

Belang and Kabata Banda

The significance of nature in the *adat* practices in the Banda Islands

JOËLLA VAN DONKERSGOED AND MUHAMMAD FARID

ABSTRACT

As an island community, the culture of the Bandanese is closely linked to their natural maritime environment. Not only is fishery the main source of income for many Bandanese, their cultural practices also include the creation of traditional boats and songs which tie the people, their environment and history together. These boats, locally referred to as *belang* or *kora-kora*, feature symbolic decorations and take part in an annual competition in which competing villages chant about their oral stories, known as *kabata*. Before this performance, various sacred locations, *keramat*, are honoured and a ceremony is held at the traditional house in which special bamboo poles play a central role in the performance of the *cakelele* warrior dance. This article highlights how nature plays a significant role in the traditional practices of the villages in the Banda Islands and illuminates certain passages from *kabata* in which Bandanese nature is honoured in song.

KEYWORDS

Banda Islands; maritime heritage; *adat*; *kabata*; *belang*; *kora-kora*.

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NATURAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE BANDA ISLANDS

“In the olden days, the Bandanese people knew from the start about the nutmeg tree and useful spices it produced” (Neirabatij 1922: 67).¹ This phrase has been translated from the *Hikayat Lonthoir*,² a handwritten manuscript which describes the oral history of the Banda Islands from the perspective of the village of Lonthoir (see Images 1 and 2).



Image 1. Map of the Banda Islands, including the names of the islands and the location of the village of Lonthoir (marked as Lonthoir). Made by Lencer CC BY-SA 3.0 (publicly available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File: Banda_Islands_en.png#filehistory](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Banda_Islands_en.png#filehistory); accessed on 28-8-2021).

With this sentence, the author Muhammad Saleh Neirabatij not only introduces the chapter about the famed spice trade of the Banda Islands, in it he also indicates that the knowledge of the nutmeg resided in the community of the Banda Islands. Neirabatij’s manuscript will form the basis of this short

¹ This 1922 manuscript by M.S. Neirabatij, *orang kaya* from Lonthoir was recently digitalized and, after short research by J. van Donkersgoed, made publicly by the National Maritime Museum in Amsterdam. You can download it here at: <https://www.hetscheepvaartmuseum.nl/sites/default/files/2021-05/manuscript.pdf>. Page numbers in this article refer to the penciled page numbers in the manuscript which were added later. The original text is as follows: *Alkisah maka terseboet Tjerita dari Orang2 Banda pada permoelaan tahoe pohon2 Pala dan boeanja itoe ada begoena kepadanja*. Translation by authors.

² Throughout the article we use the modern Indonesian spelling of the words and names from the manuscript of M.S. Neirabatij. For example, “hikajat” is written *hikayat* and “Tjiloe Bintang” *Cilu Bintang*.

introduction to the history and culture of the Banda Islands. To complement this manuscript, we shall use a written account of its oral history by a Bandanese diaspora group from Banda Ely in the Kei Islands. These local sources will allow us to discuss the history of the islands from a local angle, rather than the usual, colonial Dutch perspective. Moreover, they enable us to highlight the importance of the maritime environment to the Bandanese community in the past. After the historical overview we shall continue to discuss the contemporary cultural practices.

The *Hikayat Lonthoir* was written in 1922 by M.S. Neirabatij, an influential man (*orang kaya*) from the village Lonthoir on the island Banda Besar in the Banda Archipelago. The linguist A. van Engelenhoven argues that the manuscript is an oral historical account written down by a copyist (Wim Manuhutu and Glenda Pattipeilohy 2021). Besides the embellished handwriting, the manuscript is illustrated with detailed drawings of the various boats which have played a central role in local history (see Image 2, and also Images 10 and 13).

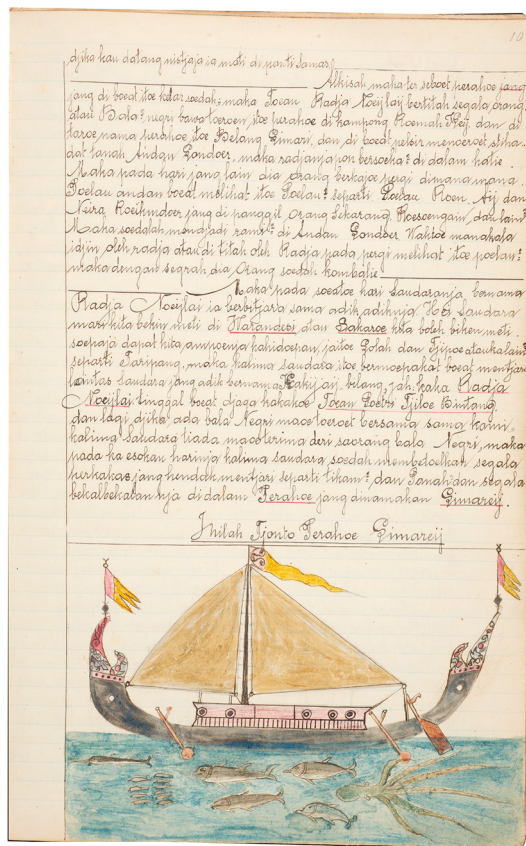


Image 2. Full page of the *Hikayat Lonthoir* with a drawing of the *belang* or *kora-kora* named *Limarei* (Limareij). (Source: M.S. Neirabatij *Hikayat Lonthoir* 1922: 10, in the collection of the National Maritime Museum in Amsterdam).

Although the content of the manuscript was partially known through an article by Ph.S. van Ronkel (1945) summarizing it, it has only now been digitalized and made publicly available by the National Maritime Museum in Amsterdam (Diederick Wildeman 2021). The preliminary research and discussion generated by this process have already contributed to a renewed debate on the history of the Banda Islands and the contents might offer a way to decolonize the historical narrative. For example, the manuscript emphasizes the importance of Islam and maritime travel, aspects which are not prominent in colonial historical sources. Further research is needed to discover why M.S. Neirabatij created the manuscript, for whom and how it came to be in the collection of Professor J.C.M. Warnsinck before it was included in the collection of the National Maritime Museum.

Spirituality plays an important role in the *Hikayat Lonthoir* as it has links to stories from the Holy Bible and the Qur'an and places the Banda Islands right in the centre of the narrative. The close relationship between the Bandanese people and God becomes clear from the very first pages of the *Hikayat Lonthoir* which narrate the story of the first people to come to the Banda Islands, from the moment the sea retreated after the great flood (see Neirabatij 1922: 1-3; Farid 2021: 13). A bird told Noah that the first land which had fallen dry was Andara, also called Banda, and this island was subsequently followed by Tidore, Ternate, Java, and Bali. The descendants of Noah's sons, Ham, Shem, and Japheth, roamed the world, but they lived in sin and there was no ruler in Banda for 200 years. Then the Angel Gabriel visited Jalin, a *wali* of Allah, and told him and the woman, Siti Kalsum, to go to Banda where they settled on Mount Ulupitu. Siti had a craving to eat pomegranate (*buah dalima*) but none was to be found. Therefore, Jalin proposed that she prayed two *rak'a* to Allah and ask Him for the fruit to grow. After she had finished, a man called Iliya found the pomegranate growing on Mount Ijan, which is now called Gunung Api, and he brought it to Siti. After she had eaten the fruit, she gave birth to two sons, and each time she prayed the fruit would grow and she would give birth to more children until there were six sons and one daughter. She then returned to God, and is buried on the eastern side of Mount Ulupitu.

This first part of the *Hikayat Lonthoir* sets the tone for the rest of the manuscript, as nature plays an integral role in the lives of the (first) inhabitants of the Banda Islands. It describes Banda as the first island to arise from the sea and the eating of the produce of the land is directly related to the births of the legendary siblings. The *Hikayat* highlights that the islands themselves were favoured by Allah, a characteristic which is confirmed by Philip Winn's research in which he describes the islands as "blessed land" (Winn 1998: 2005). We have called these siblings legendary because most of the manuscript revolves around these brothers and their sister. At the outset, they lived heathen lives while observing and following the laws of nature. As these instances of the realization of natural laws are noteworthy, we shall describe three instances as examples. (Neirabatij 1922: 3-5). The first is when a brother falls asleep under a tree and, when he awakens, he realizes that the sea has receded and left the beach strewn

with food resources. A second example is when the sister realizes how the sun traverses through the sky and relates this to the ebb and flow of the sea. At that moment they are residing on Mount Kilsarua, which means looking at the sun. The third is the well-known legend of the discovery of a water source on the island Banda Besar, which was created when the sister stumbled and her feet met the ground. The water source was discovered by the brothers when they noticed a wet cat coming out of the bushes. They decided to settle near the water source. These stories highlight how the lives of the early inhabitants were interwoven with their awareness of the environment around them and that they were in tune with the rhythm of nature such as the ebb and flow of the sea.

That nature was a point of reference for these first inhabitants is also evident from the moment that the brothers wanted to name their sister. Before this, the *Hikayat* mentions that, on a bright moonlight night, the sister gave each of her brothers a name: the first was called Nuilay, the second Silisely, the third Kiyakbir, the fourth Senggoear, the fifth Sikly, and the youngest Kakiyai (Neirabatij 1922: 7-8).³ Then on a dark night, each brother came to her to give her a name. Nuilay called her *Cilu Bintang* because her face shone like a star. Silisely gave her the name *Cilu Matahari* because she looked like the sun. Kiyakbir called her after the moon, *Bulan*, Senggoear after a flower, *Melur*, and Sikly called her *Padjar* because her face was radiant. When all the brothers were asleep, Kakiyai went to his sister and a bright light resembling the moon emerged from her chest. He woke the other brothers and they agreed to call her moon. In short, she received many names: *Cilu Bintang Matahari Mustika Bunga Melur Bulan*, and she became known as *Cilu Bintang Matahari*, queen of Kilsarua. She remains an important figure in the oral history of the Banda Islands and, throughout the *Hikayat Lonthoir*, she is described as a wise woman who is consulted by her brothers and cared deeply about them.

