

Provenance report regarding Kromme sabel met schede, de kling met geïncrusteerde Arabische inschrift

Klaas Stutje

	Custodian	NMVW Tropenmuseum
	Current possessor	Dutch State
	Inventory number	TM-H-1669
	Material/technique	Wood, iron
	Measurements	Sword: 12 x 3 x 63 cm Sword with sheath: 16.5 x 3 x 74.5 cm

Photo: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll.no. TM-H-1669

Summary of findings

This *beladah belabang* sword was produced in the town of Negara, in today's kabupaten Hulu Sungai Selatan in South Kalimantan, Indonesia. The sword was donated in 1888 by colonial official Ferdinand Theodoor Pahud de Mortanges (1832-1898) to the Koloniaal Museum in Haarlem, a predecessor of today's NMVW Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam. Further research indicates that Pahud de Mortanges was a frequent donor of objects, paintings, and books from and about the Netherlands Indies to various Dutch museums. It is unlikely that he acquired this *beladah belabang* first hand, but it is not possible at this time to reconstruct how the sword came into his possession.

I do not know how to specify predecessor

How do I mention this fact?

Reconstruction provenance

[no date] - [no date]

[...]

[no date] - 1888

Ferdinand Theodoor Pahud de Mortanges

Inventory card object number TM-H-1669.

1888 - today

Koloniaal Museum in Haarlem (today NMVW Tropenmuseum)

Object information

This type of curved and double edged sabre is called a *beladah belabang* (nailed, double edged sword), which among collectors is more commonly known as a *parang nabur (nabur sword)*.¹ It is an iconic weapon of the nineteenth century Banjarmasin region. Its shape is a local derivative of similar Dutch navy cutlasses and Islamic scimitar swords. Both sides of the blade of this *beladah belabang* are decorated with inscriptions in Arabic characters, encrusted with gold. They evoke Quranic verses, the four caliphs, archangels and the first words of the *shahada*: “la illahi ila Allah” (there is no God but Allah). The texts are written in untrained handwriting and contain spelling mistakes.² The ricasso is decorated on both sides with an Islamic magic square with numbers derived from the Indo-Arabic numeral system. All the numbers in the rows, columns, and diagonals of the square add up to 20 on one side and 15 on the other:

how to mention context?

4	9	2
3	5	7
8	1	6

8	6	4	2
2	4	6	8
6	8	2	4
4	2	8	6

¹ J. D. E. Schmeltz, “Beiträge zur Ethnographie von Borneo,” *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie*, J. D. E. Schmeltz (ed) Vol. 5 (1892), 233, 237.

² The author wishes to thank Mirjam Shatanawi for translation and interpretation of the inscriptions.



Photo: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll.no. TM-H-1669

The brass hilt deviates from a regular *beladah belabang* because the cross guard, knuckle guard and the grip are not decorated. Moreover, other than with a regular *beladah belabang* the knuckle guard is not attached to the grip but runs into the pommel, and the tang of the blade is not attached with a characteristic winged nut but is riveted on the top. The grip, ribbed and coated with black leather, probably originates from a western sabre, or is an imitation of it. The sheath is made of wood, and coated with a layer of black leather.³ The blade is treated with varnish, probably by curators attempting to prevent degradation.

There are many similar *beladah belabang* sabres in Dutch museum collections, at least 48 in NMVW collections alone. *Beladah belabang* are also regularly traded on the international art market.

This *beladah belabang* has an old number from the Koloniaal Museum Haarlem: 765-16-1888.

Provenance report

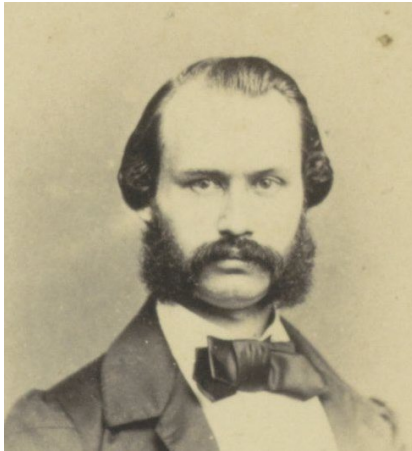
The letter H in the *beladah belabang*'s inventory number TM-H-1669 indicates that the sabre once belonged to the Koloniaal Museum in Haarlem. Established in 1864, this museum was focussed on collecting and exhibiting raw materials, crops and products from the colonies. In the course of years, the

³ The author wishes to thank Albert van Zonneveld for his information. See also TMS, Inv.kaart TM-H-1669.

