PART II
THRIFTY RETURNS IN THE 1970S

As in many other European countries, in the Netherlands and Belgium it was entrepreneurs who initiated the colonial expansion. In the Republic of the Seven United Provinces, wealthy businessmen joined forces in the VOC and the WIC. They traded, started plantations or founded industrial enterprises. Over the years, the VOC and WIC acquired more than forty colonial possessions in Asia, Africa and North and South America. They were colonies, trading posts and forts. Many of the powers given to the companies by the Republic were similar to those of a state. At the end of the eighteenth century, the Republic assumed control of all VOC and WIC possessions. With the exception of the Dutch East Indies, Suriname and the Caribbean islands, they were exchanged, sold or taken away from the Dutch in the following years.

In Belgium, a king was the entrepreneur and engine behind the expansion. Through skilful manoeuvring at the Berlin Conference (1884–1885), Leopold II gained control of a large area around the Congo River in Central Africa. He founded the Congo Free State (1885–1908) and became its ruling authority. Thereafter, the Belgian state took over the king's private property and the Belgian Congo came into being. After the German defeat in 1918, the German colonies of Rwanda and Burundi were added to Belgium's mandate. Two centuries before, in 1722, Habsburg Austria had set up the Ostend Company to compete with the VOC in China and Bengal. For a short time, the Company trumped the VOC in the tea trade in China, but in 1731 the company was officially disbanded.

Following their independence, the new countries wanted part of the cultural heritage taken during the colonial period to be returned. In 1949, the Netherlands and Indonesia started negotiations on this. It was not until a quarter of a century later, in 1975, that they agreed on *Joint Recommendations by the Dutch and Indonesian Team of Experts, Concerning Cultural Cooperation in the Area of Museums and Archives, Including the Transfer of Objects* (hereafter, *Joint Recommendations*). A copy of the document is in the National Archive in The Hague. After Congo's independence in 1960, Belgium and Congo discussed restitution and, after ten years, reached an agreement. Unfortunately, the document in which this was laid down has still not been found.

The two largest former colonies dominate the discussion on restitution. The smaller ones, Burundi, Rwanda, Suriname and the Caribbean islands, are often left out in the cold. This is not justified. Over the years, Suriname and the Caribbean have recovered collections of pre-Columbian shards and colonial archives. Between Burundi and Belgium, there is no form of conversation, but Rwanda is talking intensively with Belgium about sharing colonial archives and returning objects.

Amid the current developments in the restitution debate, the negotiations with Indonesia and Congo in the years 1960–1980 seem far away. Belgium and the Netherlands only made sparse returns at the time. How did the talks proceed so soon after almost four centuries of colonialism and Indonesia's extremely bloody struggle for independence, and after the exploitation and often humiliating and racist treatment of the Congolese? What wishes did the former colonies express and how did the former colonisers respond? What was finally agreed and were those agreements honoured?

5.
INDONESIA, THE NETHERLANDS AND DIPONEGORO'S KRIS

Of the many major wars waged by the Netherlands in the Indonesian archipelago, the Java War (1825–1830) claimed the largest number of victims: an estimated 200,000 dead on the Javanese side, most of them from starvation and exhaustion, and 8,000 European and 7,000 soldiers from the archipelago on the Dutch side. After the defeat of the Javanese aristocracy and farmers, King William I was able to introduce the Culture System of forced production of export crops. This became, as mentioned, a disaster for the peasants.

Besides large-scale confrontations, there were countless smaller ones. There was always 'one somewhere and often in several places at once' (Hagen, *Koloniale Oorlogen in Indonesië*, 2018). The violence could be indescribable. Particularly notorious were the actions of Jan Pieterszoon Coen's men on the Banda Islands in 1621. Of the 15,000 inhabitants, the Dutch murdered, expelled or enslaved 14,000. Then and later, here and elsewhere, colonial soldiers regularly misbehaved. Sometimes they continued to shoot at rebels and villagers even though the battle was over and their superiors had told them to stand down. Or they looted bodies of the dead, even though this was forbidden. In wars on Bali and the island of Lombok, regional rulers chose the *puputan* ritual, in which the defeated ruler and his entire retinue, including children, would either fight to the death or else die by suicide or kill each other in front of the approaching enemy.

