INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

BEB-16

Leftovers

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Jalan Seno IV/5
Tebet Barat
Jakarta Selatan
Indonesia
19 April 1983

Dear Peter,

The bus descends as if from the sky, out of the low-lying clouds, along the narrow thread of asphalt, down the tortuous slopes of the North Sumatran hills. It is a snaking, switchbacking journey, past waterfalls, past the hovels of Batak woodsellers, through narrow, rock-hewn tunnels barely wide enough for a single vehicle's passage. The brakes squeal. The engine protests. The bus groans down the hillside.

This bus, a Mercedes, is, like all Sumatran buses, a gaudy, polychromed affair. The bumpers are black, green, red and chrome and the body is chromed and pin-striped, with multi-hued running lights, chi-chi ball trim and tinted windows. On the windshield is the pronouncement, Full Video, in reflective gold. Folk art on wheels.

Inside, on seats of tattered red vinyl, sit the passengers. Jammed together like cordwood, as is the usual practice, they sit four to a seat, twenty to the aisle, the remainder filling the doorways. Here too the decoration is lively: batik-patterned formica walls and a baroque, heavily molded, teakwood ceiling are the main features. The air here is still and close. Few of the small wind vents are open. The passengers sweat, clutching their tickets and asuransi chits, insurance should the brakes fail and the bus plunge through the guardrail into the ravine below. Most of the passengers are Batak or Minangkabau, the dominant ethnic groups in this part of Indonesia. In the back, however, behind a pile of lumber, next to some bags of cotton, huddle the bule (pronounced "boo-lay"), the foreigners.

On the front bulkhead, above the tassled window trim and decals, has been bolted a video monitor. This trip, a Hindustani movie is playing, popping and jerking in time with the potholes below, the over-burdened speakers crackling and hissing through a succession of musical numbers, kung-fu style fight scenes and romantic interludes. The audience is entranced. The bule ignore this entertainment and talk among themselves. Their speakers are silent: the wires have been cut.

Outside, the sky is streaked with carmine and violet. Soon it will be sunset. When the roadside vegetation thins those passengers looking out can catch a glimpse of a wide sweep of bay, far below. The water is studded with

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islands and myriad fish traps. It glitters with the reflection of the waning sun. In a few hours it will be dark. In a few minutes they will reach Sibolga.

The vehicle creaks to a halt amidst a clammering throng of vendors, porters and becak (pedicab) drivers. Downtown Sibolga. No taxicab plies these streets and few private cars. Motorcycles and motorized becak mesin are rare. Though capital of Tapanuli Tengah regency, Sibolga resounds only rarely with the din of engines. More common are the jingle of becak and bicycle bells, the clip-clop of horse-drawn bendi, the padding of slippered feet. The arrival of a bus is a Major Event.

Passengers disembark quickly; this bus will soon be heading on to Bukitinggi, fifteen hours to the south. Baggage and Indonesians are hustled off into the gathering darkness. The bule, with their backpacks, dufflebags, surfboards and cameras, remain, harangued by a persistent circle of becak drivers. Eventually they straggle off with the winners. The prize: an extra two to three hundred rupiah* a foreigner can usually be coerced to pay for a few unnecessary rounds about town. No bule will remain in Sibolga that night. Eventually, all will be herded down to the docks and the waiting Sumber Makmur (Source of Prosperity), a hundred-ton passenger vessel set to depart that evening. Their destination: a small island, 240 kilometers (149 miles) long and 80 kilometers (50 miles) wide, out of sight, 125 kilometers (78 miles) off the west Sumatran coastline: Nias.

Hilly, stony, fertile, Nias is a pleasant enough place, carpeted with a lush mantle of forest and coconut palm, fringed with mangrove swamps, white-sand beaches and coral reefs. The island's inhabitants number some 200,000, a mixed lot of imported Batak, Minangkabau, Chinese, Achenese and the indigenous Niah. The outsiders are concentrated mainly in the island's two towns, Gunungsitoli (the capital of Nias regency) in the north and Telukdalam in the south, both small, quiet provincial ports, peaceful relatives of Sibolga. They serve as traders, businessmen, hoteliers and petty government officials. Though the Niah are also well represented in the towns, the majority are scattered across the land in small villages ranging in size from a few hundred to a few thousand residents.

