



K O N I N K L I J K E N E D E R L A N D S E
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Provenance report regarding Kris met schede (Kreh bugéh meusarongan)

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Draft provenance report regarding Kris met schede (Kreh bugeh meusarongan)

Mirjam Shatanawi

	Custodian	NMVW Museum Volkenkunde
	Current possessor	Dutch State
	Inventory number	RV-1599-660
	Material/technique	Iron; ivory; gold; gemstones; wood
	Measurements	43 x 11.5 x 6.5 cm keris without sheath: 40 x 7 x 6.5 cm sheath: 36.5 x 11 x 3 cm

Photo: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll.nr. RV-1599-660

Summary of findings

This keris dagger was sold to the 's Rijks Ethnographisch Museum (the current Museum Volkenkunde) by Theodorus Jacobus ("Theo") Veltman (1868-1943) in 1907. Veltman was an officer in the Dutch East Indies Army (KNIL) and civil governor of the Meulaboh district in Aceh. The keris was sold to Veltman by Panglima Muda Raja, a relative of Teuku Umar, in 1906. According to Veltman, the keris once belonged to Teuku Umar (1854-1899), one of the most important resistance leaders during the Aceh War and a national hero of Indonesia. Archival research did not find supporting evidence for this claim. Analysis of the style of the keris indicates that it was made for a member of the Acehnese elite.

Reconstruction provenance

After 1700 – before 1899

Manufacture of keris

Email from Raden Usman Effendi to author, 17 January 2022

Before 1899 - 1906

Panglima Muda Raja

Notes with series 1599, Archives of the Museum Volkenkunde, no inventory number.

1906 – 1907

Theodorus Jacobus Veltman

Notes with series 1599, Archives of the Museum Volkenkunde, no inventory number.

1907-present

NMVW Museum Volkenkunde

Inventory card RV-1599-660, digitised in TMS.

Introduction and context

This keris was sold to the 's Rijks Ethnographisch Museum (the current Museum Volkenkunde) as having belonged to Teuku Umar (1854-1899), the famous resistance leader of Aceh, and for decades considered to be the main adversary of the Dutch. He came from a lower-ranking noble (*uleebalang*) family that was indirectly related to the sultan's house of Aceh. Between 1884 and 1896, Teuku Umar alternately was an ally of the Dutch forces and their enemy. In 1893, he was put in command of a legion of soldiers fighting with the KNIL (The Netherlands East Indies Army). In March 1896, he turned (again) against the Dutch, leading to years of chasing him and eventually, to his killing in 1899.

In the colonial period, objects that belonged to Teuku Umar were much sought after by museums and private collectors. It was a matter of pride and prestige to own objects that were attributed to him. Therefore, there are quite a few of these items present in the museums in the Netherlands. In the collections of the National Museum of World Cultures, thus far eleven objects have been described as originating from Teuku Umar. Other museums in the Netherlands, like the Wereldmuseum and Museum Bronbeek, also own objects that are said to have belonged to Teuku Umar.¹ It is not certain that all of these items really belonged to him, because donors and sellers may have had reasons to attribute objects to Teuku Umar to enhance their value, while in reality this may not have been the case. Not all Teuku Umar objects in Dutch museum collections were looted; some are purchases or gifts from Teuku Umar or his relatives.

¹ For a provisional list of Teuku Umar objects in public collections in the Netherlands, see bijlage A in: Caroline A. Drieënhuizen. 2012. "Koloniale collecties, Nederlands aanzien: de Europese elite van Nederlands-Indië belicht door haar verzamelingen, 1811-1957." PhD diss, Amsterdam, University of Amsterdam. <https://hdl.handle.net/11245/1.371729>

Object information

The kris is made from wrought iron. The sheath is of the Buginese type, hence the Acehnese name *kreh bugeh meusarongan* (Buginese gilded kris). The blade shows Minangkabau, Buginese, and Javanese influences.² The kris has a blade with a flaming pattern (*pamor*), seven curves, two blood grooves (*sogokan*), and a central ridge (*dada*). Sharp points (*greneng*) have been made on one side of the wavy blade. The forging of the blade looks Javanese and the style is Buginese (*lau lau*), made in Sumatra. If the blade is Javanese, the style is called *jarang goyang* (dancing horse), which is associated with securing the love of women. The Buginese *lau lau* style stands for bravery.

The ivory hilt of this kris is carved in the shape of a stylised bird, depicting Jawa Demam.³ In the lower part, a number of diamond shapes are carved. This type of hilt is associated with the Gayo region in Aceh, but according to kris expert Raden Usman Effendi, this hilt looks more Minangkabau.⁴ The bowl-shaped hilt ring (*selut*) is made of enamelled gold, with floral ornamentation and is inlaid with precious stones (many have disappeared), in Acehnese style. The sheath (*gandar*), the shoe of the sheath and the sheath-hole (*wrangka*) are carved of wood and entirely covered with gold leaf, decorated with repoussé flower and leaf ornaments, in Gayo style. This type of ornamentation was used across Sumatra, but the technique used is typical for Aceh, where gold was given a reddish colour by soaking it in a blend of hot water and acid.⁵

The stem ring and the shoe (tip of the sheath) are now missing, but they were still present in 1912, as they were described in the museum's catalogue of Acehnese objects.⁶ The stem ring was made from gold (or gilded) and inlaid with red gemstones. The shoe was oval and bud shaped.