These wars also produced heroes and Prince Diponegoro (1785–1855) was a very great one. He was a hero during the Java War, but later also for Soekarno and Mohammad Hatta, who proclaimed Indonesian in-

LEFT: *Diponegoro, lithograph by C.C.A. Last, 1835, after an original pencil drawing by A.J. Bik, 1830. © National Museum of World Cultures Collection (TM 1574 32)* RIGHT: *Statue of Prince Diponegoro on the square of the National Monument in Jakarta. © Jos van Beurden*

dependence in 1945. And he still is. Many cities have a street named after him, there is a Diponegoro University and a museum and at the national monument in Jakarta there is a huge statue. It goes without saying that Indonesia cherishes every memory of him and wants to possess everything that was his, including what is still in the Netherlands.

A FIND

At the end of the Java War, Dutch general Hendrik de Kock invited Prince Diponegoro for peace talks at the residence in Magelang, Central Java. Upon arrival, the two did not talk: De Kock had him handcuffed and shortly afterwards sent into exile to Makassar on the far away island of Sulawesi. At the time, De Kock's performance horrified in Java, while it evoked pride and nationalistic feelings among many Dutch people, but not with everyone. After a visit to Diponegoro in his place of exile, Prince Hendrik (1820–1879) wrote to his father, later King William II, how warmly the exile had received him, and called the way the Netherlands had dealt with the rebel leader a 'blot' and a breach of trust with

Javanese rulers. 'No Head will ever want to have anything to do with us again' (quoted in Wassing-Visser, *Koninklijke Geschenken*, 1995, p. 71). When he returned home, he was told not to air this opinion in public.

As with all prominent men in the colony, Diponegoro owned several krisses (stabbing weapon). The kris in Dutch possession was a most important sign of his status. In 1975, Indonesia had asked for objects related to its national heroes and the Netherlands had promised to look for them. Diponegoro's weapon was a very important one. But it was as if it had fallen off the radar and might never be found again. Until, on 4 March 2020, a press release from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science arrived out of the blue: the kris had been handed over to Indonesia. The weapon arrived in Jakarta on 5 March. Both the research into it and its departure from the Netherlands had taken place in relative silence.

Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden had discovered the weapon – it had been in its own depot. In the press release we see a picture of three happy people: Culture Minister Ingrid van Engelshoven, Indonesian ambassador I Gusti Agung Wesaka Puja and museum director Stijn Schoonderwoerd. In front of them is the smooth, gold-leafed sheath, with the kris inside it. On 10 March 2020, the Dutch royal couple and Indonesia's President Joko Widodo and his wife showed the lost relic in public: corrugated blade and golden snake head, flowers and leaves. Everyone was happy, and the media in Indonesia delighted. The precious weapon was shown at a special exhibit in the Museum Nasional in October 2020.

All that time, Diponegoro's kris was suspected to be in the Netherlands, but no one could confirm it. There was not even anyone who knew what the kris looked like. In a lecture in 1997, Susan Legêne talked about the 'game of disappearance and appearance', wondering whether that 'not-knowing' was a 'not-wanting-to-know' that reflected our unwillingness to look back at that violent war and the manner of the colonial administration's arrest of Diponegoro in 1830.

One sentence in the press release of 4 March 2020 stuck with me: the motive for the transfer was given as 'compliance with international agreements'. It referred to the *Joint Recommendations* of 1975. Back then, the two countries had agreed on new cultural relations and the return of some objects, archives and prehistoric remains. Why did it take forty-five years for this agreement to be honoured?

ARDUOUS NEGOTIATIONS

From 1942 to 1945, Japanese troops occupied the Indonesian archipelago. Immediately after their departure, Indonesia declared independence. Four years later, during a Round Table Conference of 1949, the Netherlands resigned itself to this. Traumatising atrocities committed by most parties involved (i.e. both Dutch and Indonesian) between 1945 and 1949 left the two countries diametrically opposed. This was made worse by expensive conditions attached to the transfer of sovereignty, which forced the new state to transfer astronomical amounts of money to compensate for the losses which the Netherlands had suffered. As a result, the colonial relationship remained largely financially and economically intact and the contribution to the post-war reconstruction was comparable to the Marshall Plan aid received by the Netherlands (Hoek and Van de Kleij, 'Hoe Nederland profiteerde', 2020). Indonesia stopped the 'reparations' in 1956. DR Congo would also find that its relationship with Belgium changed little after independence in 1960.

