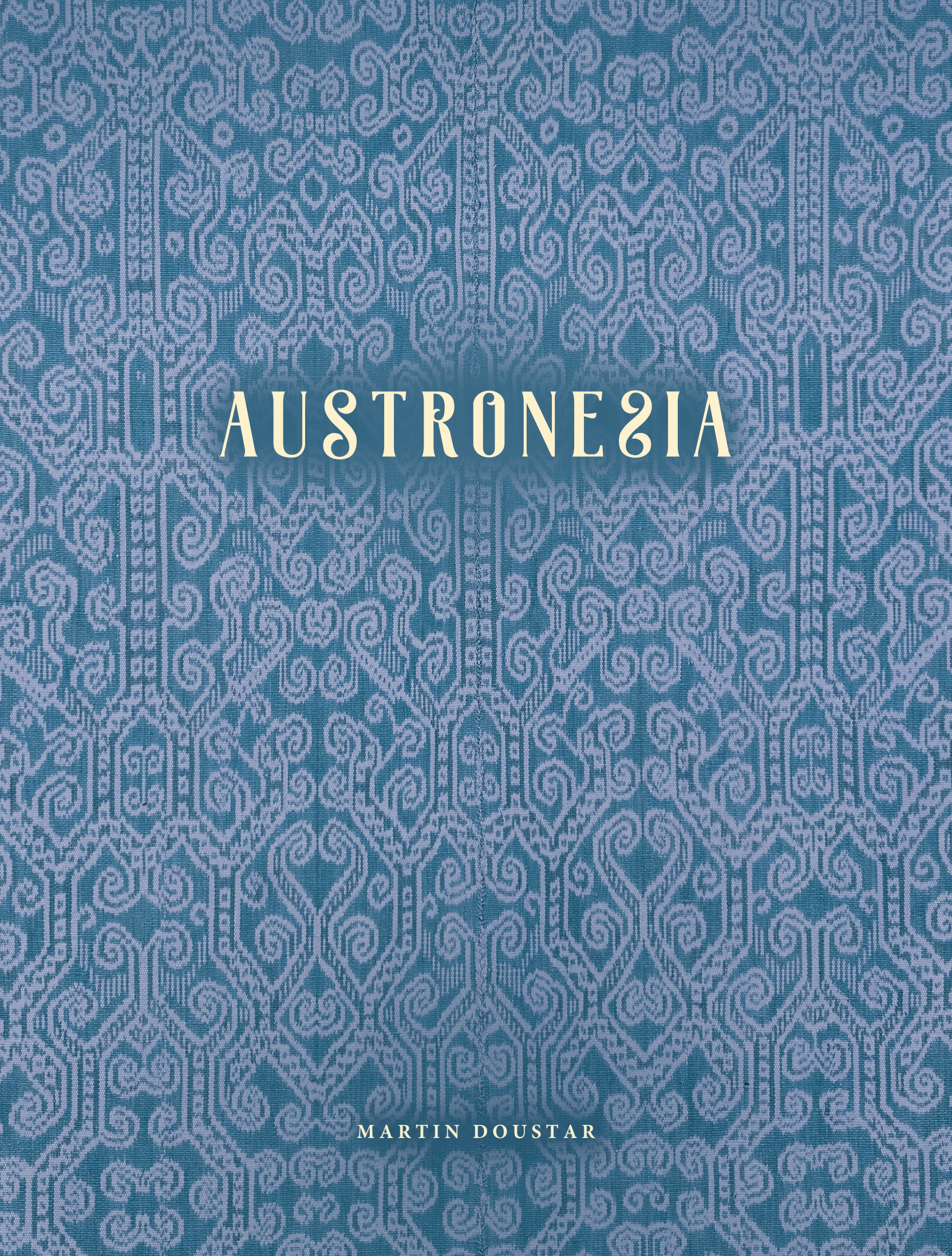
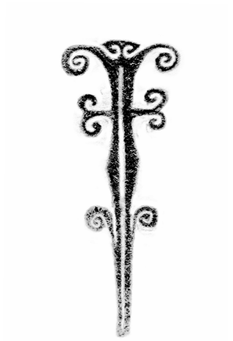

AUSTRONESIA
MARTIN DOUSTAR

AUSTRONESIA

In Pursuit of the Origins



By

MARTIN DOUSTAR

with contributions by Bruce W. Carpenter

For those scholars, linguists, ethnologists, or historiographs; but also for the collectors, the inquisitive minds and travelers interested in the arts and cultures of the Indo-Pacific region, the word «Austronesia» exerts a very peculiar fascination. Like the mythical land of the Atlantis, its power of evocation excites the imagination, rises theories, and engenders a few myths...

After all - aren't Austronesians the great argonauts of the South Seas ?

In 2014, I held my first exhibition along with the publication of a catalogue: «Art of the Bronze Age in Southeast Asia». This was the occasion of an initial attempt - through a selection of sculptures and artefacts from the Dong Son culture - to highlight the connection between certain motifs and iconographies that emerged in Mainland Southeast Asia in the first millenium before our era, and their resurgence - or permanence - at later stages in Maritime Southeast Asia and the islands of the Pacific.

Over the past decade, I continued to explore this theme, following the sea route traced by these Austronesians, while collecting hints of their passage. The present catalogue compiles the eclectic findings I made along this very personal journey; often the result of encounters with passionate collectors, erudites or «passeurs d'art», ferrymen of culture from another type...

The Austronesian topic is vast and complex; thus, this selection cannot pretend to be exhaustive, nor does it give all the answers. It is essentially the reflection of a taste, and the second chapter of an enduring attraction for the distant cultures of the Indo-Pacific region, the beauty, and the diversity of their artistic production.

M. D.

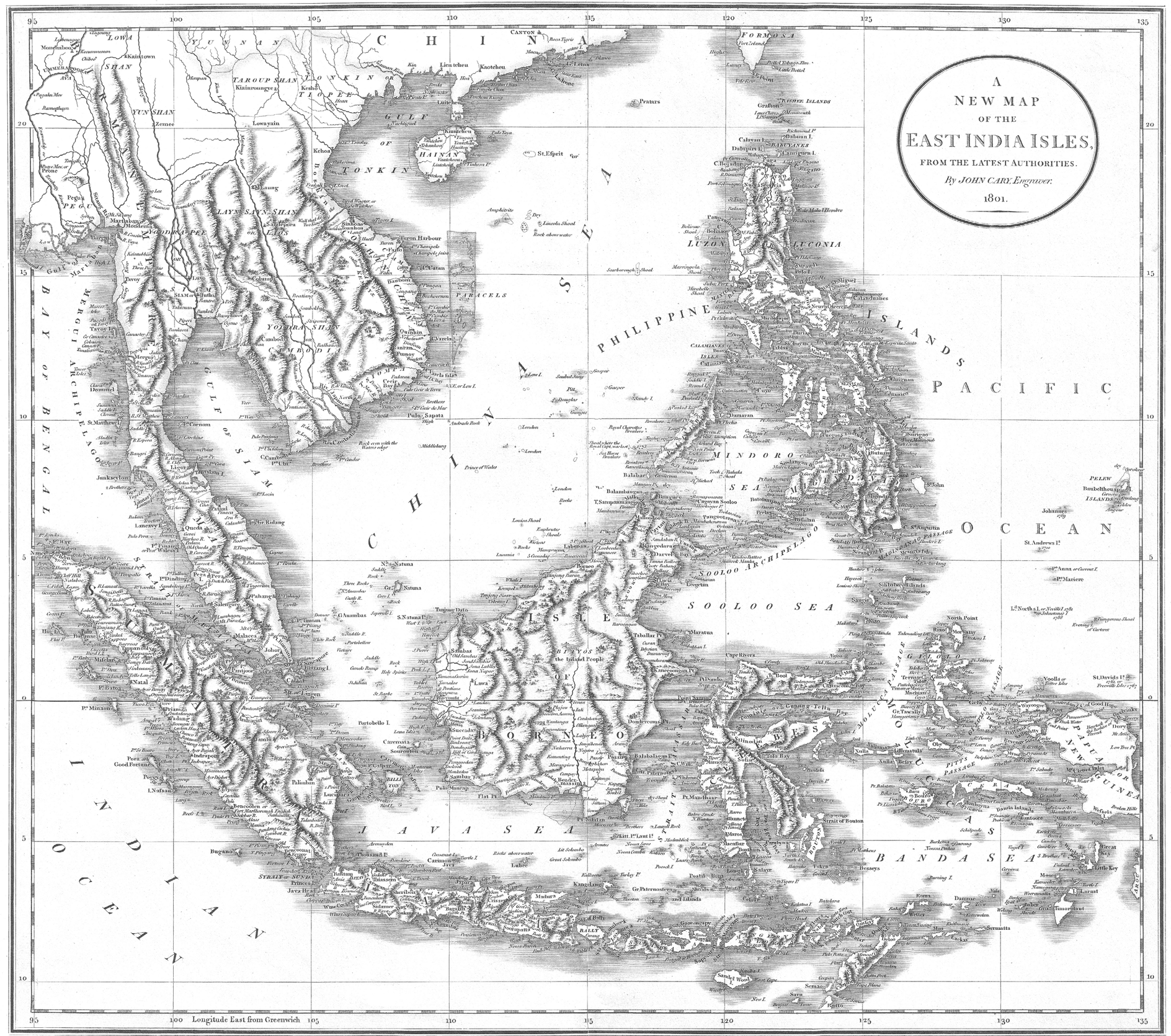
The East Indies refers to a term used in historical narratives of the Age of Exploration. A period largely overlapping with the Age of Sail, approximately from the 15th century to the 17th century in European history, in which seafaring Europeans explored regions across the globe.

At the turn of the 16th century, the extensive overseas explorations - with the Portuguese and the Spanish at the forefront - led to a serie of conquests and discoveries in the Indian Ocean and in Southeast Asia. Through Vasco de Gama's route to India, and the quest to find the so-called «spice islands», Europeans were finally able to reach the Indonesian Archipelago and establish their new maritime trade routes...

However, long before Europeans set foot in Insular Southeast Asia, some other seafarers sailed over huge distances to reach these islands and establish their own trading routes. That happened about 3,000 years before the golden age of «Discovery», and they were the Austronesians.

This superb map covers in detail the entire Southeast Asian region and the Malay Peninsula, as they were known in 1800; including Singapore, as well as the Philippines, Borneo, Sumatra, java, the Celebes, and parts of Papua New Guinea. It is one of the few maps of this region to label the volcanic island of Krakatoa between Java and Sumatra, which famously erupted, obliterating the entire island in 1883. It also shows some off shore details, especially the shoals near Borneo and the Philippines. In Southeast Asia this map notes the kingdoms of Siam (Thailand), Tonkin (North Vietnam), Cochin (South Vietnam), Cambodia, and Pegu (Burma). Includes part of the Island of Formosa as well (Taiwan).

Map of the East Indies (1801), New Universal Atlas, by John Cary, London.



Austronesian Expansion and the «Out of Taiwan» Theory

Austronesia does not appear on any map, it never had a kingdom nor a capital. Yet it is the primeval invisible continent of almost four hundred million people to this day. Widely spoken throughout Insular Southeast Asia, Madagascar, the islands of the Pacific Ocean and by indigenous ethnic minorities in Taiwan and Mainland Southeast Asia, Austronesian languages are the fifth-largest language family by number of speakers. The nations and territories inhabited by Austronesian-speaking peoples are known collectively as Austronesia.

Aside from language, Austronesian peoples widely share cultural characteristics, including such traditions and technologies as headhunting, ancestor worship, tattooing, stilt houses, jade carving, wetland agriculture, and various rock art motifs. They also share domesticated plants and animals that were carried along with the migrations, including rice, breadfruit, Dioscorea yams, taro, paper mulberry, chickens, pigs, and dogs.

The remarkable feats of navigation that Austronesians have accomplished to spread across the Indo-Pacific have led to multiple theories. One of the most influential hypotheses on the spread of Austronesian-speaking peoples was proposed and popularized by the anthropologist Peter Bellwood through the closing decades of the last century. Drawing on linguistic – primarily the great diversity of Austronesian languages spoken by Indigenous Taiwanese peoples – and archaeological evidence, Bellwood hypothesized that Austronesian-speaking peoples in Taiwan began experiencing major population growth around 5,000 years ago which, over the next few millennia, drove migration to island Southeast Asia and Oceania. Proponents of Bellwood's «Out of Taiwan» hypothesis often link this population growth to highly productive wet rice agriculture taking hold in mainland Asia and subsequently Taiwan.

This aerial photo shows extensive rice culture in Southeast Asia. The shape of the paddy fields seems to draw abstract motifs which are reminiscent of patterns appearing during the Bronze Age, notably on objects from the Dong Son culture of Northern Vietnam.

This photo shows a group of Amis natives, one of the Indigenous Austronesian ethnic groups of Taiwan among the descendants of the first seafarers who migrated towards Island Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands.

It is attested that Early Homo sapiens reached the Indonesian archipelago between 60,000 and 45,000 years ago. The majority of Southeast Asian Homo sapiens fossils prior to 8,000 BCE have been identified as being distinct from Austronesians. The remnants of the pre-Austronesian groups of Southeast Asia survive in isolated pockets notably in Malaysia (Semang) and the Philippines (Aeta).
The Austronesian migration did not implied a replacement of earlier populations but rather an incremental admixture and integration within the pre-existing cultures.

The photograph below shows an Austronesian Indigenous inside an outrigger boat with a group of Aeta fishermen with bows and arrows. Modern Aeta populations have significant Austronesian admixture and speak Austronesian languages.

Below: A Negrito Outrigger, Philipppines, ca. 1890.

The broad consensus on the homeland of Austronesian languages, as well as the Neolithic early Austronesian peoples, is accepted to be Taiwan, and the Penghu Islands. They are believed to have descended from ancestral populations in coastal Fujian, in mainland southern China, which are generally referred to as the «proto-Austronesians». From the coast of Fujian these proto-Austronesians are supposed to have migrated to Taiwan between approximately 10,000 BCE - according to certain theories - and as late as 4000 BCE according to radiocarbon dating. They maintained regular contact with the mainland until 1500 BCE, which may explain the divergences about the dates.

As Bellwood explains, from Taiwan the Austronesians then sailed through the region and performed island-hopping; south first, through the Philippines Archipelago around 2000 BCE, reaching the north of Borneo about 1500 BCE. From there, a first branch expanded to western Indonesia and the other one to eastern Indonesia, circa 1000 BCE, where they met earlier inhabitants, the Australo-melanesians and Austroasiatics.
In its later phase, the Austronesian expansion from the east branch sailed eastwards through Papua and the Islands of the Pacific; while the west branch is believed to have left the Sunda Islands in direction of Madagascar, in the second half of the first millenium BCE... The opponents to Bellwood generally suggest a later date, around 500 AD.

In the case of the Indonesian archipelago, scientists believe that there were two major migratory flows. First, Austroasiatic speakers, who arrived around 4,300 - 3,000 BCE, and then the Austronesian speakers. Both these groups may have originally come from a larger common language family, the Austric languages. The language may have been spoken in Southern China before breaking into the two previously mentioned language families. But this is a controversial hypothesis that not all linguists agree with.
However, genome studies show that several ethnic groups in the western Indonesian archipelago have significant Austroasiatic genome markers, despite none of these groups speaking Austroasiatic languages. Thus, this could mean that there was either once a substantial Austroasiatic presence in Island Southeast Asia, or, Austronesian speakers migrated to - and through - the mainland in different waves...

The history and chronology of human settlements in the Indo-Pacific is definitely more complex than it seems, and new studies are constantly challenging our understanding. The cultural material that emerged from the Austronesian world clearly attests of the diversity and richness of its heritage, but also of the syncretism of beliefs of motifs that occured in the course of its expansion.

As Peter Bellwood pointed, Southeast Asia did witness the oldest recorded maritime voyage by humans. The driving force behind the Austronesians' spectacular expansion by sea lies perhaps in the articulation of fertility, headhunting and mortuary rituals that we are to see. Likewise, the Indo-Europeans, with their articulation of fertility, force and religious sovereignty, achieved an unparalleled expansion by land.

Peter Bellwood, (1979). Man's conquest of the Pacific: The prehistory of Southeast Asia and Oceania.
Peter Bellwood, (2007). Prehistory of the Indo-Malaysian Archipelago (3rd, revised ed.). ANU E Press.

Stone relief from the Paiwan people, Taiwan, circa 1900
Institute of Ethnology of the Academia Sinica, Taipei

Up right : Human motif on axe head, Roti Island
Indonesia, ca. 500-300 BC, Museum National Indonesia
Middle: Double human motif, Lapita culture, 1500 BC
Below: Bronze dagger, Dian Kingdom, China, 300 BC

Shield, Mentawai, circa 1900
Photo © Laurent Wargon

The Pejeng Moon, circa 300 BC
Bronze drum (Bali, Indonesia)

ARCHEOLOGY

OF

SOUTHEAST ASIA

1

VESSEL

Ban Chiang culture, Thailand
300 BC - 200 AD

Clay, natural pigment, 22 cm

Collection of Rodney Ellison, Sydney (1924-2019)

Ban Chiang is an archaeological site discovered in 1966 on the Khorat plateau of Udon Thani province in northeast Thailand. The region was occupied from about 3600 BC to 200 AD. Excavations starting from the late 1960s, contributed in large quantities of potteries in a variety of styles, along with numerous bronze and glass ornaments, including armbands, anklets, rings, and necklaces. But the site is especially renowned for its typical earthenware with buff slip painted of swirling motifs in red oxide pigment, of which the above example is a superb testimony in pristine condition.

