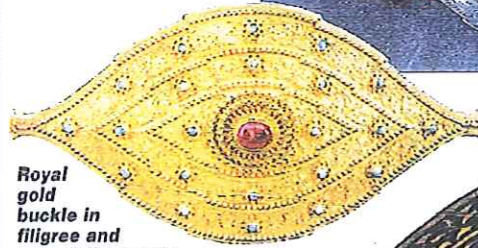
Archaeological sites show trade links were established as early as 900 AD with the discovery of Southern Sung ceramics in Kelantan and Brunei. From the Srivijaya, Majapahit and Langkasuka empires to the advent of the Europeans, the Malay world created works of art absorbing these elements while preserving a distinct Malay feel. With the consolidation of Islam from the 14th century onwards, the Sultanates of Kelantan and Brunei show influences from Arabia, Persia and Turkey, reaching new peaks of excellence. E



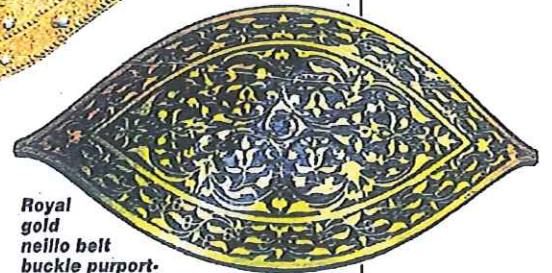
LEFT: Brass buckle on beaded belt; 18th century, Borneo.



BELOW: Neillo belt; early 19th century, Kelantan.



Royal gold buckle in filigree and granulation work with multiple turquoise and a central red stone setting; 19th century, Kelantan.



Royal gold neillo belt buckle purportedly from a Sambas Sultan, related to Brunei; Late 18th century, Sambas Borneo.



BELOW: Royal gold crown belonging to the late Sultanah Zalnab of Kelantan; fine filigree and granulated work and coloured gems; early 20th century.



Royal brass betel nut container (Langgual) from the former Istana Brunei in Kuching, Sarawak, from the reign of Sultan Sir Omar Ali Saifuddin; 20th century, Brunei.

For information, contact Perbadanan Muzium Negeri Kelantan, tel: 09-748-2266; Pucuk Rebung Gallery-Museum, tel: 03-206-1769.



Istana Jahar - Royal Ceremonies and Customs Museum.



Betel nut container that belonged to the late Tengku Meriam Tengku Ahmad; between 1920 and 1944.