In a subcommittee of the Round Table Conference, the two countries discussed the return of colonial collections. They drafted a cultural paragraph, including Article 19 on the 'exchange' of disputed objects.

The transfer of the kris of Diponegoro at the embassy of Indonesia in The Hague. It is now in Indonesia's Museum Nasional but not yet on display, as more research is needed. © Collection National Museum of World Cultures

By using the term 'exchange', the Netherlands ensured that return was not a one-way street and that it could also request return of objects, in particular VOC archives. The term indicates a desire for reciprocity and a denial of the one-sidedness of the flow of objects that typified Europe's colonialism. However, the cultural paragraph, and thus Article 19, remained a dead letter.

Although the subject of return did not disappear from the agenda, thorny issues hampered any progress. To Indonesia's anger the Netherlands still ruled over New Guinea. In 1957 Indonesia nationalised all Dutch companies in a single day and on 5 December Dutch people were asked to leave the country. It took until 1962 before the conflict over New Guinea was resolved. To the frustration of many Papuans, their area did not become independent, but the Netherlands ceded it to Indonesia. The way in which Jakarta dealt with the rights of the Papuans after 1962 caused irritation in the Netherlands. The irritation increased when General Suharto seized power in a bloody *Kudeta* (coup d'état) in 1965 and hundreds of thousands of people suspected of communist sympathies were killed or imprisoned. Indonesia in turn opposed the presidency of former coloniser the Netherlands over the IGGI (Intergovernmental Group for Indonesia) aid consortium in 1967. It was irritated by the finger-wagging about human rights violations and by anti-Indonesian protests by Moluccans that took place in The Hague at the time. But the two countries could not ignore each other. They not only shared a past but also, as they were in the same Cold War camp, a present.

SECRET MISSION

It was not until 7 July 1968 that the two countries concluded a Cultural Agreement. It was not, however, about the return of colonial objects, but about exchange and cooperation in the area of archives. Objects would be discussed later. The agreement did bring about a thaw in the relationship. Diplomatic exchanges increased and the Netherlands gave financial support to several cultural programmes in Indonesia. The negotiations for the agreement appear to have been a practice run for the 1975 return negotiations.

When, around 1970, President Suharto insisted on the return of manuscripts that had disappeared to the Netherlands during the Lombok expedition (1894) and Aceh wars (1873–1914), Ambassador Hugo Scheltema in Jakarta suggested returning the fourteenth-century palm leaf manu-

script Nagarakertagama from the library of Leiden University. According to the authorities in Jakarta, the manuscript proved that the archipelago was already united in the pre-colonial period, including the rebellious Papua and East Timor, once colonised by Portugal. The Netherlands supported this and during a state visit in 1973, Queen Juliana handed over the palm manuscript. It is still in the Arsip Nasional in Jakarta. To this day, the fight for self-determination continues in the present province of Papua, while East Timor became an independent state in 2002.

In preparation for the return negotiations, three board members of the Historical Buildings Foundation in Jakarta visited the Netherlands in 1974. The municipality of Amsterdam had invited them, the Ministry of the Interior was aware of their coming, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was kept in the dark. In a short time, the delegation visited over twenty institutions, spoke to dozens of staff members, copied hundreds of documents and photographed countless objects. The three left the Netherlands with a list of thousands of objects, including those they attributed to Diponegoro.