The Niah are a docile, agricultural people, 95% Christian and 5% Muslim. They spend their days fishing and growing rubber, rice, coconuts and patchouli. This last, an aromatic shrub valued in the West for its use in perfumes and medicines is, with coconuts, one of the island's most important export crops. Called nilam in Indonesian, the plant is cultivated in villages throughout the island, the leaves dried and their oil rendered, distilled and sold to urban traders (mostly Bataks) who in turn send the product to Medan and Singapore for export to the USA and Europe. Few of the Niah, or for that matter the traders, understand the use of nilam in the outside world. They do know it

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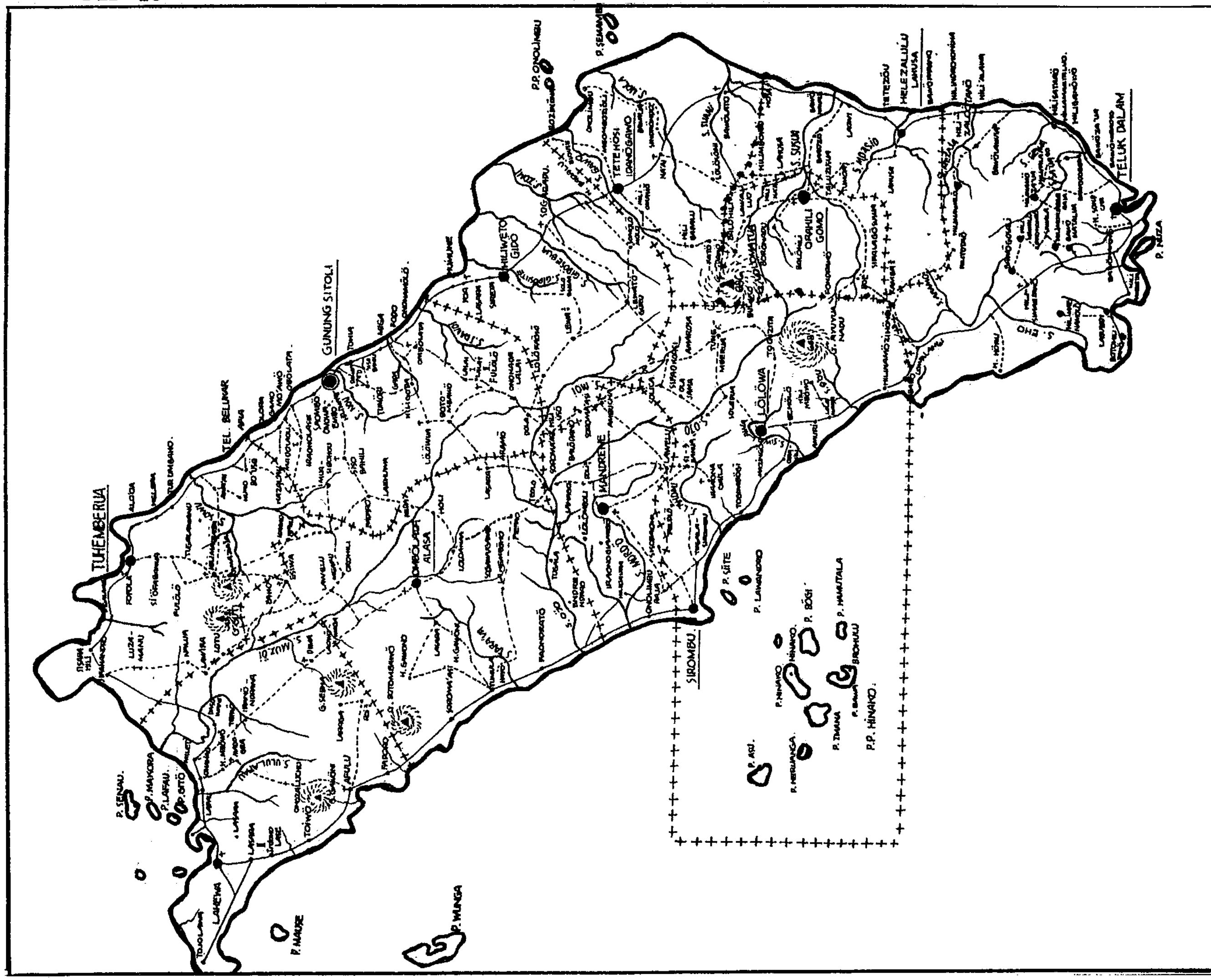
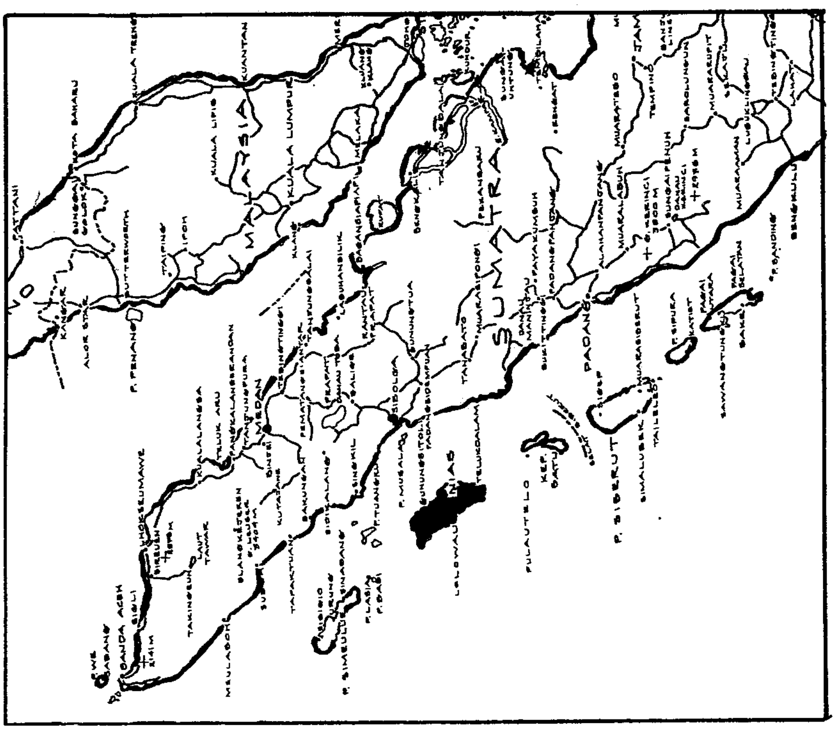
* During the period of my research in Nias the rupiah was officially valued at 700 to the US$1, the rate of exchange used throughout this report. Since April 1983, however, the rupiah has been devalued to 970 to the US$1.