The precious materials used and the high quality of execution indicate that this kris was made for a member of the Acehnese elite.⁷

Provenance report

The kris was purchased in 1907 by the 's Rijks Ethnographisch Museum (the current Museum Volkenkunde) for around 15 guilders from Theodorus Jacobus ("Theo") Veltman (1868-1943). Veltman was a KNIL officer, who served the largest part of his military career (from 1896 to 1917) in Aceh.⁸ He was born into an Indo-European family in Semarang and trained at the Royal Military Academy (KMA) in Breda. In 1890, he relocated to Indonesia, first to be stationed in Sulawesi, then in Aceh. From 1899, he served with the *marechaussee*, the elite corps of the KNIL that was tasked with crushing the guerrilla war in Aceh. The highest rank he earned was General Major (titular rank, 1927). Veltman was known to be fluent in Malay and Acehnese, and to be highly knowledgeable about Acehnese culture. Besides his work for the KNIL, he published several scholarly works about the history of Aceh, the production of gold, the silk industry, and gold and silver jewellery and goldsmith's work.

² Email from Raden Usman Effendi, kris expert, to author, 17 January 2022.

³ Albert G. van Zonneveld, *Traditional Weapons of the Indonesian Archipelago* (Leiden: C. Zwartenkot Art Books, 2002), 66.

⁴ Email from Raden Usman Effendi, kris expert, to author, 17 January 2022.

⁵ Email from John Klein Nagelvoort, curator Museum Bronbeek, to author, 2 January 2021.

⁶ Hendrik Willem Fischer, *Atjeh, Gajō- en Alaslanden (Sumatra I)* (Leiden: Brill, 1912), 190. <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:129408>

⁷ Email from Raden Usman Effendi, kris expert, to author, 17 January 2022.

⁸ NL-HaNA, Oorlog / Stamboeken Officieren KL, 2.13.04, inv.no. 634.

https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/2.13.04/invnr/634/file/NL-HaNA_2.13.04_634_0179

The kris was part of the sale of a collection of 753 objects (series RV-1599), mostly from Aceh, for a total price of 8,970 guilders.⁹ The purchase was partly subsidised by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (*Ministerie van Binnenlandsche Zaken*).¹⁰ The sale included another kris that for a brief period had belonged to Teuku Umar (RV-1599-661, this kris is now missing). Veltman provided an inventory list with information about each object he sold.¹¹ Number 423 on the list (the current RV-1599-660) is described as:

“kreh bugeh meusarongan, with *dandan* [tusk] hilt that, by the way, is fully covered in gold. This precious Acehese kris also belonged to T. Uma [Teuku Umar]. He donated it as *tanda* [a keepsake] to his relative Panglima Muda Raja of Woyla. After Cut Nya Dhien, Uma’s widow, was arrested, Panglima Muda Raja subjugated to the authorities. A lack of money made him sell this *pusaka* [heirloom] on this occasion.”¹²

A mistake occurred in the museum records. A comma was placed between “Panglima Moeda” and “Radja van Woyla”, suggesting that his position was raja of Woyla (a position that did not exist; the ruler of Woyla held the title of *kejeruen*).¹³

From Veltman’s description, the following information can be distilled: the kris was sold by Panglima Muda Raja after the arrest of Cut Nya Dhien (Teuku Umar’s widow) in November 1905. He sold it due to a lack of money, according to Veltman, on the occasion of his subjugation to the Dutch. Veltman and other colonial-era sources describe him as a relative of Teuku Umar, but none mention exactly how they were related. Colonial reports indicate that the subjugation of Panglima Muda Raja took place in early 1906.¹⁴ The *Koloniaal Verslag* of 1906 mentions that “after the arrest of Cut Nya Dhien, the relatives of the late T. Uma subjugated, that is Panglima Muda Raja, the most important opponent of Upper Woyla, and T. Men, Dato Puteh’s son.”¹⁵ After her arrest, Cut Nya Dhien called for Panglima Muda Raja and pressed him to surrender.¹⁶ This all happened within the geographical area under Theo Veltman’s jurisdiction: he was civil governor (*civiel gezaghebber*, which, despite the name, was a military position) of Pulo Raya until 25 March 1905, then he held the same position in Meulaboh, and both places are located on the west coast of Aceh.¹⁷ The Woyla area, where Panglima Muda Raja was based, was part of Meulaboh district. Furthermore, it is important to note that the arrest of Cut Nya Dhien happened under Veltman’s leadership and, therefore, that he was directly involved in the subsequent subjugation of Panglima Muda Raja.¹⁸ The KNIL took as spoils from one of Cut Nya Dhien’s hiding places a collection of objects, which included jewellery, several kris daggers embellished with

⁹ Price list, files series 1599, Archives of the Museum Volkenkunde, no inventory number.

