

The Religious Art of the Southeast Moluccas

Masterpieces from the collection of the National Museum of Ethnology and their cultural context

by Nico de Jonge ©

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Introduction

The traditional material culture of Maluku Tenggara, the Southeast Moluccas, is considered to be among the most fascinating in Indonesia. Religious art in particular has always attracted attention. Many statues of gods and ancestors are expressive and appealing, and these objects have been sought-after collector's items for more than a century.

1 - The collection and the collectors

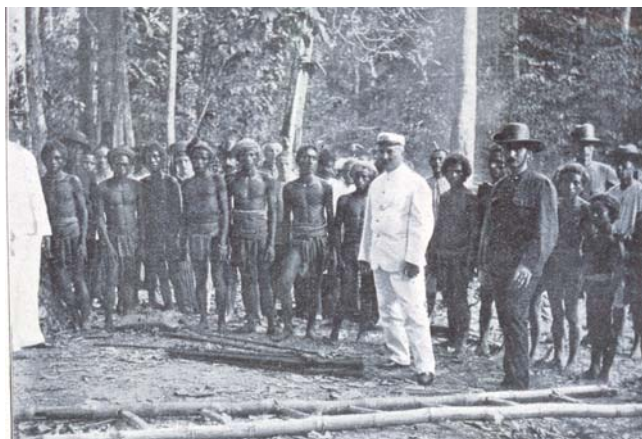
The Maluku Tenggara collection of the National Museum of Ethnology (RMV) is particularly rich in these religious statues. The majority of them arrived in Leiden at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Apart from its aesthetic qualities the collection is of great ethnographical value. Many important objects were collected by Dutch administrative officers, two of whom - J.G.F. Riedel and M.C. Schadee - deserve closer attention. A third collector who must be mentioned is A.J. Gooszen. This Royal Dutch East-Indian Army officer's interest in ethnography resulted in thousands of objects from East Indonesia reaching the museum.

Riedel

From 1853 onwards J.G.F. Riedel worked in various parts of the Dutch East Indies. In 1880 he was appointed Resident of Ambon, a region which at the time included the islands of Maluku Tenggara, hundreds of kilometres to the south. The objects he collected came from both Western and Eastern Maluku Tenggara (the former Southwest and Southeast islands). Various objects were described in his extensive work *De sluiik- en kroesharige rassen tusschen Selebes en Papua* ('The lank- and fuzzy-haired races between Selebes and Papua'), published in 1886. This book brought him both a great deal of criticism and a doctorate (from the Academy in Leipzig in Germany). Many of the inaccuracies in the book are probably a result of the way in which the information was assembled. Riedel visited few of the islands himself, but relied on informants to bring the objects to his residence in Ambon (Nutz 1959: 8).¹

Schadee

Much less is known about M.C. Schadee. We do know that in 1902 he was serving as a government official (Controleur) in Tual in the Kai islands, a post which included responsibility for Tanimbar and Babar (Drabbe 1940: 225). He appears to have ruled with a rod of iron. On various occasions he resorted to heavy-handed methods to enforce peace in a region plagued by wars.



In 1907 the Dutch colonial government carried out a punitive expedition against the inhabitants of the village of Wakpapapi on the island of Babar. Afterwards administrative officer Schadee (in the white uniform) posed by the ladder used to storm the village.

Later in his career he served in Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo). Schadee's Maluku Tenggara collection was collected during his official tours to both the former Southwest and Southeast islands. The series of

luli statues he collected on the island of Lakor, part of the Leti group, is particularly important due to its relative rarity.²

Gooszen

Gooszen, a professional soldier, arrived in the Dutch East Indies in 1890. In 1907 he led the first exploration detachment to Southern New Guinea.



Staff from the first military exploration detachment to Dutch New Guinea. Sitting down and wearing a cap is A.J. Gooszen.

His later career also kept him in Eastern Indonesia. As Military Commander of Ambon and Ternate he had ethnographica collected on a large scale - out of both military and scientific interest. As a result of his efforts the museum received more than 6000 objects, including many weapons (Lamme 1987: 144). The majority of the objects from Maluku Tenggara were collected on the former Southeast islands.³ The statue known as *Werwat* (RMV 1889-2), collected by Gooszen on Kai Kecil, enjoys international renown.



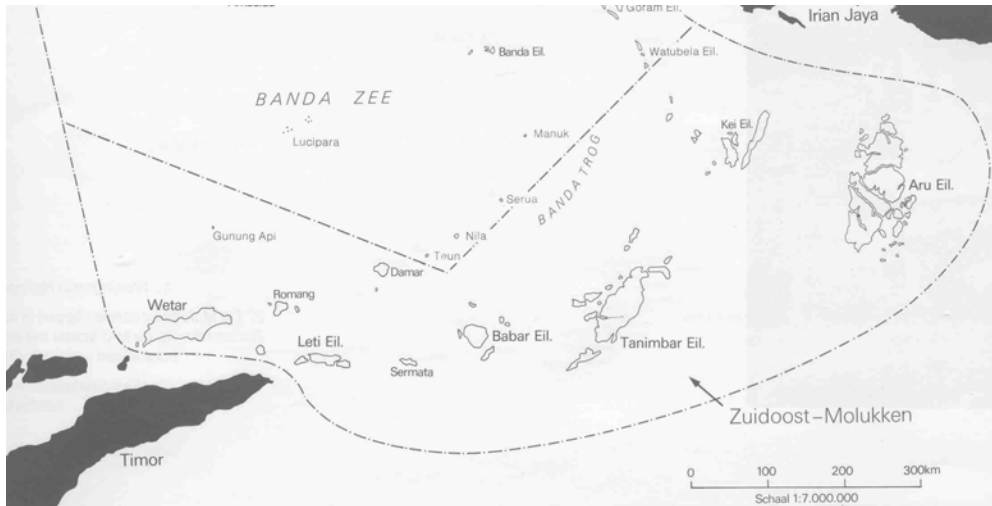
Left: RMV 1889-2. Centre: The statue of *Werwat*, flanked by his or her daughter, photographed in 1911/12 in the ritual centre of the village of Gelanit on Kai Kecil. Right: RMV 1889-15.

Because of its intriguing design and an absence of reliable information the identity of this sculpture has become shrouded in a veil of mystery (see chapter VI.4). Unfortunately, almost all the Gooszen collection lacks proper documentation.

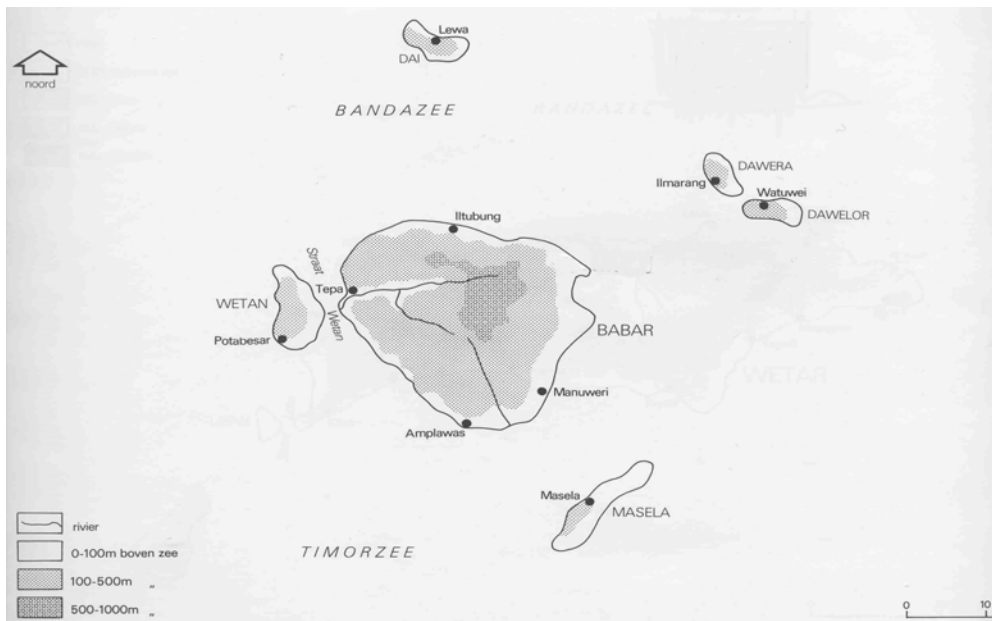
In this survey we are able to highlight only a small portion of the material assembled by these three collectors, and only a fraction of the other Southeast Moluccan god and ancestor statues in the museum's possession.

2 - Maluku Tenggara

The Southeast Moluccan islands are spread throughout the Banda Sea between Irian Jaya in the east and Timor in the west.



Map of the Southeast Moluccas (above) and of the Babar archipelago (below).



Situated on the periphery of the Indonesian archipelago, this chain of islands stretches over a distance of almost a thousand kilometres. Administratively, the region is part of the province of Maluku, which consists of three districts (*kabupaten*): from north to south, Maluku Utara (Northern Moluccas), Maluku Tengah (Central Moluccas) and Maluku Tenggara (Southeast Moluccas).⁴ In 2000, the population of Maluku Tenggara was about 300,000.