TUHEMBERUA
GUNUNG SITOLI
TELUK DALAM
LÖLÖWA
SIROMBU
LAHEWA
P.P. HINAKO


MALAYSIA
KUALA LUMPUR
SUMATRA
MEDAN
PADANG
NIAS

2. European and Australian bule travelers in the Hotel Wisata, Gunungsitoli, awaiting their boat to Telukdalam.

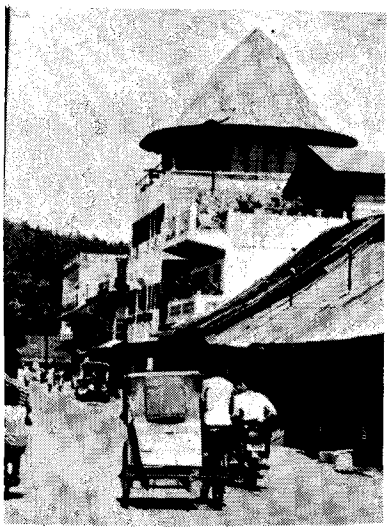
smells nice, helps small cuts and wounds to heal quickly, requires little care, takes six months to harvest and fetches Rp. 24,000 ($34) per kilo of oil. By one trader's estimate 100,000 kilograms of nilam are exported from Nias each month. That's $3,400,000. Small wonder Nias has to import rice these days. Everyone is growing nilam.

But, though the fragrance permeates every corner of the island, it is not nilam that brings foreign tourists by bus, boat and occasional plane to Nias. Nor is it the oddly European-styled churches, their congregations singing de profundis in the tropical heat. Certainly it is not for the coconuts. No, tourists come to Nias for two main reasons: the surfing, reputed to be some of the best in Southeast Asia, and the villages, the last remnants of a unique, megalithic, headhunting culture that flourished well into this century, but is today little more than a memory.

Foreigners have been visiting Nias for a long time. The Chinese and Persians came, and mentioned Nias in their records. So did the Portuguese, and left evidence of their passage in the bas-relief galleons of Niah wood carving and the wing-tipped shoulder plates of Niah armor. The Dutch, however, came to conquer.

3. Watching the bule entertainment, Hotel Wisata, Gunungsitoli.

When the first Dutch finally came to Nias in the 17th century they found a stratified, martial society, steeped in internecine warfare. The island the newcomers began to conqueor was not really one society, but two, the north and the south, with distinct architectural styles, customs and dialects. The northerners, with their villages of scattered, oval homes proved easy prey to conquest and conversion. This latter process was speeded by German Lutheran missionaries who, in the early years of this century not only converted



4. Hotel Gomo, Gunungsitoli, with northern-style roof.

the Niah, but provided them with a unique Romanized system of writing (the only one in the region that uses an umlaut ö, phonetically comparable to the English schwa), gave scholars an unsurpassed corpus of literature on Niah custom and culture and left Germany with one of the finest collections of Niah sculpture in the world.