Koloniaal Museum changed its name and continued as the Koloniaal Instituut, which received the ethnographic collection of the Amsterdam zoo's Natura Artis Magistra, and opened a new monumental building in Amsterdam in 1926. In 1945, the Koloniaal Instituut was renamed the Indisch Instituut, which five years later became the Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen, with the Tropenmuseum managing the ethnographic collection. Since 2014, the Tropenmuseum has been a part of NMVW.

According to an inventory card of the Koloniaal Museum, this *beladah belabang* was donated to the museum in 1888 by Ferdinand Theodoor Pahud de Mortanges. He was a son of the high colonial official Charles Ferdinand Pahud de Mortanges (1803-1873) who became Minister of Colonies between 1849 and 1856 and Governor General of the Netherlands Indies between 1856 and 1861.⁴ Ferdinand was born on 16 January 1832 in Batavia and studied law in Switzerland, the country of origin of his grandfather.⁵ Shortly after his father assumed office in 1856 as Governor General, Ferdinand returned to the Netherlands Indies. In 1858, he began working as a *hoofdcommies* (chief commissioner) at the Algemene Secretarie, and within a year he was promoted to the highest function of *referendaris* at that same office. Then two years later Ferdinand was again promoted to become Assistent Resident in Buitenzorg (today Bogor), near Batavia (today Jakarta). According to some journalists, Ferdinand's rapid career rise in the colonial administration was related to his father's position and they saw it as an example of nepotism and favoritism.⁶ Between 1867 and 1873, Ferdinand was a high official in the Department of Finance and between 1874 until his retirement in 1882, he was Resident in the Preanger-regentschappen, the area of Parahyangan in West Java. For his efforts in the latter residency, he was made a Knight in the Order of the Netherlands Lion.⁷

biography of
the collector



Portrait of Ferdinand Theodoor Pahud de Mortanges,
1857 – 1862, photographer *Walter Bentley Woodbury*,
Rijksmuseum Amsterdam
<http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.538889>

Apart from his work in office, Ferdinand Theodoor Pahud de Mortanges was active in numerous additional positions and honorary functions in Batavia and Buitenzorg. Among these were a membership of the Netherlands Indies Society of Industry and Agriculture (*Nederlandsch-Indische maatschappij voor*

⁴ Charles Ferdinand and Ferdinand Theodoor were born with the family name Pahud. In 1866, Charles Ferdinand gained the royal permission for himself and his offspring to carry the name Pahud de Mortanges, a right reaffirmed by the Governor General in 1869: "Geregtelijke aankondigingen," *Nederlandsche Staatscourant* 14 December 1866; "Geregtelijke aankondigingen," *Nederlandsche Staatscourant* 14 May 1869.

⁵ "Verschiedenes," *Der Bund*, Band 7-196, 17 July 1856.

⁶ "Protektie," *Bataviaasch handelsblad* 11 September 1867; "Mail-overzicht," *Bataviaasch handelsblad*, 17 June 1874.

⁷ NL-HaNA, Koloniën, 1850-1900, 2.10.02, inv.nr. 6121, Verbaal 3 December 1879 U19; NL-HaNA, KdK 1841-1897, 2.02.04, inv.nr. 2354, KB 12 December 1879 nr. 29.