A similar vase is in the collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore; see R. Maxwell, *«Life, Death & Magic: 2000 Years of Southeast Asian Ancestral Art»*, (National Gallery of Australia, Canberra), 2010, p. 32

2

HEAD

Central Sulawesi, Indonesia
Circa 200 BC (tested by thermoluminescence)

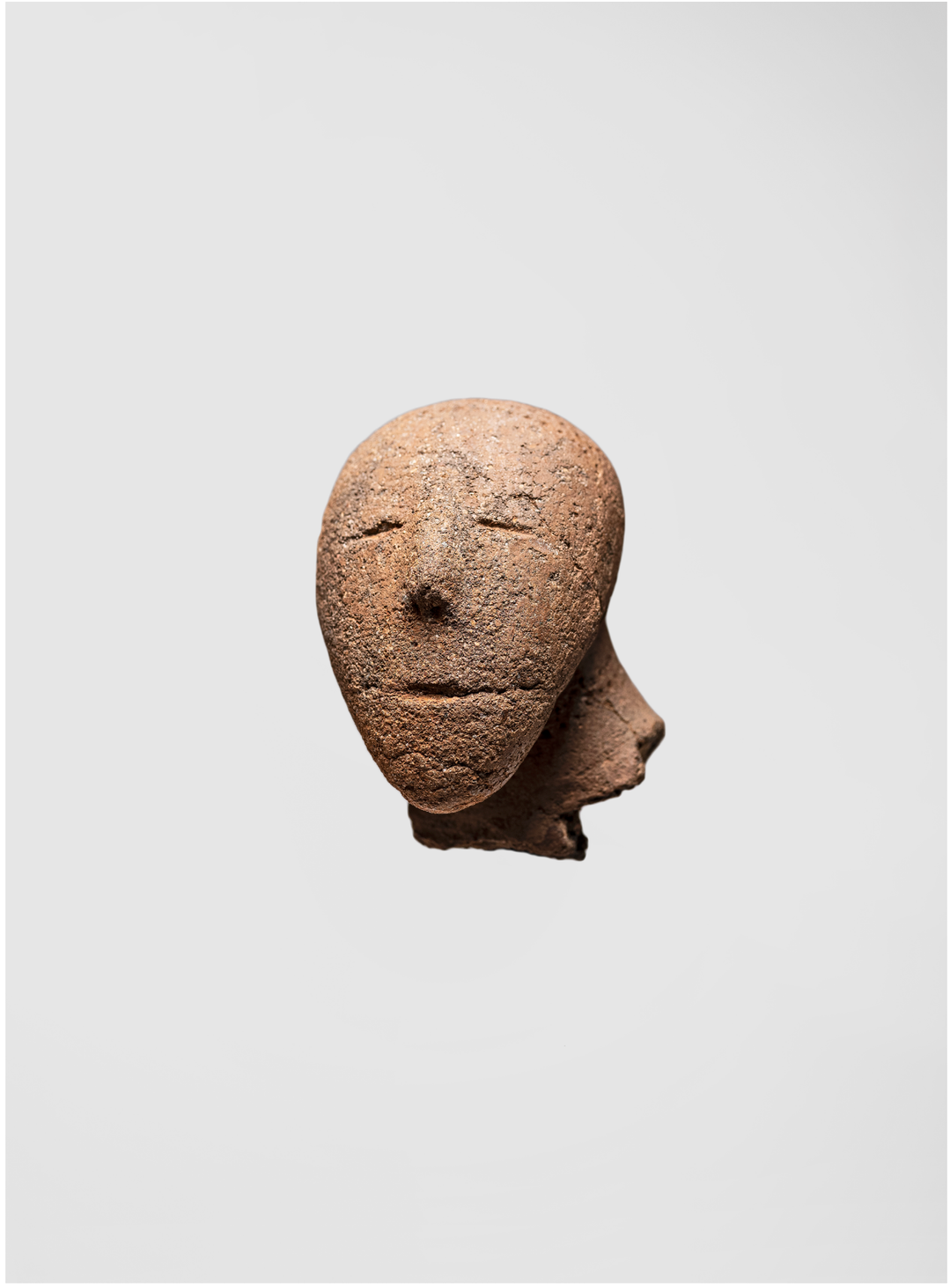
Clay, 7,2 cm

Collection Jean-Marcel Gayraud, Paris

A group of low fired terracotta figures discovered in Bulukumba at the southern tip of the province of Sulawesi Tengah was published by Gallery Bareo in 1990 (see Irene Lim-Reid, "Borneo & Beyond", Gallery Bareo, Singapore, 1990, p. 16-17). Although that group of sculptures differ a bit stylistically from the above example and the two others illustrated below, they share common features and similar purpose. Found in various burial sites scattered throughout the Island of Sulawesi, these objects are generally fragments of funerary jars. The present head, of great sensibility, was probably part of a torso that was used as a stopper. It displays a characteristic "stargazer" shape with punctiform decoration. The eyes and mouth are delicately suggested by incision.

Head
Central Sulawesi, Indonesia
Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (Inv. 70.2001.27.342)

Jar Stopper
Central Sulawesi, Indonesia
Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (Inv. 70.2001.27.403)



2

3

RITUAL AXE

West Java, Indonesia
Early 1st millenium BC

Stone, 40 cm

Samuel Eilenberg collection, New York
With Joe Gerena, New york
Collection Bruno Gay, Paris

In the course of time, a great quantity of axes in a variety of stones and shapes have been found on the island of Java. Carved in jade, agate, or chalcedony for the most precious examples, they often display a perfectly mastered shape and polish. These prestige objects were produced since the Neolithic era, at least from the fifth millenium before Christ. Certain type of axes were used for hunting and farming, but the most beautiful sculptures were destined for ritual events such as wedding dowries, and thereafter as part of burial provisions. The National Museum of Indonesia in Jakarta hold a vast collection compiling the great variety of styles and material.

The present axe belongs to a scarce corpus of quadrangular shouldered axes. It is an exceptionally large example, of great sophistication, and in almost perfect state of preservation despite the extensive calcification of the stone.

4

SPEAR HEADS

Gò Mun culture, Northern Vietnam
1100 - 700 BC

Hardstone, 4 to 14 cm

Collection of Tuyet Nguyet and Stephen Markbreiter, Hong Kong

Named after the archeological site discovered in 1961 in the province of Phú Tho in Northern Vietnam, the Gò Mun culture flourished during the third phase of the Bronze Age, preceding the Dong Son period. This culture was the continuation and development of the previous Dong Dau culture. Stone tool production decreased, while the production of bronze tools increased. The latter category accounting for over half of the total number of tools and weapons excavated, mostly arrows, spears, hooks, knives, and spear heads.

Gò Mun material culture is extremely rare. This exceptional collection of 15 stone artifacts comprising spear heads, arrow heads and a pair of slit rings, come from the collection of Tuyet Nguyet (1934-2020) and Stephen Markbreiter (1921-2014). Pioneers in the Asian art world, the couple were the founders and publishers of *Arts of Asia*, the leading magazine for connoisseurs and collectors of Asian art and antiques.

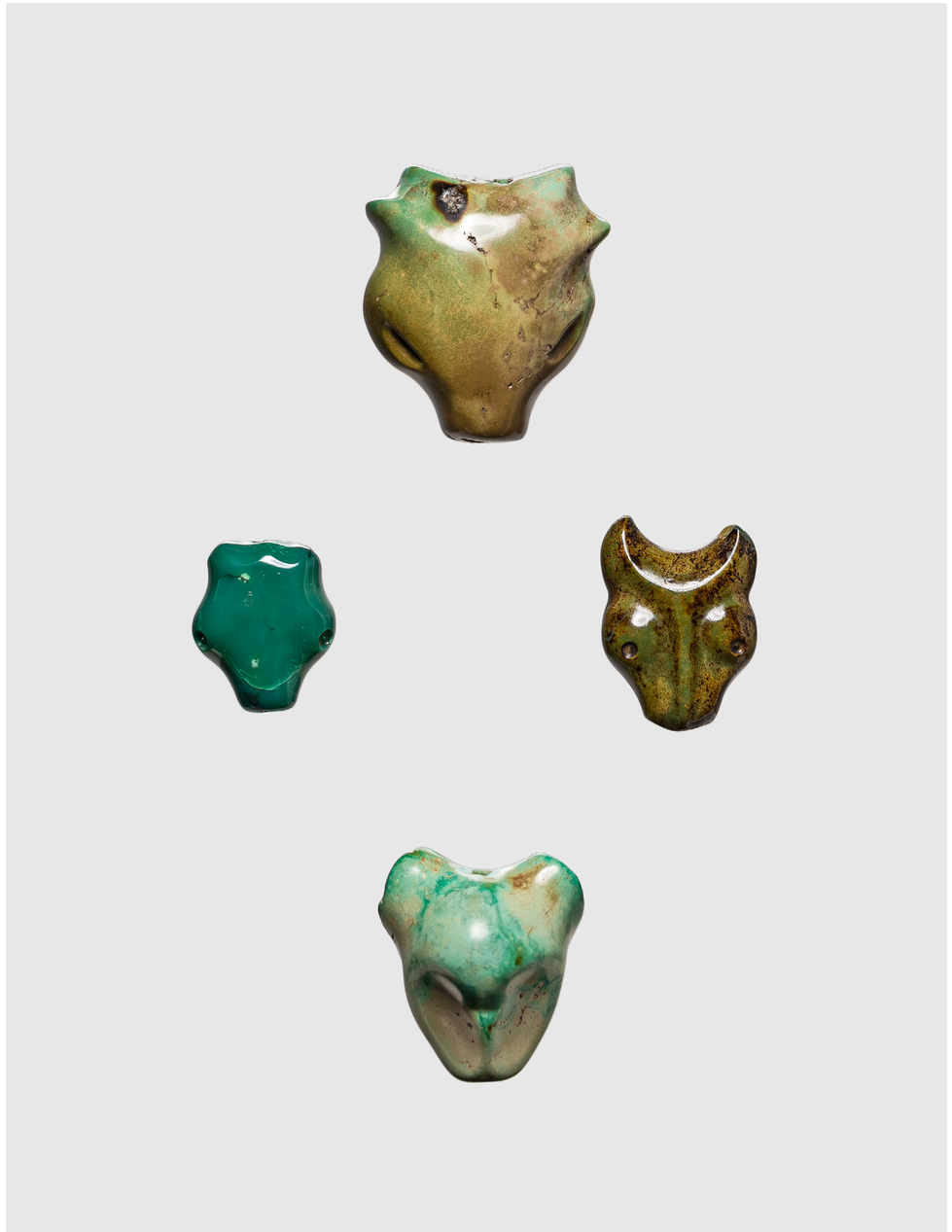
5 . 6

BANGLES

Late Neolithic, Northern Thailand
1500 - 1000 BC

Shell (Tridacna Gigas) and stone; 13,4 and 15,5 cm

With Galerie Davide Manfredi, Paris



7 . 8

AMULETS

Dian Kingdom, Southern China
300 -100 BC

Jade, from 4,3 to 2,2 cm

Acquired in Kong Kong circa 1980-1990
Collection Acher Eskenasy, Paris

9

TATTOED FIGURE

Yue or Wu Kingdom, Spring and Autumn Period, China
800 - 400 BC

Bronze, 10,2 cm

Acquired in Hong Kong in 1990
Private collection, Paris

The State Museum of Zhejiang province in Hangzhou hold in their collection a bronze figure of a kneeling tribesman with elaborate tattoos covering his body (below) unearthed in the region of Yue. The people of the independant states of Wu and Yue were cultural others to the Zhou states. These Austronesian speakers lived in the regions down to their conquest and sinification circa 240 BC.

BELT HOOK

Han Dynasty, China
Circa 200 BC - 200 AD

Bronze, stone inlays, 10,3 cm

Acquired in Hong Kong circa 1980-1990
Private collection, Paris

The earliest archaeological evidence of belt hooks dates to the 7th century BCE, in East Asia. Texts from Warring States period China claim that the belt hook originates from Central Asian nomads. The equestrian tradition, initially foreign to China, was tightly related to wearing belted pants, thus belt hooks became one of the features of «barbaric» exoticism. As such, the hooks became an object of aesthetic contemplation. The notorious scholar Qu Yuan (c. 340-278 BCE) for instance, compares beautiful women to the belt hooks of Xianbei nomadic people inhabiting the steppes of eastern Mongolia.

Belt hooks and buckles were used in ancient China to fasten elaborate belts around the loose-fitting embroidered silk robes of the time. They were traditionally made of bronze - iron and jade examples are also known - sometimes gilded or silvered, and inlaid with turquoise, malachite or nephrite. A great variety of styles and iconographies have developed in the course of the first millenium BCE. The present example displays several intricated animals: a monkey suspended from a branch, and a tortoise entwined together with a snake. This latter is the symbol of the «Black Tortoise» representing the North Star, one of the four mythological creatures appearing among the Chinese constellations along the ecliptic, and viewed as the guardians of the four cardinal directions. It was also known as «Black Warrior» in Ancient China. The motif illustrates the asterism (group of stars that form a pattern in the night sky) that forms the Big Dipper in the Great Bear constellation.

The influence of early chinese art on the cultures and aesthetics of Insular Southeast Asia, and in particular of Kayanic Dayak art, is clearly evident through the present object.

11

DAGGER-AXE

Eastern Zhou Period, Sichuan, China
Circa 500 - 400 BC

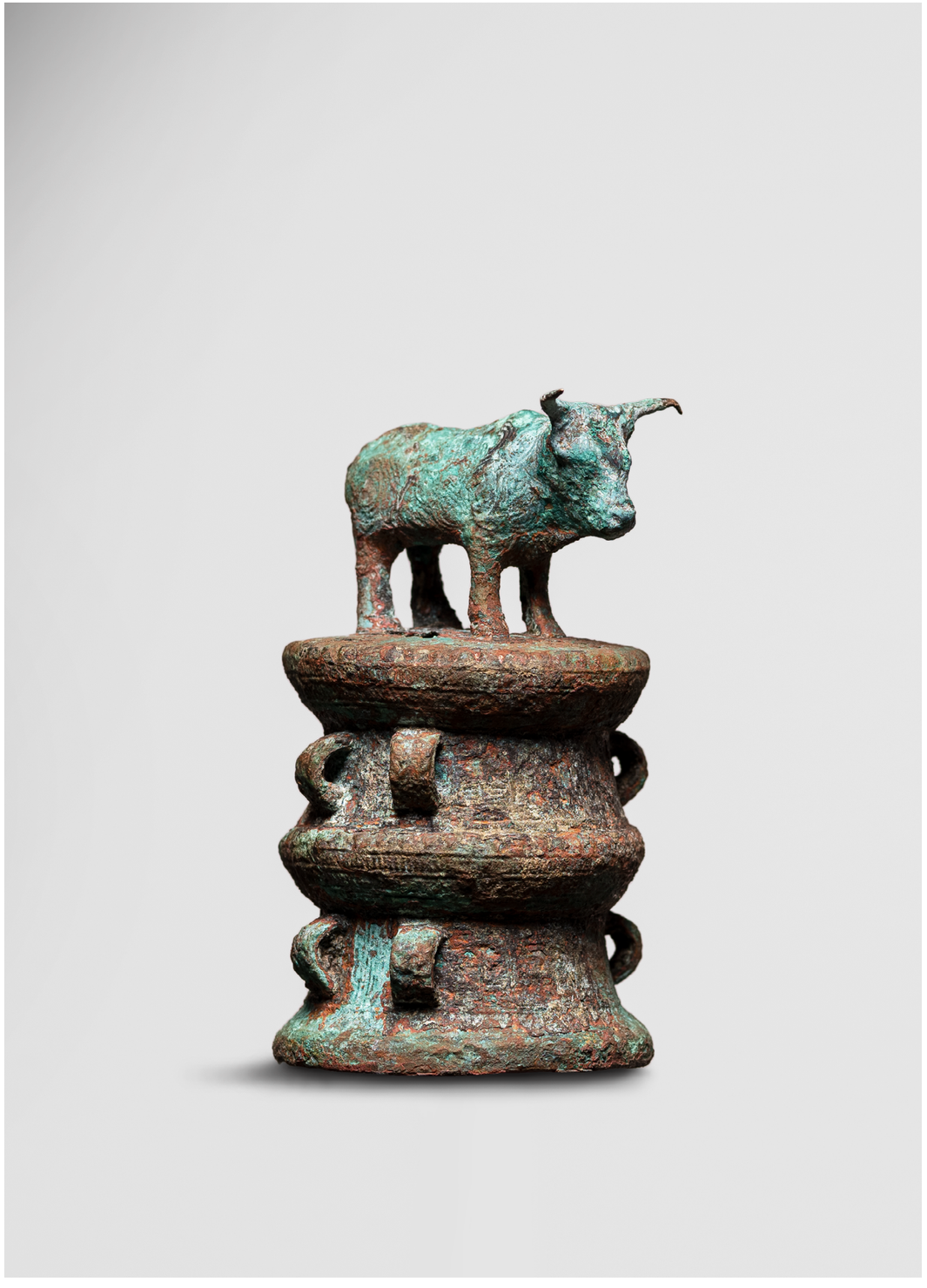
Bronze, 22,4 cm

Acquired in Hong Kong circa 1980
Private collectiion, Venice

The shape of this dagger-axe, or halberd, should be linked to an earlier distinctive bronze weapon type of willow-leaf-shaped blades dating from the late second millenium to the 10th century BCE, respectively the late Shang and Western Zhou periods in ancient China. Their full name is a modern definition given by Chinese archaelogists based on its distinctive morphology, the slender narrow blade resembling a willow leaf. A raised spine is usually featured on the blade and tapers to a sharp pointed end. A wooden shaft or shorter hilt would generally be attached and fastened to the perforated grip cast integrally with the slender blade.

The present example is of an uncommon style, simply decorated with a human face on each side of the blade. What clearly makes the beauty of the blade is its superb turquoise patina, thicker and blueish on one side, crusty green on reverse.

Yan Sun, «A Divergent Life History of Bronze Willow-Leaf-Shaped Swords of Western Zhou China from the Eleventh to the Tenth Century BCE» in «Memory and Agency in Ancient China: Shaping the Life History of Objects» chapter V, Cambridge University Press (2018), p. 120



LID ORNAMENT

Dian Kingdom, Southwestern China
Circa 300 - 100 BC

Bronze, 13 cm

Private collection, Italy

This rare and mysterious bronze object consisting of a bull standing on a double drum in miniature is known by at least two other examples, of exactly the same size. One was published by Boisgirard & Associés in their catalogue of November 27th, 2009, under the number 31; and the second example belonged to Galerie Davide Manfredi in Paris.
The iconography represented here clearly identifies an origin in the Yunnan province, in southwestern China, and the period during which the Dian people established their kingdom in that region, around the Dian Lake.
The Dian were sophisticated metal workers, casting both bronze and iron, using both the mould method and the lost wax technic. The Dian elite burials revealed an extraordinary array of bronze objects, including richly decorated weaponry, ornaments, or vessels, often depicting scenes of the daily life, like hunting, farming or weaving. Horses, felines and oxens particulary are heavily featured in Dian art. The bull is the main totemic animal in most Southeast Asian cultures, essential in agriculture, and also a symbol of the clan. Bronze drums also seem to play a key role for the Dian, who employed them to communicate during battles, and buried them along their elite members. The top of these drums were thereafter removed and replaced by a bronze lid decorated with complex scenes depicting miniature structures, and figurines engaged in daily life activities related to leisure, warfare or agriculture. On some of these lids, we sometimes find in their center a smaller decorative structure composed of little drums stacked on each other, and surmounted by a figure or a bull like in the present case. Similar bronze ornaments were also found on the lids of large funerary vessels containing cowrie shells.

13

CEREMONIAL AXE

North Sumatra, Indonesia
Circa 500 BC - 300 AD

Bronze, 49 cm

Private collection, Belgium

Reportedly discovered in the northern part of the island of Sumatra, this exceptional bronze axe is quite unique in the vast corpus of axes and weapons from Southeast Asian Bronze Age. Considering its great sophistication we can assume it was intented exclusively for ceremonial rites of utter importance, perhaps as a percussive instrument, or a recipient.

Prior further consideration it must be noted that the upper part of this object - forming a sort of headdress, or «horns» - has been restored, possibly in ancient times. Therefore it is unclear if the current state of this part of the sculpture reflects its original appearance.

What strikes first when looking at this object is the resemblance of the head, on top of the long shaft, with a *Singa* motif - the mythological creature emblematic of Batak art - whose likeness protects individuals, homes, and communities from malevolent supernatural forces. The name *Singa* derives from the Sanskrit word meaning lion; but for the Batak Toba people it rather takes the shape of a supernatural composite figure between a felid and a water buffalo. Among the defining features of the *Singa* which also appear on this bronze are the large round eye sockets, and a human-like nose with prominent nostrils, and a muzzle that reminds the water buffalo. On the back of the head two little ear-hooks were probably used to attach some sort of ornaments. The body of the piece, consisting of a thick shaft, is entirely decorated with typical dongsonian patterns of single spirals.

Several smaller figurative bronze axes from Indonesia are known, notably in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (acc. n° 2000.284.38; 2001.433.401). But the parallel with another major bronze discovered in Sulawesi, seems more interesting, in reference to the massive «Ceremonial Object in the Shape of an Ax» (acc. n° 1993.525) used as a percussion instrument to be suspended and struck.