Some people wonder whether such a list really does exist, as it has still not been found. There is, however, ample indirect evidence of its existence. In a report to the Dutch government on the negotiations in November 1975, Pieter Pott of Museum Volkenkunde noted that the Indonesian delegation had claimed 'that they have lists of many thousands of objects from Indonesia in Dutch museums'. Rob Hotke, director-general of Cultural Affairs at the Ministry of Culture, Recreation and Social Work, reported on the 1975 negotiations that Indonesia initially stated that 'all objects present in the Netherlands from the former Dutch East Indies should return to their country of origin'. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, obviously irritated because it had not been informed of the visit, was concerned about the length of the list and prepared a report on Dutch acquisitions, in which the ministry admitted that some prominent Dutchmen had indeed taken Javanese antiquities from the Buddhist Borobudur or the Hindu-Javanese temple complex Prambanan and still had them at home. These findings would play a role in the agreements made in 1975.

Long lists of lost heritage were also composed by other former colonies. Sri Lanka has already been mentioned; China, Iraq and Ethiopia have carried out similar investigations (Savoy, *Afrikas Kampf*, 2021, pp. 146–147).

JOINT RECOMMENDATIONS

In the decision to begin official negotiations, the Foreign Ministers of both Indonesia and the Netherlands, Adam Malik and Max van der Stoel, played important roles. During one of their meetings, Malik handed over a memorandum in which Indonesia said it needed objects in order to train young people in museums and archives and fill the gaps left by what the Dutch had taken. Van der Stoel informed Prime Minister Joop den Uyl in late 1974 that restitution was a hot potato in Jakarta and that a solution had to be found quickly, if relations with Indonesia were not to deteriorate again.

At the time, Malik argued to the Dutch daily *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant* that Indonesia wanted everything back, but he did not expect this to happen immediately. In an interview in the same newspaper (8 November 1974), a spokesman for the Indonesian embassy in The Hague claimed four large Hindu god statues that were in the Museum Volkenkunde: 'They are the property of the world and there is no objection if copies are made', he said, 'but the originals belong in Indonesia'. When the newspaper asked the museum for photographs of the four, it refused to provide them, even when the government urged it to do so. In protest, the newspaper left the space intended for the photograph empty.

In early 1975, the Netherlands agreed to an Indonesian proposal that each appoint a team of experts to draw up recommendations for new cultural relations and the return of objects and archives. The teams met in Jakarta in November 1975. In his opening speech, the leader of the Indonesian team, Director-General Ida Bagus Mantra for Culture at the Ministry of Education and Culture, thanked the Netherlands for several recent returns and for its cooperation in the archival field. He emphasised that his country needed many objects currently present in the Netherlands to strengthen its national identity and to supplement its often meagre museum collections. Not everything would have to be returned, because Indonesian objects should also be on display abroad, but the unique specimens, which were a 'source of national pride', certainly should. Subsequently, the Indonesian team presented the aforementioned long list.

Through Director-General Rob Hotke of the Ministry of Culture, Recreation and Social Work, the Netherlands indicated it was prepared to return pieces, though not too many, advocating a 'distribution of cultural objects throughout the world'. Here, the Netherlands joined forces with Belgium and other former colonisers. None of them would allow their

former colonies to submit extensive claims. Each would limit itself to 'recommendations regarding specific objects or categories'. The Dutch team proposed a much shorter list, but the Indonesian team stuck to its own.

In negotiations that threaten to become stymied, sometimes something unexpected happens that makes it possible to continue. This was the case here. During a courtesy call on Indonesian Minister Sjarif Thayeb of Education and Culture, the minister said that he had no desire to get 'everything' back, 'because he didn't know where to put it'. He did so 'to the annoyance of some and the surprise of all', a Dutch team member noted. Indonesian team members were shocked. The Dutch smiled smugly, as the Indonesian minister had just created space for their proposal.

THE HOMECOMING OF 'ASIA'S *MONA LISA*'

After more than a quarter of a century of negotiations, thanks to Minister Thayeb's intervention the way was open for *Joint Recommendations*. The governments of both countries quickly converted the recommendations into an international agreement. And that was the agreement to which the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science's press release about the transfer of Diponegoro's kris, on 4 March 2020, referred.

