

# **Navigating Polyvocal Heritage in a Postcolonial Cultural Landscape**

Banda Islands, Indonesia

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**Cultural roots in religion, travel,  
and trade**

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# 1 Cultural roots in religion, travel, and trade

The opening quote of the first part of the book is from the *Hikayat Lonthoir*, which describes the oral histories from the village Lonthoir on the island Banda Besar. The traditional leader of this village, Neirabatij, had it written down at a moment of impending change, in an effort to gain recognition for their long and sacred past (van Donkersgoed, 2023). Likewise, this first chapter aims to present the long history of the Banda Islands with the Bandanese peoples as the main actors. Therefore, the *Hikayat* will feature as the main storyline for the first part of this triptych on the histories of Banda.<sup>1</sup> Since the *Hikayat* presents a particular view of its history, centralizing their village and events on the island Banda Besar, I will also draw from other sources to complement its narrative and highlight the polyvocality of the Bandanese histories. These include the stories retained by the *Banda Asli* in Banda Eli, the stories collected by Des Alwi and Bandanese history enthusiast Lookman Ang, as well as archaeological research.

However, to merely draw from local sources would deny the impact that colonial historiography has had on the perception of the history and heritage of the Banda Islands. In European literature, the history of the islands often starts at the arrival of the Portuguese, Dutch and English traders, leading up to the violent conquest by the Dutch East India's (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie: VOC*) commander-general Jan Pieterszoon Coen. In order to fully sketch the polyvocality of the past, I will therefore provide an overview of the most important events and tensions as recorded by European agents in the last part of this chapter. These narratives continue to inform heritage interpretation and tourism narratives.

## The islands' origins

The shape and position of the islands in the archipelago play an important part in local history and identity. The archipelago is comprised of an active volcano, the Gunung Api,<sup>2</sup> around which there are two concentric rings of inhabited islands: the main inner islands are Banda Neira, Banda Besar, and the Gunung Api itself, and the outer islands include Ay, Rhun, and Hatta. The islands are the remnants of a prehistoric explosion of a larger volcano (Monk et al., 2012, pp. 24–25). The archipelago is located in the Sunda-Banda Arc, which was formed along the Indo-Australian Plate by the westward movement of the Pacific Plate, trapping the old

Cretaceous oceanic crust, forming the 5,000-m-deep Banda Sea. The Banda Sea serves an important role in the human habitation of the islands, its depths attracting marine diversity for sustenance and its currents and monsoon winds providing transportation to other regions. In particular, the east monsoon (April) connects Banda to Java via Bali, while the west monsoon (May-June) allows for the return trip from Java via Timor (Ellen, 2003, p. 54). As a trading hub, the Bandanese people were able to specialize in the production of spices and rely on trade to provide for essential supplies such as sago and rice (Ellen, 2003, p. 79).

The Gunung Api is the focal point in the archipelago – it is the visual marker to orient oneself and the first sight to greet you when crossing the Banda Sea. Its role in spatial orientation is exemplified by the origin story for the name “Banda”, as told by the *Banda Asli* elders.<sup>3</sup> They informed me that it is derived from the following three Arabic letters:

- Bā (ب), representing the islands Banda Besar and Hatta;
- Nūn (ن), representing Neira and Gunung Api; and
- Dāl (د), representing Rhun and Ay.

Together these letters form BāNūnDāl, which was shortened into Banda (Figure 1.1). When looking at a western map of the Banda Islands oriented to the north, the correlation between the letters and the islands seems far-fetched. However, when you orient the map toward the Gunung Api rather than the north from the perspective of the main village on the island, the resemblance becomes clear. Since Gunung Api serves as the main visual point of orientation from each island, it is natural that space is experienced in relation to it, rather than through the northward bird’s-eye view presented on our maps. I will refer to the islands as Banda; however, they have also been referred to as Wandan, Wandhan, Andara, and Andan.

The Gunung Api plays a significant role in Bandanese oral history. The *Hikayat* starts with the flood of Noah and describes that the land of Andara (Banda) was the first to arise from the water, followed by Tidore, Ternate, Java, and Bali (Neirabatij, 1922, p. 1).<sup>4</sup> Thus, the islands were already marked as blessed land, although it was not until the arrival of the first couple that society took shape. The earliest archaeological traces of habitation on the Banda Islands (thus far) have been dated to 3500 B.P. (≈1500 B.C.) on the island Ay, although earlier sites might be found underneath the dense volcanic ashes on the other islands (P. V. Lape, 2000; P. Lape et al., 2018).

Another origin story related to Gunung Api is the “tale of Mount Ganafus and Gamala”, as recorded by Lookman Ang (Ang, 2017b). It is a romantic tale about the lovers Ganafus and Gamalama, who went on a trip to the Moluccan Isles. Ganafus’s mother gifted her daughter a golden comb with a strict warning to return before the rooster crowed three times on the seventh day. They arrived on the beautiful island Banda Neira and forgot about time. They panicked when the seventh day arrived and boarded their boat in order to return. The rooster started to crow, and while brushing her hair with the golden comb, Ganafus begged Gamala to leave her and continue to safety. At the second crow, she jumped overboard

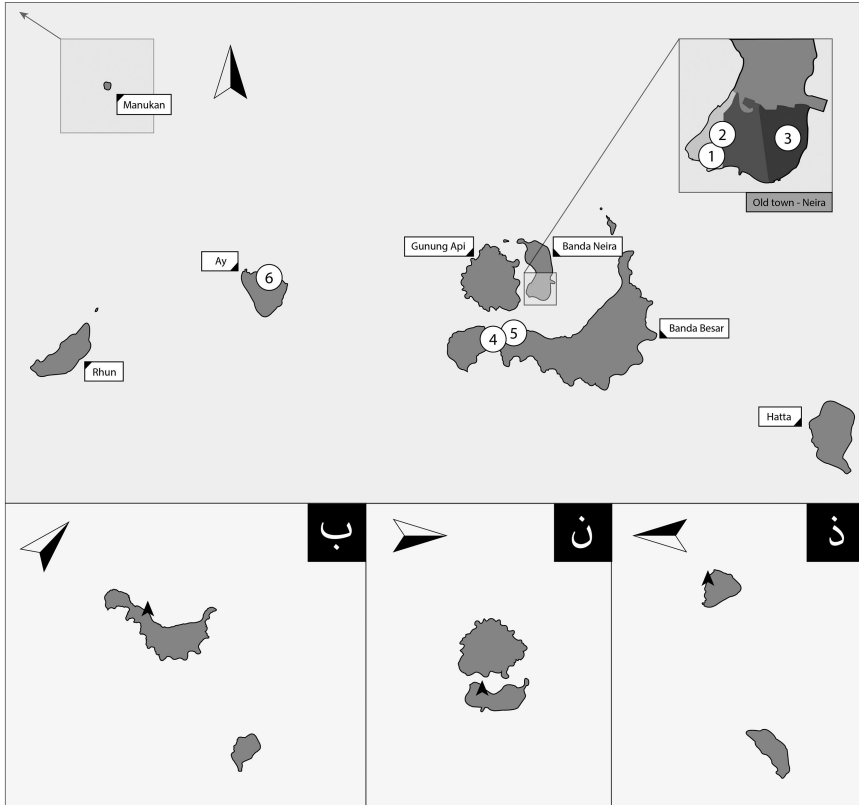


Figure 1.1 On top: a map of the Banda Islands, marking their contemporary names. In the right top corner is a detailed view of the old town of Banda Neira, with the *adat* areas Namasawar (light grey), Ratu (grey), and Fiat (dark grey). The numbers refer to the following significant places: (1) Fort Nassau, (2) Fort Belgica, (3) The old mosque, (4) Village Lonthoir, (5) Fort Hollandia, (6) Fort Revenge. Below: the islands re-arranged based on Gunung Api as a reference point rather than the north; the black arrow refers to the standpoint of the main villages Lontor, Neira, and Ay. Based on this orientation, the islands form the Arabic letters: Bā (ب), representing the islands Banda Besar and Hatta; Nūn (ن), representing Neira and Gunung Api; and Dāl (د), representing Rhun and Ay. Created by J. van Donkersgoed.