Within little more than a century, northern Nias was incorporated into the administrative structure of the Netherlands East Indies and the residents into the ranks of Christiandom* (Achenese Muslim missionaries got a late start and consequently managed to convert only a handful of the island's populace to Islam). The more truculent southerners, with their fortress-like hilltop villages, proved harder to subdue. Southern heads were still being gathered well into the 1930's and traditional law and the rule of local rajas remained in effect until Indonesian independence in 1947. Even the Japanese, who occupied Indonesia during the Second World War, treated the south with kid gloves. The south remains feisty today: barely six years ago the villagers of Botohilitanö, enraged over some now forgotten slight, set fire to neighboring Lagundri, burning a portion of that settlement to the ground.

Today, southern Nias is the island's last window to the past, a magnet for tourists and researchers alike. The foreigners aboard the Sumber Makmur were heading south; after a brief stopover in Gunungsitoli, most would take the eight hour boat trip to Telukdalam. Also, the twice monthly cruise liners M.S. Mahsuri and M.S. Scandanavia call exclusively in the south. The Nias segment of David Attenborough's BBC television program, The Spirit of Asia, was filmed primarily in the south. And, it is more than one southern village that can boast an anthropologist's visit. All such visitors have been anxious to see the Nias of yesterday alive, before the shutters of modernity close forever.

5. A northern style Niah home, Sifalete village, Gunungsitoli.

No one is quite sure from whence the Niah came. The doyen of Nias researchers, the late Dr. G.M. Thomsen, is said to have discovered a region of

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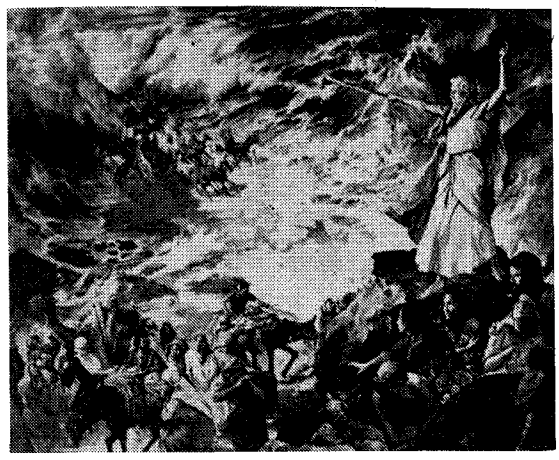
* Niah Christians are now 70% Protestant and 30% Catholic.

6. A southern Nias beach. Jamborae, Telukdalam.

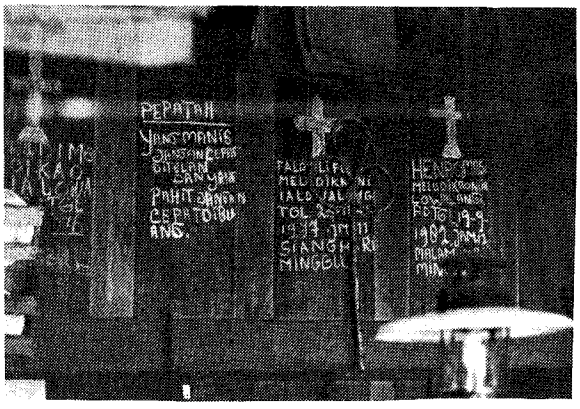
Tibet whose inhabitants still speak a language and practice social customs similar to those of Nias. Other anthropologists, however, insist the islanders are related to the hilltribes of Burma, having migrated from there five to seven thousand years ago. Linguists point to Madagascar, citing similarities in the Malagasy and Niah languages. Contentious art historians point to the striking similarities between Niah wood carving and the sculpture of the Nagas of Himilayan Assam.

The Niah have their own theories. Some of their ancient legends claim that the island's first inhabitants were formed from the elements - the earth, the air and so on. Others intimate that they fell from the sky. But most popular is the tale told, with slight variations, throughout the island, the story of Gomo:



7. Moses parting the Red Sea on the walls of a Niah home near Gunung-sitoli. An imported Western print.

Long ago, a princess from somewhere in China, ostracized from her father's realm, was shipwrecked on an island, near a rivermouth. She and her crew made their way upriver to search for inhabitants, found none, and set up their camp within sight of the coast so that one day, if a rescue vessel appeared, it could be signaled. And lo, one day another ship, also from China, did appear. The princess's crew signaled. Low on rations and seeing the signal, this new ship made for shore with the intent of raiding the islanders of their stores. Upon arrival they set upon the princess and her crew, who had come down to the beach to welcome the newcomers. A terrible battle ensued. Many died. Finally, the helmsman of the princess's boat called upon the helmsman of the raiding ship:

