



# INDONESIA IN POLISH RESEARCH AND COLLECTIONS



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Edited by Maria Szymańska-Ilnata

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THE ASIA AND  
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MONOGRAFIE

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**Mazovia.**  
heart of Poland

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# INTODUCTORY REMARKS

## Indonesian pronunciation:

As geographic names and proper names of objects typical for the discussed cultures are given in the original spelling, below is a short overview of those Indonesian alphabet sounds that differ from the standard English pronunciation:

c = /tʃ/ as in **church**

g = /g/ always as in **guru**

j = /dʒ/ as in **job**

v = /f/ as in **fair**

y = /j/ as in **yes**

x = /x/ as in Scottish **loch**

oe = /u/ similar to the vowel sound in **moon**  
(old-style Indonesian spelling)

sy = /ʃ/ as in **shell**

r is always rolled

## Indonsian administrative divisions:

*Provinsi* – province  
(first-level administrative subdivision)

*Kabupaten* (kab.) – regency  
(second-level administrative subdivision)

*Kecamatan* (kec.) – district  
(third-level administrative subdivision)

# FOREWORD

The book is published in conjunction with the seventieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Poland and Indonesia. The two nations' academic and cultural ties have, nevertheless, a much longer history and go back to the eighteenth century. The oldest account, not merely a mention, of a Pole's journey to Indonesia is arguably the diary of Anzelm Teodor Dzwonkowski, who sailed to Asia on board *Zephyr*, a British East India Company packet ship. A detailed record of the voyage provided in the journal was later published by his daughter (Dzwonkowski, 1985). Dzwonkowski, however, was not a professional researcher but a careful observer of the life of Indonesian people. The first Polish scholar of Indonesia was Michał Siedlecki, who worked at the botanical garden in the present-day city of Bogor, Java, from 1907 to 1908. Siedlecki believed that every naturalist should also be a humanist, since humans are an inseparable part of the ecosystem, and any investigation of local flora and fauna must inevitably involve the study of the people who live amongst it: their costumes, beliefs, and language (Siedlecki, Siedlecka, Fedorowicz, 1966: 65). He described his views in the book

*Jawa. Przyroda i sztuka: uwagi z podróży* [Java: Nature and Art. Notes from a Journey], which includes extensive descriptions of Javanese culture and art (Siedlecki, 1913).

It has been over a hundred years since Michał Siedlecki visited Indonesia. In the course of the century, university education, as well as travel and research trips, have become significantly more accessible to the general public. This has fostered scientific progress in various fields, including Indonesian Studies, which were pioneered in Poland by Janusz Kamocki and Andrzej Wawrzyniak at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, although the exact term did not emerge until later. The number of people with an academic interest in the country was steadily growing. An important role in the process has been played by the Darmasiswa Scholarship Programme available for Polish students for thirty years now. The scheme enables its beneficiaries to take a one-semester or two-semester course in a chosen field at an Indonesian college or university. Around 450 people have profited from the programme since 1995. Many of them later devoted their professional life to Indonesia. Some are even among the contributors to this collection. Other Polish scholars of Indonesia developed their interest in the country independently, for instance, thanks to the Asia and Pacific Museum in Warsaw, which has been spreading knowledge about Nusantara since the 1970s and holds an internationally significant collection of Indonesian artefacts that is without equal in Poland.

The Museum aspires to be a hub that brings together Polish scholars of Indonesia and promotes knowledge about the country and its people. Up to this point, the institution has mounted exhibitions as well as being involved in educational, scientific, and popularising activities. With the release of this book, it ventures into academic publishing. The year 2023 saw lavish celebrations of the Museum's fiftieth anniversary. The jubilee was marked with the opening of the first part of the long-awaited permanent exhibition, including the Indonesian Gallery, an academic conference on Indonesia, and the Festival of Indonesia. The country is the subject of the first volume in the series *Asia and Oceania*:

*Monographs*. All of this underscores the special role that Indonesia plays in the history of the Asia and Pacific Museum.

The book you are holding in your hands attempts to familiarise the readers with the people, works, and museum collections that epitomise Polish-Indonesian academic ties. It comes in the wake of the 2023 conference, which brought together researchers of Indonesia and people fascinated with the country from across Poland. The event became a platform for exchanging knowledge and experiences, and a vital networking opportunity for representatives of different academic centres and cultural organisations. Expanded versions of selected conference papers have been published in this collection. The chapters pertain to a variety of issues, providing a broad panorama of topics that Polish researchers and museum professionals are interested in.

The conference was dedicated to the memory of Dr Janusz Kamocki, an ethnographer, a museum curator, and a scholar of Indonesia. His stay in the Indonesian Archipelago is documented in artefacts, films, and recordings held by the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków (MEK), and his book *Przygoda z Indonezją* (Kamocki, 1976). Kamocki's life and work are the subject of the first chapter in this collection, written by Eleonora Tenerowicz, a long-standing staff member of the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków and the continuator of Kamocki's legacy, namely the Department of Non-European Cultures. The text sheds light on one of Poland's first researchers of Indonesian cultures, provides an account of the early operations of the Embassy of Indonesia in Poland, and explores the post-war history of the Kraków museum. Furthermore, the author deals with Poland's oldest collections of Indonesian artefacts, including objects brought from the archipelago by Michał Siedlecki and currently held at the MEK.

The largest section of the book concerns different Indonesian museum collections in Poland. The five texts, however, do not exhaust the subject and leave room for further study. Instead of providing general information on the kind and provenance of the exhibits, the authors zoom in on concrete issues and artefacts, reporting their research findings

and presenting the objects in question in a broader context. Artur Fonzychowski introduces the readers to the collection of Indonesian boats along with ship and boat models kept in the National Maritime Museum in Gdańsk. Exhibits of this kind are rarely displayed and studied; however, they can be found in other museum collections. The remaining four texts deal with the collections of the Asia and Pacific Museum. The first and the most general one discusses the history of the institution, presents an overview of the Indonesian collection, and examines its potential and the challenges it poses to its curators and conservators. Subsequent texts focus on such subjects as Bali crises, manuscripts, and leisure activities and games. The authors, all of whom are staff members of the Museum, present the findings of their often years-long research. Notably, the texts are accompanied by numerous high-quality photographs that offer a good look at the discussed objects.

The second part of the monograph consists of three texts whose authors are not museum professionals. Michał Sęk analyses the Indonesian public policies and their influence on the administrative divisions and government structure in the country. His text is an excellent source of information on the Indonesian government's actions, which impact practically all aspects of life in Indonesia, including culture and art, the main focus of the book. It is to art that the following two texts are devoted. One, written by Dawid Martin, gives an overview of music descriptions in travel literature. As it turns out, most published accounts of journeys to or longer stays in Indonesia include mentions of the country's musical culture. Thanks to their authors, we have absorbing, if not fully professional, descriptions of music from different corners of Indonesia. The monograph ends with a text by Anna Brzezińska about volcano imagery in visual arts. The author analyses the means used to depict volcanic cones, and the information and emotions that the artists wanted to convey. She also discusses examples of artworks with a material link to volcanoes, such as pieces made with the use of volcanic dust.

*Indonesia in Polish Research and Collections* comes after earlier academic studies on Indonesia published in Poland.

The list opens with Michał Siedlecki's above-mentioned book, which was named the first Polish academic publication on Indonesia by Maciej Klimiuk, the author of *Bibliografia polskich i polskojęzycznych publikacji z zakresu studiów indonezjanistycznych i malaistycznych 1913–2013* [A Bibliography of Polish and Polish-language publications in the field of Indonesian Studies and Malay Studies 1913–2013] (Klimiuk, 2014). Klimiuk's catalogue clearly indicates a surge in the number of publications after 2010. Sadly, no such record for the last decade exists, but it seems like the upward trend has continued and is further strengthened by this book.

I hope the readers have a positive reaction to the publication and wish you all an enjoyable reading experience.

*Maria Szymańska-Ilnata*

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**ELEONORA  
TENEROWICZ**



Janusz Kamocki, Kraków, 2011 (the author's private archive)

# JANUSZ KAMOCKI: THE FOUNDER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF NON-EUROPEAN STUDIES AT THE ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW, RESEARCHER AND POPULARISER OF ASIAN CULTURES

Janusz Kamocki (1927–2021) was an ethnographer, doctor of humanities, cultural studies researcher, and lecturer. Born in Warsaw, he spent his adolescence at a family estate in the area of Sandomierz, where he would frequently return as a grown-up and where he found his final rest on 22 October 2021. Throughout his entire adult life, from 1946 until his death, he lived in Kraków. There, he studied ethnography under Professor Kazimierz Moszyński, graduating in 1952 with a master's thesis titled *Krytyczny przegląd kwestionariuszy etnograficznych wydanych w języku polskim* [A critical review of ethnographical questionnaires published in Polish]. From 1947 he also studied diplomacy at the School of Political Studies of the Law Faculty, Jagiellonian University, graduating in 1949 (Zachorowska, 2022: 406).

As a fresh ethnography graduate, Kamocki took up employment at the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków (MEK). As he said in a 2010 interview, he had, received two offers: one came from the Museum of Folk Cultures in Młociny (now: National Ethnographic Museum, PME) – a part-time job for him and a part-time job for his then fiancée and future wife; the other

from the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków. He accepted the latter.<sup>1</sup> Kamocki started working at the MEK on 1 January 1952 and continued until his retirement in 1987. As he would jokingly admit, he had been hired at the Museum 'mainly because his muscular strength' (*Sto i pół*, 2011: 52) and a good word put in for him by Zdzisław Szewczyk (1918–2004), an older alumnus of the ethnography programme who had already been employed at the Museum (*Sto i pół*, 2011: 132). Kamocki was chosen over another candidate, a student Jadwiga Bezwińska. His winning asset was physical strength: apart from intellectual prowess, the Museum needed muscle power to set up headquarters in the former town hall of Kazimierz.

Komocki's muscular strength was particularly needed for transporting, carrying, and unloading heavy chests full of museum exhibits stored during the war at the Kraków University of Technology and the Polish Academy of Learning. 'You never knew what you'll find inside,' said Komocki. A chest could be filled with rocks wrapped in oakum, which was a ruse employed by Professor Roman Reinfuss to protect the artefacts from being taken to Germany (*Sto i pół*, 2011: 92).

The Museum's then director, Professor Tadeusz Seweryn, had the employees rotate through different departments, since he expected his staff to be familiar with all museum jobs. And so, together with his colleagues, Kamocki helped with whatever needed to be done around the Museum: he would repair a broken lift with Zdzisław Szewczyk, lend a hand with cleaning and masonry work, fix agricultural tools, and mount exhibitions. 'The only job I didn't do was director, accountant, and stoker,' he once quipped (*Sto i pół*, 2011: 132). Dressed in overalls, the Museum's female staffers were also actively involved with manual work. One of the support staff cooked one-course lunches in the conservator's workshop to keep everyone's energy high.

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1 An interview with Janusz Kamocki conducted by the author in 2010 for a publication marking the centenary of the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków in February 2011.



Janusz Kamocki (in the window) during exhibition installation at the MEK's post-war headquarters – 1952; ref. no. III 29198F\_II 16453 (MEK collections)



Janusz Kamocki with Lutosława Hajówna<sup>2</sup> and Aleksandra Jacherówna during exhibition installation at the MEK, 1952, ref. no. III 29223F\_II 16447 (MEK collections)

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2 Lutosława Hajówna (1909–1971) was employed at the MEK already before the war (since May 1937), working with its founder, Seweryn Udziela. After the war broke out, she helped rescue and hide the artefacts and collection catalogues. She returned to work at the MEK after the war and was actively involved in the process of organising and cataloging the surviving collections. From 1951 to 1969 she served as the head of the museum library; she also took part in the Museum's research camps and conducted her own research.

As one can clearly see, the Museum's post-war beginnings were difficult, but the staff lacked neither energy nor humour. Many of the Museum's employees received nicknames, such as 'Inspector', 'Angel', or 'M.A.' (short for 'Master of Arts'). Inspector (Zdzisław Szewczyk) and M.A. (Janusz Kamocki) were a particularly well-matched pair. The former owed his nickname to his informal role as a labour inspector. The latter was the Museum's first new hire with a degree in ethnography (Tenerowicz, 2010). Angel was the moniker of young Aleksandra Jacherówna (later: Tyszkowa, 1925–2018), a sociologist and ethnographer (without a diploma) who joined the MEK staff in 1951 and also played a fundamental role during the transformational period, working in the Inventory Department. Her role was crucial, since the department was assigned the difficult task of identifying, sorting, and provisionally describing the collections, after they had been dispersed during the war. Despite major obstacles, the Museum opened its first Polish folk culture exhibitions in 1951. Later that year, the Museum held two presentations of exotic artefacts for ethnography students. As an employee of the Inventory Department, Aleksandra Jacherówna was the person who organised these showcases. Despite the lack of any display products, the exhibit included a cross-section of all the cultural circles represented in the Museum's collections and was an excellent complement to Professor Moszyński's lectures. Such presentations were later repeated at demand, covering artefacts of selected ethnographic groups (Kamocki, 1998: 89).

## The Department of Non-European Cultures

The manual work and rotation through the Museum's various departments was just a prelude to the ultimate challenge faced by young Kamocki, namely setting up a Department of Exotic Cultures, considering in particular that clouds were gathering over the Museum's non-European artefacts: by the decision of the state authorities, the objects were to be handed over to the Museum of Folk Cultures (later: National

Ethnographic Museum, PME) being restored after wartime damage in Warszawa-Młociny. According to an official policy, all non-European ethnographic collections were supposed to be transferred to the Museum of Folk Cultures. The other museums were to be restricted to holding only Polish and Slavic collections, which, in practice, meant being relegated to a regional role. Although the plan was adopted by the Ministry of Culture and the Arts in 1947 (Makulski, 1973: 22; Słabczyński, 1949: 224; Suliga, 2008: 46),<sup>3</sup> the risk did not materialise until much later. In 1950 museums started receiving letters requesting that all non-Slavic collections that are the subject of ethnic studies, or 'the ethnography of exotic peoples,' be transferred to the Warsaw museum. Quoted in *Zwykłe-Niezwykłe*, the letter sent by the first postwar director of the Warsaw ethnographic museum to the Museum in Gliwice and the Museum Directorate clearly demands that the 1947 decision be implemented<sup>4</sup> (Suliga: 2008: 46). Many museums, including the National Museum in Kraków (MNK), which took over the holdings of the Museum of Technology and Industry (MTP) after the institution was closed in 1950, began to transfer their collections to Warsaw. The MEK defied the orders due to its difficult situation: the institution had to renovate its new headquarters, located at the Kazimierz town hall, before it could move and unpack the collection and start cataloguing it. Initially, the Museum's director, Professor Tadeusz Seweryn, managed to stall the process by claiming that the Museum was still taking

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3 'In December 1947, the Polish National Ethnographic Conference in Warsaw held by the Chief Directorate for Museums and the Preservation of Historical Artefacts operating within the Ministry of Culture and the Arts, adopted the consequential decision that all non-Slavic ethnographic collections in Poland should be gradually handed over to the Museum of Folk Cultures (later: National Ethnographic Museum) in Warsaw, which was given a central role after postwar reactivation.' (Suliga: 2008: 46, p. 46).

4 The Museum's director wrote: 'According to the State Museum Reorganisation Plan, which envisages the centralisation of all non-European ethnographic collections in the Museum of Folk Cultures in Warsaw, our Museum has begun the process of taking over such collections from local museums. Consequently, we kindly ask that you hand over any ethnographic artefacts of exotic cultures...' (Suliga: 2008: 46, fn 14).

inventory of the collection and could not possibly determine how many non-Slavic objects it included. Furthermore, Professor Kazimierz Moszyński, the head of the Department of Slavic Ethnography of Jagiellonian University, which closely cooperated with the Museum, wrote letters to the Ministry to defend the non-European collections, arguing that they played an important role in teaching students of ethnography and related subjects, and should remain at the Museum (Kamocki, 1998: 89). The year 1954 was a turning point for the collections. The Museum could no longer use inventory taking as an excuse: the process was supposed to end that year, according to a deadline set by the Ministry of Culture and the Arts. To keep the collection intact, Director Seweryn decided to establish an informal 'Exotic Department' within the Museum. The mission was assigned to Janusz Kamocki. Why? Undoubtedly, his M.A. degree, young age, and ability to cope with difficult situations weighed in his favour. But there was more. At the beginning of his employment at the Museum, Kamocki and his older colleague Zdzisław Szewczyk were responsible for the storage of the Museum's collections (Tenerowicz, 2010). At first, they performed all the necessary work together; yet, over time, they developed separate interests and divided their duties between themselves. Szewczyk was mainly in charge of Polish material heritage, while Kamocki leaned more towards the 'exotic' collections, which undoubtedly was a factor in the Director's decision. Following the entry into force of the Act on the Protection of Cultural Goods and Museums in February 1962, the existing organisational structure of the Museum was formalised in 1963 (Zachorowska, 1998: 10). From that moment on until his early retirement in 1987, Kamocki served as the official head of the Museum's Exotic Department. The unit's name was changed to the Department of Non-European Folk Cultures in 1968, yet Kamocki intentionally omitted the 'Folk' attribute, as evidenced by the plaque on the department's door, which read 'Department of Non-European Cultures'. This is also the department's current name. Unofficially, however, it is still referred to as the 'Exotic Department'. The

years-long battle with the Ministry of Culture did eventually pay off. The idea to centralise control of the non-European collections fell through. The museums that had transferred their artefacts to the State Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw (formerly: Museum of Folk Cultures) now demanded the return of their collections. The MEK played an active role in the process, although it had not transferred its non-European objects to Warsaw. Some of the artefacts handed over by the Kraków National Museum (which originally belonged to the Museum of Technology<sup>5</sup>) were complementary to our collections, e.g. Rogoziński's African artefacts, Benedykt Dybowski's Siberian artefacts, or Jarosław Waszak's Indonesian artefacts (Kamocki, 1988b: 250; Zachorowska, 1988: 11), which were now returned to the MEK, instead of the MNK, thanks to the good working relationship between the two institutions (Kamocki 1988b: 90). Based on a 1962 decision issued by the ministerial Directorate for Museums and the Preservation of Historical Artefacts, the MEK received around 3000 objects, including non-European artefacts, hailing from Stefan Szolc-Rogoziński's African collection, Benedykt Dybowski's Siberian collection, objects acquired by Artur Müldner during his transoceanic expeditions to South America, Asia, and Australia, Antoni Rehman's South African collection, Jarosław Waszak's Indonesian collection, and many more. The artefacts were handed over in instalments until 1964. In 1980, 1989, and 1990 other non-European objects were gradually handed over based on subsequent agreements between the MNK and the MEK, owing much to Kamocki's efforts.

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5 In 1913 the first batch of exotic artefacts was handed over to the MEK in connection with a reorganisation of the Kraków Museum of Technology (MTP) and the institution's move to new headquarters. The artefacts that did not fit the MTP's profile were handed over to the Kraków Municipal Office and subsequently deposited at the Ethnographic Museum. Among the approximately 800 artefacts, many were non-European objects originally collected by B. Dybowski, S. Szolc-Rogoziński, and A. Müldner.

## The processing of objects and the first exhibitions

The task of creating the Department of Non-European Cultures from scratch, cataloguing and at least partial processing of the objects was a formidable job. It required a great deal of effort and commitment from Kamocki and many of his colleagues at the Inventory Department who worked on the catalogues and descriptions. The staff members who processed, or rather inventoried, the non-European collections before 1954 remain nameless: it was not until that year that a space for the employee's signature was added to the inventory cards. Some of the objects were processed by persons from outside the Museum, mostly ethnography students, who were involved in the process to meet the 1954 deadline set by the Ministry of Culture and the Arts (Zachorowska, 1988: 15). Due to the lack of specialists in non-European ethnography in the first decades after the war, the objects were catalogued by Kamocki as well as other museum employees and interns, including Jerzy Czajkowski, who was in charge of the Siberian artefacts and subsequently wrote an M.A. thesis on them (Zachorowska, 1988: 16).<sup>6</sup> It was not until later, after the MEK's organisational structure was formalised and the employees' roles were clearly defined, that the cataloguing of the non-European objects was handled exclusively by the employees of the Department of non-European Cultures. The task was notably more difficult than in the case of Polish folk artefacts. Many pre-war records were lost, while some inventory cards attached directly to the objects were damaged, which further complicated the task. The lack of sufficient data made it impossible to process the collections properly. As a result, many of the objects were described based on intuition in the hope that further research would make it possible to

6 Ethnographer Jerzy Czajkowski worked at the MEK from 1953 to 1971. In 1959 he wrote the M.A. thesis *Zbiory syberyjskie w Muzeum Etnograficznym w Krakowie* [The Siberian Artefacts in the Collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków].

identify the mistakes and supplement the incomplete or downright wrong attributions and descriptions (Kamocki, 1988b: 88–89). The mistakes were indeed gradually rectified, while the process of supplementing the documentation and cataloguing the objects is still ongoing.

One of the first tasks given to Janusz Kamocki after he took over as the head of the newly-founded department was to hold another temporary exhibition of non-European artefacts for ethnography students. There was neither the climate – ‘the state’s push to centralise control of local non-European collections was not conducive to flaunting them to a wider audience’ – nor the conditions in the building on Wolnica Street to mount a permanent display of the exotica. The Museum had to focus on displaying Polish culture: the exotica was presented on loan in other locations (Kamocki, 1988b: 90). The first of such exhibitions held after the war was *Sztuka Tybetu* [The Art of Tibet], mounted in 1959 in collaboration with the Association of Art Historians at the organisation’s headquarters on the Main Square in Kraków. The display featured artefacts from the collections of Professor Julian Talko-Hryniewicz and Witold Światopełk-Mirski. Later in 1959 Kamocki developed the exhibition *Teatr, broń i batiki jawańskie* [Javanese Theatre, Weaponry, and Batiks], also in collaboration with the Association. It comprised weapons and puppets from Marian Raciborski’s collection held by the MEK and batiks loaned from the MNK (Zachorowska, 1988: 16; Kamocki, 1988b: 90). The exhibition attracted significant interest, prompting several regional museums, in particular from the region of Silesia, to ask for similar displays to be mounted at their headquarters. The MEK subsequently mounted another exhibition of Javanese art independently, this time featuring artefacts hailing exclusively from its own collection. It was accompanied by a brochure. This ‘nomadic’ exhibition, as Kamocki called it, toured Silesia between 1962 and 1967. It was displayed in custom-made cases which were easy to disassemble and repurposed from the remnants of old and heavy cabinets (Kamocki, 1988b: 91; Zachorowska, 1988: 16–20). The travelling exhibition era started in 1962 in Racibórz. Between



*The Art of Java*, an exhibition held by the MEK in Racibórz, 1962;  
photo: Emilian Szostek, ref. no. III 25309F\_III 4852, (MEK collections)



*The Art of Java*, an exhibition held by the MEK in Prudnik, 1962;  
ref. no. III 25315F\_III4848, (MEK collections)

26 1963 and 1967 the show was presented in Prudnik, Będzin, Gliwice, Zabrze, Bytom, Częstochowa, Bielsko-Biała, Tarnów, Sandomierz, Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Łódź, Sieradz, and Opole. A revised version was shown in Brzeg nad Odrą in 1975, and in Toruń and Grudziądz in 1977. The curator was naturally Janusz Kamocki, who also mounted exhibitions of interesting African artefacts held by the Museum, but – as he later wrote – the representatives of the African countries in Poland were not interested in promoting their culture in this manner. The opposite was true of the Indonesian embassy in Poland, whose officials took part in the official openings of the exhibitions on invitation by local museums and institutions. The exhibition in Racibórz was visited by embassy representatives, while the opening in the small town of Prudnik was attended by an official delegation.

Here is Kamocki's vivid description of the event:

The town 'went mad' with excitement. The last time they had visitors of this stature was probably in the 17th century, when Sobieski was heading for Vienna with his army. The delegation



*The Art of Java*, an exhibition held by the MEK in Sandomierz, 1964, ref. no. III 25306F\_III4871, (MEK collections)

(a young embassy official accompanied by two Indonesian students from Warsaw acting as his interpreters) was greeted at the railway station by local children with flower bouquets. A security officer was sent from the provincial capital to keep watch over the visitors while they stayed the night in a hotel. In truth, the whole point of the pomp and circumstance was to protect the remnants of the city walls belonging to the museum, which the local authorities wanted to demolish. The head of the museum desperately tried to save them, yet his voice fell on deaf ears in the local political circles. Following the vernissage and the guests' praises of the town's perfectly maintained historical structures (requested beforehand by the organisers), local dignitaries suddenly became incredibly concerned with the town's ancient monuments...

(Kamocki, 1988b: 92).

The MEK's good working relations with the embassy of Indonesia facilitated the cataloguing of the Museum's collection of Javanese *wayang golek* theatre puppets. Each puppet is made of a head mounted on a stick that goes through

the body. The structure was a cause of many mistakes. The people who hurriedly packed the puppets during the war and subsequently unpacked and treated them did not ensure that the heads matched the bodies. The slips of paper attached to the artefacts did not prove very helpful either, since many of them fell off or were not complete. As a result, the staff paired the heads and bodies at their own discretion. Unsurprisingly, there were a lot of mismatches. What is more, the puppets were wrongly described as almost identical female characters. Thanks to Kamocki's enduring contacts with the embassy, the collection was appropriately reconstructed.

## A growing interest in Indonesia

Janusz Kamocki's interest in Indonesian culture and peoples was kindled by the Museum's Indonesian artefacts brought to Poland by the botanist Professor Marian Raciborski (1863–1917), who stayed in Java and other Indonesian islands from 1896 to 1900. Both Raciborski and Kamocki came from the area of Sandomierz, which could have been another facilitating factor. In 1970 the collection grew after the family of the zoologist Professor Michał Siedlecki (1873–1940) donated the objects he collected when conducting research in Java from 1907 to 1908. Subsequently, the Museum acquired the collection of Jarosław Waszak, a physician and pharmacist who worked in the Philippines and the Indonesian island in the latter half of the 19th century. Next, the Museum set out to familiarise the wider public with the old collections. The exhibitions enjoyed great popularity despite their initial roughness. The MEK's contacts with the Indonesian embassy, as well as travellers and collectors, opened up new research and acquisition possibilities. The relationship, and subsequently friendship, with Andrzej Wawrzyniak (1931–2020), a long-standing Polish diplomat who served at the embassy of Poland in Jakarta and other Asian countries (including Nepal and Afghanistan), proved especially important. The excellent expert on Indonesian culture and

collector of Indonesian art was instrumental in the organisation of Dr Kamocki's trip to Indonesia and in introducing him to the right people while there. In 1966, before setting out for Indonesia, Kamocki mounted a large exhibition of Indonesian art in Kraków, titled *Sztuka mórz południowych* [The Art of Southern Seas] for political reasons (Kamocki, 1988b: 92).<sup>7</sup> The display mainly featured Indonesian artworks held by the MEK, the National Museum in Kraków, the State Ethnographic Museum, the Kórnik Muzeum, as well as Andrzej Wawrzyniak's private collection, complete with a small number of objects hailing from Malaysia and Polynesia. The exhibition was shown at the Palace of Art in Kraków and the exhibition spaces of the Society of Fine Arts Lovers in Nowa Huta. Designed by Leszek Wajda, the exhibit was accompanied by a catalogue published in collaboration with the Society. The official opening was attended by the Indonesian embassy representatives. Two years later, in 1968, the Archaeological Museum in Poznań mounted the exhibition *Sztuka Indonezji* [The Art of Indonesia]. Curated by Janusz Kamocki and organised in association with the Indonesian embassy, the showcase had an accompanying Polish-English catalogue (Kamocki, 1968) and was held in conjunction with the Poznań International Fair. It featured artefacts from the MEK's Raciborski and Siedlecki collections (the latter loaned by his daughter), as well as objects from the repositories of the Kraków National Museum and the State Ethnographic Museum, Andrzej Wawrzyniak's possessions and objects owned by Mr Tengku Maimoena Habsjah, the ambassador of Indonesia in Poland from 1967 to 1970, who loaned his heirloom weapons among other artefacts. Kamocki's close cooperation with the Embassy of Indonesia resulted in an invitation to visit the country and deepen his knowledge of its culture. Due to political reasons

7

This was a difficult time for Indonesia: after the revolution and the deposition of President Sukarno, the Polish regime considered the country to be anti-communist and opposed any promotion of its culture.

(Zachorowska, 2022: 412–413),<sup>8</sup> the trip did not materialise until two years later, in 1970, when Andrzej Wawrzyniak used his diplomatic connections to help Dr Kamocki obtain an academic travel grant from the Indonesian Ministry of Culture. As a result of Kamocki's few-month-long trip to Indonesia at the turn of 1970 and 1971, the MEK's Indonesian collection grew considerably. It also inspired multiple lectures and publications. Kamocki described his research trips to Indonesia, India, Nepal, as well as his travels across Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran in the book *Azjatyckie wędrówki z polskim epilogiem* [Asian Travels with a Polish Epilogue] (Kamocki, 1987: 205–211). Between 1970 and 1981 he took four non-European research trips, spending a year and a half in Asia: eight months in Indonesia, a month in Armenia, and eight months in Nepal and India, divided between two trips, which included a month-long hike across the three above-mentioned countries. While in Indonesia, Kamocki went on many research expeditions, which he meticulously documented in his travel log.<sup>9</sup> The journal later became the basis for his publications. Apart from Java, he visited Madura, Bali, Lombok, Sulawesi, Flores, Palu'e, and Sumatra, where he reached the little-known Kubu people, whom ethnographers believed to be atheists. Kamocki refuted the claim in a series of articles describing the community's life. In Polish, he published a paper on the life of the Forest Kubu in *XIV Rocznik MEK* (Kamocki, 1998: 29–45). In English, he published the paper 'Medak River Kubu' in *Asian Folklore Studies* (38– 1, 1979, 91–106). Despite spending little time with the Kubu due to the approaching wet season, Kamocki managed to collect enough information and almost all material culture objects used by his hosts, including a fishbone, spear, a few baskets, two mats, a bag

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8 Janusz Kamocki was persecuted for his political views, collaborating with underground anticommunist organisations, and involvement in the scouting movement. In 1962 he was imprisoned. He was also banned from leaving the country.

9 Currently held by the MEK together with other documents; ref. no. I/ 1918/MNP.

woven of rattan and pandan, and a crocodile hook. In total, he obtained more than a dozen artefacts, some of which had been made in the Kubu Kampung village.

During his stay in Indonesia, Janusz Kamocki collected over 150 objects, which he subsequently donated to the Museum. When selecting the artefacts to bring to Poland from Java and other islands, his goal was to supplement the Museum's existing collections and add new contexts to them. Among the artefacts he obtained was a Javanese batik kit including a set of pens, a brush, wax samples, a ceramic heater and a pot for melting wax; a set of metal batik stamps; a bamboo rack for the batik fabrics; and a set of batik samples from a Jakarta manufactory that presents the stages of creating *batik tulis*.

The objects are contextualised by fabrics brought from the islands of Palu'e and Sumatra, decorated using distinctive local techniques.

The largest subset of Kamocki's acquisitions originates from Palu'e and comprises 67 objects of local material culture. Apart from fabrics, these included a betel nut chewing set, baskets, fish traps, a bow with arrows, musical instruments, sculptures, decorations, boat models, and more.

Kamocki supplemented Raciborski's valuable collection of theatre puppets with a bronze-cast oil lamp in the shape of the mythical Garuda and an unusual Javanese 'mermaid' puppet representing the dualist figure of half-man, half-serpent inspired by Hindu mythology.

The objects Kamocki brought back to Poland included small gifts from the Verbites, Catholic missionaries based in Flores, who facilitated his contacts with the local people and presented him with *sarongs* and a *slendang*, among other items. From Madura, Kamocki brought a harness for bull racing (*karapan sapi*) and a mobile stand with a satay grill.

Kamocki described his journey to Indonesia in the book *Przygoda z Indonezją* [An Indonesian Adventure] published in 1976 by PAX. Years after his expedition, Kamocki enriched the Museum's archives by donating his photographic documentation to the institution. In 2016 he gifted the Museum



Forest Kubu, Sumatra 1970–1971, photo: J. Kamocki,  
ref. no. IV8366PC (MEK collections)



A batik kit, Java, acquired in 1970/1971, photo: M. Wąsik, ref. no. 41214–41216 and 41331 MEK, (MEK collections)

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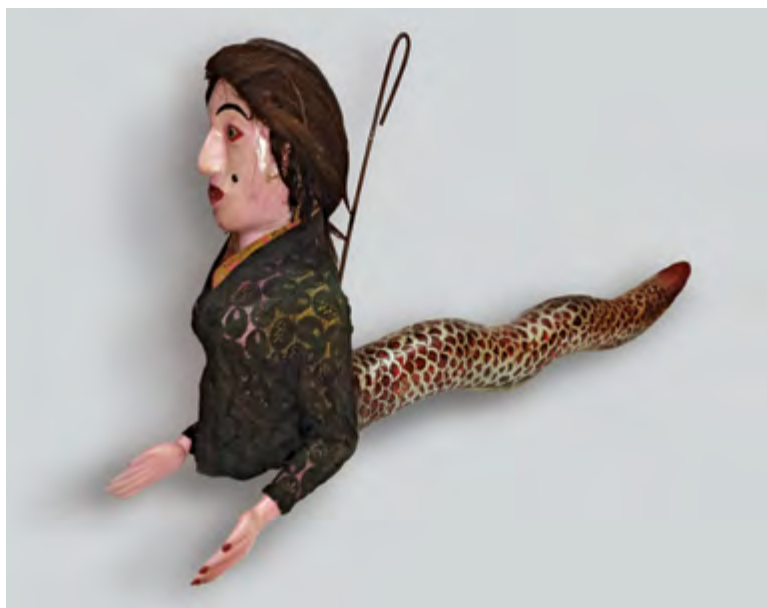
ELEONORA TENEROWICZ



The mythical bird Garuda with a cosmic egg; Bali, end of the 18th century, photo: Marcin Wąsik, ref. no. 41224 (MEK collections)



*Loro Blonyo*, or the 'inseparable couple'; Java, region of Yogyakarta or Solo, 1920–1930, photo: Jacek Kubienna, ref. no. 41206–41207 (MEK collections)



Javanese 'mermaid', Java, Telengan, before 1970,  
photo: Jacek Szymański, ref. no. 41209, (MEK collections)

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ELEONORA TENEROWICZ



A mobile stand with a satay grill, Madura, 1960s/1970s,  
ref. no. 41230–4234, photo: Marcin Wąsik (MEK collections)

nearly 850 colour slides featuring the natural scenery and exotic landscapes of the places he had visited and explored, as well as urban architecture and sacred buildings, rural villages and settlements, scenes of everyday life, street markets and vendors, and religious festivities. Among images of people drying fish, weaving baskets, or working at a wooden mortar, there are insightful portraits of working men and women, children playing, as well as images presenting the process of creating batiks or bull races in Madura. The slides document Kamocki's other Asian expeditions (e.g. pictures of Tibetans and their festivities in Nepal and India) and the customs of cultural minorities in Poland (Polish Tatars celebrating Eid al-Adha, or Feast of Sacrifice, in Bohoniki).