and prayed that Gamala would return swiftly home. Her prayer was answered, but when the rooster crowed a third time, they were both transformed into a volcano, and the golden comb into the island Banda Besar. The Gunung Api in Banda is thus also known by the name Ganafus, and the volcano in Ternate as Gamalama. “To this day, if Mount Gamalama erupts in Ternate, the tremors will be felt in Banda Naira too, as Ganafus responds to her lover” (Ang, 2017b, p. 29).

The Gunung Api is locally also known by another name: Lewerani.<sup>5</sup> This name is mostly used within the traditional villages and in the traditional *kabatas* that are

sung in the old language during the *kora-kora* boat race. One particular verse goes as follows:

*Rani gunung lewerani. Man soro soro tanda gunung apie gunung lewerani.*

It translates as: Rani Mountain Lewerani. Go with the current past Lewerani Volcano (van Donkersgoed & Farid, 2022, p. 63). This verse describes the journey of the ancestors who followed the current past the volcano. 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 at Sembahyang Beach, which is on the coast of the island of Gunung Api. Another possible meaning is that this journey refers to “the journey of life of Banda”, which is winding, complicated, and 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 people from the very beginning until the arrival of the Europeans, which brought suffering and tragedy and beyond.

### **Cilu Bintang and her brothers**

The various parts of the *Hikayat* seem to have two main goals: to highlight religious importance and settlement developments in the Banda Islands. It starts in the time of Noah’s great deluge, situating the Banda Islands as blessed land to arise first from the flood. It then mentions that the people who lived in the land Andara were living haram and had no ruler for centuries. Then the angel Gabriel visited Djailin, who lived in Makawaij, and ordered him and the woman Siti Galsoen to go to the land Andara. One day, Siti was craving a pomegranate and asked everyone to find her the fruit, but it did not yet grow in the land. After she prayed two *raka’ahs* to God, a tree with the fruit grew on the mountain Gunung Api, and after she ate the fruit, she gave birth to two sons. When she prayed again, she gave birth to two more sons and a while later a daughter, and later she prayed once more and gave birth to two more sons. In total, she gave birth to seven children: six sons and a daughter. Siti Galsoen then returned to God, and she is buried on mountain Ulupitu facing the east (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 1–3, 2021, pp. 1–3).

The children grew up on the mountain Keliseroeah, where they lived in sin as they covered themselves with leaves and killed animals with tools they made from stone, skin, and wood. They discovered they could make fire by rubbing wood together. One day when they went out to find water and food, one of the brothers sat down under a tree and he fell asleep. When he woke up, the water of the sea had retreated and there was food on the beach. Since that day, they went to the beach to gather food, and the sister understood that they could tell the time of the tide from the position of the sun in the sky. They brought water and food to the mountain. The people who lived on the mountain were the people of nine, *Orsia*, and the people near the beach were the people of five, *Orlima*.<sup>6</sup> (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 3–5)

The *Hikayat* continues to describe how the brothers created a first settlement on the mountain, guided by the wise words of their sister (Neirabatij, 1922, p. 5, 2021, p. 5). One day the sister stumbled and water sprouted from the place where her feet struck the earth. But because of the overgrown vegetation, they did not know until a wet cat appeared from the bushes. They were happy to find this source of water and stayed near it to build their settlement. Today, the main freshwater source for the village Lonthoir is a well that is connected to this origin story. The well is considered a sacred place; only people from the village Lonthoir are allowed to draw water from it (although visitors are encouraged to drink it), and its water is said to have magical properties. Once every 10–12 years, the well is ceremonially cleansed during a ceremony called *cuci parigi*.

On a bright moonlight night, the sister gave a name to each of her brothers: the first was called Noeilaij, the second Siliselij, the third Kijakbir, the fourth Senggoear, the fifth Siklij, and the youngest Kakijaij. On a dark night, each of the brothers came to her to give her a name in return. Noeilaij called her Cilu Bintang because her face shone like a star. Siliselij gave her the name Cilu Matahari because she looked like the sun. Kijakbir called her after the moon, Bulan, and Senggoear after a flower, Meloer. When all the brothers were asleep, Kakijaij went to his sister and a bright light like the moon came from her chest. Thus, she received many names: Cilu Bintang Matahari Moestika Bunga Meloer Bulan, and she became known as Cilu Bintang Matahari, queen of Keliseroeah (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 5–8).

One day, the oldest brother, Noeilaij, was chosen by his brothers and the people of the land as the ruler of the land of Andara. He told the people that they no longer needed to roam around, but that they would build a settlement called Keli Siang, and that they would communicate through sound (drums) when it was time to return to the village. Noeilaij had the idea to build a boat to explore the other islands, and this idea was received well by his sister and brothers. The boat was built by five villagers, and the five brothers of Noeilaij decided on the sailing rules, tools, and navigation. Noeilaij therefore called the boat Limareij, *lima* meaning five, referring to the five builders and five brothers (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 8–11). Thus, the first boat was built with which they sailed to the other islands on the premise that they would always return to Lonthoir.

One day, the five brothers received permission from Noeilaij to go to the island Warandesi to find shells and sea cucumbers. Siliselij said that they should try to return to the land soon, but a storm blew them off course, and due to the weather, they could not tell which direction they were going. Days later, the sun finally started to shine, and they saw a large stretch of land. They did not know where they were, and when they asked the people who lived there, they answered it was Jeddah,<sup>7</sup> the land of Islam. The brothers answered that they came from the east, from the land Andara.<sup>8</sup> The four brothers were given clothes and food, and they left for Mecca and Medina to gain knowledge. They left their youngest brother, Kakijaij, behind to guard the boat (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 11–12).