One day, the oldest brother, Nuilay, was chosen as the leader and he ordered a boat to be built so as they could explore the other islands which they could see from the mountain (Neirabatij 1922: 8-10). One of the village men, called Limara besi, offered to build the boat with his four children: Kumbang besi, Joko Londor, Waisamar besi, and Maijalah. The boat was built by these five men, and the five brothers of Nuilay decided on the sailing rules, fitting out, and navigation. Nuilay therefore called the boat *Limarei*, referring to the two groups of five men who were involved in her construction (see Image 2). After receiving permission from their eldest brother, the five brothers took the boat to go fishing. However, a severe storm and strong winds blew them off course and only days later they were able to spot land when the sun broke through (Neirabatij 1922: 11). When they landed, they were informed they had arrived in Judea. The four older brothers left their youngest brother to guard the boat, while they went to Medina and Mecca to convert to and study Islam.⁴

³ In the *Hikayat*, the names are spelled as Noeijlaj, Siliselij, Tjakbeir, Senggoear, Siklij, and Kakijaij. In this article we have chosen for the contemporary spelling as used on the Banda Islands. The sister's name is spelled as Tjiloe Bintang.

⁴ The *Hikayat Lonthoir* does not give any indication of when these stories took place. However,

By the time the wind turned from west to east, the brothers had become very knowledgeable about Islam and they asked permission to return to Banda (Neirabatij 1922: 16-26). When they returned to their boat and brother, Kakiyai, they told him to fetch water for the return voyage. While on this errand, Kakiyai met an old man who guided him to another place to get water. Here, after they had bathed in the water, the conversion of Kakiyai to Islam occurred. The man gave Kakiyai a Qur'an called Nurun Mubin (see Image 3), a water container, clothing, and prayer beads made from stones. He told him to keep these objects on his person at all times. When Kakiyai returned to his worried brothers, he did not tell them what had happened and kept his conversion secret. On the voyage back, Kakiyai fell ill and he asked his brothers to throw him overboard with all his belongings when he died. Without the brothers knowing, a big fish carried Kakiyai to the Banda Islands where he arrived before them and brought Islamic teachings to the community.



Image 3. The presentation of the *adat* regalia, including *buka puang*, in the *adat* village Fiat. In front stands the Qur'an Nurun Mubin which is mentioned in the *Hikayat* as belonging to the brother Kakiyai who brought Islam to the Banda Islands. Some monetary donations have been placed in front of this scripture. (Photograph by J. van Donkersgoed, 23 October 2017).

from other sources it can be deduced that Islam arrived in the Moluccas between the eighth and thirteenth centuries (Thalib 2016: 6).

Along their way back to the Banda Islands from Mecca, the four brothers stopped at the Majapahit kingdom and befriended the ruler, Wijaya. At a later point in the *Hikayat*, Wijaya visits the brothers in the Banda Islands and marries their sister, Cilu Bintang, establishing a tie between Banda and the Majapahit kingdom (Neirabatij 1922: 47).⁵ By mentioning this diplomatic relationship, the *Hikayat* again places the Banda Islands at the centre of a larger narrative, similar to the beginning of the *Hikayat* in which the Banda Islands are at the first to arise from the waters after the great flood in Noah's time.

Pertinently, the narrative of this first long sea-voyage tied to the arrival of Islam in the Banda Islands indicates the importance of the sea for the well-being of the Bandanese. The sea not only provides food, it also brought religious knowledge and trade relations. The sea and the ability to navigate the marine environment is therefore an essential part of life. The *Hikayat* describes the first boats which were built in detail, accompanied by drawings of the boats and descriptions of who the boatbuilders were and why the boats were given certain names. After the return of the four brothers from Mecca, each was given a territory into which to introduce Islam and rule (Neirabatij 1922: 36-45). Each brother also built a boat to be able to return to their eldest brother and sister who remained on the island currently known as Banda Besar.

The *Hikayat* also relates how the division of the society in the Banda Islands into two moieties occurred from the moment the brothers settled in other areas (Neirabatij 1922: 36). The original settlement in which they had lived (Lonthoir) remained *Orsia* (people of nine), while the brothers became *Orlima* (people of five). We shall discuss this division in more depth and give other interpretations of its origin in the Banda Islands in the next section about the *Buka kampong* ceremony.

The last sea voyage in the *Hikayat* we shall mention here recounts the travels of Boi Ratan. The *Hikayat* describes her as the very beautiful daughter of the ruler of Waer who had organized a big gathering. During this gathering, the captain (*kapitan*) of Londor became enamoured by her and they met secretly. Sometime later, King Nusaniwe⁶ of Ambon came to propose marriage to Boi Ratan (Neirabatij 1922: 54-62). However, her belly began to grow and she told people she had been bitten by a fish. After treatment, some months later she gave birth to her daughter, Boi Keke, and the leaders were flustered about what to do next because they had broken their promise that she could marry Nusaniwe. Therefore, they exiled her and her daughter, putting them on a raft with provisions and so she travelled to many lands. The place where she was sent adrift was near the Island of Manukan, which is also known as Pulau Suanggi (Witch Island) because, after this event, a barrier was drawn around the Banda Islands so that no witches could pass this island and insinuate themselves into the inner Banda Islands.

⁵ See also Thalib and La Raman (2015: 73), for a discussion of this history and the link to the *Babad Tanah Jawi*.

⁶ In the *Hikayat Lonthoir* the name is written Noesniwie or Noesniwij.

Besides the importance of the maritime environment and travel in it, various mountains play an important role in the *Hikayat*. Elevations are used not only to offer a greater perspective on their environment but they are also used as locations of spiritual importance. The active volcano Gunung Api is mentioned as the fertile soil in which the pomegranate grew that was the prelude to the birth of the seven siblings. As this volcano is the mother of the surrounding islands, the connection between Gunung Api as a generating source of land and life is logical. The volcanic island is also the location on which Kakiyai washed ashore and his brothers subsequently landed on their return from their journey to Mecca. After the brothers settled in their respective areas, several built their villages, mosques, and prayer houses at the foot of their respective mountains. Lastly, mountains acted as a ground to convene and justice was pronounced. For example, the meeting of the brothers to decide the fate of Boi Ratan and her illegitimate child was held at the top of Mount Ulupitu.

Gunung Tabaleko on the Island Neira is another elevation which plays a significant role in the latter part of the *Hikayat*. This elevation is identified as the first land which was bought and controlled by European forces. Therefore, it signals the first phase in losing hegemony over the land. The *Hikayat* relates that the king of Timor wanted to marry the daughter of the ruler of Neira (Neirabatij 1922: 67-68). However, this marriage proposal was rejected because he was not a Muslim. Outraged by this refusal, he asked his Portuguese allies to go to Banda Neira to press his case. When the Portuguese arrived, they bought a small plot of land in which to bury their dead. After the Bandanese had sold them land on Gunung Tabaleko for this purpose, the Portuguese secretly filled the coffins with ammunition and cannons. As the Bandanese were breaking their fast (because it was Ramadan), the Portuguese opened fire on the defenceless people from their higher elevation. Some jumped in the sea or used boats to escape the onslaught, and they travelled to other regions to bring Islamic teachings. The remaining Bandanese surrendered to the Portuguese, and they were allowed to establish a settlement on Tabaleko. This story of deceit was later used by the Dutch to ally with the people of Lonthoir. They joined forces to attack the village of Lewetaka⁷ and conquered the Portuguese settlement on Gunung Tabaleko. After this bloodbath, the Dutch strengthened their position on Neira and this area became the heart of their Bandanese colony (Neirabatij 1922: 74-78).

At this point, we shift from using the *Hikayat* as our primary source to the oral accounts of the Bandanese diaspora in the Kei Islands. The reason for this move is that the *Hikayat* does not describe the Bandanese genocide in the year 1621, perpetrated under the command of Jan Pieterszoon Coen in pursuit of a monopoly on the production of and trade in nutmeg and mace for the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Nevertheless, the *Hikayat* does mention that the Dutch collaboration with *Lonthoir* did lead to an exodus

⁷ Historical village which is also known as Labbatacca, Lawataka, and Labetacke. The contemporary settlement is known as Lautaka.

of several communities in Banda Besar who were hostile to and distrusted the motives of the Dutch. The oral history of the people in Banda Ely in the Kei Islands does describe this exodus, as it was their ancestors who fled the Banda Islands to escape the Dutch colonial violence. After they arrived in the Kei Islands, they continued to speak the Bandanese language and adhere to traditions such as pottery-making: skills now lost in the Banda Islands. They are therefore called *Banda Asli*, the original Bandanese.

One group of *Banda Asli*, who settled in a village called Banda Ely in the Kei Islands, has written down their ancestors' oral history (Masyarakat Wear – Ohoitel Banda Ely 2014). This account describes some of the ancient history, including how their ancestors decided to leave the islands to flee from the Dutch who were oppressing, raping, and killing the people on Banda Neira (Masyarakat Wear – Ohoitel Banda Ely 2014, D). With heavy hearts, they set sail in their armada of boats in two groups: one led by Raja Firamanji Solmasa of Waer in the boat called *Resi Alam* and the other led by *orang kaya* Suji Futun in the boat *Lele Alam*. Both boats were given a new name when they arrived in the Kei Archipelago, the first was renamed *Duang* and the latter to *Tumaf*. The *Hikayat Lonthoir* describes a similar process and, in both cases, the act of renaming indicates a permanent disconnection from the place/land from which the boat had come so as to form a new tie with the island on which they landed.

The *Banda Asli* left Banda Besar just before the Dutch commander Jan Pieterszoon Coen executed his plans to depopulate the islands to make way for the creation of a Dutch-led plantation colony farmed by convicts and enslaved people. The capture, torture, and brutal execution of 44 Bandanese leaders (*orang kaya*) has become the crucial moment which attests to the colonial cruelties committed in the Archipelago. An eye-witness report of a Dutch officer describes how the *orang kaya* were herded into a bamboo-enclosed space and, as the rain poured down, the men were mercilessly decapitated and quartered (Nicolaes van Waert 1621). According to the *Banda Asli*, their decapitated heads were placed on bamboo poles (Masyarakat Wear – Ohoitel Banda Ely 2014, D). Hence bamboo poles are an important natural element in the commemoration of this history, as the *cakelele* dance must be performed in front of them. We shall describe the significance of this practice in more detail in the section about *Buka kampong*.

The apprehension felt by the ancestors of the *Banda Asli* towards the Dutch was not based solely on the earlier duplicity of the Portuguese and subsequent mistrust towards Europeans in general. They did not trust the Dutch because there was a prophecy in the Banda Islands that one-day white men would come and seize the land (J.A. van der Chijs 1886: 21). This was reinforced by the fact that, when the Dutch arrived at the islands, dormant Gunung Api became active again (Valentijn 1858, 3: 72). This was seen as a bad omen and a warning about the Dutch traders and their (true) intentions. Hence the volcano again features as an important element and acts as an embodied natural phenomenon with direct links to the people on the Banda

Islands. Its importance is obvious to anyone who has ever been to the islands; the volcano is visible from every island and it functions as a fixed point of spatial orientation (see Image 4). Moreover, the formation of clouds clustering around its top is a good indicator of the weather conditions. In short, people regularly look to the mountain as a point of reference.