## Other research interests

In the subsequent years, Kamocki undertook more ethnographic trips to Asia. In 1978–1980 and in 1981 he visited Nepal and India twice, spending eight months there in total. On his way back to Poland in 1979, he visited Peshawar and Lahore in Pakistan and Herat in Afghanistan. He returned to Nepal and India in 1981, reaching the Tibetan monasteries in Ladakh, where he sought the monks' opinion about a unique Tibetan 'first aid kit' held by the MEK.<sup>10</sup> He visited Leh, the capital of the region of Ladakh, also known as Little Tibet, Hemis Monastery located around 45 km away from Leh, and the predominantly Muslim Kargil close to the Indian-Pakistani border (Kamocki 1987, 207–208). Kamocki combined the former trip with the congress of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnographic Museums in New Delhi held in 1978 and a Folklore Seminar in Cuttack, Orissa, where he

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10 The MEK holds a highly valuable Tibetan 'first aid kit' comprising two medical manuscripts written in Tibetan and Mongolian as well as around 300 medicaments collected on the border of Mongolia and Buryatia at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries and acquired by Professor Julian Talko-Hryniewicz from Witold Światopełk-Mirski, a Polish exile.



The process of reproducing a religious text from a matrix,  
Nepal, Mustang, Jharkot, 1978–1979, ref. no. IV 9099 PC,  
photo: Janusz Kamocki (MEK collections)



Plaque from a sacrificial wall; Nepal, Dhaulagiri, Mustang, Jharkot; mid-20th century, ref. no. 56120, photo: Marcin Wąsik (MEK collections)

38 also conducted ethnographic observations. In Nepal, he visited Kathmandu and its environs, as well as the then hardly accessible<sup>11</sup> Buddhist kingdom of Mustang, a province in the district of Dhaulagiri, which retained its distinctiveness from Nepal. Due to the predominance of the Tibetan language, culture and religion, it was more Tibetan than Nepalese.

From these expeditions, especially from Nepal, Kamocki brought back many artefacts that complemented the MEK's existing collections, including Buddhist votive objects, mani stone and a yak horn with an engraved mantra, as well as a set of dozens of plant samples used for medical purposes by the Tibetans from Jharkot in Mustang.

Kamocki was also interested in national minorities in Poland, both those with Asian roots and those living in the borderlands (Spisz, Orawa, Zaolzie, Łużyce). He spent years conducting research among Polish Tatars. He published the findings independently and in collaboration with Aleksander Miśkiewicz (Kamocki, Miśkiewicz, 2004). Another group which



Phylacteries used by Jews in Buchara, Uzbekistan, Buchara, early 20th century, ref. no. 72368, photo: Marcin Wąsik (MEK collections)

attracted Kamocki's interest were Armenians. He made contact with them in the 1970s through Stanisław Donigiewicz (1904–1980), an Armenian activist and promoter of Armenian culture in Poland. It was on his initiative that Kamocki set out on a month-long research trip to Armenia in 1975. Based on informal arrangements made with Polish Armenians and the Historical Museum in Yerevan, several Armenian objects were supposed to be exchanged for Polish ones. The selection of artefacts for the MEK was to be facilitated by the Yerevan museum. Unfortunately, the exchange did not come to fruition, since the Polish authorities failed to complete the necessary formalities (Kamocki, 1987: 206; Kamocki, 1988b: 103). For this reason, the MEK's Armenian collection is humble and comprises fewer than 10 artefacts. Thanks to Kamocki's collaboration with the Armenians and his efforts, in 1980 the Armenian Culture Section was established within the Kraków Branch of the Polish Ethnological Society. In 1990 the Section transformed into the Armenian Cultural Society. Doctor Kamocki continued to work with the Armenians, becoming the Society's honorary member in 2015 (Zachorowska, 2022: 411). He searched for traces of

Armenian culture in Poland, during his trips to India and Iran, and in Singapore, where he stopped by on his way back from Indonesia. He kept in touch with the Armenians he met there.

He presented his research on Asian cultures in the article 'Azjatyckie wędrówki z polskim epilogiem' [Asian Travels with a Polish Epilogue] (Kamocki, 1987) and many other publications, such as *Egzotyczne podróże etnografa. Azjatyckie wędrówki i poszukiwania polskich zesłańców w ZSRR* [An Ethnographer's Exotic Journeys: Asian Travels and The Search for Polish Exiles in the Soviet Union] released by Kubajak Publishing House in 2013. Studying Asian cultures did not exhaust Dr Kamocki's research interests. He was also interested in Polish culture. In 1992–1993 and 1996 he conducted research among Poles living in Tatarstan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. When travelling to Central Asia, he also brought back local artefacts. Examples include phylacteries used by Jews living in Buchara, Uzbekistan.

## Summary

Doctor Kamocki was not an armchair scholar. He was in his element when conducting field research. Thanks to his ability to establish a rapport with people, he gained their trust when working at home and abroad, also outside of Europe. The hardship of travel never deterred him. He identified three major flaws which hindered his work as a researcher of non-European cultures and did not allow him to take full advantage of his studies, ultimately diminishing their results (Kamocki, 1987: 209–210). The first, and most significant, was his lack of talent for foreign languages: he was not proficient enough in English to discuss all of his topics of interest. The only language he mastered with relative ease was Indonesian: Kamocki quickly learnt enough of it to go without an interpreter. The second flaw that, in his assessment, did not allow Kamocki to make the most of his field trips was the fact that he rarely stuck to the original research plan: he would often deviate from his course unable to miss an exciting opportunity only because it had



Dr Janusz Kamocki and Andrzej Wawrzyniak at the opening of the exhibition of Tibetan art at the Archaeological Museum in Kraków, 1987, ref. no. III 74839F\_II2 4275, photo: Jacek Kubiena (MEK collections)

not been on his itinerary in the first place. It seems, however, that it was due to Kamocki's subversive character and impetuousness that his travels and studies were more interesting. The third problem – 'the permanent lack of money' – can hardly be seen as a 'flaw': these were the difficult realities in Communist Poland that everybody had to face. The lack of sufficient funding surely made Kamocki's field work harder, forcing him to seize any opportunity that came his way, including the risky ones. Thanks to his indomitableness of spirit and persistence, he tirelessly advocated for the Museum's holdings, especially the non-European ones, to be presented to the widest possible audience. Unfortunately, despite his best efforts, a separate department presenting the non-European collections was not established and the main building cannot still accommodate a permanent exhibition of non-European

cultures. In his work as a museum curator, Dr Kamocki preferred to prepare and mount exhibitions, make contacts with people, and spearhead many non-standard and difficult endeavours to enrich the Museum's non-European collections, rather than painstakingly process the exhibits, both Asian and coming from other continents and cultural spheres. Doctor Kamocki's frequent field trips, the organisation of exhibitions, and the implementation of other projects became easier after a young ethnography graduate from Poznań University, Maria Gołuchowska (later: Zachorowska), joined the team in 1970. The future director of the Museum (1991 to 2008) excelled at systematic, meticulous work, particularly evident in her efforts to set up the non-European storage anew after its relocation and in processing the exhibits, thereby compensating for her boss's chaotic approach to these tasks. As a result, Janusz Kamocki could freely devote himself to organising or co-organising temporary exhibitions at the Museum and in other locations. The exhibitions were devoted to Asian and other cultures. In 1972–1973 Kamocki mounted a touring exhibition presenting the MEK's holdings and Andrzej Wawrzyniak's private collection. Titled *Sztuka Bali* [The Art of Bali], it was shown in Bytom, Częstochowa, Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Wieluń, Pabianice, Raciborz, and Żywiec. In 1980 the MEK's Bali objects were displayed in Białystok. The largest exhibit of Indonesian art, which Janusz Kamocki prepared together with Maria Alberowa of the National Museum in Kraków in 1974, was *Broń Indonezji* [The Weapons of Indonesia]. It comprised objects from Andrzej Wawrzyniak's, the MNK's, and the MEK's collections, and was accompanied by a catalogue written by Maria Dzieduszycka and Janusz Kamocki, published jointly by the two museums. The last project and Kamocki's farewell as the long-standing head of the Department of Non-European Cultures was an academic session and a large-scale exhibition, *Sztuka Tybetu* [The Art of Tibet], drawing on the collections of the MEK, the MNK, the Asia and Pacific Museum in Warsaw, the Missionary Museum in Pieniężno, as well as Marek Kalmus, Ewa Waldek-Kurtyka, and Janusz Kamocki. Designed by Leszek and Anna Wajda, the display was presented in the



Dr Janusz Kamocki at the MEK during the official celebrations of his nineteenth birthday held by the Kraków branch of the Polish Ethnological Society (PTL), 2017, photo: Filip Wróblewski (private collection)

rented spaces of the Archaeological Museum in Kraków at the turn of 1987 and 1988.

In conclusion, Dr Janusz Kamocki did his best to expand the MEK collection, especially the non-European holdings, by gathering objects during his field trips and making contacts with collectors, travellers, and missionaries, and inspiring them to work for the Museum. As a result, the Museum acquired many interesting and rare artefacts; however, there have been some unintended fiascoes and lost opportunities resulting from the superiors' failure to attend to important matters. Kamocki conducted intense research practically until the end of his life. Once retired, he focused on teaching and academic work. He gave lectures in ethnology at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, the Cieszyn-branch of the Silesian University, the Higher School of Humanities and Natural Sciences in Sandomierz, and the Polish University in Vilnius. He published *Etnologia ludów pozaeuropejskich – zarys* [Ethnology of Non-European Peoples: An Overview] (Kraków: 2003) and *Zarys grup etnograficznych w Polsce* [An Overview of Ethnographic Groups in Poland] in 'Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska', Sectio F, 46/47, 1991/1992. He remained academically active during his retirement, maintaining contact with the Museum, which he considered his second home. There is no doubt that Dr Kamocki was not just the man who created the Department of Non-European Cultures but one of the main pillars of the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków and a tireless researcher of cultures.

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# **ARTUR FONZYCHOWSKI**

# INDONESIAN ARTEFACTS IN THE COLLECTIONS OF THE NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM IN GDAŃSK

The National Maritime Museum in Gdańsk has a complex organisational structure. Currently, the institution has nine active branches (four in Gdańsk, two in Tczew, and one in Gdynia, Hel, and Kąty Rybackie) and one under construction (Museum of Underwater Archaeology and Baltic Fisheries in Łeba). As stated in its status, it is Poland's key museum established to preserve traditions and gather maritime heritage. Due to the prestigious status of a national museum (which only two other thematic museums in Poland have, namely the National Museum of Agriculture in Szreniawa and the National Museum of Technology in Warsaw), the National Maritime Museum's focus primarily lies in Poland, both in its current and historical borders. Nevertheless, in the course of the NMM's history, almost from the moment of its foundation, the Museum has been collecting non-European (or, more precisely, non-Polish) artefacts. The primary reason was the presence of the Polish merchant navy in the seas and oceans around the world. In the Communist times, Polish Ocean Lines crews would actively acquire interesting artefacts from the residents they met, be they fishing boats or small objects of artistic quality. What is

more, the captains of the ships were personally connected with the Tricity and eagerly helped enlarge the collection of the Gdańsk museum due to local patriotism. Owing to numerous gifts from individuals such as Captain Stefan Brąglewicz of Sopot, the Museum acquired extremely valuable and inspiring objects from regions which were hardly accessible for the average Museum visitor. Apart from seamen, the collection also grew thanks to generous donors, such as Polish diplomats based in Peru or Indonesia. Let us also take the opportunity to gratefully mention Andrzej Wawrzynak's 11 gifts that enriched the NMM's collection: a boat and ten models he donated in 1971.

The Department of Marine Ethnology, which is responsible for caring for the Museum's non-Polish artefacts, was established in 1998. However, the first efforts to separate them from the rest of the collection, as part of a 'Department of non-European Cultures,' began around 1990.

Due to a series of organisational changes over the years, today, ethnographic artefacts from outside Poland are held by three different units of the Museum: the Department of Shipbuilding, the Department of Maritime Art, and the Department of Marine Ethnology.

The NMM inventory lists 42 historical objects originating in Indonesia. As for objects classified under the Marine Ethnography Collection, the majority of them (22) hail from Indonesia. More generally, Southeast Asian artefacts constitute one-fifth of the Museum's non-Polish ethnographic holdings. What is more, the NMM's oceanographic collection includes 49 cephalopod, bivalve, and snail shells found in Indonesian waters. The NMM also holds more than a dozen objects with uncertain provenance, many of which very likely came from Nusantara.

## The Indonesian collections

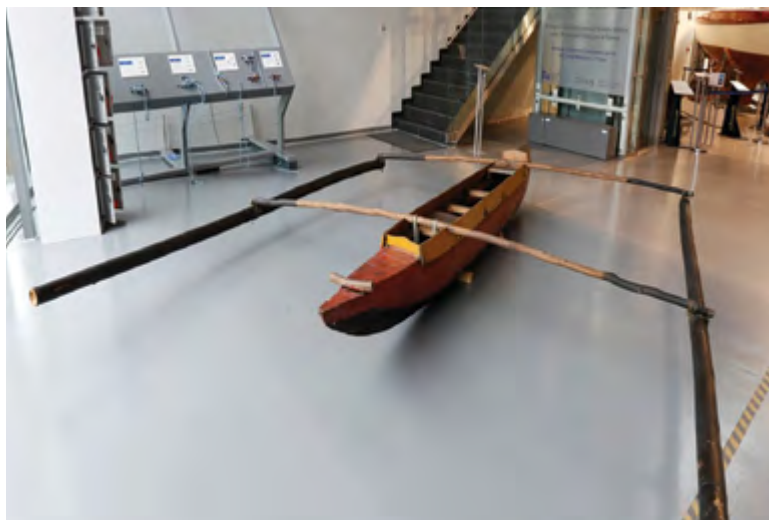
Considering the NMM's profile, the most characteristic of the Museum's Indonesian objects are boats. The collection includes three.



Javanese boat (dimensions 374 × 107 × 56 cm, float length: 548 cm), CMM/BO/169, photo: Bernadetta Galus, Paweł Józwiak (NMM collections)

49

The Javanese boat is informally referred to as a *perahu* by the Museum staff. A closer analysis of the Indonesian terminology shows that *perahu* means boat and is simply the Indonesian generic term for the object. Analogous boats with lateral support floats are typical for Nusantara. In East Java, the outriggers have a characteristic curved shape. Interestingly, to comply with the rules of Islam, the boat features flowers instead of the famed magical eyes, which were believed to bring sailors good fortune and allow the boat to 'see' the right course. The boat was gifted to the Museum by Andrzej Wawrzyniak in 1971, when he served as the Embassy Secretary in Indonesia.



Boat from Panjang, Sumatra (dimensions: 464 × 42 × 46 cm),  
CMM/BO/871, photo: Bernadetta Galus, Paweł Józwiak (NMM collections)

50                    The boat from Panjang, Sumatra is a classic example of a simple outrigger canoe. The outriggers project far away from the hull. Vessels of this kind are used both for fishing and transportation in the Malay Archipelago. This boat was gifted to the Museum in 1985 by Captain Stefan Brąglewicz and the crew of the *Ursus* merchant motor ship.

The unfinished dugout canoe from the region of Anambas Islands is a logboat with a special place in the NMM's international boat collection for two reasons. Firstly, it is the first exotic boat the Museum acquired (1966). Secondly, it is undoubtedly an object with an extraordinary history. The unfinished dugout was spotted drifting in the South China Sea by the crew of the *Chopin* merchant motor ship. This is how Captain Marian Chodkowski recalled the incident years later:

A group of fishing boats was spotted on course. They were towing the unfinished dugout. It soon turned out that the last storm washed the boat into the sea. Asked if they would be willing to gift us the boat, the men gladly agreed. In exchange for the dugout, I gave them our shipowner's ensign



Unfinished dugout canoe from the region of the Anambas Islands (dimensions: 460 × 68 × 40 cm), CMM/BO/101, photo: Bernadetta Galus, Paweł Józwiak (NMM collections)

and treated them to a Polish dinner prepared by the galley crew. This way, we established a friendly rapport with the fishermen of the Anambas Islands, communicating mostly with our hands (Zamościński, 2019: 341).

Another priority subcategory in the NMM's collection are **watercraft models**. The Indonesian ones are represented by a diverse assortment of large ships, smaller boats, and dugout canoes. Due to their dimensions, vessels need a lot of display space – more than the Museum will ever be able to provide for a growing collection. A compromise solution is to create a collection of models, allowing visitors to familiarise themselves with the watercraft in a smaller scale. This is the strategy the Museum has adopted. Currently, the NMM holds 18 watercraft models. The most interesting ones are:

Made of cloves, the *perahu cengkih* models symbolise the spice trade in the Moluccas. Such unusual artefacts are famously made in Ambon Island, the colonial-era spice production centre. The NMM owns two such extraordinary structures. The smaller model's dimensions are 34 × 13 × 47 cm.



Model of a ship made of cloves, CMM/EM/10,  
photo: Bernadetta Galus, Paweł Józwiak (NMM collections)

52 The donor bought it in a small harbour shop in Java in the 1950s for the symbolic price of 1 US dollar. The larger model is 60 × 8 × 47 cm. Little is known about its acquisition. Both models were made around 1950-1960.

The dugout canoes used by Asmat people, an ethnic group of New Guinea, are also often represented in ceremonial carvings (*wuramon*). They are distinguished by complex figureheads usually portraying human and spirit figures. The NMM holds two models demonstrating the craftsmanship of the Asmat. Both objects were acquired from the same collection in 2017.

The models of boats used by the Dayak people inhabiting the basin of the Barito River in Borneo are especially interesting, since the indigenous groups of Kalimantan, collectively called the Dayak, specialise in decorative wood carving. Boats are one of the most prominent examples of their art. The boat models were made of red natural rubber. Their length varies between 25 and 50 cm. One model features an eye-catching hunting scene. Apart from two seamen, it depicts a hunted-down stag lying across the



The dugout canoes used by Asmat people, NMM/EM/103, NMM/EM/107, photo: Bernadetta Galus, Paweł Józwiak (NMM collections)

boat, guarded by two hounds. The models were gifted to the Museum in 1971.

The *palari* model represents a type of sailing vessel from South Sulawesi. The boat is used for transporting goods and people. The *palari* is a subtype of wooden *pinisi* boats. The art of building *pinisi* boats in the region was recognised by UNESCO in 2017,<sup>12</sup> when it was inscribed on the list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity as only the sixth tradition from Indonesia. What is more, it is one of only 10 entries connected to shipbuilding on this prestigious list. The object was donated to the Museum in 1971. Its dimensions are 65 × 60 × 12 cm.

In **decorative silver models**, the openwork hull and sail are styled to resemble palm leaves. The models come from South Sulawesi and Java. Both belonged to the same

12 *Pinisi*, art of boatbuilding in South Sulawesi – intangible heritage – Culture Sector – UNESCO <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/pinisi-art-of-boatbuilding-in-south-sulawesi-01197>.



The *palari* model, CMM/BO/162,  
photo: Bernadetta Galus, Paweł Józwiak (NMM collections)

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Models of boats used by the Dayak people, CMM/BO/157, CMM/BO/158,  
photo: Bernadetta Galus, Paweł Józwiak (NMM collections)



Decorative silver models, CMM/SM/1592, CMM/SM/1660,  
photo: Bernadetta Galus, Paweł Józwiak (NMM collections)



Ceremonial oars from Indonesia, NMM/EM/104, NMM/EM/105,  
photo: Bernadetta Galus, Paweł Józwiak (NMM collections)

56 collection and were donated to the Museum in the early 1980s.

Another subcategory of maritime artefacts held by the NMM are oars. The Museum owns **four ceremonial oars from Indonesia**, bought in 2017. Three come from the region of Sentani in the province of Papua in New Guinea. Although they had a ceremonial function, they could be used to propel a boat, owing to their professional construction. The inhabitants of Sentani are known for making decorative oars for women (*mie reng*) and oars for men (*roh reng*). The oars are carved from a single piece of wood. Their length varies around 150 cm.

The last subgroup of the NMM's Indonesian holdings are varied objects collected during museum collection queries over the years, artefacts acquired together with strictly maritime objects, and gifts. These sundry items excellently complement the maritime narrative about the diverse and vibrant

culture of Indonesia, a country whose realities are different from those in Poland.

The NMM holds 17 such objects:

- two reliefs depicting scenes from the epic *Ramayana*,
- two *kris*es,
- two Indonesian shadow play puppets,
- six sculptures, including one from Bali depicting god Vishnu and one representing the mythical bird Garuda, symbolising Indonesia,
- a model of a Batak house,
- a ritual mask of Raksasa,
- a container made of lontar palm leaves,
- a few paintings.

## Summary

Indonesia is undoubtedly a large source of inspiration for maritime ethnographers. Its uniqueness is shaped in great measure by its geography. Scattered across thousands of islands, the country's inhabitants are, as it were, naturally predestined to be involved in sailing, fishing, and shipbuilding. The country's island location has resulted in the isolation of its residents, which enables present-day ethnographers to study many, sometimes starkly diverse cultures which coexist within one political entity. As a department set up to explore the nautical traditions and artefacts of cultures distant from our own, Indonesia certainly is and will be high on the list of our priorities.

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# **MARIA SZYMAŃSKA-ILNATA**

# THE INDONESIAN COLLECTION OF THE ASIA AND PACIFIC MUSEUM: POTENTIAL AND CHALLENGES

The Asia and Pacific Museum (MAiP) is 50 years in existence. Its turbulent history has eventually led to the formation of a modern institution that responds to the latest trends in museology, while continuing to develop and attract a growing audience. Since its establishment, the Museum has acquired 23,000 objects from various regions of Asia and the Pacific region, including 5,500 from Indonesia alone. Until recently, most of the holdings were kept in the Museum's storage. A few could be seen in temporary exhibitions and catalogues. In 2022 the institution finally opened its permanent exhibition, *Journeys to the East*. It includes the Indonesian Gallery featuring ca. 400 objects held by the Museum.

## The genesis of the Museum and its collection

The Asia and Pacific Museum probably would not have come into being or indeed survived without the motivation and determination of one man: Andrzej Wawrzyniak (1931–2020),

a sailor, diplomat, and most of all a collector (Wasilewska, 2021). It was his interest in the art and culture of Indonesia, as well as his passion for collecting objects connected with them, that led to the Museum's establishment. The institution is one of only a few Polish museums profoundly influenced by a single person, who determined its shape and form at inception and for the next 40 years. Andrzej Wawrzyniak spent nine years of his life in Indonesia, where he worked at the Polish embassy, travelled the country, and made numerous contacts that allowed him to develop his passion. Fascinated by Indonesian culture, he first collected cold weapons, mostly kris<sup>13</sup> batik fabrics,<sup>14</sup> and theatre masks and puppets. Later, he started to collect other artefacts, including everyday objects used by the inhabitants of the country's different regions. After he left his post in Jakarta in 1971, his collection comprised over 3,000 different items, which, as he admitted in a 2016 interview,<sup>15</sup> took up his entire house. Consequently, he began to explore the various methods of maintaining and displaying his holdings once they were brought to Poland.

While still working in Indonesia, he sent a part of his collection to Poland and took efforts to have it displayed to the public. That is when he began developing his collaboration with the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków, which held Indonesian collections brought from their travels by Marian Raciborski (1863–1917) and Michał Siedlecki (1873–1940). The first fruits of this collaboration were a few exhibitions of

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13 Daggers with a characteristic tapering or serpentine blade, incrustated with stones and precious metals, and fitted with carved handles. They occur in Southeast Asia. In 2008, the kris was inscribed into the UNESCO list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity.

14 Batiks are fabrics created with the technique of wax resist. Artisans first draw patterns with wax on a cloth, then immerse it in a dye. After the colour is absorbed by the unwaxed sections of the cloth, the wax is removed. The process is repeated for every new colour.

15 The interview was conducted by Julitta Poluch for the exhibition *Azja/Pacyfik/Solec 24* (Asia/Pacific/Solec 24) and archived by the MAiP's Visual Materials Section.



The inside of Andrzej Wawrzyniak's home,  
WIZ/MAP 1/1269 (MAiP collections)

Wawrzyniak's holdings, curated by ethnographer Janusz Kamocki,<sup>16</sup> who worked at the MEK.

Kamocki was the first curator of Wawrzyniak's collection and the author of the brochures which accompanied the exhibitions. Their collaboration evolved into a friendship that lasted until the collector's death. It was on Kamocki's advice that in 1973 Wawrzyniak donated his collection, which at that point comprised exactly 2,899 objects, to the Polish state in exchange for the establishment of the Nusantara Archipelago Museum and the position of its director. The Museum's articles of incorporation state as follows:

with the view of increasing the number of museum exhibits held in the country and making them available to the society, [the owner] hereby donates to the State [...] his collection of Malay art as described in detail in the Inventory Book (the notary's deed quoted in: Strzechowska, 2000: 50).

16 Janusz Kamocki also authored the catalogues for these exhibitions, e.g. Kamocki and Dzieduszycka, 1974.



The invitation to attend the opening of the exhibition *Sztuka mórz południowych* [The Art of the South Seas], 1966 (MAiP collections)

These were not all of the artefacts collected by Andrzej Wawrzyniak in Indonesia. Previously, he had sold some to the Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum in Kraków and kept others as his private property. He also gifted hundreds of others to the Asia and Pacific Museum over the subsequent years. In total, Wawrzyniak donated 3,368 Indonesian objects to the MAiP.

At the moment of its foundation, the Museum received two historical buildings at 24 Solec Street in Warsaw, which required extensive renovations, as well as a budget to employ staff. The original name was in use for only three years. In 1976 the institution was renamed as the Asia and Pacific Museum. The change was connected with the expansion of the collection, primarily due to the director's new acquisitions made in Nepal, where he served at another post, and other Asian countries (Ginter-Frołow and Wasilewska, 2016: 129–131). Currently, the Museum holds artefacts from most countries in Asia, but the Indonesian collection is the largest, with 5,545 inventory items in total.

It has been expanding in a variety of ways. Some items were brought to Poland by Andrzej Wawrzyniak himself, other travellers, individuals who worked in Indonesia, missionaries, and diplomats. The artefacts were subsequently either gifted or sold to the Museum. These people included Janusz Kamocki, one of the first Poles to explore Indonesia, as well as the missionaries Fr. Stanisław Pikor, Fr. Józef Glinka, and Fr. Stanisław Wyparto, who mainly supplied the collection with objects from the island of Flores, where they worked. These were mostly ikat fabrics, interesting batiks with Christian motifs, and woven baskets. They totalled almost 40 objects.

Recently, the Museum has been gifted 15 items by Jerzy Markiewicz, Poland's former ambassador to Indonesia and his wife, Alina. Among the new acquisitions are shadow play lamps, masks, weapons, and sculptures. More objects, including valuable paintings, are currently being catalogued and will also be donated to the Museum. Another set of 17 artefacts, including sculptures, paintings, and drawings, was gifted by Edward Śluczański, the author of popular science books about Asia. The Museum has also received generous gifts from the citizens of Indonesia. Abdul Azis of Surabaya, of whom not much else is known, donated 122 items to the MAiP. Consisting mostly of *wayang klitik* puppets and theatre props, this is an excellent set of artefacts rarely seen in European museums. The famous Indonesian painter Nyoman Gunarsa gifted the Museum 100 drawings and watercolours, which amount to over half of all his works held by the MAiP. These are the artist's early pieces, mostly depicting the culture of Bali. Excluding the items donated by Andrzej Wawrzyniak, 680 objects in the Indonesian collection were gifts.

## The makeup of the collection

Currently, the MAiP's Indonesian collection can be divided into a few larger subcategories that correspond with Andrzej Wawrzyniak's main areas of interest. These were the types of objects that inspired his passion for collecting Indonesian

artefacts. The largest of the subgroups is a collection of 1,180 theatre puppets, almost 590 of which are Javanese *wayang golek* puppets, 450 are shadow play *wayang kulit* puppets, and 140 are wayang klitik puppets, presently the rarest type of the three. The Museum can boast a complete shadow play set comprising puppets, a chest for their storage, woven mats for placing the puppets, a cotton screen, and examples of ornate metal lamps used to light the screen. Theatre-related artefacts are well represented in the MAiP's permanent exhibition *Journeys to the East*, which features tens of puppets of all the above-mentioned types as well as masks, the second-largest subcategory in our Indonesian collection. The subgroup consists of 570 theatre masks, 171 of which come from the environs of the city of Malang, 143 from Bali, and over 70 from Central Java. Unfortunately, many of the masks need to be studied in more detail to determine their provenance. A somewhat smaller subcategory comprises 533 weapons, 249 of which are different kinds of kris from various regions of Indonesia. The collection is extremely valuable and significant both from a Polish and a European perspective.

Another large subcategory are textiles. At the MAiP, they are divided by usage. Of all the lengths of fabric intended to be wrapped around the lower part of the body, which are labelled as 'draped outfits' in the Museum's inventory system, 314 come from Indonesia. They can be divided by the technique used to create them: 173 batiks, 70 ikats,<sup>17</sup> 21 songkets,<sup>18</sup> and embroidered textiles.

17 Ikats are fabrics created with the technique of resist dyeing. The resist is formed by wrapping sections of warp yarn to achieve the desired pattern. The yarns are then immersed in dye, which is not absorbed by the wrapped sections. The procedure can be repeated multiple times, depending on the intended colour pattern. When the dyeing is finished and the yarns are dried, the wrap is woven into a cloth together with a single-coloured weft. The resultant patterns have uneven, blurred edges.

18 Songket is a fabric with supplementary metallic threads woven between regular weft threads.

Sculptures are another substantial subgroup in the MAiP's Indonesian collection (650). More than half of the objects come from Bali. This subcategory also includes the oldest items in the collection: almost 100 terracotta sculptures from Java. Some of the pieces are dated to the 14th century or the Majapahit period. The subgroup includes around 30 sculptures attributed to Sumatran Bataks and another 30 pieces attributed to the residents of Nias Island. Except for more than a dozen stone sculptures of considerable size, most of the objects are compact.

Thanks to his contacts with Indonesian artists, Andrzej Wawrzyniak gathered a significant collection of paintings. Today, it comprises 285 objects, most of which (179) are pieces by Nyoman Gunarsa. Others were painted by Hendra Gunawan, Batara Lubis, Basuki Abdullah, Tatang Ganar, Dullah, and Yap Hian Tjay.

Musical instruments have been part of the Museum's collection ever since its foundation. Currently, the MAiP holds 136 objects of this kind from Indonesia. Instruments comprising two Javanese gamelans<sup>19</sup> and their mallets constitute 40 inventory items. The remainder are mostly drums, bamboo recorders, bells, and small gongs used for decoration or signalling purposes.

Another interesting subcategory is a collection of more than 80 vessels and containers for storing and serving betel quid,<sup>20</sup> over 20 of which were bought in 2021. Made of various materials, including metal, plant fibres, wood, horn, and bone, they originate from different parts of Indonesia (Java, Sumatra, Sumba, Bali). The Museum also holds numerous vessels and containers with various uses, jewellery, and drawings. It can also boast a well-catalogued collection of over 30 manuscripts, most of which are written on lontar palm leaves and come from Bali. The remainder hail from North

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19 Gamelan is a traditional orchestra made up predominantly of metallophones, as well as drums, string instruments, and a flute.

20 Betel nut chewing is a popular practice of chewing betel leaves together with areca nuts, slaked lime, and flavouring substances, such as tobacco and cloves.

Sumatra and are written in the Batak script on bark or bamboo. Finally, the MAiP's Indonesian collection includes fewer, yet nonetheless significant, tools, decorations, fashion accessories, and tourist souvenirs.

As for their geographic origin, the holdings can be divided into several groups. The two most numerous ones consist of items from Java (3,047) and Bali (1,215). Several factors certainly contributed to this. The first is connected to the fact that the Polish embassy, where Andrzej Wawrzyniak was posted, has been located in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta on Java. Since the island was his home for nine years, the collector had easier access to its material heritage. Another contributing factor was certainly the long history of European research related to the traditions of Java and Bali. Many of the local artefacts, such as krises, batiks, and sculptures, had been acquired by Europeans in colonial times and made their way to museum collections, bearing the prestigious label of 'art' in the European sense. Furthermore, the island of Bali was already a popular holiday destination, attracting tourists as well as Jakarta-based diplomats. Relics from other regions of Indonesia are not as well represented in the collection, which is probably because they were both less accessible and less popular for Europeans. At least some of the objects from the founding collection were acquired in Java from merchants, not the local communities who made or used them.

Sumatra is represented in the MAiP's Indonesian collection by 360 artefacts, 71 of which are objects connected to Batak culture, 41 hail from the area of Palembang, 29 are from the region of Minangkabau, 29 from Aceh, and as many as 77 from the neighbouring island of Nias. We own 152 objects from Kalimantan and 112 from Sumba, the majority of which were bought in 2021 from a private collector with a keen interest in textiles created on the island. The Museum has gathered more than 80 artefacts from Sulawesi, mostly the areas populated by the Torajan, 74 (predominantly textile) objects from Flores, and 64 items from Madura (predominantly krises and architectural elements). More than

50 objects in the collection hail from East Timor. These are mostly textiles, as well as baskets, betel containers, and mats.

The western part of New Guinea belongs politically to Indonesia (the former provinces of Papua and West Papua, divided in 2021 into a few smaller provinces). The Museum holds ca. 180 objects from this region, mostly weapons, tools, and pieces of clothing, as well as shields, sculptures, vessels, and masks. Since culturally the region is closer to Oceania than the other parts of Indonesia, the artefacts are not displayed in the Indonesian Gallery of the *Journeys to the East* exhibition. Instead, they are classed together with the items of the Pacific Region collection.

## The characteristic features of the collection

The Asia and Pacific Museum's Indonesian collection is the largest of its kind in Poland and significant as compared to its international counterparts. Besides its size, the collection has other features that also make it noteworthy. To understand its identity, one needs to get to know the history of its constituent collections. The majority of the artefacts were made in the 20th century, more specifically before 1970, which was when Andrzej Wawrzyniak left Indonesia and returned to Poland. As a private collector, his financial resources were smaller than those of the expeditions organised by Western European countries, which could afford to acquire and ship in large-scale sculptures or even buildings. He sought to buy the most interesting objects he came across, using his expanding knowledge of the local culture as well as his taste. His financial limitations certainly meant he was not always able to make immediate purchases. It often took him considerable time and effort to buy the desired object. Many people who knew him at the time have recalled his excellent haggling skills, which are famously highly appreciated by Indonesians. It is a common practice for local sellers to offer bundles including additional items for free or at a discount. These Indonesian realities are probably why Wawrzyniak's collection comprises objects of

high artistic merit as well as less sophisticated items produced for the average local customer. One example are his batiks: he gathered both high-quality pieces featuring classic patterns and created by experienced artisans, as well as textiles created somewhat hurriedly and with less precision for a less wealthy customer. Today, these seemingly inferior pieces are internationally unique. Since most collectors rejected the less refined objects, focusing on their high-quality counterparts, it is thanks to the MAiP collection that we can get a broader perspective on the way batiks were made and used decades ago.

Until the Museum's establishment, Andrzej Wawrzyniak gathered his artefacts at home for lack of other storage space. Just like his Indonesian contemporaries, he decorated his home in Jakarta and then in Warsaw with such objects as batik tablecloths and paintings, which were later added to the Museum's collection. The wear and tear they endured is a testament to the history, tastes, and realities of life in Indonesia in the third quarter of the 20th century. They also provide some information about the goods made for Europeans at the time, perhaps based on the Indonesian perceptions of their needs and preferences.

Andrzej Wawrzyniak's taste as a collector and subsequently museum director was a decisive factor in the choice of the artefacts added to the collection. Apart from the founding collection, Wawrzyniak gifted the Museum almost 600 additional items. Furthermore, he accepted and rejected new gifts and purchases offered to the institution by various individuals and entities. Wawrzyniak was not a scholar of Indonesian culture. He developed a passion for collecting during his career as a sailor. It took its final shape when he served as a diplomat. While posted in the Polish embassy in Jakarta, he was able to travel across the country and meet a lot of people. It did not, however, enable him to get an insight into the everyday life of Indonesia's average residents. He acquired items through merchants, friends, and other intermediaries, not in the field. For this reason, the history of most of the objects is unknown. In some cases, even the place of origin is unidentified. The efforts undertaken nowadays by the curators to supply the

missing information based on the currently available materials often prove futile.