The four brothers journeyed to Mecca, where an imam converted them to Islam and taught them the Islamic customs. They became very knowledgeable, and when

the wind turned from the west to the east, the brother requested permission from the Sheikh to leave. They were tasked with bringing Islam to their land and sharing their knowledge. When they returned to Jeddah and the boat, they joined their brother Kakijaij, whom they designated their cook and tasked him to find water for the journey back (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 16–17). When Kakijaij went to fetch water from a well, an old man warned him that doing so would lead to his robbery and death. Frightened, Kakijaij followed the old man to another place to get water. There, the old man told him to drink and bathe and then helped him do the same. The old man circumcised Kakijaij, taught him Islam, and gave him the Qur'an Noeroemoebin, a water container, prayer beads, and clothing. The teacher told him to return to Andara, warning of a long, feverish journey, but assured him God would guide him through prayer with Noeroemoebin. Kakijaij took his teacher's name, Jääni Datoe Maulana Hasan Hoesin. Upon his return, his brothers, who had searched for him for three weeks, noticed a change, but Kakijaij kept his encounter secret (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 17–21, 2021, pp. 21–25).

During their journey back, the sun shone brightly, and Kakijaij fell ill. He told his brothers that when he died, they should throw his body overboard along with all his possessions. They promised to do so and, when he passed away, they threw his body overboard at the stern of the boat. A bright light appeared and traveled to the bow, surprising the brothers. Then, the boat stopped moving, and the sails failed to catch the wind. Filled with sadness, the brothers declared that this was due to their brother's death. Because they were running low on freshwater, they rowed to a nearby island where the people took them to meet the ruler of Majapahit. They told the ruler about their journey to Mecca and how their youngest brother had passed away on the return trip to Andara. The ruler took pity on them, provided water, food, and clothes, and promised to visit them one day in Andara. Afterward, they left Java and set sail for Andara (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 21–23, 2021, pp. 25–27).

When they neared the Gunung Api, they were surprised to hear the sound of a mosque. The people told them about a man that had washed ashore earlier and brought Islam. They were taken to their brother Noeijlaj and Cilu Bintang, whom they told about their journey and the death of Kakijaij. Meanwhile, their lost brother had been on the islands for four months and seven days. As Datoe Maulana, he had taught people about Islam, built the first mosque, and established the Friday prayers. Datoe led the Friday prayer with nine men, establishing themselves as *Orsia*, or “people of nine”. He explained that conversion must come from free will, and after forgiving his brothers, he and Siliselij spread Islam across *Orsia*, with the people gladly embracing the faith (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 23–29). Cilu Bintang then encouraged them to spread Islam to the other islands, and subsequently, the peoples on Rhun, Ay, and Neira were converted too. The *Hikayat* refers various times to the spiritual strength of Cilu Bintang, whose dreams were meaningful and whose wisdom was followed by her brothers. She lived according to the four Islamic mystical concepts: *sharia*, *tariqah*, *hakikat*, and *makrifat* (Neirabatij, 1922, p. 31, 2021, p. 35).

The arrival of Islam to the Banda Islands is thus a major event, as it is described in detail in the *Hikayat*. True to the nature of oral history, the *Hikayat* does not

provide a timeframe for these events. Peter Lape's archaeological research has tried to provide more insight by using the absence of pig remains as an archaeological marker for Islamic conversion (P. V. Lape, 2000; P. Lape, 2005). Contrary to historians who claim a sudden and complete conversion around 1450 AD, his results show that some enclaves continue to eat pig throughout their occupancy (ca. 500–1650 AD), while other settlements never show any sign of the consumption of pigs from their initial settlement as early as ca. 1200 AD. Therefore, this data suggests that Islam arrived in the Banda Islands earlier than the European historical documents indicate, and that the spread of Islam was gradual rather than sudden. Moreover, the *Hikayat's* mention of a visit to the Majapahit kingdom ruled by Raden Wijaya indicates that this story could have taken place between 1293 and 1309.

The *Hikayat* continues to discuss how the rule over the islands was divided among the brothers. Noeilaj remained in Lonthoir on Banda Besar, where he appointed Datoe Maulana as the first harbor master (*shahbandar*). Two other brothers left to rule Waier, Lautaka,<sup>9</sup> and Warrantesi and so left *Orsia* to become *Orlima* (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 30–33). The *Hikayat* thus gives a second explanation for this division in Bandanese society. In his book *Sejarah Banda Naira*, Des Alwi mentions even more mythical and historical explications for the division into these two groups (Alwi, 2006, pp. 7–11). The first is 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.<sup>10</sup> The second explanation is that the grouping resulted from the influence of the Ternate and Tidore sultanates over Seram, Ambon, and their surroundings, with the *Orlima* group allied to Ternate and the *Orsia* group to Tidore. No matter the origins, the legacy of this division remains, as the current traditional (*adat*) villages on the Banda Islands are still divided among this line.

In each of their settlements, they built a place of prayer and a boat to visit their elder siblings (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 33–38). During one of these visits, Cilu Bintang and Noeilaj asked them to contribute a pillar to the mosque in Lonthoir. They agreed; however, two to three months later, the promised pillars had not been brought to Lonthoir. Only Kijakbir was true to his word; their boat was called “he who keeps his promise”, and the pillar from Selamon was used to point in the direction of the Kaaba (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 38–40). The three other brothers were summoned, and as punishment for breaking their promise, Lautaka's boat had to bear a snake on the bow, symbolizing deceit with a split tongue. Similarly, Senggoear's boat was named Manggoenena (forest chicken) to remind his descendants to keep their word, and Siklij's boat was named Manggoeratjie (cuscus) as punishment for failing to fulfill his promise on time (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 40–42). This episode shows how religion, cultural symbols, and practices are entangled on the Banda Islands.

The story continues with Cilu Bintang and her two brothers, Noeilaj and Datoe Maulana, who remained in Lonthoir. One day, the ruler of Majapahit, Wedjaja, came to return the visit of the four brothers who now ruled Lautaka, Selamon, Waier, and Warandesi. A great feast was organized that lasted nine days and nine nights, according to the customs of *Orsia*. Wedjaja asked the brothers for their

permission to marry their sister, Cilu Bintang. When she had accepted his offer, the wedding was attended by both *Orsia* and *Orlima*. Wedjaja stayed for three months and ten days; when the wind shifted toward the east, he asked for permission to return to Java (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 45–49).

The Majapahit kingdom is prominently featured in Old Javanese literature, including the *Nāgarakṛtāgama* (or *Deśawarṇana*) and the *Babad Tanah Jawi*. The first was recorded between 1350 and 1389 AD by a high official of the court of King Rājasanagara, in which Wandhan is mentioned as a region that falls within the reach of the empire's influence (Prapañca & Robson, 1995, p. 34). The first king of the Majapahit empire is mentioned as Raden Wijaya, which relates to the phonetical spelling of Wedjaja in the *Hikayat Lonthoir*. The *Babad Tanah Jawi* is a traditional form of Javanese chronicles written in verse, likely composed during the reign of Sultan Agung between 1613 and 1646. The *Babad Tanah Jawi* has seen various versions and translations. A copy from 1786 was recently republished by Wim Rimmelink, in which he notes a passage about King Prabu Brawijaya, who was told to cure his venereal disease by sleeping with “a Wandhan woman who has a yellow complexion” (*Babad Tanah Jawi, The Chronicle of Java*, 2022, p. 13). According to the *Babad Tanah Jawi*, this woman from Wandhan was brought there by his wife from Cempa; however, according to a Bandanese descendant and the *Hikayat*, Putri Wandan Kuning was a legitimate wife of Brawijaya.<sup>11</sup> The uncertainty about her position in the household is a case of polyvocality – the Javanese writers might have had their reasons to illegitimize the marriage for political reasons, while the Bandanese people have their reasons to elevate the status of their princess. Either way, it is clear from these two sources that there were indeed ties and mobility of people occurring between the Majapahit kingdom and the Banda Islands.