Image 4. Gunung Lewerani or Gunung Api in the Banda Islands. It is the visual marker of the Banda Islands, the first thing you see when you arrive in the Archipelago and is visible from each island. (Photograph by J. van Donkersgoed, 13 December 2014).

This short historical introduction to the Banda Islands shows how the local history and mythology are closely linked to the plants, animals, mountains, and other natural features in the marine environment. The link between the Bandanese sustains them not only physically but is also bound up with the arrival of a new religion, Islam, and hence as a source for spiritual guidance. To be able to travel to other islands and lands is crucial to gaining access to knowledge and food sources and therefore boats play a significant role in the identity and traditions of the people. These traditions and forms of local knowledge are called *adat* and the next sections will explore various aspects of the *adat* practices on the Banda Islands in some detail.

BUKA KAMPONG: THE OPENING OF THE VILLAGE

One of the most important ceremonies in the Banda Islands is called *Buka kampong*. It is a traditional ceremony consisting of a series of events held at the various *rumah adat* (traditional houses) in the *adat* (traditional) villages. Not all villages in the Banda Islands are *adat* villages. In total there are eighteen administrative villages but only seven of these are *adat*. They are (1) Nusantara

or *Namasawar*, (2) *Dwiwarna* or *Ratu*, (3) *Kampung Baru* or *Fiat*, (4) *Selamon*, (5) *Lontor* or *Lonthoir*, (6) *Waier* or *Waer*, and (7) *Ay* or *Sairun* (see Image 5) (Des Alwi 2006: 5; Usman Thalib 2015: 46-54; Farid and Amsi 2017: 6). There is an eighth *adat* village called *Rosenggin* on the Island of Hatta whose status is somewhat disputed because it no longer has a *rumah adat* and therefore the inhabitants can hold no *Buka kampong* and perform no *cakelele* dance. However, they do have a traditional boat with which they participate in the *belang* race.

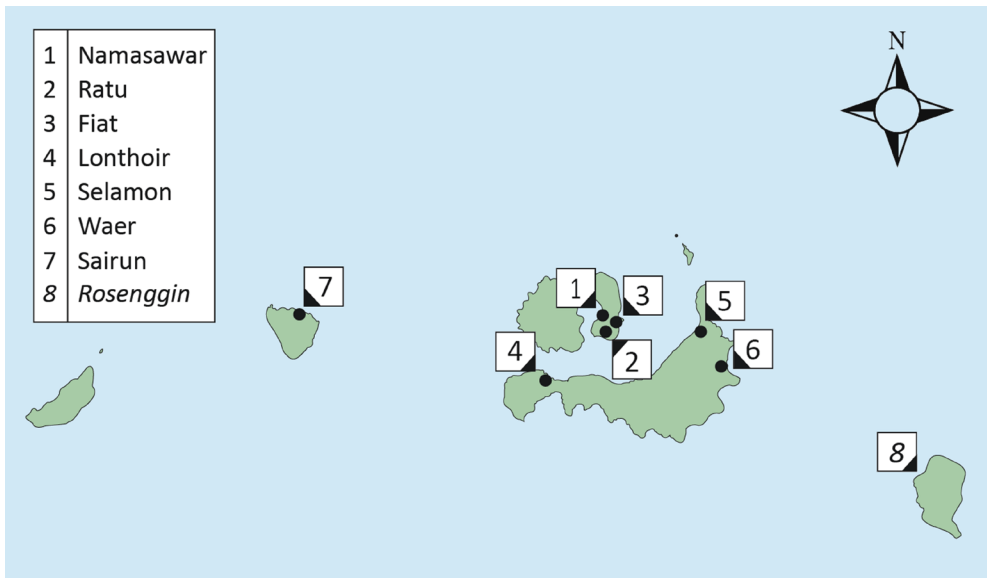


Image 5. Map of the *adat* villages on the Banda Islands, including the disputed *adat* village Rosenggin. (Created by J. van Donkersgoed 2021).

Earlier we briefly mentioned there are two groups into which the inhabitants of these *adat* villages are divided: the *Orlima* (people of five) and the *Orsia* (people of nine). In his book *Sejarah Banda Naira*, Des Alwi (2006) mentions that there are multiple mythical and historical explications for the division into these two groups. The first is the myth that the division was caused by a flood on the island of Seram which caused the population to flee and, in the aftermath, they became separated into three parts of the region. In West Seram, they formed the *Ulisiwa* group (also *Orsia*), in East Seram they formed the *Ulilima* group (also *Orlima*), and in the small islands to the south of Seram they formed the *Uliase* group. The second explanation is that the grouping occurred as a consequence of the power the sultanates of Ternate and Tidore exercised over the islands of Seram, Ambon, and their surroundings. The *Orlima* group is an ally of Ternate and the *Orsia* group is allied with Tidore. The third reason claims that the separation of *Orlima* and *Orsia* occurred because of a fierce competition between the king of Ternate and King Sahulau, with the *Orlima* supporting Ternate and the *Orsia* backing King Sahulau (see Alwi 2006: 7-11). As mentioned earlier, the Hikayat Lonthoir

describes that the division into *Orlima* and *Orsia* originates from the separation of the legendary brothers when they left the village Lonthoir.

This division is still obvious in the Banda Islands where, of the seven *adat* villages, only one, Lonthoir, belongs to the *Orsia*. Meanwhile, the other six *adat* villages; Namasawar, Ratu, Fiat, Selamon, Waer, and Sairun belong to the *Orlima* (Alwi 2006, see also Farid 2021: 49). This construction is bound up with the historical dominance of the sultanate of Ternate, rather than the sultanate of Tidore, over the entire Banda Archipelago. The power of these two kingdoms over the Banda Islands had been seized long before the Europeans (Portuguese) arrived in the seventeenth century (Alwi 2006: 9-10).

The characteristics of the *adat* structure of the *Orlima* and *Orsia* can be seen in the different performances of the *cakelele* warrior dance in the Banda Islands. The number of the *cakelele* dancers is related to their relationship to their *adat* village. Therefore, the *Orlima* have five dancers and the *cakelele* of the *Orsia* has nine dancers (Alwi 2006: 12).⁸ Moreover, the customary *adat* structure of an *Orlima* village consists of two equal male and female parts; five *bapak lima*, five *mama lima*, five male *cakelele* dancers, five female *mai-mai* dancers, who are accompanied by three instruments. The *adat* structure of the *Orsia* is more or less similar, the only difference is their numbers consist of nine people.

Each *adat* village has its own *Buka kampong* ceremony which has to precede the performance of *adat* traditions such as the *cakelele* dance. The designation *Buka kampong* is generally interpreted simply as “the opening of the village”, but the real meaning is much deeper. Based on the findings of the recent fieldwork by Muhammad Farid, the Bandanese traditional leaders define *Buka kampong* as “the opening of the beginning of life”, or “beginning a life”. This meaning is based on the essential part of the ceremony called *buka puang*, which literally means the ‘opening of the coconut flower’. *Puang* is a term used for the coconut flower but when this flower is still in the bud it is known as *mayang*. The opening of this flower bud is the essence of the *Buka kampong* ritual (see Image 6). This bud, the *mayang*, symbolizes a new-born baby, a new life. Therefore, the Banda elders identify the *Buka kampong* ritual as being similar to the process of giving birth by women or the circumcision ritual for men.

The connection between circumcision and the beginning of life might not seem obvious at first. Male circumcision is performed worldwide for religious, social, cultural, and medical reasons (Tobian and Quinn 2013: 148). Its origin can be traced to the ancient Egyptians, after which it was adopted by the Jewish and Islamic faiths (K’Odhiambo 2019: 11-12). As a practice, male circumcision is associated with moral (sexual) behaviour, a commitment to God, and is seen as a benefit to health (see also Islamiah 2018: 25). Similarly,

⁸ For an impression of the *Buka kampong* ceremony and the *cakelele* dance in the *adat* village Namasawar (*Orlima*) with five dancers, you can watch a video on YouTube: “Cakalele Namasawar” uploaded on 9-9-2020, by Banda Nutmeg at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjGxHiVRRDE>. For an impression of the *cakelele* dance in the village Lonthoir (*Orsia*) with nine dancers, you can watch a performance on YouTube: “Cakalele Adat Lonthoir Banda Naira Maluku” uploaded on 23-7-2016, by Husni A. Ang at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XV7bTSUPNvQ>.

among the Bandanese Muslims circumcision is not performed just as a sign that a person has converted to Islam; it is also a (male) effort to protect a man from the desire to indulge in deviant (sexual) acts and attests his devotion to become an honourable paternal head of a family. Moreover, circumcision represents an initiation phase in which a boy becomes a man. The relationship to the *buka puang* is to symbolize the commencement of this new phase of life and the male (moral) role in creating a new family.



Image 6. Young Bandanese men carrying the *buka puang* behind the *cakalele* dancers in a procession of *adat* performers and *adat* leaders to the site of a *cakalele* performance. (Photograph by J. van Donkersgoed, 11 October 2017).

Buka kampong is also identified with the process of childbirth for a woman. For the Bandanese, childbirth is very important because it signals the beginning of a new life which will become part of the community and, having a family, is an important goal in life. The importance of childbirth and its relation to nature is also mentioned in the *Hikayat Lonthoir*, when Siti Kalsum becomes pregnant after eating the pomegranate. From the *Hikayat*, we learn that childbirth and the lives of the Bandanese are closely tied to the concept of sacrality. Sacrality encompasses the relationship with God, sacred objects and places, and the spirits of the ancestors. Therefore, sacrality imbues various aspects of life. Phillip Winn (1998) describes this condition of the Banda Islands as a “blessed land”, which means a harmonious blend of the sacredness of Islam and *adat* in the life of the Bandanese (Winn 1998: 77). In practice, this sacrality means that all religious rituals are invariably followed by traditional ceremonies and vice-versa. This interconnectedness between religion and *adat* is also integral to the ritual of *Buka kampong* and the paddling of the traditional boats, *belang* or *kora-kora*.