## The challenges

Museums have to catalogue their holdings and prepare inventory cards containing essential information about each object in their collections. In the 1970s, due to historical, political, and financial reasons, in Poland, there was a shortage of people well-read in the culture of Indonesia. Access to reliable academic publications was also limited. The multiple books about Indonesia brought to Poland by Andrzej Wawrzyniak were written in Indonesian, a fact that certainly was an obstacle for the original staff of the Nusantara Archipelago Museum and the Asia and Pacific Museum.

Most of the inventory cards made early on in the Museum's history contained only very general, basic information. This was due to the time pressure: the museum staff had to catalogue a large number of artefacts in a short space of time. Subsequent generations of MAiP employees provided the items with more detailed descriptions and verified earlier records by consulting more recent publications and foreign subject-matter experts. Some objects, however, remain a mystery to this day. Their provenance and function cannot be precisely determined, since no analogous objects have been found in other museums or available sources. This is one of the challenges still faced by the Museum.

Another major challenge faced by museums with collections from Southeast Asia are the climatic differences between their place of origin and Poland. This, unfortunately, affects the condition of such materials as bamboo, wood, or leather. Maintaining temperature and humidity in the museum storage at a similar level to Indonesia is an extremely hard task. Stored in less humid conditions, the objects dry and may sometimes crack. Situations like this mostly occurred in the first years after the Indonesian collection was shipped to Poland.

Museum conservators are responsible for ensuring that the collections are preserved in good condition for as long as it is possible and reducing the negative consequences of unfavourable climatic conditions. To this end, they choose from a variety of treatments, depending on the materials and technique used to create the preserved artefact. The MAiP's conservators-restorers not only know them, but can also identify and employ them.

Although not ancient, the Museum's Indonesian collection is nevertheless varied. It represents the heritage of different ethnic groups inhabiting all major Indonesian islands. Put on display, the objects provide an overview of the country's rich culture and can inspire conversation on various topics during guided tours or museum lessons. It would seem that due to the Museum's 50-year-long history, its oldest collection should be an open book for the curators. This is not the case and, I believe, the situation is to the benefit of all of us interested in this geographical region. Each of the collection's previous curators had preferred topics of interest to which they devoted more time and work. Inspecting individual objects in detail, consulting the relevant literature, and studying analogous exhibits held by other museums is extremely time-consuming. What is more, preparing inventory cards is not the only job required of curators. For this reason, certain parts of the collection still need special attention. Due to the advances in specialist knowledge, the interpretation of some objects may change over time. Highly interesting information may also be gleaned in the process of conserving the artefacts. Here are three examples from my practice.

The first case concerned the reinterpretation of two objects from the founding collection, originally described as raincoats from the island of Flores (MAP 2937 and MAP 2938). Looking for information about them, I reached interesting conclusions. This was possible thanks to an online publication by Rosie H. Cook, a young conservator from Australia (Cook 2017). While still a student, she was assigned the task of restoring a heavily damaged object, which turned out to have two functions. It was a leaf-woven rain and sun cover used to

protect ducks put to graze in the meadows. Once fitted with strings, it could also serve as a musical instrument called *kowongan*. In her paper, Cook described her experiences while searching for information about the item, its restoration, and efforts to revive the practice of playing the *kowongan* in the Javanese region of Wonosobo, where it comes from. Thanks to the descriptions and photographs she provided, I was able to ascertain that the two objects held in the MAiP collection were, in fact, not raincoats but rain covers doubling as musical instruments, made in Java, not Flores. As a result, the interpretation of the two items was completely revised.

The second example involves a mask from the founding collection, which was singled out for restoration during an inventory inspection due to paintwork damage. While working on the object, the conservators discovered that its condition was even worse than initially expected. They also concluded that the item must have suffered damage years ago, most probably still in Indonesia. When removing subsequent layers of peeling paint, the conservators found an insect nest with eggs and dead insects inside the mask. The condition of the object and its lifeless inhabitants were photographed under a microscope. The insects and their eggs were removed, the missing wood replaced, and the paintwork reconstructed. The item turned out to be a challenge for the conservators, who had not expected to discover what they did during their work. The internal damage, invisible on initial inspection, meant that the scope of restoration was much wider than expected and took longer to complete. This shows that museum staff often have to modify their work targets and schedules due to unexpected occurrences, which is another challenge faced by professionals in this line of work. Discoveries like this, however, make objects more special, adding a new dimension and story to the artwork. Looked at in a new light, the item can inspire the imagination of the museum staff and the visitors.

The third museum object with an interesting, and accidentally discovered, history is a cloth from West Sumatra (MAP 9017), which also underwent conservation. Cloths of this type are used to cover gifts carried by women during parades



An archival photograph of the *kowongan*, MAP 2938 (MAiP collections)

connected with different celebrations, such as weddings. This particular object was donated to the Museum in 1989. It was encased in a frame and protected by a glass pane. This was probably how the piece had been displayed at the house of its previous owners. While developing an exhibition, the museum staff took the cloth out of the frame to restore it to its original form. A detailed inspection of the object revealed two incomplete pages from a 1973 newspaper sewn inside the cloth. This allowed the museum staff to establish a more precise date of the item's making. Previously, it had been dated closer to the acquisition date.

It can be assumed that many more items in the MAiP collection hold similar mysteries. Due to the permanent shortage of exhibition space the Museum has faced for almost 50 years, many of the objects remain in storage. In the run-up to the opening of the Indonesian Gallery over the previous couple of years, a few hundred of them underwent conservation and detailed curatorial inspection. Many, however, are still awaiting their turn.

## The way forward

The collection's expansion and supplementary acquisitions are both a challenge and an opportunity for its current curators. The most recently purchased objects were acquired for the newly opened Indonesian Gallery and predominantly comprised of pieces of clothing. As textiles and leathers are sensitive to light and can be displayed only for a limited time, the Museum needed replacements for the objects selected for the permanent exhibition. The new acquisitions included men's festive attire from Central Java and a Balinese dance costume.

We are also working to expand the collection by acquiring items representing the regions and categories that are entirely absent from it. Consequently, in 2021 we purchased a set of almost 100 objects from the Lesser Sunda Islands, mostly Sumba. When expanding the collection, we are forced



Mask during and after restoration, MAP 497 (MAiP collections)



Dalamak cloth, MAP 9017 (MAiP collections)

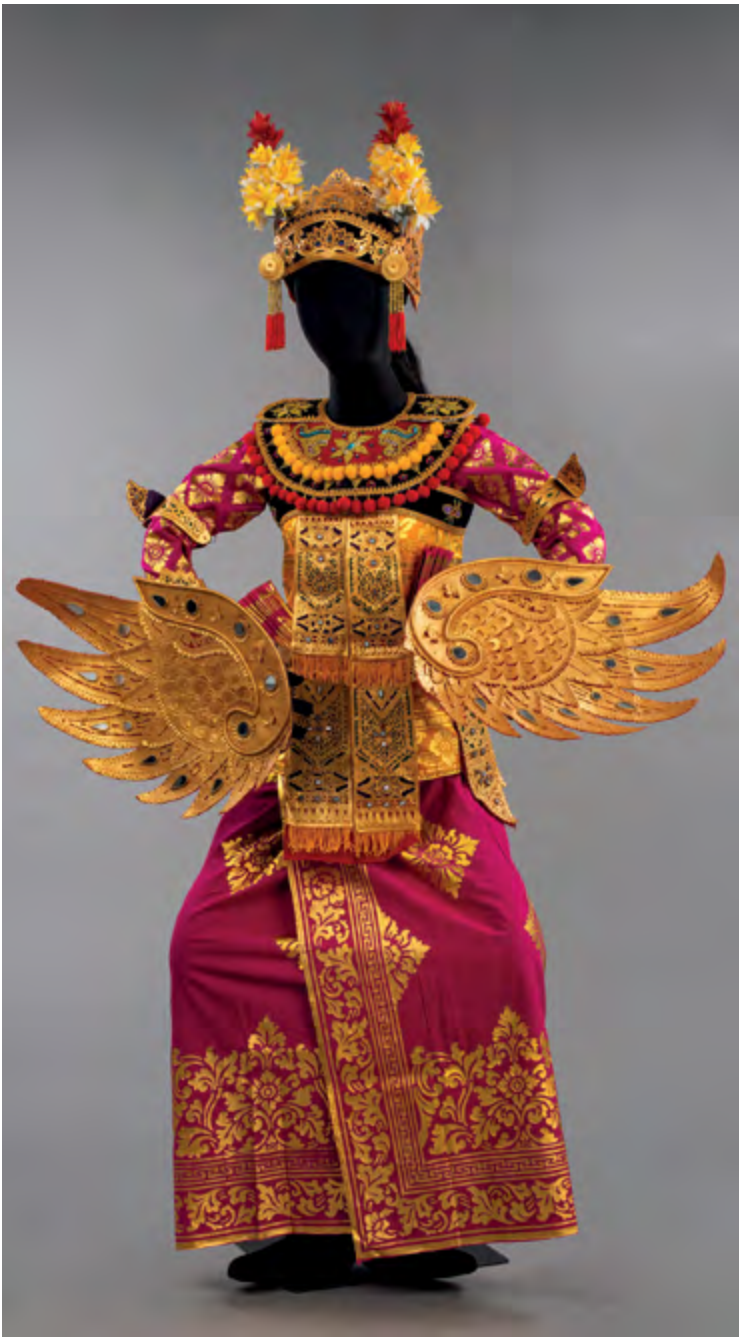


One of the newspaper fragments found in the cloth (MAiP collections)

to adhere to a well-thought-out plan also because of limited storage space and the high cost of preserving the artefacts in good condition. We do not seek to acquire antiques but focus on contemporary artefacts. We try to identify interesting cultural developments and include their material manifestations in the collection. One example are protective face masks made with batik patterns that will forever remind us of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A few years ago, the Museum started to gather audio-visual materials complementing its collections and make them available online. The majority are negatives, slides, and prints, which are gradually digitised, but we also acquire materials in digital form. Currently, the MAiP's digital inventory contains 46,323 items, 8,882 of which pertain to Indonesia. These are photographs taken by Andrzej Wawrzyniak and Janusz Kamocki, the two people who played the biggest role in the establishment and operations of the MAiP, reporters such as Jerzy Chociłowski, as well as travellers, diplomats, missionaries, and Poles working in Indonesia. In most cases, the pictures are gifted to the Museum by the authors or their heirs. The delicate photographic materials are stored in a specially adapted museum space. Currently, the Museum owns the professional infrastructure needed to preserve the physical objects in good condition for many years to come, digitise them in compliance with the most recent recommendations and using the latest technologies available, and showcase them to the public.

Most of the audiovisual materials we receive come without descriptions and need to be analysed in detail. In particular, the curatorial team must identify the locations and situations seen in the photos. Considering the small size of the team, the task will take years to complete, yet the photographs are already an excellent source of knowledge. They also contextualise the museum objects on display. Importantly, many of the pictures were taken at the time when the founding collection was being created and provide valuable insights into the everyday realities of the period. They are also an interesting resource waiting to be studied by specialists in various areas.



Balinese *legong* dance costume, MAP 20974 (MAiP collections)

## Summary

All of the above reasons make the Indonesian collection of the Asia and Pacific Museum a truly interesting one. I hope that now, when a selection of the artefacts is displayed in the Museum's permanent exhibition, which was our long-anticipated goal, we will be able to explore and use them in new ways. I believe this publication can help attract more interest to the collection on the part of researchers from other institutions, who will recognise it as a valuable object of study. The Museum has also ventured more boldly into the international arena, seeing considerable interest from foreign scholars. We promote the collection and gradually publish its sections on the website. The full catalogue is available at the Museum in digital form.

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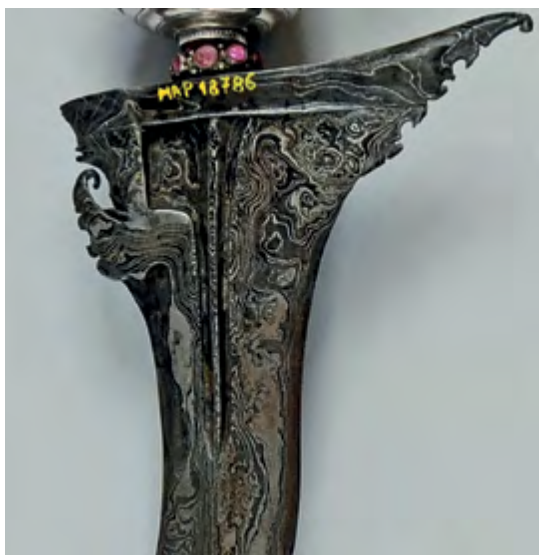
**KRZYSZTOF  
MORAWSKI**

# BALINESE *KRIS*ES: FORM AND SYMBOLISM

Decorative kris (*keris*) daggers continue to play an important role in the life of Balinese people as ceremonial objects passed down the male line. Many varieties exist, mostly differing in ornamentation. Krises have complex symbolism and are related to centuries-old beliefs. The examples used in this text come predominantly from the collection of Balinese kris held by the Asia and Pacific Museum in Warsaw. Many of the items are on display in the Museum's permanent exhibition, *Journeys to the East*, which opened in 2022 and includes a gallery of Indonesian artworks and artefacts.

## **The kris in Indonesia: construction, distribution, and significance**

The kris is a dagger with a double-edged, sometimes wavy, blade, often beautifully decorated. It is the national weapon of Nusantara, the world's largest archipelago. The blade is asymmetric, meaning that it widens more to one side than to the other near the hilt. This is a rare feature as compared to



Kris blade detailing,  
MAP 18786, photo: Eugeniusz Helbert (MAiP collections)

83 different types of cold weapons, not only Asian. Another unique element is a crosswise guard called a *ganja* at the base of the blade, just before the hilt. It has the shape of a small metal bar with jagged edges. It is reminiscent of the perpendicular cross-guard seen in European swords and has the same function: to protect the wielder's hand from the opponent's weapon. The *ganja* is not, however, synonymous with the cross-guard. The European cross-guard is part of the hilt, while the *ganja* is part of the blade. This is also a good example of the terminological problems we often face: Asian weapons fall outside the European nomenclature.

The *ganja* is mounted on the blade's tang, a spike protruding from the blade reminiscent of a long nail. The tang (Javanese: *paksi*) passes through an opening in the *ganja* into the hilt, yet the opening is not positioned centrally. The guard's longer side is narrow and often jagged; the shorter side is thicker, since it is the extension of the thicker edge of the blade, known as the 'face of the kris'. The *ganja*'s asymmetric shape highlights the asymmetry of



Kris meant for individuals of the rank of Bali rulers,  
MAP 17160, photo: Eugeniusz Helbert (MAiP collections)

the whole blade. Sword-like symmetric krisers do occur, but they are rare.

Another characteristic feature of the kris is the *pamor*, a lighter patterning reminiscent of wood grain, lines, fern or palm leaves, or roughly geometric and symbolic forms visible against a darker background (black or dark brown in Bali) provided by the blade. The difficulty of making the pattern is compounded by the fact that it is not visible<sup>21</sup> until the blade has been forged and subsequently

21 The *pamor* is a pattern forged into, or rather, together with the blade. A bar is first forged from both materials (pure iron and alloy iron-nickel), then broken in half and forged into the original length, which doubles the number of lines visible along the bar. The procedure can be repeated several times. The result is the simplest *pamor* pattern composed of longitudinal lines, called *adeg*. The bar is then divided into three parts: the shortest is shaped into the *ganja*, the blade overlay serving as a cross-guard. A bar of steel is inserted between the two longer parts and forged together into the kris blade. In cross-section, the blade resembles a sandwich with a steel core and two outer layers composed of iron with *pamor* on the flats. Thus, most krisers have the same *pamor* on both sides, but this is not always the rule. The forged kris still needs to be chiselled, polished, etched, and rubbed with aromatic oil.

chiselled, filed, ground, and eventually etched in a solution containing arsenic. As a result, the iron surface of the blade blackens, while the pamor, made of an iron and nickel alloy, retains a lighter, silvery or yellowish colour. The designs are not random: they have a symbolic meaning and are believed to have magical powers. Consequently, they must be as close as possible to established variants, over 230 of which have been identified by the best literature on the subject (Tammens, 1993).

Krises are also distinguished by a multitude of smaller and larger projections on the edges, as well as depressions and ribbings on the flats of the blades. These details are concentrated at the base of the blade, near the hilt. Importantly, their selection and arrangement are not accidental: just like the pamor, they need to be reproduced by the *empu*, or kris makers.

Kris hilts and sheaths<sup>22</sup> come in a great variety of types. In particular, there are many regional hilt designs, which are predominantly figural, with varying degrees of stylisation, or geometrical. Made from different materials, kris hilts are detachable and can be replaced.<sup>23</sup> If this were not the case, a kris's provenance could be established based on the hilt only, since individual islands have distinctive hilt styles, be it one or more (Java, Bali, Sumatra). Anthropomorphic hilts range from designs featuring a distinguishable human figure, to a stylised yet still discernible ancestor figure (*Jawa demam* depicting 'a Javanese suffering from fever'), popular in certain parts of Sumatra, to almost abstract *tunggak semi* ('budding tree trunk') designs common in Central Java, which feature a hardly recognisable human head and silhouette. Although simplified in form, the design is sophisticated, consisting of smoothed-out, perpendicular facets. Zoomorphic hilt designs are not uncommon, with examples including hilts shaped as a parrot,

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22 Hilts and sheaths on different islands come in matching sets.

23 Records show that krises sold to inhabitants of different islands were fitted with a new hilt that corresponded with the local style.

a chess knight, or a beetle (in Bali). There are also many geometrical designs.

Sheaths, too, come in a great variety of forms. Their characteristic feature is a top, crosswise part, referred to as *wrangka*, or boat, which gives the sheath the T shape. The letter is, however, slightly asymmetrical to accommodate the protruding ganja. Kris sheaths vary mostly by *wrangkas*. The lower part of the sheath, called *gandar*, can be encased in fitting (*pendok*) of precious metal, or, more commonly, in an alloy of semi-precious metals, such as paktong and tombak. The *pendok*'s surface can have different finishes: smooth, engraved, or embossed. The fitting can be full, in which case it is decorated with engraved ornaments, or feature an openwork design on one side. Alternatively, it may have a long narrow slit running along almost its entire length on one side or a longitudinal panel displaying a decorative metal insert with an openwork ornament. Locally, in Madura and Bali, the fitting extends to the *wrangka* and features the mask of Boma with a stern expression ornately embossed in the metal.

Multiple regional varieties of kris daggers can be found in many, but not all, Indonesian islands, parts of the Philippine archipelago, and in Malesia. In Indonesia, kris-es are common in Java, which is considered their cradle, even though their genesis is not entirely clear, as well as in Sumatra, parts of Sulawesi, the coastal areas of Borneo, in Bali, Lombok, and Sumbawa. They are not made in the Lesser Sunda Islands east of Sumbawa, nor Central Borneo, and the Moluccas.

Kris-making was a highly valued art in Indonesia. The prominence of these objects in the Nusantara culture is evidenced by their extensive terminology in the region's different languages, especially Javanese. A multitude of proper names are used to describe the various parts and details of the kris. For instance, the Malay and Indonesian equivalent of *wilah*, the Javanese word for the blade, is *mata keris* (literally: 'the eye of the kris').

The Javanese *ukiran* (literally: 'sculpture'), which denotes the hilt, is synonymous with the Indonesian *hulu keris* ('upper part of the dagger'). The name for the weapon also varies across the different languages used in Indonesia. The West Sumatran Minangkabau call it *karih*, while the inhabitants of the Philippines term it *kalis*. A second element is also commonly added to the generic name to denote the specific characteristics of a kris type. For instance, *keris Nagasasra* ('crowned snake kris') is a kris whose both flats are decorated with a carved and gilded body of a serpent whose crowned head is visible near the hilt on one of the edges. *Keris Nagakresna* ('black snake kris') features a similar design, which, however, is blackened, not gilded. Both types are examples of particularly striking blade ornamentation, with their wavy shape adding flair to the object. The names depend on a combination of details: the blade's protrusions, depressions, and outline, which can be straight or wavy. The number of waves (*luks*, gulfs) is always odd. Straight kris es are considered to have one luk. The general shape of a kris is called *dapor*. There are individual names for different *dapors* (Tammens 1991: 40–59).

Interestingly, while wavy kris es are predominant in museum collections, the straight variety has been more common in real life. Curved kris es are extremely spectacular, yet harder to forge and more time-consuming than straight ones. Consequently, kris makers have been manufacturing more of the latter.

## Balinese kris es

Balinese kris es differ from those made in the other Indonesian islands in their larger size and weight. The Balinese variety is one of the largest in existence. The blades are massive and heavy, especially as compared to the Javanese and the Sumatran kris es, the latter being the most delicate. The *pamor* and *dapor* correspond with the Javanese patterns and blade outlines, which can be straight or wavy. Kris es

from the neighbouring Lombok, which is to a certain degree influenced by the Balinese culture, are practically the same as Balinese, even though I have come across a – controversial, as it seems – view that they are less polished, with more of a rough texture (Ghiringhelli 2007: 46–47).<sup>24</sup>

Balinese krisess were made in different varieties for the upper classes (nobility and Brahmins) and the lower classes (called *sudra* in Balinese). Each of the above variants had ceremonial and combat subtypes. They differed as regards the shape of the *wrangka*, the transverse upper part of the sheath. The *wrangkas* of the ceremonial krisess were oval, rectangle-like, or trapezium-shaped, with fanciful elongated endings. In any case, they were the dominant element of the design, while the *wrangkas* of the combat subtypes took the form reminiscent of a flattened funnel. Interestingly, the sheaths of Balinese krisess come in all four variants known in Indonesia, which is unprecedented elsewhere in the country. Only three *wrangka* types are known to occur in Java. Rectangle-like *wrangkas* are not found there.

Balinese hilts are also of considerable size. They mostly feature geometrical and anthropomorphic, with a zoomorphic addition in the form of a beetle (see below). Depending on the type, some are fully encased in precious metal, such as silver, and richly decorated, which signifies their ceremonial function. Wooden hilts, in turn, were used in combat. Balinese hilts encased in metal feature a ring made of precious metal and set with plain faceted decorative stones near the base of the blade, called *selut*, which is a characteristic feature of krisess from the island. Some wooden hilts feature a *selut* imitation carved on the surface of the hilt, together with wooden gemstones.

Figural anthropomorphic hilts are referred to as *togogan*. They were made for monarchs and the nobility (courtiers). The depicted figures come from Hindu

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A discussion forum for the old weaponry enthusiasts and experts: <http://www.vikingsword.com/vb/showthread.php?p=96198> [access: 30.08.2023].

mythology, including the Indian epics. These mythological depictions are styled similarly to Javanese and Balinese shadow play puppets (*wayang kulit*). The characteristic features of the style, especially in Java, are narrow eyes and sharp, pointed noses in calm and positive characters and round, googly eyes in impulsive and negative characters, such as evil rulers. Some hilts depict the hero Bhima from the *Mahabharata*, the Hindu god of the winds, Bayu, or characters with menacing, clearly demonic features, emphasised by fangs and round eyes. Auction catalogues and the relevant literature commonly refer to such characters as *raksasa*, which is the name of demons featured in Hindu mythology. The ghastliness of their faces can vary from truly savage (huge teeth taking up half the face, bare fangs, protruding round eyes) to less threatening (with fangs only).

Many of the characters depicted in figural hilts are identified in the relevant literature by name, but some inconsistencies occur. The characters include:

- Bayu, the Hindu god of the winds;
- Bima, a hero from the *Mahabharata* and Bayu's mythical son;
- Rahwana, the chief antagonist in the *Ramayana*, represented both as a demon and a warrior;
- Bhuta Nawasari, a wrathful aspect of Shiva (Ghiringhelli, 2007: 154–155);
- Durga, a fearsome Hindu goddess (Weihrauch, Kloubert, Aljunied, 2015: 122).

The figures are depicted seated on a high pedestal that forms one with the figure. The fourth of the listed characters, Bhuta Nawasari, is the easiest to identify due to his distinctive iconography, characterised by a dynamic pose and gesture. He is seen seated, yet seems to be in motion: with one knee lifted to waist level, he reaches behind his head and holds a triangular object, referred to as a spike of rice or a pandanus flower.



Hilt depicting Vayu  
(The Metropolitan Museum  
in New York collections,  
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/23017>)

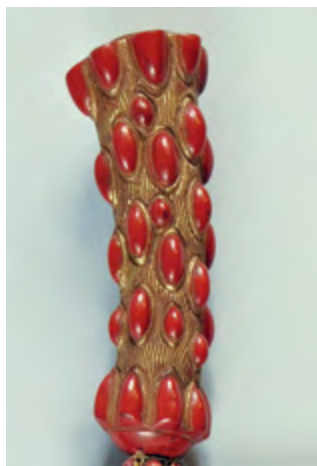
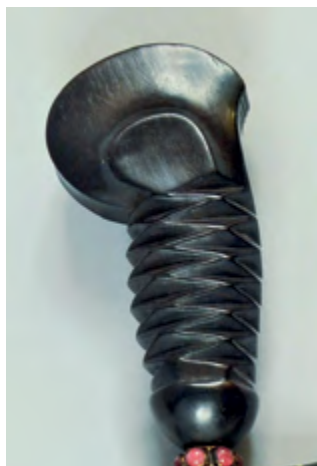


Kocet-kocetan type of hilt,  
MAP 18785, photo: Eugeniusz Helbert  
(MAiP collections)

The *kocet-kocetan* is a specific zoomorphic hilt carved in the form of a real-life beetle species. The insect symbolises a figure from Hindu mythology. He is the mythical brother of Garuda the eagle. This type of hilt is meant for Brahmins.

Geometric hilts were made for the lowest social class. They come in a few varieties:

- cylindrical, slightly curved hilts encased in metal or with the grip covered with woven metal thread (*grantim*) are an element of ceremonial kris used by this social group;



Fragments of the krisen  
MAP 381, MAP 119,  
MAP 18795, MAP 125,  
MAP 18790,  
photo: Eugeniusz Helbert  
(MAiP collections)

- cylindrical, slightly curved hilts with a wrapping around the grip, *tapukan*; the wrapping is usually made of horsehair or string;
- faceted concertina, *cecekahan*;<sup>25</sup>
- reminiscent of a short and massive umbrella handle, *bebondolan*; not unlike Central Javanese hilt called *tunggak semi*, yet markedly more massive;
- cylindrical, with a few rows of oval ‘growths’, *cecanginan* (Weihrauch, Kloubert, Aljunied, 2015: 120).<sup>26</sup>

Let us also mention krisess whose sheaths are decorated with polychrome leaves and geometrical patterns in gold against a plain red, green, or black background (some ornaments use more colours than gold). This hilt type was made for courtiers.

All krisess have a metal collar called *uwar* (in Bali only; in Java: *mendak*) between the hilt and the blade. It covers the small fragment of the blade’s tang which is not fully covered by the sheath. Uwars are made of a great variety of materials, including copper, brass, less commonly silver and even gold. They are decorated using such techniques as pressing, granulation, and sometimes brass plating, silver plating, and setting in decorative stones. Uwars in Bali are usually reduced to mere rings. They can, however, be as richly decorated as jewellery; in particular, they are set in decorative stones or colourful pieces of glass in more modest examples.

25 Ghiringhelli (2007: 46) cites a similar name, *cekah solas*, which translates as ‘eleven notches’ (<https://www.mandarinmansion.com/item/bali-straight-keris>). There are inconsistencies concerning the hilt type names in the relevant literature. Edward Frey (2003: 60) and Gerard Tammens (1994: 20) use the term *terhi-merhi*. Some authors exchange names between two hilt types, for instance, *cecekahan* and *bebondolan*.

26 Some experts on the topic refer to this hilt type as *cecanginan* (Weihrauch, Kloubert, Aljunied 2015: 120) or *jampaka* (Tammens 1994: 24). Writing on an internet forum for old weaponry experts, Alan Maisey has argued, based on the principles of the Balinese language, that *cenangan*, a simplified version of the first name, is the correct one (<http://www.vikingsword.com/vb/showthread.php?t=23380>).



Fragment of the kris, MAP 17988,  
photo: Eugeniusz Helbert (MAiP collections)

## 93 The role of crises in Bali culture

The island of Bali fell within the sphere of Indian influence at least in the 7th century CE. Chinese scholar and traveler Yijing (635–713) mentioned that during his expedition to India, he visited a Buddhist country, known as Bali, ca. 670 (Ramseyer, 2002: 35). The influences could have come directly from India or through an international Buddhist university in Sriwijaya, South Sumatra, which gathered over a thousand students and faculty members in the 7th century. The first royal degrees issued ca. 882 were written in Old Balinese without any specific Javanese features, which suggests that the first Indian influences came to Bali directly from the subcontinent, without Java acting as an intermediary (Ramseyer 2002: 36). It did occur, however, probably at the turn of the 10th and 11th century. Udayana, a descendant of Kesari Warmadewa, the first king of Bali whose name appears in the records, married a princess from the ruling dynasty in East Java in 989. Their son, Erlangga reigned in East Java (Ramseyer 2002: 36). Javanese influences had a transformative impact on Bali

(except for the villages inhabited by Bali Mula, the Original Balinese, which I discuss below), after it was conquered in 1343 by Gajah Mada, the powerful minister of King Rajasanagara, also known as Hayame Wuruk, the ruler of the East Javanese Majapahit Empire. The minister appointed Brahmin Sri Kresna Kapakisana as his vassal-governor and dispatched him to Bali. When setting up a court (*kraton*) in Samprangan, Kapakisana brought his courtiers from Java. According to a questionable Balinese chronicle, he also came to the island with his kris (Ramseyer, 2002: 57). The next court was set up in Gelgel, later in the 14th century. The fall of the Majapahit Empire under the pressure of newly established small Islamic states in Java in the 15th and 16th centuries caused a surge in migration, especially of the elites, who did not accept the new circumstances. This triggered another wave of Javanese cultural influence in Bali. Even if this was not a one-off, legendary event brought about by the fall of Trowulan, the capital city of Majapahit, but rather a decades-long, gradual influx of Javanese Hindus and Buddhists, it is proof of Javanese influences on Bali.

Until it was eventually conquered by the Netherlands in 1908, Bali was divided into a multitude of little warring kingdoms, whose borders correspond with the island's current administrative division. The subsequent courts precipitated the gradual Javanisation of Bali. The 14th century saw the conquest of Bali. It was also a time of Java's cultural boom. Under the rule of the Majapahit dynasty, Javanese arts, including sculpture, theatre, and literature, flourished (Ramseyer, 2002: 57). Balinese rulers and their circles were the first to embrace Javanese culture. They welcomed Javanese artists and craftsmen of various trades: actors, dancers, sculptors, woodcarvers, painters, blacksmiths, and goldsmiths. Many contemporary artists and artisans practising traditional arts and crafts trace their origins to Java. Balinese rulers, in turn, liked to think of themselves as descendants of the Pandavas, the five legendary brothers from the *Mahabharata*.

The kris is revered both in Bali and Java. The local people believe it is connected to their ancestors. They honour it by burning incense and giving offerings of foodstuffs and

flowers to the daggers. In Bali, kris owners dedicate offerings to the daggers and their ancestors once a year, meaning once in 210 days, according to the Balinese calendar of rituals. The practice is also common in Java, despite the island's five-century-long Islamisation. The kris is sanctified by the bladesmith, or empu, who has the status of a lower-ranking priest,<sup>27</sup> since he has the power to perform the ritual of giving the kris life and endowing it with a soul, which is believed to reside in the pamor. For this reason, strictly speaking, only the kris blade is venerated.<sup>28</sup> In the Hindu communities of Bali, the *pande besi* blacksmiths are all members of the same clan, tracing their lineage back to Brahma as their mythical ancestor. The secrets of the trade and related rituals are passed down through generations. Joining the profession is voluntary for clan members, but they still need to give offerings to the mythical ancestor in the *pura dadya*, the temple of ancestors.

Apart from krises, Balinese blacksmiths made spears, knives, farming tools, and betel scissors used to cut areca nuts, which are an ingredient of the betel quid, into smaller parts. A blacksmith developing a kris for a king or a noble court official had to pray and give offerings daily to be blessed with good fortune. He would start work on what was considered a fortunate day and work until dusk, day by day (Ramseyer, 2002: 64).<sup>29</sup>

The kris is worn behind the back. Due to the dagger's large size and the specific cut of Balinese local costume, which is tied high on the chest, the hilt sticks out above the wearer's right shoulder, almost up to head level. This is supposed to protect the wearer against the 'evil powers' from behind. It is believed that the kris guards the owner and may warn him about imminent danger, especially if the hilt depicts

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27 Blacksmiths are held in high regard in Indonesia, including Bali, since metals, especially iron, are believed to possess magical powers.

28 Except for Javanese *gana* hilts, which were naturally shaped like the sculpture of the fearsome Hindu goddess Durga.

29 Genuine bladesmiths may still exist in Bali, but they are outnumbered by charlatans selling tourist fakes (Ramseyer, 2002: 64).

a Hindu deity or a raksasa (de Marval, 1997: 32). During the mass suicides, or *puputans*, of 1906 and 1908, in a desperate protest against the Dutch attack on the palace, the Balinese ruler and aristocratic officials directed their kris against the invaders' guns in the belief that kris can strike at a distance.

Old-time Balinese etiquette supposedly required that a person visiting the palace or a dignitary's residence should leave their kris in the hand of a polychromed wooden statue standing by the door (Brinkgreve 2010: 245). The sculpture had a human form (prince, servant) or an animal shape, e.g. a monkey (Hanuman) or a frog. One of the statue's hands had an opening wide enough to insert the kris. In the case of the frog, the kris was inserted into the animal's upturned mouth.

The kris even became an element of male attire in the village of Tenganan Pegringsingan, inhabited by Bali Mula (Original Balinese),<sup>30</sup> as the indigenous Balinese people call themselves. They live by the traditional customs preceding the spread of Javanese influence in the 10th century. Every man needs to wear his kris when he leaves home; otherwise, he is excluded from participating in community life and rituals for three days (Ramseyer, 2002: 64). As seen, the kris has even gained ground among members of an indigenous community.

## The origin of the kris

Various theories on the genesis of the kris exist. Some suggest that the dagger originated locally, most probably in Java, while others argue that they were modelled on a prototype invented in Vietnam or India; Chinese origin is also taken into account.

The fully developed form we know today has been in existence at least since the 14th century, when the oldest

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Also known as Bali Aga (Mountainous Balinese), but the name is considered offensive.

dated specimen of the weapon was made.<sup>31</sup> One of the widely accepted present-day theories traces the origin of the kris to a dagger known as the kris Majapahit in reference to the dynasty that ruled over the East Javanese empire from the late 13th century to the early 16th century, or *kris sajen* (Indonesian for 'sacrificial offering'). Developed in 1947 by George Cathart Wooley, the theory has not been successfully challenged to date (Wooley, 1947). In that early variant, the blade and hilt were forged from a bar of iron hammered with the pamor (an alloy of iron and nickel). The hilt was anthropomorphic. On the other hand, it is assumed that the kris could have been modelled on 3th-century BC Vietnamese (more precisely: Dong Son culture) bronze daggers whose human-shaped hilts formed one piece with the blade. They were not asymmetrical like the present-day kris. Nevertheless, no archaeological finds were discovered from the period between the Dong Son era and the presumed time when the kris sajen/Majapahit was in use (Frey, 2003: 9–11), namely before the year 1000 CE (Tammens, 1994: 114–115).<sup>32</sup> Consequently, we have no information about a transitional dagger type existing between the two distant epochs.