The region contains a number of separate groups of islands, the largest being the Aru, the Tanimbar and the Kai archipelagos, all lying in the eastern part of the district. Under Dutch administration these three

groups of islands were known collectively as the Southeast Islands. To the west of them lie the Babar archipelago, Luang-Sermata, the Leti group, Damar, Roma, Kisar and Wetar, which collectively formed the Southwest Islands.



Luang-Sermata from the water. Due to the lack of infrastructure westerners rarely visit the islands of Maluku Tenggara.

These old names refer to the position of the islands with respect to the island of Banda (Central Moluccas), which at the time was an important economic centre for the Dutch.

Infrastructure

Because of the lack of infrastructure large parts of the district are very difficult to reach, which means that tourists seldom visit the area. For a long time the only Westerners to visit the region were Dutch administrators, military personnel, scientists and missionaries of various persuasions. For a long time at the end of the 20th century western islands such as Leti and Kisar were even completely cut off from the outside world as a result of the Indonesian annexation of East Timor in 1975 and the state of war, which lasted until 1999, that followed.

Economy

The limited infrastructure is a direct consequence of the economic poverty of the region. Apart from a few Buginese and Makassaran traders on the lookout for products harvested from the reefs, the only interest in the islands was during the administration of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). The monoculture in the nutmeg centre of Banda then necessitated the import of sago from Tanimbar and Kai. Damar was the only spice-producing island in the region. The power politics engaged in by the VOC, however, reduced exports to zero and since then trade has remained restricted. Only Aru, where a few Japanese firms cultivate pearls and where there is a lively trade in products of the sea, can - stretching a point - be called an economic centre.

Small-scale bartering traditionally flourishes in the hot, calm period which precedes the western monsoon when for example, the island inhabitants exchange food for basketwork or *sopi*, a strong local drink distilled from palm wine.

Island arcs

The less than flourishing economic situation must be seen in the context of local soil structures.

Geologically speaking, two types of island, corresponding with the same number of 'island arcs', can be distinguished. A small, northwesterly-lying series of islands forms what is known as the Inner Banda arc. This runs from Wetar through Roma, Damar, Teun and Nila to Serua, and then towards Banda. The islands in this arc are volcanic and the soil is relatively fertile.

The majority of the Southeast Moluccan islands, however, are part of the Outer Banda arc, which begins at Kisar and runs via Luang, Babar, Tanimbar and Kai, towards Seram.



View of a village on one of the Kai islands, part of the so-called "Outer Banda Arc".

These islands consist of elevated coral and are not very fertile. Many smaller islands have been deforested and even partially eroded. The hills of Luang and Leti, for example, look like a barren moonscape.

Living standards

Of course, these geological factors influence the lives of the islanders themselves. The produce from the fields and gardens is often just barely enough to live on and, in general, the standard of living is low. The prevailing climate also plays a role in this. Frequently the monsoon rains fail to arrive and the harvest fails. Hunger is an almost annually-recurring problem on the smaller coral islands, where maize is the main food crop. Often, faced with such circumstances, people are forced to buy rice from local (often Chinese) merchants. Where possible the money necessary is earned by selling copra and products harvested from the sea. Usually, however, debts just pile up and entire villages are dependent on the benevolence of the merchants for the basic necessities of life.

Migration

Because of the difficult living conditions many inhabitants of the islands have left their homes in the last few decades and sought to make a new life elsewhere. The limited medical and education facilities also induced many to leave. Large numbers of people from Maluku Tenggara now live in South Seram, where they work in the timber and clove industries, and in Ambon, which also offers opportunities of employment. During recent years, however, many Christian Southeast Moluccans have returned to the islands of their birth to escape the violence resulting from religious differences with the Muslim community and follow events, temporarily they hope, from a safe distance.

Religion

More than three quarters of the population of Maluku Tenggara profess to the Christian faith. More than half is Protestant, and approximately a quarter Catholic. Christianity came to the region with the arrival of the Dutch in the 17th century. The first attempts at conversion were unsuccessful; it was only at the beginning of the 20th century that the missionaries had any real success. The Roman Catholic mission concentrated on the eastern islands (especially Tanimbar and Kai), while the Protestant mission claimed more or less a monopoly on the former Southwest islands. The Protestant missionaries often converted the inhabitants forcefully, and this was largely at the expense of the existing cult of ancestor worship. Many ancestor statues ended up in the sea or were ritually burned. It is ironic that today ancestor worship is still widely practised everywhere. It functions - although without the original sculptures - side by side with a belief in the Christian God Tuhan Allah, who has taken the place of the local gods.

Threatened cultures

Other traditional means of cultural expression are currently under pressure. Within the framework of the Panca Sila, the state philosophy emphasizing democracy and justice, the ancient caste system (which consists of a nobility, a middle caste and a slave caste) in several islands has been officially outlawed. The various local languages, which with the exception of one spoken in parts of Kisar all belong to the Austronesian group of languages, are also under threat. In elementary schools only the official state language (*Bahasa Indonesia*) is allowed and outside school Moluccan Malay is becoming increasingly popular as the *lingua franca*.

Although its versatility makes it resilient, the boat symbolism found on many Southeast Moluccan islands is also under threat. This symbolism has probably been present in Maluku Tenggara since prehistoric times and although its forms of expression are becoming fewer and fewer as the islands become more and more modernized, it is still deeply embedded in many island cultures. Nautical symbolism dominated the cultural context in which, on many islands, religious art had an important function. Furthermore, the decorative motifs and designs of different types of statue also can be related to boat symbolism.

3 - Boat symbolism

Boat symbolism is expressed at various levels in society and among other things it reflects the most important social values - the essence of a culture. The culture of the islands of Dawera and Dawelor, part of the Babar archipelago, is a representative example providing insight into boat symbolism.



Dawelor, seen from Dawera. Boat symbolism plays a prominent role in the culture of both islands.

Here we can see how this symbolism is used to bring order to the living world, and as a means of expression, in order to convey a message.

Bringing order to the world

Visitors to Dawera and Dawelor soon realize that the boat is more to the islanders than simply a means of transport. As a model of order it plays an important role in local culture. This is particularly apparent in the symbolism relating to the villages. The settlements are built according to an age-old pattern, in which nautical concepts such as 'pilot' and 'helmsman' function as spatial categories. The basic pattern has undergone many adaptations over the years, but it is still clearly recognizable.

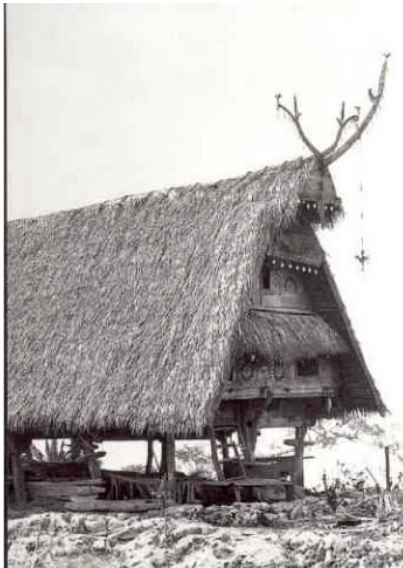
'Eyries'

Tales from the past tell us that the present-day location of the villages - almost all of them are situated on the beach - is a relatively recent development. Traditionally, each settlement was built on an elevated cone of rock which was difficult to reach - in many cases it was only accessible by means of one or more wooden ladders which could be pulled up after people had climbed up or down them. The reason for this isolated location was the continual threat of war. Most villages were also surrounded by walls for fear of enemy attacks.

Within each of these 'eyries', in and around an impressive house known as the 'sacred house' or 'great house', lived a single large family group descended from a single ancestor (a 'descent group'). The structure of the great house was basically a 'roof on posts'. These posts were about two metres in height and they supported a bamboo floor. This in turn supported a roof made of coconut palm leaves. There were no intermediate walls. In this house, or in one of the outbuildings, the villagers were born, entered into marriage with a member of the group, had children, and died. The village, or to put it a better way, the great house, was a fully self-sustaining community. The members of such house communities saw themselves as a ship's crew, and this notion was elaborated in various ways.

Architecture

It was most strikingly evident in the architecture. Long, upwardly-curving extensions were fitted to each end of the ridge pole of the great house, so that the line of the roof resembled the basic form of a boat.



The former "great house" of the Kapressy descent group on Dawelor in 1913. The steeply rising extension pieces on the ends of the ridge pole give the roof line the basic form of a boat.

These extensions were fork-shaped, a characteristic motif of the stem and stern posts of both the sailing vessels and tree-trunk canoes of the islands.

Spatial orientation

Less visible was the elaboration of the notion of a ship in the spatial orientation of the great house. The building was associated with a boat 'sailing', following the orbit of the sun, from east to west. Inside the house this symbolic course was reflected in the names of the living spaces. The interior was divided into two halves separated by a relatively narrow central space. In accordance with the 'course', the eastern living space was called the 'helmsman's area', and the western space the 'pilot's area' .

