

## FEATURE

As a researcher of ethnographic art concentrating on the documentation of missionary collections, I was asked to have a closer look into the history of a recently surfaced korwar collection. I did not know what to expect. It was hard to imagine a collection of korwars outside a museum to begin with, yet now I was gazing at korwar figures lined up before me, which dominated the entire room. Their expressive faces stared at me defiantly. On the ground lay some wrinkled newspapers in which these ancestral effigies had been wrapped: *The Haagsche Courant*, Monday, August 24, 1953. My puzzled look did not go unnoticed: "All I know is that these korwars have been in the possession of a teacher whose family name was Blekkink. He taught geography at Christian High School in The Hague. He died in 1953."

It could hardly be a coincidence that these korwars were wrapped in the daily newspaper from The Hague of the same year in which Blekkink had died. Small handwritten tags on some of the korwars revealed where they were once collected: "Southern coast of Biak," "Japen Island," and "Mios Woendi, Padaido Islands." On the back of one korwar was written: "Soul image of Wongor Soeri, Mokmer southern coast Biak." I have never seen a korwar with this kind of provenance attached to it in any private collection. Unbelievable. This was almost as good as it gets. From whom did Blekkink gather

this detailed information? Or could he have collected these korwars himself? But then again, who said that the handwriting on these tags was Blekkink's to begin with?

"There is a photograph in the collection of the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam, in which one of Blekkink's korwars can be seen. I believe it was taken around 1910, during an expedition in North New Guinea. I was also told that Blekkink had connections with the "Zendingsbureau" in Oegstgeest. I heard missionaries were trained there, but that's your expertise, isn't it?"

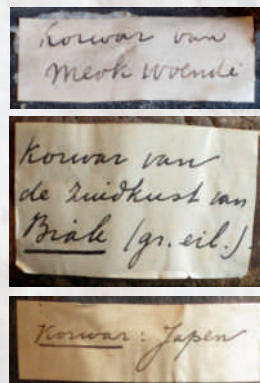
That did ring a bell. Oegstgeest, a town just north of Leiden, had been home to several protestant missionary societies. With this last remark there were enough clues to start my research based on Blekkink and The Hague, a photograph, Oegstgeest, and a missionary society. Over the following days I focused on these little facts and pieces, tying them together, and a story worth telling slowly unraveled.

### HENRY BLEKKINK AND THE HAGUE

In order to learn more about Blekkink and to find out if he had a past in the Dutch East Indies, I went to several archives in The Hague. A visit to the Dutch East Indies Family Archives (Foundation I.F.A.)<sup>1</sup> was very helpful: Henry Siegfried Leonard Blekkink was born on October 27, 1888, in Kendal, Java. His father, Hendrikus Blekkink, had been

FIG. 2: Some of the labels from the Blekkink korwar collection.

Photo © Tribal Art magazine.  
Inscriptions read:  
"Korwar van meok woende"  
"Korwar van de Zuidkust van Biak (gr. eil.)"  
"Korwar: Japen"



# THE KORWAR COLLECTION OF Henry Blekkink

By Frans-Karel Weener

FIG. 1 (below and screened behind): Pages from *Haagsche Courant* that were used to wrap the korwars.

Photo © Tribal Art magazine.

FIG. 3: Photograph from the Mamberamo Expedition, 1909.

Glass plate negative.  
Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen, Amsterdam, Mamberamo no. 25 (coll. no. 10006136).  
© KIT.







FIG. 4 (left): Henry Blekkink with students at De Populier school, The Hague, 1953.

Archive Chr. De Populier school, inv. 1415.  
With thanks to Mr. F. van Rooijen, Gemeentearchief, The Hague.

sent to the Dutch East Indies for a second time, where he was appointed as a teacher. Henry's parents had left the Netherlands on October 29, 1887, aboard the steamship *Prinses Amalia*. About ten years later, due to a liver disorder of his father, the family traveled back to the Netherlands, where his father died on May 8, 1900, in Winterswijk. The death of his father must have had a significant impact on the eleven-year-old Henry.