The same is true of a similar theory that traces the origin of the kris to the Chinese bronze knife *ge* [ko], in which the blade is attached crosswise to the handle, just like the head of an axe is joined with the haft. The knife had another distinct characteristic: its blade was asymmetrical, with a single spike at the bottom protruding to the side, bringing associations with the kris. The *ge* were also common in the Bronze Age, during the Shang and Zhou Chinese dynasties

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31 Charles Knaud's kris is named after its former owner (1840–1897), Dutch physician in the employment of Pakualam V of the Principality of Pakualaman within the Sultanate of Yogyakarta, Central Java. Knaud received the kris from the prince. It is now held at the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam. A date deciphered on the blade is 1342, but it is assumed that the date refers to the ornaments seen on the kris, and the dagger itself is older.

32 Gerard Tammens (1924–2001) was a proponent of dating kris to a very early period. His view practically did not find supporters among prominent Western experts on the topic.

(17th century–256 BCE). As is the case with the Dong Son bronze daggers, we are not aware of any subsequent forms that could be considered the connecting link between the ge and the fully-developed kris (de Marval, 1997: 8).

According to a third, and most recent, hypothesis developed by Garrett Solyom (Solyom, 1978: 12–13), the forerunner of the kris was the *kris buda* (meaning 'Buddha' or 'Buddhist'). The term is used by the inhabitants of Surakarta in Central Java to describe pre-modern krisses discovered by archaeologists, which the locals believe to come from the Hindu-Buddhist era. In the last years of the 20th century, Solyom's thesis was developed by Alan Maisey (Maisey 1998: 8–11, 23), who described the weapon in question as *Prambanan II* in reference to the temple compound in Central Java also erected in the Middle Javanese period, presumably in the early 10th century (Kempers, 1959: 59). The temple is richly decorated with architectonic reliefs, many of which depict the story of the *Ramayana*, featuring the ancient weapon. The pre-modern krisses had a wide yet short blade in the shape of an ovate leaf tapering towards the point. In a typical kris fashion, they were asymmetrical just before the hilt and had the ganja guard.

The Prambanan reliefs also depict other forms of short cold weapons. Their blades are not asymmetrical, their hilts are purely prominent and practical, with a pommel and a cross-guard. Their wide and 'leaf-shaped' outline of the blade prompted Maisey to suggest in the paper mentioned above that the weapon had been an earlier forerunner to the kris. He named this dagger type *Prambanan I*, hypothesising that it had originated in ancient India.

Other proposed theories, now refuted, claimed that the kris evolved from rays' stingers (Gardner, 1936) or the spear blade reattached to a short hilt (Griffith-Williams, 1937).

The Javanese origins of the kris are corroborated by six Javanese courtly manuscripts, which were studied in detail by the Dutch J. Ostmeier over a century ago (Frey, 2003: 7–8). The manuscripts generally agree with each other on the chronology of the oldest krisses and the names

of kings and empu bladesmiths, while diverging as regards other matters. According to these sources, the oldest kris-es were made between 230 and 288 CE and had straight blades. The first wavy kris was forged in 329 CE. The data are suspiciously precise and are not corroborated by other sources or archaeology (Frey, 2003: 7–8).

According to Javanese legends, the kris was introduced to the 'East Islands' in the 10th century by the mythical hero of the Javanese, Prince Panji, together with the wayang kulit shadow play and the gamelan orchestra. The combination of those three different cultural phenomena is surprising. Experts believe the gamelan and wayang were original achievements of Javanese culture, developed independently of Indian influences, a fact their native Javanese terminology seems to confirm. Shadow play has been mentioned by the sources since the 11th century, which is not contradictory to the legend. The kris and shadow puppetry could, therefore, be of the same age. As mentioned above, the relevant literature surmises that kris sajen/Majapahit, one of the two potential forerunners of the kris, could have originated around the year 1000 (Tammens, 1994: 114–115).

The fully developed kris type that we know today could have spread from Java across almost the entire Indonesia and partly beyond its present-day borders. This could be evidenced by the fact that the kris occurs in the territories where the influence of the East Javanese Majapahit culture reached, and is not known in the eastern part of the Lesser Sunda Islands and interior Borneo, where this influence did not make itself felt. The proliferation of kris's use and production could have taken place during the Majapahit period at the latest. The legacy of this culture was and still is continued in Bali.

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**DOMINIKA**  
**KOSSOWSKA-JANIK**

# THE WRITING TRADITIONS OF INDONESIA AND THE ASIA AND PACIFIC MUSEUM'S MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

The Asia and Pacific Museum's Indonesian manuscript collection contains 37 items. These are mostly Balinese palm-leaf books, Batak *pustaka* books, and inscriptions on bamboo stems. The Museum also holds texts on Islamic matters written on European-style paper. Although small and relatively contemporary, the collection is an excellent illustration of the development and evolution of writing traditions in the Malay Archipelago. The structure of the scripts, book forms, and book production techniques display strong Indian influences. The Indian spirit has also survived in the literature itself, which draws copiously on Hindu epics and medical texts. This is the case with some Balinese *usada* manuscripts that discuss healing methods and medicinal treatments. The MAiP collection also demonstrates how the script was adapted to local needs across different regions. For instance, Batak *aksars* look different from the characters used in Java or Bali, as their shape was possibly adapted for carving in hard materials like bamboo. The use of bamboo and tree bark contributed to the transition from the *pothi* format to new, locally developed book forms. The MAiP collection is complemented

by Javanese manuscripts written on European paper in a native variety of the Arabic script (Pegon<sup>33</sup>), which serve as an example of the powerful impact made by the Arabic and European civilisations on the developments in the Malay Archipelago, including literature, religion, the eventual replacement of the local writing systems by the Latin script.

This chapter attempts to paint a picture of the pre-colonial writing traditions in the context of the MAiP holdings. As the introduction of paper, the transition to the codex format, and the modification of the Arabic and subsequently the Latin alphabet to write the Indonesian languages require a separate analysis, I will focus on the development of the Indic scripts, palm leaf book production, and the use of local writing materials such as bamboo and tree bark.

## The history of the collection

The vast majority of MAiP's Indonesian manuscripts come from the founding collection, which contains almost 3,000 items donated in 1973 to the Polish state by Andrzej Wawrzyniak, who proceeded to become the Museum's first director. Wawrzyniak was a controversial figure who, nevertheless, rendered great service to the popularisation of Asian cultures in Poland. As a teenager, he signed on the *Dar Pomorza* sailing ship. His first encounters with geographically and culturally distant regions kindled a passion that led him all the way to Polish diplomatic posts in Vietnam, Indonesia, Laos, Nepal, and Afghanistan. His almost decade-long stay in Indonesia was the most consequential. That was when he started gathering objects for the collection that became the germ of what we know today as the Asia and Pacific Museum, and what initially was called the

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33 Names of languages and scripts are written in Roman type as proper names.

Nusantara Archipelago Museum, due to the character of its then collection.

Unfortunately, we are unable to trace the history of the manuscripts from the founding collection. Andrzej Wawrzyniak did not leave behind any information on the circumstances surrounding their acquisition. What is more, some of them were initially misidentified; for instance, Balinese manuscripts were attributed to the Karo Batak people from Sumatra. Consequently, it is unclear if they were bought in the antiquarian market or from private libraries. The wear and tear of some of the items, including chafing, cracked leaves, and missing fragments, may suggest the manuscripts were intentionally removed from local collections. In the past, it was a common practice in South Asia and Southeast Asia to first copy, and then burn or deposit damaged books. Currently, the trend is the opposite: while the art of writing on leaves is on the wane, significant emphasis is placed on the preservation, study, and digitisation of manuscript collections in situ.

The MAiP's Balinese collection also contains seven illustrated manuscripts. The objects were produced with traditional methods for the collectors' market. Three of them (MAP 9070, 9071, 9072) were purchased from Maria Giedwidż in 1985, one (MAP 17365) was gifted to the Museum by Jerzy Chociłowski in 2003, while MAP 2546, 2547, and 2548 come from the founding collection. The Museum can also boast an interesting, if enigmatic, manuscript written in an unidentified local variant of the Javanese script (MAP 4278) donated by Wawrzyniec and Brigitta Węclewicz in 1978. Most probably, the donors had bought the manuscript outside of Indonesia, since the Museum acquired it as an object of unknown provenance. Following initial consultations, its origin was mistakenly attributed to Myanmar. Currently, we believe it was made in Madura or Lombok.

Apart from Balinese manuscripts, the founding collection comprised most of the Batak manuscripts now held by the Museum, except for the pustaha book (MAP 11798) donated to the Museum by Bogdan and Zofia Staeven in

1988, the inscribed bamboo tube (MAP 14721) and inscribed bamboo strips (MAP 14722) gifted to the MAiP by Waldemar Klimont in 1995, and the calendar (*porhalaan*) etched on a buffalo scapula (MAP 17519), which the Museum received from Barbara Chwilczyńska-Wawrzyniak in 2003. Just as is the case with the founding collection, we have no information on how and when the benefactors acquired the objects.

It is even harder to trace back the history of the MAiP's seven manuscripts written on European paper (MAP 22185–MAP 22191). We assume that the objects were originally placed in the Museum's library by Andrzej Wawrzyniak. They were only added to the MAiP's catalogue in 2023, after stocktaking of the book collection.

The MAiP's Indonesian manuscripts are written in archaic scripts and languages which are currently out of use and remained mostly unidentified for years. At the turn of 2019 and 2020, they were studied as part of the project Digitisation of Manuscripts and Printed Books from the Asia and Pacific Museum Collection, which I led and which was supported by the Digital Culture Programme of the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. As part of the project, we enlisted the cooperation of Dr Andrea Acri,<sup>34</sup> a specialist on old-Javanese and Balinese texts, and Roberta Zollo,<sup>35</sup> an expert on Batak writing systems, who helped confirm the origin of the manuscripts and develop an initial interpretation of their contents. The whole collection was digitised and published online in the Digital Library of the Manuscripts and Printed Books from the Asia and Pacific Museum's Collection available on [manuskrypty.muzeumazji.pl](http://manuskrypty.muzeumazji.pl) in Polish and English. Currently, the online repository can also be accessed through the Digital Libraries Federation and Europeana.

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## The development of writing in the Malay Archipelago

The history of writing in the Malay Archipelago dates to the first centuries of the 1st millennium CE, when the region saw the influx of Indian people attracted to the archipelago by the robust trade activity in the Indian Ocean basin. Due to the high air humidity, no written records on perishable materials have survived from that period. The only evidence of the early development of writing in Southeast Asia are inscriptions carved into stone and other hard materials. Although they are relatively few, they do shed light on the evolution and expansion of writing in the region. The earliest inscriptions were written in Sanskrit using a southern variant of Brahmi, the oldest writing system of India that indirectly gave rise to the majority of contemporary scripts in South Asia and Southeast Asia (Kossowska-Janik, 2020: 196–237).

The earliest written record discovered in the territory of Indonesia dates back to the 5th century CE. It comprises seven stone pillars that feature inscriptions in honour of King Mularvarman found in Kutai, East Kalimantan (Vogel 1918; de Casparis, 1975: 14–18). Just like the other extant early inscriptions from Southeast Asia, the text is written in Sanskrit using a script derived from a southern variant of Brahmi, more commonly known as the Pallava script<sup>36</sup>.

Somewhat more recent epigraphic relics were discovered in West Java, in the area of Jakarta and Bogor (de Casparis, 1975: 18; Susanti et al., 2015: 20). The second half of the first millennium saw the emergence of Malay inscriptions, with examples including epigraphic relics from the islands of

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36 Having analysed the Kutai inscriptions, J. P. Vogel (1918) proved that the characters are similar to the Grantha script, a variant of Brahmi used in a South Indian state ruled over by the Pallava dynasty in India. For this reason, the writing system of the oldest inscriptions found in Southeast Asia is associated with the Pallava script. A. Griffiths (2014a: 54) believes, however, that in the early period the scripts used in South India were so close to each other that it is impossible to authoritatively say that the Pallava script was the forerunner of the Indonesian writing systems, but one of the southern variants of Brahmi certainly was.

Bangka and Sumatra dated to the late 7th century (Guy, 2014: 12). In the mid-8th century in Java the South Indian script commonly used in the Indonesian islands evolved into the Kawi (old-Javanese) script. The earliest known Kawi relics are Sanskrit inscriptions from Plumpungan (750 CE) and Dinoyo (760 CE) (de Casparis, 1975: 28–33). The Kawi script gave rise to other systems, including the Sundanese, Javanese, and Balinese scripts. The epigraphic material discovered outside of Java is so scarce that it is impossible to trace the evolution of the other writing systems, such as the Ulu and Batak scripts in Sumatra or the Makassar and Lontara scripts in Sulawesi. It is generally assumed that they emerged from earlier forms of Kawi (Kozok, 1996: 233–234). Recent research has significantly added to the existing corpus of epigraphy (Griffiths, 2011, 2012, 2014b, 2020), which may contribute to a better understanding of the history of writing in Sumatra and the neighbouring islands.<sup>37</sup>

The Indonesian writing systems have partly resisted Arabisation, which brought Islam and the Arabic alphabet, among others. The Arabic script was modified to write the Malay language (Jawi) and the Javanese language (Pegon). Currently, the Jawi script is still used to write the Malay language in Brunei. It is less commonly used in Malaysia, where the Latin alphabet has gradually replaced all other writing systems since the 17th century. Nowadays, the Latin script has been adopted to write all the languages spoken in Indonesia, after the local systems have disappeared or are marginalised.

Importantly, all the writing systems derived from Brahmi, including the Indonesian scripts, are not alphabets but abugidas, or alphasyllabaries. Each unit is based on a consonant read together with an inherent vowel (a). The change of the vowel is marked by a diacritic added to, before, or after the consonant grapheme. The characters

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37 Christopher Miller (2010) believes that the Lontara script, Sumatran scripts, and Philippine scripts evolved from Gujarati, which spread to Indonesia in the mid-2nd millennium CE, together with merchants from North India. The theory, however, has not been widely accepted.



## Palm-leaf manuscripts in the Indonesian culture

Along with the concept of writing came the Indian book-making practices. It is assumed that palm leaves were the basic writing material used in the Malay Archipelago ever since the emergence of writing in the region. Apart from birch bark, the material was used in one of the oldest Indian manuscripts discovered in the territories occupied by the Gandhara civilisation and oases located on the edges of the Taklamakan Desert. The leaves' narrow and elongated shape led to the development of a new book format called pothi. Cut into a rectangular shape, the pages were turned along the longer edge.

Owing to the warm and humid climate of Southeast Asia, no ancient documents written on perishable materials have survived to this day; however, there are reasons to believe that palm leaves could have been the primary writing surface used already in the earliest period. One of them is a relief found in the Borobudur Temple in Java,<sup>38</sup> which depicts people holding palm-leaf manuscripts. The relief can be dated to the turn of the 8th and the 9th centuries. Another possible proof of the widespread use of palm leaves as writing materials can be the discovery of relatively numerous inscriptions made on copper and gold plates (e.g. de Casparis, 1975: Plates IV, VII, VIII; Susanti et al., 2015: 76, 79, 100; Gryffiths, 2014: Fig. 39, 40), whose narrow and elongated shape certainly corresponds with the palm-leaf format.

As far as we know, in the Indonesian islands, two types of palm trees were used in manuscript production: the palmyra or lontar palm (*Borassus flabellifer*), the gebang palm (*Corypha gebanga* or *Corypha utan*), and perhaps also the nipa palm (*Nypa fruticans*). The most popular material by far was the lontar palm, which gave the palm-leaf manuscripts their name of lontar (*ron tal* meaning 'palm leaves' in Javanese). The palm can grow to be 30 metres tall. Sourcing the leaves is



Palm-leaf manuscript, MAP 2556,  
photo: Łukasz Brodowicz (MAiP collections)

extremely dangerous, since the individuals climbing the tree do not use any protection. Allegedly, the best-quality leaves obtained between September and October and between March and April can be used for writing sacred texts (Hinzler, 1993: 443–444). The cutting of the leaves is just the beginning of a months-long process as part of which the leaves are dried, trimmed, hardened, and protected against insects. Depending on the workshop, the particulars of the process vary, yet the basic concept remains unchanged. Based on the relevant literature, audiovisual materials, and the information obtained from local producers,<sup>39</sup> it can be concluded that nowadays, palm leaves are processed using the same methods as they were

39 The Asia and Pacific Museum reached out to Widyaksara Nyurat Lontar and ordered leaves, ink, and equipment from the seller. The described leaf processing method corresponds with the traditional procedure.

at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.<sup>40</sup> First, they need to be laid out in the sun to dry. Next, they are cut to shape, pressed down with a stone, and immersed in water, which should be changed daily to prevent the spread of germs. After the soaking phase is complete, the leaves are laid out in the sun again, then transferred back into a water-filled container. Later, they are boiled for a few hours in water with the addition of a few ingredients with antiseptic properties. When dried, the leaves are placed under a wooden press. When the treatment is complete, they are cut to shape, polished with pumice or abrasive paper, punctured, and marked with lines. Their edges are commonly covered with a red dye (e.g. Chinese lacquer), which, besides its aesthetic value, protects the manuscript from pests.

The surface of the lontar is too smooth to write on with ink. First, the text needs to be etched with a metal tool called *pengrupak*. Contrary to other South Asian and Southeast Asian regions, pointed-end styluses are not employed in Indonesia. Instead, a tool similar to a small knife or a chisel is used. The scribing technique is, nevertheless, the same, since only the pointed tip of the blade is pressed into the leaf surface. Highly qualified scribes can inscribe the text quickly and very accurately. This is, however, not a straightforward process, because the leaflets' venation hinders writing. Once etched into the leaf's surface, the characters are hardly visible. The scribe usually avails himself of lines previously applied to the surface of the leaf. In Indic scripts, the characters are written under the lines, not above them, as is the case with Latin letters.

The text usually becomes visible when rubbed with charred candlenut (*Aleurites moluccanus*), known in Indonesia as *kemiri*. In most South Asian and Southeast Asian regions, the mixture used to blacken the text is made from ash and oil. Due to its high oil content, charred candlenut can be used on its own, yet it is often combined with coconut oil anyway.

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40 More on the different methods of treating palm leaves can be found in Hedi Hinzler (1993) and Raechelle Rubinstein (1996: 136–137). The process has also been recorded on video by Studio Mini (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UyDasycrk0&t=1s>).



Writing materials and implements,  
photo: Łukasz Brodowicz (MAiP collections)

The sticky mixture enters the incisions; it also creates an oily protective layer on the lontar. After the surface is wiped with a cloth, the black colour remains in the incisions.

Thus prepared, the manuscript is placed between two wooden covers. Subsequently, a string is threaded through the centrally positioned hole in the leaves and the covers, and eventually wrapped around the whole book. In the case of Indonesian manuscripts, the strings are often adorned with Chinese or colonial coins. Alternatively, the string's ends may be decorated with a single bead or another ornament (van der Meij, 2017: 175–179).

Nowadays, the art of writing on palm leaves is on the wane. The only Indonesian island where the tradition is still kept alive is Bali. Although the scribes increasingly make ornate decorations for tourists instead of manuscripts, they continue to incise the text or illustrations using the canonical method on a traditionally treated leaf. Making copies of the original manuscripts is also not uncommon. What is more, the process is still preceded by the prescribed rituals.

The Balinese currently treat lontars as their common good, which has given rise to numerous projects aimed at the preservation and digitisation of manuscripts, translation and promotion of Old Javanese and Balinese texts, and the application of digital technologies to palm-leaf writing (Acri, 2015).

The island of Sulawesi can boast an interesting type of lontar. The text is written on long (max. 60 cm) and narrow (ca. 3 cm) strips of leaf, which were subsequently sewn together and wound around two spools mounted on a special wooden structure (Tol, 1996: 217). The reader unwound the manuscript from one spool and wound it around the other. Only a handful of such manuscripts have survived to this day, since European paper was a more common writing material in Sulawesi in the colonial times.

As compared to the well-documented and thoroughly studied lontar production, we know significantly little about manuscripts made using other palm tree leaves. In the literature, they are usually termed as *nipah*, in reference to the nipa palm (*Nypa fruticans*). Aditia Gunawan (2015) proved that both the name and the palm species have been identified erroneously: the manuscripts were made using the leaves of the gebang palm (*Corypha gebanga* or *Corypha utan*). Currently, only 30 gebang manuscripts are known to exist in Indonesian and European collections.<sup>41</sup> The leaves are not as stiff and smooth as those of the lontar palm, which is the reason why text is not incised but inked on their surface. All known gebang manuscripts originate from West and Central Java (Gunawan, 2015). Short texts were also written on pandan leaves (*pudak*) (Hinzler, 1993: 438–439).

## Lontars in the MAiP collection

The Asia and Pacific Museum's collection contains 20 Indonesian manuscripts written on palm tree leaves (Table 1). Apart from the

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41 Aditia Gunawan (2015: 254) listed 29 known manuscripts, omitting the British Library's MSS JAV 105.

previously mentioned MAP 4278 manuscript, all originate from Bali. Only two have a colophon at the end that makes it possible to ascertain when the items were made (MAP 2537 in 1884; MAP 2539 in 1931). The other examples can be safely dated to the turn of the 19th and the 20th centuries. The majority are traditional medical and magical *usada* texts written in Balinese and Old Javanese. Some of the magic texts contain illustrations (*rajahan/rerajhan*) which can also be found on amulets, since they serve as incantations (van der Meij, 2017: 230–231; Hinzler, 1993: 456). Seven manuscripts (MAP 2546, 2548, 9070, 9071, 9072, 17365) are the so-called *prasi* manuscripts, richly illustrated with scenes from Old Javanese poems (*kakawin*), in particular the *Ramayana*. The tradition comes from Bali, yet nowadays *prasi* are mainly made for the European collectors' market (van der Meij, 2017: 222–230).

Many of MAIP's Indonesian manuscripts bear smudges of dirt, show signs of damage, or lack pages, which indicates frequent use. Manuscript MAP 4278 is an interesting example of traditional repair methods: its cracked leaf was sewn back together with a fair thread.

Card No. 33<sup>42</sup> from manuscript MAP 2545 was reinforced with an additional leaf sewn in three places with stitching running from the card's top to its bottom. This was not a repair but an indication of the change of the work's subject matter. Some cards in several manuscripts have a piece of string or fibre threaded through one of the holes, which was the typical way of marking important sections of the text.

As mentioned above, it can be assumed that the texts were copied over time, and the damaged manuscripts were deposited or removed from the library collection. Item MAP 2542 is not only made up of at least two manuscripts whose cards are of different sizes, but its text is not blacked with ink, which is an indication that it is an unfinished piece that has never been read.

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42 According to the original numbering. Due to the manuscript's incompleteness, the card was given the number 32 during the digitisation process.

Table 1. Lontars in the MAiP collection

Inventory No	MAP 2535	MAP 2536	MAP 2537	MAP 2538	MAP 2539	MAP 2540	MAP 2541	MAP 2542	MAP 2543	MAP 2544
Content	magical and medical text	medical text <i>Kuranta Bolon</i>	fragment of <i>Malat Rasmi</i> and the poem <i>Tantri</i>	texts devoted to incantations of mostly exorcist character	the kakawin <i>Harivamsa</i>	texts of magical and exorcist character	magical texts, incantations	herbalist formulas and magical procedures; at least two different texts	Pamali incantations against disease	magical and medical text
Dating	20th century	20th century	1884	20th century	1931	20th century	20th century	20th century	20th century	20th century
Language	Balinese	Balinese, Old Javanese	Balinese, Central Javanese	Balinese, Old Javanese	Old Javanese	Balinese, Old Javanese	Old Javanese	Balinese	Balinese, Old Javanese	Balinese, Old Javanese
Script	Balinese	Balinese	Balinese	Balinese	Balinese	Balinese	Balinese	Balinese	Balinese	Balinese
Leaf dimensions	3.2 × 31.6 cm	3.2 × 37.4 cm	3.6 × 42.2 cm	3.1 × 28.3 cm	3.4 × 52.8 cm	3.1 × 38.3 cm	3.7 × 44.2 cm	3.7 × 48 cm	4 × 36 cm	3.2 × 30.5 cm
Number of holes	3	3	3	1	3	3	3	3	3	3
Number of lines	4	4	4	4/3/2/1	4	3	4	4	3	4
Text layout	two-column	two-column	two-column	single-/two-column	two-column	two-column	two-column	two-column	two-column	single-column
Covers	wood	wood	wood	tiger bamboo	tiger bamboo	wood	wood	bamboo	wood	wood
String decorations		Chinese coin		blue bead	1-cent Dutch East Indies coin from 1937	Chinese coin		coin	blue bead	

Inventory No	MAP 2545	MAP 2546	MAP 2547	MAP 2548	MAP 2556	MAP 4278	MAP 9070	MAP 9071	MAP 9072	MAP 17365
Content	incantations and invocations to deities	narrative accounts	narrative accounts	narrative accounts	mantras, orthographic mysticism	unidentified text	narrative accounts: scenes from the <i>Ramayana</i>	narrative accounts: scenes from the <i>Ramayana</i>	narrative accounts: scenes from the <i>Ramayana</i>	narrative accounts: scenes from the <i>Ramayana</i>
Dating	20th century	20th century	20th century	20th century	20th century	19th–20th century	20th century	20th century	20th century	20th century
Language	Balinese, Old Javanese	x	Balinese	Balinese	Old Javanese	?	Balinese	Balinese	Balinese	Balinese
Script	Balinese	x	x	x	Balinese	Javanese	x	x	x	x
Leaf dimensions	3.5 × 32.8 cm	3.5 × 21.5 cm	3.1 × 25.7 cm	3.4 × 21.2 cm	2.9 × 21.7 cm	3.5 × 24.7 cm	3.5 × 30.5 cm	3.5 × 30.5 cm	3.5 × 30.5 cm	3.3 × 22 cm
Number of holes	3	1	1	1	3	3	1	1	1	1
Number of lines	3	x	3/2/1	x	3	4	1	1	1	2
Text layout	single-column	single-column	single-column	single-column	two-column	single-column	single-column	single-column	single-column	single-column
Covers	wood	bamboo	wood	bamboo	wood	wood	bamboo	bamboo	bamboo	bamboo
String decorations		two Chinese coins		two Chinese coins			Chinese coins	Chinese coins	Chinese coins	two Chinese coins



Page with a colophon, MAP 2537, photo: Konrad Stasiuk (MAiP collections)

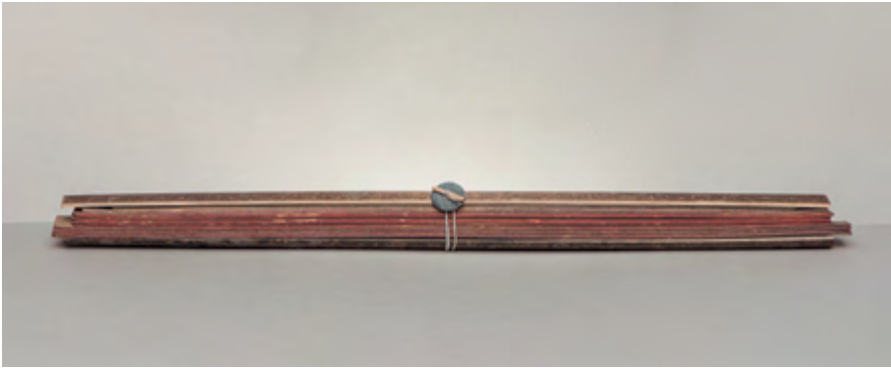


Page fixed using a traditional repair method, MAP 4278, photo: Konrad Stasiuk (MAiP collections)

Indonesian manuscripts are usually small in size. Due to the size of the lontar leaves, the height of the cards is between 2.9 and 4 cm. Their length is more varied and can range between 21 and 53 cm. Hinzler (1993: 452–454) noted that the length of the cards depends on the subject matter. Kidung and kakawin poems, translations of Indian epics written in prose (*parwa*), and commentaries on them (*purana*) are written on longer leaves. Didactic texts (*sasana*), medical texts (*usada*), horoscopes, calendars (*wariga*), as well as Balinese poems (*parikan*, *geguritan*), genealogies (*babad*, *silsilah*), and incantations (*mantra*) were made on shorter leaves. The

smallest manuscripts were dedicated to black magic (*kaputusan*, *kawisésan*).

The manuscripts can also be divided according to card layout. The first group (MAP 2535, 2536, 2537, 2539, 2540, 2541, 2542, 2543, 2556) are pieces with three holes in each card (on each side and in the middle), creating two columns, each containing four, or sometimes just three, lines of text. The characters are written with care and precision. Manuscripts in the second group (MAP 2544, 2545, 4278) also have three holes, yet their text is not divided into columns but runs from one side of the card to the other, except for



Manuscript in bamboo covers decorated with a coin,  
MAP 2542, photo: Konrad Stasiuk (MAiP collections)

the central hole. The side holes mark the margins. Each card usually features four, or sometimes three, lines of text. In both groups, the card numbers are placed in the left-hand upper corner on the verso side. Contrary to the manuscripts from Myanmar, Thailand, or Cambodia, the cards are not marked with subsequent aksaras but with numbers. The third group consists of manuscripts with one centrally positioned hole. Except for MAP 2538, all of the pieces are the items made for the collectors' market that I mentioned above.

The custom of painting the cards' edges with red dye is an interesting protective and decorative practice. It is part of the leaves' preparation process. The MAiP collection contains five such manuscripts (MAP 2539, 2540, 2541, 2542, 2556). Another protective treatment is placing the cards between two wooden covers in the shape of a trapezium, rectangle, semicircle, or naturally rounded bamboo covers, the most original of which are made of tiger bamboo (*babambo tutul*) covered with rusty spots (MAP 2538, 2539).

In the MAiP collection, only the manuscripts made for the collectors' market (MAP 9070, 9071, 9072, 17365) have bamboo covers etched with decorative motifs. Contrary to Java, Madura, and Lombok, manuscript covers were rarely decorated in Bali (van der Meij, 2017: 164). The traditional



Manuscript in wood covers decorated with a bead, MAP 2543, photo: Konrad Stasiuk (MAiP collections)

decorative technique in Bali and the neighbouring islands was to attach coins or beads to the string that kept the cards together (MAP 2538 and 2543). The most commonly used coins were the Chinese *kepeng* from the Manchu-led Qing dynasty, whose square, centrally positioned hole made them perfectly fit for the purpose. Some of the Dutch Indies coins had a similar use, for instance, the 1937 one-cent coin adorning manuscript MAP 2539.

## Manuscripts made of tree bark and bamboo

While palm leaves were the primary writing material used in Java, Bali, Madura, Lombok, and Sulawesi, Sumatra had the tradition of writing on bamboo, tree bark, animal bones, and buffalo horn. Due to the humid climate, no ancient manuscripts have survived to this day, which makes it impossible to ascertain when the materials started to be used in manuscript making. The most numerous examples of local writing traditions were found in North Sumatra, populated by the Batak people (mostly Karo, Toba, and Simalungun), as well as the provinces of Jambi, Bengkulu, South Sumatra, and Lampung,

whose populations used languages of the Ulu family (Kerinci, Rejang, Lampung).

Likely, the simple forms of the characters of the Sumatran scripts, which evolved from the South Indian script or Kawi, are the consequence of the specific character of the writing material used. It can be assumed that the rounded characters of the earlier scripts were easier to inscribe on palm leaves, which can crack from longitudinal incisions (Diringer, 1972: 364–365; Hartmann, 1986: 15–16). Straight lines are, in turn, easier to etch in bamboo, which is probably why the Sumatran characters are simpler in form. A similar process likely occurred in the neighbouring Philippines.

The most common writing material used in Sumatra was bamboo, preferably lignified stems 2–7 cm in diameter, which were cut into sections whose length ranged from over a dozen to more than a hundred centimetres. Often, the length of the manuscript depended on the distance between the nodes. Longer manuscripts also existed, in which case the text was divided between internodes. The beginning was usually marked with a longitudinal, sometimes decorative, line running across the whole manuscript. The text was etched with a knife and subsequently dyed. Most often, the content consisted of love or mourning songs, divination instructions (e.g. Batak *porhalan* calendars), and letters (Zollo, 2020: 76).

Apart from cylindrical manuscripts, texts were inscribed on bamboo slips ranging between a few and over a dozen centimetres in length and between 1 and 4 cm in width. The characters were written on the outer side of the stem, usually in a few lines. The slips were either threaded on a piece of string (in which case a hole was drilled in their surface) or tied with a rattan band. A manuscript would commonly consist of more than a dozen elements. Similar plates were sometimes made out of bone.

Another significant book format is the leporello (concertina fold) made from tree phloem.<sup>43</sup> It is unclear when

such manuscripts first began to be made. The oldest known bark manuscript is a *pustaha* made by the Toba Batak people before 1764, when it was gifted to the British Museum by Alexander Hall (Voorhoeve, 1950: 290)<sup>44</sup>. Interestingly, bark books were unknown elsewhere in the Malay Archipelago apart from Sumatra. Most extant examples held in Indonesian and European collections are of Batak origin. We know of significantly fewer bark manuscripts from Central and South Sumatra. Compared to the Batak relics, which are exclusively dedicated to magic and divination, the content of the Sumatran manuscripts is more varied as they also contain laws and legends (Voorhoeve, 1950: 284). Bark manuscripts were made in Sumatra until the early 20th century. Nowadays, they are only produced for the tourist market.

Among the Sumatran bark manuscripts, the Batak ones are the best processed and studied. The Toba Bataks call them *pustaha*. The term derives from the Sanskrit word *pustaka*, which means 'book'. Bark manuscripts were made by *datu* (priests or healers) for their own use. The texts dealt with magic healing treatments, so-called black magic, and divination (Winkler, 1925: 78). They are predominantly collections of incantations and descriptions of different practices, intended to be used as aids during rituals. In simplified terms, the manuscript was a *datu*'s private notebook, which he ultimately passed on to his successor. Apart from text, *pustahas* also featured numerous illustrations.

Based on the available literature, analysis of museum manuscripts, and observation of manuscript production for the tourist market, René Teygeler (1993) attempted to recreate the *pustaha*-making process. The procedure does not seem overly complicated. First, you needed to remove the phloem of the *alim* (*Aquilaria*) tree. After the phloem was dried, the

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In Southeast Asia, the leporello format has been used in Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos, where concertina books were made of the paper mulberry. As is the case in Sumatra, the age and origin of the tradition are unclear. Researchers do not know if it developed locally or under the influence of Chinese culture. The leporello format has also been known to be used in China, but much more recently.

datu selected sections of the right size for the manuscript. Longer books were sewn or glued from several parts. Next, the surface was evened out with a knife, and smoothed and polished with coarse leaves. Finally, the folio was folded concertina-fashion. A wooden beater was used to create firm creases. Both sides of the book were then coated with water or rice starch to make the ink more viscous.

The text was written in black ink obtained from the tarry substance produced by charring resinous wood, with a pen made from twigs found in the fibre of the sugar palm (*Arenga saccharifera*) tree (Teygeler, 1993: 605–608). Only black ink was used for the writings, while some drawings were dyed red and occasionally yellow. The outer sides of the first and the last fold were left blank, serving as the covers. They were often furnished with wooden or sometimes leather covers. The front cover was usually carved with decorative motifs or painted with patterns. Some wooden covers had a drilled hole for hanging the manuscript up. Commonly, the book was secured with a rattan band to prevent it from opening spontaneously.

Pustaha books vary in size. The smallest known manuscripts are 4 by 6 cm, the largest 28.5 by 42.5 cm. The books were made of one or several folded strips of bark. Others could reach 16 m when fully extended. (Teygeler, 1993: 595; Zollo, 2020: 66).

