

Indonesia before independence

THROUGH THE KERN COLLECTION



ANDREW GOSLING FOLLOWS THE CAREER OF CIVIL SERVANT AND ACADEMIC RUDOLF KERN, WHOSE LIFELONG INTEREST WAS THE DUTCH EAST INDIES

servant who feels a vocation for his work sees the indigenous world opening up to him during this period of the greatest receptivity of mind.

In 1903, illness forced him to take extended home leave. During this time, he wrote articles for publication, notably a long discussion about Sundanese formal language, and also lectured at the Indies Society.

Returning to the Dutch East Indies in 1906, Kern spent time in Pacitan in East Java, which he found a rather remote and sleepy spot:

there are places in Java where the world seems to stand still ... The town seems to be deserted, and one has to have settled down to notice that quietly and silently life does go on.

He then moved back to West Java as District Officer in Bandung, the provincial capital. After further home leave from 1911 to 1913, he was soon promoted to Assistant Resident in Brebes, Central Java. In 1920, he was appointed Acting Adviser for Indigenous Affairs in the capital, Batavia (Jakarta). The distinguished scholar of Indonesian Islam, G.W.J. Drewes, remarked in his obituary for Kern:

it must have been Kern's serene and unflinching sense of duty and his conviction that he could be of use in this new position which induced him to accept this highly unpopular office in the Netherlands Indies of the time.

During a period of increasing nationalism, Kern argued in favour of greater political rights for the people of the Dutch East Indies. According to Drewes, who began his own



IN 1959, THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF Australia purchased the Kern Collection, its most important collection of pre-twentieth century books about the Dutch East Indies (modern-day Indonesia). It had belonged to Rudolf Aernoud Kern (1875–1958). Kern was born in the Dutch university town of Leiden, the second son of the renowned scholar, Hendrik Kern (1833–1917), who had been born in Java, where his father had been an officer with the Dutch East Indies Army. Hendrik Kern did important work on Indonesian languages and Rudolf Kern continued this family connection with the Dutch East Indies.

Rudolf Kern lived in the Dutch East Indies for nearly 30 years. Before this, however, he studied in Delft, in The Netherlands, at the Institute of the East Indies, a training college for those wishing to join the colonial civil service. In 1896, he became an Acting Junior District Officer in West Java. Thus began his lifelong interest in the Sundanese people of West Java, particularly their language, literature, history and customs. Kern wrote about his early career:

The years between twenty and twenty-five are particularly decisive to later life. A civil

TOP
Frank Hurley (1885–1962)
*Tjipanas Pool with Three Huts
and Palm Trees, 1913*
glass full plate negative
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-an23478193

ABOVE
Unknown photographer
Rudolf Aernoud Kern,
Indonesian specialist and
board member of the Royal
Netherlands Institute
of Southeast Asian and
Caribbean Studies (KITLV),
Leiden, from 1927 to 1937
Courtesy KITLV/Royal
Netherlands Institute
of Southeast Asian and
Caribbean Studies

career in Batavia as an official under Kern in 1925, the latter was dissatisfied with colonial government policy and returned to The Netherlands permanently in 1926.

Already in his fifties, Kern began a new career as lecturer in Sundanese language at Leiden University in 1927. Apart from the war years, when the university was closed, he continued at his post well into old age. His duties were not confined to Sundanese. He lectured for a time on Islam in the Dutch East Indies. He also extended his studies to Makasar and Bugis, the two most important languages of the island of Sulawesi (formerly Celebes). In July 1940, Drewes was a colonial official on home leave. He was about to take up the position of Acting Professor of Javanese at Leiden, but was seized by the Gestapo and interned as a hostage. This was in retaliation for the arrest of Germans in the Dutch East Indies after the invasion of The Netherlands. Kern took over the teaching of Javanese until the university was closed.

Throughout both his official and academic careers, Kern wrote prolifically on Indonesian topics. The guide to his papers, published in 2009, is being purchased by the Library. It lists almost 500 documents, nearly all dating from the period 1896 to 1926, when he was in the Dutch East Indies. Drewes' obituary for Kern listed some 80 of his academic writings on a wide variety of topics, ranging from short articles to a massive annotated catalogue of more than 1000 pages describing 'La Galigo' manuscripts that were held in European libraries. 'La Galigo' is a cycle of stories in Bugis, and is one of the most extensive bodies of traditional literature in the world.

In the year after his death in 1958, the Library purchased Kern's collection from the bookseller, Martinus Nijhoff, in The Hague. This was on the recommendation of the distinguished scholar, A.H. Johns, who had recently been appointed to teach Indonesian at Canberra University College and who had examined the books and manuscripts in The Hague. On 23 February 1959, the Deputy National Librarian, Cliff Burmester, wrote, in support of the purchase, that it contained a 'preponderance of works from before 1910 now becoming difficult to acquire'. In contrast, the Library's existing Indonesian holdings were mostly from the twentieth century.

At the time of its acquisition, the Kern Collection was in two parts. The general section of 950 titles covered bibliography,

history, law, religion, ethnography, archaeology and fine arts of Indonesia. The other group of 629 titles, on Austronesian languages, contained many grammars and dictionaries of languages including Ambonese, Balinese, Batak, Bugis, Formosan, Javanese, Makasar, Malagasy, Malay, Sundanese and Tagalog. After weeding out some duplicates, the Library integrated the material into the Rare Books Collection, the general collections and the Manuscripts Collection.

