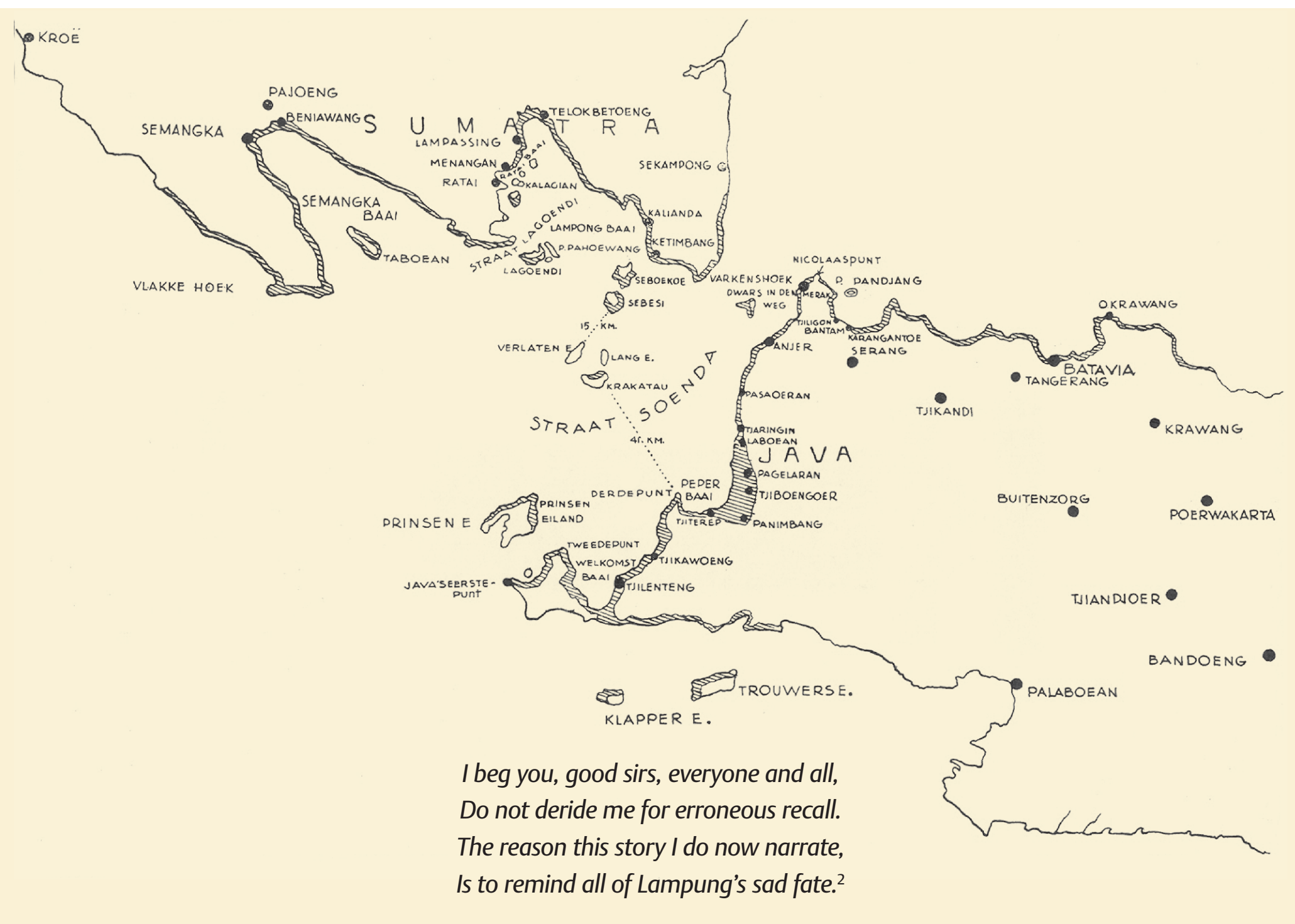


The tale of Lampung submerged



As the history books have recorded, one of the world's most cataclysmic volcanic outbursts was the 1883 eruption of Mount Krakatau, situated in the Sunda Strait that separates the Indonesian islands of Sumatra and Java. The eruption nearly wiped out the entire island of Krakatau, but after a number of submarine eruptions starting in 1927 it became clear that a new island was starting to emerge in the original location. Known as *Gunung Anak Krakatau* ('The Child of Krakatau'), it is, like its predecessor, an active volcano, which continues to grow consistently.