All *adat* villages on Banda Neira have their own *cakelele* dance, *belang* or *kora-kora* boat, and a unique way of performing the *Buka kampong* ritual. Nevertheless, there are similarities. The *Buka kampong* ceremony consists of these processes: (1) *Musyawarah*: the meeting or deliberation; (2) *Putar tanpa siri permisih*: asking permission by presenting offering baskets; (3) Carrying the offering basket to a sacred place; (4) Preparation of implements; (5) *Putar jaster*: preparing the *jaster*, the headcloth worn by the dancers; (6) Cutting bamboos for the ceremonial arch; (7) *Putar tanpa siri besar* or preparing the big offering basket; (8) Cutting the bamboo for the *cakalele*; (9) *Buka puang*; (10) *Cakelele* dance; (11), *Belang kora-kora* regatta; (12) *Kasi mandi belang*: bathing the *belang* boats; (13) *Tutup kampong*: closing of the village. However, the order and execution of these processes are flexible depending on the interests of the local community and their customs. Sometimes the ritual is performed simply to inaugurate the *cakelele* performance followed by the *Tutup kampong* with no *Belang kora-kora* event.

Before describing the *Belang kora-kora* regatta, we shall give a run-down of the various elements of the *Buka kampong* to give an overall picture. The first step is to call a *musyawarah* to ensure that all the component parts can be properly planned and well run. This meeting, which is attended by the traditional elders and religious and community leaders, is held seven days before the second step. The purpose of this second step, called *Putar tanpa siri permisih*, is to ask the permission of the spirits of the ancestors. It is carried out one day before the *tampa siri* (woven offering baskets) are delivered to a sacred place (*keramat*). At it, prayers are offered to God so the implementation of the event will be given a divine blessing and the permission of the *fratourom*, the ancestral spirits, is requested. The practice of making the offering baskets is one of the cultural influences which recalls the long history of inter-Asian relations with Hindu traders in the Banda Islands. The third step encompasses the delivery of the *tampa siri* to the *keramat*, which is different in each *adat* village because each has its own sacred places. For example, in Ratu village there are four sacred places, namely: (1) *Parigi Laci* or the well of Laci; (2) the grave of Boi Kerang; (3) the Stone Mosque at Lautaka; and (4) the Stone Kadera at Lautaka (Najira Amsi and Rafita Muhammad 2021: 4).

After permission has been granted and the *tampa siri* have been placed at the *keramat*, the fourth step is the preparation of the attributes to complete the outfits of the *cakalele* dancers. This task is usually undertaken by the *mama lima* or *mama siwa*, beginning with the clothing and including the *cakalele* attributes such as the *salawaku* (shield) and *perang* (sword). At this stage, if the *Belang kora-kora* regatta is also to take place, the attributes for it are also prepared. When all these preparations have been concluded, it is time to initiate the final preparation for the *cakalele* dancers: the turning of their headcloth. At this point, only the *mama lima/siwa* and *bapak lima/siwa* may enter the *adat* house it is very important that the atmosphere remains calm. The sixth step takes place away from the *adat* house: cutting the bamboo to make the archway which will be set up in front of the *adat* house (Image 7). During this step, they will

also collect coconut leaves and the coconut *mayang*. This process is carried out one day before the breaking of the “puang” (*buka puang*) procession. The seventh phase involves the preparation of the *tampa siri besar*, a large offering basket in which the *buka puang* will be placed after the completion of the ninth step. The *tampa siri besar* is stored in the *adat* house and it will always be taken wherever the *cakalele* dancers perform.



Image 7. Photo of *cakalele* dancers kneeling in front of the bamboo arch, bamboo poles and *buka puang* in front of the *rumah adat* of Namasawar. (Photograph by J. van Donkersgoed, 12 October 2017).

The eighth step is cutting the bamboo poles for the *cakalele* performance. In the tradition of the *Orlima*, the number of bamboo poles is five, while the *Orsia* use nine bamboo poles. Each bamboo pole is planted in front of the *adat* house, the location where the *cakalele* will be performed. Several rules must be observed during the process of cutting bamboo for the *cakalele*. For example, the cut bamboo must not touch the ground before it has arrived at the *adat* house. This rule does not apply to the bamboo cut for the archway in front of the *adat* house. The site from which the bamboos are taken is also specific.

The treatment and cutting of these bamboo poles is executed with great care because they have a particular significance in the Banda Islands. The bamboo poles for the *cakalele* are understood to be the personifications of the Bandanese ancestors, the *orang kaya*, who were slaughtered by the Dutch East

India Company in 1621. The piece of red cloth tied to the top of each bamboo pole is a symbol of the blood spilled and their severed heads which were stuck on the bamboo. Another interpretation says the red cloth, called a *patola*, is a symbol of “victory” (see Farid 2021: 51). Therefore, the event at which the bamboo poles are erected can be interpreted as follows: even though the *orang kaya* were killed, they stood tall and they were the victors because they never surrendered to colonialism. The *cakelele* is therefore a commemoration of their strength and heroism and a celebration of the resilience of the Bandanese *adat* community.

The ninth step in the *buka puang* ritual is carried out at night. It begins with reading a prayer, the requisite opening of the *cakelele*, then waiting until midnight. While waiting for the “unopened *puang*”, no visitors are allowed to enter the traditional house, with the exception of the group of *bapak lima/siwa* and *mama lima/siwa*. Waiting for an “unopened *puang*” is understood as waiting for the birth of a baby from the womb. Or, it can also be interpreted as the waiting of a boy to become an adult which is marked by circumcision. The moment at which the *puang* opens symbolizes the time at which the awaited baby has been born or a boy has reached adulthood (*akil balig*, Islam). After the “*puang* opens”, the community is allowed to enter the *adat* house to view the opened flower and all the sacred items inside (Amsi and Muhammad 2021: 5). It is highly recommended that visitors give charity (donate money) as a token of respect and for the upkeep of the *adat* (see Image 3).

The tenth step is the performance of the *cakelele*. It can be carried out in front of the *adat* house or sometimes upon request at another place. In the Banda Islands, the *cakelele* is a traditional dance unique to the region and rich in meaning. Unlike other Maluku *cakelele* dances, the *cakelele* in the Banda Islands is performed with the aim to connect with the spirits of the *datuk* or their ancestors who were killed by the colonialists (Farid 2021: 50). Therefore, the Banda *cakelele* is imbued not only with artistic but also with strong spiritual values. This tenth phase is sometimes also carried out simultaneously with the *Belang kora-kora* event, although there are also villages in which it is observed on other days. During the *Belang kora-kora* event, the various *adat* villages paddle their boats against each other in a race. More will be said about this event in the next section.

The two final steps comprise the closing activities. The eleventh phase is the bathing of the *belang* boat after the *Belang kora-kora* competition between the *adat* villages. This moment takes place at a particular site called *tita pantai* and it is a moment of great solidarity. After the various *adat* villages have competed fiercely against each other, they close the event by chatting and joking together while bathing their respective *belang* boats. This is a time at which emotional tensions between rival villages are released and a moment of comradery. The final phase is the *Tutup kampong*, the activities which close the village after the *cakelele* and/or the *Belang kora-kora* regatta. On that day, everything related to the completed traditional rituals will be removed and put away, beginning with the storing of the *cakelele* attributes, and the removal of the poles, the archway and the decorated flags from the *adat* house.

BELANG KORA-KORA: LOCAL BOATS

Before discussing the particular boat traditions of the Banda Islands, we shall sketch a general overview of boat traditions in Indonesia. Elymart Jastro (2010) has described how traditional boats in Indonesia have characteristics which are based on knowledge from the *getok tular* (hereditary, oral tradition) passed down from the ancestors. Generally, traditional boats are made of wood and other raw materials which are easily obtained in various places (Jastro 2010: 61). For the purpose of this article, we interpret the term “traditional” to mean local, since it is based on local knowledge and the materials used are locally sourced.

Indonesia is rich in a wide variety of boats based on their area of origin. “Sumatra boats” are found in Sumatra and on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula. Their characteristics are a long and low hull, high bow and a high mast of the boat (Singgih Tri Sulistiyono 2004: 75). These characteristics make it suitable for use in the waters around Malacca which tend to be calm.⁹ The second boat type is called the “Javanese boat”, which is characterized by bow and stern of equal height, vertical hull and rectangular sail, but which can sometimes be either trapezoid or triangular. They are small and still exist in Madura (Sulistiyono 2004: 75-76). This type of boat was once widespread on the northern coast of Java, on Madura, and in southern Java.¹⁰

The final boat type can be found throughout Eastern Indonesia and examples of it are abundant in Maluku. The main characteristics of this boat type are that the hull of the boat is wide and short, the gunnels are low, the ends are high and ornate, and it has one mast and one sail (Sulistiyono 2004: 76). This type of boat includes the *cadik karere* and the *kora-kora* which are still used in the Banda Islands.

The ability of this last boat to travel far and wide is testified to not only by the stories in the *Hikayat* but can also be seen in the decorative arts of other cultures. For example, on the ancient reliefs of the famous Borobudur temple there are carved depictions of boats which have been identified as Moluccan *kora-kora* boats (Haris Sukendar 1998/1999) (Images 8-9). The decorative arts are also an important feature on the boats themselves since, besides serving an aesthetic purpose, the ornamentation on them is often imbued with a mythical, religious or spiritual meaning. In contrast to Bali, where decoration serves a mainly aesthetic purpose to attract tourists, the decorations on traditional boats in Eastern Indonesia generally have religious and spiritual meanings (Jastro 2021; Sukandar 1998: 92). For example, the Asmat tribe in Papua associates depictions of humans and animals with the causes of death, while in some other areas of Papua birds, snakes, and humans are interpreted as serving

⁹ Examples of this boat type are *banting*, *cunia*, *jalur*, *jung*, *gobang*, *kalamba*, *kenabat bagolu*, *kolek*, *lancing*, *lelayang*, *meudagara*, *perahu sasak*, *pencalang*, *rakit*, *sampan*, *sampan gadang*, *sampan kaur*, *sampan payang* (*pamayang*), *tambangan*, and *tunda* (Asnan 2007: 261).

¹⁰ Examples of this type of boat are *lesung*, *sampan*, *sope*, *jegong*, *tembon* (*compreng*), *bondet*, *mayang*, *kolek* (*mayang*), *konting* (*dogol*), *jukung katir*, *perahu prawean*, *golean lete*, *janggolan*, *pencalang*, *lambo*, et cetera (Wangania 1981: 26).

to ward off bad luck (Jastro 2010: 74; Mohammad Amir Sutaarga 1974: 34). For the Banjar tribe in South Kalimantan, the bird symbol refers to the male gender, and the dragon snake is connected to the female. Since the Banda Islands were an active inter-Asian trading hub, it is likely that these ideas about symbolism have also been circulated.