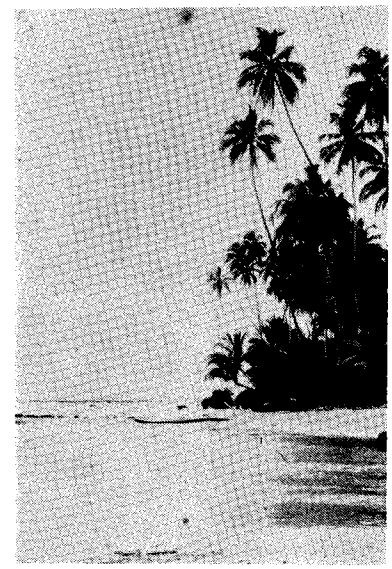


7. A chalk-written wall record of one family's deaths. Births are recorded on the opposite wall.

Bawögosali, Telukdalam.

"Let us stop this carnage," he said. "You and I will fight. The loser and all his crew will become the slaves of the winner. That is better than a field of dead."

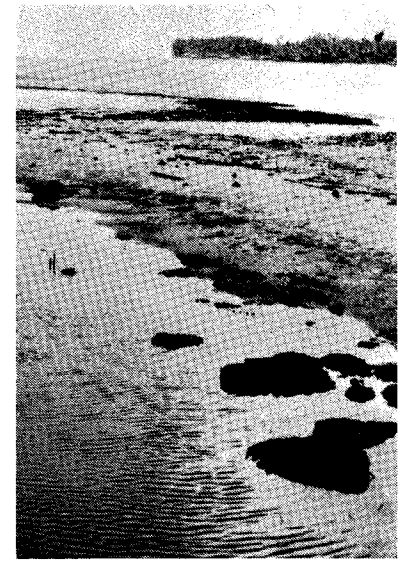
So they fought. But so evenly matched were they that neither could best the other. Finally, exhausted, the helmsmen called a truce and vowed to cooperate. Overjoyed at the outcome, the princess, whose surname was Go, asked the helmsmen of the raiding party his surname, which, it turned out, was Mo. Thus was born the first village of Nias, Gomo. In time, the settlement prospered and grew. The inhabitants and their descendents spread across the land, building other villages and intermarrying with the peoples of neighboring islands and the Sumatran mainland. Today, though many of the coastal Niah exhibit Malayo-Polynesian features, in Gomo and other villages of the interior, the descendants of those first ships retain the epicanthic folds and light skin of their forebears. Perhaps Dr. Thomsen's Tibetan connection is not so outlandish after all.



8. A southern Nias beach near Jamborae, Telukdalam.

That first battle of Gomo was a portent of things to come. Soon, village rajas were sending warriors (adult males) to do battle with their neighbors for prestige, booty, slaves and heads. The prestige and booty were necessary to keep the rajas in power. The slaves made good trade items for Achenese gold and provided the base for the island's multi-tiered caste system. The heads had a number of uses: some were placed under the massive support posts of Niah homes; others were gathered for a raja's funeral, their owner's souls to serve as the raja's slaves in the afterlife; not a few were victims of Niah rites of passage, for headtaking was an important step on the road to male adulthood. Human blood had an important use as well, as part of the red paint used, with black and white pigments, to decorate homes. Frederic Lontcho describes acceptable Niah headhunting technique:

> In general, the ambush was the preferable method. The hunter would hide himself at the edge of a remote pathway and wait. If a woman passed by, perhaps on her way to fetch water, she would be



9. View of Jamborae across Lagundri bay, Telukdalam.

10. A Niah warrior in full battle dress, father of the current headman's assistant, Hilisimaetanö, Telukdalam.

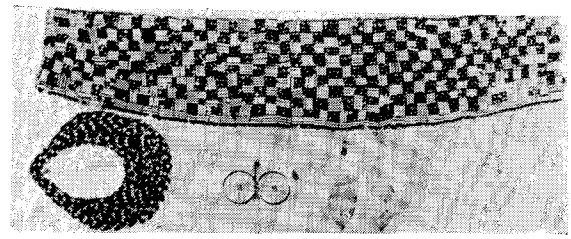
11. A takulatefaö, öröba and under-tunic.

attacked from behind, killed and decapitated, and the 'hunter' would quickly flee with his loot. No scruples were shown: many against one was perfectly acceptable, and helped guarantee the safety of the attackers .... heads of children, of women, of warriors, were all of the same value.

