

A tale of two museums

Indonesia: The Discovery of the Past

The exhibition *Indonesia: The Discovery of the Past* will be on show in De Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam from 17 December 2005 until 17 April 2006. The result of co-operation between the Museum Nasional of Indonesia (MNI) in Jakarta and the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde (RMV) in Leiden, the exhibition is drawn from the collections of both museums, often referred to as the best Indonesian collections in the world.

Pieter ter Keurs

Since January 2004, staff from both museums have been co-operating in an intensive programme addressing storage facilities, registration, conservation, training programmes, research and, last but not least, the creation of a large-scale exhibition from the collections of both museums. *Indonesia: The Discovery of the Past* enabled the project team to combine training with practical results, providing a successful formula

for further co-operation. The exhibition and catalogue – both addressing the two institutions' collecting histories – are the most visible results thus far.

Many similarities exist between the MNI and RMV collections as they often originate from the same source. Finds from archaeological sites or ethnographic collections were often (not always) divided between the colony and the motherland. This is the central focus of the exhibition as well as of the preparatory research. The division of ethnographic collections became official policy in 1862, but collections were often separated before then. A team of curators from both museums worked for two years to compare documentation, to update information about the MNI collections from old Dutch sources, to develop the storyline, and finally, to write the articles for the catalogue.

The Museum Nasional is the successor of the Museum of the Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen (Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences) founded in 1778 by VOC officer J.C.M. Radermacher. The Dutch Society of Sciences began its activities in 1752; Radermacher proposed a branch in Batavia, which eventually became the independent Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen. The Genootschap – a typical Enlightenment institution – stimulated research in the cultures and nature of the archipelago and collected archaeological and ethnographic material. During the English period in the early 19th century, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles backed the Genootschap's activities, while Dutch authorities under King William I developed in the following decades a keen interest in the cultures and nature of the East Indies. Although there was scientific interest, politics and economics were never far removed.

Indonesia: The Discovery of the Past features some of the most spectacular Hindu-Buddhist statues collected in the early 19th century. The main display concentrates on the Singasari period (end of the 13th century), including six large Singasari statues from the Leiden collection and the Prajnaparamita from the Jakarta collection. Also included are the finds of Muteran, Combre and Puger Wetan. In all cases the artefacts were divided between Leiden and Batavia.

C.B.H. Baron von Rosenberg is a good example of an early collector of ethnographic material who played a major role in producing the first catalogue of the Bataviaasch Genootschap's collections. Other 19th century scientific expeditions include those by the Naturkundige Commissie (Natural Science Committee), the Nederlandsch Aardrijkskundig Genootschap (Dutch Geographical Society) and A.W. Nieuwenhuis' travels through Central Borneo.

Standard for a kris
Tabanan, Bali

Collected by W.O.J. Nieuwenkamp,
RMV 1586-142



Kris
Badung, Bali
Collected during the conquest
of Badung in 1906,
RMV 1602-17



Interest in the archipelago went beyond the scientific. The last decades of the 19th century saw European imperialism at its height, and although the search for ethnographic 'treasures' was never used to justify military involvement, some superb collections were found in the palaces of local rulers, in particular in North Sumatra and on Bali and Lombok. *Indonesia:*

The Discovery of the Past displays objects from these colonial wars from the collections of both museums. The Lombok treasure is a special case. Found after the local ruler was defeated in 1894, it was sent to Batavia; a part of it was later sent to Holland. In 1977 a large part of the Dutch Lombok collection was returned to Indonesia where it is now part of the MNI collection.

The exhibition will display examples from all three parts of the Lombok treasure.

Not all Indonesian rulers were at war with the Dutch; many tried to develop friendly relations by exchanging gifts, whose value depended on the receiver's status. Many colonial officers brought their gifts to the Bataviaasch Genootschap, while others brought some superb objects to Holland after retirement and donated (or sold) them to the museum in Leiden.

Some Dutch developed an interest in 'kunstnijverheid' (applied art) at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. G.P. Rouffaer, who together with H.H. Juynboll wrote a standard work on batik, can be seen as part of this tradition. Another important figure, J.E. Jasper, was a colonial officer who organized *Jaarmarkten* (annual markets), usually in Batavia or Surabaya, where products from all over the country were sold. Jasper worked with the Javanese artist Mas Pirngadi to publish major volumes on *Inlandsche Kunstnijverheid* (Local Arts and Crafts). N. Adriani and A.C. Kruyt of the Protestant Mission in Central Sulawesi documented, collected and stimulated trade in decorated barkcloth from Central Sulawesi. Both the MNI and RMV collections include *sigas* (head cloths) from Adriani and Kruyt with their price tags still attached.

The exhibition and catalogue also focus on collecting in East Indonesia: scientific expeditions such as the military exploration of West New Guinea (A.J. Gooszen), and by missionaries (B.A.G. Vroklage, P. Middelkoop), civil servants (J.G.F. Riedel, G.W.W.C. van Hoëvell) and scholars (P. Wirz). All contributed to the collections of the Bataviaasch Genootschap and the RMV and can be seen in the exhibition in De Nieuwe Kerk. They reveal the story of colonial collecting and of contact between Europeans and local people. They tell a story of appreciation, but also a story of image-building by means of collections. They show images Europeans had of 'the other' and – less explicitly – how 'the other' thought of Europeans. On this last issue, however, much more research is necessary to understand how local people experienced the arrival of the colonizer. <

Pieter ter Keurs
Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden

Wayang kulit figure,
Batara Brama,
Purwadipura,
Central Java

1856, collected by
W.L.H.A. Harloff,
Painted leather, horn,
Length: 59 cm,
RMV 37-729



For further information on this project and upcoming exhibition please visit www.rmv.nl and www.nieuwekerk.nl. The conference *Collecting cultural heritage in Indonesia: ethics, sciences and politics*, co-organized by IIAS, will be held in Amsterdam, 23-25 March 2006. Contact person: Pieter ter Keurs: terkeurs@rmv.nl