I did not find much about his whereabouts in the following years, but according to the Municipal Archives in The Hague, Henry Blekkink moved from the city of Utrecht to The Hague in September 1919. He lived there at several addresses together with his mother, whom he looked after until her death in 1942. I was not surprised, therefore, to find that Henry Blekkink never married. Until his death on June 27, 1953, aged sixty-four, he taught geography at the Christian High School, "The Populier," in The Hague. A nephew inherited his korwar collection.



FIGS. 5 and 6 (two views): Cenderawasih Bay, western New Guinea.

Wood. H: 27 cm.  
Private collection, The Netherlands.  
This Korwar is the only one to appear in the photograph from the Mamberamo Expedition.  
Photos © Jan van Esch.







### THE PHOTOGRAPH WITH HENRY'S KORWAR

The photograph in the collection of the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) in Amsterdam, in which a korwar from Blekkink's collection can be seen, was at once significant. It shows eight korwar figures, a figurine in the shape of a twisted snake, a human skull in a basket, and ten amulets. According to the information given to me by the KIT Photo Bureau,<sup>2</sup> this photograph was taken during the first military exploratory expedition to the Mamberamo area (November 1909–April 1910) under the command of Dutch officer Franssen Herderschee.<sup>3</sup> To my knowledge, this photograph was published for the first time in 1920 in a report about the military exploratory expeditions in Dutch New Guinea between 1907 and 1915.<sup>4</sup> The image caption reads: "Papuan idols (Korwar) Geelvink Bay." The korwar in the upper right-hand corner of this photograph was part of Henry Blekkink's collection. Truly wonderful! But what made this photograph of overriding importance was the fact that two other objects



in the picture are part of the collection of the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam, namely, the skull korwar<sup>5</sup> and the twisted snake next to it, inventory numbers 17634 and 17635, respectively. If it were possible to find out how these two objects ended up in Rotterdam or maybe even who collected them, it would give me a number of new research possibilities.

The catalogues, registers, and inventory lists from the Wereldmuseum yielded much more information than I could have hoped for.<sup>6</sup> Apparently, the skull korwar and the twisted snake entered the museum collection in June 1910 together with a number of other objects. All items had been acquired from the protestant missionary F. J. F. van Hasselt, who had been in Kwawi, Doreh Bay, northern New Guinea. Van Hasselt had been a missionary of the Utrecht Missionary Society



(UZV) and the headquarters of this society had been in Oegstgeest. I could hardly contain my joy.

**FRANS JOHANNES FREDERIK VAN HASSELT (1870–1939)**

The Utrecht Missionary Society was founded in 1859 and sent its first three missionaries to northern New Guinea, the Geelvink Bay area, in 1862. Among them was Frans van Hasselt's father, J. L. van Hasselt. The missionaries worked in a hostile environment and were regarded with mistrust by the natives. After twenty-five years of hardship, the results were quite discouraging: Only twenty natives were baptized. After fifty years' work, the number of converts had risen to 260. In the archives of the Utrecht Missionary Society, I found evidence that missionaries from this society collected korwar from the very start of their mission in New Guinea. How many korwar they collected is hard to estimate, as numbers are not mentioned in their booklets.



**FIG. 13: Missionary conference on Roon Island, 1900.**

Standing from left to right: Metz, van Balen, van Boetzelaer, and Frans van Hasselt. Seated from left to right: Dr. J. W. Gunning (director of the missionary society of Utrecht) and J. L. van Hasselt, Frans' father. © Archive Protestants Landelijk Dienstencentrum (PLDC), Utrecht, Foto-1-portretten-G-2. With thanks to Ms. Duursema, Ms. Werner, and H. Lems.