The Netherlands would transfer objects that were directly related to persons or events of great historical and cultural importance for Indonesia. The Netherlands was to hand over the statue of the deity of supreme wisdom, Prajñaparamita, and parts of the Lombok treasure captured in 1894. The Dutch government promised, within the limits of its powers, to help establish contacts with private owners of, for example, Buddha heads from the Borobudur temple complex. The Netherlands would cooperate in the transfer of objects belonging to national heroes such as Diponegoro that it was thought were kept in Museum Bronbeek in Arnhem. And experts from both countries would investigate who owned the prehistoric Dubois collection, including the Java man – now in Naturalis, Leiden.

The Netherlands made four restitutions. The first was the painting *The Capture of Pangeran Diponegoro* by the Indonesian painter Raden Syarif Bustaman Saleh (1811–1880). We will come across Raden Saleh more often. The canvas came from the private collection of the Dutch Royal family and was lent by them to Museum Bronbeek. In addition, half of the items from the Lombok treasure that were still in Museum Volkenkunde and the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, in total 243 pieces, were returned, and later a red saddle with stirrups, bridle, parasol and spear,

Director Pieter Pott at the farewell of the Prajñaparamita in 1978. © National Museum of World Cultures Collection (RV – 12420-2)

which had belonged to Diponegoro. He had surrendered these when he was arrested in 1830. These came also from Museum Bronbeek. His kris was not among the items. And the icing on the cake: the thirteenth-century stone Buddhist Prajñaparamita statue, which was in Museum Volkenkunde. It had disappeared from East Java at the beginning of the nineteenth century. To the delight of the Indonesian government and many Javanese, it was handed over in 1978, on the bicentenary of the Nasional Museum of Indonesia. Because of its beauty, it has been called 'the *Mona Lisa* of Asia'. In order not to be left completely empty-handed, Director Pieter Pott of Museum Volkenkunde had four plaster casts made of it before the departure. His employees called them, with some irony, 'the tears of Pott'. They are still in the depot.

THE SEARCH FOR THE STABBING WEAPON

With the *Joint Recommendations* at hand, the Netherlands had to search seriously for objects attributed to national heroes such as Diponegoro. Very occasionally his stabbing weapon turned up in documents of the Dutch embassy in Jakarta. In 1983, ambassador Lodewijk van Gorkom assured The Hague in a coded telegram that the dagger was in the Rijks-

museum Amsterdam. The Netherlands had to 'consider a transfer of the kris to Indonesia', because that country had more interest in it than the Netherlands. The Rijksmuseum was a serious possibility because of its large collection of colonial highlights. Nothing was done with Van Gorkom's message. In 1985, his successor, Frans van Dongen, suggested to Foreign Affairs Minister Hans van den Broek and Director Pott (whom he had known since his student days) that they should use the celebration of forty years of Indonesian independence for 'a grand gesture' and the return of the kris. Later, in 2011, he told me: 'It would have been a symbolic meaning for the whole of Indonesia and a special meaning for the president'. Pott replied that a return was undesirable. Van Dongen says, 'From my correspondence with Pott I know for sure that the kris was in the museum in Leiden at that time.'

Van Dongen's notion did not come out of the blue; he was right and wrong at the same time. Shortly before his contact with Pott, the Leiden director thought he had traced the kris. He had found a clue in the archives of the former Royal Cabinet of Curiosities. Sultan Hamengku Buwono V of Yogyakarta was said to have given it to Dutch colonel J.B. Cleerens at the end of the Java War. This would mean that the kris had not been war booty but a gift. But Pott's conclusion did not stand for long. We now know that the stabbing weapon Pott had in mind was a different one.

In preparation for a state visit of Queen Beatrix and Prince Claus to Indonesia in 1995, officials of the Foreign Ministry in The Hague were looking for gifts. They asked Willem van Gulik, former director of Museum Volkenkunde, for advice. Van Gulik suggested giving Her Majesty Diponegoro's kris from the museum. Apparently, he thought it was there. His successor, Steven Engelsman, ordered curator Pieter ter Keurs to look for it. He reported that the weapon was not in the museum. Ter Keurs says: 'We really could not find it. Moreover, I thought that a national collection was not something that royalty could just shop around for, but as a simple curator I could not say that openly.' Engelsman reported to Van Gulik that he 'could not help'. Despite repeated requests, Van Gulik has never commented on this.