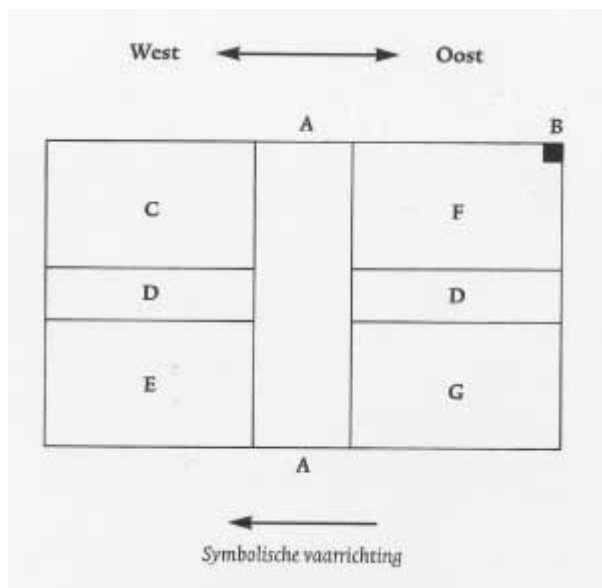


Figure 1: Schematic arrangement of a traditional house on Dawera/Dawelor. **A** are the doors, **B** is the main post, **C** the right pilot's room, **D** the fireplaces, **E** the left pilot's room, **F** the right helmsman's room, and **G** the left helmsman's room.

Both halves of the house were, in turn, divided into two 'rooms', separated from each other by a fireplace. The names of the four areas thus created also reflected the symbolic course. Standing with one's back to the east - thus facing west - the 'right helmsman's room' and the 'right pilot's room' were on the right-hand side of the great house, and the 'left helmsman's room' and the 'left pilot's room' were on the left-hand side.

The lord of the village

The symbolic ship's crew was led by a symbolic helmsman, the head of the descent group. He was traditionally linked to a specific room in the great house.

Each of the rooms represented a line of descent, which went back to the founder of the group. The mutual relationship was compared to that between older and younger brothers, the right helmsman's room being regarded as the oldest line of descent. Traditionally, this line supplied the leader of the house community, the man who represented all members of the group in dealings with the outside world and who officiated at rituals in the name of the group. In the local language he was addressed as *orletol* ('lord of the village'); in Moluccan Malay he was called *tuan tanah* ('lord of the earth'). 'Earth' here is meant in the sense of 'soil'.

The superiority of the right helmsman's room was also expressed in the construction of the house. The main post, which was called *mekamulol* ('the one who holds the helm') was the first post erected when a house was built, and it was situated in this room. The sacred heirlooms of the house community were also kept there. These objects, called *pusaka* in Moluccan Malay, mainly consisted of gold ornaments and what are known as *basta*, imported lengths of cotton cloth decorated with block-printed motifs.



Detail of a *basta*, a cotton cloth decorated with block printed motifs and traded by the Dutch East India Company.

New villages

It is not known when cones of rock ceased to serve as places of settlement for these nautically based societies. For reasons we can only guess at, however, at some time in the distant past, probably some centuries ago, the continuity of the descent groups must have come under threat. Most of them abandoned their isolated existence and began to live together on larger rock plateaus. Villages consisting of three or four originally isolated house communities were created, societies which again formed themselves into a symbolic boat which still 'sailed' westwards.

Instead of four rooms the boat was now formed by a number of great houses in which the position of each group's great house showed that group's symbolic role within the greater whole. The groups living to

the east functioned as helmsmen, those to the west as pilots. The function of 'bailer boy' was created for those groups living in the centre of the village.

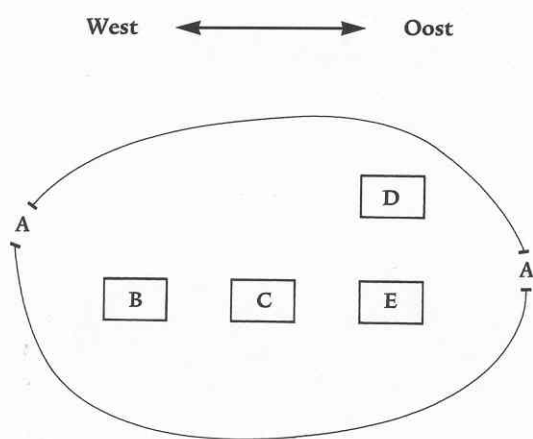


Figure 2: Schematic arrangement of a traditional village on Dawera/Dawelor: **A** entrances, **B** pilot, **C** bailer, **D** right helmsman and **E** left helmsman.

Double function

These new settlements also recognized the function of lord of the village. The provision of the ritual leader was reserved for the group that had first settled on the plateau and could therefore be regarded as the founder of the new settlement. The leader of this group thus filled a double role - he was the symbolic helmsman of both his own group and the newly-formed community.

The symbolic role of the lord of the (new) village was reflected in the village layout. The great house of his descent group usually stood at the eastern edge of the site; his group functioned as a symbolic helmsman within the larger whole. In this way the traditional pattern of ordering the house community was maintained in the layout of the larger villages. There was a notional ship's crew led by a symbolic helmsman.

To the beach

Today, however, this type of village is also a thing of the past. Despite the fact that the 'eyries' had been abandoned, waging war remained part of the normal way of life and the villages on the plateaus were also provided with impressive fortifications. In 1890 the Dutch government official Van Hoëvell wrote: "The native villages on the various islands which form the Babar group have all, with the exception of the principal village of Tapa and a few native villages on Wetang, been constructed on steep heights and surrounded by strong walls, which is a necessity in view of the incessant state of war. Nowhere, however, did I see such thick and high walls as on the islands of Dawera and Dawelor. The native village of Angkoeki, among others, has walls three metres thick and six metres high, entirely built of stacked blocks of sandstone and provided with doors."⁵

This situation was a thorn in the side of the Dutch colonial government and at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century the islands were pacified. All the settlements on rock plateaus were evacuated and the present-day villages were built along the coast at places where they were easy to control. The traditional boat model once again served as a guideline for the layout of these new villages - the hilltop settlements were simply rebuilt on the beach. In some instances during the forced resettlement villages were merged, but even in the larger communities thus formed the familiar boat configuration was retained: the villages were constructed as two or three ships 'sailing in convoy'.

The present day

During the process of scaling-up - from the isolated house communities to the villages on the beach - the endogamous marriage principle was abandoned, although there is still a tendency to marry a 'house member'. Under the influence of the missionaries the physical construction of the houses also changed in the course of the 20th century. The length and width were reduced and the posts became shorter, while at the same time the floor and roof were separated by increasingly high bamboo walls.



The last "great house" on (short) posts, Dawelor 1981. The interior still has the traditional layout. To the left of the hearth is the "left-hand pilot's room"; to the right the "right-hand pilot's room".

The final result can be seen in recently built houses; the ground has become the living room floor and the roof is supported by walls the height of a man.

Members of a descent group now live in single-family houses situated around the much smaller 'great house', the interior of which no longer follows the original design.



The village of Welora on Dawera. The traditional "great house" can no longer be seen. It has been replaced by a modernized version around which the villagers live in smaller houses with separate kitchens.

It is usually occupied by members of only one descent line - that of the right helmsman. Here, as in days gone by, ancestral heirlooms are guarded; a task that members of the oldest line will not readily abandon. In the second half of the twentieth century the role of the lord of the village became more and more diminished by the advent of Christianity. Increasingly often a Protestant minister functioned as the symbolic helmsman of the settlement. Only during the celebration of the (western) New Year festival, based on an ancient fertility ritual (see later), does the old *tuan tanah* continue to play a prominent role in some villages.

The message of boat symbolism

Besides its function as an ordering model the image of the boat has a completely different role in the island culture. The use of the terms 'boat' and 'helmsman' as constituent parts of a whole express, at

different levels, a dependency relationship. On the islands the creation of things on various occasions is described or represented as bringing that thing 'into service' (as one would a ship). But boats can only set sail when two conditions have been met: both boat and helmsman have to be available. We shall try to clarify what this means in practice on the basis of boat symbolism as it applies in the founding of a family or the creation of society.

The forming of a family

In order to bring a family 'into service', it is necessary to enter into a sexual relationship, something that must take place within the framework of a marriage. This 'precondition' for the creation of progeny is expressed by means of boat symbolism.

Imagery is one of the forms in which the symbolism is expressed. The woman is usually compared with a boat with an open drainage hole lying on the beach, waiting for a man who wants to go sailing. Only when the man, the helmsman, boards the boat and, as it were, 'seals up' the drainage hole can the boat set sail, that is to say, can a family come into being.

Life and death

Although this image may seem familiar - the 'ship of marriage' leaving the quayside - there is a concept involved which is much less easy for outsiders to understand. In the ideology of the islanders, namely, the creation of new life is related to the killing of existing life, an old religious concept common throughout Indonesia. This concept finds expression in the tradition that before a man can marry and beget children, he must have killed life existing in the 'outside world'. In so doing he makes his contribution to the process of creation. When he has returned with his hunting trophies he may marry and his wife can then make her contribution to the creative process; developing and giving birth to new life. Apart from the imagery, this is very explicitly expressed in a ritual in which the founding of a family is represented nautically.