**FIG. 14: Museon inventory card, The Hague.**



**FIG. 7 (facing page left): Korwar, Cenderawasih Bay, western New Guinea.**

Wood and fabric. Private collection, USA. Its label reads: "Korwar van ..nga, doeber Zuidkust ...gr. eil., Biak."



**FIG. 8 (facing page center): Korwar, Cenderawasih Bay, western New Guinea.**

Wood and fabric. H: 32 cm. Private collection, The Netherlands. Photo © Jan van Esch. Its label reads: "Zielebeeld van Wongor Soerie = krokodil groeien Mokmeer a/d Zuidk. v. Biak."



**FIG. 9 (facing page right): Korwar, Cenderawasih Bay, western New Guinea.**

Wood. H: 27 cm. Private collection, The Netherlands. Photo © Jan van Esch.

**FIG. 10 (above left): Korwar, Biak Island, Cenderawasih Bay, western New Guinea.**

Wood. H: 30.5 cm. Private collection, The Netherlands. Photo © Jan van Esch.

**FIGS. 11 and 12 (above and right): Korwar, Biak Island, Cenderawasih Bay, western New Guinea.**

Wood. H: 31 cm. Yann Ferrandin Collection, Paris. Photos © Hughes Dubois. Its label reads: "Korwar Z. Kust Biak."





FIG. 15 (above): **Korwar, Cenderawasih Bay, western New Guinea.**

Wood, beads, glass. H: 23.5 cm.  
Private collection, USA.  
Its label reads: "Biak."



FIG. 16 (left): **Korwar, Biak Island, Cenderawasih Bay, western New Guinea.**

Wood. H: 7.5 cm.  
Galerie Pascasio Manfredi, private collection.  
Photo © Frank Verdier.

FIG. 17 (right): **Korwar, Biak Island, Cenderawasih Bay, western New Guinea.**

Wood, glass beads. H: 26 cm.  
Galerie Pascasio Manfredi, Patrick Wormser Collection.  
Photo © P. Notarianni.



It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century, after the establishment of direct government in New Guinea and a smallpox epidemic,<sup>7</sup> that the Papuans in Geelvink Bay gradually became more interested in Christianity and less attached to their venerated korwars. When a village "converted" to Christianity, Papuans would either burn or hand over their korwars to the missionaries.

Missionary Frans van Hasselt arrived in New Guinea in 1894 and joined his father in Mansinam, a small island near Manokwari. With his little sailboat named *Utrecht*, he was able to visit the different islands within the Geelvink Bay area, such as the Schouten Islands and Numfor. He did so several times a year, and from his letters sent to the board of his society it can be concluded that during these trips he collected numerous korwars and amulets. In a letter dated May 13, 1908, from Mansinam, for example, he wrote that on Sunday, April 26, seventy-two korwars were handed over to him on the island of Biak.<sup>8</sup>

On April 16, 1909, he wrote to the director of his society that he would send a collection of approximately 400 korwars, amulets, trophy heads, and weaponry to the Netherlands, which he collected on the island of Soepiori, Sowek, in February 1909.<sup>9</sup>

In a letter dated May 7, 1909, from Kwawi, van Hasselt writes that he is busy packing the korwars, which he had collected on Biak, Numfor, and Mansinam, for "the exhibition."

He sent these korwars to Utrecht and noted that his father and missionary Jens<sup>10</sup> could easily distinguish the difference between those from Biak and those from Numfor.<sup>11</sup>

By "the exhibition" van Hasselt meant the mission exhibition organized by the Utrecht Missionary Society in 1909, which was celebrating its 50th anniversary. Visitors entering this exhibition were surrounded by curiosities and ethnographic objects.

