

PDF hosted at the Radboud Repository of the Radboud University Nijmegen

The following full text is a publisher's version.

For additional information about this publication click this link.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2066/217883>

Please be advised that this information was generated on 2021-06-13 and may be subject to change.

and function of the Javanese *kraton* administration from which the archive originated.

With this important volume, Carey and Hoadley have made a major contribution to the study of Indonesian history. The principalities of Java at the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century are now open to serious historical discussion and study on the basis of indigenous documents produced by their own administrations.

Wilfried Van Damme (ed.), *Bijdragen over kunst en cultuur in Oceanië/Studies in Oceanic Art and Culture*. Gent: Academia Press, 2000, 122 pp. ISBN 90.382.0222.9. Price: BEF 450.

ERIC VENBRUX

This volume offers a sampling of current research into Pacific art in Belgium. It includes five papers first presented at a symposium on 'Art and Culture in Oceania' in Ghent on 23 October 1998. The symposium marked the conclusion of an exhibition of Pacific art from the ethnographic collections of the University of Ghent. Although the papers are written in the Dutch language, summaries in English have been added to make them accessible to a wider audience. The three authors affiliated to the Department of Art Studies at the University of Ghent (Van Damme, Bruyninx and Van der Zee) all deal with a topic relating to the arts of New Guinea, while the two remaining contributions (by Darge and Forment) have Polynesian art as their subject matter. Moniek Darge, who teaches at the Institute of Higher Education in Ghent and is a composer herself, gives an overview of Maori musical instruments and genres. Francina Forment, curator of Polynesian art at the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels, concentrates on the dating of an old wooden statue from Rapanui (Easter Island).

Wilfried Van Damme, likewise, is occupied with a single object, in this case a decorated wooden bowl from the Tami Islands in northeastern Papua New Guinea; but he attempts to recontextualize it. In spite of the presence of these bowls in a great many museum collections, the information available about them is still scanty. The University of Ghent added a Tami bowl to its ethnographic collection in 1905. The object, purchased as a double from the Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde, seems to have been collected by the German trader Eduard HERNSHEIM in the late nineteenth century. Van Damme makes it clear that the oval vessels served the Tami as items of trade in the region until about 1920, when the Siassi Islanders took over the production of and trade in the very same bowls. From the early 1970s onwards,

these vessels have also been produced in West New Britain. Van Damme notes that 'despite the shifts in production centre, hardly any change has occurred in size, form and decoration (as well as – presumably – function and use) of the bowls' (p. 13). He makes the point that, as this particular example shows, the 'one tribe – one style' paradigm in the study of non-Western art will be difficult to maintain.

Elze Bruyninx is concerned with change in art and material culture, mainly as a result of external influences. In 1994 she visited the East Sepik, Madang and Morobe Provinces of Papua New Guinea. On the basis of her observations, Bruyninx discusses the various factors leading to change in architecture, pottery and the carving of wooden objects. She makes a distinction in the contemporary art of the regions concerned between 'popular art, tourist art, and an elitist "academically trained" art' (p. 32). Bruyninx fears that what she calls 'popular art' might either disappear or lose its local characteristics. Interestingly enough, her contribution contains some further information on the carving of wooden bowls by the Tami. Bruyninx reports that a limited production of the wooden vessels had continued for local usage until they were substituted by introduced, metal ones in the 1960s. In succeeding years, Tami carvers occasionally made smaller and shallower bowls of a round shape for the external market. In ornamentation and finish, however, these Tami objects are comparable to the older, oval type of bowls.

The woodcarver appears as a culture hero in creation stories of the Asmat and the Mimika (Kamoro) of West Papua. Pauline Van der Zee analyses the striking parallels in accounts of the deeds of the mythological woodcarver given by members of these two groups as recorded in the Dutch colonial period. She also pays attention to the variability of the narrative in relation to the art of story-telling. Oral accounts were influenced, among other things, by adaptation to locally specific circumstances, by people's changing aspirations, and by narrators' property rights in variants of the tale. Nevertheless, the recorded Mimika and Asmat stories show close mutual resemblances 'in narrative structure, *dramatis personæ*, conduct of the hero, attributes and theme'. 'In fact the myth tells the same story', concludes Van der Zee (p. 60). In contrast to the Asmat versions, however, the Mimika ones lack the final episode in which the woodcarver brings his wooden sculptures to life with the help of the sound of a drum which he has made. The Mimika story of the 'monster killer' Mirokoatajao or Paju accounts among the Asmat for the act of the creation of human beings instead. In this case it includes the creation of other people, such as the Chinese and the Dutch. Furthermore, the story deals with the ritual secret and promise of the forthcoming arrival of foreign goods. When their stories were written down, Van der Zee explains, the Mimika had already felt the effects of colonization for a few decades, whereas the Asmat (in the 1950s) had only just begun to experience it.