14

15

SPATULAS

Eastern Java, Indonesia
Circa 500 BC - 300 AD

Bronze, 17 cm and 19,3 cm

Private collection, Indonesia
Private collection, Italy

These two zoomorphic bronzes are lime spatulas in the shape of a bovine and a crocodile. The slender bodies of the stylized animals forming the handles, and the tails extending into blades. The ox is an emblematic animal in Southeast Asian cultures from the mainland, such as the Dian people for instance, and it is profusely attested in Dong Son iconography as well. On the other end, the crocodile is an important totemic creature for the insular and coastal populations, considered as a symbol of the underworld and linked to the ancestors and the creative myths. In terms of style, this second spatula can be related to a larger bronze object in shape of a crocodile, also from Eastern Java, which was published in «Dong Son - The Image of man and animal in early Southeast Asia», M. Woerner (2015), p. 34-37.

Two comparable zoomorphic spatulas from Samuel Eilenberg's collection are now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Acc. num. 2001.433.550 and 2001.433.551).

16 - 17

FIGURINES

Eastern Java, Indonesia
Circa 200 BC - 200 AD

Bronze, 15,6 cm and 14 cm

Private collection, Italy

These rare figurative bronzes - sometimes zoomorphic - are usually described as lime spatulas. A little hook on the back of some of them suggests they were probably also worn as pendants. Most examples were discovered in the province of Eastern Java.
It appears that the majority of these figurines share similar features, long slender body with male attributes, large smiling face with bulging eyes, and webbed extremities which give them a «frogman» appearance. A common iconography widespread in the whole Southeast Asian region during the Bronze Age period.

In this little corpus, the right figure above clearly stands out as one of the most refined in existence. The elegant shape of the body, slightly curved at the pelvis, is outlined with a delicate zig-zag pattern on the torso, like a snake or a lizard skin. The figure wears an unusual flat cap topped with a eight-pointed sun/star motif.

A comparable anthropomorphic spatula was notably found in Lumajang, it is now in the collections of the Ashmolean Museum (EA1997.184). Another very similar patula previously in the collection of Samuel Eilenberg is in the Metropolitan Museum of New York (2001.433.553).

THE "SCHULMANN" VENUS

Peri-Dongsonian, Mainland Southeast Asia
Circa 500 - 200 BC

Bronze, 29,5 cm

With Peng Seng, Bangkok
Acquired from the above by Josette Schulmann, 4 september 1975
Collection Josette and Théo Schulmann, Paris

This enigmatic Venus who looks like no other goddess from ancient times, emerged from a land we know little about. Her knees slightly bented and hands resting on the hips, she seems in motion, dancing gently for an hypothetical ceremonial of fertility. Her slender body, in its nudity, is merely underlined: a modest belt and bronze armlets. Yet, the figure emanates an aristocratic elegance; and a certain modernity, somehow reminiscent of Alberto Giacometti's widely acclaimed sculptures of walking figures...

This exceptional bronze figure is certainly one of the most important early representation of human figures from Southeast Asia. It belongs to a reduced corpus of extremely rare large standing figures related to the Dong Son culture and the peripherical development of bronze casting throughout mainland asia (Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia) and Indonesia. However, the size, quality and style of the present figure sets it apart from the rest of the corpus. The fact it represents a female figure is also unique to our knowledge, with the exception of the two famous Pre-Classic figures found in Indonesia and now in the collections of the National Gallery of Australia and the Honolulu Academy of Arts.
This latter example, which was collected on the upper Wahau River in East Kalimantan, shares a few similarities with our figure. The heads of both figures have a comparable rounded-shape with thin braids slicked back, prominent almond eyes and ears, and a receding pointed chin. Their large feets have a distinctive webbed appearance, common to many figurative bronzes from Southeast Asian Bronze Age period.
The present example displays another unique trait: the figure seems to have a labret accross his mouth, OR, it is actually a tattoo.
Among the only Southeast Asian peoples to practice a similar facial tattooing for women are the Atayal from Taiwan, an Austronesian Indigenous group who are believed to have migrated from Mainland Southeast Asia. Recent genetic studies have actually shown specific connections with the people of Thailand... End of the story ?

No, the most striking element is to be found on the back of the figure, with a serie of four large heart-shaped motifs in relief, depicting additional tattoos, or scarifications. These motifs, similar to those found on bronze drums from Mainland Southeast Asia are widespread in the whole indo-pacific region, from Taiwan to Borneo until the northern shores of Papua New Guinea. They represent fern shouts, a generic symbol of fertility in the Austronesian cosmogony and the main, primeval, iconographical motif.

19

PAIR OF BRACELETS

Peri-Dongsonian, Northeastern Thailand
Circa 500 BC - 200 BC

Bronze, approx. 13 cm diameter

With Galerie Patrick Dupont, Brussels

The lost-wax process allowed during the Bronze Age period the creation and duplication in Southeast Asia of numerous ornaments and jewelry. In this vast corpus of artefacts the group of bronze bracelets displaying stylized elephants in circle - like this very well preserved pair - is particulary rare and spectacular. Several examples are known in private hands and institutions, as a single bracelet, or more rarely, in pairs.

Martin Doustar, «*Art of the Bronze Age in Southeast Asia*», Brussels, 2014, fig. 36
Michael Woerner, «*Dong Son-The Image of Man and Animal in Early Southeast Asia*», 2015, p. 14-15

20

RITUAL AXE

Dong Son culture, Northern Vietnam
Circa 400 - 200 BC

Bronze, 15,6 cm

Fred S. Clark collection, Worthing
Robert Stonard collection, Surrey
With Adam Prout, London

Unlike the common perception, the Dong Son people did not belonged to the Austronesian-speaking peoples but to the Austroasiatic and Tai-language groups. However, their influence in the Austronesian world and in Insular Southeast Asia in particular was extremely important.

Pediform and crescent-shaped axes are one of the important corpus of bronzes from Dong Son culture. The example illustrated above is a superb ritualistic axe, of large size, decorated on both sides with plumed warriors in kneeling position inside a boat. A smaller figure in front of the bow seems to hold a large bird. The feathers of the bird of paradise were highly favored by Dong Son elites, who would launch long maritime expeditions to the Moluccas and Papua New Guinea to collect them. The scenes represented on these axes are certainly an illustration of this tradition.

A comparable example is in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia, see Robyn Maxwell, «*Life, Death & Magic: 2000 Years of Southeast Asian Ancestral Art*», (National Gallery of Australia, Canberra), 2010, p. 27.

21

CEREMONIAL HALBERD

Eastern Java, Indonesia
Circa 500 BC- 300 AD

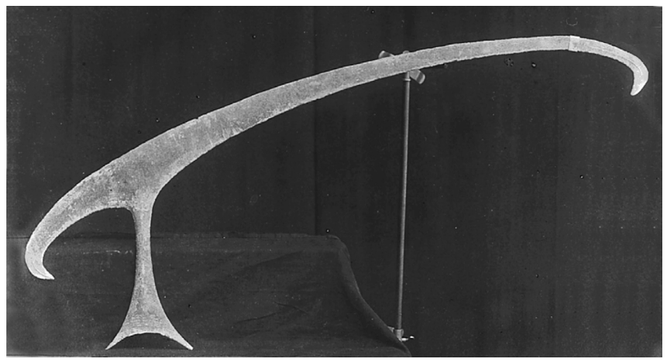
Bronze, 36 cm long

Private collection, The Netherlands (acquired in 1968)
Private collection, Singapore (since 2009)
Michael Woerner Oriental Art, Bangkok

Among the variety of bronze axes discovered across Indonesia, numerous swallow-tail socketed axes were found in Java, including those with a curved blade - called *Candrasa* - found in many sizes including miniatures. Illustrations of these axes carried by plumed warriors appears on various bronze objects across the archipelago and in northern Vietnam. These archaeological findings made in various locations accross the Indonesian Archipelago indicate a thriving inter-island trade around the end of the first millennium AD.

By the perfection of its shape and its remarkable decoration including a human face, the present *Candrasa* is clearly a superlative example, in pristine state of conservation.

A comparable example is in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia, see Robyn Maxwell, «*Life, Death & Magic: 2000 Years of Southeast Asian Ancestral Art*», (National Gallery of Australia, Canberra), 2010, p. 27. Another example is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (n° 2001.433.472).



A very large *candrasa* discovered in 1912 in Cihonje, Western Java; National Museum of Indonesia, Jakarta (inv. n°853c)

22

CEREMONIAL HALBERD

Eastern Java, Indonesia
Circa 300 BC - 200 AD

Bronze, 56 cm

Private collection, New York

Ceremonial bronze axes were produced in the Indonesian archipelago since the middle of the first millenium BCE. Archaeological sites in Java, Bali, Sulawesi, and even around Lake Sentani in Papua, have shown that bronze axes were at the center of an extensive trade network connected to the Dong Son culture of Northern Vietnam.

Ceremonial axes continued to be produced during the pre-Classic era, in the first millenium AD. During this period, bronze-casting *ateliers* flourished, especially in Java and Bali. These workshops were probably instrumental in the manufacture of a great variety of ceremonial axes.

This exceptional halberd belongs to a more limited corpus of asymmetrical hafted axes, in comparision to the crescent-type illustrated previously in this catalogue (cat. n°21). However, it is by far the most remarkable example of its category. The sophistication and elegance of the blade, with its sickle shape and reversed ridge are absolutely unique, and unmatched. We don't know much about the exact purpose of this halberd, but the conceptual - as well as technical - *tour de force* required for its fabrication suggest it was made for a high-rank persona, and certainly reserved for important ceremonials.

A smaller asymmetrical axe previously in the legendary collection of Samuel Eilenberg is now on display in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (acc. n° 2001.433.476).

HAND BELL

Majapahit Kingdom, Eastern Java, Indonesia
Circa 1300 - 1400

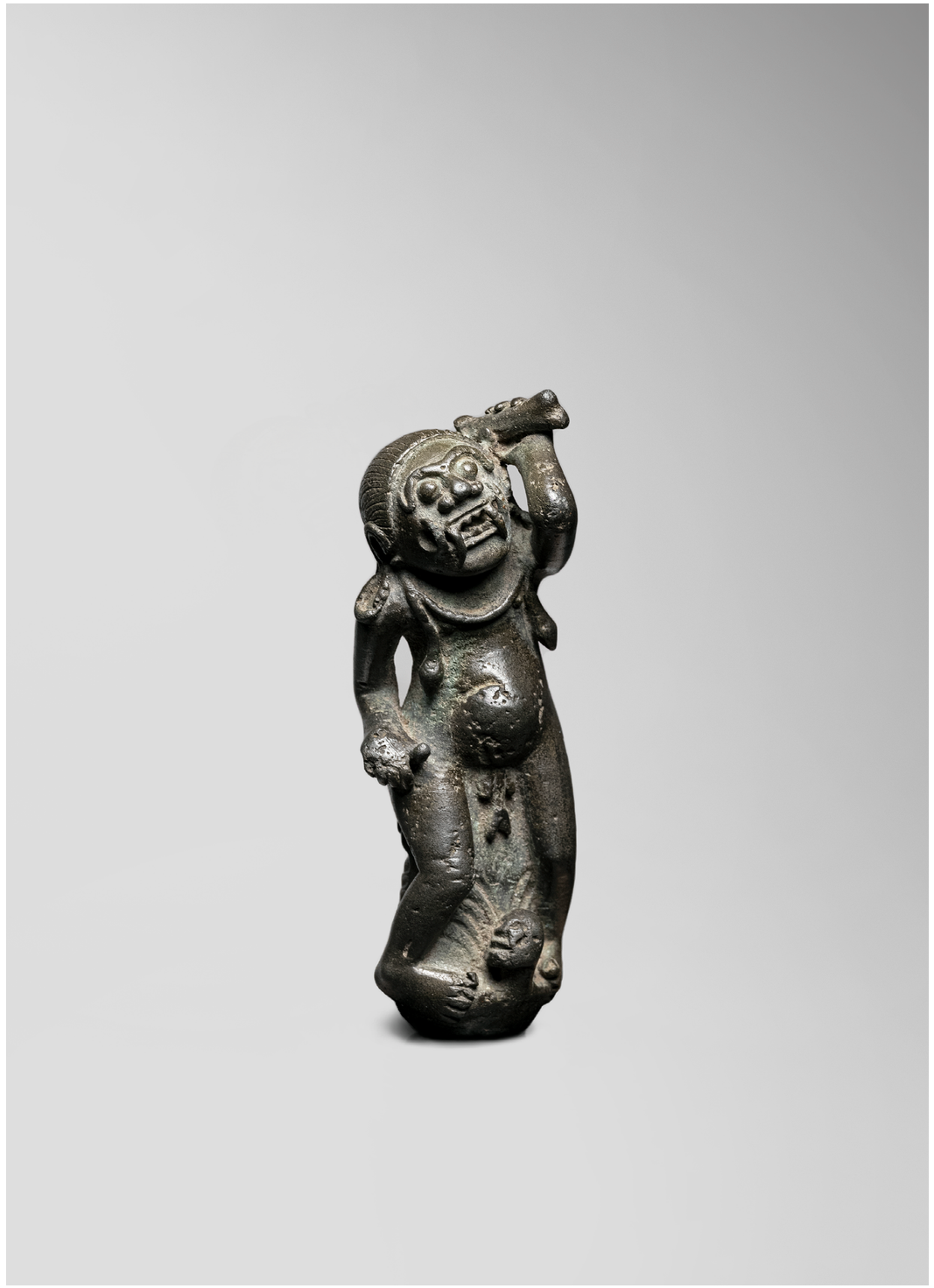
Bronze, 16,5 cm

Private collection, Italy

Majapahit was a Javanese Hindu kingdom based on the Island of Java, and considered to be one of the greatest and most powerful empires in the history of Indonesia and Southeast Asia. It existed from 1293 to circa 1527 and reached its peak of glory during the era of Hayam Wuruk, whose reign from 1350 to 1389 was marked by conquests that extended throughout Southeast Asia, with 98 tributaries stretching from Sumatra to New Guinea, including present-day Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, southern Thailand, East Timor, and southwestern Philippines.

Small bronze hand bells seem to have been produced in number before and during the Majapahit period, and in a great variety of styles: from typical Hindu-Buddhistic iconography depicting zoomorphic subjects like sacred bulls or mythological creatures like dragons, to more archaic and figurative representations. The present example belongs to this smaller corpus and displays a female figure in squatting position, her hands joined above the knees seem to hold an object. The bell is covered with a thick crust of beautiful blue-green patina.

A comparable hand bell previously in the collection of Samuel Eilenberg is now on display in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Accession number 1987.142.237).



HANDLE

Eastern Java, Indonesia
Circa 1000 - 1300

Bronze, 11 cm

Private collection, Italy

This is probably an early bronze version of a kris hilt, depicting a typical Hinduist demon - an auspicious motif for a dagger, as one of his roles is to ward off evil and offer protection to the keeper of the weapon. The history of this emblematic Indonesian weapon goes back to the Hindu-Buddhistic Mataram Kingdom, in Central Java, which flourished between the 8th and the 11th centuries. The earliest and most famous renderings of a kris appear on the bas-reliefs of Borobudur, circa 825 AD.
This particular handle dates from one of the next dynastic periods, possibly the beginning of the Majapahit, circa 1300 AD, before the spread of Islam.

ARCHAIC WOOD SCULPTURES OF BORNEO

An Ode to an Enigmatic Group of Sculptural Objects from West Borneo

In the past, the discovery of the art of a lost or unknown people - such as Heinrich Schliemann's uncovering of Troy in 1871 - was greeted with great fanfare. Sadly, in today's overexploited world, this is a rare, if not miraculous, occurrence. While grand finds may be uncommon in our post-industrial technological world, those of smaller scale carrying great implications still exist. This then is the tale of a small but important group of sculptural objects from West Borneo. But first, we digress:

The islands of Indonesia have long been shrouded by darkness and mystery. None more so than Borneo. The third largest island in the world, sensationalized tales of bloodthirsty barbarian headhunters and Joseph Conrad's «Lord Jim» (1900) about the island haunted and electrified the imagination of «civilized» European minds as they smoked cigars and sipped cognac in Europe's plush parlors.

While the once dense and impenetrable forests of our lurid imaginations have been largely felled for export and the closest thing to headhunting to have occurred since it was outlawed in the 19th century has been a bloody and tragic sectarian outbreak in 1997, the recent dating of cave paintings between 38-40,000 years of age has demonstrated that this great island is still full of secrets. (see *Nature* journal 564)
News that Indonesia was now a member of an exclusive club of nations with the earliest art made by humans flashed around the world for one brief moment. While many went 'ooh and aah', a number of scholars lurking in the woodwork were scared out of their wits because the early dating did not fit into the carefully constructed and seemingly unassailable mode they had learned by heart. The matter was further complicated by the dating of equally ancient paintings in Sulawesi's Maros Cave. Not surprisingly many immediately questioned the accuracy of the results and others simply ignored them and carried on as before.

For others it was *déjà vu*. A parallel situation had been raging for over a decade concerning radiocarbon tests performed on wooden tribal sculpture from the upper basin of Mahakam River in East Borneo. At the time the tests were made, nobody doubted that the statues were old and authentic but results of one thousand years and more did bring shock. It also disproved the prejudiced platitude that wood could never survive more than a century in a damp tropical climate, a fact well known around the world but conveniently forgotten. The reaction was predictable. As if a precursor of today's increasing anti-scientific bias, the worst cast aspersion on the accuracy of a well-proven test that been used and been employed by scientists for more than sixty years.

Aubert, M., Setiawan, P., Oktaviana, et al. «Palaeolithic cave art in Borneo». Nature 564, 254–257 (2018).

Back to the wondrous group of objects presented here, we are looking at a potentially groundbreaking style of early sculpture that was previously unrecognized. Its geographic origin is a region straddling the border of Sarawak and Indonesian West Borneo. Hewn from ironwood with a dark patina resulting from exposure to riverine silt and earth, the iconography and function of these pieces are enigmatic. While often fragments and heavily worn, many display an otherworldly presence or ferocious expression, presumably to ward off malevolent spirits. Another shared characteristic is extreme age, more than 2000 years, significantly older than the sculpture of East Borneo. This was because little major sculpture had been found in West Borneo before the appearance of a series of unusual statues with hollow backs a few years prior, but, while related, that is an altogether different story. One thing led to another and the number of pieces fitting the criteria expanded over time suggesting none were in fact isolated finds. Also, as had occurred in East Kalimantan, the pieces included objects acquired years before with no idea of their approximate age. Some remembered that thousand-year-old wooden objects had been tested by Tom Harrison, director of the Sarawak Museum in Kuching, already in the 1950s when carbon 14 was in its infancy still.

So who then made these things, we ask? According to the prevailing hypothesis, the paintings and sculptures are the work of ancestors of the Dayak, an Austronesian people, who had migrated and settled Insular Southeast Asia some 3000 years earlier, but oh yes, that date does not work very well. The next best candidate, the Papua-Aborigine races, the first Homo Sapiens to arrive in the region some 60,000 years before, was, likewise, awkward for many. Best known for the tribal cultures of New Guinea and Australia, while the legacy and genes of the Papua-Aborigines was not apparent in most of the archipelago, it still lingered on receiving far less attention. They include the inhabitants of the Nicobar and Andaman Islands, which while technically in India, are geologically part of the Indonesian Archipelago. The same is true of numerous dark-skinned, kinky haired groups inhabiting isolated corners of the jungle. Labelled *anak asli* (the original people) or *anak rimba* (children of the jungle) they were viewed with both fear and loathing while simultaneously admired for their survival skills. The picture has become even more complicated because of recent genetic testing, which suggests there may have never been a pure Austronesian race in the first place, as well as significant evidence of interbreeding between the various migration waves.

The point of all this is that scholars and the scions of grand theories and histories are not always pleased with new discoveries that challenge the accuracy of long-held narratives and beliefs. True to form, the longer they have stood, the greater the resistance. On the other hand, there is the unending march of knowledge, pushed forward by dedicated researchers and those who have no agenda other than finding out the truth.