The emphasis was placed on the presentation of exotica: Fearsome weaponry, trophy heads, and korwars were displayed. Missionaries told stories, which frequently portrayed themselves as pioneers among the savages, with evil sorcerers or headhunters as their opponents. The seventy-two korwars, which van Hasselt collected on Biak,





FIG. 18 (left): **Korwar, Cenderawasih Bay, western New Guinea.**

Wood. H: 26 cm.  
Private collection, The Netherlands.  
Photo © Jan van Esch.



FIG. 19 (right): **Korwar, Cenderawasih Bay, western New Guinea.**

Wood. H: 19.5 cm.  
Private collection, The Netherlands.  
Photo © Jan van Esch.



FIG. 20 (lower left): **Korwar, Cenderawasih Bay, western New Guinea.**

Wood. H: 19 cm.  
Private collection, The Netherlands.  
Photo © Jan van Esch.



FIG. 21 (lower right): **Korwar, Yapen Island, Cenderawasih Bay, western New Guinea.**

Wood, shell. H: 21 cm.  
Private collection, The Netherlands.  
Photo © Jan van Esch.  
Its label reads: "Korwar: Japen."

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were all displayed on a table and formed the main attraction of this exhibition. Presented as “The booty of Biak,” these korwars were seen as evidence of the victory of Christianity over heathendom.

Over the years, dozens of these protestant mission exhibitions were held, co-organized by the Utrecht Missionary Society. The purpose of these exhibitions was twofold: to make the public aware of people who had never been evangelized, and, secondly, to attract benefactors and raise funds to further the work done by the missionaries posted overseas. During my search I found some photographs of protestant mission exhibitions, and in each of them korwars could be seen. These korwar figures are now part of museum or private collections, and some of them could be identified. Regrettably, I recognized no korwars from Blekkink’s collection in any of these photographs.

Rethinking the information I had found so far, I ruled out the possibility that Henry Blekkink had collected any of the korwars in New Guinea himself. In fact, I found nothing in Blekkink’s records that indicated that he had been in northern New Guinea at all.

Given the date of the *Haagsche Courant* in which Blekkink’s korwar collection had been wrapped, it seemed to me that it was stored away two months after his death, most probably by his nephew.

After reading van Hasselt’s letters in the archives, I knew it was not his handwriting on the tags attached to Blekkink’s korwars. But who else but Frans van Hasselt would have known where Blekkink’s korwars had been collected? “Soul image of Wongor Soeri, Mokmer, southern coast Biak” and “Mios Woendi, Padaido Islands.” Even the korwars given to the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam by the Utrecht Missionary Society lacked this kind of firsthand information. Therefore, I reasoned that it had to be Henry Blekkink’s handwriting on the labels and Frans van Hasselt’s knowledge. They had known each other, but when and where did they meet? I found the answer to this question after a visit to the Museon, a museum for culture and science in The Hague.

## NEW GUINEA STUDY CIRCLE OF THE MOLUCCAN INSTITUTE

The main purpose of my visit to the Museon was a collection of African objects and had nothing to do with my research on Henry Blekkink’s collection. But when I saw several korwars on display at this museum, I was eager to find out how these korwars had come into the possession of the Museon. A certain J. W. F. J. de Wal had apparently given some korwars along with some other things to this museum in 1934. He collected these korwars in 1911 in New Guinea. One of the inventory cards of the collection from de Wal contained the inscription: “Acquired from E. J. F. van Hasselt.” I was very excited when I read Frans van Hasselt’s name, but who was de Wal? I soon learned that Johan de Wal had been the commander of the second military exploratory expedition to the Mamberamo area in 1911. While searching for more details about this expedition, something else caught my attention: De Wal had been a member of the New Guinea Study Circle of the Moluccan Institute.<sup>12</sup>

The New Guinea Study Circle was connected to the Royal Colonial Institute (nowadays the Royal Tropical Institute) and founded in 1934. It was based in The Hague. Its members shared a general interest in New Guinea, and many of them had lived in the Dutch East Indies. Among them were officials of the Netherlands Indies’ administration, representatives of colonial enterprises, a variety of scientists, and interested persons. Lectures were organized, and during meetings information about New Guinea was exchanged. For obvious reasons I visited the archive of this New Guinea Study Circle and delved into its membership records: Frans van Hasselt registered as a member in 1934; Henry Blekkink did so in 1937. Sometimes you get lucky.