## **Batak manuscripts in the MAiP collection**

The Asia and Pacific Museum collection (Table 2, Table 3) contains three pustaha books (MAP 2553, 2554, 11798), six inscriptions on bamboo tubes (MAP 2549–2552, 2555, 14721), and one set of bamboo strips (MAP 14722). The pustahas are written in the language and script of the Toba Batak people. Two of them (MAP 2554 and 11798) are almost illegible, since the ink has become hardly visible. The text of the manuscript MAP 2554 is written in black ink, while the illustrations are filled with red ink. The manuscript is furnished with two wooden

covers. Manuscript MAP 11798 is in even worse condition, with fragments of text and illustrations surviving in some folios. This seems to be the oldest manuscript in the MAiP's Batak collection (18th–19th century). The best-preserved item in the collection is the pustaha MAP 2553, despite the damage visible on the cover and the first folio. The first part of the text provides instructions on how to make protective potions (*pagar*), prepared by the datu using herbs, fruits, and sometimes animal ingredients. The mixture was swallowed, carried in an amulet container, or hung at a specific place (Zollo, 2020: 68). The other side of the manuscript contains a description of the oracle of the hanging rooster (*manuk gantung*). The dying animal was cut in half, and the datu made a divination based on its entrails (Zollo, 2020: 74).

The six manuscripts written on bamboo tubes contain writings in the Simalungun Batak language and script. These are original objects that can most safely be dated to the 19th–20th century. They are 23.5–133 cm in length and 4.5–7 cm in diameter. The beginning of the text is marked with a double line, sometimes filled with different geometrical motifs.

In some cases, the text is divided into several sections separated by a black line that runs across the manuscript. There are between a dozen and several dozen lines of text per manuscript. The longest manuscript in the MAiP collection is made of several internodes, each featuring 38–52 lines of text. On some manuscripts, a decorative motif can be seen around the tube (on the internodes or in the margins). Three objects have a hole through which a cotton cord has been threaded.

All the writings on bamboo held in the MAiP collection are concerned with religion and magic. They predominantly contain invocations of the deities of the three worlds (the higher, the middle, and the underworld). According to Batak mythology, the realms constitute the whole universe. The most common invocations are: *mari ma handingan* and *mari ma hamu* ('come hither'), as well as *turun ma hamu* ('descend'). Another recurring formula reads *surung ma ko* ('arm yourself with strength') and is addressed to the spirit Pangulubalang,

Table 2. Manuscripts made of bamboo in the MAiP collection

	MAP 2549	MAP 2550	MAP 2551	MAP 2552	MAP 2555	MAP 14721	MAP 14722
Content	invocations to the gods of the three worlds	list of ingredients (probably for preparing a potion)	invocations to the gods of the three worlds	invocations to the gods of the three worlds; recipe for a potion	invocations to the gods of the three worlds, summons to Panglulubalang	a threatening letter; invocations to the gods of the three worlds	divinations
Dating	19th–20th century	19th–20th century	19th–20th century	19th–20th century	19th–20th century	19th–20th century	19th–20th century
Dating	26.9 × 5.7 cm	41 × 4.6 cm	38.6 × 7 cm	29 × 4.8 cm	132.9 × 5 cm	23.5 × 6.2 cm	21.5 × 2 × 1 cm (15 slats)
Script and language	Simalungun	Simalungun	Simalungun	Simalungun	Simalungun	Simalungun	Simalungun
Text start marker	double line with ornaments	double line	double line	double line with ornaments	double line with ornaments	double line	none
Number of text lines	26	17	36	20	38–52	22	3–7
Dimensions into sections	none	none	5 sections separated by a line running along the entire manuscript	5 sections separated by a line running along the entire manuscript	4 internodes with additional divisions into subsections separated by single lines	2 sections separated by a 1.2 cm line	15 slats
Special features	a square with two intersecting lines next to the last three lines of text on the right-hand side; cotton cord	left margin decorated with an ornamental motif; cotton cord	two decorative lines on the right margin; cotton cord		decorative motifs on the nodes		

Table 3. Manuscripts made of tree bark in the MAiP collection

	MAP 2553	MAP 2554	MAP 11798
Content	pagar, manuk gantung	?	?
Dating	18th–20th century	18th–20th century	18th–20th century
Dimensions	11 × 9 × 3 cm	15.5 × 11 × 2 cm	8 × 4.8 × 8 cm
Script and language	Toba	Toba	Toba
Ink colour	black	black and red	black
Covers	none	wood	none



Bark books (*pustaha*), MAP 2553 and MAP 2554,  
photo: Łukasz Brodowicz (MAiP collections)

whom the datu dispatches to fight enemies (Voorhoeve, 1950: 286–287). Two texts provide instructions on how to prepare magic potions.

Finally, the Batak manuscript collection boasts a set of 15 bamboo strips threaded on a cotton string (MAP 14722). The outer side of each strip features 3–7 lines of text written in the language and script of the Simalungun Batak people. These are mostly divinations and recommendations that the datu used when telling the future of a sick person. The Asia and Pacific Museum also holds inscribed Batak objects manufactured for the collectors' market. One of them is a calendar (porhalaan) made on an animal scapula (MAP 17519). Many European museum collections can boast inscribed bones. Objects of this kind attracted the interest of Western collectors in the early 20th century at the latest, which boosted their production by the Batak community (Zollo, 2000: 83–84). The MAiP collection also includes bamboo containers with a carved cover (MAP 17520, 17521, 18888), whose sides are decorated with the Batak calendar (porhalaan).

The parchment calendar stored in an ornate wooden cylinder (MAP 2802) is an interesting and relatively mysterious artefact. The object comes from the founding collection, which means it must have been made before 1973. It is a very uncharacteristic example of Batak craftsmanship.

## The popularising activities of the Asia and Pacific Museum

Apart from researching Asian writing traditions, I am involved in numerous popularising activities at the Asia and Pacific Museum. One such project was the exhibition *Słowa nieulotne. Pismo w kulturach świata* [Nonephemeral Words. Writing in the World Cultures], which was on display at the turn of 2019 and 2020. The section dedicated to the writings from Southeast Asia featured several Balinese palm-leaf manuscripts, Batak pustaha books, and bamboo inscriptions, among other artefacts. On 8–10 December 2020, as part of



Bamboo tube with a religious inscription, MAP 2549,  
photo: Konrad Stasiuk (MAiP collections)



Bamboo slats with magical inscriptions, MAP 14722,  
photo: Konrad Stasiuk (MAiP collections)



Calendar (porhalaan) on an animal scapula, MAP 17519,  
photo: Konrad Stasiuk (MAiP collections)

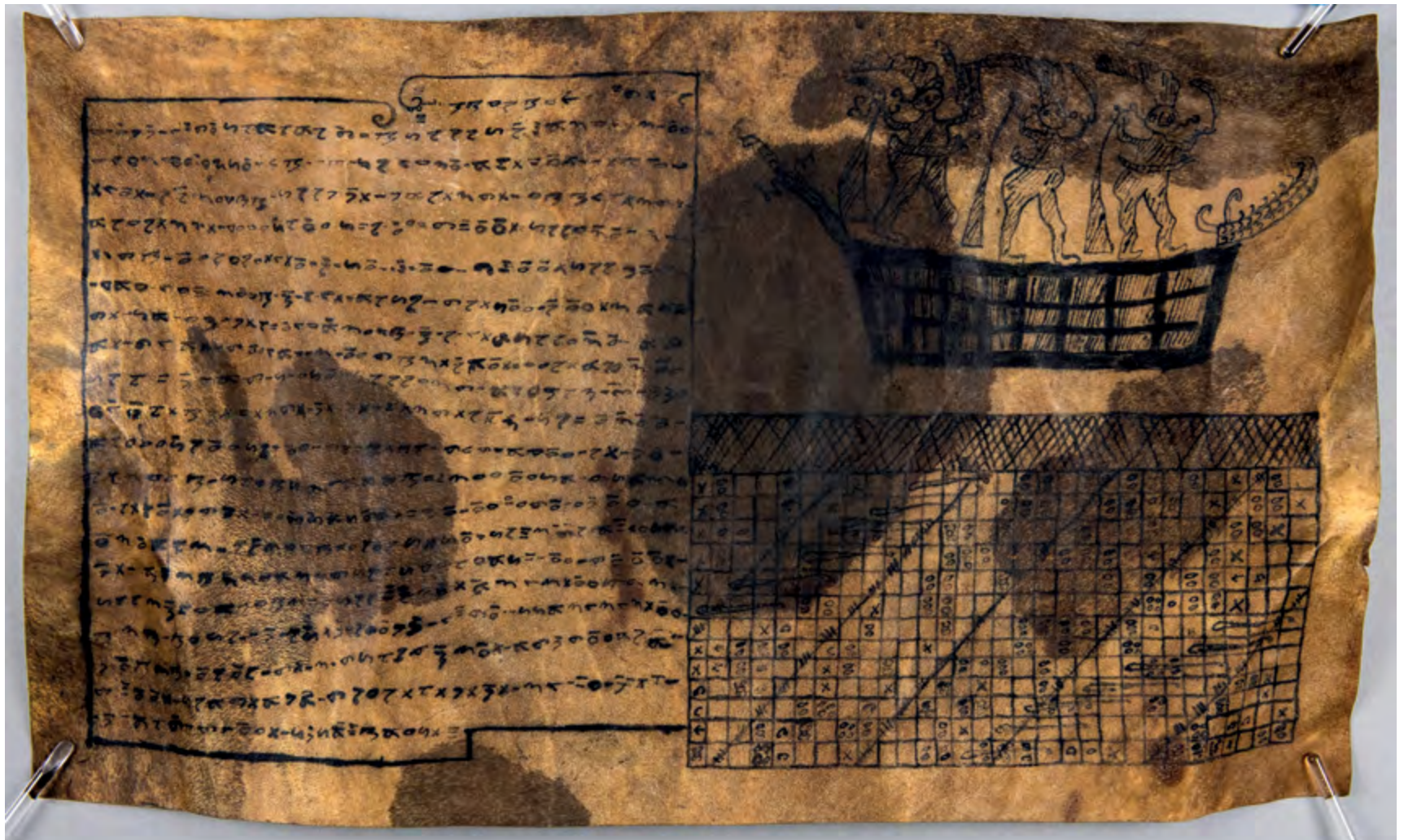


Calendar (porhalaan), MAP 17520,  
photo: Konrad Stasiuk (MAiP collections)

the project Digitisation of Manuscripts and Printed Books from the Asia and Pacific Museum Collection, we held the online conference *Szkoła manuskryptów* [The School of Manuscripts], featuring presentations by Dr Andrea Acri and Roberta Zollo, among others. The programme was primarily geared towards the students of Oriental studies, Conservation, Archaeology, History of Art, and related fields. In 2022, thanks to the help of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, we had specially treated palm leaves, writing implements, and candlenut ink shipped from Bali to Warsaw. Since that time, I have been leading Workshops on Balinese Palm-Leaf Writing as part of my Art of Writing series. The classes attract professionals (experts in Oriental studies, conservators, librarians, calligraphers) and amateurs interested in Asian cultures. The Balinese script and the art of writing on lontar were also the topic of the family workshop *Zapiski na palmowym liściu. Podróż na Bali* [Writings on A Palm Leaf: A Journey to Bali] and the Museum workshop held as part of the 26th Science Fair organised by the Polish Radio and the Copernicus Science Centre in 2023.

## Summary

A small but interesting collection of Indonesian manuscripts amassed primarily by Andrzej Wawrzyniak before 1973 has inspired manuscriptological research and numerous popularisation activities now conducted at the Asia and Pacific Museum in Warsaw. These books are a testament to the multiplicity of writing systems used in Indonesia and provide an insight into a rich literary content that often bears the mark of Indian influence. They are also excellent material for the study of writing media and book formats.



Calendar on a piece of bark, MAP 2802,  
photo: Konrad Stasiuk (MAiP collections)

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# TRADITIONAL GAMES AND PLAY OF INDONESIA: BETWEEN THE MUSEUM COLLECTION AND EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS

As noted by Johan Huizinga, the author of the monumental book *Homo ludens*, 'play is older than culture' (1985: 11). It is the most spontaneous and primordial form of human activity. Play gave rise to the first games. They are 'as old as man and his mind; when he started to exist and act, when he started to think, he started to play games' (Pijanowski, 1969: 169). Play and games have been an inherent part of humans' daily life, providing us with entertainment and an escape from the routine. At the same time, they play a significant role in building social relationships and passing cultural heritage between generations. Over a 100 years ago, the games researcher Eugeniusz Piasecki wrote: 'A nation's specific games have their unique features that constitute an intrinsic part of the people's heritage, as important as the dress, ornaments, customs, language, and even the physical characteristics of the race' (1916: VIII).

In the face of a rapidly changing world and ubiquitous globalisation, it is important to preserve time-honoured traditions and unique cultural heritage, which can also be reflected in traditional physical activities. As part of its effort

to protect cultural heritage, UNESCO has emphasised the special importance of games and leisure activities, stating that they should be afforded the same care as artworks, architecture, or regional languages. This approach is reflected in the International Charter of Traditional Games and Sports (Bronikowska, 2013: VII).

This chapter examines the use of traditional Indonesian games and play in the Asia and Pacific Museum's educational projects. It also presents the diversity of long-established Indonesian leisure activities based on the Asia and Pacific Museum's collection and discusses their potential as learning aids. In addition, the text provides practical examples of how these games and activities can be used as tools to transfer knowledge, develop interpersonal skills, strengthen interpersonal relationships, and promote cultural values, identity, and an understanding of other cultures.

For the purposes of this analysis, it is worth noting the distinction between play and game. The former is a spontaneous activity performed for entertainment. In the words of Karpowicz, it is '[an] action taken by a human without coercion [...], for the simple pleasure of it' (cited in Rębowski, 1935: 4). It was play which gave rise to game, a more complex form based on rivalry. To quote Bronikowska: '[A] game is play arranged according to an organised system, with a goal, structure, and the means to carry it out' (2013: 12).

## **The place of games and play in the Museum's activity**

Traditional games and play have not always been afforded interest by the academic community, which was accurately summed up by Iwona Kabzińska-Stawarz, when she wrote that the topic was 'not considered one of the so-called big topics of scholarly study and was lingering on the periphery of researchers' interest' (1983: 253). This perception changed in the late 20th century with the realisation that traditional forms of physical activity are an underappreciated source of

information about cultural heritage. Studying them can provide an in-depth insight into the different aspects of a culture and a society. In the words of the Chinese scholar Lin Yutang, 'one cannot understand a nation without knowing its daily play activities' (Wang, 2003: 1).

A similar situation was observed in the museum sector, where games and play were usually treated as an 'unwelcome' element of tangible heritage incorporated into museum collections without a clearly defined purpose. The Asia and Pacific Museum has been different in this respect. When the MAiP's Educational Department was established in 2015 and began developing its programme offer, we were certain that Asian games and leisure activities had incredible educational potential. There was no doubt in our minds that they could be an important means of intercultural education and, more importantly, facilitate closer intercultural ties and understanding. We hoped that by using them as the theme of our workshops, we could encourage the participants to reflect on the world around them and stimulate their interest in the countries where these games and activities originated. We were guided by the words of Lorraine Barbarash, who said that adopting 'a multicultural and multiethnic approach in education can provide children with information that they can later use to forge their own opinions and their paths in life' (cited in Bronikowska, 2013: 19). We wished to symbolically transport the participants of our programmes into a different time and space by offering them access to an extraordinary experience through joint play. This led to the launch of the Asian Games and Play workshops, which are now the primary component of our educational offering.

Our interactive workshops were designed around the Museum's Asian artefacts. We revived our Indonesian spinners, Japanese *kendamas*, and many other games to create a unique space for learning, playing, and creative exploration. The participants were given the opportunity to learn about the cultural diversity of games and experience it firsthand. Our engaging and interactive classes were designed to develop the participants' interpersonal skills, foster social bonds,



Children playing with a spinning top,  
photo: Tomasz Madej (MAiP collections)

and promote an active lifestyle. Traditional games and play became a vehicle for valuable educational experiences that contributed to the participants' growth in many spheres of life.

Our games and play projects were not limited to the museum setting. The Educational Department team went beyond the museum walls to take part in multiple outdoor events, festivals, and local gatherings. Our presence at those events not only attracts attention but also allows us to reach a wider audience with information about our one-of-a-kind educational offerings.

From the very beginning, the workshops were met with great interest, with several thousand people attending our classes, demonstrations, and game sessions. Seeing the participants' enthusiasm and joy, we are convinced that traditional games and play have an extraordinary power to bring people together, as they have fun and join in a common activity.

The great interest in the classes, as well as the feedback we received from teachers, parents, and other participants, prompted us to develop an exhibition dedicated to traditional games and play. Ultimately launched on 7 April 2018,



A visit to the 'Playing with Culture' exhibition,  
photo: Łukasz Brodowicz (MAiP collections)

the exhibit *Zabawa z kulturą. Tradycyjne zabawy i gry Azji* [Playing with Culture: Traditional Asian Play and Games], curated by the author of this text, was on display until 30 September 2018.

The exhibition combined a conventional display of objects in museum cabinets and opportunities to try out selected games and play. Special interactive zones set up in the museum setting offered viewers a chance to test their skills and physically immerse themselves in the richness of diverse cultural traditions, while discovering the mystery and joy that play can give. Our goal was to encourage the visitors to reflect on the world around them and to inspire their interest in the countries where the games originated. At the same time, we were keen to build positive social attitudes that promote intercultural understanding.

*Playing with Culture* was received enthusiastically. Children, young people, and adults were all fascinated by the opportunity to participate in the traditional games. The exhibition space became a place for people to meet, share experiences, and strengthen social interaction. We were pleased



Interactive stands at the 'Playing with Culture' exhibition, photo: Łukasz Brodowicz (MAiP collections)

to see people discovering and appreciating the potential of games and play as educational and integrative tools. To provide a fuller picture of the richness and significance of traditional games and play, we also published a catalogue featuring their histories and practical tips on how to partake in them. This way, we sought to share our knowledge of traditional leisure activities with a wider audience and provide teachers and educators with practical learning aids they could use in their work.

## **Traditional games and play in the Museum's collection**

The Asia and Pacific Museum boasts a fascinating assortment of traditional games and play, which are a highly valuable resource. Although the artefacts do not constitute the largest part of the collection, they serve an important role in the Museum's activity. These unique objects include both games of skill and board games, which are both a source of

entertainment and a challenge for the body and the mind. At the same time, the Museum's Educational Department has begun to amass its own collection. Unlike the objects with inventory numbers, our games can be used as teaching resources. Building the collection was a complex process that also involved collaboration with various institutions and experts on Asia.

A particularly significant moment was my participation in the 6th TAFISA World Sport for All Games held by the Association for International Sport for All in Indonesia in 2016, where I was able to make contact with such organisations as the Hong Community and the Myanmar Chinlone Federation, which resulted in the acquisition of Indonesian and Korean games of skill.

Building the collection would not be possible without the support of scholars, travellers, and the Museum's friends. Thanks to their commitment, we managed to obtain valuable information, photographs, and videos, which enriched our knowledge of traditional games and play. Our close collaboration with the Kolong Tangga Museum of Toys and Education in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, proved particularly important. The museum's founder, the sadly late Rudi Corens, generously gifted selected objects from his collection of Indonesian games and toys to the Asia and Pacific Museum.

Thanks to its multilateral collaboration, the MAiP can nowadays present its audiences with a wide range of traditional games and play activities that reflect the richness and diversity of Asian cultures. What we have amassed is not only a unique collection but a platform that allows our visitors to discover, appreciate, and enjoy the educational and historical value of these traditional forms of entertainment.

## **Indonesian games and play collection**

Combined, the museum and the educational collections total over 40 objects that form a fascinating mosaic reflecting the country's diversity and cultural heritage. They dazzle with their



*Gasing* spinning top, ca. 2016, wood, bamboo, 17 × 7 cm, string length 57 cm, EDU 30, photo: Łukasz Brodowicz (MAiP collections)

141 richness and variety, offering insights into Indonesia's history and physical activity traditions. In the words of the authors of the book *Traditional children's games of Indonesia*:

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Traditional toys and games in Indonesia are learning aids for the child to learn about their history, knowledge, cultural values and traditions. Without omitting the element of fun that is important in the process of growing up, traditional games were more than just games. They teach moral values, encourage interaction with social and natural environments (2013: 3).

Below, I present examples of games and play featured in our museum collection that can be used as multipurpose educational aids, including in the teaching about Asia and the process of discovering the continent.

One of the most important objects in the collection are Indonesian spinning tops. According to the description featured on the cover of the book *The Top: Universal Toy, Enduring Pastime*, authored by a leading expert in the field, Douglas W. Gould: 'The top is one of the oldest and most

widely known toys in the history of man' (1973). The *gasing* is usually the main attraction of the museum workshops. This simple spinning top is made of natural materials and consists of three parts. The central element is a straight wooden stick serving as the axis of symmetry with a fragment of a bamboo cylinder attached to it. The cylinder ends with wooden elements and has an oblong hole cut into the central part of its body. The second element is a string ending with a wooden handle. The third element is a wooden slat with a hole drilled at one end. The toy's working principle is simple: the string is threaded through the hole in the slat, then coiled around the upper part of the skewer. Once the handle is pulled, the top starts spinning, while the hole in its body produces a humming sound. The collection also includes handmade tops from the islands of Bali and Lombok, which stand out for their size. For example, the so-called *gasing perwira* from Lombok has a diameter of 18 cm, a height of 14 cm, and weighs 1.5 kg. Such tops are prized for their high-quality workmanship and speed of spinning. They require a lot of strength and skill from the player. Characteristically, to set a *gasing perwira* in motion, the player needs to throw it with their hand. The tops are used in specially arranged battles where the participants try to strike each other's tops. Playing with a spinning top during a workshop improves the player's motor coordination and precision. In addition, they require dexterity and the ability to operate the string, which promotes the development of fine motor skills and concentration.

Another interesting group of objects are balls made of rattan obtained from a palm tree species growing in Asian woodlands. The toy's production process involves cutting the stems near the root, removing their spikes, cutting them into five-metre-long sections, and drying. The stems are then separated into fibres from which the balls are woven. Many ball game variations have developed in Indonesia. Each has its own rules and playing methods. Played on the island of Sulawesi, *tepa pongga* requires the players to aim the ball at a bamboo goal while squatting. The aim of the Sumatran game of *sepak raga* is to move the ball from one player to another around



Ball, ca. 2017, rattan, dia. 13.5 cm, EDU 40,  
photo: Łukasz Brodowicz (MAiP collections)

a circle, without dropping it to the ground. In Java, players try to shoot the ball into a basket mounted on a two-metre-high pole. Ball games engage the players in a dynamic physical activity that requires speed, agility, accuracy, and motor coordination. Participation in these games promotes muscle strength, physical fitness, and the development of tactical and strategic skills.

*Bekel* is an Indonesian game of dexterity reminiscent of knucklebones, known in Poland as *kamienice* or *ciupy*. The Indonesian version, however, is played using both hands. It involves tossing a rubber ball with the left hand and then catching several small metal objects with the other hand after the ball bounces off the ground. This game improves motor coordination, agility, and grasping skills.

*Benthik* or *patok lele* is a game consisting of two elements. It is played with two sticks, one shorter and one longer, made of local wood. The shorter one is either propped between two bricks or placed over a hole. The players then try to pick it up from underneath or hit one of its ends with the longer stick. Once the shorter stick has



*Bekel* game, ca. 2016, metal, natural rubber, 2.2 × 1 × 0.8, dia. 4.2 cm, author's private collection, photo: Łukasz Brodowicz (MAiP collections)

been successfully sent into the air, the player takes a swing and tries to strike it again to send it as far as possible. This game develops strength, precision, and motor coordination.

Implements for playing target games are another subgroup of objects in the collection. These are simple toys made from commonly accessible materials, such as bamboo and wood. The most popular example is the *ketapal* sling. The *bedil jepret* 'rifle' is a more complex object. It consists of a bamboo cylinder with three notches and a long flexible strip of bamboo which is inserted into the notches and serves as the trigger. Seeds or gravel are inserted into the makeshift barrel. Releasing the front end of the bamboo strip fires the projectile. Another toy gun variation, the *bedil karet*, is built of a bamboo plank and has a simple trigger mechanism. Also made out of bamboo, the *pletokan* or *bedil-bedilan* resembles a simple water gun with one difference: instead of water, children put bamboo seeds into the barrel. These games shape motor skills such as agility, speed, and precision.

*Babalonan samping* is a game played with the use of a sarong, a rectangular piece of fabric whose shorter



*Benthik* game, ca. 2016, bamboo, 47.5 × 3 × 1.1 cm; 18.5 × 2.6 × 0.6 cm, EDU 27, photo: Łukasz Brodowicz (MAiP collections)

sides are sewn together to create a tube. The objective is to throw the fabric up at the right angle so that it fills with air and starts whirling.

The collection can also boast bamboo and coconut sandals, known as *spatu batok*, *anul*, and *jangkungan*. The unusual footwear is made of two halves of a coconut or pieces of bamboo. A string is threaded through a hole drilled in the middle of the sandal. The players step onto the sandals barefoot, grabbing the ends of the string and race, which requires agility and motor coordination. The *rorodan* is a wooden vehicle propelled by the muscles of children, who push it while the driver is sitting inside. The game develops strength, endurance, and competitive spirit.

Another interesting game, *conglak*, is the Indonesian variant of mancala, one of the world's oldest board games. The boards are made of wood and have two rows of holes with two larger holes at each end of the board. The holes are filled with cowrie (*kauri*) shells. The objective is to strategically move the shells from one hole to another, according



*Bedil jepret* rifle, ca. 2016, bamboo, 49 × 17 × 3.5 cm, EDU 34,  
photo: Łukasz Brodowicz (MAiP collections)

to a set of rules.<sup>45</sup> The game requires planning skills, tactical thinking, and the ability to anticipate the opponent's move. Congklak is not just a form of entertainment but a way of developing logical thinking and decision-making skills.

## Summary

One of the objectives of the Asia and Pacific Museum's educational activities is to develop innovative programmes and classes that expose the participants to the world of Asian cultures and traditions in an interesting and interactive way.

The launch of traditional games and play workshops in 2013 confirmed what we had assumed: a simple yet attractive class design can provide the participants with a wealth of valuable experience. The activities develop social skills, including communication, cooperation, problem-solving, and

45 For an explanation of the principles of congklak, see the exhibition's catalogue (Madej, 2018: 119).



*Sarong*, ca. 2016, cotton fabric, 86 × 111 cm, EDU 10,  
photo: Łukasz Brodowicz (MAiP collections)



*Sepatu batok* sandals, ca. 2017, coconut, hemp string, 6,5 × 12 × 150 cm,  
EDU 15, photo: Łukasz Brodowicz (MAiP collections)



*Congklak* game, ca. 2013, wood, 24.5 × 5 × 74 cm, EDU 43,  
photo: Łukasz Brodowicz (MAiP collections)

decision-making. Playing together also provides an opportunity to build interpersonal relationships, integrate group members, and strengthen bonds between them. Activities revolving around the traditions of the Asian continent enable the participants to explore other cultures and develop respect for the cultural heritage of other nations.

Traditional Indonesian games and play activities perform a crucial role in this respect. Their potential is enormous. Not only do they convey the history and culture of the country, but they are also a tool that we can use in the process of learning and discovering Asia.

We believe that introducing Asian games and play into the learning process from the earliest age can contribute to building intercultural bridges and, consequently, forming attitudes based on sensitivity and respect for others. This can also help prepare the youngest ones for the dynamically changing environment and equip them with useful skills and knowledge about the world around them. After all, as Roger Caillois eloquently put it, 'Empires and institutions may disappear, but games survive' (1997: 387).

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**MICHAŁ  
SÉK**

# POWER-SHARING IN INDONESIA: HOW TO MAINTAIN PEACE IN A MULTIETHNIC COUNTRY?<sup>46</sup>

The Dutch colonial empire spanned over an area extending over 1/8 of the Earth's circumference (its latitudinal extent was about 5,100 km, the longitudinal extent about 1,800 km) (Frederick et al., 2011; Google Inc., 2014). This roughly corresponds to the distance between Kazakhstan and Iceland (cf. Fig. 3), Kyrgyzstan and Japan, or Bermuda and California (Talmage & Maneice, 2018). Currently, the archipelago is inhabited by over 270 million people,<sup>47</sup> representing ca. 350 ethnolinguistic

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46 Cf. *Podział piramidy władzy. Reforma decentralizacji kraju i jej efekty* [in:] *Archipelag nierówności. Rozwój regionalny w Indonezji*, Cywiński Paweł (ed.) Instytut Kultur Śródziemnomorskich i Orientalnych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa 2021.

47 According to Statistics Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik; BPS), in 2010, the country had a population of 237,641,000 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2011). According to the 2020 CIA WORLD FACTBOOK, Indonesia's population was 267,026,366 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2020). The population size reported by the BPS is based on the 2010 census; the next census was scheduled for 2020. Due to the high costs and complicated logistics, censuses are conducted relatively infrequently. At the same time, census data are among the most reliable. For the purposes of this monograph, I assumed that the population of Indonesia was around 260 million.

groups, and speaking close to 700 different languages,<sup>48</sup> 180 of which are based in Papua. Thirteen of the languages are estimated to have more than a million users. The Javanese constitute 45 per cent of the population, the Sundanese 14 per cent, the Madurese 7.5 per cent, the Coastal Malay people 7 per cent, and the remaining ethnicities 26 per cent. Ethnic identities are not always clear-cut, well-established, and enduring. Some ethnic groups have a sense of cultural distinctiveness (Frederick et al., 2011). Although the majority of Indonesians are Muslim (ca. 87 per cent), other religions amount to ca. 35 million individuals.<sup>49</sup>

Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world (after China, India, and the United States) and the country with the largest Muslim population (ca. 225 million). It is also the most populated country in Southeast Asia, with Indonesians constituting ca. 40 per cent of all inhabitants of the region (Bonczol, 2012; Kaplan, 2012; Central Intelligence Agency, 2020).

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48 The national and official language of Indonesia is Indonesian, the lingua franca of the archipelago. It is the native tongue of ca. 17–30 million Indonesians and the second language of the remainder of the population, who use it to communicate with members of other ethnolinguistic groups and state institutions. Apart from Indonesian, which has many regional varieties, more than 700 other languages and dialects are used in the country. The most widely spoken indigenous languages are Javanese (75 million speakers), Sundanese (27 million speakers), Madurese (nearly 14 million speakers), and Malay (10 million speakers). Other languages with more than 1 million speakers are (in descending order): Minangkabau, Balinese, Buginese, Aceh, Batawi, Banjar, Sasak, Toba Batak, various dialects of Chinese, Makassar, Lampung, Dairi Batak, and Rejang (Frederick et al., 2011).

49 Most Indonesians (87 per cent) identify as Muslim and observe Islamic practices to varying degrees; another 5 per cent identify as Protestant, 3 per cent as Roman Catholic, 2 per cent as Hindu, 1 per cent as Buddhist, and 1 per cent as followers of other religions. Animism is practised in some remote areas. The five religions listed above are recognised by the state and guaranteed freedom of religion by the constitution (Frederick et al., 2011).

## No independence without unity

The Indonesian nation did not exist back in the 19th century.<sup>50</sup> The archipelago spanning between Australia and continental Asia was populated by a multicoloured mosaic of over 200 ethnic groups that formed independent indigenous kingdoms of varying size and influence. The region was divided between Dutch, British, and Portuguese colonies. The concept of Indonesian nationality was non-existent. Indonesia as we know it today emerged as a result of Dutch colonisation, which scarred the history of the archipelago. It also laid the foundations for the modern Indonesian state.

Based on pitting communities against each other,<sup>51</sup> preying on the local population, and predatory economic exploitation, Dutch colonisation created a shared enemy for the different ethnic groups. The unification against the oppressive powers-that-be found its outlet in the consolidation of nationalist movements,<sup>52</sup> which subsequently played a key role in

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50 If one considers the multitude of ethnicities and cultures, the national identity of Indonesians does not correspond with the Western understanding of the concept, yet '[m]ost Indonesians have a strong sense of citizenship in the larger Indonesian state [...]. Three generations of schoolchildren have worn similar uniforms, sung common songs, learned a common language, and recited similar facts of history, civics, and the Pancasila ideology. The red and white Indonesian flag is a common sight throughout the archipelago. Uniformed state employees and ordinary citizens alike have all grown accustomed to carrying their *kartu tanda penduduk*, or the national identification card' (Frederick et al., 2011).

51 The Dutch maintained control of the archipelago by employing the politics of divide and rule: exploiting conflicts between elites and regions, gaining allies among certain ethnic groups and social classes to make others dependent. It was common practice to subjugate local aristocratic elites, who in turn controlled the subordinate populations. This situation perpetuated feudal relations and was a cost-effective system of indirect governance for the colonisers, especially in peripheral areas where state institutions were relatively weak (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007e).

52 English-language literature uses the terms 'nationalist movements' and 'nationalism'. The movements aimed to unite and build the Indonesian nation to achieve independence and establish a sovereign state. In Polish, the term 'nationalism' implies an attitude of superiority of one nation over others (*Encyclopedia PWN*, 2014; *Słownik języka polskiego*, 2014), which is why the Polish version of the text uses 'ruchy narodowościowe' (nationalist movements), 'narodowościowcy' (advocates of independence).

gaining independence. Furthermore, there was a widespread belief among all the nationalist movements<sup>53</sup> that eliminating the colonial yoke would solve other problems (Cribb and Brown, 1995; Laskowska, 2012).

Indonesia declared independence in 1945, yet four years passed before it was recognised as a sovereign state by the international community. In the meantime, the Netherlands attempted to maintain control over the former colony by means of the politics of divide and rule, and backed out only as a result of international pressure, including the US threat to halt the Marshall Plan.<sup>54</sup> Indonesian leaders saw the unification of the country as key to achieving independence and stronger autonomy. The Dutch East Indies were a federation of 16 states. The division enabled the Netherlands to implement the strategy of divide and rule towards the colonies. That

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53 The most prominent of them were communist (Partai Komunis Indonesia), Muslim (traditionalist Sarekat Islam and reformist Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama), geared towards popular education (e.g. Budi Utomo), representing certain ethnic groups (e.g. Jong Java, Jong Ambon) or regions (e.g. Kau Betawi, Timorsch Verbond, Pasundan). Importantly, all these movements were primarily social, not political in nature (Laskowska, 2012).