Will we ever know everything? Doubtful. But can wood survive thousands of years? Yes, without a doubt. Yet more secrets await those who seek them. Let these new images tantalize our souls, intellects and imaginations!

Bruce W. Carpenter

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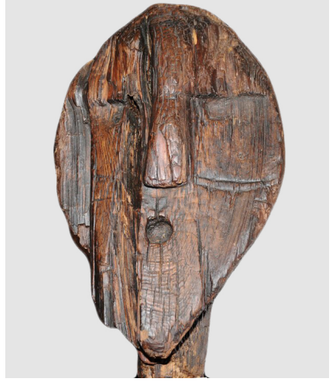

4.

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Resistance. Acceptance. Praise...

There is an inclination of the art world - specifically among a restricted (but pernicious) corpus of jaded and *blasé* scholars, collectors, germanopratine explorers and africanists, etc - to be skeptical and skittish in the face of unusual, unknown, undocumented, unvalidated, forms of art. This is particularly true in the field of so-called primitive arts and cultures, obscenely renamed «Non-Western» arts... Or, in a vain and even more preposterous attempt to erase the rhetorics of the past : *Arts Premiers*.

In this particular field, for instance, a persistant belief concerning wood statuary implies that carvings in wood cannot survive for long in humid or tropical climates. Yet, the examples proving the reverse are numerous and eloquent. No need to leave our continent, the few sculptures illustrated on the opposite page - to name some of the most famous ones - demonstrate that man has carved wood idols for religious purpose since at least the Mesolithic Period; and some of these sculptures have actually survived.

The anaerobic environment and the presence of tannic acids found within boglands, deep riverbeds or other waterlogged soils in various regions around the world can effectively result in the remarkable preservation of organic material such as wood.

The oldest wood carving in existence, the 5 meters tall Shigir idol, was discovered accidentally in 1894 by gold prospectors digging up a peat bog (wetland) near the Russian city of Yekaterinburg. But the exceptional nature of this discoverey was revealed only a century later when the first radiocarbon dating were carried out, in the 1990s. Back then, scholars questioned the dating of 9,800 years, because they believed that the hunter-gatherers who inhabited the area 9,800 years ago would have been incapable of crafting and decorating such a massive object !

In 2014, a new serie of radiocarbon datings were made and the samples revealed even older dates, moving the age of the sculpture back 1500 years, to a time when the world was still transitioning out of the last ice age. An antler carving discovered near the original find spot in the 19th century yielded similar dates, adding credibility to the result. A few years later, equipped with pumps and special equipment, the archeologists returned to Shigir and another bog site about 50 kilometers away to excavate finds buried several meters deep in the waterlogged soil. They found hundreds of small bone points and daggers from the same period, along with elk antlers carved with animal faces.

The society that carved the idol is only starting to come out of the shadows...

Left page:

1. Funerary figure, ca. 600-300 BC. Discovered in Soulac-sur-Mer in 1973. Musée d'Aquitaine, Bordeaux.
2. The Dagenham idol, ca. 2250 BC. Discovered in 1922, Valence House Musem, Dageham, United Kingdom.
3. The Lurgan canoe, circa 2000 BC. Discovered in Galway in 1901. National Museum of Ireland, Dublin.
4. The Shirgir idol (head), ca. 11,500 BC. Discovered near Kirvograd in 1894. Sverdlovsk Regional Museum.
5. An Irish bog oak dugout canoe, Neolithic or early Iron Age, sold at Bonhams London, 26 jan. 2022, lot 459.

Archaic Wood Sculpture and Austronesian Imagery in Borneo

In the case of an immense territory like Borneo, inhabited by various populations since almost 50,000 years, the chances to uncover new archeological sites and unknown cultural material are highly probable, as attested by the numerous discoveries made in the last decades in Kalimantan, but also in the state of Sarawak and the rest of Malaysia.

The photographs reproduced on the opposite page illustrate for instance the extraordinary wood coffin burial sites of the Kinabatangan Valley in the state of Sabah, on the northernmost portion of Borneo Island. The region's archeological treasures were known since the late 1960s, when Tom Harrisson - then curator of Sarawak State Museum - and his wife conducted a brief survey about ancient burial sites and myths related to the wood coffins. However, at the time, their studies did not involve iconographical analysis of the motifs and patterns on the coffins, nor their dating. It is only towards the end of the 1980s with the work of Peter Bellwood that more formal studies were carried, notably with the first radiocarbon datings. It was then suggested that the wood coffins were probably the relics of the Idahan people, an Austronesian-speaking group from the east coast of Sabah.

More recently, extensive studies were carried by Malaysian scholars and scientists (2007 to 2010), including systematic radiocarbon dating of every wood coffin discovered in the limestone burial complexes along the Kinabatangan River. The results indicated a wide spectrum of dates, ranging from 640 to 1410 AD, with a strong concentration of dates around the end of the first millenium AD. (Chia: 2-3)

It was demonstrated that the coffins were generally carved from *belian* - like probably the majority of archaic Borneo wood carvings in this catalogue -, an ironwood typical of Borneo and scientifically known as *Eusideroxylon zwageri,* one of the most durable hardwood species in the world. The coffins were generally carved with a buffalo head, and decorated with zoomorphic motifs: crocodiles, lizards, monkey, snake, along abstract patterns inspired from the native flora, typical of the Austronesian imagery.

The less accessible coffins - and the most beautifully decorated ones - were generally placed in more remote caves; and certainly destined to chieftains, or to the higher grades of the society. This is a practice we can observe in many regions of the Indo-Pacific.

Through this example of the wood coffins from Kinabatangan - and the following group of archaic sculptures - we want to bring to light the cultural richness of the Island of Borneo, but also the depth of its heritage, of which a large part remains unknown and probably still buried in its harsh geography.

Stephen Chia, «Wood coffin burial of Kinabatangan, Sabah», Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2013.

Above: Coffins which have collapsed from their original location, Kinabatangan Valley, Sabah, Malaysia.
Below: Coffins with buffalo heads inside a limestone burial complex, Agop Sawat, Kinabatangan, Malaysia.

Up left: *Patong* figure, 1000-1200 AD
Discovered in Terusa Kupang, Brunei.

Up right: Detail of a monkey figure carved on a coffin, Kinabatangan

Below: Decorative motifs on a wood coffin, Sabah State Museum, Malaysia

25

FIGURE

Proto-Dayak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia
Circa 3300 - 3100 BC (radiocarbon testing)

Ironwood, 28 cm

With Mark A. Johnson, Marina Del Rey

While staring at this enigmatic figure it's obviously the image of Edvard Munch's iconic painting «The Scream» which comes first to mind. A strikingly modern and familiar impression, and yet, almost 5000 years separates these two works of art...

Recovered from the deep river mud of northwestern Borneo, the sculpture suffered intensive erosion and important amputations but it still emanates a haunting and powerful presence, probably enhanced by the natural elements and the passing of time.
When considering the results of the radiocarbon dating (attested by two different tests), this sculpture could be the second oldest wood carving to be found in the Indo-pacific region, just behind the large 8000 years old figurative housepost from Yale University.

Our little idol has some androgynous qualities. It appears to have a male sex organ (which also resembles a face) and yet shows a female hairstyle. With Borneo art, it is not unusual to mix sexual imagery, but considering the age, it is also possible the hairstyle was something males wore at the time OR what appears to be male sex organ is something else, perhaps the head of another figure ? We can assume the hands originally connected to the chest, with the arms outwards and bent at the elbows, a posture common in Borneo art and on many sculptures found in the western and central areas of Borneo. The calved area on the chest is probably where the hands were attached. Assuming there was some space between the arms and the chest, this would be a weaker spot on the sculpture, which could have allowed the arms to break off, taking part of the chest with them. These breaks clearly happened long, long time ago.

Now, what really makes the sculpture is the facial expression. After 5000 years, this wonderful little sculpture has emerged, full of life and vitality, with this intense screaming expression. Although it is common theme in the imagery of Borneo - to signals danger and warns malevolent forces to stay away - we did not suspected it be so ancient.

26

CEREMONIAL BOWL

Proto-Dayak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia
Circa 1500 - 1400 BC (radiocarbon dating)

Wood, 69 cm

Acquired from Nunung Jamila, Bali
Collection Yves Bonan, Paris

This exceptional and seemingly unique ceremonial bowl was recovered a few decades ago by members of the Iban community inhabiting the northern part of West Kalimantan province, near the border with Sarawak.
Informants reported back then that the object had been apparently discarded for a very long time prior to its rediscovery. The Iban then continued to use it for a few years during their own ceremonies, before a runner who traveled to the region bought it. Thereafter, the bowl found its way into a European collection, where we had the opportunity to acquire it.

Considering the massive density and weight of the object combined to its deeply weathered surface we rapidely suspected that it could be a few hundred years old, so we dediced to submit it to radiocarbon dating. The astonishing, and unexpected, results obtained with the first samples literally bluffed the laboratory, and conducted them to make a second testing, which confirmed the initial results.

So here we are, with a 3500 years old wooden dish in our hands, unprecedented in terms of antiquity, and which does not correspond to any of the canonic model of sculpture from the region.

A proper investigation may be necessary...

Although a multiplicity of ritual and utilitarian recipients were found on the island of Borneo, for the most part, they belong to Kayanic traditions and styles from East Kalimantan, and none of them resemble to the present example. Nevertheless, we are going to consider two ceremonial bowls that are not directly related to our object but which share some common characteristics.

The first bowl belongs to Sarawak State Museum in Malaysia, and consists of a large monoxyle dish flanked of two ferocious figures on each side, forming the handles of the vessel. This object originates from the Berawan tribes of Sarawak, an Austronesian-speaking people who live in longhouse communities along the Lower Baram River. Although the style of the carving is less archaic and more baroque, we are nevertheless within the same type of corpus, namely: the large ceremonial bowls with two confronting figures on either side forming the handles of the receptacle.

The second bowl which will draw our attention is the centerpiece of the Philippines' art collection in the Museo Nacional de Antropologia of Madrid: the Kankanai «seated figure holding a bowl», from Norther Luzon (CE.1971). What is particularly notewhorty on this piece, is the presence of a rosette motif on the hands of the figure, comparable to the large six-petals rosette carved under the base of the present bowl, and repeated on the hands of the two figures.
This motif is actually very common in the Austronesian world, and can be found at different times on numerous sculptures and tattoos, with some variations in style and meanings.
Among the Kankanai and other Austronesian-speaking tribes of the Cordillera, for instance, the star-motif represents *Bituwon*, the beacon that guides the wary headhunter on his way.
In West Borneo, it seems that the motif evolved to become the distinctive Dayak rosette - composed of six or eight wings -, a tattoo design found among Iban men and which marks the passage from boyhood to manhood. The symbolic may have changed a little over time, but what we see is the permanence of this motif along the Austronesian maritime route, and across time. These observations are also widely demonstrated by science, both linguistics and genetics. Thus, for example, it is interesting to note that recent DNA studies have shown that the Kankanai along with the Atayal people of Taiwan, were most probably among the original Austronesian mariners. (Mörseburg, 2016)

In the same way, if we look at the commonly accepted chronology of the Austronesian expansion we can observe that the northern part of the Philippines was reached around 2000 BCE, and the northern coast of Borneo around 1500 BCE; this timeline traces a trajectory for the diffusion of population, beliefs and artistry, which is clearly consistent with the dating of the present bowl.

In conclusion, what we can draw through this comparative approach of formal similarities is the probable linkage and common ancestry between the peoples who conceived these three sculptures.

Alexander Mörseburg, et al., «Multi-layered population structure in Island Southeast Asians», 2016. European Journal of Human Genetics. 24 (11): 1605–1611.

27

FIGURE

Proto-Dayak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia
Circa 1000 - 900 BC (radiocarbon dating)

Wood, 57 cm

Private collection, California

The iconography of this mysterious sculpture seems unique to our knowledge. The figure is depicted as if suspended in the air, dangling from a branch. She appears to be pregnant or giving birth to another figure, a smaller head emerging from between the legs. The figure's right arm, oversized compared to the left arm, appears to be holding a crescent shaped object above it's head. Or, is that a cupped hand that was meant to hold another object, or perhaps support a cross beam/post (?). We can notice odd angles cut into the face and torso of the main figure, and some strange cut-out shapes on its forehead. These are clearly not accidental damages, but deliberate choices probably made at the time of the carving. We can speculate that these cuts were ritual, especially in the chopping of the face. Was it desacralized or discarded by the carver, or the community?

Upon closer inspection, we distinguish dominant vertical adze cuts on the overall surface, constrasting with smoother sections. The bold and powerful style of the carving is clearly related to the ceremonial dish illustrated previously in this catalogue (n°26).
The figures represented on these two sculptures are extremely similar. The heads in particular, with their high forehead and flattened headdress, are identical and present the same mutilations on the face. The appearance of these figures is also reminiscent of Chu Kingdom wooden figures dating approximately from the same period. We know that in the first millenium BCE a maritime trade route between the western coast of Borneo and Mainland Southeast Asia was already established. However, there is no ascertained connection between the Chu sculptures and the present figure.

ALTAR GUARDIAN

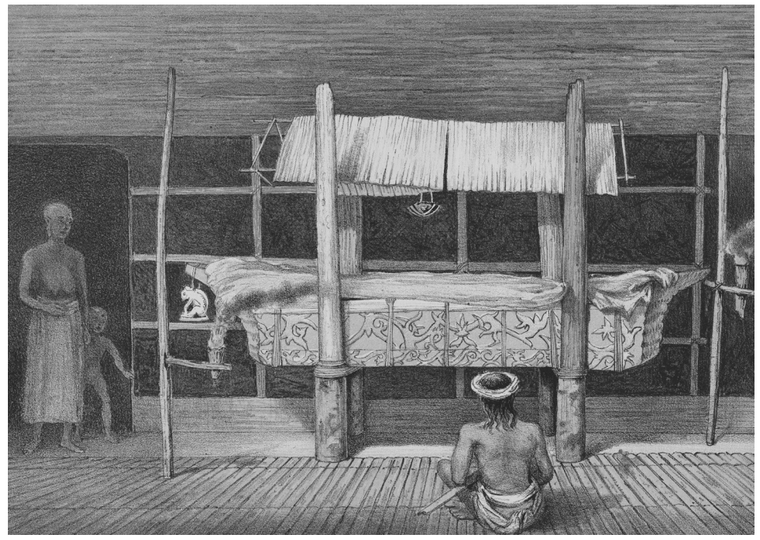
Proto-Dayak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia
Circa 600 - 500 BC (radiocarbon dating)

Wood, 18,5 cm high

With Mark A. Johnson, Marina Del Rey
Private collection, California

This is another sculpture of incredible strength and presence discovered accidentally while digging in an ancient river bed during a gold mining operation (see cat. n° 25). Local informants reported the piece was recovered from a pit that was around ten meters deep. The mining group responsible for this finding was actually digging in an ancient flood zone, where mud and debris (and apparently larger deposits of gold washed down by the river) have accumulated very long time ago. This is the main reason that explains why this figure - and others found in the same context - is much older and much better preserved than pieces collected on surface, or shawllowly buried, or discovered in natural caves.

This sculpture has to be regarded in light of a colour plate published in 1882 in Carl Bock's "Headhunters of Borneo: A narrative of travel up the Mahakkam and down the Barito; also, Journeyings in Sumatra". On plate 25 (see next page), titled "Dyak chief lying in state", is depicted the interior of a ceremonial house, or a shrin: a young Dayak warrior is seated on the floor, in front of a sumptuously decorated sarcophagus suspended on pillars. The artist has put a specific accent on a small zoomorphic sculpture hanging from the front tip of the coffin. A woman and her child standing on the doorstep seem terrified by the event, or, intimidated by the little protective figure in front of them (?). Torch fires are diffusing a deep smoke in the room. We are attending here the funerals of an important parent or a chief.



The second element to take in consideration is the existence, in an important Austrian private collection, of another sculpture resembling precisely the guardian figure illustrated on Carl Bock's colour plate n°25. This latter figure and the present one have multiple traits in common. Both sculptures seem to represent a ferocious animal, almost polymorphic, between a wild boar, a tiger, or a sun bear. Both animals have long straight fangs and a powerful lower body, enabling them to raise up on their back legs, to rest their hands on what is likely a ritual altar. The two carvings are of a similar scale and aspect: extremely dense and heavy wood, strongly weathered dry blackish surface with remains of alluvial deposits.

The section in front of the present animal is very interesting and probably the focus of the "story" of this sculpture. As mentioned, it probably represents a sort of altar, surrounded by three human figures. These figures are depicted with a screaming expression, mouth open and arms raised, in a characteristic protective posture. One figure is shown with its legs bent straight up, with the feet under the raised arms (these figurative conventions showing a haunting figure in frontal splayed position are common to the entire Austronesian world). There are roundish objects below the arms of two of the figures. They could represent the severed heads of slaves or victims of headhunting raids. We can speculate that the sculpture actually represents a sacrificial altar where beheading was performed, and the animal incarnating an important deity or spirit, is its guardian. The purpose of such object is generally protective, to ward off malevolant spirits or ennemies, and bring back balance to the community during times of calamity such as disease, warfare, drought, crops failures, etc.

Carl Bock, "Headhunters of Borneo: A narrative of travel up the Mahakkam and down the Barito; also, Journeyings in Sumatra", S. Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, London (1882), plate 25

29

ANIMAL FIGURE

Proto-Dayak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia
Circa 600 - 800 AD (radiocarbon dating)

Wood, 32 cm

Private collection, California

This sculpture presents two unusual features: the attached feet to a base, and the scooped out back which imply the object was placed on another flat surface and used as a ritual recipient - probably in conjunction with some funerary rituals. It seemingly represents a mythological creature, maybe an archaic version of a *Aso* dog/guardian, intended to protect the access to a shrine or a sanctuary. The dry and craqueled surface of the wood suggests that the piece originated from an ancient site which was destroyed or abandonned long time ago, and then possibly placed inside a cave or a natural grotto.

30

ANIMAL FIGURE

Proto-Dayak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia
Circa 1000 - 800 BC (radiocarbon dating)

Wood, 73 cm

Acquired from Mark A. Johnson, Marina Del Rey
Collection A. B., Paris

Published in «Dayak from Borneo», Bernard de Grunne (2015), p. 14-15

Probably the most striking figure in this group of archaic wood sculptures, and also the most enigmatic in terms of iconography and function. The piece was discovered accidentaly during gold mining operations in the northern section of West Kalimantan. The following sculpture in this catalogue (n°31) was also found in the same region. The current residents of this area are the Banyuke Dayak (also known as Banyudu and possibly Manyuke), a Bidayuh Dayak sub-group (Land Dayaks as they were called during the colonial period). We can assume that these people are probably the descendants of the people who made this statue, and lived there at that time.

The figure was likely carved from the heartwood of the tree, as it has extremely dense and closely packed wood grains. This certainly help it survive so long, buried in the mud. The surface of the sculpture shows extensive oxydation of the wood, and traces of ancient fungal alterations with remains of alluvial deposits in some places.

The animal which is depicted here is ambiguous. It has a reptilian head, with a distinct forehead ridge and fangs. However, it has ears, so it is more likely it represents some sort of mammal, perhaps a marsupial like the opossum? Another potential contender could be the yellow-throated marten, a fearless animal with few natural predators... And it could also well be more than one animal morphed into a powerful mythical animal spirit.
The obvious view is an animal head, with arms raised to the side of the head and a long protruding tongue, reaching the chest. However, the «tongue» widens out from the mouth and on close inspection, the beginning of the tongue does not seem to emerge directly from the mouth. Another possible view is to imagine the «tongue» as a tail, coming up from the body of the animal with the tip, touching the mouth. The «arms» would be legs, pulled back, with the feet touching the side of the head. Both types of iconographies exists. In Dayak art, figures are known to twist and contort body parts in bizarre and seemingly impossible ways. And it is not uncommon for Dayaks to morph more than one type of motif or body part into other types.