LITTLE COOPERATION

Around 1997, Susan Legêne delved into the archives to find out what important colonial objects added to the history of the Netherlands as a colonial power. Among them were the krisses of Diponegoro and other

rulers. Legêne notes: 'Krisses are family heirlooms. They represent a lot of emotion. You could see that in Saïdjah's father in *Max Havelaar*, the man who had to sell his buffalo and his kris because of poverty.'

Legêne obtained extensive information 'about the captured clothes and weapons of the Sultan of Palembang', who had resisted Dutch expansion in Sumatra around 1821, and 'also about some state krisses that Javanese sultans had offered as diplomatic gifts to King William I'. In Legêne's view, they were involuntarily relinquished 'curiosities' and politely accepted 'valuables' with which the colonial administration 'carefully maintained the balance between the image of domination and the suggestion of autonomy'.

But the archival trail to Diponegoro's kris came to a dead end. She therefore wanted to closely examine the collection. 'But in those years', Legêne explains, 'Museum Volkenkunde was constantly rebuilding. Nobody could do anything with the few characteristics of the kris I had; the staff could help, they said, if I gave them an inventory number. But there was a lot of confusion about that. On top of that, security only allowed short visits to the treasury where the museum kept its precious treasures. You had to know exactly what you wanted to see, so as an outsider you couldn't really do any object research.' Its whereabouts remained shrouded in mystery.

TURNING POINT 2017

In 2011, and again in 2015, I made enquiries at the Leiden Museum and always received the answer: No, the kris is not here. This made me doubt whether it would ever be found. Anything could have happened. Insects could have eaten away the labels or moisture could have made them unreadable. Registration numbers could have been mixed up, so that the kris would have had a different number in the museum registration. That happened quite often. It could have been stolen. That also happened. In the 1960s, the Leiden museum had to deal with the theft of several Balinese krisses – war booty from the palace of the prince of Klungkung in Bali, which was largely destroyed in 1908. They were never recovered. No one could rule out the possibility that a staff member with access to the treasury had taken them.

In 2017, the National Museum of World Cultures (*Research Report*, 2020, p. 3) decided to complete the research on the kris once and for all. Why then? It had to do with the 'renewed attention for it in the

media and in science' and with the museum's 'growing responsibility' for provenance research on disputed objects in its collection. The museum brought in researchers to take a fresh look at the objects and maintained close contact with the Indonesian embassy in The Hague.

After the completion of the provenance research at the end of 2019, it had an Indonesia expert from outside the Netherlands evaluate the results, the sources used and the methodology. She reported that there was 'unfortunately still a piece of the puzzle missing', especially regarding how Colonel Cleerens had acquired the kris, but confirmed the researchers' conclusion that the kris with registration number RV-360-8084 was the weapon that had belonged to Prince Diponegoro. Indonesia then sent two experts. They came to the same conclusion. With this, the museum felt it had a sufficiently strong case for the final step: convincing the Minister of Education, Culture and Science that the Dutch state had to transfer the ownership to Indonesia. And she readily agreed.

What I miss in the research report is any attention paid to the occasional appearance of the kris after 1975. For it is these moments that make clear how not-knowing, disinterest, self-interest and obstruction postponed the fulfilment of the international agreement on the kris for decades.

As mentioned, the kris went straight to Indonesia. But even then, kris experts in the country, reports the April 2020 Indonesian magazine *Tempo*, are not convinced that the transferred stabbing weapon was really the one handed over by Diponegoro to Colonel Cleerens. The National Museum of World Cultures immediately announced that it stands by its conclusion. Director General Hilmar Farid for Culture of Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture supports this.

While the story of the kris is important for the Netherlands, it is largely unknown in Belgium. One of the motivations for covering two countries in one book was that colleagues are scarcely aware of important restitution movements in the other country. When, after the return of the kris, I asked some contacts in Belgium if they knew about it, they remained vague and mumbled in their emails: heard about it somewhere, but don't really know. Conversely, a Dutch journalist was not going to pay attention to the exhibition *100 x Congo* in Antwerp, as 'it is more something for Belgium'.

WHERE DOES THE JAVA MAN BELONG?