54 In November 1946 the Dutch signed a peace treaty, called Linggajati Agreement, with the Indonesian government. In it, the Dutch recognised the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia over Java, Madura, and Sumatra. The rest of the archipelago was to remain under Dutch control. On 1 January 1949 a Federation of Indonesia was to be established, consisting of the Republic of Indonesia and two other independent states, Borneo and the so-called Great East (Sulawesi, the archipelagos of the Lesser Sunda Islands and the Moluccas, and New Guinea). The Dutch idea of dividing the archipelago into three states divided Indonesian society and elites. Prime Minister Sjahrir, who signed the peace deal, lost the trust of some Indonesians, while some peripheral regions supported the Dutch proposal. In Sulawesi and the southern part of Borneo, the old aristocratic elites who had collaborated with the colonial regime feared political control and repression from the unified state, as did the Christianised population of the island of Ambon in the Molucca Archipelago, as local recruits had been the core of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army troops sent to pacify resistance movements throughout the archipelago. In Aceh, the ruling *uleebalang* nobility was replaced by the *ulamas*, Islamic clerics who began to introduce sharia. Led by Kartosuwirjo, the Darul Islam rebellion fought against a secular state, striving for the establishment of an Islamic State of Indonesia. The movement was joined by regional rebellions of a religious nature (Aceh and armed bands in South and Central Sulawesi). After the rebellions were quelled, Darul Islam continued to fight in East Java until Kartosuwirjo was killed by the army in 1962 (Bonczol, 2012).

is why Indonesian leaders considered the federation model of government as internally weak. A unitary system was supposed to give Indonesia a stronger bargaining power vis-à-vis the former coloniser, yet the fact that the Javanese-dominated national parliament in Jakarta was the main forum where the ethnic, cultural, and religious interests of the different Indonesian groups clashed automatically caused strong frictions. On 17 August 1950, the fifth anniversary of the declaration of Indonesian independence, Sukarno announced the change from a federal to a unitary system of government. The shift was met with opposition from some regions: West Java, West Kalimantan (Kalimantan Barat), Ambon (South Maluku), and South Sulawesi (Sulawesi Selatan). The resistance was crushed in all these cases (Cribb and Brown, 1995). The newly independent country was internally divided, with conflicts running along ethnic, religious, and regional divides. The republic's government did not have full control of the situation: the radical constitutional transition proved explosive. Many social groups felt that it was time to even the score. Social rebellions swept through Java and Sumatra, with people taking justice into their own hands to punish those they considered complicit in the oppression experienced under the Dutch colonial rule and Japanese occupation (Cribb and Brown, 1995).

The government's priority was to regain control of the archipelago and its population. The only institution that was efficient, determined, and disciplined enough to bring order to the chaos was the army, which had significantly contributed to winning independence. In the process of striving for full sovereignty, both the military and the Indonesian ruling classes concluded that unity was a prerequisite for maintaining the country's self-rule.

## **The fall of Suharto and the division of the power structure**

Since the declaration of independence following World War II until the end of the 1990s, Indonesia was an authoritarian

state, first ruled by Sukarno, then by General Suharto. One of the factors that strengthened the government's authoritarianism was the elite's conviction that the country's independence depended on its unity and that the military was the only guarantor of that unity. In particular, during the rule of President Suharto, himself a former military general, the country was governed by military officials, who took over control of a large part of the state apparatus (as retiring army officers commonly took positions in state administration).<sup>55</sup> As long as Suharto was able to keep all the different forces within the country in check and technocrats gained the upper hand in periods of crisis, Indonesia continued to be an example of economic success based on the neoliberal doctrine. Researchers described the New Order as an authoritarian interventionist developmental state. Before the outbreak of the Asian financial crisis, the majority of them had not noticed how weak the foundations of Indonesian economic success were. Instead, they perceived Orde Baru as a network of well-integrated institutions operating in disconnection with society, yet able to stimulate gradual economic growth in relatively free market conditions (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007h). This perspective implied that the main focus should be on the centre: Jakarta. The capital city was the seat of power, the place where key decisions were made and which was at the forefront of modernisation. In truth, however, earlier descriptions of Indonesia's political structure better reflected reality. The patron-client relationships and crony capitalism reinforced each other to such a degree that it was impossible to function outside the corrupt structure controlled by the centre (Sek, 2021a). The various groups (old nobility, Christians, socialists, progressive Muslims, Chinese minority entrepreneurs) benefiting from patron-client relations supported centralised power.

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In 1970 20 out of 26 provincial governors were members of the military; in 1997 14 out of 27 governors had army connections (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007b).

The economic crisis of the late 1990s wiped out some of the growth achieved under Orde Baru, while the networks of paternalistic ties, instead of gains, started to produce growing losses. As a result, Suharto's regime lost the political backing it hitherto enjoyed (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007a). Living standards began to decline for the first time since General Suharto took power. The government lost its legitimacy and the president was forced to resign.

The integrity and stability of the country were enforced through authoritarian rule. The regime's fall triggered destabilising and centrifugal tendencies. Suppressed for decades, the conflicts between the archipelago's different communities flared up anew. For many minorities, democratisation became a chance to gain freedom from the oppressor, which was how they saw the Javanese-dominated central government. The change unfolded so abruptly and caused so much tension and separatist movements that it posed a danger to the unity of the country (Emmerson, 2000). The scale and challenging nature of the political transformation that Indonesia was forced to undergo can only be likened to the decolonisation and democratisation of India. The objective was to end the economic crisis, reduce growth inequalities that stirred up social conflicts, introduce a democratic system of government (including the devolution of some power to the regions), and prevent the breakup of the country.

In his monumental book, Theodore Friend quotes a question he was once asked by a retired civil servant: 'How can such a gentle and lovable people as we be so murderous to each other?'. Friend repeated the question later to a former cabinet member, who turned it around, asking: 'How can such violent peoples produce such refined cultures?' (Friend, 2003). The solution to the challenge of maintaining Indonesia's integrity and reducing tensions between the different ethnicities, while overhauling the country's political system, was to be decentralisation. According to the then-prevailing neoliberal paradigm, the devolution

Figure 1. Indonesia's economic growth

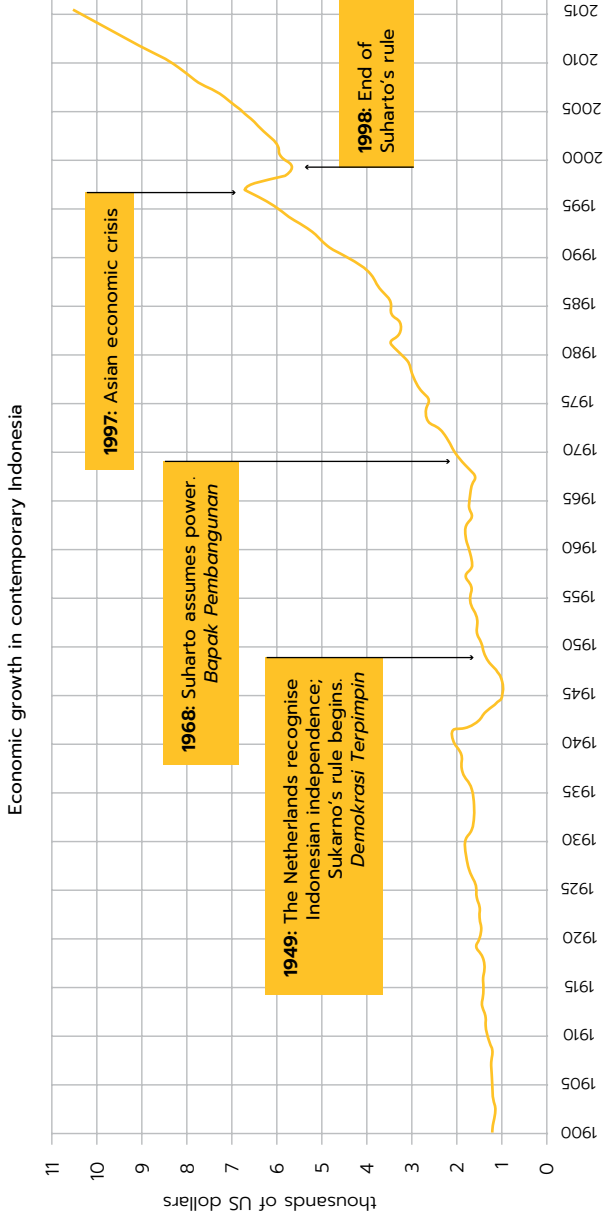
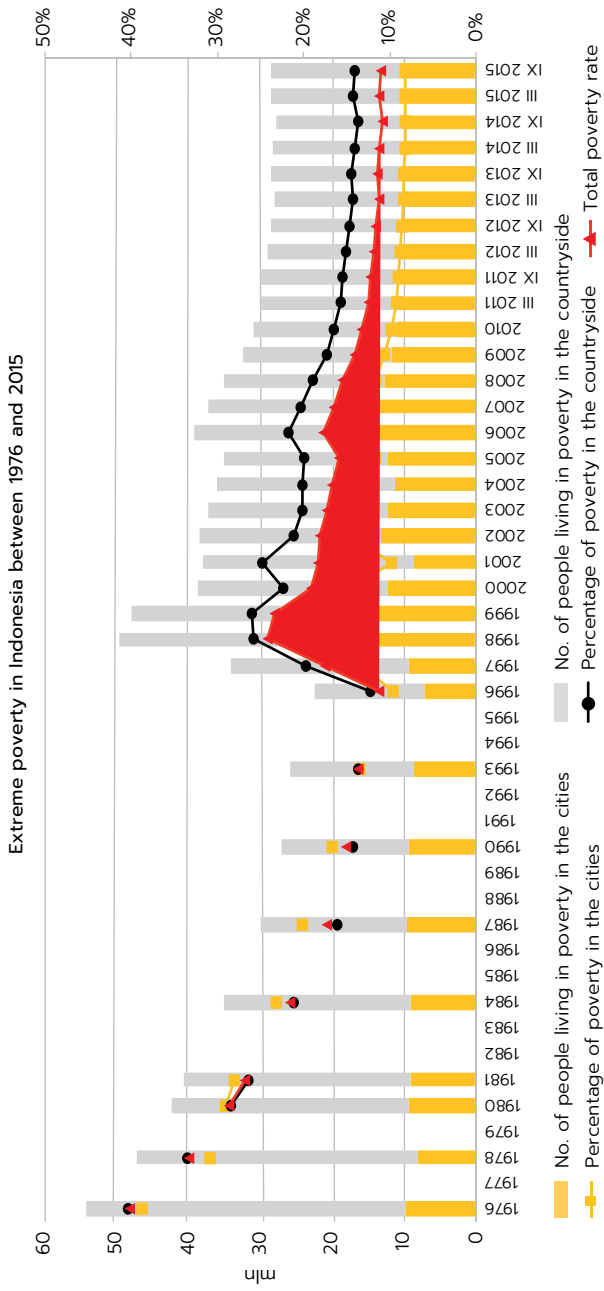


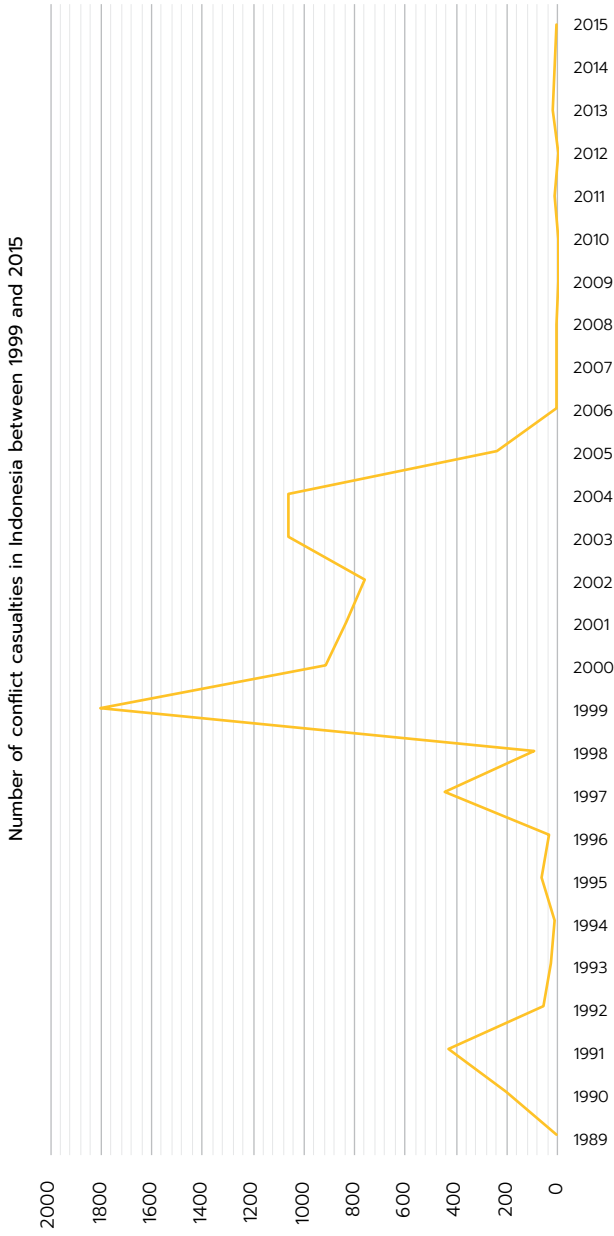
Figure 2. Poverty reduction between 1976 and 2015 (own compilation based on BPS data)



(own compilation based on BPS data)

\*The year 1996 is shown twice: the data on the left was gathered using an old methodology, while the data on the right was gathered using a new methodology. Since 2011 the data has been released twice a year, in March and September. The year 2006 saw a significant rise in poverty following the tsunami that hit the coast of Indonesia in December 2005. The downward trend slowed down after 2013 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2017).

Figure 3. Victims of conflicts in Indonesia (NVMS 2017)



(NVMS, 2017).

of power was also supposed to help level out the developmental disparities across the regions.

The country needed a political transformation that could calm the tensions and bring hope for economic recovery. When Suharto left office, neoliberalism met *Reformasi*, a period of political change orchestrated by experts representing Western-dominated international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007e). The period of Reformasi (1998–2004) started with the assumption of power by Jusuf Bacharuddin Habibie in 1998, Suharto's former vice president and deputy (Horowitz, 2013). During the 17 months of his presidency, Habibie implemented reforms of fundamental importance for the system of government, the country, and the society, including the introduction of freedom of the press, new procedures that made it easier to register a political party, and free elections. A referendum was also held, as a result of which East Timor separated from Indonesia. Free markets were to serve as a catalyst for economic growth, while the logic of unbridled competition was to prompt individuals, businesses, and public administration agencies to take rational and optimal decisions contributing to increased prosperity and a better quality of life across the country. The approach was shaped by the recommendations issued by international institutions (IMF, World Bank), which advised and decided on the allocation of financial aid to the crisis-hit Indonesia. Their recommendations mainly focused on increasing competition, liberalisation, privatisation of state-owned enterprises, and deregulation. The decentralisation of power was seen as a tool for freeing up the markets: it was supposed to strengthen the economy, democracy, and civil society (Horowitz, 2013). More freedom, more competition, and more independence were seen as a 'natural' path to optimal allocation of the resources, better economic policy, improved living standards, and reduced tension between different social groups. The process of democratisation was seen as inseparable from the free market. The much-needed transformation was described as

a shift from authoritarian rule to a more democratic system with a greater role played by the civic society.

## **Indonesian-style decentralisation: more power to the *kabupatens* and the marginalisation of the provinces**

Decentralisation is the division of powers, political responsibility, and functions, as well as participation in the economic growth across different levels of government (central, regional, and local). The proportions in which the powers are allocated are considered in the relevant literature on Indonesia as three aspects (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007e):

- Delegation of tasks and obligations from the central government to the regions, while full responsibility still rests with the central government (this model was introduced by the law of 1974);
- Deconcentration, or the transfer of decision-making powers and policy implementation to different entities within centralised administration (introduced by the law of 1957);
- Devolution, or the transfer of actual powers, obligations, and responsibilities to lower levels of government (introduced by the reforms of 2001).

Due to the country's immense size and its island location, ruling and exercising control over Indonesia was already a challenge for the Dutch colonisers, who tested different methods of governing the archipelago. This meant that they alternately decentralised (transferred powers to the local level) and centralised the administration. After the country declared independence, the central government would also expand the prerogatives of local authorities, only to limit them several years later (Şek, 2021a). During the New Order introduced by General Suharto, the central government tightened its control over the regions, while

deconcentrating some of its functions to different ministries, which became more influential and autonomous (e.g. the ministries of agriculture, public works, or religion). They even had regional representation and could implement their policies there (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007b)

Two laws were crucial in this respect. They were drafted, without any consultation with the regions, by a small group of bureaucrats, known as the Team of Seven.<sup>56</sup> Its key members were US-educated academics and technocrats with strong ties to Western institutions, still strongly committed to the idea of decentralisation. In 1999, a month before the general elections to be held in June, the parliament, whose composition had not changed since Orde Baru,<sup>57</sup> adopted Laws No. 22 and 25, which paved the way for a reorganisation of the administrative and fiscal system that was the backbone of the unitary minimal state in which the government served as ‘the night watchman’, in line with the neoliberal doctrine. ‘The proposed two-year period of transition and implementation was even shortened by six months, which meant that the biggest administrative reorganisation in the history of the Indonesian state had to be completed by 1 January 2001. [...] In a sense, the laws of 1999 revived the process of decentralisation that was stopped in the late 1950s, but went even further’ (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007g). The power of the provinces was dismantled as the new autonomy was located at the local level of *kabupatens* and *kota*<sup>58</sup>.

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56 The same team had earlier drafted the new electoral laws (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007g).

57 Having lost political backing in Java, the government, still dominated by the GOLKAR party, sought to maintain support in the outer islands and stay in power by granting more autonomy to the regions (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007g).

58 Written by the Home Ministry, Law No. 22 was intended to decentralise power in order to bring government to the people and to offer more transparency. Similar to Law No. 1 of 1977, regional executives (provincial governors, *bupati*, and *walikota*) were no longer appointed by the central government in Jakarta but by elected regional assemblies, which strengthened the position of politicians with power bases in the regions (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007g).

Table 1. The division of powers between the central government and the districts

Powers of the central government	Powers of the regions
Defence and national security, foreign policy, fiscal control, monetary and macroeconomic policy, natural resources, justice system, religion	Public works, education and culture, healthcare, agriculture, transportation, industry, trade, investments, environmental protection, labour, land and real property management

Designed by the Ministry of Finance, Law No. 25 was centralist in character: the central government controlled 80 per cent of all the sources of revenue of the regions (including 75 per cent of income tax, VAT, tariffs, and foreign aid) as well as a significant proportion of state-owned enterprises. 25 per cent of that revenue is redistributed to the regions and lower levels of administration in the form of a general grant,<sup>59</sup> 90 per cent of which was channelled to the kabupatens (and kota) and only 10 per cent to the provinces.<sup>60</sup> The criteria of fund redistribution among the kabupatens were related to the population size, poverty rate, cost of goods and services, and geographic conditions. The intention was to deprive the provinces of own revenue, thus reducing separatist incentives (kabupatens and kota are too small to separate from the rest of the country). On the other hand, the objective of the DAU

59 *Dana Alokasi Umum* (DAU).

60 In 2001 in total [...] USD 6.1 billion flowed from Jakarta to the regions. [...] The contentious provinces of Papua and Aceh received special autonomy (respectively Laws No. 18 and 21/2001), granting Aceh 80 per cent of the oil and gas revenues, and Papua 80 per cent of its mining revenues and 70 per cent of the revenues from oil and gas. It is ironic that in the case of both Aceh and Papua, autonomy [and the resultant fruits] was granted to the province instead of the districts. One might expect this could favour separatist sentiment in the rebellious provinces. However, both provincial administrations are still dominated by old GOLKAR elites and the army, who control the flows of money (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007g).

system of fiscal transfers was to reduce development disparities as smaller, poorer, and less populous kabupatens received relatively larger transfers.

Local parliaments had the power to elect and dismiss local executives (*bupati* and *walikota*), who gained independence from the centre, yet became more dependent on the local parliamentarians, whom they often corrupted to be elected and not to be dismissed.<sup>61</sup> In an attempt to change the situation, the government of Megawati Sukarnoputri introduced new regulations in 2004. Laws No. 33/2004 on Fiscal Balance and No. 32/2004 on Regional Government redefined the power balance between the central and the regional administration. While Law No. 33 did not essentially change the power relationship between the government and the provinces (the latter remained dependent on the former), Law No. 32 substantially reduced the powers previously allocated to the local parliaments, walikotas, and bupaties. District parliaments<sup>62</sup> lost the power to appoint and dismiss walikotas and bupaties (who are now chosen in general elections modelled on and held in the same year as presidential elections). According to the new law, they can be unilaterally suspended by the central government based on corruption charges or if they 'threaten [national] security'. Thus, regional assemblies lost their most crucial prerogative: to elect and dismiss the executive. While bupaties and walikotas became more dependent on the central government, their position against the regional parliaments grew more powerful thanks to their popular mandate (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007e).

The Indonesian legislators were faced with a paradoxical challenge: how to introduce democracy at all levels of government, liberalise the economy and increase competition in line with the IMF demands, while reducing regional disparities

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61 The system of corrupt connections and dependencies was quickly termed *politik uang*, which is Indonesian for money politics. (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007g)

62 *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah* (DPRD).

and ethnic tensions that could lead to secessions (and, consequently, the breakup of the country). They succeeded, at least partly, thanks to the overhaul of the electoral system and decentralisation. The most significant changes introduced to the electoral law included:<sup>63</sup>

- Introduction of direct, general elections for president and vice president, governors and vice governors (*gubernur* and *wakil gubernur*), bupati and their deputies (*wakil bupati*), mayors (*walikota*) and their deputies (*wakil walikota*). Candidates must secure a party nomination before competing in an election; as a result of the change in regulations, candidates run in pairs on a joint ticket.
- To take part in an election, a political party must:
  - Have subnational branches in all Indonesian provinces, at least 75 per cent of kabupatens and kota, and at least 50 per cent of districts (*kecamatan*), the third-level of administrative division;<sup>64</sup>
  - Every subnational party branch should have at least a thousand members; alternatively, the membership should amount to at least 1 per mille of the region's total population;
  - Have at least 30 per cent of women on its board;
  - Hold permanent offices at the central and subnational levels until the last round of the election.

To win presidential elections in the first round, the presidential and vice presidential ticket must receive more than 50 per cent of the popular vote as well as at least 20 per cent of the vote in more than half of the provinces.

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63 The presidential election is regulated in Article 6A, Chapter 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (International Labour Organisation, 2002). The political party requirements are set out in the new law on general elections (International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), 2012).

64 There are a few exceptions to these requirements (for example, the formation of regional parties in the province of Aceh is permitted), but they are not relevant to this text.

Presidential candidates can be nominated by political parties which have at least 20 per cent of parliamentary seats or won at least 25 per cent in the previous elections. No additional requirements applied for subnational elections.

These requirements mean in practice that only national and multiethnic parties can nominate candidates for executive positions. The impossibility of forming regional parties and the specific design of the electoral law are so-called centripetal measures. The system is structured in a way to incentivise the different segments of society (ethnic groups, religious groups, etc.) to cooperate (e.g. within a single political party) to win power. The objective is to reduce friction between different segments of society. In the case of Indonesia, the system was also supposed to reduce the risk of the country falling apart. Therefore, candidates run in pairs (in ethnically diverse regions, this usually means that they belong to different ethnic groups and compete for the support of different segments of the electorate). Furthermore, as a result of decentralisation, kabupatens compete for central funds, which reduces the risk of provinces seceding from the country (Şek, 2018).

The 1999–2005 decentralisation reforms were aimed at making the relationship between the central government and the provinces more transparent, to increase the regions' autonomy, and consequently make the system more democratic. '[T]he process of decentralization in Indonesia was equated with a process of democratization and the rise of civil society. These are, however, three very different processes. A shift from centralized to a decentralized government is not synonymous with a shift from authoritarian to democratic rule, nor does it automatically imply a shift from a strong state towards a strong civil society. The weakening of the central state does not automatically result in more local democracy. On the contrary, decentralization can under certain conditions be accompanied by new forms of authoritarian rule' (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007d:1).

## ***Pemekaran*: thousands of new administrative subdivisions in the pyramid of power**

The first local executive head elections were held in 2005. They passed without disruption and with a high turnout, becoming a permanent feature of Indonesian politics. The recent change of the power balance between the centre and the subnational-level administration de facto constituted a reintroduction of the divide and rule strategy by the centre. The government kept its fiscal powers (both in terms of fiscal supervision and fiscal transfers between the government and the provinces). Due to the impossibility of establishing regional parties, local and regional politicians grew dependent on the party leaders in Jakarta, at the central level. The party structures became centralised (and usually dominated by the Javanese), which caused friction between party leadership and the regions, prompting politicians to try and create cross-party alliances between individuals of the same ethnic background or place of origin (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007g). On the other hand, the increased autonomy of regional executive heads led to the fragmentation of the local political scene. Having gained more independence, bupati and walikotas started to play a more significant role in the patron-client system. Opinions on the effects of the decentralisation reform vary.

NGOs like SMERU,<sup>65</sup> and donor organizations like Support for Decentralization Measures (SfDM), Ford Foundation, Asia Foundation and financial giants like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank actively support decentralization and proclaim a firm ideological belief in its success. In the SMERU report, decentralization is basically seen as a big administrative operation in which possible weaknesses can be improved. The World Bank sees it as a huge financial

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65 An Indonesian NGO specialising in social and economic research, in particular regarding the problem of poverty and the effects of government public policies. It is part-financed by the Australian Development Aid Programme (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007f; The SMERU Research Institute, 2014).

operation [...]. And in a publication sponsored by the Asian Development Bank, it is said that 'The great achievement of decentralization in Indonesia is that it took place, and on schedule'. [...] Decentralization is supported by a coalition of financial institutions and organizations like the Asia Foundation and the Ford Foundation, which support it because it is supposed to strengthen democracy and civil society (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007f: 15–16).

The opponents of decentralisation have pointed out that the revenue received by the regions is sufficient to maintain their own administration but insufficient to finance education, healthcare, or poverty reduction (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007f).

Although the reforms reduced the reliance of the provinces on the centre, they also created more disparities between the regions,<sup>66</sup> especially that kabupaten, kota, and kecamatan administrations struggled with bureaucratic incompetence. Furthermore, local officials grew so used to waiting on orders from the centre, they lost their ability to take an active stand. Regional parliaments became largely dependent on party bosses, who prioritised party interests. 'Because most regions are subsidized by the centre, regional governments tend to become spending machines. In general, financial management and accountability is weak, while *money politics* seem to prevail' (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007f: 17). A large proportion of the funds transferred from the centre to the regions disappeared along the way.

In order to acquire additional funds, regional administrations tend to burden their regions with extra taxes, while they pay little or no attention to environmental issues. Because of a lack of coordinating power at a supra-regional

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66 The richest region has 50 times more income than the poorest one (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007f). As a result, rich areas have the resources and capabilities to create transnational economic networks, leaving poorer areas gradually more isolated and struggling economically.

level, decentralization encourages interregional competition and conflict' (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007f: 17).

The main issues associated with decentralisation are the anaemia of regional parliaments and administrative structures, lack of planning, insufficient use of existing potential and resources, regional rivalry (instead of cooperation), and environmental protection. Equally problematic is the adoption of patrimonialism at the subnational level. District heads, namely walikotas and bupati, play a significant role in the new system. They control the majority of funds received from the centre as well as the channels of their distribution. If they manage to cooperate with the chair of the local assembly and key local businesses, and have the favour of the head of the local military structures, they can maintain their patrimonial links and govern the district without much opposition. 'Various people call the new autonomous regions *little kingdoms*, but do we know where the kings come from? Except for a few scholars [...], this question is by and large ignored in recent publications on decentralization' (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007f: 18).

Delegating powers and responsibilities to the districts, while passing over the provinces, was a deliberate move on the part of the government. The districts were considered too small to become independent of Jakarta and thus break the country apart. At the same time, the government transfers to local authorities have been insufficient, leading to economic backwardness, according to many researchers. Income uncertainty, combined with the local authorities' lack of mandate to introduce new taxes, prompted them to seek new financing through informal taxes and levies. This complicated the business environment and created favourable conditions for corruption. Some scholars (Kuncoro, 2006) believe that the scale of corruption was larger in the regions that received smaller government transfers, since business in the areas either moved into the informal sector or relocated to a region where internal costs (e.g. connected with corruption) were lower. This way, political decentralisation, combined with the

government's tight fiscal grip, contributed to the concentration of businesses in some regions (Kuncoro, 2002, 2006; Lengyel, 2011).

Another unforeseen effect of decentralisation was the fragmentation of power at the district level. The politicians took advantage of grassroots movements connected with the development of local identity to demand that the government divide existing administrative divisions into even smaller ones. This led to the creation of new jobs dependent on the politicians and, consequently, a more extensive and denser network of informal connections. As a result, deconcentration not only altered the power balance between the centre and the regional and local authorities, but also changed the borders between the country's existing administrative divisions. In the course of several years, the number of provinces rose from 27 to 38, while the number of districts increased from 283 to 500. Dubbed as *pemekaran*, or blossoming in English, although a more suitable term would perhaps be 'budding' (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2007), this was a bottom-up process which the Home Ministry attempted to halt. The local politicians, however, did not negotiate with the government but focused on convincing the members of the national parliament (often through bribes or a promise to participate in the proceeds from new offices created in the regions) to pass the relevant laws (Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), 2013).

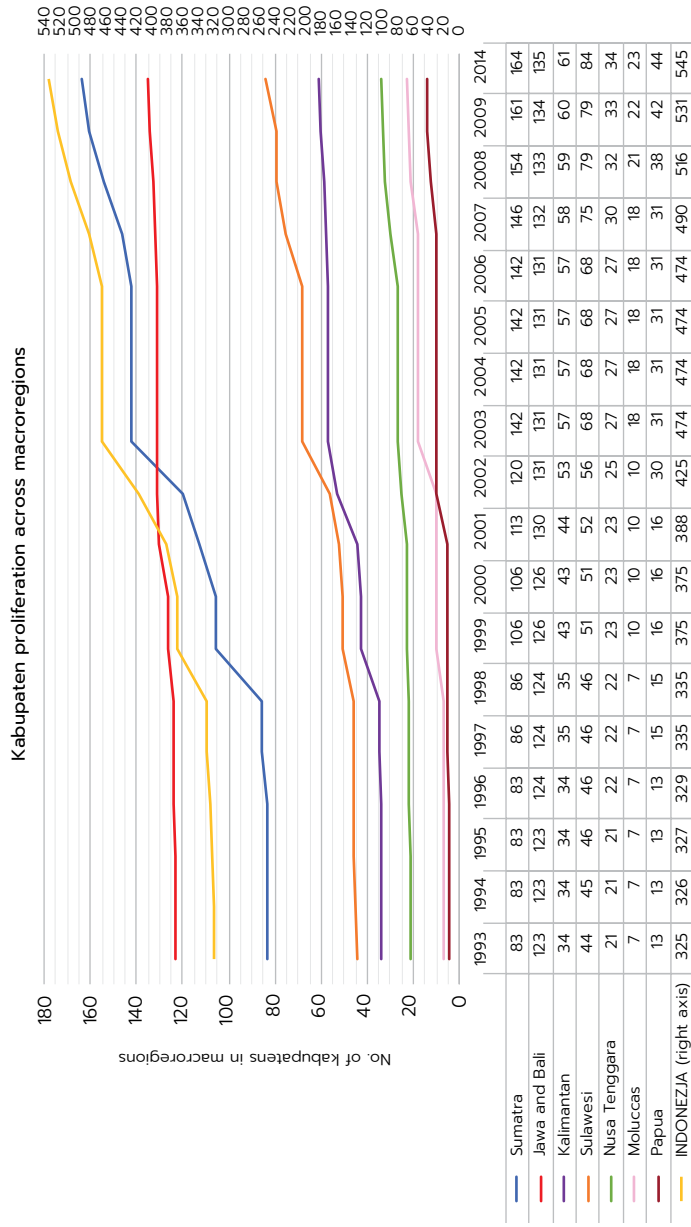
*Pemekaran* also enjoyed the backing of the police and the military, since new command structures had to be established in the new administrative divisions. The state's loosening grip on the regions and the relative ease with which the local elites managed to section off and gain control over new areas led to more intense competition between local politicians. While they had no scruples about exploiting ethnic resentments, their ultimate objective was not secession but securing a privileged position in the rivalry for central government funds (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007e). Between 1993 and 2014, the number of Indonesian *kabupatens* rose by 69 per cent. The largest increase was recorded in the least populated provinces: Papua (238 per cent), the Moluccas (229 per cent),

and Sumatra (98 per cent). In the same period, the number of kabupatens in Java and Bali grew by 10 per cent.

## **Ambiguous effects of decentralisation**

During Orde Baru, the issues of race, faith, ethnic identity, or social class were political taboos. Every public debate touching upon these topics was strictly controlled by the authorities. In reality, however, once stirred up, animosities have become a permanent feature of Indonesia's political landscape. Kindled by Sukarno, popular nationalism, combined with its potential to mobilise the masses, was transformed into state-regulated ceremonialism during the Orde Baru period. This has deepened ethnic identification and strengthened kinship and ethnic bonds, causing communities to risk their lives to cleanse their territories from groups they considered alien enemies. This kind of sentiment, previously suppressed by the Suharto regime, was gaining momentum as the central government was losing its power, leading to brutal conflicts in the Moluccas, Central Sulawesi, and West and Central Kalimantan in the 1990s (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007e). The conflicts are usually explained by newly emerging cultural, religious, or ethnic identities, because these factors are the easiest to see. What they conceal, however, are raw economic interests. As a result of decentralisation, the 'official' state, defined by Weber as 'a human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (Weber, 2009), succumbs to the 'shadow state', or a system in which political power does not depend on the uncontested ability to use physical force and violence, but on the ability to control the markets and profits generated by the economy. In other words, as a result of decentralisation, the power in the regions was transferred from state institutions (which controlled the use of force) to entities that controlled the informal sector. The border between formal state structures and the grey economy became blurred, with the shadow state penetrating both spheres and exerting more influence than

Figure 4. Kabupaten proliferation across Indonesian macroregions



legal state institutions. The system of ambiguous, usually illegal connections (including the clanishness discussed above) benefited all the involved actors, who also happened to be part of official state structures, namely local businesses, police, and politicians (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007c). For instance, in the Bangka-Belitung province, a local businessman nicknamed King of Tin<sup>67</sup> became the main competitor of a state-owned tin mining enterprise, PT Tambang Timah, thanks to a collusion with the police and district authorities. The bupati took it upon himself to advocate for King of Tin in Jakarta, explaining that the special exemptions made for the local tin operator were justified and the police chief must take part in the 'illegal' tin shipments (Erman, 2007). In another case, a key businessman based in the province of Banten, whose business depends on government contracts, managed to extend his influence over the provincial parliament.<sup>68</sup> Only a person who agreed to the monopolistic terms set by the contractor could be appointed the bupati (Hidayat, 2007).

The muddy web of ambiguous relationships between politicians, state institutions, uniformed services, state employees, local businesses, and *preman*<sup>69</sup> (shadow state) and their economic connections (grey economy) empowered those actors who could use force to effectively realise their economic interests or those who earned impunity thanks to their informal relationships and economic influence, and could use force without fear of accountability. As a result, the general sense of security diminished. Decentralisation and simultaneous deregulation were supposed to reduce the state's role in the economic and social life of the regions. Its side-effect was an erosion of democracy: 'If democracy is a process of

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67 With time, the role of King of Tin was taken over by other entrepreneurs with preman connections. Regardless of who triumphed in the rivalry, the influence of 'King of Tin' was undisputed. The author does not reveal the identity of the King of Tin (Erman, 2007).

68 Like in the case of 'King of Tin', Syarif Hidayat calls the local magnate and former GOLKAR politician by a nickname, *Tuan Besar* (Great Master), to protect his privacy (Hidayat, 2007).

69 Or other gangs appealing to local ethnic identity, e.g. *pendekar* in Banten (Hidayat, 2007).

protected consultation, then the absence of protection spells its death' (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007a). In the case of the Poso district in Sulawesi Tengah, the police and the military profited from a religious conflict by supplying weapons and ammunition to the combatants (Sangaji, 2007). In the province of Lombok, infamous for its thief gangs, the passivity of the police and the military led to the development of community vigilantism that eventually saw every fourth adult man join the anti-crime militia formed to protect the residents<sup>70</sup> (MacDougall, 2007).