The function of the object is another enigma. The post, representing the tail of the animal, widens at the base, so it may not have been placed inside another piece, but probably attached to - or part - of a structure, perhaps a guardian spirit atop a crypt, or a coffin. The posture of the animal clearly refers to a protective stance, to ward off malevolant spirits and intruders. The only certainty is that the sculpture belonged to an ancient funerary shrine.

31

FUNERARY PANEL

Proto-Dayak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia
Circa 1000 - 800 BC (radiocarbon dating)

Wood, 150 cm

Acquired from Bruce Carpenter, Bali
Private collection, Paris

Published in «Dayak from Borneo», Bernard de Grunne (2015), p. 11

This extraordinary sculpture - possibly a coffin lid or an altar panel - belongs to a small group of extremely ancient proto-Dayak carvings discovered in a long-abandoned funerary complex located in the north of West Kalimantan, near the border with Sarawak.

In an attempt to establish a chronology of Dayak sculpture, Bernard de Grunne (2015) identifies four major phases in the history of Dayak art; relying on both stylistic and scientific analysis he distinguishes: the Archaic style, the Early Classic style, the Classic style, and finally the Late Classic style. With a radiocarbon dating between 1004 and 857 BCE, the present carving appears to be the earliest and most important sculpture of the first group. This period corresponds roughly to the Austronesian expansion through the north of Borneo; but at the same time, it also corresponds to a wave of Austroasiatic migration from Mainland Southeast Asia, towards the shores of West Borneo.

The incredibly rich iconography of this panel seems to contain a syncretism of stylistic elements and motifs inherent to both these ethno-linguistic groups. The geometric patterns for instance, recalls Dong Son bronzes from northern Vietnam, while the spiral shoots spurting out of the vagina and the gibbon-like figure echoe the squatting splayed figures typical of Austronesian imagery. Carved with masterful artistry in an extremely dense and heavy wood that has harden like stone over time, the panel strikes by the power of evocation of its enigmatic iconography, imposing itself as a fundamental testimony of the early archaic cosmogony that emerged in Borneo at the turn of the first millenium BCE.

Several comparable large panels with a central figure carved in high relief are known in private collections in Europe and Asia. They are of great antiquity as well, but less elaborated in terms of sculpture.

32

FIGURE

Proto-Dayak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia
Circa 400 - 100 BC (radiocarbon dating)

Wood, 53 cm

Private collection, California

The last sculpture from the group of archaic wood carvings discovered in the northern part of West Kalimantan province is this ghostly human figure, unusual in every aspects...

Despite the heavy erosion, it appears that the figure had probably no face; or, as suggested by the subtle cuts on the left side of the head, the face was litteraly carved on the left edge of the head; with the little bump on the left side of the neck indicating the Adam's apple. This is a plausible assumption, such representations are not unknown in Borneo.

Another particularity is the position of the arms, with the hands around the genitals, or seemingly holding an object. We already observed this type of representation, notably on a figure illustrated previously in this catalogue (n°27). A more hypothetical assumption is to imagine another head in this very same place, in relation maybe with the practice of headhunting or funerary rites.

A comparable figure, on loan at Yale University Art Gallery, displays the same ghostly presence and formal abstraction, despite - or in consequence of - heavy alterations and losses. (ILE2014.8.90)

GUARDIAN FIGURE

Dayak peoples, West Kalimantan, Indonesia
Circa 1100-1300 (radiocarbon dating)

Wood, 92 cm

With Adrian Schlag, Brussels
Galerie Davide Manfredi, Paris
Private collection, Paris

This figure has suffered from long weathering exposure and lost its arms during the process, but it still stands as a very early, enigmatic, and particularly elegant sculpture inside the large corpus of anthropomorphic male figures with outstreched arms, sometimes erroneously nicknamed as *Patong Polisi* or *Hampatong Polisi*.

These figures actually have a wide distribution in Island Southeast Asia. They occur in Central and South Nias, Borneo, southeastern Indonesia, and the Phillipines. In West Kalimantan, they are carved by Dayak groups who give them the name of *Patong* (or *Hampatong) Pantak*. Placed outdoors, in the vicinities of villages, they functioned as protective guardians, with the guesture of outstretched arms signifying an attempt to block malevolent spirits from passing.

34

GUARDIAN FIGURE

Land Dayak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia
19th century or before

Wood, 100 cm

With Perry Kesner, Ibiza
Private collection, Paris

This male figure was initially collected along a female figure (now in an important Austrian collection) in Landak Regency, in the northern part of West Kalimantan. They probably originated from the Kendayan people, who are often assimilated to the Bidayuh (Land Dayaks) ethnic groups.
It belongs - like the previous sculpture in this catalogue - to the type of guardian figures called *Patong* (or *Hampatong*) *Pantak*. Although they have not been dated by radiocarbon dating we can suspect that they are both extremely ancient. The long natural weathering process enhanced particularly the aura of mystery and elegance of the present example.

35

GUARDIAN FIGURE

Modang people, East Kalimantan, Indonesia
Circa 1300-1400 (radiocarbon dating)

Wood, 33 cm

With Mark A. Johnson, Marina Del Rey

Published in «The Kayanic Tradition, Vol. I: Guardian Sculptures», M. Johnson (2020), p. 45, 95.

This striking figure belongs to a group of important guardian figures considered to be the oldest known sculptures carved in the Kayanic style. This corpus has been described by Mark A. Johnson in the first volume of his study of the Kayanic tradition.
«Of Special note among Kayanic art objects is a class of extraordinary and potentially ancient hardwood figures, representing powerful guardian spirits, possibly the thunder god *Aki Belarik Ubon Do'*, that were reserved for the ancestral shrines of the village nobility. The most interesting examples of these figures popularly referred to in the art market as cave guardians were not, despite their appearance, freestanding sculptures, but were originally carved figures projecting outward at each end of the ancestral shrine. These figures were positioned horizontally, face up, with the head connected to the end of the ancestral shrine and the legs thrusting into space. The front of the figure is in fact the top and the back is the bottom. Because many of these shrines were carved from heavy hardwood and were often found in remote, difficult-to-access locations, local sources (or runners) usually removed the figurative end sections of the rectangular boxes for easier transport.
The earliest version of this shrine guardian figure is a type that has what can be described as a pentagonal-shaped head (PSH). The faces of these figures are more implied than articulated, with a protruding diamond-shaped mouth, a vertical ridgeline that may indicate a nose, and, on some examples, inset cowrie shells to indicate eyes. It is not uncommon for additional shells to be inserted as enhancements in other areas, such as the nose, mouth, chest, or limbs, including knee and elbow joints. (...)

Perhaps twenty or more objects of this type have been recovered. The majority of known examples are in poor condition, often missing limbs or heavily eroded, leaving just a few that remain completely rendered full figures». (Johnson: 39-40)

Further on, referring to the figure illustrated above, the author notes that it «is a special and particularly refined example (...) sensitively carved and incorporates more imagery and subtle motifs than any of the other shrine figures known. This imagery changes depending upon the angle of the view. In the normal horizontal position, that is, when viewed from the side, it forms the head of an animal (perhaps an *Aso*), with fangs and oversized ears, emerging from the end of the shrine box. (...) When viewed from the top (...) this piece takes on a completely different form, revealing a variation of the typical PSH guardian figure. It has the archaic pentagonal head where it attaches to the shrine box, the prominent chest that is also the top of the head of the animal figure, and upper arms, which are created from the ears of this animal figure. When this piece is viewed vertically, a shrine guardian figure is clearly visible, floating legless in space, ethereal like a spirit.
There's more. At the base of this shrine figure's torso is another face or mask of an anthropomorphic figure with eyes, nose, mustache, and tongue. And lastly, when viewing the horizontal profile, the small triangular nose of the animal could be interpreted as a hornbill casque.
To sum up, several important images are incorporated into this one piece: what is presumably an *aso*, or dragon (a symbol of the under world); the hornbill (a symbol of the upper world); a mustached anthropomorphic face (a symbol of the middle world); and the archaic cave guardian image (a symbol of the spirit world).» (Johnson: 44, 46)

Mark A. Johnson, «The Kayanic Tradition, Vol. I: Guardian Sculptures», (2020), p. 39-40, 44,46.

36

COFFIN FINIAL

Kayanic Dayak, East Kalimantan, Indonesia
Circa 1400 - 1500 (radiocarbon dating)

Wood, 41 cm wide

Collected by Jacques Cortecero on the Upper Mahakam River in 1975

Courtesy of Leiden University Librairies, (KITLV 173913)

The above photograph, taken by H. J. Tillema during his voyage in the Apo Kayan region circa 1932-1933, illustrates the front end of a typical Bahau coffin from the southwestern part of the province of East Kalimantan.

A much more ancient Kayanic coffin end is illustrated on the opposite page. This fragmentary example was recovered from a long abandonned shrine. It represents a typical guardian spirit in the form of a large heart-shaped face, with large round glaring eyes (missing the inlaid shell discs). Despite the scars of time, this archaic example is strongly reminiscent of early Austronesian motifs.

«It is considered a powerful protective spirit that will aggressively fend off both both spiritual and physicial ennemies. It is possible that this motif represents a thunder spirit.» (Johnson: 35)

Mark A. Johnson, «The Kayanic Tradition, Vol. I: Guardian Sculptures», Marina Del Rey, (2020), p. 35

37

SARCOPHAGUS

Toraja people, South Sulawesi, Indonesia
Circa 1100 - 1300 (radiocarbon dating)

Wood, 305 cm

Private collection, Ghent
With Philippe Laeremans, Brussels

This magnificient sarcophagus echoes the characteristic shape of an ancestral Toraja house, called «*Tongkonan*». Their form is inspired by traditional boats with oversized saddleback roof, typical of many Austronesian cultures.

There are basically three types of coffin: the water buffalo-shape that was intended for the middle-rank landowners, the pig-shape for the lower caste, and finally the ship which was reserved for members of the local nobility.

The coffins were believed to serve as vehicles bearing the different Toraja ranks to the Land of Souls. Individuals were interred with their most valued possessions: precious textiles, beadwork, ceremonial sword and gold jewelry.
The sarcophagi usually display extremely elaborate carvings with intricated swirling motifs and geometric patterns reminiscent of ancient iconographies associated with the Austronesian expansion. The similarities with Lapita potteries found in certain Islands of the Pacific, or Maori art, are particularly striking.

The present sarcophagus is remarkable not only by its superb decoration, but more importantly because of its astounding antiquity, dated by carbon-14 between the 12th and the 14th century - while most of the surviving Toraja coffins are considered to date from the 19th century to the early 20th century. These early dates corresponds approximately to those of similar sarcophagi found in Kinabatangan Valley, in the state of Sabah in Malaysia.

J. Feldman, «The Eloquent Dead: Ancestral sculpture of Indonesia and Southeast Asia», University of California, Los Angeles (1985), p. 141, 142.

GUARDIAN MASK

Kayan people, East Kalimantan, Indonesia
1700 - 1900 (radiocarbon dating)

Wood, 39 cm

With Mark A. Johnson, Marina Del Rey

Published in «The Kayanic Tradition, Volume I: Guardian Sculptures», M. Johnson (2020), p. 246

The present mask and the next example in this catalogue (n°39) form a pair of rare Kayanic wall masks, male and female, which were allegedly hung as guardian spirits inside a crypt house (Johnson: 56). The association of a male and female character within the same sculpture, or in combination, is one of the most common theme not only among the Dayak, but also in the Austronesian world. We can legitimately speculate that they represent the male and female ancestors of the clan, or village, where the shrine was located. The style of the present mask with its more angular shape and menacing teeth represents the male guardian spirit.

39

GUARDIAN MASK

Kayan people, East Kalimantan, Indonesia
1700 - 1900

Wood, 37 cm

With Mark A. Johnson, Marina Del Rey

Published in «The Kayanic Tradition, Volume I: Guardian Sculptures», M. Johnson (2020), p. 59, 247

The present mask and the previous example (n°38) in this catalogue form a pair of rare Kayanic wall masks - male and female - which were allegedly hung as guardian spirits inside a crypt house (Johnson: 56). The association of a male and female character within the same sculpture, or in combination, is one of the most common theme not only among the Dayak, but also in the Austronesian world. We can legitimately speculate that they represent the male and female ancestors of the clan, or village, where the shrine was located. The style of the present mask with its more rounded shape and softer traits is probably the female spirit.

The shape of the mouth is reminiscent of sculptures with grimacing faces from Hawaii (another member of the Austronesian-speaking peoples), with their wide 8-shaped mouth constricted in the middle.

40

FUNERARY FIGURE

Sumba Island, Indonesia
1500-1800 or before

Limetone, 28 cm

Collection Liliane and Michel Durand-Dessert, Paris

This mysterious sculpture should be seen in the light of two other important sculptures from Sumba: the first one was previously in the Musée Barbier-Mueller in Genera - on display now in Musée du Quai Branly in Paris - and a second smaller example in the Museum der Kulturen in Basel. These two sculptures seem to have been made at a later date but they present a similar frog-like head of elongated oval shape, round protruding eyes, a thin flat nose and a closed mouth. The hands along the body point to their genitals. There is one male and one female figure.
The tall standing figure in the Quai Branly has a *Marangga* pendant (a symbol of wealth) carved on the chest, identifying the statue as the founder of a clan or of a village. These two statues probably had a commemorative role, erected to honor departed members of the nobility and offer homage to their ancestral lines.

The present sculpture is clearly of a more archaic style and earlier period. Its surface is heavily worn and covered with thick layers of calcerous deposits accumulated over a long period of exposure to the elements. It remains difficult to determine if the statue was broken in ancient times or if it was intentionally carved as a bust, meant to be used as a lid for an ossuary, like the Mindanao burial jars from the Philippines. The head is also strongly reminiscent of the megalithic figures discovered in Bada valley, in Central Sulawesi. In fact, we can observe remarkable similarities between all these sculptures - whose funerary traditions are all related to the same Austronesian substratum.

41

MEMORIAL FIGURE

West Sumba, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Stone, 120 cm

Collection J. Mikulecky, Praha
Private collection, Brussels

Megaliths and large stone sculptures are found in numerous locations throughout the islands of Indonesia. Archeologists have determined that some of these monuments can date to as early as 1000 BCE, while others, like this *penji*, are more recent in date.

On the island of Sumba, monumental stone tombs were placed at the ceremonial center of traditional villages. These impressive tombs are the final resting place of noblemen who commanded extraordinary reverence and respect both in life and in death. In the west of Sumba, these tombs were commissioned by the owner during his lifetime.
«The construction of these tombs involved the marshaling of considerable resources. First the stone had to be acquired from the owners of quarries along the coast. The stone, weighing from ten to thirty tons, then had to be transported, a task that sometimes involved movement over both water and land. This task necessitated the labor of hundreds and sometimes thousands of people. Following the arrival of the stone at the entrance of the ceremonial village, prescribed rituals were conducted, followed by feasting. Afterward, the stone was carved with finishing motifs and designs appropriate to its geographic location and as dictated by the family. (Ellis: 234)
In West Sumba, four-sided tomb chambers are topped by a massive «male stone» called *Kamone*, and (...) sometimes capped by human figures (like the present example). Vertical upright slabs resembling the branches of a tree sometimes stand alongside.» The chamber enclosed by this kamone creates a womb-like sarcophagus chamber for the body to rest in.

George Ellis, «Memorial stone or grave marker (penji reti),» in Eyes of the Ancestors: The Arts of Island Southeast Asia at the Dallas Museum of Art, ed. Reimar Schefold in collaboration with Steven Alpert (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 234..

42

PECTORAL

West Sumba, Indonesia
19th century or before

Gold, 28 cm wide

With Serge Le Guennan, France
Collection Bruno Gay, Paris

The *Marangga* are probably the most emblematic objects of the Sumbese people. They are sacred valuables worn suspended to the neck as a pendant, forming a kind of chestplate. They are traditionally made of a thin sheet of precious metal - gold or silver - hammered and twisted to form a double triangle that join in the center. The *Marangga* of Sumba are heirloom objects that were accumulated by the clan leader through time, and stored in the attics inside the houses of notables. They were taken out into the light only during special ritual occasions, and under the careful control of the village priests. One of the reasons for taking these precautions is that it was believed their power could kill onlookers or cause natural disasters.
They are essentially found in the megalithic culture of West Sumba - especially among the Anakalang society - but this particular shape is known in other islands as well, like Flores or Babar. More archaic examples were also discovered in archaeological sites throughout the archipelago of Indonesia. Marangga-like objects were actually first seen in small pre-classical gold pieces found in Java, dating back to the 4th-6th century.

The shape of the *Marangga* remains a mystery, although the more archaic examples seem to evoke a squatting human figure. On the ritual monuments located in the center of the village of Tarung, near Waikabubak, a round head and two wings ressembling a figure can be seen on a bas-relief. According to the local priest it represented a very ancient type of *Marangga*.

In terms of quality and thickness of the gold, elegance of the shape, beauty of the patina, richness of the surface, and age, the *Marangga* illustrated above is clearly a superlative example.

A comparable pectoral is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession n° 1988.166). Another smaller example in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia, published in Robyn Maxwell, «*Life, Death & Magic: 2000 Years of Southeast Asian Ancestral Art*», 2010, p. 140.

Susan Rodgers, «*L'or des Iles : Bijoux et Ornements d'Indonésie, de Malaisie et des Philippines*», Musée Barbier-Mueller, Genève (1986), page 189, 333, cat. n°139, 140.

43

FUNERARY FIGURE

West Sumba, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Stone, 54 cm

With Thomas Murray, Mill Valley
Collection Bruno Gay, Paris

Published in «Animistic Art of Island Asia», Thomas Murray (2008), p. 67

The minimalistic aesthetic of this funerary figure is characteristic of the megalithic style found on the island of Sumba. Possibly intended to mark the grave of an important persona, the lower third of the sculpture appears to have been formerly planted in the ground. Enigmatic lines etched on the frontal plane of the body possibly relate to the status of the deceased. However, the exact purpose of this statue remains vague. It could well be a «*katoda*», an altar for offerings to the spirits.

Cf. Jean Paul Barbier, «Messages de Pierre: Statues et Sculptures de l'Indonésie Primitive dans les collections du Musée Barbier-Mueller», Skira, 1999, p. 194, fig. 280.

FEMALE FIGURE

44

Sakalava people, Madagascar
19th century or before

Wood, 122 cm

Private collection, Flanders
With Grusenmeyer-Woliner, Brussels

Recent studies about the early Austronesian setllement of Madagascar reveal one of the most fascinating epic voyage through the oceans. The *Malagasy* expression «*vahoaka ntaolo*» which translates literally as «the original people» - makes reference to these pioneer settlers. The Proto-Malayo-Polynesian roots of this expression, from *va-waka* meaning «the canoe people» and *tau-ulu* translating as «first men», give us an indication about their origins (Malayo-Polynesian being the largest branch of the Austronesian languages).

Anthropologist Philippe Beaujard recalls that «Austronesians reached the western Indian Ocean at the end of the first millennium BCE or even earlier. These migrations did not come about by accident, but were based on commercial strategies embedded in evolving exchange networks throughout the Indian Ocean. It is likely that the Austronesians tried to take advantage of the demand from the West – and also from the East – transporting coveted products (above all spices), along routes that bypassed India and allowed them to reach East Africa directly. It may be within this context that Austronesians later settled in the Comoros and Madagascar.» (2019: 595)

Malagasy, the national language of Madagascar is an Austronesian language spoken today by around 25 million people. It is the westernmost Malayo-Polynesian language, brought to Madagascar by the settlement of Austronesian peoples from the Sunda islands around the 5th century AD or before.
Among all Austronesian languages, it has been demonstrated that *Malagasy* and *Ma'anyan* – an East Barito language still spoken to this day by the Dayak people of Central Kalimantan - were particularly closely related.
This linguistic background explains the numerous similarities between the arts and cultures of Indonesia and Madagascar. The Sakalava sculpture above is an archaic testimony of great sensitivity and presence, illustrating perfectly these formal affinities.