There are other agreements from 1975 that the Netherlands has not fulfilled. One is about a rein of Diponegoro's horse in Museum Bronbeek,

reports historian Mark Loderichs ('The Prince on the Horseback', 2016). The museum, which because of its military-colonial background has war booty in its collection, is investigating the rein together with Museum Nasional in Jakarta and some Indonesia experts and it looks like it will be returned. Another unfulfilled deal is the commitment to help contact Dutch collectors with important objects, such as Buddha heads from the Borobudur. In the 1970s, the government admitted that these were there, but has done nothing further to date.

The Netherlands has also never helped to find out which of the two countries is entitled to the prehistoric Java man. Three pieces are involved that may be a million years old: a skull cap, a molar and a thighbone. The discovery is attributed to the Dutch physician and palaeontologist Eugène Dubois (1858–1940). The skull cap is the first specimen of the early humanoid *Homo erectus* ever found. Dubois unearthed it in 1891. They are among the Naturalis's top exhibits. On the fifth floor, they have been given their own room where the captions visible to every visitor explain the natural history side of fossils, and not their disputed background.

This emphasis on natural history elements characterises many narratives about natural history collections. In a joint piece, Caroline Drieënhuizen of Open University and Fenneke Sysling ('Java Man', 2021), state the same: 'The view that natural history objects are only bearers of neutral, biological significance has been called into question only recently.' They argue that Naturalis's approach is out of date: 'Dubois was fascinated by fossils and he deliberately left for the Dutch East Indies to do research there.' But he was not the one who did the heavy fieldwork: 'That was done by local forced labourers made available to him by the colonial authorities. Dubois did not appreciate them much. He found them unreliable and often lazy. To his dismay, they sometimes even ran away.'

Dubois also made eager use of existing local knowledge when determining excavation sites: 'Twenty-five years earlier, Raden Saleh, primarily known as a painter, had excavated fossils on Java and published about them. He probably did this on the instructions of Prince Adipati Ario Tjondronegoro. There were also legends about giants whose remains could still be found in the landscape. This ensured that Dubois knew where his chances of success were greatest.'

After his departure from the colony in 1895, Dubois kept the fossils at home for years without doing much with them. In the 1930s, the Geological Survey in Batavia and institutions in the Netherlands fought over

The fossils of the prehistoric Java man. © Naturalis Biodiversity Center, Leiden

them, but no solution was found as to where the fossils belonged. Later, Dubois reluctantly gave them up and they ended up in Naturalis. After independence, Indonesia asked for the Java man again. Sysling and Drieënhuizen note: 'The country needed the Java man because it supported the idea that Java, and thus the new nation state Indonesia, was the cradle of mankind. But the request was received with disdain by Dutch officials: they called it an "unsympathetic" and "provocative" request.'

Willem Vervoort, director of Naturalis from 1972 to 1982, made a distinction between natural history and ethnographic objects. As Sysling and Drieënhuizen point out, 'The skull was of the first kind and, according to him, had universal, scientific value. As far as he and the Dutch government were concerned, it could therefore remain in Leiden. That the Java man, just like the Prajñaparamita statue and the Diponegoro kris, had an important cultural and symbolic value for Indonesia was less relevant to him.' According to Sysling and Drieënhuizen, 'the discussion about decolonisation of such objects, including their possible return, is still in its infancy in all respects.' Very slowly, Naturalis's research is going

beyond strict natural history paths and including the colonial past. The study of collections of minerals is no longer only about minerals but also about the profitable colonial mining industry. The new knowledge trickles down into some publications. But, as I am told, they don't shout it from the rooftops.

In 2011, Indonesia Museum Sangiran – *The Homeland of Java Man* – opened its doors. It is cutting edge modern, has a good collection and is located in an area on Java where many prehistoric fossils were found. Since 1996, the discovery area has been on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

A RICH MUSEUM IN JAKARTA

The Museum Nasional of Indonesia is housed in a classical building. In the courtyard, a large number of statues from old temple complexes can be seen. Inside, on the top floor of a new extension, the Prajñaparamita statue, the gold pieces with jewellery from the Lombok treasure and a number of objects attributed to Diponegoro transferred by the Netherlands are on display. All are behind thick glass. Museum Nasional owns 140,000 Indonesian objects, the National Museum of World Cultures in the Netherlands 172,778 (Shatanawi, 'Colonial Collections', 2019, p. 3). For some in the Netherlands, the rich collection in Jakarta raises a question. Museum Nasional is a continuation of the museum of the Batavian Society. It had already received the Society's large collection when it was transferred in 1949. The question is: Why does the Netherlands have to return objects to Indonesia?