### **Boij Ratan and Boij Tamang**

The first part of the *Hikayat* thus features Cilu Bintang as the heroine and her brothers as the legitimate (and religious) leaders of the Banda Islands. The following stories seem to take place at a later time. An attentive reader might have noticed that the *Hikayat* has referred several times to an island called Warandesi, one that is not depicted on any contemporary maps of Banda archipelago. According to the *Hikayat*, the island disappeared overnight and only one woman survived. She told the rulers that an old, sick man had appeared in the village one Wednesday morning. Nobody offered him a place to go or offered him food or drinks, even though he said he was hungry. She was the only one to offer him food, and he blessed her in return. That afternoon, a fierce wind carried a white chicken to her house, and it carried the woman and man to safety. When she awoke, it was Friday, and the island Warandesi had disappeared into the sea. The survivor settled on the island Roesoengain (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 51–54).

Around the time of the disappearance of Warandesi, there was a large celebration at Waier. During the festivities, the captain Waijlondor noticed the beauty of Boij Ratan, daughter of Siliselij, and they secretly met. Boij Ratan had an adventurous

spirit, and always had a great desire to travel. After this party, word of her beauty spread to Seram, Gorom, and the island Ambon, where the king Noesniwie ruled. He traveled to Banda, and after seeing her beauty, he requested her hand in marriage. The Bandanese rulers met on a mountain and agreed to the marriage and dowry (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 54–56). When she traveled with her mother in preparation for the match, her belly grew bigger and bigger. Her excuses about a fish bite and illness rang false when she gave birth to a daughter (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 54–58). The kings felt embarrassed about the broken marriage contract and decided to exile Boij Ratan and her child. Her brother provided his sister and the child with provisions, and Boij Tamang Koestamber was tasked with taking the raft and pushing it to open sea beyond the island Ay (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 58–60). Boij Ratan made Boij Tamang promise that, after they had pushed the raft away, they would not return to Lautaka because, if they did, bad things would happen. Boij Tamang landed on the island Ay instead, where they renamed the boat “big waves” (*Ombak<sup>2</sup>*), referring to the big waves Boij Ratan faced on her raft. Again, the act of renaming a boat is tied to an act of authority and defiance.

It was not easy for Boij Ratan and her daughter on the raft, but with the blessing of God and the provisions of her brother they reached the land Seram. Everywhere she went, people were impressed by her story but also a bit scared. She always introduced herself and her daughter to the local leaders, and thus she is known in many lands. When she left Seram, she came to the island Ambon, where she and her daughter are buried at the cape Noesniwie. Out of fear for the broken promise to Noesniwie, the leaders of the Banda Islands set a sacred border at the outer island Manukan. If a witch (*suanggi*) with mal intention tried to pass this border, they would fall into the sea. Since then, the island is also known as Pulau Suangi (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 60–63).

Indeed, Boij Ratan is a character who appears frequently in the rich oral tradition of the Moluccan peoples. Her legacy continued to be told by people of Moluccan descent in the Netherlands, who created a video based on the narration by Ano Upulesi Meserua (Jaïr Pattipeilohy, 2020). They link the exile of Boij Ratan to the close kinship and spatial separation between the Banda Islands, Seram, Ambon, and the Lease Islands. In this narration, Boij Ratan spoke a curse over the land after the father of her child denied paternity. Her actions caused the land to split in the different islands there are today, and her tears filled the Banda Sea. The end of the story is her wish to bless the Banda Islands and its people, which were now far removed from the other islands.

### **Ties with China**

Besides the *Hikayat Lonthoir*, there are other oral historical traditions that are tied to the precolonial past. One such community are the Bandanese-Chinese community, whose arrival to the Banda Islands is told through the legend of the *ikan lassi* (Ang, 2017a, p. 17). Centuries ago, Chinese merchants traveled with a sailboat beyond the land of the Bamboo Curtain. Using the science of astronomy, they navigated by the stars. After months at sea, facing harsh weather conditions, the

Gunung Api could be seen as a homing beacon within the Banda Sea. However, misfortune struck them – the boat overturned and started to sink. The merchants started to pray, begging for their lives to be saved. Then, from the depths of the sea, the fish known as *ikan lassi* seemed to gesture that the sailors could ride their backs. Each person rode two fish by hanging on to the back of the fish with their fingertips. Thus, they safely arrived on the shore of Banda Neira. Ever since, the *ikan lassi* bear the five marks of the fingertips on their back – and those of Chinese descent do not eat the fish out of gratitude.

It is claimed that the first Chinese tradesmen visited Maluku as early as the first millennium, although the Banda Islands are not named specifically. One of the oldest mentions to the region is from the Tang dynasty (618–906), which mentions Maluku (Mi-li-ku) in reference to the journey to Bali (Groeneveldt, 1876, pp. 117–118). One of the earliest written accounts from China about the Banda Islands dates from 1339 (Rockhill, 1915, pp. 256–257). The account in the “Summary Record of the Island Foreigners” (島夷誌略) was written by Wāng Dàyuān (汪大淵), a Chinese man from Quanzhou who traveled around much of Asia in the early 14th century, when China was ruled by the Yuan (Mongol) dynasty. The Banda Islands are referred to as Wēn-tan (文誕), similar to the ancient name Wandan. It is described as a hot climate, having a ruler, and producing spices that could be traded for cloths, musical instruments, and porcelain. Apart from that, Chinese traders conducted soft diplomacy by contributing to the local traditions, traces of which can be seen in the adoption of the dragon pattern on flags, boats, and other traditional attributes (Ang, 2019, p. 28).

One particular legend pertains to the village Namasawar, which is the area of the Chinese neighborhood (Ang, 2019, p. 30). Once, a Chinese emperor invited a high-ranking captain from the village to fortify the trading relations with Banda Neira. When he arrived at the emperor’s palace, everyone was in a state of uproar because the emperor’s pet dragon was on a rampage. In response, a contest was announced to slay the dragon. The captain, armed only with a traditional sword and shield, courageously accepted the emperor’s challenge. Despite the odds, he successfully killed the dragon. As a reward, the emperor allowed him to take the dragon’s head back to Banda Neira, along with gifts of gold and silver. Upon his return, he mounted the dragon’s head on the prow of his traditional pirogue (Kora-Kora). Ever since, the traditional boat of the village Namasawar features the head of the dragon on its bow.

After the collapse of the Yuan dynasty, the Ming dynasty continued and expanded trade on Banda Neira. It was during this dynasty that they built a settlement on the west coast of the island, an area that has since been known as *kampung China*. In this area, they constructed a temple dedicated to Ma Cho – the God who controls the seas and protects sailors during trade (Ang, 2019, p. 28). The sign above the temple entrance “天順 (Tiān shùn)” refer to the sixth and eighth Emperor of the Ming dynasty, who ruled from 1435 to 1449 and 1457 to 1464.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, it is possible that the temple was constructed between 1435 and 1464, or the mention of this emperor could be a mere honorific. The temple is known by the name Sun Tien Kong, and according to an older Bandanese-Chinese resident, the temple was built by craftsmen who were brought over from China especially (Alwi & Ho, n.d.).