Philippe Beaujard, «The Austronesian Expansion and the First Malagasy Cultures» in «The Worlds of the Indian Ocean, A Global History», Volume I, Cambridge University Press, 2019, p. 595-642

45

FUNERARY MASK

Java, Indonesia
Circa 1900

Gold alloy, 15 cm

Collection of the Ambassador of Portugal in East Timor
With Manuel Castilho Antiguidades, Lisbon

This mask belongs to a very ancient tradition of funerary gold masks, attested on the island of Java since at least the middle of the first millenium BCE. This tradition seems to have persisted throughout the centuries - with variations in style and size - until more recent times, as attested by the present mask that we can date around the turn of the twentieth century.

Several other masks and fragments from different periods are known in public institutions; we can mention: a 14th century Majapahit mask in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1995.569.2); another mask dating circa 700-800 AD, in the same institution (1998.544.464); or the preclassic mask dated circa 500 BC-200 AD in the collections of Yale University Art Gallery (2008.21.90).

46

POST FIGURE

Modang people, East Kalimantan, Indonesia
19th century or before

Wood, 125 cm

With Alexander Goetz, Bali

This fragmentary sculpture is related to a group of Modang posts collected by Edmund Grundner on the banks of the Telen River after a massive flood. These sculptures were laying in the mud for at least 300 years when they were recovered. The most important specimen of this important finding was acquired by the Quai Branly Museum, in Paris, (Inv. n° 70.2008.72.1). The rest of the collection was dispersed among various collectors.

An archaic stone sculpture in the remote highlands of Apo Kayan region, North Kalimantan, Indonesia.

Unlike the Grundner' group of sculptures, the present figure was not collected on the Telen River but on the neighbouring Wahau River, further east. However, it presents some extremely similar style and features. Like the other sculptures of the corpus, we can observe multiple intertwined forms: anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and vegetal. The central figure is emerging violently, arms raised, and a fearsome expression on his face. On the front, a large lizard or a varan seems to melt into a plant shoot that spirals upwards... This intricated iconography is illustrated on the other sculptures in a more stylized - almost abstract - style.

Anthropologist Antonio Guerreiro explains that these burial posts represent a psychopomp spirit linked to thunder and lightning; their responsibility is to escort newly deceased souls of chiefs and nobles to the afterlife. Varans are associated with this spirit as a symbol of the deceased.

47

HUNTING CHARM

Iban people, West Kalimantan, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Wood, 63,5 cm

With Michael Woerner, Hong-Kong

These wooden charms were used for deer hunting, in the same way as the pig-trap sticks called «*tun tun*», but here the figures are typically larger and the charms much rarer.
However, the present example is exceptional as three squatting figures are carved on its top, thus considerably enhancing the chances of success of the hunter. The carver skilfully used the same central trunk to sculpt the three figures. A carving prowess and a truly unique example.

48

PADDLE

Kayanic Dayak, East Kalimantan, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Wood, 163 cm

Collection Serge Le Guennan, France

Carved in ironwood, this early Dayak paddle displays a long cylindrical shaft strenghten in its center and at the junction with the blade. It is decorated with a «cup-shaped» flower motif, from which the leaf-shape blade is emerging. The handle is carved with an elegant floral shape as well. The weathered surface of the paddle suggests it was probably recovered from the river mud; and attests with certainty of its great antiquity.

POST FIGURE

Ngaju people, Central Kalimantan, Indonesia
19th century or before

Wood, 164 cm

Acquired by Jacques Lebrat in Jakarta in 1989
Galerie et Atelier Punchinello, Paris

The naturalistic style of the carving and its very distinctive composition lead us to attribute this sculpture to the Ngaju people, a sub-ethnic group of the Dayak living in the central part of Borneo.
The Ngadju-Dayak like the neighbouring Ot Danum people erect human or animal figures near the entrances to their dwellings and along footpaths leading from their villages to the river. Known collectively as «*hampatong*», some figures portray ancestors and other supernatural guardians who prevent dangerous spirits, particularly those bringing sickness, from entering community.
Carved in dense ironwood, the present sculpture shows a female figure with her child in a protective posture, long protruding tongue out and the arms joined on the chest. A crocodile runs along her back. This totemic animal is a symbol of the underworld, associated with fecundity and regeneration. An elaborated beadwork belt around the waist of the figure indicates the high rank of the ancestor represented. The important headdress is now heavily worn. It was possibly topped with another totemic animal like the hornbill.
On this point, Steven G. Alpert notes: «In Dayak art, upper-world animals such as the hornbill were often depicted together or in conjunction with their complementary opposite, a serpent or dragon from the underworld. Upper- and underworld animals were also fused with one another to represent a composite creature, or they can depicted naturalistically in the order of their cosmic alignment.» (2013: 117)

Steven G. Alpert, «Borneo: The Island-Its People» in «Eyes of the Ancestors: The Arts of Island Southeast Asia at the Dallas Museum of Art», ed. Reimar Schefold in collaboration with Steven G. Alpert (Dallas Museum of Art; Yale University Press, New Haven and London), 2013, pages 117-123.

50

POST FIGURE

Busang Dayak, East Kalimantan, Indonesia
19th century or before

Wood, 143 cm

Collected in situ by Edmund Grundner, Salzburg
Collection Bruno Gay, Paris

Large sculpted posts were planted in the vicinities of villages and longhouses and designed to provide protection against evil spirits, ennemies, and various disorders or diseases. The present example shows a guardian figure reduced to a large menacing face seated on a cylindrical base decorated with typical foliated motifs. It is surmounted by a tall headdress in the shape of a burgeoning tree of life called *Sanggaran* in Dayak mythology.

From the late 1980s, following a life-long fascination with indigenous cultures and jungles, Edmund Grundner made annual trips to Borneo. He immersed himself in the Penan community, who at that time, were among the last nomadic jungle natives in existence. He became a close friend with Swiss environmental activist Bruno Manser; and even showed him a route over the mountains from Kalimantan to the Penan of Sarawak. He was the last westerner to see him alive before Bruno vanished in the jungle...

Over the years, Grundner amassed a large collection of sculptures and daily objects. He notably compiled a remarkable ensemble of arrow quivers. However, The centrepiece from his larger findings was a monumental abstract Modang figure now in the collections of the Quai Branly Museum, in Paris. (Inv. n° 70.2008.72.1)

He personally collected the present sculpture, in a Busang village located along the middle course of the Mahakam River region. It is carved in a specific type of tropical ironwood called *Kayu Ulin* (Eusideroxylon zwageri).

51

FUNERARY MASK

Ngaju people, Central Kalimantan, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Wood, natural pigments, iron nails, 86 cm

Collection Ed Smit, The Hague
Lempertz, Brussels, 31 March 2018, lot 93

The striking composition of this unusually large mask uses a concave wooden oval center. Painted black, it is shockingly punctuated by circular white and ochre red eyes and a jutting toothy mouth, all which appear as chevrons. The main body of the mask is further enhanced with attachments – a long curved nose with what appears to be a snake head at its end, ears with black outlined red floral features and a matching forward-leaning finial extending from the crown giving an impression suspended between sheer terror and mischievous humor.

Used by the Ngaju Dayak peoples of Central Kalimantan during traditional funerary ceremonies, very few of these masks have survived because they are usually burned after the performance. A similar example, now in the collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Basel was collected in situ in the 1930s presumably by Paul Wirz during his Borneo expedition. Another comparable funerary mask in the Basel collection is attributed to the Tumon Dayak, a subgroup of the Ngaju living in South Kalimantan.

These masks represent an underworld spirit and accompany the spirit of the deceased during the *Tiwah,* the Dayak secondary funeral, which included a complex series of ceremonies running over days, weeks or months. The frightening appearance of these masks was intended to scare off any malevolent spirits that may come into the village and seek to disrupt the course of the ceremonies. For this purpose, the masked characters, called *Bukung,* would carry a split piece of bamboo (a *selekap*) in one hand, sometimes one in each hand, which they would raise and shake to make a loud rattling clacking sound.

For many decades the present mask was owned by restauranteur and avid tribal art collector Ed Smit, supposedly from an old colonial source. Smit, along fellow collector H. J. Da Silva and well-known tribal art dealer Loed Van Bussel, was one of a small and influential group of postwar collectors and dealers from the Hague, which was nicknamed the widow of the Indies because of the high concentration of ex-colonials who retired there.

J. H. Van Brakel, et al., «A Passion for Indonesia Art: The Georg Tillman Collection at the Tropenmuseum», 1996, Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam, p.20, plate V.

52

HUDOQ MASK

Ujoh Bilang, East Kalimantan, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Wood, natural pigments, rattan, brass, trade-cloth, fur, feathers, 36 cm

Field collected by William O. Krohn in 1927
Collection of Thor Heyerdahl, Norway
Collection H. J. da Silva, The Hague
With Anthony Plowright, London

Exhibited in «Beyong the Java Sea: Art of Indonesia's Outer Islands»,
National Museum of Natural History, Washington, April 19, 1991 – July 14, 1991.

Published in «Art Borneo», Mark A. Johnson, Marina Del Ray, 2008, p. 6
«In Borneo Jungles», William O. Krohn, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, 1927, p. 220.

With a ghostly pale white complexion, long pointed nose, large brass bulbous eyes, a slightly opened mouth exposing two rows of teeth, four tusks and large peculiarly shaped wing-like ears, this extraordinary mask embodies the mysterious and otherworldly aesthetic of the sacred art form from the upper regions of Mahakam River. Described as gods, spirits and ancestors, the most important Hudoq masks have personal names, powers and attributes. They are said to have been supernaturally made to cover the visages of the deities lest they drive those who see them in their full glory go mad .

The mask represents a syncretic mythological being merging symbols of the upper, middle and underworld (Johnson, 2008). While the long nose is the beak of the rhinoceros hornbill (buceros rhinoceros), universally revered as the high god and ultimate symbol of the celestial realms, the menacing fangs belong to a Naga dragon, the primordial lord of the underworld and fertility.
The middle world of humans is his aristocratic dress as a warrior or chieftain, a crown-like cap embellished with upright white and black tail hornbill feathers, faux tiger claws piercing his upper ears and long pendulant earrings dangling to his shoulders from chains fixed to his lobes. With arching eyebrows mirroring an upward turned moustache, the mask is further decorated with tattoos or face-paint - parallel horizontal stripes on the ears and spirals on a protruding chin that curves upward. The archaic style and materials strongly suggest it dates from the 19th century.

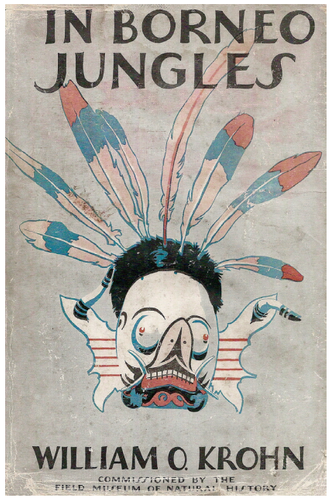
"As these unearthly looking actors begin their swaying movement, to the rhythm of gongs…"

William O. Krohn, 1927, p. 293

Hudoq dance rituals descend of pan-Indonesian agricultural dances that probably originated in the Neolithic. The performances took place at the beginning of the rainy season, after the planting of the rice, and lasted up to nine days. While its chief purpose was to protect the vulnerable seedlings from a host of malevolent spirits, the period was also one of wild alcohol-fueled celebrations when many taboos, including those on sexual behavior, were overlooked. Besides the rows of solemn deities photographed by most foreigners, the masks also included wild jungle beasts and all manner of clowns and fools who engaged in ribald antics. Dances were also held at times of pestilence, natural and manmade calamities.

This mask has a noteworthy provenance and history. It first appears in photos and in a drawing on the cover of a book published in 1927 by William O. Krohn, a forensic doctor from Chicago and member of New York's Circumnavigator's Club, who set off on a world tour to collect ethnographic art officially on behalf of Chicago's Field Museum. His visit to the Upper Mahakam River basin in East Borneo when it was part of the Netherlands East Indies was his most important and daring expedition. There he witnessed and photographed the dances in the village of Ujoh Bilang. While many of the artifacts he collected were presented to the Field Museum, this mask, which was featured on the cover of his book, remained in his private collection and upon his death passed on to his heirs. The mask surfaced again in the 1970s in the hands of Thor Heyderdahl of Kon Tiki fame, who sold it, along with several other Borneo artifacts, to legendary Dutch collector, H.J. da Silva. This was asserted by da Silva to the author, who saw the mask in his collection in the Hague in the 1980s. Since da Silva's death in 1988, it changed hands several times. In 1991 the mask was included in "Beyond the Java Sea", a prominent traveling museum exhibition that toured North America, Europe and Australia at the occasion of the 'Year of Indonesia' Festival. It will also be published in a major book on masks that is slated to come out by the end of 2022.

(Bruce W. Carpenter, personal communication, August 2022)



53

HUDOQ MASK

Kenyah/Kayan People, East Kalimantan, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Wood, natural pigments, rattan, fiber, 26 cm

Collection Ed Smit, The Hague

Among the Kayan and Kenyah of East Kalimantan, masks are linked with the rice-planting festival, when elaborate performances are staged to ensure a good harvest. These striking masks immediately captivated the cultural intelligentsia when they first appeared in the West. The surrealists were fascinated, and André Breton himself owned a superb example.

With a short forehead, animal-like round eyes looking out to the sides, huge ears, wide tubular nose and snarling mouth with upturned pointed upper lip and open moth bristling with teeth and curved tusks - symbols of the underworld - this mask is as brutish as it is ghostly. Appearing in rows and heavy costumes made of long dried leaves, Hudoq dancers sway to the beat of gongs as they weave themselves through the village. Mighty lords of the Upper and Lower Realms, they act as mediators between the polar forces of the Cosmos before the coming of the rains and after the seeding the rice fields upon which the well-being of the community depend. The starkness of the features and white pigment decorated with stripes and mysterious symbols, like the cross on the upper nose, embody an innate power visualized in elemental forms combining anthro and zoomorphic features.

(Bruce W. Carpenter, personal communication)

54

DAYAK SHIELD

Kenyah/Kayan People, East Kalimantan, Indonesia

1800 - 1900

Wood, pigments, 113 cm

Collection of Robert Wilson, New York

Exhibited at The Watermill Center, Long Island, 2015-2018

Following pages

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SHIELD

Circa 1900

Wood, pigments, 135 cm

With Davide Manfredi, Paris

56

SHIELD

1800 - 1900

Wood, pigments, 133 cm

Private collection, Rotterdam

57

SHIELD

Circa 1900

Wood, pigments, 121,5 cm

Berry de Bruijn collection, Breda

58

PROTECTIVE FIGURE

Kayanic Dayak, East Kalimantan, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Wood, 17,6 cm

With Erik Farrow, San Rafael, California

The shamans of the Dayak on Borneo keep their objects (small containers with ‘magic substances’, animal teeth, special stones, etc.) which they need for their work (oracles, soothsaying, judgements etc.) in round receptacles. These round ‘jars’ consist of bark, sewn up with wickerwork, and closed with a round wooden lid. On the outer wall of these sacred or ritual containers, normally such protective spirit figures, carved out of wood, are attached, in order to guard and protect the valuable contents of the ‘shaman boxes’. The present figure is such a tutelary spirit of a shaman box: carved carefully out of hard, dark brown wood in typical Dayak style, the spirit sits on a rounded plinth. Below a five-sided rod with two holes is connected, made out of the same piece of wood. By means of the two holes, above and below the protective spirit is connected to the container holding the paraphernalia of the shaman. (Feldman: 147, 148)

J. Feldman, «The Eloquent Dead: Ancestral Sculpture of Indonesia and Southeast Asia», University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1985, p. 147-148.

HEADHUNTING

AND TROPHY SKULLS

The practice of killing people to obtain their heads - Headhunting - is attested in most parts of the Austronesian world till the turn of the twentieth century. It was particularly widespread in traditional Indonesian cultures where it played a key role in the social organization, religion, and worldview of nearly all Dayak groups of Borneo - who typically believed it provided a supernaturally mediated reward, such as agricultural fertility, status in the afterlife, favour of spirits, protection of villages and general supernatural power.

Though the practice of headhunting has been of great interest to anthropologists since the early colonial times, little is known about the prehistory of this practice in Austronesia. Some scholars, like Robert Burst, conjectures that headhunting occurred at least 4,000 years ago in Proto-Malayo-Polynesian culture, and notes that it may be even older.

The recent phylogenetic studies of reconstruction of the ancestry of headhunting in Austronesia («*Pulotu*: Database of Austronesian Supernatural Beliefs and Practices», fig. 5A)confirms an even earlier origin of headhunting in the common ancestor of all Austronesian cultures.

Robert Burst, «Austronesian culture history: Some linguistic inferences and their relations to the archaeological record». World Archaeol. 1976; 8(1): 19–43.
J. Watts, «*Pulotu*: Database of Austronesian Supernatural Beliefs and Practices» (2015)

Left: «Two men hunting in Borneo», circa 1935. Photograph by M. Honda.
Courtesy of Leiden University Digital Library.

Among the Dayaks

Head-hunting was a living tradition encountered among all Dayak groups. In his essay «Decorated headhunting trophies of Borneo: A forgotten ritual art», austrian anthropologist Markus Mally writes : «A few groups decorated their trophy skulls in characteristic ways by either attaching wooden or other elements to individual skulls and/or by engraving mostly floral elements on the neurocranial and facial parts of the trophy. Some of these decorative techniques resulted in lavishly adorned objects that are found hardly anywhere else in the world. (...) He continues further : «an enemy´s head was an object of veneration, a blessing to the village community, and a kind of sacrifice to the supernatural beings. (...) As head/skull trophies were imbued with spiritual power, they were treated with great care to ensure their positive effects, as with poor treatment the owners were at risk that skulls would become dangerous. (...)

Although simple revenge was a frequent cause for headhunting all over Borneo, there were also specific circumstances under which either the *adat* - personal motivations - , or strategic and economic decisions would demand a fresh head or skull. Such trophies were either secured during a raid on an enemy's village or by ambushing villagers on their way to their fields, the nearby river, etc. As soon as the successful warriors arrived back home in their village elaborate reception ceremonies, the head feasts, that surrounded the ritual welcoming of the victim's head enabled its spirit to become a friend, guardian, and benefactor of the headhunters' community.»