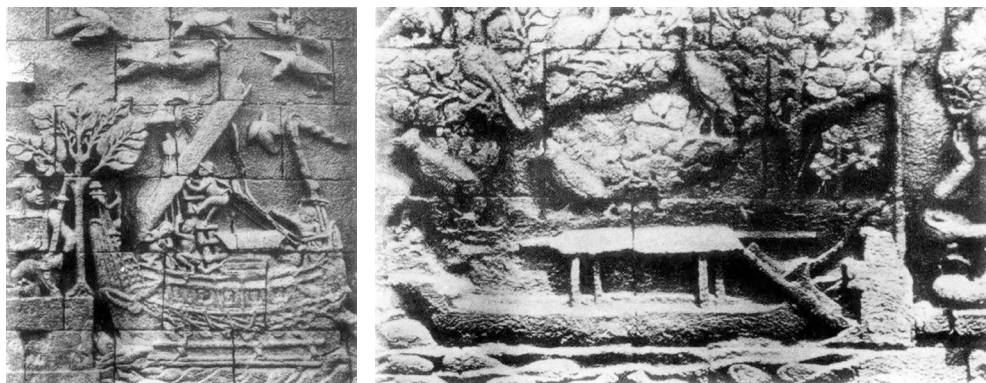


Image 8. Depictions of Moluccan boats on the walls of Candi Borobudur. The right-hand boat is described as a “*perahu ‘Jukung’*”. (Photographs by A.J. Bernet Kempers in 1976, published in Sukendar 1998/1999: 70).

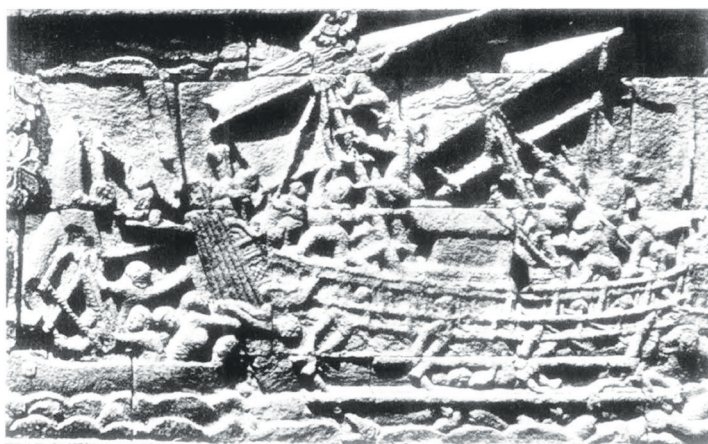


Image 9. Depiction of Moluccan boats on the walls of Candi Borobudur. (Photographs by A.J. Bernet Kempers in 1976, published in Sukendar 1998/1999: 67).

In the *Hikayat Lonthoir* by Neirabatij, there are several illustrations of boats including the details of their decoration. For example, it is said that, as the boatbuilders were constructing the second boat, they saw the young of a bird called a *susi* and decided this should be the decoration on the bow of the boat (Neirabatij 1922: 14-15) (Image 10).



Image 10. Excerpt from the *Hikayat Lonthoir* which features the boat *Manuk Nusi* (*Manaoesi*) and the accompanying *kabata*. The name of this boat is related to the *susi* bird the boat builders encountered while constructing the boat. The bird is depicted on the bow. An explanation of the *kabata* is given between the red lines below the drawing. (M.S. Neirabatij 1922: 15; courtesy of the National Maritime Museum in Amsterdam).

The boat was called *Manuk Nusi*,¹¹ and the drawing is accompanied by a blessing and a *kabata* (more about the importance of the *kabata* in Banda in the next section). Besides the decorations of animals (fish/birds) on the boat, the *Hikayat* also reveals the connection between the boat and marine animals. As decorations on boats, both these illustrations exemplify how nature and culture are entwined in the practice of boatbuilding in the Banda Islands.

An important reason for the people on the Banda Islands to have constructed boats has been to be able to travel long distances and maintain their prominent position in the inter-Asian trade. The Banda Archipelago had attained fame as a nutmeg-producing area long before the first Europeans arrived in the sixteenth century. This international trade was a two-way affair since the Bandanese trade in nutmeg and mace not only stimulated foreign traders to travel to the islands, the Bandanese themselves also initiated trade voyages to such trading hubs as Malacca and engaged with trading fleets from India, China, and Arabia. In *Suma Oriental*, Tomé Pires mentions that one of

¹¹ In the *Hikayat*, the name is written *Manaoesi*.

the groups of traders established in Malacca were from Maluku and Banda (see Adrian B. Lapien 1992: 43; Thalib 2015: 90).

Thalib states that the Bandanese had their own trading fleet which transported agricultural products from other islands to Banda (Thalib 2015: 97). This historical information reveals that Banda has long had sea transportation facilities capable of transporting goods between islands. Thalib explains that the Banda fleet was known by the term “kora-kora” or “belang”. He describes the *belang* and *kora-kora* as two different boat types: the first used for war and the second for the transportation of kings (Thalib 2016: 4). In this article, we have chosen to use the compound *Belang kora-kora* because this is the term which is currently used by the Bandanese to describe their traditional boats.

Dutch reports record that, in the early seventeenth century, nearly sixty large and small ships arrived in Gresik in East Java each year with a cargo of spices from the Moluccas. From other sources, it is known that at most seven big ships (called *jung*) transported nutmeg from Banda to Java every season, the rest was transported on smaller vessels. The spices were transported to Gresik on Bandanese boats and from there the spices were taken to Malacca, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Patani, and Siam on other vessels (Lapien 1992: 43). Tomé Pires also mentions that, among the visitors to the city of Malacca, were Bandanese; among the four ports in the city of Malacca, there is one specifically reserved for traders from Java, Maluku, Banda, and Palembang. From this information, Talib (2016) concludes that, at least since the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Bandanese had settlements in Malacca and had a trading fleet capable of sailing to Malacca (Thalib 2016: 85-97). Until the 1970s, there were still a number of vessels used for sea transportation in Banda, such as *arumbai*, *kolekole*, *tambangan*, *jungku*, *belang*, and *rurehe* (Thalib 2016; Mezak Wakim et al. 2015). These various vessels had different functions. Some were used for fishing around the Banda Islands, while others were used for inter-island shipping and some sailed as far as Malaysia and Singapore.

The traditional *Belang kora-kora* in the Banda Islands can be seen in a drawing which accompanies Jacob Cornelisz van Neck’s travel account of 1599 (Van Neck 1601). As seen in this print (Image 11), the *kora-kora* could accommodate more than thirty to forty people and this one was decorated with a dragon figurehead with a dragon tail at its stern (see Thalib 2015; Wakim et al. 2020). Although *belang* of this size are no longer to be found in the Banda Islands, the tradition of building boats with these decorative elements continues.

In fact, the tradition of building these boats was reinstated by Des Alwi, a prominent cultural heritage promotor from the Banda Islands who was also called the “King of Banda”. A few decades ago, he collected oral testimonies, historical sources from colonial books and paintings so as to reconstruct the shape and meaning of the *belang*. Each of the traditional *adat* villages in the Banda Islands has a *belang adat* and the remaining administrative villages also have a boat called *belang nasional*. The latter are used for tourism, but the *belang adat* still retains its traditional role.

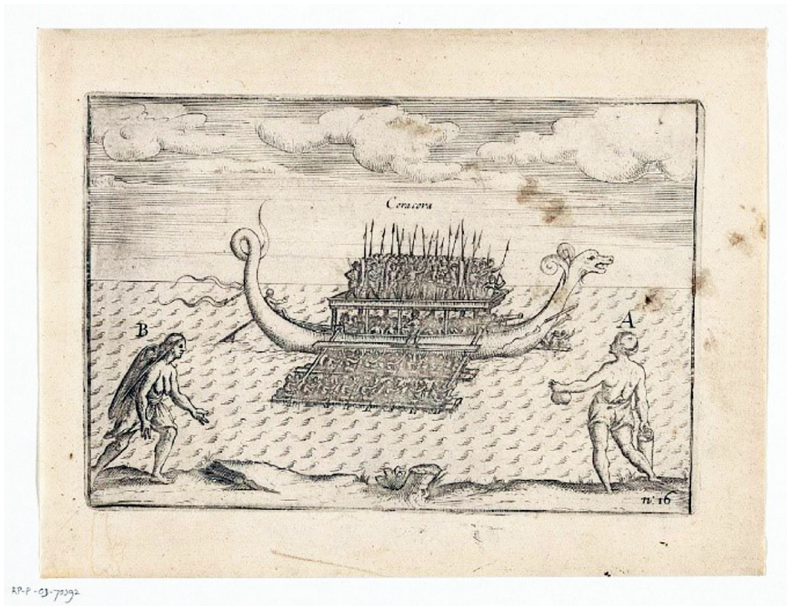


Image 11. "Coracora" from the Banda Islands in 1599, anonymous, published in 1619, *ets en gravure*, (engraved etching), 145mm × b 215mm. (Courtesy of Rijksmuseum Amsterdam).



Image 12. Left: Photograph of the horse figurehead of the *belang* at the *rumah adat* of Fiat. Lower right: Photograph of a carved and painted fish on the side of the *belang* of Namasawar. (Photographs by J. van Donkersgoed, 23 October 2017 and 21 November 2015). Upper right: Photograph of the decoration on top of the entrance gate to the *rumah adat* of Lonthoir. It features the *dalima* fruit flanked by the *salawaku* shields and *perang* which are used during the *cakalele* dance. (Photograph by Soraya Ramli, n.d.).

Each *adat* village has its own distinctive *belang adat*, distinguished by colours and symbols whose meaning is enshrined in the oral history of that *adat* village. For example, in the *belang* of Fiat village, the colours of the *belang* are a combination of yellow, blue, red, black, and white, with a yellow horse figurehead carved from wood (Image 12). The Waer's *belang* has a different colour combination of yellow, red, white, blue, black, and green. Their figurehead is a *burung kakatua*, a cockatoo. Another example is the *belang* of Namasawar, whose colour combination consists of green, red, yellow, and white, and whose figurehead is a dragon snake.