## EPILOGUE

After the death of Blekkink’s nephew, the korwar collection was sold. Due to circumstances, my research ended with a visit to his widow. She told me that Henry Blekkink died suddenly from heart failure and that her husband, Blekkink’s favorite



Zendingstentoonstelling  
23-28 Febr. 1931  
Gymlokaal Chr. H.S.

FIG. 22 (left): Missionary exposition, gymnasium, Christian High School, The Hague, February 23–28, 1931.

Henry Blekkink Collection. Reproduced by kind permission of his heirs.

The inscription on the back is recognizable as the same as on the labels of the korwars.





FACING PAGE  
 FIG. 23 (top): **Korwar,**  
**Cenderawasih Bay,**  
**western New Guinea.**

Wood. H: 29 cm.  
 Private collection, Belgium.  
 Photo © Anne Deknock.

FIG. 24 (center): **Korwar,**  
**Biak Island,**  
**Cenderawasih Bay,**  
**western New Guinea.**

Wood. H: 29 cm.  
 Private collection, The Netherlands.  
 Photo © Jan van Esch.  
 Its label reads: "Korwar van de  
 Zuidkust van Biak (gr. eil.)."

FIG. 25 (bottom): **Korwar,**  
**Biak Island,**  
**Cenderawasih Bay,**  
**western New Guinea.**

Wood. H: 38 cm.  
 Private collection, The Netherlands.  
 Photo © Jan van Esch.  
 Its label reads: "Korwar Biak."

THIS PAGE  
 FIG. 26 (above left):  
**Korwar, Yapen Island,**  
**Cenderawasih Bay,**  
**western New Guinea.**

Wood. H: 22.5 cm.  
 Private collection, France.  
 Photo © Jan van Esch.  
 Its label reads: "Korwar: Japen."

FIG. 27 (above right):  
**Korwar, Cenderawasih**  
**Bay, western New**  
**Guinea.**

Wood. H: 35 cm.  
 Private collection, The Netherlands.  
 Photo © Jan van Esch.  
 Its label reads: "Korwar van Meok  
 Woendi."

FIG. 28 (left): **Korwar,**  
**Biak Island,**  
**Cenderawasih Bay,**  
**western New Guinea.**

Wood, glass beads. H: 32 cm.  
 Private collection, The Netherlands.  
 Photo © Jan van Esch.  
 Its label reads: "Korwar van de  
 Zuidkust van Biak (gr. eil.)."

FIG. 29 (right): **Korwar,**  
**Padaido Island,**  
**Cenderawasih Bay,**  
**western New Guinea.**

Wood, fabric. H: 37.5 cm.  
 Private collection, The Netherlands.  
 Photo © Jan van Esch.  
 Its label reads: "Korwar van  
 Meokwoendi Padaido - eil."







nephew, inherited Uncle Henry’s house with everything in it. Henry Blekkink had been very fond of his korwar collection, and it was kept in his study in a specially made cabinet.

“My husband used this cabinet for his books, and shortly after Henry’s death he wrapped all korwars in newspapers and stored them away in two wooden chests. I opened these boxes only a few months ago.”

I went through the photo albums of Henry Blekkink that she gave me to look in. In one of them I found a photograph of a mission exhibition. On the back was written: “Mission exhibition, gym, Christian High School The Hague. 23–28 February 1931.” Blekkink’s handwriting for sure, and definitely the same as that on the labels attached to the korwars. Apparently, Blekkink helped organize a mission exhibition of the Utrecht Missionary Society at his own school. Several korwars could be seen in the photograph.

