

# The crown jewels lost and found

What really happened with the valuable objects and jewelry appropriated during the Japanese occupation of the Netherlands East Indies? The Japanese took over the use of 'warehouse services' during the occupation. In these occupied warehouses were kept not only the goods and property handed over to them, but also the valuable objects they confiscated, such as jewelry and antique book collections belonging to interned Dutch citizens.

Louis Zweers



The young Sultan of Pontianak, Mohammed Alkadri, with his white golden crown set with large diamonds on his *songkok* (a rimless hat). In his left hand he holds the Dutch State sword with lion and crown. 1937-38, Pontianak, West-Borneo (West-Kalimantan). From the collections of the Wereldmuseum, Rotterdam.

MOST OF THE DOCUMENTATION in the National Archive in The Hague is not about such individual cases, with the exception of the confiscation of the crown jewels of the Sultan Mohammed Alkadri of Pontianak in West-Borneo (1895-1944), who was killed by the Japanese military. An old photograph (above) from the 1930s shows the young Sultan Mohammed Alkadri, who collaborated with the Dutch-Indies government, wearing his white golden crown set with large diamonds on his *songkok* (a rimless hat). In his left hand he holds the Dutch State sword with lion and crown. Some years later, in 1941, an unknown local photographer captured for eternity the annual ritual washing of the sultan in West-Borneo (top-right). In this photograph, we see a group of young women in traditional dress and with golden crowns perched on their heads. They are holding golden ceremonial creeses and swords from the collection of the aristocratic family. As an eastern monarch, the Sultan is sitting bareheaded on his throne. A servant holding a ritual silver dish has just washed him. Directly behind him stands a Dutch government official in a white tropical suit filming the scene with a simple Kodak-camera. Never before had permission been given to film or photograph this private ceremony in the palace (*istana*). This was not only the first, but as it turned out also the last, time that this annual ceremonial ritual was captured on camera.

Pontianak, the capitol of West-Borneo, was bombed on the 19th of December 1941 by enemy Japanese airplanes. By late January 1942 the Japanese had occupied this coastal resort on the Kapusi river. A few weeks later, the entire Dutch East Indies archipelago was taken over by the Japanese troops. In the spring of 1944, Sultan Mohammed Alkadri of Pontianak along with all the male family members of the royal house (28 relatives in all) were beheaded by the Japanese occupation force, having been charged with a so-called conspiracy plot. The Japanese had the influential indigenous elite in West-Borneo murdered. Only the Sultan's son Hamid II (1913-1978)

escaped the murder party because he was staying in Java at that particular moment. After the war, Sultan Hamid II, who was educated at the Breda Royal Military Academy, held an important position in the Dutch-Indies state organization and became head of the federal state of West-Borneo.

Hamid II considered it his duty to retrieve the crown jewels that had been stolen by the Japanese during the war. He notified General MacArthur, the American Chief of Staff in Japan, in writing about this painful issue, emphasizing that the collection of crown jewels had been in the possession of his family for generations. He pointed out that the jewels were of great importance "not only for their actual value, but also as symbols of a long and proud tradition of self-government". Unfortunately, documents containing a precise description of the objects as well drawings and photos were destroyed by the Japanese military. Later, hitherto unknown photos of the crown jewels and the golden ceremonial creeses belonging to the sultan emerged. Hamid II composed a temporary inventory of the collection, which consisted of one ceremonial sword, eight golden creeses, a tiara in the shape of a crown, several golden crowns, a *pusaka*-ring of gold, and many other jewels and precious stones.

General MacArthur gave an immediate order for the recovery and identification of the traditional family jewelry belonging to the Sultan and his staff undertook an intensive investigation into the theft of the Sultan's properties. Only a few of the precious items were traced and restitution of these became difficult because of a Japanese declaration stating that these jewels had been a gift. It is true that the crown jewels had been offered to the Japanese officers by the wives of the interned Sultan and his family members to prevent their execution. This had been in vain, however. They were all killed. Here was a clear case of giving up the rights of possession under duress, so the valuables did

qualify for subsequent restitution. In the summer of 1947, the head of Foreign Affairs in Batavia handed over to the pro-Dutch Hamid II the valuable tiara, a crown made of white gold encrusted with a large number of diamonds. This restitution had a political and symbolic significance, but the great majority of the crown jewels, including the golden creeses and the ceremonial sword, were never found.