Besides the horse figurehead, Fiat's *belang* is decorated with fish at both the prow and stern of the *belang* and the *belang* flies the Indonesian national flag as well as red and yellow flags in the middle. The number of peddlers in Fiat's *belang adat* is thirty-seven. Not all people serve as peddlers as some occupy several other roles, namely:

1. *Kapitan laut* (Captain of the sea), meaning the leader/commander in a sea war who has the expertise to guard the maritime territory. He stands alongside the front flagpole and acts as the captain and navigator who directs the course of the *belang*.
2. *Imam* (the Priest), as a symbol of the religious leader of the *adat* village. He stands in front of the central flagpole and his role is to encourage and pray for protection, victory, and safety for the crew.
3. *Tua adat* (*adat* elder) or representatives of the local government. He stands in front of the rear flagpole, provides encouragement, connects with the spirits of the ancestors and wards off attacks from opponents by wielding his magical powers in order to protect and obtain victory.
4. *Orang kamudi* (the helmsman) controls the direction and course of the *belang* under the instructions and directions of the *kapitan laut*. He sits in the stern.
5. *Natu*, usually two people sitting opposite each other in the prow of a *belang*. Both of them play a role in playing the *tiwa* (drum) and the gong while singing *kabata*, to praise and invoke the heroic spirit of the ancestors to encourage the peddlers.
6. *Orang panggayong*, or peddlers usually totalling thirty people. In addition to peddling, they would once have acted as soldiers. They are seated two by two, one on the left side and the other on the right side of the *belang*; fifteen pairs.
7. *Akibalu*, sometimes called *timbaruang*, usually consisting of two people in charge of bailing out the *belang* and occasionally also dousing the peddlers with water to keep up their spirits and strength as they paddle. The position of the two *akibalu* is between the front flagpole and the centre flagpole and the other stands between the centre flagpole and the rear flagpole.

If we look at the composition and role of each of the crewmembers on Fiat's *belang adat*, there can be no doubt that the *belang* tradition not only provides information about these maritime troops; it also casts light on the structure of community institutions, resembling a government agency with a clear

hierarchy and a very neat division of roles. Therefore, if the function of *belang* in the past was military (war), this vessel can be said to resemble a hierarchical war strategy which was in advance of its time.

Besides providing an insight into the community (or naval) structures, the *belang* tradition also underlines the importance of the connection between the people and their natural environment. The decorations on the *belang* all have a symbolism which has links to the historical ties of the *adat* villages to their environment. The bird is frequently used in cultural heritage practices in the Banda Islands. For example, the *adat* village Namasawar features a bird on its *belang* and the bird can also be found on top of the *puang*, the opened coconut flower used in the *buka puang* ceremony. The movements of a bird are imitated in certain parts of the *cakelele* dance and also by the female *mai-mai* dancers. These movements include spreading the arms like wings, hopping and waddling until the *tifa* drum and *natu* singer have finished a certain *kabata*.

A bird is also featured on the boat of the village of Waer. As said, other animal references found on *belang* include a horsehead in the village Fiat, a dragonhead in the village Namasawar, a dragon snake in the village Ratu and a watchdog on the *belang* of Sairun (see Image 12). The village of Lonthoir also features a pomegranate (*dalima*), referring to the origin story of the mythical siblings as described in the *Hikayat Lonthoir*. These elements have more than a symbolic meaning, they also refer to the oral history of the islands. For example, the dragon is featured on the *belang* of both Namasawar and Ratu, a fact which is explained in oral history as a symbol of their close kinship because they are as brother and sister descendants of the king of Lewetaka. Another interpretation is that using these symbols is the result of acculturation from Chinese and Malay cultures in the course of the trade on the island of Neira.

The harmony between *adat* and religion and the people and their natural environment does not necessarily extend to harmony between villages, since the stories and decorations can also allude to (historical) conflicts between the villages. For example, in the *Hikayat Lonthoir* Neirabatij writes that the various figureheads of the *belang* were inspired by a conflict between the eldest brother and his younger siblings (Neirabatij 1922: 40-45). The decorations and *kabata* (verses) assert the authority of Lonthoir as the oldest village. Farid (2021) describes this as the "superiority of *adat*", as these stories establish a hierarchy between the various *adat* villages. These tensions were probably acerbated during the colonial times, as the Dutch would make use of local tensions to gain and retain power. For example, Neirabatij describes in the *Hikayat Lonthoir* such an alliance between Lonthoir and the Dutch, formed to take revenge on the people of Lewetaka (Neirabatij 1922: 74-76).

The *belang* is therefore not only a physical link which connects the Bandanese community to their marine environment, it also celebrates their natural surroundings expressed in the decoration on their boats. These decorations are not merely ornamental but are symbolic links to remind the community of their oral history. Although these symbols are partly explained in the *Hikayat Lonthoir*, some are kept solely by the *adat* elders as sacred knowledge, passed down from generation to generation through the *kabata*

and cultural practices. *Adat* emphasizes and strengthens the cultural ties to the environment, the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, and teaches mutual respect, care, and preservation.

KABATA: SONGS NARRATING ORAL HISTORY

In the previous section, we mentioned that the *natu* sing *kabata* from their *adat* villages as the *belang adat* is paddled in competition against those of the other *adat* villages. These *kabata*, also known as *kapata*, are a typical cultural feature in Maluku. It is sometimes identified as a genre of folklore (Prihe S. Letlora 2018), as poetry or singing (Friccan Tutuarima and Falantino Eryk Latupapuan 2010), as a story of a journey, a tragedy, a tale of cause-and-effect (Rudi Fofid 2014) or as advice and prayers (Letlora 2016). Letlora defines *kabata* in more detail as a folklore genre mainly found in the cultural rituals of various villages in Maluku, such as in the ritual of selecting a king and the ritual of the inauguration of a *baileo* (traditional Moluccan house) (Letlora 2018: 154). Because most forms of oral literature in Maluku are cast either in poetry and folk prose (Mariana Lewier 2018), some experts define *kabata* as a combination of poetry and song.

Tutuarima and Latupapuan (2010) state that *kabata* have two articulative possibilities: they can be recited poetry or sung to a certain melody (with or without musical accompaniment). Even when a *kabata* is performed without a particular melody, the beat of a rhythmic musical instrument like a *tifa* drum still adds a musical effect because the metre is formed as it is declaimed (Tutuarima and Latupapuan 2010: 3). When *kabata* are performed during the *Belang kora-kora* race, they are supported by the rhythmic accompaniment supplied by the *natu* on drum and gong.

Generally, the content of *kabata* covers a swathe of knowledge: it can be drawn from history, give advice, is a form of worship, tells of sacred places or recounts other aspects of life intrinsic to Moluccan society (Letlora 2016). Similarly, Fofid affirms that the main contents of *kabata* are stories about travel, the origin of the population, advice or recount a tragedy and therefore act as a conduit of memory (Fofid 2014: 326). Because of their significance to the local population (and often their age), *kabata* are performed in the local language, commonly called *Bahasa Tanah*. Farid stipulates that *tanah*, the word for land, refers not just to the geographical location in which this language is spoken or to a demographic group within Maluku. Rather, the term *tanah* is an all-encompassing word referring to life in its entirety and to the noble values inherited from the past which are expressed in this language in the stories about past experiences, pilgrimages, and their hopes for the future.

Although the *Kabata Banda* are a link between the ancestors and the contemporary Bandanese, they are not quite the same as the *onotani* which are performed by the *Banda Asli* on Banda Ely and Banda Elat. Their verses are sung in their native tongue, *Turwandan*, which is still used by about 500 speakers (Timo Kaartinen 2012: 236). On the contrary, *Bahasa Tanah* is no longer used as a daily language. Besides the difference in language, the subject of the songs and prose pieces are also distinct. Most *onotani* refer to the journeys of

the ancestors and pass on advice to future generations, while the *Kabata Banda* deals with more general topics such as spirituality, legends about Banda and the natural environment. Moreover, the *Kabata Banda* can only be performed during traditional ceremonies such as *Buka kampung*, the *cakelele* dance, or the *belang* race, while the *onotani* can also be performed during funerals, weddings, concluding agreements, celebrations, and other ceremonies (Kaartinen 2012: 387). Despite these differences, the purpose of both traditions is to connect contemporary people with their ancestors. Their purpose is to transfer ideas, experiences, stories, and values from the past to the present with their hopes for a better future.

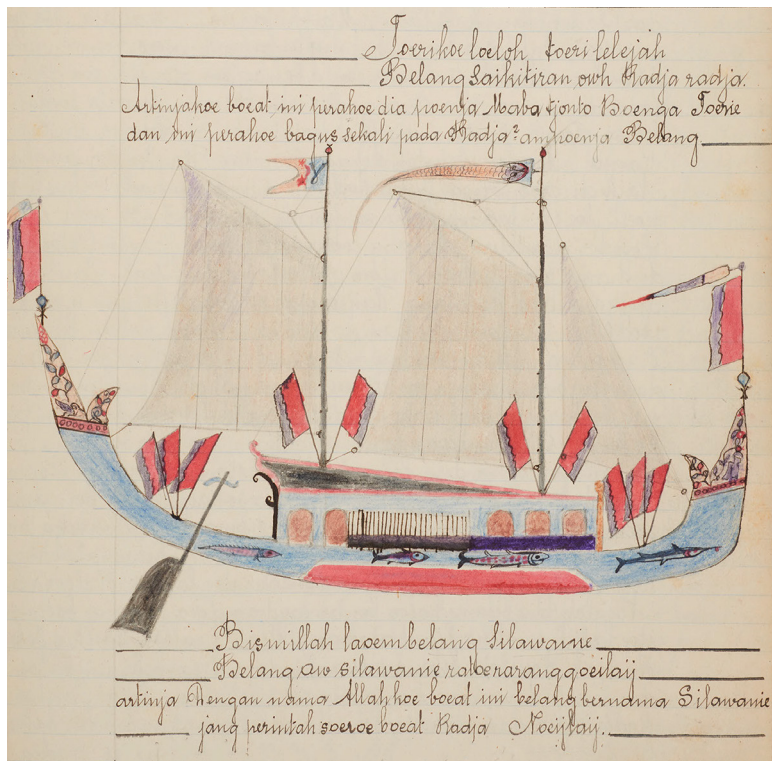


Image 13. Drawing of the boat *Silawanie* featuring several fish on the side of the boat and on the flag. The writing under the drawing includes the *kabata* in *Bahasa Tanah* and an explanation. (M.S. Neirabatij 1922: 34; courtesy of the National Maritime Museum in Amsterdam).