This question was also raised at the 1949 Round Table Conference. At that time, the Dutch Minister for Union Affairs and Overseas Territories had a clear answer: 'The transfer of the objects in the Museum of the Batavian Society in Batavia' would 'suffice for the most part'. According to him, the only thing that still had to be done was 'to return the few objects in Dutch museums of which it has been established that they have been captured'. So, in his view, apart from war booty, nothing needed to be returned.

The founding of the Batavian Society at the end of the VOC period was part of a trend of learned societies emerging in the Republic and the rest of Europe. It studied flora, fauna and material cultures. Members – well-to-do, mostly Dutch people in the colony – arranged for the supply of objects, both from the archipelago and from other VOC bases in Asia.

Soon the Society began building a museum to house all its acquisitions. There it decided which objects would remain in its museum in Batavia and which would go to heritage institutions in the Netherlands.

The name of one of the Society's members can still be found in Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden. This is Nicolaus Engelhard, Governor of Java's north-eastern corner, who found five large statues of gods in and around the overgrown Singasari temple complex in 1803. He took them with him and kept them in his garden, but handed them over to the Society after complaints about this. The Society shipped them to the Netherlands and in 1903 they came to Museum Volkenkunde. According to Director Pott, four of the five – the Hindu gods Ganesha, Durga, Nandishwara and Mahakala, which had come from the same temple – formed a unique unit and were among the finest Java had to offer. The fifth statue, that of Prajñaparamita, was also a masterpiece. During the negotiations in 1975, when Indonesia asked for those five statues, the Netherlands stipulated that it would hand over only the Prajñaparamita. The other four are still in Leiden. Can we still agree with the government's response in 1949 that, apart from war booty, nothing had to be returned, because the Netherlands had left enough behind? An obvious

Sculptures and fragments in Museum Nasional of Indonesia, Jakarta. © Jos van Beurden

argument against is that Indonesia has many more museums, and their collections are considerably more modest than that of Museum Nasional. Dutch heritage specialist Wim Manuhutu – who is of Moluccan descent – digs deeper and offers a clear opinion: 'Indonesia has clearly asked for those four statues. It needs them for further nation-building. So why is the Netherlands making such a fuss about it? The depots in Leiden have enough other pieces. He would like the Southeast-Asian country 'to take more of a lead in its cooperation with the National Museum of World Cultures. But fortunately, a new generation is rising in the Indonesian cultural sector. I notice when I am there that they are in favour of it. Legally speaking, those statues may belong to the State of the Netherlands, but ethically speaking Indonesia should have control over them.'

This is almost in line with the position of the Dutch cabinet in the *Policy Vision Collections from a Colonial Context* of January 2021 (which still needs parliamentarian approval). It opts for the possibility of returning objects that were lost involuntarily or taken away without consent and objects that are of greater cultural, religious or historical importance to the former colony than to the former coloniser. If Indonesia indicates that the four statues are important to the nation, a formal request for restitution stands a good chance.

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Anyone comparing the atmosphere between Indonesia and the Netherlands in the mid-1970s with that of today sees a serious difference. The Netherlands is prepared to take a more critical view of its own colonial past and to decolonise museum collections. Indonesia has developed a clearer vision and policy of its own in that half a century. At the same time, the policies of the two countries do not necessarily run parallel. Moreover, the Netherlands' ties with Indonesia have loosened, as it is increasingly focusing on its East Asian neighbours.

The long search for the kris of Prince Diponegoro makes clear that institutions in the Netherlands have difficulty in tracing objects of this kind. The research only gained momentum when the National Museum of World Cultures felt outside pressure, opened up to the outside world and admitted external experts. Cooperation with countries of origin seems crucial in the research of disputed heritage.