M.H. Halewijn, a former Resident on Borneo, and commissar for the Dutch East Indies, writes in 1832: *«The so-called head-hunting raids of the Dayak are always celebrated with extraordinary expressions of joy. The head, which they usually acquire by means of assassination, is brought home, accompanied by a kind of fiercely shrieked war cheers (lahap-lahap), and proud gestures, where wife and children meet the husband, and receive him with tokens of happiness; guest meals are held, and the head-hunter considered to be brave is congratulated by the visitors with envy. He sits with haughtiness in their midst, as if to wished to put his comrades to shame, saying, "akau menting joea; akau tato joea", meaning: "I am also a rich man; I am also a man of prestige." The incitements of women here have a particularly damaging influence on this so murderous tradition of the Daijak, as they usually say to their husbands: "Are you not ashamed to see that another man has been able to hunt a head? Why do you stay at home, as if you were a coward? If you do not have enough courage, I, a woman, shall give you an example hereof.", and more such expressions, by means of which the husband's passions are aroused and often inflame in anger, so that he immediately decides to go on a head-hunting raid, and if possible takes the life of the first unfortunate individual he comes across. If, however, he does not succeed in doing so, and he must therefore return home without the bloody spoils, then upon his return, sorrow and contempt await him; his wife taunts him with words and gestures, and throws her veil (selindang) at his face and then, even for a long time, does not wish to meet him as her husband. (...)»*

59

HALF SKULL

Dayak Peoples, West Kalimantan, Indonesia

19th century or before

Human skull, 20 cm

With Galerie Alain Bovis, Paris

HALF SKULL

60

Melawi Dayak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia

19th century or before

Human skull, natural resin, 18 cm

With François Coppens, Belgium

About the existence of half trophy skulls, Mally explains that «although in most cases the possession of a whole head or skull was the goal, headhunting rites did not always require a complete trophy. Certain conditions demanded the division of a skull into two halves, for example, when two Bidayuh tribes went on a headhunting expedition but obtained only one head, it was - after its defleshing - divided along the middle axis and both parties received one half. Such skull divisions - quartered in some cases - were also reported from southeastern Sabah, and for the Tagal of Sabah even smaller pieces of a fresh head trophy were sufficient.»

He further enumerates the most relevant reasons that required a fresh head trophy: mourning, fertility for the women and the crops, the erection of a new longhouse, protection against diseases, social prestige and marriage, territorial expansion and individual motives.

Concerning the decorative aspect of trophy skulls Mally notes the enormous variety of decorations that were applied to the skulls compared to specimens of other regions of Southeast Asia. He basically distinguishes two type of decoration: «embellishments which were affixed to the skull, and motifs which were carved into the surface of the skull bones.»
Of this latter type, he points two recurrent motifs :

1. «The Lotus flower: a large flower motif, arranged mostly with four (main) petals around a circular center; the latter being the characteristic feature of this decoration that represents the spiritually important receptaculum of the common lotus flower illustration in Borneo. On most skulls this motif decorates the center of the frontal bone; sometimes it also frames the drilled hole on the skullcap which served for hanging up the trophy in the longhouse.

2. The Cup-shaped flower: this provisional nomenclature is proposed for certain, usually large flower motifs with various cup-shaped outlines of their calyces and tripartite corollas. When this motif is carried out in pairs and multiples thereof it is arranged in a characteristic symmetrical position along the centerline of the skullcap - the calyces either facing to the midline or the temples of the skull. Between the anterior and posterior pair of flowers usually a curved or bud-like protrusion is depicted.»

The ritual significance of most of these ornaments still remains an enigma. However, in the case of floral motifs like the lotus flower, the evidence of a previous Hindu-Javanese influence is obvious; and many of these designs actually find their origin during the Majapahit period, or well before. The floral offshoot motifs, and the scrolled and sprouting tendrils for instance, can clearly be related to the spiral shoots motifs which appear frequently in Austronesian iconography in prehistoric times and later. Over the ages, the symbolic remained quite the same: a metaphor for life, the revival of nature through human fertility and agricultural prosperity. These are highly important ritual elements connected to headhunting, of which trophy skulls are both the spiritual and the material vehicles.

Markus Mally, «Decorated Headhunting Trophies of Borneo: A Forgotten Ritual Art», art. in Borneo Research Bulletin n°46 (2016), p. 135-171.
Albert Van Zonnenveld, «Traditional weapons of Borneo: The Attire of Head-Hunters, Volume I: Shields and War Clothes», Sunfield publishing, Leiden (2018).

61

TROPHY SKULL

Bidayuh People, Northwestern Borneo, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Human skull, tinfoil, glass beads, 13 cm

With Loed Van Bussel, Amsterdam
Collection Robert Burawoy, Paris
Collection André Fourquet, Paris
Galerie Bernard Dulon, paris
Private collection, Switzerland

This striking trophy skull belongs to an extremely reduced number of Dayak skulls decorated with metal foils. An important specimen from this corpus - previously in the collection of Count Baudouin de Grunne - is now in Yale University. Several other examples are held in european museums: Leiden, the Tropenmusem, Stockholm, Leipzig, or Dresden, to cite a few. Roughly a handful are also known in private collections.

The use of tinfoil to cover the skull seems to be exclusively linked to the Bidayuh tribes who live across Sarawak and the north of West Kalimantan. The technic consists in gluing the tinfoil to the bone surface, and cutting the motifs from this foil. The characteristic ornaments are the lotus flower or the larger «cup-shaped» flower, unfurling its calyces and tripartite corollas symmetrically along the centerline of the skullcap. On a few - very scarce - examples an anthropomorphic figure is cut from the tinfoil and glued to the skullcap. The orbital cavities are usually filled in with vegetal resin or wooden discs and decorated with cowrie shells, giving the impression of closed eyes with lashes.

The presence of glass beads inserted in the eye sockets is quite rare, and gives an hallucinated look to the present head. The relatively small size of its cranium suggests that it may be from a woman or a child. Early accounts mention that some of the tribes considered the heads of women and children to be more valuable than those of the men, since it demonstrated that the warrior had penetrated into the heart of enemy territory and captured those very individuals whom men should protect.

62

KNIVES AND QUIVER

Dayak Peoples, Kalimantan, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Wood, iron, bone, 60 cm

Berry De Bruijn collection, Breda

Published in «*Traditional weapons of Borneo: The Attire of the Headhunters Part III : Swords & Knives*», Albert Von Zonneveld, 2021, p. 234

Considered perhaps even more valuable and personal than the sword itself, the *Piso Raout* is the utility knife of the *Mandau*. It is carried inside a secondary scabbard, often made of palm tree leaves instead of wood, and attached to the main scabbard. The *Piso Raout* knife was used after headhunting to remove the softer parts of the victim's head, like the eyes, etc.

Here, we have a superb set of five *Piso Raout* with a holder. All of them have a refined carved end, including two examples from animal bon (probably deer). The blade of the second one from the left is different from what is considered the norm, instead of fixing the blade in the handle, the top of the blade slides over the handle. The holder ends with a sculpted head of an *Aso* figure at the bottom, in which the points rest. Quite scarce to find a complete set with a beautiful holder.

63

RITUAL CONTAINER

Dayak People, Kalimantan, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Monkey skulls, beads, ceramic, rattan, cord, 18,5 cm

Collected *in situ* by Albert Reumert Rasmussen (1927-1999)
Private collection, Stockholm

Albert Reumert Rasmussen was a Danish explorer, filmmaker and producer, president of the Danish Adventurers club for many years. He traveled the world extensively, from Sahara to Borneo, where he recorded hours of films while collecting artifacts from the local tribes.

According to scholars, the type of ritual container like the example above was supposed to hold magical substances that would either help shaman's with healing or as protection against malevolent spirits. The are basically a magic charm, like a carved wood figure, but in the form of a ceramic jar with monkey skull lid with other decorations like animal teeth or bone fragments attached with beads.

Other sources suggests that they held the umbilical cords of newly born babies, as a way to protect them from bad spirits after birth. Small baskets with similar shells and beads decorations that did hold the umbilical cords in a small pouch place inside are actually known in the Iban-Dayak area.

WEAVING TOOL

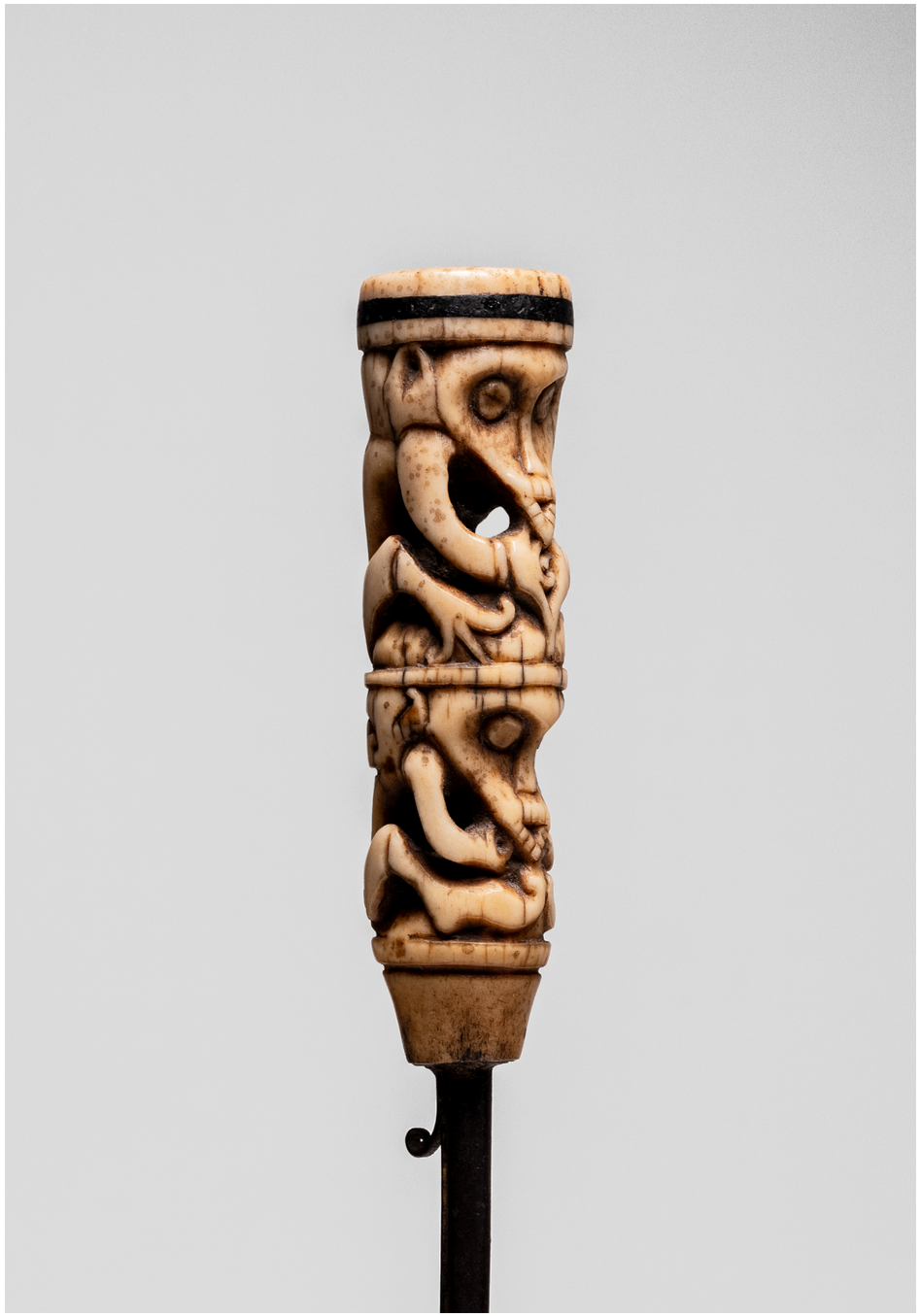
Kayanic Dayak, East Kalimantan, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Bone, iron, 18,6 cm

Private collection, Paris

The mat weaving tools called *kawit* in certain languages of Borneo - like the kelabit - are traditionally made of a wood or bone handle carved in an often intricated and beautiful combination of stylized animals and vegetal motifs, extending into a thin iron pick curved in its end and used to tighten the mats.

The present example is a little masterpiece. It depicts two archaic figures in powerful kayanic style, with typical large heart-shaped faces and intertwined limbs. The pick has also an elegant shape with a small loop and a curved point, combining both utilitarian attributes and refined aesthetic.



BEADWORK

Kenyah people, East Kalimantan, Indonesia

1800 - 1900

Beads, thread, 42 x 28 cm

Private collection, United States

66

ANKLET

Babar or Tanimbar Islands, Moluccas, Indonesia
19th century or before

Bronze, 13 cm

67

BRACELET

Iban People, Sarawak, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Shell, natural resin, cauris, 10 cm

MANDAU

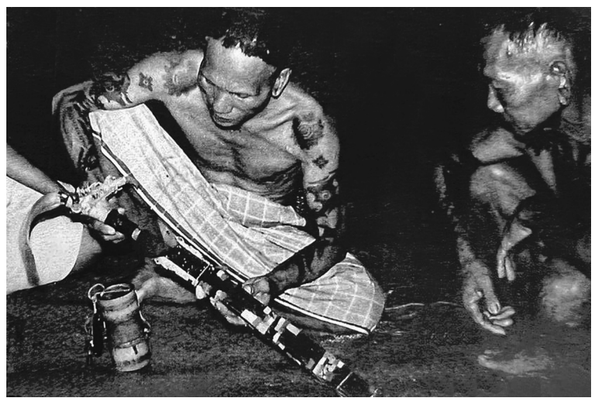
Iban people, Sarawak, Malaysia
Circa 1900

Iron, wood, animal bone and hair, 80 cm

Collected *in situ* by Charles Lenars in the 1960s.
Charles and Josette Lenars collection, Paris

Charles and Josette Lenars, both photographs and passionate about ethnography and archeology, worked in more than 80 countries around the world, documenting the life and art of indigenous people in numerous publications and films.

In the late 1960s they traveled for the first time to Borneo and Sarawak, where they had the opportunity to meet a local chieftain, photographed below, and acquire his «*parang ilang*» sword.



69

BULATO

Northern Nias Island, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Iron, wood, brass, buffalo horn,
boar tusks, rattan, 70 cm

Collection André Schoeller, Paris
Sotheby's Paris, 12.12.2012, lot 32
Collection Laurent Wargon, Paris

The highly symbolic handle of this superb sword represents the open jaw of the snake-dragon *Lasavra* surmounted by an ape-like figure with twirled legs. A typical assemblage of pig tusks forming a magical bowl intented to provide luck and protection to the warrior ornates the top of the scabbard.

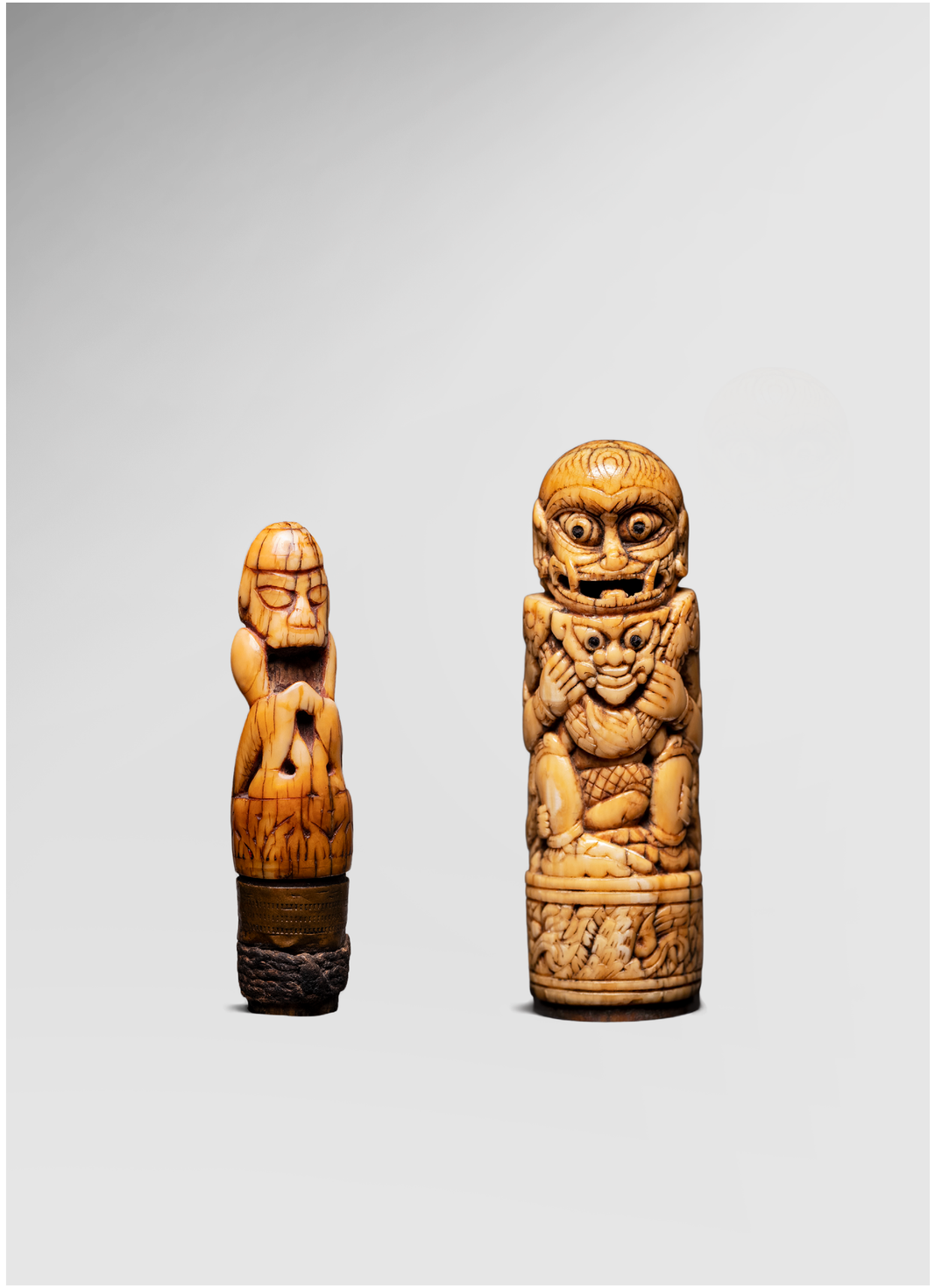
70

MANDAU

East Kalimantan, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Iron, silver, wood, horn, rattan
67,5 cm

With Renaud Vanuxem, Paris



71

KRIS HANDLE

Shan People, Burma
19th century or before

Ivory, brass, cord, 9 cm

Private collection, Barcelona

Exhibited at «*Ancestres Dels Mars Del Sud*», Fundacio Caixa, Girona
21 September-11 November 2007

Published in «*Ancestres Dels Mars De Sud*», Fundacio Caixa, Girona,
A. C. Salavedra, F. Pujol, Y. Ferrandin, J.M Ferrater, 2007, p. 38

72

SWORD HILT

Shan People, Myanmar/Burm
1700 - 1900

Ivory, black stone, 13,5 cm

Estate of Dr. Otto Schwend (1892-1951)
Collected in Siam between 1926 and 1938

73

SWORD

Shan People, Myanmar/Burma
1800 - 1900

Ivory, leather, iron, 45 cm

Estate of Dr. Otto Schwend (1892-1951)
Collected between 1926 and 1938, and since then continuously in family possession.

Dha is the Burmese word for «sword». The term is conventionally used to refer to a wide variety of knives and swords used by many people across Southeast Asia, especially present-day Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Yunnan, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.

As these hilts were all custom ordered, no two were the same. They tend to be full of symbolism that probably says something about the owner and the intended purpose of the weapon. On this example, the main figure represents the ogre *Bilu*, a fierce monster in Burmese folklore traditionally depicted with fangs and a protruding tongue.

The *Bilu* and his *Bilu ma* (female ogre) are fierce evil spirits thought to bring bad luck, disease, and famine. Consequently, the Burmese perform various acts of exorcism to drive *Bilu* away from their villages. According to legend, when the *Bilu* heard the words of the Buddha, they renounced their evil ways and fought for the Buddhist cause.

The broad use and diffusion of the *dha* across Southeast Asia makes it difficult to attribute a definitive origin. It may have its origins with the Tai people who migrated to the area from present-day Yunnan Province in southern China. It is interesting to note that comparative linguistic research seems to indicate that the Tai people were probably of Austronesian descent. Prior to living in mainland China, Tai-Kadai peoples are thought to have migrated from a homeland on the island of Taiwan, where they spoke a dialect of proto-Austronesian or one of its descendant languages.