Kabata are therefore an important source for learning about the past, both as a historical source and as a guide to understanding how people in the Moluccas have a tradition of living with positive humanist values (Latupapua and Tutuarima 2008: 16). The *kabata* and the various *hikayat* are among the few historical sources which describe the arrival of Islam in the Moluccas between the eighth and thirteenth centuries. These include the *Hikayat Ternate*, *Lani Nusa Lani Lisa* (local language of Morela), *Kapata Ulapoko* in the tenth century AD,

as well as in the oral traditions of Ternate, Banda Neira, and Leihitu 132H/8M (Thalib 2016: 6). The *Hikayat* as recorded by Neirabatij includes many *kabata* in *Bahasa Tanah*, which are distinguished from the rest of the text either by underlining, indentations or other forms of marking to indicate their significance (Neirabatij 1922). These *kabata* are often followed by an interpretation explaining their meaning to the reader (Image 13).

In the Banda Islands, the *kabata* are generally sung to a rhythm, sometimes using a *tifa* accompaniment; sometimes they are sung acapella. They are performed at special moments in time such as *Buka kampong*, when the *cakelele* dance is performed or as the *belang adat* is paddled. A special occasion on which the *kabata* performance is held takes place in the *adat village* of Lonthoir, where a unique ceremony called *Parigi pusaka*, which encompasses the ritual cleansing of their sacred well, is observed every seven to ten years. In a nutshell, there are four *Kabata Banda*: *Kabata buka kampong*, *Kabata cakalele*, *Kabata belang*, and *Kabata parigi pusaka*.

The *Kabata Banda* are either in prose or a poem written using either *Bahasa Tanah* or the native language of the Bandanese. The original language is no longer spoken today, most people do not understand the meaning. Only certain people (*adat* elders) can interpret the *kabata* language. As stated before, *Bahasa Tanah* is more than a local language, it is the embodiment of the expression of life for the Bandanese. The language speaks fully to the Bandanese; it covers all thoughts, experiences, pilgrimages, and values lived by the Bandanese in the past, present and enshrines their hopes for the future. Therefore, it is a complex form of expression which makes it difficult to translate or understand the *kabata* word for word. Rather, it must be understood in its entirety, backed up with knowledge of all the traditional Bandanese lore which still exists to this day.

Based on the information gathered by Farid, the contents of *Kabata Banda* are generally related to these themes: the natural environment (including mentions of the sea, fish, and mountains), spirituality, philosophy of life, the origins of events, the early inhabitants of the Banda Islands, wars, and tragedies. They also often contain memories and advice. The following *kabata* were recorded by Farid in the *adat village* Fiat (Kampong Baru) on the Island of Banda Neira. Each *kabata* is followed by the explanation given by the *adat* elders and an interpretation of the category (natural environment, spirituality, social reality, social structure and the colonial situation) and the way in which these relates to the *Hikayat* and oral history of Banda Neira.

The first three *kabata* which we discuss relate directly to the natural environment.

Kakatuae manung kakae. Kasaturie manung leko rane.

'The cockatoo is a parrot. The *kasturi* bird flies towards Lewerani.'

This stanza describes that when a parrot flies over a *belang* it is an auspicious portent. This is the reason that the *adat village* of Fiat has carvings of these birds on their *adat belang*. The flight of the bird is even more significant,

because it is stated that it flies towards the mountain Gunung Api, which in the *kabata* is referred to as Lewerani. We will discuss the importance of this volcano in the *kabata* “Rani Gunung Lewerani”.

The presence of birds is paid special attention in the oral history of the Banda Islands. For example, the *Hikayat* begins with the end of Noah’s flood when a bird brings Noah the news that Banda is the first land to have arisen from the water. The *susi* bird on the boat *Manuk Nusi* is another example of a bird tied to oral history (see Image 10). Birds have even taken possession of the outermost island in the archipelago, known as Pulau Manukang, which refers to the Javanese word for bird, *manuk*. We have already mentioned this island under the name Pulau Suanggi “Witch Island” and it marks the symbolic border at which one crosses into the Banda Archipelago.

The *kabata* mentioned above is not the only poem which mentions birds. They are a recurring theme in many of the *Kabata Banda*. For example, in the *adat* village Namasawar, there is a *kabata* which goes: “*walang e walang e marpati walange 2x, marpati lewetaka e*”. This verse refers to the home of the nutmeg pigeon, which is the symbolic bird of Lewetaka. This *kabata* refers to the kingdom of Lewetaka, the first rulers on the Island of Banda Neira. The importance of this pigeon is connected to the nutmeg trade, as it has specialized in swallowing the nutmeg seeds whole to consume the mace. It was long believed this was the reason for the special quality of the nutmeg from the Banda Islands, as it was claimed that a tree would only grow after its seeds were excreted by this bird (Georgius Everhardus Rumphius 1741: 20).

Other animals which receive particular attention in the *kabata* are fish, such as in the following verses:

Sarui essarui manu ikang essarui. Sarui geteng-geteng manu ikang essarui.
‘Sarui is a sarui fish. Small sarui are sarui fish’.

Sarui essarui manu ikang essarui. Sarui nusukaru manu ikang essarui.
‘Sarui is a sarui fish. The sarui goes to the back of the sea’.

The *sarui* fish is a type of long fish commonly found in the Bandanese waters. This fish has achieved legendary status in the oral history of the Banda Islands. The *Hikayat Lonthoir* mentions the fish as the “saviour of man”, in a fashion similar to that of the prophet Yunus in the Qur’an.¹² Other stories describe the role of this fish as “guiding the way”. Fish are depicted on several *belang* (see Image 12), and its importance for the Bandanese community is not restricted to mentions to it in oral history. Fishing is an important source of income and food and the waters around the Banda Islands teem with a great variety of marine life.¹³ The islands are an important point of migration for many species, including larger fish which might have inspired the legends. Therefore, the cultural significance of these marine species is tied to the natural

¹² This story is also part of the Bible and known as Jonah and the whale.

¹³ To learn more about marine diversity and preservation on the Banda Islands, please visit <https://www.coraltrianglecenter.org/banda-islands-mpa-network/>

wealth of this region and this enforces the harmony between the Bandanese and their marine environment.

The *adat* practices of the Bandanese are therefore aimed to keep and reinforce this harmony between the people and nature. Natural features such as fish, birds, and even nutmeg trees and mountains are considered their natural allies and sacred to life in the islands. These are not just commodities, but sources which sustain life. Therefore, fishermen will use certain phrases to protect them from danger and reassert their ties to nature before they go fishing and nutmeg farmers do the same before they go to harvest in the forest. These practices can also be linked to certain places of significance, called *keramat*, which are believed to be inhabited by spirits (Farid 2019). Although these practices are weakening as a consequence of Islamic reforms, they are still practised on the islands of Run and Ay where they have a positive effect on preserving the coastal environment.

The preservation of the harmony between the people and their natural resources is especially key on the islands on which the *adat* leaders still assert the traditional system of governance on the marine resources (Van Donkersgoed and Brown 2018: 376). This form of *adat* is referred to as *sasi* and the Island of Hatta is one location on which it has made a strong revival. Here, the traditional system of *sasi* pertains to rules regulating the harvest of nutmeg on land and the collection of *lola* seashells and the sea cucumber from the sea. During a community workshop in 2015, a group of Bandanese observed that: “*Sasi* is a community action involving being wise about and respectful to nature”. This statement shows that the Bandanese regard this practice as a way by which the community can take responsibility for their natural environment and their awareness of the wisdom in retaining harmony between people and nature.

There are also *kabata* verses which tell stories about significant mountains, such as:

Rani gunung lewerani. Man soro soro tanda gunung apie gunung lewerani.
‘Rani Gunung Lewerani. Go with the current past Lewerani Volcano’.

This verse describes the journey of the ancestors who followed the current past the volcano called Gunung Lewerani, currently called Gunung Api (see Image 4). This journey can be interpreted in various ways. In its first interpretation, it refers to the journey of the five siblings in the *Hikayat* who journeyed back to their ancestral village from the holy city of Mecca. They stopped on Sembahyang Beach, which is on the coast of the island of Gunung Api. The presence of the volcano itself is mentioned in many stanzas in the *Hikayat*. Various other names for the volcano have been recorded: Goenoeng¹⁴ Boi Ijang and Lewerani.

¹⁴ In Bahasa Indonesia this is written *gunung*, which means ‘mountain’. We used the older Dutch spelling here to indicate the various names for the mountain.

Another possible meaning is that this journey refers to “the journey of life of Banda” which is winding, complicated, complex (the phrase “down the river, up the mountain” encapsulates the complexity of life). This second meaning seems to cover the whole story of the life of the Bandanese from the very beginning until the arrival of the Europeans which brought suffering and tragedy. This connection between the origin of a people and mountains is a not unfamiliar trope in Maluku. For example, the myth of Mount Nunusaku describes the origin of all Moluccans (Bartels 2017). This connection to the ancestors is the reason many *kabata* use the phrase “*aku somba*”, which is often misunderstood as worship of the ancestors or places or objects connected to them.

The reverence to the ancestors might appear to reveal a dualism between God and the ancestral spirits in the beliefs of the Bandanese. However, the ancestors and the places linked to them are valued because of their connection to God and therefore they are holy because of their closeness to the sacred. This sacrality is applied to Gunung Api, the first mountain to arise after the flood and the place at which Islam arrived in the archipelago, but is also applied to the fish who is said to have carried Kakiyai from Mecca back to the Banda Islands. Therefore, the *Hikayat Banda* affirms the importance of God and connects religion to the ancestral past of the Banda Islands. God occupies the highest position and the ancestral spirits exist by the grace of God. So, even though there are rituals addressed to gain favour with these ancestral spirits, these rites are always accompanied by reading prayers addressed to God. Hence, the spirituality in the *kabata* refers to the closeness of the (ancestral) Bandanese to God and God’s creation and describes a harmony between the Bandanese, God, and the spirits.

Besides these references to the natural environment, some *kabata* deal with spirituality. For example, the next two verses.

Bismile kau bilang fiate, jadi barakate nirabati watro.
 ‘Bismillah Fiat, with thanks to Nirabati Watro’.

A village elder explained that this verse is an instruction to the paddlers of the *adat* village Fiat admonishing them to say *bismillah* before they paddle their *belang adat*. By doing so, they invoke the blessings of their ancestor Nirabati Watro. The figure of Nirabati is a representation of spiritual people or the representatives of religion and therefore a representative of God. Nirabati is a religious figure who features prominently in the oral tradition of the Bandanese.

During conversations with village elders, it became clear that this verse describes the importance of spirituality to the Bandanese. It declares that every activity must be preceded by the pronouncement of *bismillah*, an Arabic phrase which means ‘in the name of Allah’. In the *Hikayat* many *kabata* begin with this word (see Image 13). It emphasizes the central role of God in the life of the Bandanese and as the Creator of the land of Andara (Banda).