According to a current Bandanese-Chinese merchant, the first Chinese traders who arrived in Banda Neira noticed that this island has good *feng shui* because of the surrounding islands. He further explained that this is fortunate for children born on the Banda Islands, and when they leave the islands for education and a career, they become very successful. However, their success elsewhere has also resulted in a declining Bandanese-Chinese population on the Banda Islands to continue traditions such as the celebration the Chinese New Year, which stopped in 2019.

### **Trade in nutmeg and mace**

The *Hikayat* consists of 84 pages, but only the last 16 pages are devoted to the trade in the spices nutmeg, and the consequences it had for the Banda Islands. It starts with the sentence: “at the time, the Bandanese people knew the nutmeg tree and that its spices nutmeg and mace were useful” (Neirabatij, 2021, p. 83).<sup>13</sup> It is a meaningful statement, as it implies a deep relationship between the Bandanese people and the cultivation of these spices. There are 16 varieties of nutmeg known, and Roy Ellen argued that the nutmeg on the Banda Islands might have developed from a strain from New Guinea or Gorom (Ellen, 2003, p. 64). However, recent genetic research has been conducted, which argues that the South Moluccas (Banda and Ambon islands) are the original source for *Myristica fragans* (Kusuma et al., 2023). Moreover, the long tradition of using nutmeg for food preparation has been attested through archaeobotanical analyses at a Neolithic site on Ay (P. Lape et al., 2018).

The origin of nutmeg production in Banda is also linked to the story about a beautiful Bandanese princess and a prince from Timor, who fell in love with her (Lilipaly-de Voogt, 2024, pp. 67–68). According to this oral tradition, the couple were so deeply in love that her parents feared they would elope if they did not condone the marriage. Part of the dowry included seeds of the nutmeg tree from Timor. A year after the grand wedding on Banda, the couple moved to Timor to join the paternal family. The community in Banda were left behind with only the nutmeg to remind them of their beautiful princess. The nutmeg grew really well in the fertile Bandanese soil and soon started to produce wealth that attracted people from far and strange lands.

The *Hikayat* also mentions a story about the royalty from Timor,<sup>14</sup> but with a very different outcome. It states that people came to the Banda Islands to trade for the spices, and among them was the king of Timor. After he met the king of Lautaka, Mahmoed, and his wife Boij Santang and their daughter Maroeka Ateka, he decided that he wanted to marry Ateka. However, her parents refused him because he was not a Muslim.<sup>15</sup> The king of Timor was very angry, and he told his Portuguese allies about this refusal and the wealth of spices on these islands. The Portuguese therefore went to Lautaka during the Ramadan month near the year 1509. When they arrived, they requested land to bury their dead in exchange for an amount of gold. They brought coffins to shore, pretending to weep for their dead, but the caskets were filled with cannons and ammunition. They constructed a tent on the land that they had bought on the Gunung Tabeleko<sup>16</sup> (Neirabatij, 1922, p. 68, 2021, p. 84). There, they unloaded the weaponry and waited until the Bandanese

people gathered to break their fast. Then they fired upon the people – half of them died, while others managed to escape by jumping into the water or running away from the sound of the cannons. After this bloodbath, some of them decided to continue life elsewhere, where they brought Islam, like Seram, Gorom, Ambon, Saparua and Kei. When they died, their graves often became *keramat* (sacred places), marked with stones or wood. After the remaining people of Lautaka made peace with the Portuguese, they gave them food, drinks, and money, and the settlement on the Gunung Tabelekoe was called Balkika.<sup>17</sup> Besides this, the Portuguese took all the nutmeg and mace and brought this to Europe, where the Banda Islands became famous among all nations (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 67–69, 2021, pp. 83–87).<sup>18</sup>

In the *Hikayat*, the size of the land that the Portuguese wanted to purchase was indicated as the skin of a goat or cow (Neirabatij, 1922, p. 68, 2021, p. 84). This might indicate the cross-cultural negotiations that took place, in which each negotiating party probably had different size measurements and thus used objects at hand instead. This practice was also recorded in connection to a later visit by Dutch merchants, who requested assistance from the Bandanese people to prepare a meal on the mainland (Lilipaly-de Voogt, 2024, p. 325). After finishing the meal, they cut the skin of the cow that was provided to them in strips and tied them together. They then argued that the skin was gifted to them, and all the land that it could now encompass (strung together) belonged to them. The Bandanese felt cheated and resisted, and they were brutally punished.

Following the trajectory of the Portuguese, other boats from Europe arrived. First the English came to the islands Ay and Rhun, followed by the Dutch (referred to as white *Belanda*), who came to Selamon and Waier to buy mace (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 69–72, 2021, pp. 87–90). The leaders were hesitant to receive them after the Portuguese (referred to as black *Belanda*) had tricked the people in Lautaka and taken possession of land on Banda Neira. In 1614, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) arrived with their ship Oranja Nassau<sup>19</sup> to Lonthoir at Cape Mandi Angin.<sup>20</sup> The Dutch bought a lot of mace,<sup>21</sup> but they were not interested in the nutmeg, which they threw overboard at sea near the island Seram. When the Dutch came back three months later, the people were happy to trade with them and told each other: the Dutch are better than the Portuguese because the Dutch only want to buy mace, and the Portuguese only want nutmeg. Thus, the people at Londor<sup>22</sup> became accustomed to the Dutch and decided to invite them to their town Keliliang, where their leader Neirabatij Coembana met with the Dutch.

Some of the Dutch sailors had not arrived yet, as they were trying get intel about where the Portuguese had anchored their ships (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 71–73, 2021, pp. 89–91). The people had gathered for a feast, and the leaders Neirabatij Coembana and the Dutch general had retreated. The people of the village Marah arrived later, and they got into an argument with the Dutch sailors. In the fight, they killed the sailors and took their clothes. The Dutch hurried to retreat to their ship Oranja Nassau, and with the cannons of the ship, they fired at the village Marah. During this attack, some people were killed while others were taken to be enslaved. One of the enslaved survivors was a boy called Agastoe, and therefore the cape where the attack took place was called Agustus. The village was left in ashes, and the place

was deserted. At that time, the Bandanese people were not mad at the Dutch VOC, they were mad at their friends who had acted evil, and therefore there were many riots. Those who did not commit evil said: we did not do evil to the Dutch, but we will not be repaid for the damage – our town has been destroyed, half our friends are dead, and our trade goods are destroyed. As one of the few mentions of Dutch violence against the Bandanese in the *Hikayat*, it is important to note here that this section might have been added to appease the colonial reader.

When the Dutch came back in the year 1617, they arrived with a lot of weapons, and the enslaved Agastoe acted as interpreter (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 72, 2021, pp. 90). He wore good clothes and shoes when he led the Dutch to meet the leader of the village. The people of the villages gathered because they wondered what had happened to the boy who was taken from their land, and they were curious about the customs of the Dutch. They stood on the beach together with the women, in order not to appear a threat to the Dutch on the ship. Some of the people did not want to cooperate with the Dutch because of the evil they had done in 1614. They took the boat called Mananoesi and left the island to Seram, where they built a village called Roemadang.<sup>23</sup> Some went to the mountains to join the Alifuru, while others stayed true to the customs of *Orsia* in the village.