Moniek Darge's contribution revolves around the revival of traditional music among the Maori of Aotearoa New Zealand. She describes the vocal music (recitatives and songs) as well as the traditional instruments (aerophones and idiophones). The instruments had fallen into disuse under the influence of Christianity, but have been re-introduced during the recent revival of traditional music. The controversies over what 'traditional' music is supposed to mean are mentioned in passing. 'In commercial Maori music the typical properties of traditional Maori music have totally disappeared', according to Darge (p. 90). But she does not want to deny that both types of music may be seen as 'authentic' cultural expressions of contemporary Maori.

Not the authenticity but the age of a wooden statue from Rapanui provides the central question in the last contribution to this volume. The Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels house a small 'figure with ribs' statue dating back to at least 1871. Curator Francina Forment expected that it might be as old as the monumental stone sculpture for which Easter Island is famous. The object consists exclusively of indigenous materials and leaves no doubt that stone technology was used to produce it. Convinced of an origin pre-dating European contact (1722), Forment sent a sample of the wood to a laboratory in France to get a radiocarbon dating. With this event in 1998, according to Forment, the ^{14}C dating method was used to examine a figurative wooden statue from Easter Island for the very first time (p. 114). The results of two measurements indicated with 95% confidence that the wood, taken from behind an eye inlay, was from the fifteenth century (specifically, the period 1403-72). Forment considers the possibilities of delayed use and re-use of the wood, and that this might have been from the oldest part of a tree trunk; the statue itself is not necessarily so old. A stylistic comparison with Easter Island stone sculpture, however, suggests that it may be contemporary, in which case the wooden statue must have been made before 1680. Further radiocarbon dating of wooden sculpture of the same type might be useful to clarify the matter. Forment proceeds with formulating the characteristics of a series of wooden objects which, due to similarities in carving technique, iconography and morphology, could be deemed to be roughly the same age as the statue in Brussels.

The essays in this volume are explorative. The discussion of the 'Tami style' bowls begs the question of *why* these objects made in different locations hardly changed over time. Their use as valuables for exchange as bridewealth perhaps had something to do with it. Or the transmission of copyright from one group of producers to another (which would explain why the Tami stopped replicating them for external trade). One also wonders what the part played by the ongoing (?) demand of European traders and collectors was, because these bowls can be found in museum collections all over the world. We can

only speculate, and in his thought-provoking piece Van Damme raises a whole range of other questions for further research. Bruyninx views the change in art in Papua New Guinea (and in Tambanum on the Sepik River in particular) in terms of 'acculturation' leading to cultural loss, while Silverman (1999), working within a different paradigm (at the very same geographical location) sees the emergence of new cultural forms. Darge tends to regard 'commercialisation' as the main threat to 'traditional' Maori music and speaks of 'modern, acculturated Maori music', yet unlike Bruyninx she does not want to be judgemental about it. Van der Zee, focusing on the verbal arts, also tries to grapple with historical change. Emphasizing the creativity of narrators, she allows for the production of new and meaningful variants of creation stories. She comes close to the promising processual approach to change recently proposed by Gosden and Knowles (2001). They argue that the colonizers and the colonized have to be seen in connection, their interactions and transactions bringing forth socio-cultural change, especially new forms of difference, albeit forms constantly changing in nature. Change is the main theme of this volume, and this includes Forment's mystery story about the Rapanui statue as well as the remarkably unchanging 'Tami style' bowls put in context. It is to be hoped that the authors will continue their studies and further develop what most of them say they have only explored here, so that we may look forward to further contributions to the study of Oceanic art.

REFERENCES

- Gosden, C. and C. Knowles, 2001, *Collecting colonialism; Material culture and colonial change*. Oxford: Berg.
- Silverman, E.K., 1999, 'Tourist art as the crafting of identity in the Sepik River (Papua New Guinea)', in: R.B. Phillips and C.B. Steiner (eds), *Unpacking culture; Art and commodity in colonial and postcolonial worlds*, pp. 51-66. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Raharjo Suwandi, *A quest for justice; The millenary aspirations of a contemporary Javanese wali*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2000, x + 229 pp. [Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 182.] ISBN 90.6718.134.X. Price: NLG 50.

EDWIN WIERINGA

In the 1930s, a young Javanese man started his pursuit of mystical perfection by embarking upon a life of asceticism and wandering. This person, who