The boat-building ritual

The imagery of boat symbolism does not stand independently, but is reflected in the construction rules for vessels built on the islands. Two types of boat are built on Dawera and Dawelor - tree trunk canoes, used for coastal fishing, and boats some seven metres in length and made of planks, mainly used to visit other islands.



On Dawera a plank boat is launched for a visit to the island of Babar.

In days gone by these boats also served as war proas.

The rules and regulations

The building of plank boats, in particular, is governed by rules and regulations: the building ritual, according to the islanders, reflects the founding of a family. Briefly, this comes down to the following: by following various rules, the boat is regarded as if it were a woman, with the exception of one constructional element which is depicted as a male helmsman. During construction 'the drainage hole is closed' with this male element. In a metaphorical sense this depicts the sexual union of man and woman - marriage. At the same time it is apparent that the symbolic man is a successful hunter, someone who has killed. He possesses hunting trophies and the ritual role of these spoils illustrates in a practical way that there can be no life without death.

In practice

This is what happens in practice. A keel beam is chopped from a straight part of the trunk of a tree. This is extended at each end with curved pieces of wood cut with the aid of a measuring cord - a neatly upwardly-slanting stem post (the prow) and a more steeply rising stern post.



Keel beam with prow and stern post of a boat under construction.

The name of this cord, *lerlol*, is derived from the name of the belt with which women on the islands traditionally hold up their sarongs. This gives the boat as a whole a feminine 'stamp' from the start of construction.

The first planks of the hull are then placed on either side of the keel beam. In Moluccan Malay these planks are called *papan pomali*, which might be translated as 'sacred planks'. Although all the work during the construction of a boat is carried out by men, it is a rule that these two planks are ceremonially laid against the keel by a woman. It is said these planks, together with the keel, form the boat's 'vagina', an explicit comparison of the boat with a woman.

Sun, heat, hunting

The element representing the symbolic man is the stern post, which is associated with a helmsman. The post's male identity is expressed in various ways, almost all of them identifying with the sun. This heavenly body is considered to be a 'great hunter', a notion based on its 'heat'. In Maluku Tenggara heat is a quality which has a strongly associative meaning and in general is associated with concepts of death. This can be seen, among other ways, in the hunt. Before the hunt commences the hunters are brought to a 'hot' condition by magical means, a condition in which it is said their deadly powers prevail.

The identification of helmsman and sun manifests itself, among other ways, in the orientation of the boat during construction: the stern post must be directed eastwards, the direction from which the sun rises. Moreover, identification is traditionally expressed in the decorative motifs on the stern board at the top of the stern post, which, in many cases, include a wheel of the sun.



Rudder board with a sun wheel, attached to the stern post of a boat on Dawera.

In the past the helmsman was also represented as a 'great hunter' on other stern board motifs. Usually a figure of a cock, a bird which is associated with the sun; or a dog, an animal kept for hunting; and sometimes a snake, in particular a type of water snake, would be depicted on the stern board.

Completing the marriage

The marriage of the symbolic woman, the boat as a whole, and the symbolic hunter, the stern post, is graphically expressed in the construction: the stern post is fixed to the keel by a dowel pin, an emphatic reference to sexual union. The symbolism of the imagery is thus made visible, as it were. The union of 'boat' and 'helmsman', woman and man, brings the family 'into service'.

Hunting trophies as seed

By representing the male element as a 'great hunter', the religious relationship between life and death is implicitly incorporated into the building ritual. However, this concept is expressed in another, more pronounced manner, with the aid of jewellery. Traditionally a pair of gold earrings are bound to the joint between the stern post and keel, the point of union of man and woman. Nowadays no-one knows the significance of this. The symbolic meaning of the earrings, however, looked at in the context of a number of traditions on surrounding islands, suggests that it is an elaboration of an old religious concept concerning the relationship between life and death.

On several islands in Maluku Tenggara, such as Tanimbar, this notion is expressed by comparing the man's seed with hunting trophies. Life that has been killed is considered to be a source of new life. The building of a boat on Dawera and Dawelor shows probably a ritualized translation of this. On the islands, namely, gold earrings symbolize the severed heads of the hunter's victims and their location at the joint between the male and female elements strongly suggests that they represent the hunter's seed.

Launching the boat

The building ritual is concluded with the launching of the boat. Just before this takes place the woman's contribution to the creative process is expressed. The boat, the symbolic woman who has received the 'seed', is 'cooled down' by sprinkling it with coconut juice. Like heat, coolness has a strongly associative meaning. It represents a calm, safe environment in which life can flourish and grow. The family can begin to develop.

The forming of society

The nautical symbolism, which represents the founding of a family, also functions at the level of society. Myths recounting the creation of society generally involve a marriage between a girl native to the island and an immigrant. The girl is often depicted as being very close to nature; she grew, as it were, from the soil of the island, an image that marks her as a source of fertility. In contrast the man from outside usually possesses gold jewellery and on the basis of the symbolic meaning of these ornaments (severed heads) he is a successful hunter. Their marriage lays the foundation of society.

On Dawera and Dawelor the mythical marriage ceremony is represented by means of boat symbolism. The story of the creation is reflected in the construction ritual of the great house, the building that

traditionally represented the whole community, and which forms a symbolic boat and helmsman - the main post of the house. In essence, the house building ritual corresponds to the boat building ritual and to the imagery of sexual union linked to it. The first female ancestor is again represented by a boat, the 'drainage hole' of which is 'sealed' by a helmsman, the first male ancestor. This portrays the sexual union - the marriage - of the first ancestors which brought society 'into service'.

The house-building ritual

The building of the great house begins by setting out a piece of land. Just as in the building of a real boat, a measuring cord, the name of which, *lerlol*, is derived from a woman's belt, is used for this. There is, however, an important difference: in the building of the house the belt of the founding mother is used. The cord is traditionally unwound from a small wooden statue, which represents this woman. The marked-out land, the 'in-board' space, expressly represents the first female ancestor.

The main post

All sections of the house are seen as parts of a 'boat'. The only exception is the main post, which symbolically, has a meaning of its own. This is apparent from its name *mekamulol*, which means 'the one who holds the helm'. The main post is, as it were, the helmsman of the imaginary boat and is the representative of the first male ancestor, the hunter with his trophies.

During the ritual this latter element is expressed in the phase in which the main post is positioned on the piece of land that has been demarcated by the measuring cord. Before the positioning ceremony takes place, the post is first wrapped in a *basta*, an imported cotton cloth several metres long, which, because it has come from afar, is compared to the hunter's trophies. At the same time, a large number of pigs and goats are slaughtered in the name of the main post, while the expression '*lwama!*' is repeated - 'it (the main post) stabs (the animals) to death'. This clearly makes known the fact that the first male ancestor had an impressive capacity for killing.

'Great hunter'

Here, too, there is identification with the sun as a 'great hunter'. The main post must be erected as this heavenly body appears above the horizon. The post's position - within the marked-out plot of land it is placed to the east, where the sun rises - also suggests such an identification. There is also identification with the full moon. This, too, is considered to be a 'great hunter', its status partly resting on the rich nocturnal harvest the sea yields during this phase of the moon. The full moon, and in particular 'the full moon with rings' (halos), indicates, so it is believed, a man at sea steering towards his 'prey'. This identification is expressed in the moment the main post of the house must be erected - at full moon. In placing the main post in its hole within the demarcated piece of land the symbolic helmsman boards the boat, depicting, as it were, the sexual union - marriage - of the first male and female ancestors. The boat can now be set in motion: the foundation of society has been laid.

Gold as seed

An interesting point is that besides the depiction of the founding father as a 'great hunter', the relationship between life and death is again expressed in the use of jewellery. Just before the main post is placed in the ground, a pair of gold earrings is traditionally deposited in the post hole. In terms of the symbolic meaning of the jewellery and its placement in the post hole it would seem that just as in the boat building ritual, here, too, the male seed is represented by the trophies of the hunt.

Completing the house

After the positioning ceremony, the completion of the house is dominated by the concept of coolness. All the construction rules are directed at achieving conditions in which life can grow in the symbolic boat; that is to say, in which society can develop - a situation identical to the final phase of the construction of a plank-boat.

4 - Fertility, status and ancestors

By means of boat symbolism the islanders are showing that for them the continuation of life is dependent on marriage between man and woman, and also makes manifest their contribution to the process of creation. Men 'produce' by killing, women by means of their capacity to give life.

Fertility and status - achieved by killing - are thus the most important values in Southeast Moluccan island cultures. Both are of crucial importance for the continued existence of society, an observation which brings us to ancestor worship.

In realizing the two key values, namely, the ancestors play a leading role. In the eyes of the islanders it is they who determine whether there is fertility and status (represented by the trophies of the hunt). Without help from the ancestors the seed in the woman cannot develop and a man will never kill his prey. The ancestors determine the fate of the society.