Neirabatij Coembana and those who remained kept good relations with the Dutch. When they discussed what happened before, he told the Dutch that the instigators had left when they saw that the Dutch had returned (Neirabatij, 1922, pp. 73–74, 2021, pp. 91–92). Under the watchful eye of the Dutch leader, Neirabatij Coembana ordered all the fortifications in these villages to be destroyed. From then on, Neirabatij was the leader of Lonthoir and he negotiated with the Dutch on behalf of the people and troops of the land. One day, an agreement was made about two plots of land, which were exchanged for gold coins, seven silver pipes, clothes, white cloth, and silk fabric for the leaders of Lonthoir. This agreement was sealed with blood, and the promise was made that they would live as brothers together with the people of the Dutch VOC. This blood oath might have taken place at what is currently known as the “Bloodstone”, a monument in Lonthoir (more in Chapter 2, see also Figure 2.1).

### **The European gaze**

Thus far, this chapter describes the rich and diverse histories of the Banda Islands from the time of Noah to the earliest encounters with European merchants, based on written accounts of oral histories retained by the *Hikayat Lonthoir*, the *Banda Asli*, and the Bandanese-Chinese communities. In order to show the polyvocality of this particular historical time, I have added this last section with an overview of the colonial representations of the period of first encounters. The polyvocality within this section lies in the various European gazes, notably those of the Portuguese, Dutch, and English. As they were competitors for the spice trade in this region, each portrayed its history and depicted their adversaries in a particular light. For example, the story of Portuguese treachery was included in the literary work called *Holland-sche Natie* by Jan Frederik Helmers (1812). It describes “Egeron and Adeka” as

indigenous heroes in the face of Portuguese treachery, villainizing the Portuguese merchants in an effort to depict the Dutch company as liberators. Hans Straver argues that the story in the *Hikayat* might have been influenced by this popular verse to gain favor and recognition among Dutch colonial readers (Straver, 2016). Besides providing insight into European rivalry, the European accounts contain indications about the Bandanese multicultural trade market and resistance against European interference. I will aim to remain brief about these first encounters, drawing on Subrahmanyam for the Portuguese perspective (Subrahmanyam, 2012), Francois Valentijn's *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indien* for the Dutch (Valentijn, 1858a Vol 1+3), and Willard Hanna's *Indonesian Banda* for the English (Hanna, 1978).

When the Europeans arrived on the Banda Islands, there was a thriving trading hub providing staple food such as sago and luxury items such as birds of paradise, which were traded from the region (Seram, Aru, Kei) with Javanese, Chinese, Indian, and Arab long-distance traders (Ellen, 2003, p. 65). The Banda Islands were (and are) not a homogenous unity: each harbor was governed by a *syahbandar* (harbor master), the traditional villages were linked and divided into *Orsia* and *Orlima*, and trade agreements were made by the *orang kaya* (rich men) and the imams held (religious) power as well. Prices for nutmeg were decided democratically across these factions at a neutral site under a "holy tree" in Ortatan, where each faction had its designated seating area (Aveling, 1965, p. 31; Van der Chijs, 1886, p. 3). These structures mystified the Europeans, who stated that the islands were ruled by "neither king nor lord", but that they depended on the advice of their elders and followed "the sect of Mahommedan" (Crawford, 1856, p. 35). Alliances and hierarchies with other regions and sultanes may have existed through the *Orsia* and *Orlima* polities, notably the *Orlima* with Ternate and the *Orsia* with Tidore. However, Banda was never a state or claimed territory but operated as a conjoining of "nodal points of trade – a plurality of shifting centers" (Ellen, 2003, p. 8).

This was the situation when Antonio d'Abreu, accompanied by cartographer Francisco Rodriques, arrived on the islands in 1512, where they encountered a thriving international market with established trading practices (de Barros & do Couto, 1778, p. 587; Ellen, 2003, p. 65). They spent a month on the island buying nutmeg and mace, returning to a European market with high profits. This (re)ignited competition between the Spanish and Portuguese empires, as the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) had left the Moluccan Islands as disputed territory. In the Treaty of Zaragoza (1529), this was resolved, and the Moluccan islands were agreed to be in Portuguese territory. The *carreira* system was then implemented to ensure that both Crown and private interests would be served (Subrahmanyam, 2012, p. 75). Besides their superior navigational skills, the Portuguese tried to ensure their hold on the spice trade by establishing themselves in key locations: Melaka and Ternate.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, they attempted to get a foothold in Banda in 1532, which failed (Subrahmanyam, 2012, p. 144). Between 1512 and 1605, the Portuguese focus remained mostly on Ternate (1570), Ambon (1575), and later Tidore (1578) (Jacobs, 1980, p. 217).

The situation changed in 1591, when Philip II of Spain banned foreign ships from Spanish and Portuguese ports. This prohibition had a significant impact on trading opportunities for Dutch tradesmen, who had to consider traveling to Asia

themselves to obtain the desired trade goods (Gaastra, 2007, pp. 15–17). In 1595, the first Dutch fleet of seven merchant ships tried to navigate to the Indies. When this expedition proved successful, 65 ships left the Netherlands between 1595 and 1602 for the Indies<sup>25</sup> to make their own fortunes. This exodus of individual merchant ships resulted in fierce competition between Dutch merchants, both in Asia for purchasing goods and in Europe for maintaining their profit margins.

In order to control the harsh competition that resulted in lower profits, the States-General, the highest political power in the Dutch Republic at that time, gathered in 1598 with representatives of the seven Dutch provinces (Boxer, 1965, p. 24). After four years of intense debate, the private companies of the seven provinces decided in 1602 to join forces in an united Dutch Company (*VOC*). The States-General granted this newly formed company a monopoly on the spice trade between the Republic and the Indies. Moreover, the governing power of the *VOC*, the so-called 17 lords (*Heeren XVII*), were empowered to use military power to break the Portuguese hold on trade and were allowed to establish treaties of peace and alliance, construct fortifications, and wage defensive wars in the name of both the *VOC* and the Dutch Republic. Perhaps inspired by the *VOC*'s own monopoly in the Republic to trade with the east, the *VOC* implemented tactics to create a second trade monopoly over certain key commodities, such as spices, by obtaining control over the production areas and therefore the supply of these goods (Krohn, 1991). These monopolies were to be obtained through strict, discriminatory treaties with local aristocracies, and when these leaders refused to cooperate, the *VOC* was willing and able to use force to press the issue further.

The *VOC*'s aim was to take control of the most strategic spots in the Indies to strengthen the position of the Dutch merchants in the European market. Moreover, they not only gained access to the raw materials and spice production areas but also benefited from the available (enslaved) workforce and constructed a network of storage places on the islands (Vergne, 2008, p. 5). These storage houses proved to be essential in maintaining a stable price for spices, as a surplus could be stored to prevent flooding the market, and in times of need, these stores could be used to meet the demand. Besides storing the surplus, the total area of production was restricted through the destruction of spice trees that were not sanctioned by the colonial government. Thus, the Banda Islands became an early target as the “easiest” to seize, given their remote and easily controlled location, where the valuable spices nutmeg and mace grew (Wright, 1958, p. 1, 12). At first, their mission seemed to take advantage of earlier conflicts with the Portuguese in an effort to portray themselves as benefactors: “we will always remain in good friendship with them and never join the other side, but always protect them against Portuguese wrongdoing as much as it lies within our power”<sup>26</sup> (Van Ittersum, 2016, p. 464).