Suryadi

1 (above):
A map of Sunda Strait, which separates Indonesia's islands of Sumatra and Java. The shaded areas of the Sumatra and Java coasts were the areas hit by the tsunami following the catastrophic 1883 eruption of Krakatau. Source: Ch. E. Stehn et al. 1933. *Herdenking Krakatau uitbarsting*. Batavia: Java Bode.

2 (right):
The Krakatau eruption in 1883 (KITLV #5888).

THE FIRST KNOWN MENTION of Krakatau in the West is on the 1584 map by Lucas Janszoon Waghenauer, who labeled the area 'Pulo Carcata'.³ Since then the name Krakatau has been variously represented as *Rakata*, *Krakatoa*, and more rarely *Krakatou* and *Krakatao*. Its first known eruption occurred in 416 A.D. The last eruption before 1883 occurred about 200 years previously, and had left three remnants: Pulau Sertung ('Verlaten eiland' in Dutch; 'The Deserted island' in English), Pulau Rakata Kecil ('Lang eiland' in Dutch; 'Long island' in English) and the biggest of the three, Pulau Rakata ('Krakatau island'), which had three cones: Perbuatan, Danan and Rakata (Fig. 1).

In 1883 there began a marked increase in earthquake activity in the Sunda Strait. On May 20th, volcanic eruptions began first from the cone Perbuatan and within a few days from a second newly formed vent. In July the violence of the eruptions increased and by the middle of August three main vents and numerous smaller ones were expelling large volumes of ash and steam. The last three days of activity, 26-28 August, were marked by a succession of explosive blasts, at first separated by intervals of ten minutes, but later becoming continuous. Huge quantities of pumice and ash were ejected together with rock fragments. On the morning of August 27th, more than three months after the first tremors on Rakata, enormous explosions took place at 5:30, 6:44, 10:02, and 10:52, bringing about the collapse of Danan, Perbuatan, and the northwest part of Rakata. Ash was blown to heights of seventy kilometers (Fig. 2)

and the accompanying tsunami swept the shores of Sunda Strait, with waves reaching heights of forty meters at the shore, taking the lives of—to cite the words of the colonial-era journalist, A. Zimmerman—"thirty-seven Europeans and over thirty-six thousand natives."⁴ The waves reached Australia within five hours, Ceylon in six hours, Calcutta in nine, Aden in twelve, Cape Town in thirteen, and such was its force that it was felt even at Cape Horn seventeen hours later. The caldera formed as a result of the explosion was five to seven kilometers in diameter with a depth of 279 meters below sea level; it has been modified since by the emergence of the volcano *Anak Krakatau* on the northeast margin on the principal basin.

The effects of the eruption were felt not just in Indonesia and its immediate neighbors; the aftermath affected the global climate for months, which can be read about in an early extensive report compiled by the Krakatoa Committee of the British Royal Society in London in 1888.⁵ Since that time numerous reports and scholarly publications have been devoted to the eruption and it is no exaggeration to say that because of the catastrophic intensity of the eruption and the devastation it caused, Krakatau has frequently been made the subject of writings, both scholarly and literary. A bibliographical compilation on Krakatau lists no less than 1083 references pertinent to its 1883 eruption, under a wide range of fields: geology, zoology, botany, meteorology, and oceanography to name just a few,⁶ not including

some works that are relatively recent, such as Simon Winchester's bestselling book, *Krakatoa: The Day the World Exploded: August 27, 1883* (London: Viking, 2003), suggesting that interest in Krakatau is still very much alive today.

In addition to scholarly works, there have been dozens of modern literary texts, mainly in the Western literary travelogue genre, and also cinematic representations. However, it may come as some surprise that one of the contemporaneous reports of the eruption was one that was written by a native son in the form of a *syair*, a classical Malay rhyming poem, titled *Syair Lampung Karam* (*The Tale of Lampung Submerged*).

Although attention paid to Mount Krakatau since its devastating eruption in 1883 appears to be very much alive even today, little has been written about the aforementioned poem, which was published in four editions between 1883 and 1888, with four different (but similar) titles. The poem is not even recorded in the bibliography referred to above, the largest on Krakatau ever compiled. The reason for this apparent lapse is perhaps not only because the account was written in poetic form, the *syair*, but also because it was written in Jawi script, and consequently known only to persons who were interested in classical Malay literature and who were able to read Malay in Jawi script.