“I never met Uncle Henry myself, but my husband would have known the answers to your questions, I guess. He was a very accurate man, you know. Of course, I didn’t know you were doing research on Henry’s korwar collection. If I had known that, I would never have thrown away Henry’s correspondence.”

FIG. 30 (left): **Korwar, Biak Island, Cenderawasih Bay, western New Guinea.**

Wood, fabric. H: 36 cm.  
Private collection, The Netherlands.  
Photo © Jan van Esch.  
Its label reads: “Korwar Z. Kust Biak.”

FIG. 31 (above): **Korwar, Cenderawasih Bay, western New Guinea.**

Wood, glass beads. H: 18.5 cm.  
Private collection, The Netherlands.  
Photo © Jan van Esch.

FIG. 32 (right): **Korwar, Biak Island, Cenderawasih Bay, western New Guinea.**

Wood, fabric. H: 34 cm.  
Private collection, the Netherlands.  
Photo © Jan van Esch.  
Its label reads: “Korwar Z. Kust Biak.”

NOTES

1. Stichting Indisch Familie Archief (Sifa).
2. Special thanks to Steven Vink, Photo Bureau, KIT, Amsterdam.
3. The negative of this picture is referred to as “Mamberamo-expeditie N. Guinee Nr. 25.”
4. *Verslag van de militaire exploratie van Nederlandsch – Nieuw Guinee 1907–1915*. Weltevreden: Landsdrukkerij, 1920: 324, Pl. 151.
5. This korwar has been published in Th. P. van Baaren, *Korwars and Korwar Style: Art and Ancestor Worship in North-West New Guinea*. Wageningen 1968, pl. no. 3.
6. With special thanks to Carien Dumoulin-Horst, Wereldmuseum Rotterdam.
7. When Frans van Hasselt arrived on the island of Soepiori in February 1909, the Papuans had already destroyed a large number of korwars. According to van Hasselt, they did so because the korwars were powerless against smallpox. In F. J. F. van Hasselt, *Laatste berichten uit Nieuw-Guinea*, Utrecht, 1909, 12.
8. The Utrecht Archive, Access number: 1102-1, Inventory number: 2434, letter no. 249.
9. The Utrecht Archive, Access number: 1102-1, Inventory number: 2434, letter no. —.
10. Van Hasselt’s father returned to the Netherlands in December 1907. Missionary W. L. Jens worked in New Guinea from 1877–99.
11. The Utrecht Archive, Access number: 1102-1, Inventory number: 2434, letter no. 359.
12. Nieuw-Guinea Studiekring van het Molukken Instituut.



**KORWAR**



FIG. 33 (two views):  
**Korwar, Biak Island,  
Cenderawasih Bay,  
western New Guinea.**

Wood. H: 33.5 cm.  
Private collection, The Netherlands.  
Photo © Jan van Esch.  
Its label reads: "Korwar Z. Kust  
Biak."





## KORWARS, ORCHIDS, AND HALLEY'S COMET

**What do korwars, orchids, and Halley's Comet have in common? Nothing really, but during my research they all came together.**

As primary sources about korwars are mostly Dutch and hardly any of them are available outside The Netherlands, authors frequently use van Baaren's monograph *Korwar and Korwar Style*<sup>1</sup> when writing about these ancestor figures. According to van Baaren:

The ancestor figures of the Geelvinkbay are usually called korwar. Many variations exist, e.g., karwar, kor(r)owa(a)r, etc. Korwar is said to signify soul or spirit and by extension the figure in which the soul or spirit is thought to dwell.<sup>2</sup>

And quoting missionary J. L. van Hasselt:<sup>3</sup>

By means of this korwar they converse with the spirit of the dead person when his advice or assistance is required in cases of illness or in other dangers, for success in fishing for trepang<sup>4</sup> or when planning a journey. For this reason, the korwar is held in great honour, adorned with pieces of cloth and offered tobacco, in order that he may be favourably disposed.<sup>5</sup>