The history of the Dutch presence on the Banda Islands starts in 1599, a few years before the *VOC* was established. The arrival of the first Dutch traders did not come wholly unexpected, as Van der Chijs describes a local prophecy which was recounted to Admiral Van der Hagen in 1605 (Van der Chijs, 1886, p. 21). One Bandanese resident told him that 12 years before his arrival, one of their most prominent imams had prophesized that one day white people from a faraway country would come, that

they would be fully dressed except for their faces, and that they would conquer the Banda Islands. Francois Valentijn also mentions this prophecy and states the “holy man” warned of the arrival of a white people with many ships who would come and conquer their island and many lands surrounding it (Valentijn, 1858b, p. 72). Moreover, the long dormant volcano became active again when the Dutch first entered the islands to negotiate and trade for spices: an inauspicious sign which the Bandanese read as an indication of impending danger (Hanna, 1978, p. 13). The volcano remained remarkably active in the decade to come, which was remarked upon with a similar sentiment by an official of the EIC, John Skinner (1615):

[...] I durst lay all that ever I shall be worth whilst I live that the Hollanders never get the islands of Bannnda, for all the Bandeneses will lose their lives before they will be under the Hollanders. Surely the Lord is offended with them, for from the top of Gonnepe [Gunung Api...], which continually burneth, many times flies great stones into the castle with such force that once or twice the Hollanders have been in mind to forsake it al.

(Danvers & Foster, 1899, p. 135)

Not only was the volcano’s activity regarded with distrust, but the quote also clearly indicates that the Bandanese people were resisting any encroachment on their self-governance.

In March 1599, Vice-Admiral Jacob van Heemskerck arrived with two ships carrying 200 crewman at the shore of the large island Banda Besar (Hanna, 1978, pp 11+13). During van Heemskerck’s visit to the Banda Islands, the village Neira was attacked by its neighboring village Lautaka. The warriors from Neira and allied villages from the islands Ay and Banda Besar attacked the village Lautaka to get revenge. This feud sounds similar to the account from the *Hikayat*, although the timelines might not match completely. What is clear is the animosity between the villages Lautaka and “a village from the island Banda Besar” – a situation that the Dutch merchants might have used in their advantage.

Meanwhile, a concern grew among London merchants regarding the rapid growth of (spice) trade in the Netherlands (Barrow, 2017, p. 1). A charter was created in 1600 for merchants trading in the East Indies, which developed into the United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East Indies – better known as the East India Company (EIC). During the first voyage in 1601, Captain Lancaster encountered a crowded trade market with Chinese, Indian and Arab traders, and port cities that were governed by the Portuguese through a *cartez* system (Barrow, 2017, p. 5). A license (*cartaz*) was required to sail via these ports; duties had to be paid, and restrictions were placed on the possession of weapons and spices. The problem the English faced was that they required the Indian textiles to trade for spices, which were available in these Portuguese controlled ports (Barrow, 2017, p. 7). The English were in particular competition with the Dutch, underselling and overbidding their rivals. According to them, “the fault of the Dutch is giving too little, and asking too much” (Hanna, 1978, p. 18). However, from the start, the Dutch had the upper hand: on average, the VOC sent seven ships to Asia for every three ships sent by the EIC (Furber, 1976, p. 78).

In 1601, the first English party arrived in the Banda Islands, comprised of seven ships led by Captain James Lancaster (Hanna, 1978, pp. 18–20). They chose the island Rhun as their base, as far as possible removed from the Dutch and Portuguese factories on the islands Banda Neira and Banda Besar. Dutch policy was to intermittently ignore and menace the English presence while trying to convince the Bandanese to sign a binding Dutch-Bandanese agreement giving the Dutch sole trading rights for nutmeg for the entire archipelago. The historian Willard Hanna mentions a particular perspective on this agreement: the Dutch framed it as a contract that provided the Bandanese protection from their enemies in exchange for a monopoly on nutmeg and mace (Hanna, 1978, pp. 19). However, the definition of enemies was made from the perspective of the Dutch and therefore included other foreign traders who threatened the desired monopoly. The Bandanese traders, on the other hand, actually welcomed the competition from these foreigners. Moreover, it would not make sense for the Bandanese to terminate existing trade relations, as they depended on the Asian trade for food supplies such as sago and rice. These were goods that the Dutch did not bother to trade in, as they were not as profitable enough.

In July 1614, Benjamin Farie reported that the *orang kayas* from the island Ay had complained to the ruler of Makassar about impending Dutch oppression and the lack of promised English support by Captain Keeling and Middleton (Van Ittersum, 2016, pp. 467–468). Meanwhile, Reynst was in command at Fort Nassau and was determined to scour the English, subdue the Bandanese on Ay, and build a fortress there. A call for assistance was sent to Bantam, in which the Bandanese expressed their fear that the Dutch would take their land and destroy their religion. They requested help to take Fort Nassau in exchange for exclusive rights to the spices as long as the English respected their religion and their women. Their plea was heard, and Captain Castleton was sent to aid the Bandanese. He discovered that an old friend of his, J.D. ‘t Lam, was leading the VOC forces. On 26 March 1616, Castleton signed an agreement with him, ensuring that English merchants on Ay would remain strictly neutral in any conflict between the Dutch and the Bandanese, before departing the islands with honorary salutes.

Only 11 days after Castleton’s departure, Lam landed troops on Ay, and after a month of resistance, a new treaty was signed by the *orang kaya* from various villages and islands, including Rhun. In the treaty, Dutch authority was acknowledged, and promises were made that their respective religions would be respected. Furthermore, spices were to be sold solely to the VOC –excluding “English, French, Javanese, Malay, Makassarese, Butonese, and other European and black nations, whichever these might be”. To assert their authority, Lam gave the order to construct a fort on the island, which they called “Revenge” (Van Ittersum, 2016, p. 470). However, the treaty was quickly broken by the Bandanese on the island Rhun when they welcomed Nathaniel Courthope in December 1616. His assistance to the Bandanese in resisting the Dutch monopoly and their claims to the land was popularized by Gilles Milton in his book *Nathaniel’s Nutmeg* (Milton, 2000).

The opposition of the people on Rhun against the Dutch, and their alliance with the English, becomes clear from a list of “grievances” the Dutch sent to

Courthope on January 1617. Besides the obvious transgressions of arming the Bandanese and creating fortifications, they are accused of “providing rice to the starving inhabitants” – indicating that starvation was apparently a tactic the Dutch used to force people to leave the land (Van Ittersum, 2016, p. 473). Courthope and his troops had to retreat, and when their ship lost anchorage, their resistance was over (Van Ittersum, 2016, p. 475). However, Bandanese resistance continued, as they secretly continued to trade with the English despite punishments that were issued by the VOC. These continued transgressions contributed to increased tensions between the Dutch and English – the Dutch based their claims on exclusive contracts with local authorities, while the English argued for freedom of trade, like the freedom of the seas, which had been legally argued for by Hugo Grotius in his *Mare Librum* (Furber, 1976, p. 43).