To protect themselves for this sort of sport, warriors wore a tunic of bark or multi-colored cloth (imported or homespun), and over this a coat of crocodile skin armor, the öröba (over-zealous hunting, however, produced a decline in the local croc population. By this century corrugated roofing iron had become a popular, though less durable substitute). Head protection was afforded by an iron helmet festooned with crocodile skin spikes, the takulatefaö. To keep their heads on their shoulders the warriors employed a thick bronze and coconut shell neckpiece, the kalabubu. The costume was completed by a single earring (worn in the right ear), the fonduru, and a loincloth, the öndora. Worn with one end hanging free, the length of the öndora was one indication of the wearer's status (the longer the higher).

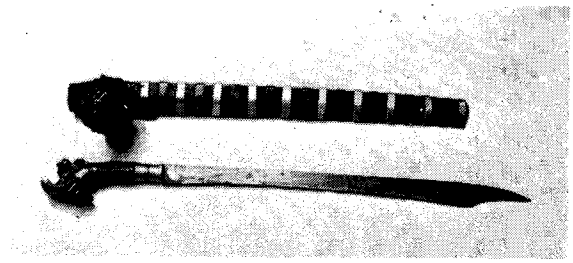
Warriors need weapons, of course, and the Niah were well equipped. Swords, called gare ("gar-ay"), were the favorite sidearms. Knives and spears were also used. Most were fashioned of iron with shafts and hilts carved from wood or, occasionally, bone. Sheath decoration was another indicator of status. Upon attainment of manhood, a warrior was entitled to wear a rattan ball on his sheath. After the taking of a first head, crocodile teeth were added to the rattan. Wooden shields were strictly protective and relatively unadorned.

Though women were fair game for headhunting, most did not participate in the festivities and consequently, their clothing had a gentler aspect. Applique sarongs and blouses were complimented by female versions of the kalabubu, the kalabagi, and a belt, the awikaba. Both were of leather with multiple rows of tegira seeds. Gold (and in recent years, brass) jewelry, such as the sialu (earrings) were also popular.

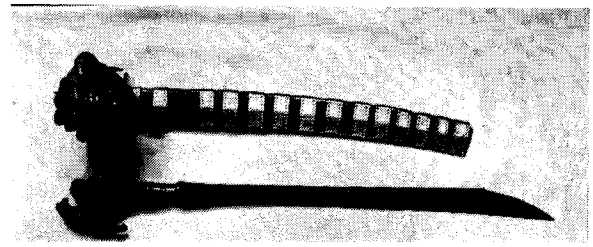


12. kalabagi, awikaba, fonduru and sialu, Hilisimaetanö

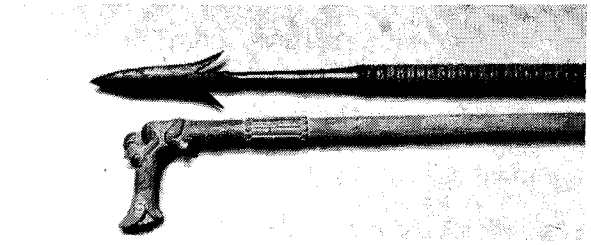
The lives of men and women, if not cut short by a neighbor's gare, were marked by ritualized stages: birth, circumcision (or for women, ear piercing), marriage and death, each marked by prayers to the ancestors and pig sacrifice. Males, on the way to adulthood, had other steps as well: learning to use the sword and shield, the taking of one's first head and a unique virility test: the fahombo, the stone jump. In the center of each village stood the hombo, a trapezoidal block of stones, two meters high, flanked on one side by a smaller take-off stone and on the other by pointed bamboo stakes set among the paving stones. To qualify for marriage, young warriors attempted a running leap over the hombo. The successful could head for the altar; the less agile were impaled in the attempt. Once married, most Niah had few personal rituals to look forward to until death. Those few men who entered the village ruling hierarchy, however, had many steps to surmount on their climb through the ranks, each requiring prayers and multiple pig sacrifices. At the highest levels of Niah society, hundreds of porkers were put to the knife for the greater glory of a single Niah man.



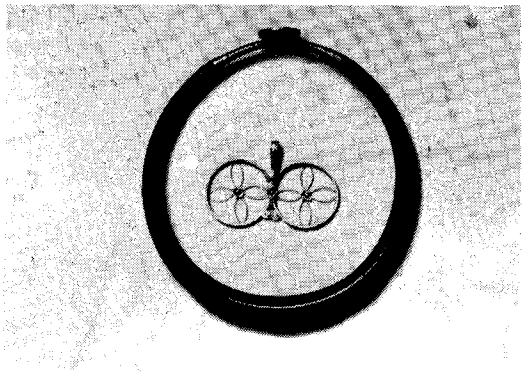
13. Ni'obawalawölö: gare sword with rattan ball sheath, Hilisimaetanö.