Trunk and top

On many islands the dependence on, and alliance with, the ancestors finds expression in botanical terms. The ancestors are regarded as the 'trunk' of a tree of which the living represent the 'top'. And just as the development of new shoots is dependent on the functioning of the base of a tree, so the continued existence of man is in the hands of the ancestors. Logically, the first ancestors of the descent groups are the most worshipped. To their descendants they represent the ultimate sources of fertility and a capacity to kill. Apart from this, they are also a powerful moral force. The most imposing statues in a Southeast Moluccan community, therefore, usually relate to these first ancestors.

5 - Portraying ancestors

In the simplest terms, in Maluku Tenggara a person is regarded as a body in which two elements have merged: a sort of 'vital force' which reveals itself in physical form and is expressed in human beings in the growth and movement of the body; and something which may be termed someone's 'ownness', an element that is less bound to the physical body and which is related to the identity of that person. The presence of the 'vital force' in man is particularly expressed in breathing and the beating of the heart. This element is also strongly associated with blood. 'Ownness', which is difficult to define, was compared by the earlier missionaries to the 'soul' or 'spirit'. The nature of 'ownness', however, differs considerably from the notion of 'soul' as it exists in the western world.

Shadow image

In practice two important aspects adhere to the notion of 'ownness'. Firstly, it refers to personal characteristics and is thus associated with someone's name and, for example, facial features, voice, the bodily shape and its shadow or reflection. People speak of someone's 'shadow image'. But much more weight is given to the fact that 'ownness' concerns the social identity of the person. The 'shadow image' is very closely linked to reputation, to the image a person has in society.

Immortal

An important difference between the two elements is that someone's 'shadow image', in contrast to his vital force, is immortal. After death it continues to exist in society, while the vital force ebbs away as the body decays. Until half way through the 20th century the point of contact for the deceased person was a small carved statue. The 'shadow image' could take up residence in this statue so that communication with the dead person could continue. On most islands these statues were made by someone skilled in woodcarving. *Kayu kenawa* wood (Moluccan Malay for *Cordia subcordata Lamk.*) was often used. Usually the figures were not more than about 40 centimetres in height. Larger statues were made only for very special ancestors, and they often had a deviant form. This category is the first to be discussed.

6 - The first ancestors

Many exceptional ancestors were linked to the origin and founding of the descent groups on the islands. Everywhere these ancestors had a special status, something which was not only expressed in the size and form of the statues, but also in the place where they were situated. Most stood in a conspicuous spot in the village or house, so the ancestors still occupied a prominent place in society generations after their death.

Founding mothers from Lakor

The descent groups on Leti and Lakor are characterized by matrilineality. The female line takes precedence and it is therefore not surprising that on these islands particular attention is paid to the statues of the founding mothers. The statues of the first female ancestors, called *luli* (sacred) in the local language, are often so beautiful that together with, among others, the Tanimbar *tavu* (see below), they can be regarded as among the very best Southeast Moluccan sculpture. As far as their design is concerned *luli* show two striking extremes. On the one hand, the figure might be a quite realistically depicted female person, with decorative motifs indicating the role of the founding mother as a source of fertility. On the other hand, a *luli* may be completely dominated by these motifs so that the female figure can barely be recognized, if at all. All sorts of 'mixed forms' are found between these two extremes.

Realism

When a founding mother is depicted realistically, she is generally holding her arms up and to the side. The palms of her hands are either facing forwards or towards her head. In the first case the palms, like the upper body, are frequently decorated. Two decorative motifs dominate in the realistic *luli* - the boat and the tree. The boat usually has stem and stern posts curling powerfully inwards. Often this motif is on the statue's stomach or abdomen, although it can also be found in other places - the palms of the hands, for example. It is usually carved into the wood but sometimes is painted in a red tint. Examples can be seen in RMV 1476-11 and 1476-9.



RMV 1476-9 and 1476-11.

Boat and womb

The boat motif is probably the most important fertility symbol in western Maluku Tenggara. We have already explained how boat symbolism, as a means of expression, is used on the islands to represent the founding of the family and society. In both cases the boat represents a woman in which, after conception, new life can thrive and develop in an atmosphere of coolness; from her spring the children of the family, the members of society. In essence the boat can even be compared to the womb, something to which the boat motif on the statues appears to refer. This could explain its position on the abdomen in various *luli*, and also the form in which it is represented in many statues - stem and stern posts curling powerfully inwards - in this way becomes understandable.

Red

The red colour in which the motif on the abdomen or stomach of some *luli* is painted also refers to growth and new life. On the islands this colour has a double meaning. Used in the context of war red indicates a situation of 'heat', the ambience in which the warrior's power to kill is dominant. But in a context dominated by 'coolness', red - associated with menstrual blood - represents exactly the opposite.

Tree

The reference to fertility also comes to the fore in the second prominent decorative motif, the tree. Sometimes the founding mother is depicted against the background of a tall tree with lots of foliage (RMV 1476-9 and 1476-11), which can be conceived as a symbol of new life. In some statues the person and foliage even seem to be one. A good illustration of this is the *luli* in photo RMV 1476-12. The first female ancestor is represented as part of a tree, a means of representation we also find in local creation myths in which a marriage usually takes place between an immigrant and a maiden of the island - the founding mother - who stands, as it were, with one foot in nature, a floral image which marks her out as a source of fertility.

Abstract

The abstract *luli*, in fact, are not much more than a combination of both fertility symbols, the boat and the tree. A striking fact is that both motifs almost always follow the same pattern: the tree rises up out of the boat. This gives still greater form to the notion of a womb from which new life springs. A typical example can be seen in RMV 1476-8, a *luli* from Lakor, in which the open-work vegetation towers high above the boat. The fact that the statue represents a human creature can only be deduced from the outstretched hands on each side of the tree motif.



RMV 1476-8

Mixed

The *luli* statues which we regard as a mixed form often show a boat motif from which a female figure, sometimes part of a floral motif, rises. The founding mother is thus part of the pattern usually found in abstract *luli* and splendidly represents new, burgeoning life. The position of the arms of the realistically represented founding mother also suggests this pattern. These raised arms, stretched out sideways, can be conceived as the form of a boat from which the founding mother springs. The detailing of the abstract *luli*, with hands on both sides, (RMV 1476-8), also suggests this.

All in all *luli* statues show that above everything else the founding mother is associated with life-giving potential. For the members of the descent group she traditionally functions as an important source of origin; the fertility of the female members of the group can be traced back to her.

Status

Many statues, however, also show a completely different aspect of the first female ancestor. As founder of the matrilineal descent group, namely, she also functions as a representative of the group and fulfils an important symbolic function.

In this capacity she propagates the status of the descent group, something that in the realistically-designed *luli* we also see in the ornaments which decorate her figure. For example, some statues have a golden headdress which indicates that the wearer - and through her, the group - belong to the *marna* - the local aristocracy. On many *luli* (RMV 1476-11) a necklace is also visible. In Moluccan Malay this is called *mas tanduk* ('golden horns'). Like all gold jewellery in western Maluku Tenggara the *mas tanduk* represents a hunting trophy, which also emphasizes the prestige of the group.

A little temple

On many islands the *luli* traditionally stood in a small, centrally situated temple that was communal property. When it became common for a number of originally solitary descent groups to move into larger villages, the *luli* were often moved to an ordinary house. We know that on Leti in a number of instances this was the founding house of the oldest of four matrilineages. The situation on neighbouring Lakor would not have been all that different.

Plank statues from Damar

A wholly different variant of ancestor statues was to be found on the island of Damar, also organized matrilineally. Although it is impossible to be completely certain, it is believed that until the advent of Christianity the founders of the descent groups on the island were represented by plank statues about one metre in height (RMV 1476-5 and 1476-5a).



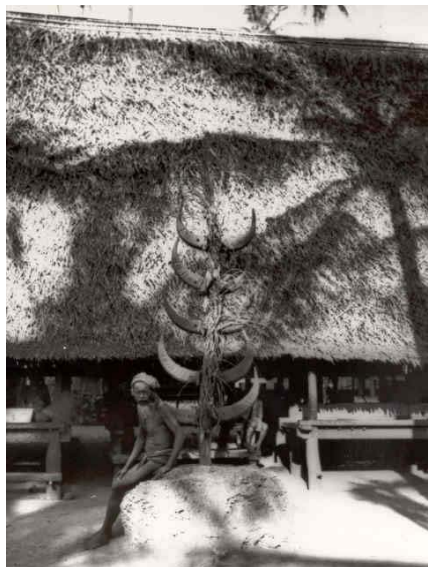
Female

In general, the planks on which the female figure is found are dominated by floral representations, combined with a boat motif - sometimes portrayed in a highly stylized manner - with stem and stern posts curving inwards. As with *luli* statues, in this boat motif a tree-like figure rises amidships.

On some female plank statues a whole series of boat-like forms, placed immediately above one another, are linked together. The motif, often stylized and in open-work, is repeated at the top of the plank (RMV 1467-5). Our impression is that the boat motif on the plank statues of Damar was used in the same way as in the *luli* from Lakor - it represented the founding mother as the source of fertility.