Back in Europe, the fear arose that these tensions would threaten the Anglo-Dutch alliance during the Twelve Years’ Truce (1609–1621) (Ittersum, 2020, pp. 251–251). Thus, a new treaty was signed in 1619, agreeing to provide each other assistance in Asia and granting the English one-third and the Dutch two-third of the trade in (north) Maluku, Banda, and Amboina (among other stipulations) (Furber, 1976, p. 44). However, the island Rhun remained a point of contention.

## Conclusion

The spiritual and cultural significance of the Banda Islands is deeply tied to its oral histories and geography. Mountains play a key role in the *Hikayat*, serving as vantage points, sacred sites, and places of judgment. The active volcano Gunung Api, seen as the mother of the surrounding islands, symbolizes creation and fertility, as reflected in the tale of the pomegranate that preceded the birth of seven siblings. It was also where Kakiaij washed ashore and his brothers landed after their journey to Mecca. After settling, they built villages, mosques, and prayer houses at the foot of their respective mountains. Mountains also served as sites for gatherings and justice, such as the meeting atop Mount Ulupitu to decide the fate of Boij Ratan and her child.

The histories presented here emphasize the significance of religion, self-governance, and the multicultural trading hub of the Banda Islands. Despite narratives suggesting ease of European dominance,<sup>27</sup> the Bandanese demonstrated remarkable resistance against colonial encroachment. Their refusal to adhere to Dutch contracts, insistence on maintaining trade with foreign partners, and appeals for English assistance underscore their agency and resilience, much to the frustration of the Dutch, who labeled them as “treacherous”. The treaties further illustrate Bandanese priorities, including safeguarding their property, religious practices, and social customs, and reflect their capacity to assert their terms in dealings with European powers (Clulow, 2019, p. 34; Van Ittersum, 2016, pp. 471–472). The Banda Islands thus emerge not merely as a site of colonial exploitation but as a testament to the enduring power of a people rooted in their land, their stories, and their faith – a powerful counterpoint to simplified narratives of colonial subjugation.

## Notes

- 1 Throughout this chapter, I refer to both the page numbers in the manuscript (later added by, probably, Van Ronkel) as well as the pagenumbers of the transcription in modern Bahasa Indonesia, in order to encourage the reader to check the original text and conduct their own analysis. The spelling I have used throughout the text is the contemporary name, if known, or the edited version, since the original manuscript uses various spelling of names and places throughout the text. This supposed inconsistency is most likely due to the nature of the recording: a professional copyist wrote down the narration of Neirabatij, and thus the spelling of names is phonetical. The manuscript is written in an artful and beautiful handwriting that differs from the handwriting on the title page, which includes Neirabatij's signature. An example of the various spellings for the same placename is the village Wayer on Banda Besar. In the *Hikayat*, it is referred to as: Waier Waeir, Wair, Waer, Kota Andan Waier. An example of the variations of a person's name is Kijakbir, also referred to as: Kijak, Tjak, Takkier, Tjakbeir.
- 2 This means literally "fire mountain", and has also been referred to as Vuurberg in Dutch.
- 3 Fieldnotes June 22, 2017.
- 4 Original text: "*Alkisa inilah tjerita dari orang toea2 di tanah Banda pada permoelaan Saijidina Nabij Joellah Nuob.*" Translation by author: This is the story of the first (old) people on the land of Banda since the time of the prophet Noah.
- 5 In the *Hikayat* also referred to as Leweran, Leweiran, and Serwanie.
- 6 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* (see also Farid, 2021, p. 49; van Donkersgoed & Farid, 2022, p. 47).
- 7 Original text: *Djoedah lagi Negri Islam*.
- 8 Here written as *Andan*.
- 9 In this book, I refer to the town as Lautaka. However, the village name is also written as Labetacca or Lewetaka, or various of this sort.
- 10 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.
- 11 Confirmed through personal communication on November 20, 2024.
- 12 Thanks to Angela Tritto, postdoctoral fellow at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, whom I met during the ICAS conference in Leiden on July 16, 2019. She graciously interpreted the temple signs and send me the translation of the characters.
- 13 Transliteration: *Alkisah maka tersebut cerita dari orang-orang Banda pada permulaan tahu pohon-pohon pala dan buahnya, itu ada berguna kepadanya*. Page 67 from the original folio (Neirabatij, 1922, p. 67).
- 14 The original manuscript reads *Timor*. However, since it is a written version of a narration that has been passed on for generations, it could also be *timoer* meaning east, which would mean that the correction translation would be the king from the east.
- 15 The text literally states that he is "orang hindu", which in other translations has been interpreted as Hindu. However, according to Van Engelenhoven, this is a common phrase to describe someone who is non-Muslim.
- 16 Also written as Tabelekoe.
- 17 A phonetic spelling of Belgica, where a fort with the same name was constructed by the Dutch general governor Pieter Both in 1611.
- 18 The validity of this story was questioned by Hans Straver in conversation with Des Alwi. They believe it has been influenced by a Dutch story about a romance and Portuguese treachery that became popularized in the 1800s (Straver, 2016).
- 19 Referring to the Dutch royal house *Oranje Nassau*. Throughout this part of the *Hikayat*, all the Dutch ships are referred to by this name, thus not referring to their actual names, but rather to the perceived authority who sent them.

- 20 This is the first mention of a date in the text, probably to appeal to a colonial reader. Dates are foreign to this narrative style and seem imposed, and therefore should not be judged for it historical (in)accuracy (van Donkersgoed, 2024).
- 21 The original text says *daoen Pala*, leaves of the nutmeg, which I interpreted as the thin outer layer of nutmeg: mace.
- 22 I kept the original spelling from the *Hikayat*, since it is not always clear whether this refers to the village Lonthoir or to the island, which is sometimes referred to as Londoer, Lonthoir, tanah Banda Lonthoir.
- 23 During his fieldwork in 1998, Peter Lape encountered one of these lesser-known Bandanese diaspora in Seram Timor, in a village called Rumadong. They retain their connection to the Banda Islands with an annual trip to a sacred place on a beach, where they gather soil to bring back to their village. Using this sand from their ancestral lands, they can call upon the spirits and retain their connection to the Banda Islands and their ancestral spirits.
- 24 This treaty lasted from 1521 to 1570, when they assassinated Sultan Hairun of Ternate.
- 25 The Indies refers to the East Indies, which includes the geographical area that is currently known as South East Asia. Contemporary countries included in the historical area of the East Indies are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam.
- 26 The Hague, Nationaal Archief (henceforth NA), VOC 478, f. 4r (instructions for VOC commanders and officers in the East Indies, 10/11 April 1608). Translation by M. Ittersum.
- 27 For example, Ittersum wrote: “Of course, there were plenty of areas in the pre-modern world where Europeans struggled to get a foot in the door—but the Banda Islands was not one of these places” (Van Ittersum, 2016, p. 463).

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