How can it be that so few valuable objects and jewelry could be found and returned? It is clear that the Dutch-Indies government was completely preoccupied with the fate of the Dutch interns, the recovery and rebuilding of the archipelago, and later with the colonial war against the Indonesian Nationals. The investigation into stolen art objects and jewelry did not have a high priority. However, in 1946 an organization called the Commission to Return Dutch-Indies Properties Abroad (*Comtieb*) was set up to deal with these matters. The office of the Dutch Military Mission (NMM) in Batavia also concerned itself with the requisition of stolen goods and objects.

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The goods discovered in Japan that originated from former occupied territories were handled by the American SCAP (*Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers*) where a special department was in charge of the investigation of claims. SCAP was very strict and declared that the claims were very often accompanied by insufficient information. It was necessary to have documents, proof of ownership, drawings and photos available for the unambiguous identification of the stolen goods and objects in Japan, but very often such information was not available because they had been lost or destroyed during the war. It was also a requirement that the circumstances surrounding the loss of valuables were written down in detail, preferably including the names of persons and organizations implicated in the theft and transport to Japan. Most of the Dutch citizens who had been interned during the Japanese occupation found themselves unable to answer

Right: Sultan Mohammed Alkadri during the annual ritual washing in the palace (*istana*). He is surrounded by women in traditional dress and with golden crowns perched on their heads. They are holding golden ceremonial creeses and swords that belong to the collection of the aristocratic family. In 1944, the Sultan was beheaded by the Japanese military and they had also looted his valuable crown jewels and creeses. 1941, Pontianak, West-Borneo (West-Kalimantan). From the author's collection.



Above: Dutch governmental official with his wife and the *ulama* (Islamic preacher, here in white dress) Mohammed Saleh pose before the entrance of the palace (*istana*). Next to them are standing (left from the preacher) the *pangeran* (crown prince) Adipati, *pangeran Agung* and *pangeran Muda*. These crown princes were also beheaded in 1944 by the Japanese military. 1941, Pontianak, West-Borneo (West-Kalimantan). From the author's collection.

these questions. Their homes had also been robbed, and they possessed neither documents nor photographs of the missing valuables and art objects. This bureaucratic attitude presented a clear disadvantage for many Dutch-Indies citizens.

The Dutch Military Mission made a list of reclaimed properties in Tokyo at the end of 1948. This mainly concerned stolen supplies of raw materials (such as rubber and tin), precious metals and diamonds with an estimated total value at the time of eighteen million US dollars. These goods were either returned or sold with the proceeds converted into dollars. Furthermore, there were objects less easily dealt with, such as three pianos, fifteen American Packard sedans in poor condition, six crates filled with books on geology, and a sack containing rare seeds from the Plantation Garden of Bogor. The important prehistoric skull of the *Homo Soloënsis*, the Javanese Neanderthal fossil excavated in the thirties on the bank of the river Solo on Mid Java, was rediscovered in Japan and given on loan to an American museum.

In the spring of 1949, the final deadline for submitting restitution claims to SCAP for stolen properties expired. An American survey demonstrates that in total nearly twenty million dollars' worth of Indonesian raw materials, precious metals and luxury goods were returned. Not a bad score in comparison to the situation other countries that the Japanese had occupied, but still only a fraction of what had been stolen. Still, the question remains: what are the current whereabouts of the art collections, the collections of Chinese porcelain, of antique books and of jewelry that disappeared during the Japanese occupation and the turbulent *bersiap* period?

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## De Engel van Kebayoran



Na de soevereiniteitsoverdracht van Nederlands-Indië in december 1949 vertrekken bijna 200.000 (Indische-)Nederlanders met passagiersschepen naar het moederland. In de zomer van 1951 reist de achttienjarige Lily, studente aan het Utrechts Conservatorium, tegen deze stroom in naar Indonesië. Ze gaat naar haar man, de adellijke Amir.

Al snel neemt de antiwesterse retoriek van Soekarno steeds heftiger vormen aan. Nederlandse bedrijven en fabrieken worden genationaliseerd, de Nederlandse consulaten worden gesloten.

Lily woont met haar man en kinderen in een villawijk in Bandung waar ze steeds geïsoleerder raakt. Haar wispelturige en licht ontvlambare echtgenoot is gecharmeerd van de kosmopolitische Soekarno.

In de loop van de tijd zetten Lily's kinderen zich steeds meer af tegen hun 'blanke' achtergrond. Lily's kleindochter Lativa, 'de engel van Kebayoran', trouwt met de zoon van een zeer vermogende minister uit het Soeharto-regime. Haar zoon Guntur daarentegen raakt aan lager wal en woont in een stadskampong van Jakarta.

*De engel van Kebayoran* gaat over familie en liefde, verlies en angst in het turbulente postkoloniale Indonesië.

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