A native's reflections of the cataclysmic eruption of Mount Krakatau in 1883¹

The lithographed editions of *The Tale of Lampung Submerged*

Syair Lampung Karam [The Tale of Lampung Submerged], appeared as four lithographed editions that were published in Singapore in the late nineteenth century. The first edition of the poem was forty-two pages in length and entitled *Syair Negeri Lampung yang Dinaiki oleh Air dan Hujan Abu* [A Poem about Lampung when Engulfed by Water and a Rain of Ash]. The small book's colophon notes that the edition was published in 1301 of the Muslim year (November 1883 to October 1884). One copy of this edition is preserved at the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia in Jakarta, another lies in The Russian State Library, Moscow.

The second edition, entitled *Inilah Syair Lampung Dinaiki Air Laut* [This is a Poem about Lampung when Engulfed by Sea Water], was published in Singapore on 2 *Safar* 1302, the second day of the second month of the Muslim year 1302 (21 November 1884). A copy of this edition is preserved at Indonesia's National Library in Jakarta.

The third edition, entitled *Syair Lampung dan Anyer dan Tanjung Karang Naik Air Laut* [A Poem about Lampung and Anyer and Tanjung Karang when Engulfed by Sea Water], was published by Haji Said on 27 *Rabiulawal* 1303, the 27th day of the third month of the Muslim year 1303 (3 January 1886). In some advertisements for this book, its title is given as *Syair Negeri Anyer Tenggelam*⁷ [A Poem about Anyer Under Water]. A copy of this edition is preserved at Cambridge University Library.

The last known edition, on which the transliteration and translation of the poem that appear in this article are based, is titled *Inilah Syair Lampung Karam Adanya* [This is a Poem about Lampung when it was Submerged] (Fig. 3 – see page 10). This edition was published on 10 *Safar* 1306, the tenth day of the second month of the Muslim year 1306 (16 October 1888). Copies of this edition are preserved at the National Library in Jakarta; Leiden University Library; the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London; the University of Malaya Library; and the collection of Malay Books of the Methodist missionary Emil Lüring in Frankfurt, Germany.

The authorship of the poem

The colophon of the 1888 edition reveals that the poem was composed by Muhammad Saleh (stanza 374) in the Bangkahulu Quarter (later Bencoolen Street) of Singapore (stanza 369) (Fig. 4 – see page 10). Elsewhere in the poem (stanza 4), the author states that he had come from Tanjung Karang and that he himself had witnessed the catastrophe caused by the terrible eruption (stanza 103). Very little is known about the author; he very well may have been one of those refugees who fled to Singapore carrying with them graphic memories of the disaster. Unfortunately he does not say where he was born.

In Lampung there is a story about an almost-legendary character by the name of Muhammad Saleh (or 'Soleh'), a religious leader who was instrumental in the building of the Jamik al-Anwar Mosque in Teluk Betung, Lampung, of which construction had begun in 1839. (Destroyed by the eruption of Krakatau in 1883, the mosque was rebuilt later.) Muhammad Saleh was a migrant to Lampung from Boné, South Sulawesi. Due to his extensive knowledge on Islam, he became a prominent religious leader in Teluk Betung and later served as its regent. In an article by Zulkarnain Zubairi and Iyar Jarkasih, published in a newspaper in Tanjung Karang, Lampung, the two journalists suggest that the name of Mohammad Saleh written in the colophon of the 1888 edition of the *syair* was possibly their former religious leader.⁸ Unfortunately, no single bibliographical evidence has yet been found to support this claim.

The publisher of the 1888 edition was Cap al-Hajj Muhammad Tayib (or Taib). As to the book's copyist, from its colophon we know that Encik Ibrahim, the copyist of the 1884 edition, was also the copyist of the 1888 edition. Encik Ibrahim was a prolific Malay copyist who lived in Riau before moving to Singapore where, in 1881, he began to work as a copyist for the lithographic printers there. As Ian Proudfoot mentions, for most of two decades "Ibrahim became the leading lithographic copyist in Singapore, working with most of the active lithographic printers of the day."⁹

In stanzas 367 and 368 of the 1888 edition Muhammad Saleh tells us that he finished writing the poem on 14 *Zulhijjah* 1300, the fourteenth day of the twelfth month of the Muslim year 1300 (15 October 1883), just three short months after Krakatau initially erupted. Given that the first lithographed edition of the poem appeared in Singapore almost immediately thereafter, it seems reasonable to surmise that the author had previously been approached and enticed to write down his tale by people connected with the Singaporean indigenous press, perhaps even by the copyist-publisher Encik Ibrahim.