The *Noemfoorsch Woordenboek*<sup>6</sup> (*Numfor dictionary*) was published in 1947. This dictionary was compiled by father and son van Hasselt and is the result of their decades-long study of the languages that are spoken in and around the Cenderawasih Bay. Frans van Hasselt had a keen interest in linguistics, and his definition of korwar slightly differs from those quoted above:

**Kārwär** (kōrwār): Wooden image for the spirits of the deceased; serves as a medium for making contact with those who have passed away, and through them with the demons, whose presence they desire, particularly against sickness. The derivation of the word is not completely certain. There are those among the Biakkers who believe the word derives from *ārwär*, which means "saying someone is dead, who is still living ..."

According to the meaning that van Hasselt attributes to the use of korwars, the spirits summoned of the predecessors are intermediaries between the living and the demons. These demons are therefore at least as important as the ancestors themselves. Two letters from van Hasselt shed a little more light on this find. On November 29, 1909, van Hasselt writes to his board: "A very strange *mon* was recently brought to me by guru Tanamal of Numfor. This *mon* was in the form of a twisted sea snake, roughly [drawing] this form. I had never seen nor heard of this type before."<sup>7</sup> In a letter dated April 15, 1910, at Kwawi, directed to the board of his missionary society, he writes:

"You will receive several korwars via Mr Simmerman. One the same as that I have already sent from Soweik, doll, in which the skull will be placed; ... one skull in a basket that is honoured as such; one snake (most certainly unique, I have found no previous description). The last is a *mon*."<sup>8</sup>

All the objects that Frans van Hasselt describes here can be seen on the black-and-white photo of the korwars. The "*mon*" of Numfor to which van Hasselt refers in his letters and of which he made a small sketch, is without doubt the snake figure that we see in this photo. But what is a "*mon*"? If we consult van Hasselt's Numfor dictionary, we find the following meaning:

**Mon** - Demon. Spirit (good and evil). Exorciser of spirits. Image for a demon. The Papuans believe the air to be inhabited by demons. People can obtain the help of such a spirit through the medium of a deceased person. They believe that the spirit of a deceased person can come into contact with a demon and lead him to the living, who require his help. Such people, possessed by a demon are also called *mon* and it is these who claim to be able to heal sicknesses through the *mon* they make use of. These *mons* are also the ones who



FIG. 34 (left): **Korwar, Cenderawasih Bay, western New Guinea.**

Wood, human skull, fabric, glass. H: 35 cm. Collected by F. van Hasselt. © Wereldmuseum, Rotterdam, inv. 17634.

FIG. 35 (right): **Mon, Numfor Island, Cenderawasih Bay, western New Guinea.**

Wood, fabric. H: 28 cm. © Wereldmuseum, Rotterdam, inv. 17635. Photo: ImageFinder/Theo van Pinxteren, with thanks to Eline Kevenaer and Luna Bremer.





bring the spirits of the deceased into the korwars fashioned for them, and, if necessary, by means of these korwars, bring themselves into contact with the deceased. Images are also made for demons, that themselves are also called "mon". People also count ancestors among the demons.

The meanings of the words *kārwār* and *mon* from van Hasselt's dictionary complement one another well and in my opinion broaden our knowledge about such issues as the use of these ancestor images. I am convinced that research in the archives of the Utrecht Missionary Society will in the future generate new information about korwars and their use.

For the time being, there is just one question that has to be answered: Who took the photo in which the korwars collected by van Hasselt can be seen? Until recently this was unknown, but partly thanks to van Hasselt this question can now be answered. In a letter to his board dated 10 December 1909, he writes: "Here are some photos. The largest was taken by Mr Demmeni, photographer of the expedition destined for Mamberamo."<sup>9</sup>

Because the glass negative of the korwar photo was part of the photo collection of the Tropical Museum in Amsterdam, I contacted Steven Vink,<sup>10</sup> former curator of the Historical Photo Collection of this museum. I asked him whether he knew anything of the name Demmeni in combination with the first Mamberamo expedition. Vink replied, "Jean Demmeni (1866–1939) is well-known to us but not from expeditions to New Guinea. He is primarily known for his photos taken during the two Committee journeys of researcher A. W. Nieuwenhuis to Borneo in 1896 and 1899 (see *Quer durch Borneo*)."