On the other hand, decentralisation has had positive effects in some areas, leading to the stabilisation of the political situation in the Christian-dominated North Sulawesi,<sup>71</sup> the Muslim-dominated district of Jepara in Central Java, and the ethnically diverse West Kalimantan. Each of the cases was different in nature. In North Sulawesi, religious institutions and their local leaders played a positive role. Importantly, the province is relatively wealthy with little social stratification and little military influence. Even in Suharto's times, the army had little impact in the region (Henley, Schouten, and Ulaen, 2007; Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007b). Similar success factors can be found in the kabupaten of Jepara, the only difference being the fact that the majority of its residents are Muslim (93 per cent) and the key political and social force is Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), a moderate traditional Muslim party (Schiller, 2007; Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007b). West Kalimantan is neither ethnically uniform<sup>72</sup> nor particularly wealthy. In addition, in the late 1990s, conflicts between the Dayak and the resettlers from Madura claimed tens of victims, culminating in Central

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70 The anti-crime militia was exploited by bupati, who sought their political backing while maintaining links with the thief gangs (MacDougall, 2007).

71 Protestants amount to ca. 70 per cent in the region (Henley, Schouten, and Ulaen, 2007).

72 The two largest ethnic groups, each amounting to ca. 30 per cent of the population, are the Dayak and the Malays, followed by the Javanese and the Chinese (ca. 10 per cent each). Finally, the Madurese (mainly transmigrants) and the Bugis constitute 3–5 per cent each (Tanasaldy, 2007a).

Kalimantan massacres, in which ca. 500 Madurese people were killed, some by decapitation (BBC News, 2004). In West Kalimantan, besides the frictions between the Dayak and the Madurese, as well as the Dayak and the Chinese, a significant factor was the rivalry between the Dayak and the second-largest ethnic group, the Malays. While Malays dominate in the cities and highly urbanised kabupatens, the Dayak are more numerous in rural kabupatens. There are also kabupatens with similar proportions of both ethnic groups. Violence was usually ignited by local elections, with the defeated politicians claiming the election was rigged to mobilise their base (mostly members of their ethnic group) to take over power by force. Mass protests would often evolve into 'festivals of violence' with lives lost, people injured, and property damaged. In 1997 and 1999, around a thousand people were killed in the clashes. Since 2001, however, the annual number of political violence victims has not exceeded 15. Between 2000 and 2015, 109 people died and 3,612 were injured (NVMS 2017). The process of decentralisation and new electoral laws created a new framework for political competition and forced politicians to change their electoral strategies. In the kabupatens with a similar proportion of the Malays and the Dayak, bupati candidates started to choose running mates representing the other major ethnic group, despite the history of violence they shared. In all types of kabupaten, regardless of ethnic composition, there were fewer instances of election undermining and resultant violent clashes. Ethnic rivalry was politicised in the sense that it became an element of the political and democratic process (Tanasaldy, 2007b, 2012; Şek, 2018). The same rules of engagement led to opposite results in the Papuan provinces. Apart from the separatist conflict (which is the only ongoing large-scale confrontation in the region), violent clashes are reported locally across Papua. In election periods, hostilities between antagonistic clans competing for power claim tens of victims. Since 1998, more than 80 people have been killed each year. Between 2000 and 2015, 719 persons died and 5,367 were injured (NVMS 2017). Local political leaders do not recognise the result of elections (the traditional nokken voting method,

which was adopted by the authorities and which is prone to illegal interference, does not make matters easier). Also, voter registration lists are falsified before the election (the number of registered voters in some kabupaten exceeds the number of residents by tens of percentage points). As a result, authorities come under even stronger pressure to section off new kabupatens, and the wave of violence continues to take its toll (Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), 2013; IPAC, 2015, 2016; Søk, 2018).

Decentralisation has triggered the residents of many regions to reexamine their identity: their newly gained regional autonomy<sup>73</sup> has excluded a discussion about citizenship and national identity. Residents of some areas with a strong local culture started to identify with their regions, as was the case in Bali<sup>74</sup> (Faucher, 2007; Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007c). In other provinces, however, local leaders (and subsequently whole communities) started to compete with one another for the favour of the political centre in Jakarta, as was the case in Papua, where local frictions and conflicts make it impossible to create a unified front against the capital (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007c; Timmer, 2007).

## The process of decentralisation: a summary

The Orde Baru regime is described as a pyramid of power based on patron-client relationships, with a very wide foundation. The system was stable as long as the majority of society profited from it (through clan networks and legally ambiguous relationships) and saw their living conditions improve. As a result of decentralisation, the system was broken into thousands

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73 This does not include implementing independent public policies. As mentioned above, the power lies with the entity that controls the finances and in Indonesia this is the central government.

74 Representatives of the Balinese middle class, however, share a sense of national belonging, which essentially comes down to their connection with the Indonesian middle class as a whole (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007c).

of smaller power pyramids consisting of local connections. As long as local politicians can improve the living conditions of the residents and voters (again, using informal connections rather than transparent standards and procedures), they stay in power. Organised groups of the electorate can stage protests to force politicians to take life-improving measures, ranging from building a road to the local hospital to creating more jobs for the ethnic majority (Pisani, 2014). This way, the system can reduce tensions between the different segments of society as ethnic rivalries evolve into rivalries between kabupatens (while the government maintains control over the country). To be successful, kabupaten populations need to cooperate (or at least refrain from engaging in active conflict) beyond ethnic divides. In the long term, however, the system is flawed. The improvement of living standards is primarily limited to fixing potholes. Some pro-growth measures, however, require cooperation and coordination beyond the local level. In Indonesia, this is only possible when the investor is the central government (whose officials, however, lack knowledge about the local conditions in individual regions).

The impact of decentralisation is still open for debate. Certainly, not all the assumptions behind the reforms have proved correct – decentralisation combined with deregulation has not contributed to a more democratic society. In the words of Henk Schulte Nordholt i Gerry van Klinken:

The idea of the nation was damaged, the legitimacy of the state questioned, the nature and future of regional identities contested, and the boundaries between ‘state,’ ‘nation’ and region have become zones of conflict. Yet amid this flux of boundaries renegotiated, Indonesians are also demonstrating an admirable confidence that futures can be made anew, a surprising resilience in the face of uncertainty (and let us not forget) poverty, and (also too often overlooked) a remarkable civility amid the differences (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007c).

Decentralisation (and the resultant pemekaran) has destroyed the old system before a new one has emerged:

the archipelago was, and to some degree, still is in a state of transition. Introduced in the neoliberal spirit, the administrative division changes have complicated the country's political situation, triggering dozens of other identity-related, religious, ethnic, social, and economic processes.

It seems justified to say that decentralisation has not fulfilled the economic expectations of its proponents. The Indonesian parliament readily accepted the establishment of new administrative divisions despite reasonable doubts about their economic viability (Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), 2013). The fragmentation affected the budgets of the new territorial units, which also had to shoulder higher administrative costs (as public offices proliferated together with administrative units). Consequently, the newly established kabupatens, kecamatans, and kotas struggled with inefficient administration, which easily fell prey to local political influences. The blossoming (*pemekaran*) did not translate into better life conditions for the public. For example, out of the 198 new kabupatens and kecamatans, only the kecamatans of Banjarbaru in South Kalimantan and Cimahi in West Java performed well economically (which was explained by the fact that both areas are highly urbanised regencies that go back to Suharto times). For this reason, the government has set a limit on the number of provinces in Indonesia: 44 of them can be formed by 2025. Creating new provinces is mainly motivated by strategic (security), demographic, and geographic reasons. At the time of writing this text, Indonesia comprised 38 provinces (CNN Indonesia, 2022). The fragmentation of local administration was greater in less populous and more peripheral regions that had lower own revenue and worse living conditions. In the long term, decentralisation will contribute to the petrification of regional differences rather than their reduction. As a result of *pemekaran*, lagging regions struggle with greater fragmentation, which makes it more difficult to implement long-term developmental policies.

It needs to be stressed that the decentralisation reforms were one of the factors that halted the separatist tendencies and the country's breakup, while significantly

reducing the scale of internal conflict (see Fig. 3). At the turn of the centuries, the risk of the country separating into smaller entities was real as various provinces became the stage of violent clashes between different ethnic groups. In recent years, the scale and severity of these conflicts has declined, and they are controlled by the state, apart from the situation in the Indonesian part of Papua.

An unforeseen side-effect, so to speak, of decentralisation was the opening of the political system. Decades of Orde Baru had fossilised the political scene: leaders had to come from political clans or have military connections. By introducing general elections for kabupaten heads, mayors, and provincial governors, decentralisation opened the door to national politics for local and regional politicians. Popular local and regional leaders now stand a real chance in national elections. The career of President Joko Widodo is an excellent example of that. His path to the country's highest office started ten years ago, when he took over as the president of Surakarta (2005–2012), after which he was the governor of Jakarta for two years (2012–2014) (Schemmel, 2023). In 2024 both presidential and parliamentary elections were held in Indonesia. The political configuration that emerged from the vote is partly the result of the series of reforms hastily implemented in the second part of the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century.

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**DAWID  
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# THE MUSIC OF INDONESIA IN THE ACCOUNTS OF POLISH COMMUNISM-ERA TRAVELLERS

For centuries, Westerners gained their knowledge of non-European communities from the travel accounts of people who explored different corners of the world. One of the natural consequences of the period known as The Age of Discovery and the subsequent colonial expansion by the European powers was the development of travel literature, which teemed with information on faraway cultures. The accounts were also crucial for the process of discovering non-European music by Western audiences, and for that reason, they are often studied by ethnomusicologists looking into the history of their field. In Poland, the topic has been explored by Sławomira Żerańska-Kominek, who stressed the high value of these source materials in her article *Opisanie muzyki w relacjach polskich podróżników na Bliski Wschód* [Music in the Accounts of Polish Travellers to the Middle East]:

Long before professional ethnomusicological research was initiated at the end of the 19th century, Europeans had already been exposed to world music, whose descriptions surviving in travel literature are often of higher quality than

the somewhat awkward attempts made by the first scholars, entangled in the Eurocentric methodology proposed by comparative musicology.

(Żerańska-Kominek, 2014: 125)

Although the history of Polish exploration of the Indonesian islands can be traced back to the period of the Dutch East India Company, the first mentions of music from the region in Polish literature date to the 20th century. The oldest account was provided by Michał Siedlecki, a prominent biologist and professor of Jagiellonian University, who conducted research in Java as part of an academic internship at the botanical gardens of Buitenzorg (now: Bogor) in 1908. During his stay on the island, Siedlecki was keenly interested in the culture of its population. In 1913, having returned to Kraków, he published the book *Jawa. Przyroda i sztuka. Uwagi z podróży* [Java: The Nature And The Arts. Notes From A Journey], dedicating copious fragments to local music (Martin, 2016: 207–217). Fascinated, he wrote:

I do not know if any other place in the world has music more interesting than that of the gamelan, both in terms of instrumentation and the harmonisation of the instruments that are used to perform it, the melodies it can produce, and, finally, the impression it makes on a person who hears it for the first time.

(Siedlecki, 1913: 236)

Siedlecki's insightful musical descriptions are illustrated with multiple depictions of Javanese and Sundanese instruments and transcriptions of the melodies he heard.

Further information on the music of Nusantara was provided later, during the Communist rule in Poland, which was the golden age of Polish travel literature and literary reportage. Given the limited opportunities for travel in those days (caused, among other things, by the relatively high costs of travelling and the difficulties in obtaining a passport), Polish readers greatly enjoyed accounts of distant countries provided

by travel writers. Many of the authors included descriptions of exotic music they heard during their travels in their books. Because of a lack of Polish ethnomusicological studies conducted on location in faraway regions of the world, including Indonesia, these travel accounts were the sole source of knowledge on the topic available in Polish at the time.

Maciej Klimiuk's bibliography of Polish and Polish-language publications in the field of Indonesian and Malay studies published between 1913 and 2013 (Klimiuk, 2014: 211–219) contains around 30 Communist-era works that can be classified as travel literature. Based on their profession, the authors can be divided into the following categories:

- Reporters, professional travel writers, authors of travel accounts from different parts of the globe (Olgierd Budrewicz, Adrian Czermiński, Jerzy Chociłowski, Wojciech Dworczyk, Wojciech Giełżyński, Wiesław Górnicki, Edward Kurowski, Andrzej Kruczkowski, Lucjan Wolanowski, and Janusz Wolniewicz);
- Scholars (anthropologist Józef Glinka, ethnographer Janusz Kamocki, and arachnologist Jerzy Prószyński);
- Diplomats (Leonard Pohoryles and Włodzimierz Janiurek<sup>75</sup>);
- Missionaries (Stanisław Ograbek, Czesław Osiecki, and Józef Glinka, who is mentioned above).

An analysis of the history of travel literature reveals that accounts by the representatives of the above-listed professions have shaped the Western perceptions of Asian, African, Oceanian, and Native American cultures over the last

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The book *Dzień dobry, Nusantaro. Reportaż z podróży Przewodniczącego Rady Państwa PRL Aleksandra Zawadzkiego do Indonezji i Indii* [Good Morning, Nusantara: An Account of Chairman Aleksander Zawadzki's Trip to Indonesia and India], authored by Włodzimierz Janiurek, is missing from Klimiuk's list.

few centuries.<sup>76</sup> Music was rarely the central focus of their writings. This is how Sławomira Żerańska-Kominek characterised their accounts of local music:

Their travel destinations, itineraries, and programmes meant that the travellers usually came into contact with local music by accident, spontaneously, and as a result of a series of unforeseen circumstances. On the other hand, some situations strictly associated with music were completely inaccessible to foreigners due to various social taboos. That is why, the descriptions found in the journals and accounts are often fragmentary and incomplete, which is only partially compensated by the spontaneity and freshness of perspective characteristic of the incidental observers.

(Żerańska-Kominek, 2014: 125)

The quoted fragment perfectly summarises the character of the Indonesian travel accounts I discuss here. In principle, all of the authors devoted some space to descriptions of music and, when considered together, these provide us with a wealth of material from various regions of the archipelago. While frequent, the mentions of the music of Nusantara are laconic. The authors rarely focused on music as such: they mostly mention it when discussing various ceremonies and spectacles, which are the main focus of their attention. In his book *Indonesia Raya*, former Polish Ambassador in Jakarta Leonard Pohoryles provided a detailed account of a Javanese wedding. While describing the subsequent stages of the ceremony, he listed the titles of the gamelan compositions (*gendings*) which accompanied the festivities, while paying little attention to the music itself. The way he described the pieces is rather trite. In his words, *Kebogiro* is 'a loud welcome melody', while *Kodok Ngorek* is 'a triumphant nuptial melody' (Pohoryles, 1976: 59–61). The author did not devote

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In the case of colonial powers, the list may be expanded to include sailors, settlers, state officials, physicians, or military personnel serving in overseas territories.

much more space to the gamelan instrumentarium, which he defined as 'an orchestra predominantly consisting of percussion instruments: cymbals made from special alloys, gongs, and metal bars arranged xylophone-fashion; as well as flutes, drums, and an instrument reminiscent of the violin called the rebab' (Pohoryles, 1976: 47). Most mentions of the Balinese gamelan come from accounts of cremation rites. In their highly suggestive descriptions, Andrzej Kruczkowski and Wojciech Górnicki portrayed gamelan music as a means used to build suspense during the ceremony (Kruczkowski, 1957: 173–176, Górnicki, 1961: 207–210). The participation of gamelan players in Balinese funerals was also mentioned by Leonard Pohoryles, Jerzy Prószyński, Wojciech Dworczyk,

Jerzy Chociłowski and Wojciech Giełżyński (Pohoryles, 1976: 95; Prószyński, 1963: 208–210; Dworczyk, 1961: 142–146; Dworczyk, 1976: 224–227; Chociłowski, 1976: 80–82; Giełżyński, 1972: 68).

Naturally, music is also mentioned in descriptions of local dances, mostly from the eagerly visited island of Bali.<sup>77</sup> The most elaborate accounts can be found in Wiesław Górnicki's book *Tam gdzie pieprz rośnie*, whose chapter on the island contains a subsection titled *Choreografia* [Choreography] that discusses more than a dozen Balinese dances divided, according to the author's self-devised classification, into modern (*tari panggul* and *janger*) and classical dances. The latter he further divided into ceremonial (*rejang*, *baris*), trance (*sanghyang*, *kecak*), magical (*barong*), and performance (*gambuh*, *cupak*, *tantri*) dances. In his analysis, Wiesław Górnicki drew on the monumental *Dance and Drama in Bali* by Beryl de Zoete

77 Books by Polish authors include descriptions of dances from many other Indonesian regions. L. Pohoryles provided accounts of Javanese courtly dances from Surakarta and Yogyakarta, a ballet performance of the *Ramayana* staged in front of the Prambanan Temple, and the dances of the Minangkabau from West Sumatra (Pohoryles, 1976: 63–65, 70–73, 116–119). E. Kurowski, W. Dworczyk, and L. Wolanowski wrote about the dances of the Dayak from Kalimantan (Kurowski, 1973: 122–123; Dworczyk, 1961: 78–79; Wolanowski, 1979: 193), while J. Kamocki and the Verbite missionaries mention the dances of the residents of Flores and Palue (Kamocki, 1976: 135, 157, 163–167, 176, 178–179, 195–196; Glinka, 1971: 14–18; Ograbek, 1977: 80–81; Osiecki, 1989: 74–75).



'An Indonesian orchestra' – a photograph of a Balinese *gamelan* from Olgierd Budrewicz's book *Druga podróż do czterech rogów świata* (Budrewicz, 1979: 146)



'The gangway has been drawn up to the tower inside of which the body of Anak Agung Gde Oka will soon be laid' – a photograph documenting a Balinese cremation ceremony from Andrzej Kruczkowski's book *Listy spod równika* (Kruczkowski, 1957: between p. 144 and 145)

and Walter Spies, among others (Górnicki, 1961: 258–266). More interesting and vivid descriptions of Balinese dances and information on the accompanying music can be found in the writings of Jerzy Prószyński, Jerzy Chociłowski, Wojciech Dworczyk, Włodzimierz Janiurek, Andrzej Kruczkowski, Leonard Pohoryles and Jerzy Wolniewicz (Prószyński, 1963, 210–215; Chociłowski, 1976: 63–71; Dworczyk, 1961: 131–132; Janiurek, 1962: 51–53; Kruczkowski, 1957: 192–198; Pohoryles, 1976: 90–91; Wolniewicz, 1988: 200–202).<sup>78</sup> Apart from dances such as *le-gong* and *barong*, they paid particular attention to *kecak*, which seemed to have made a special impression on them.<sup>79</sup> Here is the relevant fragment from Janusz Wolniewicz’s book *Bogowie gorącego słońca* [Gods of the Scorching Sun]:

The gamelan sounds sharper now. Sitting on the ground, the members of the orchestra work their mallets vigorously. Harder, harder! A crowd of half-naked men rushes onto the stage. This is an aggressive entrance. Over a hundred performers begin the *keciak*, known simply as the monkey dance. Their torsos and backs glisten in the torchlight. Everyone sits down, forming a throbbing circle made of several layers. Their movements are perfectly synchronised. They bend their bodies and perform magical hand gestures. More than a hundred men have created a pulsating unity of strength. Sharply, as if cut by a whip, a sound breaks off every so often: *Ciak!* *Ciak!* *Ciak!* The rhythmic, rippling cry will recur until the finale.

78 Contrary to other authors, Janusz Kamocki was not impressed by Balinese dances:

The dances have disappointed me; I prefer the Javanese ones. They might be better in terms of the technique, but they are cold. In fact, the perfectly indifferent look on the dancers’ faces makes you forget that what you are watching is a living creature: at times, the routine seems less like a dance and more like a mechanical gymnastic display. But the orchestra was excellent! (Kamocki, 1976: 219).

79 Some of the authors stressed that the high demand for *kecak* performances was driven by the influx of Western holiday-makers. To quote Górnicki, ‘[Kecak] attracts crowds of tourists, even if it is badly staged’ (Górnicki, 1961: 262). Kruczkowski wrote: ‘For a decade now, *ketjak* has been spreading from village to village, like cholera during an epidemic, gaining increasing popularity. *Ketjak* clubs have been proliferating across the whole island’ (Kruczkowski, 1957: 196).



'For the Balinese people, dance performances are a form of communication with the world of gods, who are the rightful owners of the island entrusted to people to use' – photograph from Jerzy Chociński's book *Bali – kwiat z ogrodu snów* (Chociński, 1976: unnumbered page in the photographic annexe, reproduced from the MAiP collections, WIZ/MAP 14/6664)

A forest of hands and rhythmic bends transform the cluster of men into one. Ciak! Ciak! Ciak! The voice grows stronger. The hands sway: the circle resembles some voracious sea anemone, then again a folding red water lily. The crimson flowers clutched behind the performers' ears shimmer in the glow. Ciak! Ciak! From time to time, colourful spectres appear in the centre of the pulsating circle. They are the characters from the Ramayana epic. I find it difficult to identify them. A parade of graceful female silhouettes and demon masks. I am absorbed in the sight of the pulsating mass of brown bodies. Some demon again! An amplified hiss, probably of a mythical snake. Ciak! Ciak! Ciak! bursts into the starry sky. The dancers are engrossed. I never thought a seated ballet could achieve such expressiveness. Phew! They are done! A storm of applause breaks out. I look at the people on my right and left. We are all excited.

(Wolniewicz, 1988: 201)

Music was also mentioned in the context of various forms of Indonesian theatre. Leonard Pohoryles wrote about the gamelan in his extensive account of a wayang kulit performance, in which he discussed the construction of the puppets, the role of the *dalang*, the organisation of the performance space, and the form of the performance in great detail (Pohoryles, 1976: 46–50). He also briefly mentioned other Javanese forms of theatre:

Sometimes the puppets are made not from leather (wayang kulit) but from wood (wayang golek) and dressed in traditional Javanese outfits. They also have normal theatre played by human actors (wayang orang). If they appear in masks, the performance is called wayang topeng. Wayang kulit enjoys the greatest popularity.

(Pohoryles, 1976: 46)

Jerzy Chociłowski provided a more detailed classification of wayang:



'A scene from the kecak dance' – a photograph from  
Wiesław Górnicki's book *Tam gdzie pieprz rośnie*  
(Górnicki, 1961: between p. 132 and p. 133)



A dalang behind a screen a moment before the beginning of a shadow play performance' – a photograph from Jerzy Chociński's book *Bali – kwiat z ogrodu snów* (Chociński, 1976: unnumbered page in the photographic annexe, reproduced from the MAiP collections, WIZ/MAP 14/6644)

In addition to wayang kulit, there is a less common form of puppet theatre in Bali called *wayang lemah*, which does not use a screen or shadows, so the difference is fundamental. Popular in Java, *wayang golek* employs painted wooden puppets dressed in costumes made of colourful cloth, with movable arms made of sticks and a head made of a separate piece of wood that can be turned at will. If the puppets are wooden but have leather arms, the performance is called *wayang krucil*, or *klitik*. Finally, there is *wayang orang*, a form of theatre in which live actors (*orang* means 'human') perform in masks and costumes styled similarly to the marionettes (this is called *wayang wong* in Bali). Classic wayang kulit, or *wayang purwa*, performances employ colourful flat leather puppets depicted from the profile. *Wayang beber*, performances in which the dalang unfolds colourful pictures painted on canvas in front of an audience, have almost disappeared.

(Chociński, 1976: 53)



'A flat puppet made of buffalo leather used in *Wayang Purwa* shadow play performances' – a photograph from Edward Kurowski's book *Taniec z duchami przodków* (Kurowski, 1973: between p. 120 and p. 121)

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When writing about Balinese theatre, the same author listed its lesser-known dance varieties, such as *janger*, *cupak*, and *arya*, which he respectively called 'music comedy', 'tragicomedy', and 'folk Balinese opera', and considered secularised versions of old-time ritual dances (Chociłowski, 1976: 63–64). A more detailed account of a *cupak* performance seen in Lombok was provided by Janusz Kamocki:

The orchestra plays for a long time until finally the dancers enter. They dance *putri sedang majen majen di Taman*. The content: *Rakshasa* (an evil demon) kidnaps a girl and the boys rescue her. The plot is somewhat similar to that of the *Ramayana*, but it does not feature the monkeys, *garuda*, etc. – it is much more primitive. Naturally, the performance has multiple interludes, called *atraksi* (attractions). The last interlude is an amazing mockery of cowardice: *Rakshasa* attacks *Cupak*, but the latter takes to his heels, the poles, etc. Then

a fight ensues between Rakshasa and Grantang, Cupak's elder brother, the epitome of integrity and bravery. Grantang kills Rakshasa. He tells Cupak about it, the latter approaches, carefully throws pebbles at Rakshasa's dead body from a distance, and when he finally sees that the demon is not moving, he carefully approaches, pulls at his clothes, and when he is finally sure that Rakshasa is dead, he sits proudly on top of him, plays the hero and boasts that he too could kill Rakshasa, triumphantly waving his kris while the humble Grantang does not boast of his deed.

The role of Cupak is the most difficult. It is entrusted to the best of the actors, sometimes the whole show is simply called 'Cupak'. Cupak has to be a comedian; he has a big red nose and personifies the evil man. Grantang is a pandit (knight). His name alludes to Hindu traditions. The actor needs to have a good voice; he sings all the lines in a rather high falsetto in the Sasak language. The newer, recently added interludes are sung in Indonesian. The play is very old, and the ancient texts about the adventures of the Arab prince Amir Hamza, who fights against the bangbari (barbarian) Raja Lanka Sari, are sung in Javanese and have been recorded in lontar books. The women who effortlessly read and sing the lyrics written in the Old Javanese script cannot read or write Indonesian. The play lasts until 11:30 p.m. The show is wonderful and the dancing is perfect. Finally, a genuine, amateur village troupe, not some ballet. I photograph and film a lot, and I am delighted with them [...].

(Kamocki, 1976: 210–211)

Music and dance were sometimes described as part of the author's personal experience. This applies particularly to Kamocki, who did not limit himself to the role of a passive observer. Instead, he played musical instruments, sang, and danced together with the locals whenever the opportunity arose. His book *Przygoda z Indonezją* [An Indonesian Adventure] features a fragment describing his experience of playing the angklung, which he considered 'the most beautiful music in the whole of Indonesia' (Kamocki, 1976: 60):



'A peasant opera' – a photograph from Janusz Kamocki's book *Przygoda z Indonezją* (Kamocki, 1976: between p. 224 and p. 225)

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After the angklung concert, the instruments were distributed among the guests, and we were offered to play a concert together. A large board with numbers was set up on the podium. Similar numbers were written on the angklungs. I was initially given instrument no. 1, but it was too small for my hands, so I received a red no. 3 with a dot at the bote tom. The instructor pointed to the numbers on the board with a stick, indicating to the players which angklung to shake. This was very easy as long as our conductor slowly pointed to the letters. Soon, however, certain combinations of numbers and colours were added, and here I would have been lost, had it not been for one member of the choir, the one who had previously sung and played the angklung, who stood by my side and instructed me how and when to shake my rattle. I wasn't the only one with a personal instructor: all whites had them, but undoubtedly I got the best-looking one!

(Kamocki, 1976: 28–29)



'Girls from a missionary school in Bandung with an *angklung*' – a photograph from Janusz Kamocki's book *Przygoda z Indonezją* (Kamocki, 1976: between p. 32 and p. 33)

The performance took place in the West Java pavilion during a national fair held in Jakarta. Later that night, the author also got a chance to try his hand at the Sundanese dance of *kethuk tilu*:

After the concert, the *angklungs* were collected and dancing resumed, but as it was already after the official part, a few Indonesian dignitaries took off their jackets and ran onto the stage to frolic with the nice female musicians. They were followed by a few Europeans. You can only imagine one Polish ethnographer twirling with tiny steps in the *ketuk tilo* (pronounced: *ktuuk cilo*) with a female *selendang* (shawl) of his partner in hand. I regret that no one filmed this. Of course, I took the opportunity to chat with my partner: she and the whole band are from Bandung.

(Kamocki, 1976: 29).

Kamocki used his music and dance interactions with the locals to collect their repertoire. Writing about his stay with the Kubu community in Sumatra, he reported:

On the way back, the Kubu started singing. The melody was somewhat similar to our Highland tunes: shrieking like *Na wysokiej Cyrli*, but sung in a sad tone. I never saw them dancing; they don't own any musical instruments either, not even the simplest ones. Some time passed before I heard them sing for the first time, which happened after a night's fishing. I asked for some more and had to sing in Polish in return. Certainly, this was the first time in history that Polish partisan and scout songs were heard along the Medak River! The fact that I was singing out of tune is irrelevant. The Kubu are hardly fit for the opera stage either.

(Kamocki, 1976: 86–87)

Let us note the interesting comparison of Kubu songs to Polish Highland music in the above description. Lucjan Wolanowski drew similar associations when describing the music accompanying a performance by Malay *ronggeng* dancers:

Sitting on the podium was an orchestra, sawing away at various pieces. The percussion was so dominant that you could only hear fragments of the melody breaking through the sound of the drums and cymbals. It was almost impossible to figure out the character of the music, although for a moment I had the impression that they were wrecking *Na perskim rynku*.

(Wolanowski, 1979: 257)

The analogy used by Kamocki and Wolanowski is undoubtedly one of the oldest and most frequently used tools in travel literature. By comparing certain manifestations of alien culture to the products of their civilisation, travel authors helped Western readers to visualise or conceptualise what was foreign to them. Published in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the writings of William Marsden, Sir Thomas

Stamford Raffles, and John Crawford, who were all associated with the East India Company, feature comparisons of the music of Sumatra and Java to old-time Irish and Scottish melodies (Martin, 2021: 111–112, 117, 133). The authors often resorted to analogy due to their lack of knowledge of appropriate terminology or the absence of relevant terms in European languages. Polish authors, for instance, found it hard to describe the gamelan instruments. Consequently, they compared them to familiar Western instruments, mixing specialist terminology (which they often used incorrectly) with colloquial vocabulary. And so, they described the *rebab* as ‘an instrument similar to the violin’ (Górnicki, 1961: caption of a photograph between p. 352 and p. 353) or ‘reminiscent of the violin’ (Pohoryles, 1976: 47); gongs and bar metallophones as ‘cymbals’ (Czermiński, 1963: 76–77), ‘copper plates’ (*ibidem.*), ‘copper kettledrums’ (Dworczyk, 1961: 71–72), ‘bells’ (Prószyński, 1963: 211, 214), ‘Glockenspiel’ (Prószyński, 1963: 207, 209, 211; Kruczkowski, 1957: 173; Czermiński, 1963: 76; Dworczyk, 1961: 71), ‘tiny bells’ (Prószyński, 1963: 191, 215), ‘dulcimer’ (*ibidem.*; Dworczyk, 1961: 71; Kruczkowski, 1957: 173), ‘metal keyboard’ (Kruczkowski, 1957: 173, 193), and ‘metal bars arranged xylophone-fashion’ (Pohoryles, 1976: 47); and xylophones as ‘wooden gongs’ (Pohoryles, 1976: 100) or ‘wooden Glockenspiel’ (Górnicki, 1961: 59).

As Janusz Kamocki continues his account, we learn that his next chance to come into contact with local music was during his stay in Palu’e:

They are asking for Polish songs. I agree, but request a Palu’e song for each Polish one I sing. There’s a bit of confusion, as is usually the case when ten people speak at once, shouting over each other, but in the end, they start to sing, mainly the young ones, who bend to the will of their teachers. They like best my spontaneous translation of [the song] about a dog whose got his tail bitten off by his beloved wife, and then our Highland songs. I bellow out *W murowanej, Na wysokiej Cyrhli, and Na wiersycku*. They laugh and shout ‘bagus’ (‘nice).



'Javanese gamelans differ slightly from Balinese ones. An instrument similar to the violin is seen in the foreground' – a photograph from Wiesław Górnicki's book *Tam gdzie pieprz rośnie* (Górnicki, 1961: between p. 352 and p. 353)

Then they ask for Polish dances. That's a step too far for me, but I start dancing with them. I either tap my feet in place or move forwards and backwards, doing some kind of a pas in three time, or, which brings them the most joy, I wobble like a duck [...] in an old ritual dance.

(Kamocki, 1976: 163–164)

A similar account can be found in Wojciech Dworczyk's book *Archipelag dymiących wulkanów* [The Archipelago of Steaming Volcanoes]. The author thus describes his interaction with the members of the 'amateur music ensemble' Orkes Amitir Chitra from Banyuwangi:

Everybody livens up. An accordion starts to play, accompanied by a guitar and a drum. Soon, the whole house is shaking from the infernal noise. Onlookers appear in the doorway. Young Irsak sings a few songs. The girl has a soft, quiet, and extremely high voice. *Lelebo* is the song I like the most. So, the fairly fast-paced, sonorous melody flows for the second time, with the same theme repeating over and over again:

Bo le le bo... Indonesia le le bo...  
Bo le le bo... Indonesia le le bo...  
Baik sonde baik... Indonesia lebih baik...  
Baik sonde baik... Indonesia lebih baik...<sup>80</sup>

After Irsak, it is time for Hati, a charming girl in a patterned sarong fastened with a silver belt, in a black velvet corset, trimmed with gold and a plunging neckline. Her arms are adorned with bracelets. Hati starts to dance. [Her dance consists of] rhythmic movements of her supple body, a few swinging and flexible steps forwards or backwards, a slight turn or bend, and above all, constant serpentine undulation of her copper-coloured arms. They play the most important role in this dance. They twist and bend like two golden snakes to the beat of the constantly recurring musical motifs. I am stunned by the dance. How I would love to kiss the charming dancer. Well, the local custom does not allow for such a way of expressing one's admiration.

Now, they ask me to sing Polish songs. A few songs from the repertoire of Mazowsze, Jontek's aria from *Halka*, and the aria with the chimes from *The Haunted Manor* are supposed to give them an idea of our music and melodies. I do my best. Judging by the wide-open mouths of the onlookers and the fierce nose-picking of one of them, I make a stunning impression. I just don't know if it's because of my low voice or the unfamiliarity of the melodies. Since Mazowsze has not been

here yet, I reap all the applause the ensemble deserves. They ask for more songs. Happy to have the opportunity to sing in Polish in front of someone, I give them everything I know.

(Dworczyk, 1961: 117–118)

The situations described by Kamocki and Dworczyk are a classic example of a direct musical exchange, which is a recurring motif in many travellers' accounts. Interestingly, one of the earliest mentions of Indonesian music in Western literature has its course in a similar context. According to Sir Francis Drake's logbook, when arriving at the southern shores of Java in 1580, his crew was met by local dignitaries, whom the English captain greeted with a performance by the ship's orchestra. The Javanese responded with a kind of music 'which though it were of a very strange kind, yet the sound was pleasant and delightfull' (Martin, 2021: 37).

Despite Drake's favourable opinion, the Europeans' first encounters with the music of Indonesia were not always the easiest. Local music surprised Westerners with its otherness in both the 16th and 20th centuries. On hearing the gamelan for the first time, Polish Communist-era writers noted the high volume of its sound. In his account of a Balinese funeral, Leonard Pohoryles mentioned the 'infernal noise made by the music which makes big beat sound like a soft lullaby' (Pohoryles, 1976: 100), while Włodzimierz Janiurek mentioned 'a storm of metallic sounds' (Janiurek, 1962: 51). Similar descriptions of the gamelan can be found in the writings of Jerzy Prószyński, who called its music 'an infernal but rhythmical noise' (Prószyński, 1963: 192) and Górnicki, who observed that the gamelan 'explodes with an insane and unexpected clamour' (Górnicki, 1961: 209–210). When describing a theatre performance held in Jakarta, Adrian Czermiński commented that the gamelan created 'a racket that makes the coconuts shake' and 'all the living creatures – lizards, bats, and vultures – flee to the jungle' (Czermiński, 1963: 76). Andrzej Kruczkowski made a point of mentioning 'drum pounding' that was turning into 'a chronic state' on the eve of a Muslim holiday (most probably Idul Fitri) in the city of Bogor (Kruczkowski, 1957: 69). These accounts

corresponded with the deeply-rooted stereotypical Western narration about Asian music, which was perceived as ‘an unvarying mass of barbaric, disorderly noise’ (Žerańska-Kominek, 1995: 15).<sup>81</sup> More often than not, it was portrayed as hard to bear and irritating. Describing a perahu sailing out to sea, Wojciech Dworczyk mentioned the crew playing gongs and drums. One of them supposedly ‘thumped the drum so zealously and created such an incredible noise that I would have gladly jumped out of my skin’ (Dworczyk, 1961: 97). Fr. Czesław Osiecki, a missionary working in Flores, had a similar impression of *gendang gong* music played by his parishioners:

I think it’s been two weeks now that they’ve been banging those gongs non-stop, and I’m starting to wonder (I’ve been patient for a long time) why they’re so eagerly and persistently pounding from dusk to dawn and from dawn to dusk, that is, constantly.