¹⁰ Letter from Minister of Internal Affairs to J.D.E. Schmeltz, director ‘s Rijks Ethnographisch Museum, 17 September 1907, NL-LdnRMV-A1-63-9.

¹¹ Notes, files series 1599, Archives of the Museum Volkenkunde, no inventory number.

¹² “kreh boegeh meusarongan, met “dandan” gevest overigens geheel met goud overtrokken. Deze Atjehsche kostbare kris heeft eveneens T. Oema toebehoord. Als “tanda” schonk hij het wapen weg aan Panglima Moeda Radja van Woyla, bloedverwant van T. Oema. Na de arrestatie van Tjoet Nja Din, Oema’s weduwe, onderwierp zich Panglima Moeda Radja aan het gezag. Wegens geldgebrek verkocht hij bij die gelegenheid deze “poesaka”.”

¹³ Fischer, *Atjeh, Gajō- en Alaslanden (Sumatra I)*, 190.

¹⁴ *Koloniaal verslag van 1906: Nederlandsch (Oost-)Indië* (’s Gravenhage: Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1906), 22;23.

https://repository.overheid.nl/frbr/sgd/19061907/0000355979/1/pdf/SGD_19061907_0001638.pdf

¹⁵ *Koloniaal Verslag*, 23. “... na de arrestatie van Tjoet Nja’ Den, de familieleden van wijlen T. Oema’ zich onderwierpen, namelijk Panglima Moeda Radja, het belangrijkste bendehoofd van Boven Woyla, en T. Mén, zoon van Dato Poetèh.” In Dutch colonial sources, opponents were regularly indicated with terms like gang leader (*bendehoofd*).

¹⁶ “Brieven uit Atjeh. XVII,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, January 3, 1906, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010650035:mpeg21:a0060>.

¹⁷ NL-HaNA, Oorlog / Stamboeken Officieren KL, 2.13.04, inv.no. 634.

https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/2.13.04/invnr/634/file/NL-HaNA_2.13.04_634_0179

¹⁸ “De gevangenneming van Tjoet Nja Din,” *Het nieuws van den dag: kleine courant*, December 21, 1905, <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/view?coll=ddd&identificer=ddd:010164157:mpeg21:a0153>.

gold, and other weapons. The objects were transferred to the Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen (the current Nasional Museum Indonesia).¹⁹

Before his subjugation in 1906, Panglima Muda Raja was considered an important enemy of the Dutch.²⁰ In May 1905, he and his supporters engaged in a battle with a *marechaussee* patrol led by Lieutenant Vastenou, during which 40 Acehnese men were killed.²¹ After his subjugation, he was hardly mentioned in colonial sources. Until at least 1915, he seemed to have been head of the mukim Krueng Be (Kroeëng Bhëe) in the Woyla district, as a photograph in the book *Marechaussee in Atjeh* demonstrates (the same photograph is pictured below).²² Mukim heads (a subdivision of a district, usually several villages) were not mentioned in the *Regerings-almanak*, the official guide listing everyone in Dutch service, and therefore it is difficult to find out the dates when he held this position.



Portrait of chiefs of the Woyla district with KNIL Lieutenant Willem Adriaan Braspot, 1915. Panglima Muda Raja is second from left. Collection Leiden University Library, inv. no. KITLV 27136. <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:805004>

Thus, the *Koloniaal Verslag* and other sources confirm that Panglima Muda Raja was a relative of Teuku Umar and that he was subjugated in 1906. The lack of money is not mentioned, but may be inferred from the reported fighting and heavy losses by the Panglima's party in the period following the killing of Teuku Umar in 1899.

¹⁹ Bataviaasch Genootschap, *Notulen van de algemeene en directie-vergaderingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van kunsten en wetenschappen*, vol. XLIII 1905 (Batavia: G. Kolff & Co., 1906), 60–62. <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:1123375>

²⁰ "Atjeh-kroniek," *De locomotief: Samarangsch handels- en advertentie-blad*, October 8, 1905, <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/view?coll=ddd&identifier=MMKB23:001630094:mpeg21:a00003>.

²¹ "Atjeh," *Het vaderland*, August 19, 1905, <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/view?coll=ddd&identifier=MMKB23:001471086:mpeg21:a00060>.

²² M. H. du Croo, *Marechaussee in Atjeh: herinneringen en ervaringen van den eersten luitenant en kapitein van het Korps Marechaussee van Atjeh en onderhoorigheden, H.J. Schmidt van 1902 tot 1918* (Maastricht: Uitg. onder auspiciën van "Oost en West" door Leiter-Nypels, 1943), 162. <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:129302>

During this research, no further information has been found about the acquisition. Theo Veltman has not left personal archives in public institutions, which is rather unusual for a KNIL officer of his standing. Contact with the Veltman estate revealed that they are unaware of the whereabouts of any remaining archival material related to him.²³ Therefore, there is no supporting evidence that the keris indeed belonged to Teuku Umar, other than the exceptional quality of the keris, which makes it likely that it was owned by a member of the aristocracy, and therefore possibly Teuku Umar.

²³ Email from M. Veltman to author, 10 August 2020.