But some hours later I received the following message from him:

I have since discovered that Demmeni did

indeed take part in the Mamberamo expedition of 1909/10. He is, however, not named anywhere and in all the literature there is no mention. Via the website of the National Herbarium of the Netherlands I discovered a reference to a small article by Demmeni dating from 1937 (two years before his death) in a magazine about orchids, in which he himself gives a brief description of his participation.<sup>11</sup>

Not surprisingly, this article by Demmeni is mainly about collecting orchids during the Mamberamo expedition. Nevertheless he gives us some valuable information about the expedition itself:

In 1909 I was detached to the section of the exploration led by Captain A. Franssen Herderschee as photographer and mentor to the 65 Kajan-Dajaks from Central Borneo, who were taken on by Lieutenant Brasser primarily as rowers and canoe builders. The expedition comprised 230 men, and arrived in Manokwari on 20 November 1909. I left with the first group on 3 January 1910 for the Mamberamo ...<sup>12</sup>

As a result of the letter from van Hasselt and the article by Demmeni, we now know that the photo of the korwars was taken by the famous photographer Jean Demmeni, between November 20 and December 10, 1909. The first Mamberamo expedition did not progress well and was eventually stopped when a large number of the team became exhausted due to sickness. Almost all the orchids collected by Demmeni were lost on the return journey. Demmeni ended his brief account of the expedition with the following words:

Let it here be noted that an impressive natural phenomenon brought us a ray of comfort after all the suffering of the severely distressed expedition. Halley's comet was in the night firmament, bathed in a never-to-be-forgotten splendour.<sup>13</sup>

FIG. 36 (above and screened behind): **Letter from Frans van Hasselt in which he mentions the twisted snake *mon*, November 29, 1909.**

The Utrecht Archive, Access number: 1102-1 - Inventory number: 2434, letter No. 423.

FIG. 37 (see FIG. 3): **Photograph from the Mamberamo Expedition by Jean Demmeni (1866–1939), made between November 20 and December 10, 1909.**

Glass plate negative.  
Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen,  
Amsterdam, Mamberamo no. 25  
(coll. no. 10006136).  
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#### NOTES

1. TH. P. van Baaren, "Korwars and Korwar Style." *Art and ancestor worship in North-West New Guinea*. Wageningen 1968.
2. Van Baaren 1968: 21.
3. J. L. van Hasselt, "Die Noeforezen." *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 8, 1876, pp. 134–139, 169–202.
4. Sea cucumber.
5. J. L. van Hasselt, 1876, pp. 195–96, translated (from German into English) and quoted in van Baaren 1968: 27.
6. J. L. van Hasselt and F. J. F. van Hasselt, *Noemfoorsch Woordenboek*, Amsterdam 1947.
7. The Utrecht Archive, access no. 1102-1, inv. no. 2434, letter no. 423.
8. The Utrecht Archive, access no. 1102-1, inv. no. 2434, letter no. —.
9. The Utrecht Archive, access no. 1102-1, inv. no. 2434, letter no. 429.
10. I am indebted to Steven Vink (Photo Bureau KIT, Amsterdam), who reacted enthusiastically about my findings and immediately shared with me all the information he could find on Jean Demmeni.
11. J. Demmeni, "Uit lang vervlogen tijden ... Mamberamo." *De Orchidee*, volume 6, 1937, pp. 172–178.
12. Demmeni 1937: 173.
13. Demmeni 1937: 178.