The Kern Collection strongly reflects Kern's interest in Sundanese studies in particular. There are many nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth century works on Sundanese language, literature, history and culture, including a number of dictionaries and grammars. There is also an unusual collection of 130 transcripts of Sundanese manuscripts, which have been described by Dr Wendy Mukherjee of The Australian National University as 'representing the traditional literary culture of West Java' and being of value to 'scholars working in comparative literature, Islamic studies, history and anthropology'.

The transcripts include romantic tales, Islamic teachings and stories, Islamic religious law, as well as moral instructions to women and lessons for children. They were apparently ordered by Kern prior to his return to The Netherlands in 1926. A copyist in Batavia transcribed them from the original manuscripts in the library of the Batavian Society for Arts and Sciences between March 1924 and March 1926. A number of the original manuscripts has been lost and their transcriptions in Canberra may now be the only extant copies available.

Unknown author
A page spread of No. 16.
Redjoena bambang Lempita,
an illustrated tale from Kern's
Sundanese manuscripts
Manuscripts Collection
MS 1673/14





ABOVE
Two seventeenth-century propaganda pamphlets in the Kern Collection: *Waerachtich verhael, van 'tgeene inde Eylanden van Banda, in Oost-Indien ... 1622* (right) and *Waerachtich verhael vande Tijdinghen gecomen uit de Oost-Indien, met het jacht ghenaeamt de Haze ... 1624* (left)

BELOW
Unknown artist
Plate XIII: A variety of fishing implements and methods reproduced from *Ethnographische Atlas* by C.A. Schröder ('s Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1885)

Some of the Library's oldest and rarest holdings about Indonesia are in the Kern Collection. There are fascinating early seventeenth-century pamphlets, which were part of a propaganda war between The Netherlands and England. These countries were rivals over the lucrative spice trade in Southeast Asia, previously dominated by the Portuguese. A 1622 Dutch pamphlet, *Waerachtich verhael, van 'tgeene inde Eylanden van Banda, in Oost-Indien* (*A True Account of What Happened in the Banda Islands in the East Indies*) seeks to justify the Dutch invasion of the Banda Islands in 1621 to suppress rebellion and enforce their spice monopoly against local and English traders. These small islands were famous as the world's only source of valuable nutmeg and mace. During their invasion the Dutch killed or enslaved many Banda Islanders.

There is also a pamphlet from 1624, *Waerachtich verhael vande Tijdinghen ...* (*A True Account of the News that Came out of the East Indies*) that deals with events in Ambon in 1623, when English traders were arrested for alleged conspiracy to take over the trading post and kill its Dutch governor. Some were executed after confessing under torture. This episode marked the end of the English presence in Ambon. While the Dutch pamphlet said the matter was 'managed lawfully ... by men of honesty and conscience', the English referred to the events as the

Ambony Massacre.

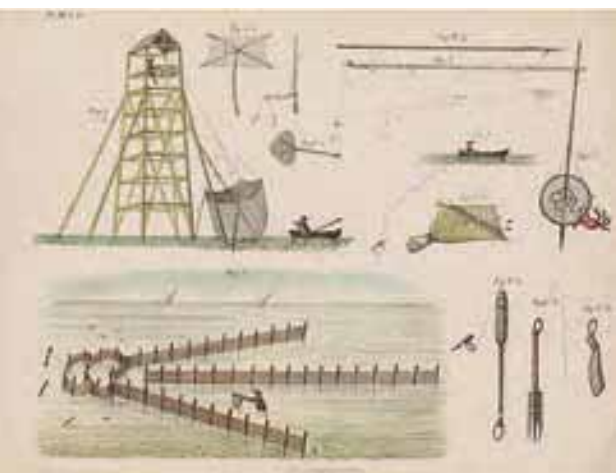
Nicolas Gervaise's *Description historique du royaume de Macassar* (*Historical Description of the Kingdom of Makasar*), published in Paris in 1688, is another item in the Kern Collection. Gervaise was a young French missionary in Siam (Thailand) from 1681 to 1685.

He returned to France with the two orphaned sons of a refugee prince from Makasar, who had died in Siam. The boys became wards of King Louis XIV and were educated at the Jesuit College in Paris. They provided information for Gervaise's history of their homeland. This original edition was the first book that was entirely about this important kingdom in South Sulawesi to be published in Europe. It provides a large amount of detail on history, government, religion, customs and products, though Gervaise does not appear to have visited the island himself.

Kern also collected important books by the pioneer of South Sulawesi studies, Benjamin Frederick Matthes (1818–1908). Matthes was a representative of the Netherlands Bible Society, who first arrived in Sulawesi in 1848 and spent long periods there until 1880. He was a tireless scholar, who collected and published local manuscripts. He also produced Bible translations, dictionaries and grammars of Bugis and Makasar. The dictionaries have been described by the Australian expert on South Sulawesi, Campbell Macknight, as 'masterworks of nineteenth-century philology'. The Library is now digitising the Bugis dictionary in the Kern Collection, as it has never been superseded. Matthes used entries from various editions of his ethnographic atlas (for example, colour plates for looms and weaving, weapons and armour, and fishing nets and boats) to illustrate the Bugis and Makasar dictionaries.

In Drewes' words, Kern's 'devotion to Indonesian studies, his knowledge, energy and assiduity compel lasting respect'. One of the fruits of this dedication, his outstanding collection of books and manuscripts, has enriched Australia's library resources on Indonesia's languages, history and culture.

ANDREW GOSLING is a consultant to the Asian Collections. He would like to thank Emeritus Professor Campbell Macknight for his advice on this article



The KITLV (Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies) in Leiden also holds an extensive Kern collection. The institute has specialised in collecting information and advancing research on the present and former Dutch colonies and their surroundings since 1851. You can search for material in the KITLV online at www.kitlv.nl/.