14. Ni'obawalasara: gare sword with rattan ball and crocodile teeth, Hilisimaetanö.



15. Spear head and walking stick, Hilisimaetanö.



16. Kalabubu and fonduru

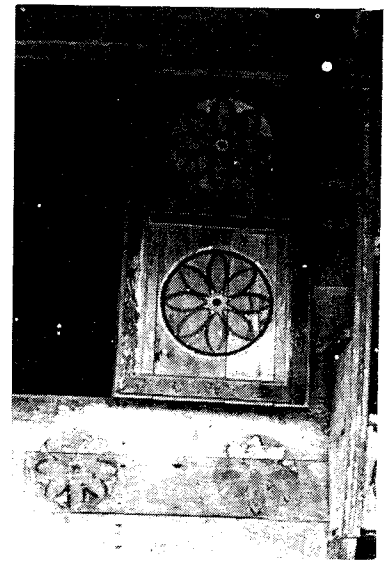
17. Bawömataluo village. southern Nias.

18. Botohili village, southern Nias.

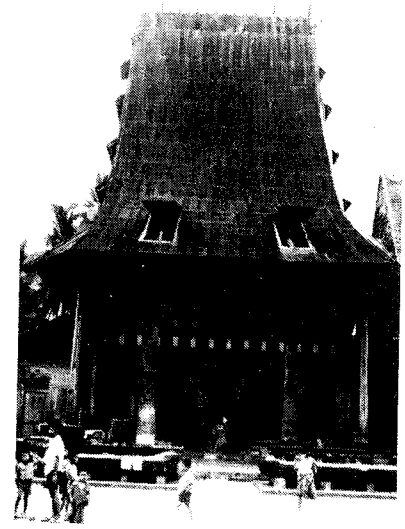
If rites of passage were important on Nias, stone was moreso, especially in the south. Pigs were butchered on stone slabs, kings ruled from stone thrones and were occasionally shaded by stone umbrellas or rested on stone couches. Their reigns were memorialized with gigantic monolithic stone stelai, tables and obelisks. Wars were fought on village streets, paved with massive stone tiles. Travellers went from village to village on paths and roadways of stone. Pillows were made of stone. So was some jewelry. And every village had its hombo.

Wood also played a major role in southern Nias, as the main architectural building material. Southern Niah villages consisted of two rows of tightly-placed, stylistically identical homes along a central stone street. Homes were built in vague imitation of ships (from Portugal? from China?), from wide, smooth-planed hardwood planks, slanting outwards over their support pillars like forecastles. A decorative bow ornament set on either wall added to the nautical image. Multi-colored rosettes (not unlike Pennsylvania Dutch hex signs) decorated window shutters and eaves. Visitors entered through a trap door set among the central house pillars, easily closed to keep out unwanted intruders. Towering above the house proper was a thatch-and-wood roof, two-thirds of the total house height. Ventilation and daytime illumination were achieved with a moveable thatch skylight. Inside, decoration was austere, the wide planks only occasionally interrupted by decorated beams or finials. However, every home had a richly carved altar with miniature thrones, the repository of the family's wooden ancestral statues. Propitiated in times of illness or crisis, the statues were made to resemble Niah warriors, with fancy headdresses, a distended right earlobe and fonduru, a gare or other weapon and a pointed beard. Inevitably, torsos were elongated. Heads were small. Penises were erect.

19. Steps to Bawömataluo village.

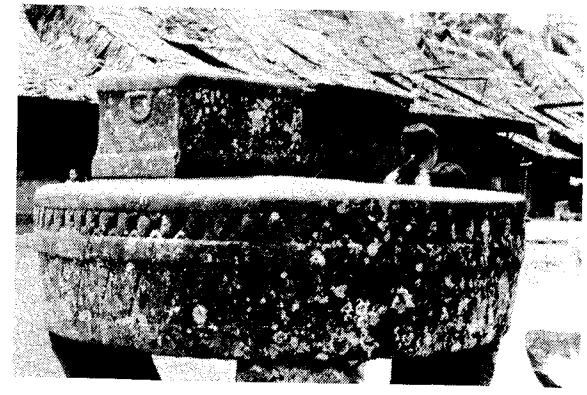


20. Window shutters, headman's house, Hilisimaetanö, with siöfehandrauli rosette design.



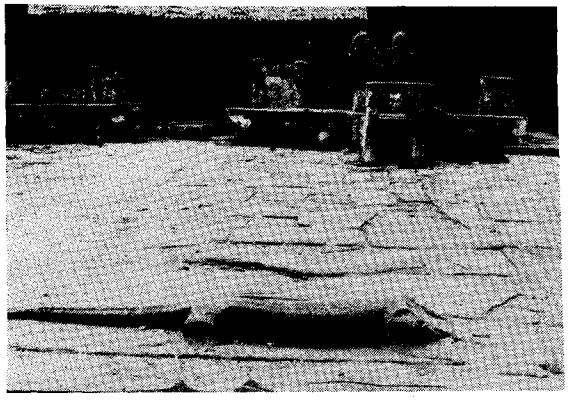
21. Old raja's home, Hilinawalömazinö village, one of the biggest traditional Niah homes in the south.