Male

It is interesting to note that on Damar besides female plank statues there were also forms with a 'male' decorative pattern. One male plank statue, which is now famous, is in the collection of the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam and has motifs referring to hunting prowess. It features a series of (buffalo) horns, placed one above the other. Such a series of horns, attached to stakes, could once be seen on various islands in western Maluku Tenggara, testifying to the prestige of the descent group.



Stake with buffalo horns which formerly propagated the status of a descent group, Babar 1913.

It is very probable that this motif illustrated the hunting prowess of the figure represented on the plank - the founding father.

It is not known precisely where the plank statues of Damar were erected. Sources indicate that they were placed both outside and inside the house. In the latter instance this house was probably the 'oldest house' (founding house) of a descent group.

Tanimbar family shrines

There is no uncertainty whatsoever concerning the position of the *tavu*, the world-famous Tanimbar plank statues - these were part of the physical construction of a founding house, usually situated immediately opposite the entrance. Only the accommodation of aristocratic families was so furnished; the richly-decorated objects radiated the fame and glory of the families concerned.

Origin

Plank statues were carved in the Tanimbar islands until the beginning of the 20th century. On average they were one-and-a-half metres tall and the basic form was often a standing male figure with his arms outspread (RMV 2235-1a).



The name *tavu*, by which the statues are known, was used on the north-eastern island of Fordate. The term is derived from concepts such as 'beginning' and 'origin'. It refers to the founding ancestors, as the origin of the family, and to the time in which - sometimes still in the form of an animal - they lived and took possession of prestigious family heirlooms. These aspects are also expressed in the decoration.

A common seat

In contrast to the statues from Lakor and Damar discussed above, a *tavu* did not usually represent a specific ancestor, but was dedicated to both the male and female ancestors of a family. By placing skulls, neck vertebrae and statues of later ancestors, called *walut*, on a shelf above the *tavu*, the plank statue became, in fact, the common seat of all the deceased members of a family group, counted through the male line. It formed a sort of family shrine where, if it were necessary, the head of the group could make an offering to all the deceased family members at the same time, and call upon all the ancestral power available. A seat was attached to some *tavu* to allow the head of the group to sit down.



Tanimbar family head, sitting in front of the *tavu*, at the beginning of the 20th century.

Tavu and luli

As far as design is concerned, Tanimbar plank statues have interesting things in common with the Lakor *luli* figures. Both types go to similar extremes. Like *luli* statues, *tavu* on the one hand may show a quite realistically designed human form, decorated with various ornamentation (RMV 2235-1), while on the other hand there are also plank statues that are completely dominated by applied decorative motifs in which the human figure, as it were, is absorbed into the ornamentation (RMV 3600-3965). And, as with *luli* statues, various 'mixed' forms are found between the realistic and the more abstract family shrines.

Decorative motifs

The spiral form is undoubtedly the most dominant decorative motif and is found on practically all Tanimbar *tavu*. As already noted, besides spiral forms there are sometimes representations of the founding ancestors and the family heirlooms they collected. Ancestors may be portrayed by means of a human or an animal figure.

When the ancestor was depicted as an animal, it was often as a cock, a dog or a fish-like creature. As in many other places in Maluku Tenggara, on the Tanimbar archipelago these animals were associated with hunters and warriors, the men who were responsible for maintaining the reputation of the family group. The symbolic meaning of the animal figures was closely linked to the frequently-occurring representation - often highly stylized - of Nautilus seashells. This type of shell was once an important status symbol on the islands and depicted the severed heads of enemies. Besides such symbolic representations, more tangible 'hunting trophies' are found on various plank statues: teeth of defeated enemies nailed into the *tavu* also bear witness to the glory of the family group.

The illustrated family heirlooms, assembled by the first ancestors, are usually gold breast pendants or earrings, jewellery well-known locally, each with its own name. Since time immemorial these precious objects played an important role in Tanimbar culture and varying from finery to dowry goods. On

Tanimbar the intrinsic meaning of the objects was much as it was elsewhere - here, too, jewellery was a substitute trophy, propagating the prestige of the family group.

'Great deeds'

Although in some ways the Tanimbar family shrines resemble Lakor *luli*, the chosen decorative motifs clearly represent different social values. It is status, not fertility, that is the dominant factor, a difference which must be seen in the context of the differences in social organization on the islands. On Lakor this was matrilineal, with a predominant role for the founding mother as a source of fertility; in the Tanimbar archipelago descent was through the male line and the ancestors' 'great deeds' were immortalized in many plank statues. Although they developed into shrines for all ancestral power, originally the *tavu* probably represented only the first male ancestor.

Village founders of Kai

A final variant in the design of first ancestor representation is found in the Kai islands. Traditionally, the effigy of the founder or protector of the village community could be found in the centre of the village beside a large offerings stone. Unfortunately, not many examples of these statues - called *sedeu* in the local language - have survived. We know from sources that on many Kai islands statues relating to an ancestor cult had all but disappeared as long as a century ago. Nonetheless, we know from descriptions and a number of surviving statues what the *sedeu* looked like. They could be made of wood or stone and usually represented the first male ancestor - the social organization on Kai was similar to that in Tanimbar. The ancestor was depicted as standing or crouching, and some *sedeu* hold a weapon. A statue collected in the mid-19th century, for example, is carrying a spear (RMV 66-32).



Werwat

The Werwat figure, mentioned earlier, is assumed to be a *sedeu*. This statue (RMV 1889-2) was collected for the Leiden museum by military-collector Gooszen. Although he shipped it without any documentation, we still know something about the environment in which it functioned. Before Gooszen, or one of his subordinates, began his collecting activities on Kai, various researchers visited the place Werwat was standing and made brief notes about it.

At the end of the 19th century the figure stood on Masbait hill next to a sacred stone, in what was once the centre of the village of Gelanit on Kai Kecil. The name 'Werwat' is probably built up of the elements 'wer' (water) and 'wat' (stone). It was assumed the sculpture represented the first ancestor and protector of the inhabitants of Gelanit. The researchers also learned that if Werwat should be removed from its place - something Gooszen must have done in around 1912/13 - it would signify the end of Gelanit. The population would die out and the village would fall into ruin.

The statue is more than one-and-a-half metres tall, simply carved, its arms crossed over the abdomen. The only decoration is an image of a bird. Below the abdomen is a cavity. This was intended for offerings and could be closed with a panel.



RMV 1889-2

It is interesting that opinions concerning the sex of Werwat vary. According to some sources, the fact that the statue has breasts means that it represents a woman, while others nonetheless see it as a male figure.

Daughter

During a field trip in 1911/12, Burger photographed the sculpture in place, flanked by a smaller statue, carved in the same style and also having breasts giving the impression that in the village centre of Gelanit Werwat was accompanied by an effigy of his or her daughter.



Left: The statue of Werwat, flanked by his or her daughter, photographed in 1911/12 in the ritual centre of the village of Gelanit on Kai Kecil. Right: RMV 1889-15.

Thanks to Gooszen's collecting activities, eventually this statue also ended up in the museum's collection (RMV 1889-15).

Owners and guardians

A separate group of statues we shall deal with in this chapter do not represent 'first ancestors' in the true sense, but creatures closely connected to them. Here we are concerned with 'distant ancestors' who can be regarded as relatives of the founding ancestors, and with members of society who acted as 'helpers' to the founders. Representatives of both categories were present on the islands in the form of statues.

Distant relatives

Distant ancestors who were related to the founding ancestors could be depicted in various ways. If they were linked to the founding mother, then fertility was usually the subject of the design. If they were members of the family of the founding father, then the depiction often radiated power and greatness - although this was not always discernible to westerners.

In general the founding mother was strongly associated with the earth - as the source of all fertility - and accordingly portrayed as someone who had risen from the island soil, as if she were a plant. In various creation myths, for example, her body is covered in leaves - in this connection the *luli* from Lakor are good examples.

In the eyes of the islanders the founding mother together with her relatives belongs to a category of creatures who inhabited the islands before human beings and who are the real 'owners of the earth'. When setting out a new garden these owners are usually asked permission for the use of the land and offerings are made to ensure a good harvest. On many islands special offerings stones, located near the gardens and symbolizing the earth and their owners, were used for this purpose. Sometimes the 'owners of the earth' were present in the form of stone statues. An intriguing Tanimbar figure (RMV 1971-347), found near the gardens on Yamdena, probably represents this category.

In many island cultures distant relatives - on the side of the founding father - were also called upon to protect crops from thieves. Animal figures, which represented these relatives (and the powers ascribed to them) were placed beside the fields. Apart from these, forked branches or parts of tree trunks were used and the statue given a roughly carved face. The message was clear to those who understood - the ancestor would severely punish the thief.



A Babar image of a far ancestor, placed in a garden to protect the agricultural products.

On almost all the islands 'helpers' of the founding ancestors were also present in the form of statues. Often they were the guardians of the village; usually one of their tasks was to act as leader in time of war. In many villages this 'helper' was regarded as an 'extension' of the founding father. He acted in his name and the deadly powers of the founding father were visible in his image. In the eastern as well as the western islands the statue of the guardian was often erected at the entrance to the village, sometimes together with a statue of his wife.