74

CULT FIGURE

Siam Kingdom, Thailand
1700 - 1800

Ivory, 25 cm

Collection Hugh Moss, Hong Kong
Finch & Co., London
Edric Van Vredenburgh, Brussels
Michael Woerner, Bangkok
Collection Berry de Bruijn, Breda

Published in «*Les Ivoires*», Tardy, 2ème Partie, 1977, p. 204, n°4.

This ivory carving of exceptional quality is an effigy of *Kuman Thong*, a household divinity of Thai folk religion, whose cult originated in an ancient practice of necromancy.

The *Kuman Thong* statuette is believed to bring good luck and fortune to the house of its owner provided that he is properly revered and displayed. Although not part of traditional Buddhist beliefs and practices the *Kuman Thong* as a tutelary deity has been popular in Thailand since ancient times. These effigies were originally obtained by shamans from the desiccated foetuses of babies who had died within the womb. The witch doctors were said to have the power to invoke these stillborn babies, adopt them as their children, and use them in a way to facilitate their endeavours.
According to ancient Thai manuscripts used by practitioners of black magic, first the unborn fetus was surgically removed from the womb of its mother. Then the body of the child would be taken to a cemetery for the conduction of the proper ceremonial ritual to invoke a *Kuman Thong*. The body was then roasted until dry whilst the witch doctor chanted incantations of magical script. Once the rite was completed, the dry-roasted *Kuman* was painted with *Ya Lak* (a lacquer used to cover amulets and talismans with gold leaf). Thus this effigy received the name of *Kuman Thong*, meaning literally «Golden Boy». In the case of a female spirit child, the effigy is not called *Kuman Thong*, but *Kuman Nee*.

HANDLE

Lombok, Lesser Sunda Islands, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Horn, silver, 11 cm

Private collection, Barcelona

Exhibited at «*Ancestres Dels Mars Del Sud*», Fundacio Caixa, Girona
21 September-11 November 2007

Published in «*Ancestres Dels Mars De Sud*», Fundacio Caixa, Girona,
A. C. Salavedra, F. Pujol, Y. Ferrandin, J.M Ferrater, 2007, p. 68

76

CHISELS

Lombok, Lesser Sunda Islands, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Ivory, iron, silver, 16 cm

With Pierre Nachbaur, Bali

A charming betel-nut crusher with a pommel carved in the shape of a hornbill head. Its eyes are inlaid with glass; and the rich honey patina attests of its abundant use.

77

Dayak, East Kalimantan, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Animal bone, iron, 12 cm

Collection Serge Le Guennan, France

This small chisel is carved with a typical kayanic /Bahau style face.

78

KNIFE

Siberut, Mentawai Islands, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Wood, steel, bone, 48 cm

Private collection, California

The Mentawai belongs to the broad family of Austronesian-speaking peoples. They follow their own animist belief system called *Arat Sabulungan*, that links the supernatural powers of ancestral spirits to the ecology of the rainforest. Also known as the «Flower People», they never harvest a plant or take the life of an animal without asking for their spirit's forgiveness first because they believe every part of the environment has a spirit.

Mentawai men traditionally wear a loin cloth made from the bark of a gum tree; and adorn themselves with necklaces and flowers in their hair and ears. They usually cover their bodies with tattoos, and are known for sharpening their teeth with a chisel for aesthetic reasons. Their attire often comprises the traditional knife called *Palitai,* carried on the right, in the loin cloth; and which may be part of the dowry.

«The *Palitai* has a straight and double edged blade. The handle is uniquely long, slim and curiously curved in shape. It is a knife with a smooth blade on both edges of which are sharpened and run parallel. The edges come together at the tip to the end in a sharp point. The blade has in the middle along the entire length an elevated rib. The steel used to produce blades was imported from Sumatra, as forging was unknown on Mentawai islands. The blades were finished in the desired form on the spot. The total length may vary from 30 cm to 1 m. The hilt of the *Palitai* is thin and long, at the blade still rather broad but becoming thinner to run long and elegantly into an almost sharp tip or decorated end. The hilt has a round thicker part just past half way. »

Excerpt from Albert G. Van Zonneveld, «Traditional Weapons of the Indonesian Archipelago». Koninklyk Instituut Voor Taal Land, 2002.

79

CEREMONIAL PADDLE

Siberut, Mentawai Islands, Indonesia
Circa 1900

Wood, 164 cm

Collection Christian Duyckaerts, Mechelen

The elegant paddles called *sinaiming* in the Mentawai archipelago were sculpted by the parents of spouses and offered to them during the wedding ceremony. Suspended inside the common house, and treasured, they would eventually be displayed on the occasion of important clan ceremonies and feasts. The beauty of the form and the delicate finition of the paddle emphasize the prestige of its owner - and of his clan in the interclan rivalry.

80

CEREMONIAL PADDLE

Yami people, Southern Taiwan
1800 - 1900

Wood, natural pigments, 117 cm

Collection Mr and Mrs T., Paris
Collection Serge Le Guennan, France

This exceptionally rare and sumptuous ceremonial paddle is an eloquent testimony of the artistry of the Yami people, who live on the tiny outlying Orchid Island, south of Taiwan. Like the other indigenous groups established in Taiwan since prehistoric times - collectively referred to as «Formosan» - they belong to the Austronesian peoples, but speak a Western Malayo-Polynesian language presumed to be more closely related to the ethnic groups of the Philippines. The Yami are also the only Taiwanese indigenous people with a maritime culture. Considering their isolation and very little intermarriage between the islands, they can legitimately be considered as the most direct descendants of the Austronesians who sailed from Taiwan to reach the northernmost group of islands of the Philippines archipelago, the Batanes Islands, around 2200 BC.

Yami's ancestral hero, *Magamaog*, is credited with bringing the arts of agriculture and boat building to the Yami. Because of his importance to the people's survival, he is depicted not only on canoes, but also on house posts and ceremonial items, like this paddle. Its leaf-shaped blade is decorated in its lower section with a typical representation of *Magamaog* in squatting position inside a boat. The upper part of the blade is painted in black and carved in shallow relief with narrow bands of concentric rectangles and saw-tooth patterns.

Images of *Magamoag* might have acted, in part, to protect the household from *anito*, the malevolent souls of the dead... On the reverse side of this paddle another complex scene is painted, possibly a representation of this latter spirit.

Another Yami paddle with similar incised geometric patterns is illustrated in Sotheby's, London, November 1982, lot 65. It was mistakingly attributed to Santa Ysabel Island in the Solomon Islands.

81-82

NECKLACES

Ifugao, Luzon Island, Northern Philippines
1800 - 1900

Mother of pearl, rattan,

Collection Daniel Cordier, Paris

83

PALETTE

Dayak People, Kalimantan, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Wood, fiber, 19,4 cm

Collection Dominique Rabier, Belgium

The refinement of this object does not lead one to suspect it is a gold pan... Carved in a thin slice of dense wood, this exquisite palette has a slightly curved and flaired shape, decorated with rows of delicately incised rope motifs at each end. The smaller section, intended to be used as the handle, was tightened with fiber to avoid breakage. At approximately mid-section a little bump creates a subtle depression in the wider portion. The outer shape as well, adopts astutely the function of the object. The deep patina attests of its long usage and cherished conservation.

84

COMB

Batak people, Sumatra, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Wood, natural fibers, lead, 17 cm

Collected *in situ* by Rolf de Maré in 1938
Private collection, Stockholm

Rolf de Maré (1888-1964) was an mportant Swedish art collector and leader of the *Ballets Suédois* in Paris circa 1920-1925. In 1931 he founded the world's first research center and museum for dance in Paris. He opened the Dance Museum in Stockholm in 1953, and traveled all over the world to document dances and collect art and dance-related items. In the late 1930s he made a trip together with Claire Holt and Hans Evert to document and film dances on Sumatra, Borneo, Bali, Java, Nias, the Celebes, Timor and Papua New Guinea for his Dance Museum in Paris (*Les Archives internationales de la Danse* : A.I.D).

This very rare and exquisite wood comb comes from the Karo-Batak people inhabiting northern Sumatra. It consists of thin wooden sticks hold together delicately with fibre, lead strips, and cotton thread on a stained wooden handle.

A similar Batak comb is in the collection of the British Museum, London (As1933,0307.26).
Another example collected before 1868 is illustrated in «The Comb: Its History and Development», J. Cruse, Robert Hale Ltd, 2007, p. 118.

BRACELET

Batak People, Sumatra, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Shell, natural fiber, cord, 13 cm wide

With Dr. Augustin Krämer (1865-1941), Stuttgart
Paul Missner collection (1889-1958), Stuttgart

This beautiful ornament is a currency bracelet consisting of 47 shell rings cut in equal diameter and thickness, and plaited in a plant fiber band. It is labelled «L. 4/47 Lövenich», in the name of the German collector who acquired it *in situ*. It belonged afterwards to Prof. Augustin Krämer, the notorious director of the Linden Museum in Stuttgart.

86-87

STAFF FINIAL

Batak Toba people, Sumatra, Indonesia
19th century or before

Brass, hair, string, 7,5 cm

Private collection, Austria

FINIAL

Karo-Batak people, Sumatra, Indonesia
19th century or before

Brass, copper, 6 cm

Private collection, Paris

RITUAL STAFF

Batak Toba People, North Sumatra, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Wood, 153 cm

Private collection, The Netherlands

The Bataks were remarkable sculptors, particularly skilful with intricated wood carvings which required precision. Among these objects, the priests' staffs - called *Tunggal Panaluan* - are probably the most emblematic artefacts of their material culture.
During the ceremonies, the Batak *datu* (priest) entered into a trance and danced and performed other actions while holding the staffs, whose supernatural powers assisted in curing ceremonies, divination, malevolent magic, and other tasks.
The ritual staffs depict a sequence of human and animal figures positioned on top of one another. The two figures at the top represent a legendary twin brother and sister, whose incestuous relationship - according to oral tradition - was responsible for the origin of the staffs. After their relationship was discovered, the twins fled to the forest and encountered a tree hung with fruit. As the brother climbed the tree to pick fruit for his sister, he merged with it, becoming a wood image. His sister followed and met the same fate. Attempting to rescue them, a succession of *datu* and animals climbed the tree, transforming into the figures that appear below the ill-fated twins. The tree was later cut down, becoming the first *tunggal panaluan*.

«Carved in the very hard wood of a thorn tree, the Batak staff was sanctified by the insertion of a small quantity of magic material made with the viscera of a human sacrified for the purpose. From then on the spirit of the victim lived in the wand and obeyed the orders of the *datu,* who kept the wand on behalf of the community.» (Barbier : 62).

The present example is similar to another Batak staff that belonged to the Barbier-Mueller Museum in Geneva, and which was exhibited at the Dallas Museum of Art in 1984. An almost identical staff, probably carved by the same priest, was in the collection of Thomas Murray. They all bear witness of an archaic style defined by figures with a protruding mouth, bulging eyes and slick helmet-like headdresses.

Jean Paul Barbier, «Indonesian Primitive Art», Dallas Museum of Art, 1984, p. 62-63

PAGAR FIGURE

Batak People, Sumatra, Indonesia
19th century or before

Wood, animal hide and hair, 28 cm

Acquired by Lou Wells in Jakarta in 1979
David Pusack, Hong Kong
François Coppens, Belgium
Private collection, Paris

This very early guardian figure - called *pagar i*n Sumatra - probably once adorned the top of an important magic staff, or was part of a ritual altar. *Pagar* figures were supposed to represent the soul of ancestors, and instilled with apotropaic magic they had notably the power to ward off malevolant spirits and allow communication with the ancestors. The squatting position with arms joined at the knees is a protective posture characteristic of Batak art. What is less common is the presence of animal hide - possibly wild boar - on the head of the figure, and horse hair under its chin. The black patina that once covered the surface of the figure is entirely gone, revealing the beautiful variations of the wood structure and the refinement of the carving.

90

PROW ORNAMENT

Cenderawasih Bay, West Papua, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Wood, 18 cm

With Bruce Frank Primitive Art, New York

The lengthy coastline and numerous islands of Cenderawasih Bay in northwest New Guinea were, and to some extent remain, linked by a vast maritime trade network, which extended eastward along the New Guinea coast and westward to Indonesia. The frequent contact resulting from this network was responsible in part for the development of a shared artistic style, which, with local variants, appears across the region.

In the past, the central images in Cenderawasih art were *korwar*s, human figures with enlarged heads and arrow-shaped noses. *Korwar* portrayed recently deceased ancestors. The most important were freestanding figures that housed the spirits of the dead. Smaller *korwar* served as charms, and *korwar* images frequently appear on objects such as staffs, headrests, or canoe prows, like this very ancient fragmentary example illustrated above.

91

KORWAR

Biak Island, West Papua, Indonesia
1400 - 1500 AD

Wood, 33 cm

Collected in situ by Bernard Tursch, 1961
Irwin Hersey collection, New York
John A. Friede collection, Rye
Luciano Lanfranchi, Lugano
Galerie Davide Manfredi, Paris

Published in *Indonesian Primitive Art,* I. Hersey, 1991, page 82

This haunting figure was discovered along another very comparable sculpture (from The Jolika collection as well, now in the De Young Museum, San Francisco) in a natural cave used as an ancient funerary crypt near the village of Wagi, on the north coast of Biak Island, in the province of West Papua.
This region and the group of islands surrounding Cenderawasih Bay were known for a very specific type of carving called *korwar.* These commemorative statues represented the ancestor who was recently deceased, and were used both as a receptacle for their soul and an oracle.

While most of the large corpus of such sculptures collected by missionaries and travelers seem to date from the time of the Dutch East Indies - roughly from the early 19th century until the advent of christianity, circa 1920 - the present figure and its companion in the De Young Museum appear to be much older, as attested by the radiocarbon dating. The very similar features and erosion observed on both sculptures also confort the idea that the two figures were carved around the same period, and propably by the same hand.
Placed amongst the bone remains inside the funerary grotto, the De Young figure stands noticeably taller, suggesting a male and female couple, possibly the clan founders of a village or a tribe. These type of binary representations are common to most melanesian funerary traditions, as for instance in the neighbouring group of islands called Raja Ampat.
The great antiquity of these two sculptures - reputedly the most ancient Melanesian wood carvings to have survived - and their archaic presence clearly set them apart in the large corpus of *korwar* figures.

92

HEADREST

Cenderawasih Bay, West Papua, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Wood, 15 cm high

With Aalderink, Amsterdam
Private collection, Amsterdam

Some of the finest headrests produced in the whole Indo-Pacific region are originating from what was then known as Geelvink (Cenderawasih) Bay, in the style called «*korwar*». Although *korwar* art follows some iconographical conventions, a great variety of headrests and styles have been documented. The above example belongs to the most represented genre: showing two reclining figures - male and female - back to back. They represent the clan ancestors and serve as symbolic protectors. The two rising arches supporting the neck-bar represent mythological serpents with open maws; they generally figure prominently in stories relating the founding of the clans of each village.

DANCE MASK

Bali, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Wood, natural pigments, 22 cm

With Aalderink, Amsterdam

The great antiquity of this Balinese *topeng* is attested by the deep blackish patina on the reverse of the mask, and by its craqueled surface, revealing multiple layers of pale yellow pigments and lacquer. The contrast with the eyes, brows, and mouth that remained darker creates a vibrant expression, nuanced at the same time, both fearsome and frightened, beautiful and ugly... Probably in a conscious attempt, the carver followed the traditional *topeng* conventions to include in his sculpture many, sometimes contradictory, aspects of the human experience: the sacred and the profane, beauty and ugliness, refinement and caricature.

94

CEREMONIAL TEXTILE

Lampung, Southern Sumatra, Indonesia
Circa 1900

Cotton, silk, 76 x 82 cm

Acquired in Jakarta, circa 1980-1989
Collection Acher Eskenasy, Paris

Situated along the Sunda Strait between Java and Sumatra, a crucial trade route since antiquity, the Lampung region of southern Sumatra has long been a crossroads of cultures and artistic traditions. Lampung's sumptuous textile traditions reflect the enormous wealth brought to the region through the trade in pepper, which grew in abundance. The women of Lampung developed a rich variety of textiles that included ceremonial forms as well as other types, which were used as clothing. Among the most visually striking Lampung textiles are the intricately woven *tampan*, small square-shaped cloths that were exchanged during important rites of passage. *Tampan* were owned and used by virtually every Lampung family to consecrate ritual occasions and to assist each individual as he or she progressed through the diverse ceremonies that marked the various stages of life. *Tampan* were displayed or exchanged at both birth and death, at marriages, circumcisions, and ceremonies marking changes in social rank. They served as the focal point for ceremonial meals, as the seat for the elders who oversaw traditional law, and were tied to the ridge poles of newly built houses. They were a sacred force that bound society together.

Tampan occur in two regional styles and in two primary colors. Those woven in blue depict the secular realm, those in red the sacred. Examples from the inland mountains show stylized natural or domestic subjects and geometric designs, while those from the coast (*tampan pasisir*) display richly detailed scenes of ships and other motifs. Although *tampan* were used by all social classes, the ornate *tampan pasisir*, such as the present example, were a prerogative of the nobility.

In pristine condition, this *tampan* is of a more discreet type of ship cloth, with its rare plain blue bands contrasting with elegant rows of boats in red. The fringes and transitions are highlighted with cream-coloured lines alterning with succession of dots.

DANCE MASK

Java, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Wood, gilt, natural pigments, 18 cm

Loed Van Bussel collection, Amsterdam
With Bruce Frank Primitive Art, New York

This striking mask is a depiction of Aswatama, the son of Pardita Durna and Dewi Kripi, which appears in the Mahabharata cycle in *Wayang Purwa*, the traditional javanese puppet theatre play based on Hindu epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. It is typically painted in flesh color or in red, has round protruding eyes with red pupils, a pointed nose, and gold painted teeth. This is a particularly expressive and well carved example.

Two comparable masks are illustrated in the book of reference by Heinz Lucas: "Java-Masken, Der Tanz auf einem Bein", Erich Roth Verlag, Kassel, 1973, pages 292, 293.

Following page : "Wajang topeng in Java", Annonymous, G. Kolff & Co. Postcard, circa 1910.

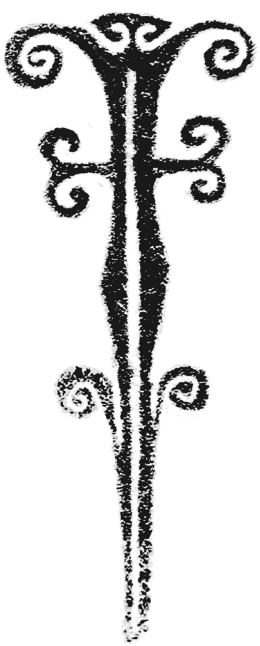
96

CEREMONIAL CLOTH

Iban People, West Kalimantan, Indonesia
1800 - 1900

Cotton, 179 x 88 cm

With Serge Schoffel, Brussels

Ceremonial cloth called *Pua* decorated with potent and charged iconography are among the most precious textiles of the Iban tribes of northwest Borneo. Textiles decorated in this manner were used almost exclusively to wrap head trophies or skulls and to mark off sacred spaces and decorate altars on which these were placed as offerings and intermediaries for divine intervention. They could also be used to wrap or cover the deceased in funerary proceedings. Iban women are initiated into the art of dyeing and weaving the intricate ikat motifs by certain spirits. They begin as young girls, copying patterns and over time as they become more accomplished, create ritually powerful new designs.

The colours of this beautiful and ancient *Pua* cloth have soften a bit over time, but its design retains a great clarity and elegance.