Nijverheid en Landbouw) as well as the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences (Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen).⁸ After his retirement in 1882 and return to the Netherlands he remained socially active. In 1883 he was involved in the establishment of the Dutch Trade Museum (Nederlandsch Handels-Museum) and in 1885 he became director of both the Dutch Society for Advancement of Industry (Nederlandsche Maatschappij ten Bevordering van Nijverheid) and the affiliated Koloniaal Museum in Haarlem.⁹

Pahud de Mortanges' donation of the *beladah belabang* to the latter museum was not his only donation to museums in the Netherlands. Already in 1861, when he had only been in the Netherlands Indies a few years, he donated a few imprints of a ring with Javanese inscriptions to the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum in Leiden.¹⁰ In 1878, he contributed to the Dutch entry for the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris, and in 1879 he donated an Acehnese canon and blunderbuss to the ethnographic collection of veteran's home of the Dutch colonial army Bronbeek.¹¹ Between 1885 and 1890, the Koloniaal Museum in Haarlem received weapons, books, drawings, paintings, clothes and "Sumatran productions," almost all from or about the Netherlands-Indies.¹² The type of occupations of Pahud de Mortanges', the fact that his career took place in the governmental heartland of the Netherlands Indies, in cities like Batavia, Buitenzorg and Bandung, and the fact that he traded in objects from peripheral areas such as Aceh, Sulawesi, and South-Kalimantan, where he had no formal obligations, all suggest that he was not the primary collector of these items. He probably purchased, ordered, or received the objects from others. Yet, we have found no archival evidence about the way in which Pahud de Mortanges acquired his collection and the *beladah belabang* in particular.

The *beladah belabang* and the weapon donation of 1888

Beladah belabang number TM-H-1669 came in 1888 to the Koloniaal Museum as part of "a very important collection of Indies' weapons, among which very rare and valuable pieces."¹³ The collection of around 55 objects included not only weapons from Kalimantan, Java, Aceh and Sulawesi, but also a few rings, walking sticks, and a Quran. It was registered under the Koloniaal Museum-series 761, followed by an object number and the year 1888.¹⁴ Initially, it concerned a loan but in 1890 the transfer was changed into a gift to the museum.¹⁵ There are six *beladah belabang* weapons in this collection, all stated to have come from Banjarmasin or Negara.

This is not surprising. Negara (or Nagara, today Sungai Mandala in kabupaten Hulu Sungai Selatan), which reportedly was also the town of origin of TM-H-1669, was a renowned local centre of metallurgy and weapon production. In 1836, a German zoologist named Salomon Müller (1804-1864), who

⁸ 'Koloniën', *Rotterdamsche courant* 29 December 1860; 'Batavia', *Java-bode: nieuws, handels- en advertentieblad voor Nederlandsch-Indie*, 30 March 1861.

⁹ "Het Koloniaal Museum te Haarlem," *Dagblad van Zuidholland en 's Gravenhage*, 5 July 1886.

¹⁰ H.H. Juynboll, *Catalogus van 's Rijks Ethnographisch Museum, Deel V Javaansche Oudheden* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1909), x.

¹¹ "Verbeterde lijst der aan Nederlandsche inzenders op de Tentoonstelling te Parys in 1878 toegekende onderscheidingen," *Nederlandsche Staatscourant*, 13 December 1878, p. 8; J.C.J. Smits, *Gedenkboek van het Koloniaal-Militair Invalidenhuis Bronbeek* (Arnhem: Uitgeverij P. Gouda Quint, 1881), 246.

¹² "Geschenken voor het Koloniaal Museum ontvangen," *Tijdschrift uitgegeven door de Nederlandsche Maatschappij ter Bevordering van Nijverheid*, 49-54 (1886-1891).

¹³ "Verslag over het Koloniaal Museum," in: *Tijdschrift uitgegeven door de Nederlandsche Maatschappij ter Bevordering van Nijverheid* 51-2 (1888), p. 210, 220; "Binnenland," *Het Vaderland*, 21 June 1888: "een zeer belangrijke verzameling Indische wapens, waaronder zeer zeldzame en kostbare exemplaren."

¹⁴ In this system, *Beladah belabang* number TM-H-1669 was registered as Koloniaal Museum number 765-16-1888.