7 - Later ancestors

Because of their very nature statues of the first ancestors (and their 'assistants') were only made in small quantities, but this does not apply to smaller sculptures of later ancestors. In the museum's collection there are dozens of examples from the Southeast Moluccan islands. These statuettes can be roughly divided into two categories: figures which stood in a fixed, permanent place and figures which were 'worn' on the body or carried in a bag. We will look at a few characteristic examples of both categories from western and eastern Maluku Tenggara.

Western Maluku Tenggara

Ancestor statuettes originating from western Maluku Tenggara, especially, are known for their aesthetic qualities. In particular, the design of figures which had a permanent place were the early target of collectors and because of this there is, relatively, a good deal of information about these statues available.

Identity

In many instances the statuettes reflected the identity of the deceased. Gender and personality traits were incorporated and sometimes the profession or speciality of the dead person was portrayed. On Babar, for example, a statuette of a blacksmith, holding a piece of iron to represent his trade, was collected. This effect was achieved by carving the figure around a nail driven into the wood beforehand.

Castes

In places where there was a caste system (as on Leti and neighbouring islands) the statuettes usually reflected the caste to which the deceased belonged. In the account of his journey to Leti, where he stayed in 1888, Jacobsen (1896: 139) reported extensively on this subject. In pictures and text he stated that members of the highest caste, the *marna*, were portrayed with earrings and head decorations that were 'reminiscent of bishops' mitres'. By the latter Jacobsen undoubtedly meant the golden headdresses which were mentioned in the discussion of the *luli* statues and which served as a mark of distinction in the Leti islands, among other places.



Woman from Sermata, belonging to the aristocracy. Her gold headdress is a mark of distinction.

According to Jacobsen, members of the lowest caste (*ate*, slaves) were generally depicted without jewellery, and members of the intermediate caste (*wusuru*) with earrings and a feather headdress. These statues were always of men, because feather decoration indicated a man's role as a warrior.

Sex

It can be deduced from various sources that on Leti the position of the legs was linked to the sex of the person portrayed. Dead men were depicted with their legs raised, in a crouching position; dead women with their legs crossed in what is known as the *bersila* position. It is known that on surrounding islands people were less consistent in this, although almost everywhere 'ordinary' ancestors are depicted sitting down or crouching.

Christian figures

It is striking that some statuettes, carved during the period of transition to Protestantism, reflect the Christian identity of the deceased. On this subject Van Hoëvell remarked in 1895 (135) that "The Christians of these islands still produce these figures, yet in a more modern manner, painted, dressed, with tall hats on their heads and sitting on chairs." Van Hoëvell illustrated his remark with drawings of statues that he collected in the village of Jerusu on Roma; similar statues can be found in the collection (RMV 3109-1). The status of the deceased is also reflected in these 'modern' statuettes. By becoming Christians people were, in a certain sense, putting themselves on an equal footing with the Dutch occupiers and they considered themselves to be superior to non-Christians. Painting and clothing the statuettes, however, was not directly related to Christianity. On many islands people had for centuries painted (or incorporated coloured motifs) and clothed the statues. In this respect the hat and the western chair on which the deceased is portrayed are much more typical. In their time both these were signs of 'modern' distinction.

'House founder'

Although they belonged to the 'later ancestors' on all the islands there were descendants of founding ancestors who acted at a lower level as 'founders' and for this reason after their death they were portrayed in a special manner. Examples of this are sculptures from Leti which represent the founders of families who once shared a house. The ancestor figures - often beautifully worked - were placed on pillars. A good example is the statuette collected on the island by Van Hoëvell at the end of the 19th century. The 'house founder' is sitting on a round wooden pillar more than half a metre tall (RMV 776-68) and, according to the collector, he looks after the interests of everybody living in the house.⁶

Station

The place where these statues were erected, varied. In the Babar archipelago they were usually placed in caves near the village. Here, in the semi-darkness, the villagers communicated with the 'shadows' of their ancestors. Only during the great fertility ritual, the *porka* festival – which will be discussed later - were the statues taken out of the caves. The celebration of this feast demanded the presence in the village of all members of the community, the dead as well as the living. The dead, in the form of statues, were given a place in the centre of the village.

Further to the west - on Leti, Moa and Lakor, for example - the ancestor figures often stood in the attic of the house, sometimes grouped in a model of a boat (RMV 3090-3). The 'shadow' of the deceased was 'enticed' into a newly-made statuette by laying the statuette on a gold plate and then carrying it to the attic. A similar situation existed on Roma, Damar and Kisar. The 'shadows' were thought to enter and leave the attic through openings in the facade or via special shutters installed for this purpose.

'Namesake'

Not all the statuettes, however, had a permanent position. Besides the statuette that was placed in a cave or in the attic, an extra model, intended to be carried around, was often made of a deceased person with whom there was a special bond (especially the 'namesake', the ancestor after whom someone was named). These statues were given a separate name (for example, on Leti they were known as *rusna*) and were only a few centimetres in height (RMV 1139-9). They were made from all sorts of material, such as wood, ivory and caribou horn. According to some sources there were also figurines of gold and silver.

Hardness

In contrast to the statues placed in caves and attics, the hardness of the material used for this small type was very important. This criterion was because of its use as a 'battle amulet' - the statuettes were made

especially for carrying into dangerous situations. The warriors carried them on a chain or in a little basket round the neck, or in a belt round the body. The statuettes represented the male ancestors who gave them the power to kill their enemies.

The hardness of the figures expressed the great reputation of the helping ancestors. On the islands hardness is a symbol of a warrior's power and invincibility. In songs warriors are often compared to hard types of wood, and this relationship was also expressed in other material cultural expressions. For example, on various islands figures representing the former heavenly deity - a 'great hunter' - were called *aitiehra*, a word which literally means 'hard wood' (see also below).

Clothing

The deadly powers of the ancestors were also expressed by the red lengths of imported cloth with which some statuettes were 'clothed'. The red cloth was associated with the double meaning that was ascribed to the colour in Maluku Tenggara. On the one hand in a context of 'coolness' it refers to fertility and new life (see the *luli*), on the other, in a context of war ('heat') it indicates the deadly power of the warrior. During battle warriors often wore a red band of imported material around their head. Home-made fabrics were never used to express 'heat'; these cloths were associated with 'coolness'. Instead of strips of red cloth, pieces of *basta* cloths, printed with red patterns (RMV 1241-321) and obtained through the Dutch East India Company, were also used.

Eastern Maluku Tenggara

On the eastern islands the depiction of 'later ancestors' was largely the same as that described in western Maluku Tenggara. Here, too, there was a distinction to be made between ancestor statues with and without a fixed, permanent place, while there were great similarities in the way in which the two categories of statue functioned in society.

Differences

There were differences, however. In the first place the design in eastern Maluku Tenggara was generally less detailed and more robust. Refined woodcarving like that on Leti and Lakor was rarely found on Tanimbar, Kai and Aru. A second difference was that statues of later ancestors which had a permanent place could not only be made of wood, but also of stone. Soft coral, which was available everywhere, was frequently used for this purpose. A last difference concerns the 'portable statuettes', which in the west of the region served as battle amulets. Besides these lethal little male figures, associated with 'heat', in eastern Maluku Tenggara there were also portable female figures. They belonged to women who carried them about in a basket and they probably served to promote the fertility of their owner. We shall illustrate the similarities and differences on the basis of the culture of Tanimbar, where statues of later ancestors were made on a large scale and about which we are relatively well informed.

Tanimbar walut

The best-known Tanimbar statues of later ancestors are called *walut*. These figures are generally a few decimetres tall (RMV 2235-1c/1d). Usually *walut* could be found on the shelf above the family shrine, *tavu*, or were placed in a special place high in the house. Just as in some western islands, houses in the Tanimbar archipelago were furnished with an opening (in the roof) through which the ancestral 'shadow' could come into the house and enter the statue prepared for him or her.

Walut could be made of wood or stone and the ancestor was usually depicted in a crouching position. In many instances the elbows are resting on the knees while the raised hands clasp an offerings bowl (RMV 1348-22). The sex could be depicted and the status of the deceased was sometimes referred to by the addition of a few small details, mostly jewellery. The number of decorated ancestor figures on Tanimbar, however, has remained relatively limited. It is interesting that in the period of conversion to Christianity statues with the same distinguishing signs as those in western Maluku Tenggara were also made on Tanimbar. A head covering and chair apparently served on all the southern islands to reflect the Christian identity - and as such the superior social position - of the deceased (RMV 1296-59).

'Hot' statuettes

Small portable statuettes of 'invincible' male ancestors in all sorts of materials could be found on Tanimbar. They were made out of wood, ivory and sea cow bone, among other things; as in the western islands the majority were only a few centimetres in height. The figurines were kept in special bags which hung on the *tavu* and could only be touched by the owners - the 'unauthorized' would be struck dead by the 'heat' of the statuettes. Besides the statuettes of 'strong' ancestors, the 'death bag' also functioned as a place of storage for other 'hot' items (mainly roots and leaves) and the neck vertebrae of the ancestor after whom the owner was named were usually kept in the bag as well.