As Ian Prodfoot described in his *Early Malay Printed Books*, the indigenous and Straits-Chinese (*peranakan*) printing firms in late nineteenth century Singapore were engaged in a cut-throat competition. Because *Syair Lampung Karam* contained first-hand and in depth information about the hugely devastating eruption that had recently taken place in the neighboring Dutch East Indies, the work may very well have become a prize in the struggle for such a publication among the publishers in Singapore at that time. An insightful publisher of the poem would have been able to profit greatly by printing it for the indigenous readership. Apparently, the first edition of this book sold very well indeed; as we know, the second edition was launched in late 1884, just a few months after the first edition had appeared.

The Tale of Lampung Submerged can be categorized as a "journalism poem" (*syair kewartawanan*), to borrow a term used by the late classical Malay scholar, Sri Wulan Rudjiati Mulyadi.¹⁰ This kind of *syair* typically contains eyewitness reports of diverse real-life events, including events of historical importance, political development, and natural disasters. Nevertheless, the purpose of the author of this poem was more to share his experience of witnessing the natural disaster, rather than to exploit it; he advised his readers to let their souls draw closer to the Almighty God.

Warning from the Almighty God

Composed as a *syair* – a prominent Malay literary genre that in previous decades had multiple functions, including the teaching of religious doctrines and reporting the factual news – the poem represents the native attitudes about the natural calamity that tend to be comprehended based on Islamic theology and philosophy. The aesthetical element of the poem is also able to arouse the emotions of its native readers.

In this poem, with its 375 four-line stanzas, from his native eyes, Muhammad Saleh dramatically relates the catastrophic situation, as it developed following the horrifying Krakatau eruption. He graphically depicts what happened to numerous towns and villages in the South Sumatra region where tens of thousands of people died as a result of the disaster. He describes how, even when faced with a calamity of such proportions, people still cared for each other. The colonial Dutch East Indies government acted quickly to help the victims. At the same time, he also gives a lively account of those who abused the situation for their own profit, and stole from others.

The author mentions in stanzas 12 and 13 that at four o'clock in the morning on 22 *Syawal* 1300, the 22nd day of the tenth month of the Muslim year 1300 (26 August 1883) he heard a thundering sound coming from the sea, which he assumed to be the horn of a steamship. Apparently, the sound he had heard was a precursor to the first huge explosion of Krakatau, which occurred one and a half hours later.