¹⁵ "Koloniaal Museum. Mededeelingen," in: *Tijdschrift uitgegeven door de Nederlandsche Maatschappij ter Bevordering van Nijverheid* 53-2 (1890), p. 82.

travelled in the region and who wrote a travelogue about his experiences, estimated that Negara numbered a few thousand inhabitants, of whom 70 to 80 were active in the manufacturing of weapons of various kinds, including swords, pistols, and rifles. Prices were “quite fair.”¹⁶ Six years later, Dutch army captain Hendriks (?-?) mentioned the possibility of ordering weapons in Negara.¹⁷ Five decades later, the Negara weapon industry was still flourishing, as can be learned from an 1882 travelogue of the German ethnographer Friedrich Johann Grabowsky (1857-1929). He visited several workshops and industries in the town, including that of a blacksmith who forged “the famous damascened Negara-sabres.” Grabowsky placed an order for a dagger, which the blacksmith began to make on the spot.¹⁸



Extract from map in G.B. Hooyer,
De krijgsgeschiedenis van Nederlandsch-Indië, van 1811 tot 1894, part II (Den Haag: De Gebr. van Cleef 1895) map nr. 24.

The Negara workshops produced richly decorated ceremonial weapons as well as regular weapons for warfare. Weapons were exported to various parts of the Archipelago.¹⁹ This implies that *beladah belabang* number TM-H-1669 could have been manufactured on demand, or confiscated in battle in South Kalimantan or elsewhere in the archipelago. Some inventory cards from Pahud de Mortanges' 1888 donation of weapons to the Koloniaal Museum carry additional provenance information. *Beladah belabang* number TM-H-1667, for instance, was a sabre that was reportedly taken from Demang Lehman at his arrest. Sabre number TM-H-1673 was stated to be Hidayatullah's. These statements are

¹⁶ Salomon Müller, *Verhandelingen over de natuurlijke geschiedenis der Nederlandsche overzeesche bezittingen* (Leiden: C.J. Temminck 1837-1844), 167: "alleszins billijk."

¹⁷ "Iets over de wapenfabricatie op Borneo, ontleend aan een rapport van den Kapitein der infanterie A. Hendriks," *Verhandelingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunst en Wetenschappen* 18^e deel (Batavia: Parapattan 1842), 4.

¹⁸ F. Grabowsky, "Negara: ein Industrie-Centrum in Südost-Borneo," *Globus, Illustrierte Zeitschrift für Länder- und Völkerkunde* 55 (1889): 90-92: "Dann besuchten wir einen Schmied, der die berühmten damascirten Negara-Säbel schmiedete."

¹⁹ Idem; Smits, *Gedenkboek van het Koloniaal-Militair Invalidenhuis Bronbeek*, 15-16.

unconfirmed, and not in correspondence with historic accounts about the arrest of Demang Lehman.²⁰ The inventory cards do not comment on these remarkable attributions, but regarding the assertion that sabre number TM-H-1668 was captured from Sulu pirates, the judgement was that this claim was “doubtful.”²¹ Be that as it may, it is a fact that *beladah belabang* were sometimes taken from the battle field.²² Other donated objects of Pahud de Mortanges were reportedly gifted by Indonesian regents with whom he had worked.²³ The inventory card of *beladah belabang* number TM-H-1669 gives no further details about its provenance and the way in which Pahud de Mortanges had acquired it.

²⁰ Anon., *Verzameling der Merkwaardigste Vonnissen gewezen door de kriegsraad te velde in de zuid- en oosterafdeeling van Borneo gedurende de jaren 1859-1864* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1865) 192; H.G.J.L. Meyners, *Bijdragen tot de kennis der geschiedenis van het Bandjermasinsche Rijk, 1863-1866* (Leiden: E.J. Brill 1886), 51: According to Meyners Demang Lehman was only in possession of a Quran, his keris *Singkir*, and his lance *Kaliblah*.

²¹ TMS, Inv.card TM-H-1668: “is te betwijfelen.”

²² See for instance Van Rees, *De Bandjermasinsche Krijg*, part II, p. 285.

²³ Cf. TMS, Inv.card TM-H-42 and -43.