Taking the bag full of ancestral power was essential for the success of every enterprise thought to be dangerous, in particularly head-hunting or hunting animals. For the latter activity a so-called *wandrar*, a double statuette carved from wood and about five centimetres in height, was carried. Both ancestor figures represented distant forefathers with an impressive reputation for hunting.

'Dead mothers'

Besides male portable statuettes, there were also portable female figures on Tanimbar. Although there is no information available on the identity of the depicted ancestors, we can assume that they were probably related to the so-called 'dead mothers'. This was a particular category of female ancestors consisting of the deceased 'mothers' of women who had married into the patrilineal family group. Offerings were made to them in all situations concerning fertility. For example, they were carved in stone or wood and placed on the *tavu*, where they were asked for an abundance of offspring. It is very likely that the small female statuettes that a woman carried in her bag, also depicted these 'dead mothers'.

8 - Gods portrayed

In pre-Christian times on almost all the islands of Maluku Tenggara the cosmos was portrayed as a system of two entities, which were usually called 'above' or 'heaven', and 'below' or 'earth'. In many places the creator was an omnipotent male creature who lived somewhere far away - in or above the firmament. The name of the highest deity often reflected his universal totality. An example is the old Tanimbar name Langit Ombak, which means 'Heaven Earth'. Nowadays in many places in the region the creator has become embedded in the Christian belief and is referred to as Tuhan Allah.

Although the cosmic divide was interpreted differently on different islands, 'heaven' and 'earth' were generally thought of as persons. 'Heaven' was a man, in the person of a heavenly deity; 'earth' was a woman, in the person of an earth goddess. Both parties were linked in a cosmic marriage in which the heavenly god fertilized the earth goddess with his seed - the rain - which, among other things, allowed the crops to grow.

Although no clear information about eastern Maluku Tenggara is available, it seems that everywhere in the region people communicated with the heavenly deity by means of symbols. Most villages had a ritual centre where the male deity was represented by a wooden stake or post statue; on the western islands the earth goddess, in the form of a stone or shell, had her own point of contact.

Symbols of heaven and earth

Of the eastern islands particularly the ritual centre of Tanimbar villages is described. In a number of high-lying 'eyries' this was in the form of a boat in which two tall stones, decorated with beautiful carvings, sometimes represented the stem and stern posts.



Village ritual centre in the form of a boat, Tanimbar around 1930.

The leaders of the village met in these centres where they presented themselves as a symbolic ship's crew and made offerings to the divine powers.

Wooden post

Near the symbolic stem post there was a large, flat offerings stone and a post with a roughly carved human face, which was called Ubila'a or Duadila'a. On the basis of a comparison with the more westerly islands, we can assume that this carved post represented the heavenly deity.⁷

On the islands of Dawera and Dawelor, lying to the west of Tanimbar and part of the Babar archipelago, a simple, undecorated wooden post, about a metre tall, could be found in the village ritual centres.

According to the islanders, the post represented Loyo Wulol, a name which means 'Sun Moon', and it was the personification of 'above'. In songs the deity was described as a helmsman, a characterization that was also expressed in the design of the heavenly symbol in the village of Watuwei on Dawelor.

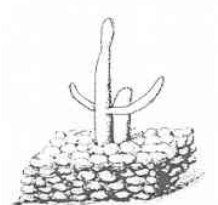


Figure 3: Statue of the heavenly deity Leyo Wulol on Dawelor, as represented by Riedel (1886). The design is linked to songs in which the deity is portrayed as a helmsman.

God as helmsman

On East Babar, Luang and Leti, the heavenly deity had a completely different appearance. There he was portrayed as a male figure, often sitting in a boat or a boat-shaped construction, which usually had a beautifully worked prow .



Statue of a heavenly deity, sitting in a boat, in the ritual centre of the village of Emroing on East Babar, in 1913.

The whole was mounted on a post about one-and-a-half metres in height and, like the 'bare' post on Dawera and Dawelor, often stood on a stone base.

It is highly probable that the presentation of the heavenly deity in a boat on the islands mentioned was linked to the nautical symbolism described earlier. It was thought that earthly life was dependent on the cosmic marriage between the heavenly deity and the earth goddess, a dependence relationship that was expressed in the depiction of the male deity as a helmsman.

Great hunter

Decorations and attributes on the 'heavenly' objects in the various island cultures fully support this notion. They reflect the male contribution to the process of creation: the killing of life. Just as in the founding of a family and society, described earlier, the symbolic helmsman - in this case the heavenly deity - is portrayed as a great hunter.

On Dawera and Dawelor, for example, this was expressed in weapons (fishing spear, bow and arrow) which were tied to the wooden post. More towards the west it was visualized by hanging symbolic hunting trophies - for example, in the form of wooden fish - on the 'ship's prow' (RMV 1476-1). The idea of a great hunter was also expressed in the decorative motifs that were used, in which the figure of a cock - as a

symbol of the sun which, because of its heat, was regarded as an invincible hunter - played a prominent role. The image of the deity, furthermore, was again emphasized by names which referred to the sun (and/or the full moon) and the local terms for types of 'heavenly' statues. For example, on Luang and Sermata one spoke of *aitiehra* and on Kisar of *aukerhe*, terms which literally mean 'hard wood' and, as such, they were a symbol of power and invincibility.

Earth Goddess

Considerably less can be said about the depiction of the earth goddess in the ritual centres of the villages. In western Maluku Tenggara they were usually worshipped in the form of a round, flat stone or a shell. As far as is known this shell was always the *Tridacna gigas*. The design of the symbol of the earth goddess in this part of the region undoubtedly indicated her sex, something which was also the case in the depiction of the heavenly deity, of course. In fact, the wooden posts and post statues were phallic symbols; sometimes this also appeared explicit from the decorations applied (RMV 1476-4).

The renewal of creation

The sexually oriented design of the god symbols in western Maluku Tenggara was partly reflected in the great fertility festival, known as *porka*. This ritual was performed if a disaster had occurred, for example, a failed harvest or a great village fire, but was also carried out at regular intervals. The object was the renewal of creation; a line was drawn under a (bad) period and people aimed towards a bright new future with many children, large numbers of cattle and abundant harvests.

Sexual union

The way in which people tried to achieve this objective was closely related to the idea of how life was originally put on earth through the cosmic marriage between the heavenly deity and the earth goddess. During the *porka* ritual the celebration of the marriage was repeated, as it were. The wooden symbol of the heavenly deity was renewed and stuck into the ground next to the stone or shell that represented the earth goddess. In terms of the boat symbolism used on the islands: the helmsman came on board and sealed the drainage hole. In this way, through the depicted sexual union of the two cosmic powers, creation once again came back 'on course'.

Headhunting

The idea that a man must have killed in order to create new life was also visible during the *porka* festival. The 'celebration' of the cosmic marriage, namely, went hand in hand with a headhunt carried out in the name of the deity. If successful, as a great hunter he could marry. Heads captured by the warriors were ceremonially brought into the community and these hunting trophies were represented as the source of new life. On Luang, for example, during this festival a woman pressed the heads to her breast as if they were babies.

Flags of death

As a sign that the headhunt was to be carried out, on many islands a special flag was raised in the village ritual centre. The character of the festival could be seen from the flag. In the Babar archipelago this was a pennant, about one and a half metres in length, in the form of a phallus. More to the west, on Sermata, Luang, Leti and Kisar, for example, the flag was in the form of a male figure with an erect penis. The top part of this type of flag was usually wood, the bottom part was fabric. Often only the wooden parts of these 'flags of death' have survived (RMV 1476-17/20).



RMV 1476-17

New Year's celebration

The hunting of heads gave both the colonial government and the missionaries an excellent excuse to oppose the performing of this ritual. In the course of the twentieth century this opposition was increasingly successful. On many islands the western New Year celebration has taken the place of the *porka* ritual. Only a few dances, which were traditionally performed during the old fertility festival, still recall the 'good old days'.

Literature

Much of the information presented here can be found in the publication *Forgotten Islands of Indonesia - The Art and Culture of the Southeast Moluccas*, written by Nico de Jonge and Toos van Dijk. This book appeared within the framework of the RMV exhibition of the same title, held in 1995, and was published in Singapore by Periplus Editions.

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Notes

1. In April 1883 the objects collected by Riedel were recorded as RMV-series 355.
2. Schadee's Moluccan collection was registered as RMV-series 1476 in March 1905.
3. The material assembled by Gooszen contains notable collections from Kai and Tanimbar. His collection is recorded as RMV-series 1889 (June 1914) and RMV-series 1971 (July 1919).
4. The process of administrative redivision that began in 1999 has now (2001) reached an advanced stage. The new province of the Moluccas contains only the Central and Southeast Moluccas. This new province will consist of four districts: Buru, the Central Moluccas, the Southeast Moluccas and the Southwest Moluccas.
5. Van Hoëvell 1890: 191
6. Van Hoëvell 1895: 134.
7. Drabbe (1940: 429), an expert on Tanimbar culture, saw a link - albeit an indirect one - between the posts in the ritual centre and the sun-moon deity. On the neighbouring islands of Dawera and Dawelor, in the Babar archipelago, this deity personified heaven.