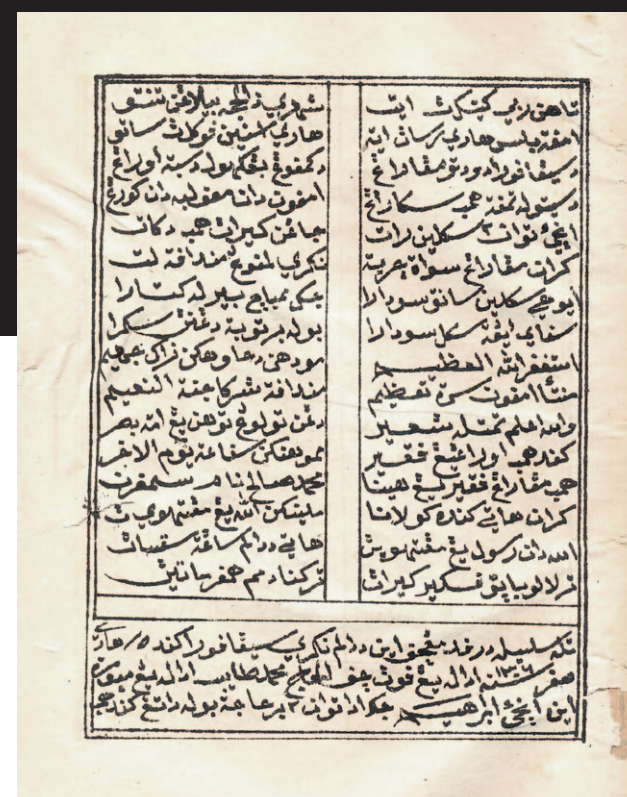
Continued on page 10 >

The tale of Lampung submerged continued



Sample of the transliteration and translation

Ini Sya'ir Lampung Karam Adanya	This is the tale of Lampung submerged
1 Bismillah itu permulaan kata, Alhamdulillah puji yang nyata, Berkat Muhammad penghulu kita, Fakir mengarang suatu cerita.	"In the name of God" is our opening phrase; To show our devotion, to Allah give praise. By the light of Mohammad, our spiritual guide, This humble servant may his tale transcribe.
2 Fakir yang daif dagang yang hina, Mengarang syair sebarang guna, Sajaknya janggal banyak tak kena, Daripada akal tidak sempurna.	Though I'm only a tradesman of humble birth, I've composed a poem, for what it's worth, A clumsy string, of uncertain rhyme, The modest product of an imperfect mind.
3 Jikalau ada khilaf dan sesat, Janganlah, Tuan, sahaya diumpat, Diambil kalam dicecah da'wat, Hati mengingatkan tangan menyurat.	For my errors, kind sirs, and if I meander, I pray you'll be kind and curb your slander. With pen in hand, I dip the nib in ink, Moving my fingers in order to think.
4 Awal mula hamba berpikir, Di Tanjung Karang tempat musyafir, Menghilangkan dendam sebabnya hasir, Dikarangkan nazam makamnya syair.	To begin, we must backtrack, this I can tell, To Tanjung Karang, where I used to dwell. Hoping to ease the source of my pain, I'll set down my words in linking quatrains.
5 Daripada hati sangat hasrat, Dibawa berdiri sangat mudarat, Ke sana-sini tiada bertempat, Mencari pikiran sambil menyurat.	My heart is eager despite my history, For even to stand means suffering and misery. I find no solace, no matter where I go; Can I express my thoughts truly? I do not know.
6 Mula pertama asalnya itu, Pada bulan Rajab datanglah abu, Dua jari tebalnya tentu, Tiga hari kerasnya itu.	To begin, hearken back to the start of it all: Rajab, the seventh month, when ash started to fall. For three long days, dark rain fell thick and hard, Until a layer two fingers deep covered the yard.



> Continued from page 9

In the last two stanzas of the poem the author speaks of his great sadness, "the melancholy within my brooding heart," and how difficult it was for him not to dwell on the disaster: "Only Allah and His Prophet can truly discern / The sorrow and pain that make my heart burn." So distraught the author is, he worries that he might perish: "With all the images that pass my mind's eye / I, in my fevered delirium, fear that I may die." (stanza 374 and 375). In various stanzas throughout the poem, he states that he witnessed the effects of the eruption with his own two eyes. To cite just two examples: in stanza 84 he writes, "So this is my story, dear sirs, I tell you no lies/One that I witnessed, with my own two eyes"; and in stanza 103, "I couldn't believe what my eyes were seeing."

Since the poem is a rare written document casting light on local perceptions of the eruption, the description of the 1883 Krakatau eruption in it tends to differ markedly from those presented in Western reports. As a Muslim, and in accordance with the tastes of the day, the writer inserts moral observations and pieces of advice, suggesting that in the face of such an immense natural disaster, people became increasingly devout and mindful of Almighty God.

Perhaps it is a generalization, but in Indonesia, a Muslim-majority country, people tend to view natural disasters as a warning or punishment from God. Thus, for example, survivors of the earthquakes and tsunami that devastated Aceh in December 2004 expressed their feelings in spiritual or moralistic terms. As reported by Reza Indria,¹¹ religious activities among the survivors of that disaster increased exponentially. Numerous politicians and religious leaders have cited a decline in the nation's morals as the reason behind the series of natural disasters that have affected Indonesia in the past decade. These same people have said that the disasters will continue if Indonesians do not take steps to eradicate corruption and pornography, as well as to shun a consumerist and hedonistic lifestyle. As is suggested by media and public discourse in Indonesia, both theological perspectives and traditional beliefs influence public views about natural disasters. If Muhammad Saleh's thoughts can be said to be representative of beliefs held by the general public at that time, then such perceptions have apparently existed in the minds of the people of this archipelago for a very long time indeed, and are likely to be passed on to future generations.

3 (above):
The Tale of Lampung Submerged, from the 1888 edition, p. 1. (UB Leiden (o) 895 D 6).