Someone muttered with a slight embarrassment that it was an adat holiday, meaning customary. What kind of holiday, I asked, lasts so long? Finally, it was explained to me that it was a relocation, that is moving the traditional Ngadhu pole houses, which stand in the village square as a sign of connection with the previous generation, or the deceased. The village wisely decided to move all these pole houses in one fell swoop (of a knife). They killed a water buffalo, but a small one (because you have to kill something for such a thing). They also killed a pig, but also a small one, and all the poles were quickly moved. And now several other villages have decided that they can afford to move them one by one. So the ‘kerbaus’, or water buffaloes, are being killed, and they are

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Perceived as noise, the music supposedly was devoid of melody and harmony. This is how it was described by Lucjan Wolanowski, who mentioned ‘shreds of melody’ (Wolanowski, 1979: 257), and Jerzy Prószyński, who opined that ‘it is hard to find a melodic theme’ in the music of the Balinese gamelan (Prószyński, 1963: 211). Interestingly, the 20th-century gamelan descriptions by the authors I studied are strikingly similar to old-time accounts of Janissary bands quoted by S. Žerańska-Kominek in *Opisanie muzyki w relacjach polskich podróżników na Bliski Wschód* [Music in the Accounts of Polish Travellers to the Middle East] (Žerańska-Kominek, 2014: 128–132).



'The band's ready! The procession is about to start, followed by a colourful traditional Balinese parade in honour of the Guest from Polandia' – a photograph from Włodzimierz Janiurek's book *Dzień dobry, Nusantara* (Janiurek, 1962: 165)

not small, because it would be a shame (you have to show off no matter the cost), pigs will die out in the area, and I don't know what else will have to go under the knife. Experts say it will probably take three weeks, because they haven't moved even half of them. They make a big fuss of every house they move. They feast, eat, drink, smoke, get into debt, and become poorer. Afterwards, they will come and ask the priest for support for the school. One could curse this Eastern logic, but it's pointless – it's a waste of time and nerves. Adat is a sacred thing, full stop. No one worries about the future, because why bother? I see another problem in this, namely, manifestations of paganism and superstition, which is worse than material impoverishment. And I don't think I'm wrong in saying that the effect is already visible.

Last Sunday, there were just a few people at Mass, because they were tired. Tomorrow, [the church] will probably be empty, because they have been tormenting themselves with excitement for two weeks now: the gong has the extraordinary power of making even the dying jump up and down. I experienced it first-hand. One of my orphans (Ela) was quite seriously ill – severe malaria is no joke – and yet she says she wanted to get up and dance when she heard the gongs. Luckily, the village is a little farther away from the church, and you can't hear it so clearly; otherwise, I would have run away to Mataloko.

(Osiecki, 1989: 74–75)

The quoted fragment seems to indicate that Fr. Osiecki's reservations about the music were not merely related to its character, but the fact that it was a part of a ritual which the Polish missionary, rather conservative in his opinions, perceived as a pagan superstition, like the other adat practices (Osiecki, 1989: 236–237). Consequently, he was also reluctant to accept the attempts to introduce elements of adat into the Catholic liturgy following the Second Vatican Council. Interestingly, his fellow Verbite, Fr. Stanisław Ograbek had an opposite view: he usually approached the local customs and music with respect and appreciation, which he expressed



'Recording Wangka singers' – a photograph from Janusz Kamocki's book *Przygoda z Indonezją* (Kamocki, 1976: between p. 160 and p. 161)

in his memoir titled *Wędrówki po Flores* [Exploring Flores]<sup>82</sup> (Ograbek, 1977: 17, 77, 80–81).

Apart from the high volume, our writers were stunned by the unfamiliar articulation and intonation. Always candid in his reactions, Kamocki mentioned songs being ‘meowed’ by the male and female singers of the gamelan of the Kraton Yogyakarta, or recording the ‘ritual singing, or rather howlings’ in Wangka on Flores (Kamocki, 1976: 41, 179). Like many travel authors in the 18th or 19th centuries, our 20th-century writers often perceived local music as lacking variety and monotonous, which was partly due to its repetitiveness and cyclical time organisation. Combined with high volume, the repetitiveness was supposed to put the listeners or the dancers into a trance. In this context, our authors emphasised the powerful impact the music had on the locals, presenting it as a stimulant that caused collective excitement, elation, or even ecstasy. Jerzy Chociłowski described *kecak* as ‘a mystery of incantations building up until it reached the verge of ecstasy’ (Chociłowski, 1976: 66–68), Edward Kurowski mentioned an ‘exciting banging of the drums’ heard during a *main caci* competition in Flores (Kurowski, 1973: 87–88), while Górnicki observed that due to their trance-like nature the Balinese dances *kecak* and *sanghyang* were supposed to satisfy ‘South Asians’ inherent need for ecstasy’ and that the gamelan sound was ‘arousing’ (Górnicki, 1961: 253, 263). Pohoryles argues that ‘in Bali trance is a common phenomenon, almost an element of the ritual’ (Pohoryles, 1976: 91), while Fr. Czesław Osiecki and Janusz Kamocki reported that the sound of gongs in Flores

82 The only exception is his description of a musical performance by the residents of the Wano village:  
 ‘The men who were our hosts accompanied us out of the village, singing and pounding their gongs. I cannot describe their singing, for the life of me. It had something of a chorale about it, because it was melismatic and without rhythm, and something of opera, because it is unpleasant to the untrained ear. It sounded like they were deliberately singing out of tune every so often. One singer or another would neigh or howl from time to time. The worst thing was that they approached it all quite seriously, while Stach and I barely managed to control ourselves with the last remnants of our weak willpower.’  
 (Ograbek, 1977: 83)

can rouse even the most seriously ill and make disabled old men jump to their feet to dance (Osiecki, 1989: 74–75; Kamocki, 1976: 176). The observations of Polish authors corresponded with the established Western stereotype about non-European cultures, which were perceived as susceptible to the power of music and natural impulses, as opposed to well-grounded and clear-headed Europeans. In this context, the ability to control one's urges, self-restraint, and self-discipline was seen as an indication of a people's civilisational advancement (Zon, 2007: 41).

After becoming accustomed to the sound of local music and, in some cases, overcoming the initial prejudice, Polish authors were able to appreciate its aesthetic value, beauty, and artistry. In his book *Indonezja. Kraj, gdzie morze przeplata się z lądem* [Indonesia: A Country Where Sea Intermingles with Land], Wojciech Giełżyński wrote that 'the artistic skill' of Balinese gamelan orchestras 'dazzles even the most discerning connoisseurs of European music' and Pohoryles called the Javanese gamelan 'original multiinstrumental music' (Pohoryles, 1976: 27). Prószyński took to the Balinese gamelan when watching a dance performance that impressed him with the excellent synchronisation of choreography and music, although what he saw remained 'foreign', 'strange', 'mysterious', and 'unfamiliar' to him (Prószyński, 1963: 211–215). In other words, his newly-found fascination went hand in hand with his inability to comprehend what he experienced. In the end, the Orient remained unpenetrable to Prószyński, just like for many travellers to the East before him.

Discussing the merits of Balinese music, Prószyński and other Polish authors writing about Bali stressed the unusual musicality, creative skill, and love for art displayed by the island's residents. Edward Kurowski insisted that 'The island of Bali is called the kingdom of music and dance. There is almost no *desa* where there is no dancing and live gamelan music in the evenings' (Kurowski, 1973: 82). In his *Archipelag dymiących wulkanów*, Dworczyk claimed that the 'simple villagers play as if they had studied at the conservatoire, sculpture as if they had a fine arts degree, not to mention

their dance and acting skills (Dworczyk, 1961: 136). In *Bali – kwiąt z ogrodu snów* [Bali: A Flower from the Garden of Dreams] Jerzy Chociłowski wrote:

Art has become for everyone – men, women, and children – just another part of their daily routine, like working in the fields, cooking rice, or playing tag. The rice farmer will return to his hut before dusk, wash the mud from his feet, put on a clean shirt, and march off to a gamelan rehearsal. He will play by ear, of course, because he cannot read music. The woman, having prepared the meal for the next day, gets down to her batik fabrics or baskets for sacrificial offerings, which she weaves from bamboo bark or palm leaves. Little girls interrupt their play to spend hours practising the extremely complex and strictly codified gestures of a dance called *legong*. Boys take up chisels and hammers at a similarly young age to learn the art of sculpture.

(Chociłowski, 1976: 54–55)

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DAVID MARTIN

Wiesław Górnicki shared a similar view of the Balinese people:

The fact that the Balinese people are exceptionally versatile in terms of artistic talent is common knowledge around the world. Art, alongside the landscapes and the beauty of women, is the main reason why the island has been enjoying such fame in both hemispheres. There is not a hint of exaggeration in the popular claim that every Balinese is simultaneously a sculptor, musician, painter, actor, dancer, builder, singer, and poet. It is hard to understand what has led to this extraordinary and arguably unparalleled concentration of talent.

(Górnicki, 1961: 253)

This view was seconded by Wojciech Giełżyński, who praised 'village orchestras whose artistic skill dazzles even the most discerning connoisseurs of European music' (Giełżyński, 1972: 66–67):

It seems hard to believe, but every Balinese girl, whether she comes from the countryside or the city, is an excellent dancer, each representing a high artistic level. What is even more unbelievable is that every Balinese boy and man, who drives the buffalo to the rice fields in the morning or goes fishing in the afternoon, transforms into an artist in the afternoon! Or carves in wood or stone, each time creating a masterpiece. Or paints. Or weaves beautiful filigree jewellery from fine silver threads. Or at least he plays one of the bizarre gamelan instruments, none of which resemble European musical instruments. Are these village gamelans, made up of dozens or even hundreds of musicians, similar to our amateur bands? Yes and no. Yes, because they are amateurs who do not receive any remuneration for their performances (except for a few representative gamelans). No, because even the most modest gamelans based in distant and poor villages represent a very high artistic standard. Each of them could perform in front of the most discerning audiences or record albums.

(Giełżyński, 1972: 70–71)

A similar sentiment was expressed by Janusz Wolniewicz:

Religious beliefs and traditions are a constant source of inspiration for every Balinese person to practise music, dance and sculpture on a daily basis. The island has never had artists in the European sense of the word. Every villager, woman, and young man, after returning from the rice fields and performing the obligatory ablutions, naturally takes up a chisel, begins practising complex dance figures, or perfects the sound of the gamelan, or the village orchestra. [...]

Therefore, everything that we call the practice of art or artistic craftsmanship was and still is an integral part of Balinese family life. Even today, when local art, due to the rapid influx of tourists, has certainly lost much of its former mastery, it is still strong enough to delight visitors.

(Wolniewicz, 1988: 196–197)

As seen from the above, Polish authors have perpetuated the stereotypical image of Bali as an island of artists, while voicing concerns about the future of local culture in the face of the mass influx of tourists. Their descriptions of dance, music, and rituals were accompanied by reflections on the cultural changes happening on the island and the issue of authenticity in Balinese art, which was deteriorating under the influence of Western art. Leonard Pohoryles wrote about the commercialisation of funeral ceremonies, which were advertised as tourist attractions (Pohoryles, 1976: 93–94), while Jerzy Chociłowski noted the ‘tourist erosion and the resultant fear that one day everything authentic would evaporate from the island like water from a teapot’ (Chociłowski, 1976: 26). The former clearly expressed his distaste with organised tourism:

The funniest (or perhaps the saddest) thing is that a great majority of the Balinese do not realise that the image of the world of white people, or more specifically, the image of the West, they get from films, hippies, cassette music, and trips of old American women is a caricature. And vice versa: everything Western visitors see in Bali has been grossly simplified and layered with kitschy makeup for their benefit. Obviously, this mostly applies to those who enter the gates of one of the hotel ‘temples of tourist cult’ with a fat wallet in their pocket.

The cathedral among these ‘temples’ is the Bali Beach hotel in the seaside town of Sanur near Denpasar. This ten-storey high branch of the Intercontinental, rather ugly in its banal boxiness, was the first building on the island (completed in 1966) to have more than four floors. A thousand-strong battalion of hotel staff does everything in their power to make the guests feel like they are in an incubator. There is a swimming pool with a lifeguard tower in the garden, and a gong next to each sun lounger. All you have to do is strike it with a hammer for an enthusiastic waiter to appear out of nowhere. Those who are thirsty do not have to bother going to the bar: drinks and beverages are delivered by decorative two-wheeled

carriages called *dokars*. These are miniature versions of the carriages which circulate as cabs on the streets of Denpasar, pulled by small horses. You can rent a *prau*, a double-hulled sailing boat, sail to the coral reefs, go snorkelling, fish, and photograph turtles, or go on an excursion in a glass-bottom boat. If you don't feel like getting on an air-conditioned bus to see Balinese choreographic specialities such as *kecak* or *barong* in one of the villages, there are performances on site. The buffet is included in the ticket price.

(Chociłowski, 1976: 35–36)

Górnicki shared similar observations, calling American female tourists 'the avant-garde of the travelling civilisation' which 'is the most effective in murdering authentic folk art and creating demand for tacky souvenirs' (Górnicki, 1961: 203). The same author noted that in Bali, there were two circulations of local culture. On one hand, there were performances and rituals preserved in their original form, geared towards the Balinese and usually inaccessible to Europeans. On the other hand, there were stylised and simplified Balinese artefacts and pseudo-festivals produced for foreign holiday-makers (Górnicki, 1961: 202–203). He wrote:

The Balitour agency announces them weeks in advance, sells tickets, allocates seats, organises transportation, and assigns individual guides, if requested. The agency's helpfulness goes so far that the entire festival lasts only three hours (a normal festival begins at dawn and lasts until late evening on the following day) during the best sunlight hours, so that the shrill old maids travelling under the wing of Cook or handsome young men don't waste more than two hundred photos.

(Górnicki, 1961: 202)

Apart from the degrading influence of tourism, Polish authors also highlighted the cultural change brought on by globalisation. Many complained that Indonesians blindly followed Western fashions and pop culture, noting

that the local radio rarely played 'Indonesian folk music' (Prószyński, 1963: 31). Even Fr. Józef Glinka, himself a missionary, predicted that the old-time customs of the residents of Palu'e he was describing would soon disappear as a result of Catholic missionary work (Glinka, 1971: 47). In *Za Wrotami Bab-el-Mandeb* [Behind the Gates of the Bab-el-Mandeb], Czermiński wrote about a time when he went to a theatre show in Jakarta hoping to see an authentic wayang performance. While the music was indeed played by a gamelan orchestra, instead of shadow puppets, he saw female dancers in European costumes performing against the background of tawdry scenery comprising poorly painted landscapes (Czermiński, 1963: 76–77). Disappointed, he wrote:

So this is what contemporary wayang looks like, I thought on my way back, this is what living people look like. I travelled to the Far East, hoping to find on the islands of Indonesia an ancient culture, nurtured, alive, and thriving in coexistence with the modern world. I imagined that demons and people would look like figurines and puppets, unchanged for centuries, playing the same roles over and over again.

I did not see any demons. I rescued the mythical Garuda from merchant captivity [...]. This was the only trace of old-time folk art that I encountered. Now, standing in my room, the golden-green Garuda, with its brilliant colours, tells me the story of Indonesia I was looking for but did not find.

Instead of a puppet theatre, I saw people who jumped straight from the jungle into the Atomic Age and do not want to know anything that was here before and stems from their cultural tradition. Fixated on imported civilisation, they become its shadows.

(Czermiński, 1963: 77–78)

When reading the first of the quoted excerpts from Czermiński's book, it is hard not to detect his disappointment in the fact that the East, which Europeans had perceived for centuries as ahistoric and timeless, does change. Czermiński seems to share the concern about the future

of Indonesia expressed by the other authors. A few decades after the publication of the books, their descriptions of Indonesian music are a fascinating literary account of the state of the music heritage of the archipelago's ethnic groups on the verge of a momentous cultural shift. Many refer to disappearing traditions (e.g. of the Bali Aga, Tenggerese, or Dayak people) or the legacy of communities that have since undergone total assimilation (Kubu). Although in many cases they cannot be considered scientific studies, they are valuable historical documents, providing contemporary researchers of Indonesian musical culture with a wealth of comparative material. Moreover, the authors' observations on the cultural transformations they witnessed add an interesting dimension to the scientific discussions on the issue. Although the descriptions of music may be striking in their dilettantism, the photographs included in the accounts are highly valuable to ethnomusicologists as well as other researchers studying Indonesian culture. In the second half of the 20th century, the camera became an indispensable tool used by every travel writer. As a result, Polish books from the Communist era contain a wide range of photographs, often of very high documentary and artistic value. Some of the authors I discuss also made audio and audio-visual recordings during their travels to Indonesia. Janusz Kamocki, in particular, left behind a rich archive. One can only hope that in the future these collections will be properly studied and published due to their great historical value.

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# **ANNÁ BRZEZIŃSKA**

# PAINTED WITH VOLCANIC DUST: INDONESIAN VOLCANOES AND ART

Volcanoes constitute a crucial element of the Indonesian collective imagination, which is unsurprising, considering that the country is located in an area of seismic activity and most of the islands of the archipelago have volcanoes that are still showing signs of unrest. This topography has had an enormous impact on both native Indonesian artists and those who were connected to the country through colonial ties. Many paintings and prints created by Dutch colonisers who did not delve into the culture of the islands depict their characteristic scenery with volcanic cones. However, the activity of Indonesian volcanoes not only influenced the image of the archipelago presented to Europeans through books, prints, and paintings. Volcanoes also had a direct impact on European art, while eruption remains were employed as an artistic medium. This article aims to trace these influences in a multifaceted way, starting with the use of volcanoes as a symbol that moulded the image of Indonesia and ending with their use as artistic material.

Researchers discussing Indonesia have noted that the reverence for mountains and volcanoes has existed in

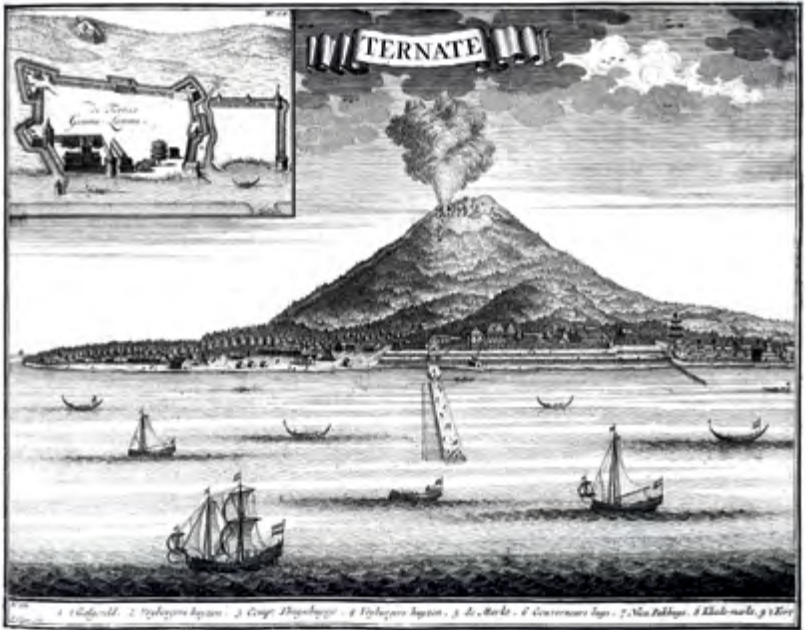
the archipelago's culture since its earliest days (Jakimowicz, 1974: 7, 18). In Java, mountains were considered places for meditation and honouring the ancestors. Hindu temples were being built on their slopes as early as the 7th century. Larger temple complexes, such as Borobudur and Prambanan, were designed in a mountain shape to symbolise Mount Meru and any type of elevated terrain. Importantly, the temples were built of andesite, a local volcanic rock (Green, 2023: 59), which further emphasises their symbolic significance. The Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw holds an andesite relief of the goddess Kali from the Prambanan Temple (Jakimowicz, 1974: 144, fig. 34). Another example of a sacred complex built from the rock is the Besakih Temple in Bali. Erected on the slopes of an active volcano, Gunung Agung, the temple reached its final form in the 14th century. It is not a self-standing entity, but a complex of buildings. Destroyed by a volcanic eruption in 1953, it was rebuilt from ruins. It remains popular to this day and is still an object of worship (Jakimowicz, 1974: 171).

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ANNA BRZEZIŃSKA

## **Before the eruption: volcanoes as a setting and a symbol**

Volcanoes were also used as an identifying and exoticising factor in the depictions of the Dutch East Indies. Widely distributed across Europe, these prints were intended to provide an encyclopaedic view of the Dutch colonial empire. One of the most representative examples is the print used to illustrate François Valentijn's *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*, an overview of the history of the Dutch East India Company and the culture of Southeast Asia featuring a detailed description of the Moluccas, which the scholar had explored firsthand. The illustration was intended to depict Fort Kastela (also known as Fort of St. John the Baptist), built by the Portuguese in 1523. What attracts the beholder's attention are not the buildings or military structures visible in the upper left corner of the image, but the Ternate volcano shown with a plume of smoke above its cone.



François Valentijn, *Ternate in 1720* [in:] idem, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën...*, Dordrecht and Amsterdam 1724–1726, print on paper.

Various types of boats and ships sail across the sea visible in the foreground, some flying the Dutch flag, which further reinforces the image's propaganda message: the East India Company is capable of operating in the area, despite the dangerous circumstances (the presence of an active volcano).

Carl Benjamin Herman von Roschenberg employed a similar trope to represent European domination over the region in a print depicting the grave of Heinrich Agathon van der Bernstein.

Pictured in the foreground is a European-style tombstone. Its main part is a stepped pyramid/obelisk with an additional tall cuboid topped with a laurel wreath. The structure is surrounded by a low balustrade decorated with a sphere-shaped ornament on each corner. Towering over the tombstone is the Ternate volcano, again depicted in an active state, with smoke rising from the vent. Although the tombstone is



TOMBE VAN DE BERNSTEIN OP DE BEGRAAFPLAATS TE TERNATE.

Carl Benjamin Herman von Roschenberg, *Tomb of Heinrich Agathon van der Bernstein on Ternate* [in:] idem, *Reistochten naar de Geelvinkbaai op Nieuw-Guinea in de jaren 1869 en 1870*, Nijhoff 1875, print on paper.

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separated from the volcano by jungle, the distance between the memorial and the dangerous force of nature is relatively short, which may have been one of the reasons why the tomb has not survived to the present day. In this and the previously discussed example, European-style buildings symbolise imperialist domination over the region and the superior position of the colonisers. What is more, the tomb image underscores the fact that the researcher remained in the place where he had lived and worked, and which had ultimately killed him, as he probably died of malaria.

Around 1900, such portrayals of the region led to the emergence of an artistic movement called Beautiful Indies Paintings (van Brakel, 2009: 50). The resultant landscapes, portraits, and genre scenes presented the Dutch colonies in what is now Indonesia in a positive light and in pastel colours. Usually, the canvases depicted exotic nature: the jungle, local

villages, and coffee or tea plantations. The paintings were intended to present the situation in the archipelago to an audience with European tastes, which, unsurprisingly, mainly included Dutch planters and their families in Europe. Even if the painters themselves had other artistic ideas, this was the only way they could earn a living, and works of this type fetched relatively high prices.

One representative of the movement was Abdullah Suriosubroto (1878–1941), a painter whose works can be found in European museums, for instance the Wereld Museum in Amsterdam. One of his most famous pieces, *Mountain in the Priangan*, features the following scene: in the foreground, you can see a river and two wooden houses surrounded by the jungle; in the middle ground, a plantation, probably of tea, and in the background, a mountain typical of the Priangan region, which also has volcanoes. The artist depicted it in greenish colours, as if a mist were hovering over the jungle, blurring all the contours. Suriosubroto employed the popular aerial perspective: behind the mountain, you can see the evening sky painted in delicate, greyish yellows and oranges.

Finally, let us focus on a piece by Czesław Mystkowski, a Polish painter who spent most of his life in what is now Indonesia, first in Java and later in Bali. His canvas, *Palmy na balijskim wybrzeżu* [Palm Trees on the Balinese Coast], probably painted around 1932, features an untypically framed scene with several trees in the foreground, a bay in the middle ground, and a purple and brown volcanic cone in the background. Despite the calm mood created by the pastel colours and palm trees depicted in misty, yellowish shades that evoke associations with exoticism (alluding to the imagery that Europe has been feeding on for centuries), there is a palpable sense of threat, which probably has a lot to do with the volcano in the background. It seems that the palm trees are merely a frame for the dangerous object shown in the background. Also, the way the palms were cropped suggests that they were not meant to be the main subject of the composition. At first glance, the piece fits into the Beautiful Indies Paintings trend. On closer inspection, however, it seems to

convey an antithetical message, revealing the danger behind the paradisiacal landscapes.

## **The eruption: volcanoes as a threat and a subject matter**

Myszkowski was not the only artist to notice that an idyllic landscape with volcanoes in the background might not be an accurate representation of Indonesia, and that idealised or imagined depictions do not, in fact, reflect the atmosphere of the islands. Many other artists and writers of encyclopedias describing the modern world recognised the threat posed by volcanoes and attempted to illustrate their destructive power.

One of the pioneers of this approach was Raden Saleh, whom researchers consider to be the first modern Indonesian painter. Born into an aristocratic Javanese family, he was able to study in Europe thanks to his background. While he mainly trained in Amsterdam, Saleh also studied in Paris under Eugène Delacroix and Théodore Géricault. He was the only artist of Indonesian origin whose works were considered worthy of being displayed at the International Colonial and Export Exhibition in Amsterdam in 1883 alongside the works by colonisers conveying the atmosphere of the empire (Bloembergen, 2009: 38). This was probably because he managed to aptly adapt European conventions of the time to portray his native themes. He painted both genre scenes, which were attractive to European audiences due to their 'orientalising' character, as well as portraits of the Javanese aristocracy and landscapes. Painted in 1841, his only known self-portrait features what the colonisers considered to be the most characteristic element of his homeland's landscape. In the picture, the painter is seen dressed in European attire (a black frock coat and light-coloured trousers), standing in a relaxed pose against a purple curtain. Its bottom right-hand corner is slightly lifted, revealing a wide-angle view of a tropical forest at nightfall in the foreground and a volcano with rivers of lava and a cloud of ash close to the horizon. This

mode of depiction is highly surprising, primarily because the artist was still residing in Europe at the time of painting this self-portrait. In this context, the partial lifting of the curtain appears to be a symbolic gesture. Despite posing in European attire and employing artistic conventions familiar to foreign audiences, Saleh had his native landscapes in mind, and his main goal was to showcase them to people who were not directly familiar with them. (It was common for artists to use various props to convey messages in their self-portraits.) Saleh revisited the theme nearly 25 years later and 10 years after his return to Java. In addition to landscapes with a volcano in the background, Saleh also created two paintings in which Gunung Merapi has pride of place: *Merapi, Eruption by Day* and *Merapi, Eruption by Night*. Both made in 1865, the pieces are currently held by the National Gallery Singapore.

The canvases depict the volcano erupting in two completely different settings. The first shows its cone against a bright sky, painted in shades ranging from light peach to pastel blue, with white streaks of clouds. Enveloped in a brown cloud of smoke, the volcanic mountain with beige swirls of dust and ash on the rocky slopes, contrasts sharply with the light colour palette used to depict the morning or evening sky. Like his predecessors and successors, Saleh placed the jungle in the foreground, yet painted it in subdued colours. The unusual, seemingly frontal lighting further accentuates the volcano. The pendant to the work, *Merapi, Eruption by Night*, is an even more surprising image. As the title suggests, it is a nocturne with a strong expressive charge. The volcano is again the central element of the composition. The mountain is presented from the same perspective, yet this time it stands against a relatively bright night sky with a band of clouds illuminated by the full moon seen on the left side of the painting. The volcano itself is illuminated by orange tongues of lava flowing down its slopes. The imagery alludes to European depictions of the erupting Vesuvius. Saleh, however, did not reduce the eruption of Merapi to a sudden explosion of the entire upper part of the cone. On the contrary, he presented the eruption as an ongoing process, sometimes preceded



Raden Saleh, *Merapi, Eruption by Day*, ca. 1865, oil on canvas, (National Gallery Singapore collections)

by a long period of seismic activity. When the activity leads to disaster, there is no turning back: the mountain turns into a destructive force capable of wiping everything off the face of the earth.

Artists tasked with illustrating publications presenting the power of the Dutch East Indies depicted volcanoes with similar, if not greater, intensity. One such representation is Jacobus van Schley's 1758 *Het Brandende Eiland* [The Burning Island], which may either portray the 1680 eruption of Krakatau (Krawczyk, 2022: 148) or an unknown volcanic eruption, as the title of the print gives no indication of the specific location.

Created in the 18th century, the print features a volcano whose upper part appears to have exploded. Of course, not all eruptions look like that. The entire scene seems to be a figment of the artist's imagination: steering a ship towards a volcano during any seismic activity is obviously not a probable course of action, even considering the state of knowledge at the time. Most likely, the 1680 eruption did not unfold in this manner, but the 1883 eruption did, at least according to subsequent accounts.



Raden Saleh, *Merapi, Eruption by Night*, ca. 1865, oil on canvas.  
(National Gallery Singapore collections)

The volcanic cone exploded on the night of 26/27 August 1883, destroying the island and leading to the formation of a new volcano, Anak, which continues to grow even today. Before the eruption, Krakatau had exhibited signs of prolonged seismic activity, ultimately leading to one of the most devastating natural disasters in human history. The eruption killed 35,000–36,000 people (the exact number is difficult to estimate) and was heard with the force of cannon fire within a radius of approximately 3,500 km, while the sound itself reached the coasts of Australia and Mauritius (Winchester, 2003: 17–18). The ejection of ash and various substances into the stratosphere led to a decrease in the average summer temperature in the Northern Hemisphere by 0.4 degrees Celsius. Furthermore, it caused a phenomenon that proved both interesting and artistically attractive, also to European artists of that time, namely characteristic red sunsets, which remained at their most intense for several months after the event (Walker, 2012; Krawczyk, 2022: 151).



*J. V. Schley, del.*

*LA MONTAGNE BRULANTE .  
HET BRANDENDE EILAND .*

Jacobus van Schley, Pierre de Hondt, *The Burning Island*, 1758,  
Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague, print on paper.

One of the artists who portrayed the phenomenon was William Ascroft. Every evening, he would go out to paint the scene before his eyes in almost abstract forms. He created dozens of landscapes in which he depicted the burning sky using intense oranges, yellows, and reds, contrasting them with the blue and (sometimes) white of the clouds. There is no doubt as to whether the paintings are illustrations of the eruption, as the artist dated his works and sometimes included the locations he painted in. They can therefore definitely be associated with the strange atmospheric phenomenon caused by the volcano.

There is also a theory concerning an artist and an artwork much more recognisable on a European scale: Edvard Munch's *The Scream*. Behind the figure standing on the bridge, you can see a water reservoir and a sunset with strange colours, similar to those in Ascroft's paintings. The hypothesis that the eruption of Krakatoau indirectly led to the creation of one of the most iconic and popular works of art in history has as many supporters as opponents. There is an entry in Munch's diary that may suggest that he once saw such a sunset. However, researchers who question the probability of the theory often point out that 10 years passed between the time when this phenomenon occurred and the final version of *The Scream* was painted (Deshpande, 2018). This does not necessarily refute the claim that the work was inspired by the post-eruption phenomenon: the expressionists' creative method did not involve painting from nature, but processing it through their emotional states. Perhaps something refreshed Munch's memory of the unusual sunset 10 years after he had seen it? Certainly, a definitive explanation is yet to be found.

## **After the eruption: volcanoes as an artistic medium**

Apart from volcanic rock, which was used to build temples in Southeast Asia, probably because it was widely available, relatively easy to carve, and weather-resistant, ashes, including

volcanic ashes, were also employed as an artistic medium (Green, 2023: 82). This, and presumably other, more private experiences, inspired the Indonesian artist Arin Dwihartanto Sunaryo to create the triptych *Volcanic Ash Series #4* in 2012. Ever since the beginning of his artistic explorations, the painter experimented with his technique and method. First, he disposed of his brushes, then oil paints, as in his view they took too long to dry. For some time now, he has been using resin and natural dyes. In the paintings discussed below, he employed volcanic ashes to depict the abstract composition and the emotions he experienced after the Merapi eruption in 2010. The volcano (and, incidentally, his native island) was where he sourced his materials. His method is based on action painting: he creates art without any artistic tools to achieve a powerfully expressive effect by splashing the material all over the board or panel and letting it spread freely. He finishes the piece off by painting with his fingers. The final result is compelling. The piece appeals to the beholder's imagination and suggests that the volcano, or rather its eruption, is not only the artistic material but also the main theme of the painting. On its light surface, you can see splashes of resin mixed with ashes in various shades of grey, making the triptych appear random but somehow harmonious, just like nature, which brought it about.

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The presence of volcanoes in Indonesian art and Indonesia-related art can be considered in several contexts. First and foremost, they were used as a symbol of exoticism and beauty in the colonial works of Dutch artists, who documented their visual impression of the Dutch East Indies in an encyclopaedic manner. Secondly, they were the subject matter explored by the artists who created highly expressive pieces portraying deadly and destructive eruptions. Third, the remains of eruptions or even the volcanic cones themselves were used in the production of art and artefacts.

Throughout centuries, artists have built temples on the slopes of volcanoes, used volcanic rock as a building material, and incorporated volcanic ashes into their artworks. These three modes of employing volcanoes in the visual arts demonstrate the significant role the 'fire mountains' have played in the artistic production of the archipelago and its identity.

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The history of the Poles' exploration of Indonesia, which goes back over a century, is inseparably linked with three pursuits: travelling, collecting, and academic study, which in most cases have been followed with a degree of passion that fascinates outside observers. [...] *Indonesia in Polish Research and Collections* is a compilation of multithematic essays focusing on the academic relations between Poland and Indonesia. It perfectly proves that the two main perspectives it presents – that of museum curators and that of researchers – are essentially intertwined, as they stimulate, complement, and enhance each other, as well as tapping into travel observations, be they one's own or other people's. The articles included in the book reveal many facets of this over a century-old principle.

Professor Dr Habil. Małgorzata Jarmułowicz  
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What is particularly impressive [about the book] is the attention that was paid to the illustrations and visual materials, which are both aesthetic and perfectly corresponding to the subject matter. While it is true that clothes do not make the man, and a book should not be judged by the cover, one cannot turn a blind eye to the visual design of this publication, which is well-thought-out and harmoniously integrated with the written content.

I recommend the book as an educational aid and an interesting read for anybody who wants to learn more about the way the non-European world was perceived in Poland and how it influenced Polish collections, research, and human biographies. It is also a highly recommended read for all those who would like to take up the baton from the older generations and immerse themselves in the sea of Indonesian cultures.

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