In the oral history of the Banda Islands, the existence of God plays a very important role in the origin and survival of the Bandanese. For example,

the *Hikayat* describes that, when Siti Kalsum wanted children, her husband suggested praying (worshipping God) so that her wish would be granted. After she had prayed to God, the pomegranate tree grew and she gave birth to the seven legendary siblings. Moreover, the *Hikayat* describes the journey undertaken by the early inhabitants of Banda to the city of Mecca. This was a spiritual pilgrimage, seeking God's (Allah) blessing on the life of the Bandanese.

Another stanza also shows the importance of the spiritual to the Bandanese.

Imam imamme juru hatibe. Lebi baca surat ayat qur'anne.
'Imam and khatib have to read verses of the Qur'an.'

In simple terms, this stanza is understood as a description of the position of the *imam* and the *khatib* who are on the *belang* and who are in charge of reading prayers supplicating salvation. In Banda, "Imam" has a dual meaning: he can be a leader in worship or in mundane social affairs. The *khatib* is a religious lecturer and he is generally a researcher in religious studies. Therefore, the purpose of this stanza might be to show that the Bandanese cannot separate their activities, their worldly affairs, from the *ukhrawi*. The profane and sacred are interconnected, and the priest and *khatib* both play an important role.

The third category of *kabata* is related to the social structure of the Bandanese, for instance:

Dua e kapitang mari nai kora-kora. Sailuna risipali kora-kora limare.
'Let two captains go to the *kora-kora*. Let Sailuna Risipali go to the *kora-kora*'.

This verse talks about the invitation to two captains from Kampong Baru, named Maitaman and Taman Bustamin who was nicknamed Sailuna Risipali (smart and handsome), to sail in the *Belang kora-kora* boat together. "Kapitang" designates the social position of someone who acts as a war leader. In the context of the *belang*, the role of the *kapitang* is to guard the sea territory. He stands alongside the front flagpole and acts as the captain and navigator who sets the course of the *belang*. The interpretation of this verse might be that the two captains refer to the two major groups, *Orlima* and *Orsia*, in the Banda Islands. The number of paddlers on the *belang* is also connected to this division of parties.

The most important position in the social structure of Banda is the *raja*, the king. This position is usually symbolized on the *belang* by the wearing of distinctive clothing and special ornaments. This hierarchical position is mentioned in the following *kabata*.

Saiketiran string saiketiran. Blang kings of saiketiran.
'Sikiteran is saikiteran. Saikiteran is the boat of kings'.

Saikiteran is another name for the *belang* of the *adat* village Fiat. The name means "kings of kings", which demonstrates the existence of social stratification before the arrival of the European colonists as it indicates there

was a distinction between “the property of the king” and “the property of the common people”. The system of government of Islamic kings is known as *Lebe Tal Rat At*, which means the “leadership of four kings [and] three priests” (Usman 2015 and 2019). The leadership of four kings and three priests was entrenched in several areas in the Banda Islands, including Lonthoir, Selamon, and Lewetaka.

The fourth and final category of *kabata* relates to the colonial era, such as:

Gong bese tipa gong bese. Bala kompania e.

‘Iron gongs *tifa* iron gongs. Company soldiers’.

In this verse, the terms “*gong bese*” and “*tifa*” identify the instruments which sounded when the soldiers of the Dutch East India Company arrived. The mention of iron is specifically made to underline the differences between the two cultures and the ownership of science and technology. It states that the two tools were used simultaneously by the Bandanese to indicate danger; to alert the community to the arrival of the Dutch East India Company troops.

These *kabata* are prose works created by the Bandanese ancestors and, as such, they are authentic evidence of the local knowledge of the Bandanese. They have been solemnly passed down to the next generation and rehearsed in silence and lamentation. *Kabata Banda* are a living testament to the close ties to the ancestors and the supernatural as well as the surrounding environment. They recount the harmony between the life in this world and the Hereafter. They reinforce the harmony between the Bandanese and their natural environment.

Some verses of the *Kabata Banda* are alive with the strong spirituality of the Bandanese, while others explain how natural elements such as forests, nutmeg trees, fish, birds and mountains are an integral part of their daily life. Other *Kabata Banda* recall the tragedy and genocide which followed the violent intrusion of the Dutch East India Company and its successor Dutch colonial regime that brought death and destruction to traditional Bandanese life. All these emotions are enshrined in deep and touching verses impregnated with longing. These verses have been passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. Their contents are believed to be true by those who call themselves the *orang Banda*, Bandanese. Therefore, they are a priceless treasure beyond any other wealth.

CONCLUSION

The history and culture of the community in the Banda Islands are closely entwined with the natural and marine environment in which the people live. This article has described elements in which this connection is apparent: the oral history as described in the *Hikayat Lonthoir*, the ceremony of *Buka kampong*, the observances around the *adat belang* and the connection this establishes between nature and culture and the *Kabata Banda* which describe in more detail the intricacy of these intimate ties between the social life and the importance of the nature which surrounds it.

The *Hikayat Lonthoir* as written down by Neirabatij not only records the oral history of the Banda Islands; it describes the earliest habitation and reliance of the people on their environment. The mountains especially are an important feature as they not only provide a wider outlook and place to settle but also function as sacred sites at which important meetings are held and, in whose vicinity, the first places of prayer were established. Therefore, religion and *adat* are indistinguishable; both revolve around natural elements like the mountains and certain animals (like fish and birds) which act as helpers of the Bandanese.

The *Buka kampong* ceremony is an example of a harmonious event in which religion, *adat* and natural symbolism are all present in equal quantities. During this ceremony, the opening of the coconut bud is an essential part before any *adat* performance such as the *cakelele* dance or *Belang kora-kora* regatta can take place since it symbolizes the beginning of new life. Besides this moment, the cutting and placing of requisite bamboo poles are a significant part of the Bandanese *cakelele* dance. These bamboo poles are treated with special care, as they represent the historical moment when the Bandanese *orang kaya* were brutally murdered by Jan Pieterszoon Coen's forces in 1621 and their body parts were displayed on such poles.

After the *Buka kampong* ceremony and the performances of the *cakelele*, the traditional *belang* of each *adat* village can be paddled in a race against the other *adat* villages. The boats with which this race is conducted have been built using traditional knowledge and the decorations on them refer to the oral history and include both natural and mythical elements such as fish, birds, a horse and a dragon snake. During the race, the *natu* recite *kabata* which describe the oral history of their villages and their connections to their natural environment.

The *kabata* sung on the *belang* are one of the four categories of *Kabata Banda*: *Kabata buka kampong*, *Kabata cakalele*, *Kabata belang*, and *Kabata parigi pusaka*. The *Kabata Banda* are recited in *Bahasa Tanah* to the rhythmic beat of the *tiwal* drums. Although *Bahasa Tanah* is no longer spoken in daily life, it retains a special meaning for the Bandanese community whose significance becomes explicit during these ceremonies, as it is a linguistic bridge to the past. Besides describing historical events, these *kabata* offer advice, spiritual guidance and reinforce the close ties between the people and their island.

These close ties between the Bandanese and their islands are therefore reinforced by these continuing cultural practices. To keep these *adat* practices strong and revive some *kabata* and other traditional knowledge which might otherwise have been lost after the Bandanese genocide (1621), the current Bandanese community are talking to the *Banda Asli* to rekindle their cultural connection. Through their engagement with their old traditional knowledge, the Bandanese community are striving to create more sustainable ways to preserve the marine environment and their cultural connections to it.

GLOSSARY

INDONESIAN WORD	ENGLISH MEANING
<i>adat</i>	Set of local traditions, ceremonies, lore, values, and ways of life
<i>Bahasa Tanah</i>	Language in which the <i>kabata</i> are recited; a local language which encompasses all aspects of life. Also referred to as “ <i>Basa Tana</i> ”
<i>Banda Asli</i>	Bandanese diaspora in the Kei Islands who uphold original Bandanese traditions and language
<i>bapak lima / siwa</i>	Men of <i>Orlima</i> or <i>Orsia</i> , the male elders of an <i>adat</i> village, also known as “ <i>orangtua bapak</i> ”
<i>belang</i>	Traditional Maluku boat
<i>Boi</i>	A prefix for a woman, also written <i>Bhoi</i> or <i>Boij</i>
<i>Buka kampong</i>	Ceremony to “open the village” which takes place before the <i>cakelele</i> and <i>Belang kora-kora</i> regatta
<i>buka puang</i>	The first phase in the <i>Buka kampong</i> ceremony, during which the <i>mayang</i> plays a central role
<i>cakalele</i>	Warrior dance which is performed throughout the Moluccas, but which has developed its own unique style in the Banda Islands
<i>datuk</i>	Spirits of ancestors
<i>getok tular</i>	Hereditary, oral tradition
<i>kabata</i>	Verses from the oral tradition in <i>Bahasa Tanah</i>
<i>keramat</i>	Sacred or holy location for an <i>adat</i> village or neighbourhood
<i>kora-kora</i>	Traditional boat from Maluku
<i>mai-mai</i>	Young (often unmarried) female dancers of the <i>maruka</i> dance performed alongside the <i>cakelele</i> dance
<i>mama lima / siwa</i>	Women of the <i>Orlima</i> or <i>Orsia</i> , the female elders of the <i>adat</i> village, also known as <i>orangtua mama</i>
<i>mayang</i>	Coconut flower bud, important during the <i>Buka kampong</i> ceremony
<i>natu</i>	Name of the two performers of the <i>kabata</i> and drummers on the <i>belang</i>
<i>orang Banda</i>	Bandanese people
<i>orang kaya</i>	Honorary title of the influential men and local leaders who defended Bandanese autonomy against the Dutch invaders
<i>Orlima</i>	One of the two party-system, meaning the “people of five”. Also known as <i>Ulilima</i> .
<i>Orsia</i>	One of the two party-system, meaning the “people of nine”. Also known as <i>Ulisiwa</i> .
<i>patola</i>	Red cloth which acts as a symbol of victory
<i>perang</i>	Swords used during <i>cakelele</i> performance
<i>rumah adat</i>	The house in which <i>adat</i> traditions are observed and attributes are stored. Also known as “ <i>rumah kampong</i> ”

<i>salawaku</i>	Shields used during <i>cakelele</i> performance
<i>tampa siri</i>	Woven offering baskets
<i>tifa / tiwal</i>	Traditional drums played during <i>adat</i> ceremonies. The <i>tiwal</i> has a wider diameter and is hit with a rattan, while the <i>tifa</i> is smaller and usually played by hand.

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