4 (right):
The last page and the colophon of *The Tale of Lampung Submerged*, from the 1888 edition, p. 36. (UB Leiden (o) 895 D 6).

To benefit a larger readership

The Tale of Lampung Submerged has always had a limited readership, and has generally escaped the attention of international scholars. In order to introduce the poem to a larger readership, I transliterated the poem into Latin script, based on the 1888 lithographed edition, as presented in my book *Sya'ir Lampung Karam: Sebuah Dokumen Pribumi Tentang Dahsyatnya Letusan Krakatau 1883* (Padang: Komunitas Penggiat Sastra Padang, 2009; 2nd edition, 2010). John McGlynn from the Lontar Foundation¹² in Jakarta translated my transliteration into English, which should be published in 2013.

Through the publication of the transliteration and the English translation of this poem, it is hoped that our understanding of one of the world's most terrifying natural disasters will be enhanced. Furthermore, it is also hoped that the transliteration and the English translation of the poem will reach an audience far larger than the philologists and experts of Indonesian and Malay manuscripts only. The poem reveals that, in addition to the many scientific analyses of the 1883 Krakatau cataclysmic explosion, which appear mostly in Western scholarly publications, there is also a native account of the disaster – and Lontar's English translation of Muhamad Salleh's *The Tale of Lampung Submerged* will hopefully enrich the body of knowledge we have about the mount of Krakatau.

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Notes

- 1 This article is an extract from Suryadi. 2008. 'Sya'ir Lampung Karam: Image of the 1883 Eruption of the Krakatau Mountain in A Classical Malay Literary Text', paper delivered at 24th ASEASUK Conference, Liverpool John Moores University, 20-22 June 2008.
- 2 Muhammad Saleh. 1888. *Inilah Sya'ir Lampung Karam Adanya* (copyist: Encik Ibrahim), Singapura: Al-Hajj Muhammad Tayib [Press], 10 Safar 1306 / 16 October 1888 (lithographed Jawi), p.36 (stanza 370). Translation by John McGlynn, based on the transliteration of the poem in Suryadi. 2010. *Sya'ir Lampung Karam: Sebuah Dokumen Pribumi tentang Dahsyatnya Letusan Krakatau 1883*, Padang: KPSP, p. 112.

- 3 Lucas Janszoon Waghenauer. 1584. *T'eerste deel van de spiegel der zeevaardt, van de navigatie der Westersche zee, innehoudende alle de custen van Vranckrijk, Spaingen en de 't principaelste deel van Engelandt, in diversche zee caerten begrepen*, Leiden: Christoffel Plantijn.
- 4 A. Zimmerman. 1928. 'Krakatau', *Inter Ocean IX* (2): 96.
- 5 G.J. Symons et al. (eds.). 1888. *The Eruption of Krakatoa and Subsequent Phenomena*, London: Trübner.
- 6 Audrey Brody, K. Kusumadinata and J.W. Brody. 1982. *Krakatoa: A Selected Natural History Bibliography*, Wellington: New Zealand Oceanographic Institute.
- 7 Anyer is a town on Java's northwestern coast, across the Sunda Strait from Lampung (See Fig. 1).
- 8 Zulkarnain Zubairi and Iyar Jarkasih: 'Jejak Islam di Lampung (5): Masjid Al-Anwar pintu Islam di pesisir', *Lampung Post*, 15 August 2010; 'Jejak Islam di Lampung (20): Kitab beraksara Jawi Abad XIV [!] di Masjid Jami'Al Anwar', *Lampung Post*, 31 August 2010.
- 9 Ian Proudfoot. 1993. *Early Malay Printed Books: A Provisional Account of Materials Published in the Singapore-Malaysia Area up to 1920, Noting Holdings in Major Public Collections*, Kuala Lumpur: Academy of Malay Studies and the Library University of Malaya, pp. 41-2.
- 10 Sri Wulan Rudjati Mulyadi. 1991. "Wartawan" yang Berdendang dalam Sya'ir dan Naskah Kita', *Lembaran Sastra* 12: 155-168.
- 11 Reza Indria. 2004. 'Muslim Theological Perspectives on Natural Disasters (The Case of Indonesian Earthquakes and Tsunami of 2004)', *Master thesis*, Leiden University, p. 1.
- 12 For more on the Lontar Foundation, see: Roy Voragen. 2011. 'Lontar: Found in Translation', *The Newsletter* No. 58 (Leiden: IIAS), pp. 38-9.