22. Raja's throne, Hilisimaetanö village.



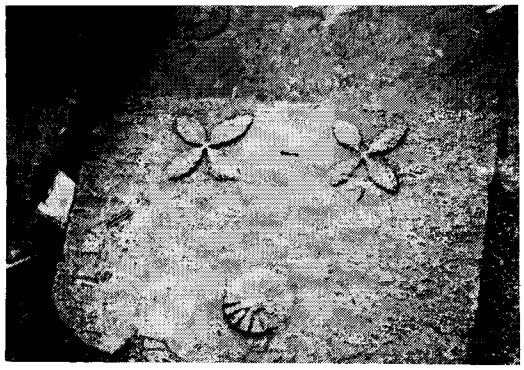
23. Stone table, Bawömataluo village.

24. Stone crocodile, the head worn smooth, Hilisimaetanö, southern Nias.



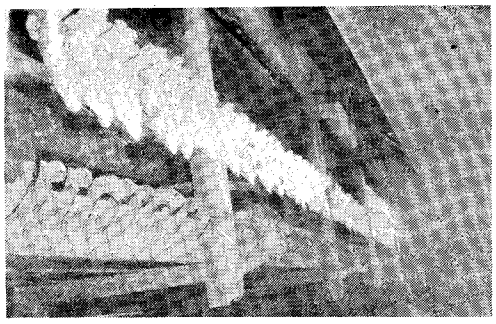
25. Drying freshly harvested rice, Hilisimaetanö village. To scare away birds, two bamboo poles are arranged, one as a pivot, the other as an arm to sweep across the rice. A string, pulled by a watchful attendant, sets the arm in motion. Another string, at the pivot point, acts as spring of sorts, pulling the arm back into place. This same method is employed in the rice fields.

26. Threshold step, headman's house, Bawömataluo, with siöfehandrauli motif.



Inter-village rivalry was fierce on Nias, a fact that was exploited by the Dutch in their conquest of the island. As elsewhere in Indonesia, they played one king against another, eventually vanquishing both. Orahili, for example, was one of the last southern villages to resist the European invaders. They were overcome only when their traditional rival, Hilisimaetanö, obligingly offered their village as a staging area for a Dutch attack. Orahili was decimated and the villagers forced to flee to Hilinawalömazinö, some 35 kilometers (22 miles) to the north. Months later they returned to rebuild Orahili - under Dutch rule of course, like their neighbors.

With the conquest of north and south Nias, the entry of Western religion and the consequent passage of headhunting, ancestor worship and traditional rule, so too passed a large chunk of Niah culture. War costumes, statuary and ritual weaponry soon became anachronisms, their manufacture a veritable lost art. Nor were many models available for future generations of craftsmen to copy: those statues not ordered destroyed by the Western iconoclasts were



27. Rows of pig jawbones, the remnants of past rites of passage feasts, in the rafters of a Bawömataluo home. Such jawbones are a common sight in traditional Niah homes, and were formerely a mark of status.

28. An ancestral statue shrine on the wall of the former raja's home, Bawömataluo village.

carted off for display in Europe along with weapons, musical instruments, clothing and other examples of traditional Niah culture. Traditional dances, centered on war and conquest, were performed less and less frequently, and soon died out altogether, preserved only in memories of the elder Niah. Though traditional home building remained vital for some time, eventually conventional materials became expensive and hard to obtain; imported plywood and corrugated iron roofing became popular substitutes for hardwood and thatch. Less elaborate architectural styles, imported from the mainland to the port towns, began to make their appearance in the villages. The integration of Nias into the bureaucratic, political and economic framework of the post-colonial Indonesian Republic sped the processes along. Traditional Nias tottered toward extinction.

Then came the tourists. Though Nias had long been host to a dribble of foreign travelers, these adventuresome souls came rarely and stayed briefly. Boat service to Nias was irregular and accomodation was sparse Gunungsitoli had only a few hotels and Telukdalam but a losmen* or two, hardly the facilities to attract big money tourism. Youthful Western "drifter tourists" were the usual fare. Even the construction of an airstrip and the assumption of weekly Merpati Airlines flights and charters in the 1970's did little to increase tourist traffic. Nias was not promoted as a major Indonesian attraction. Most tour agencies remained ignorant of the island's existence. Even Indonesian consulates and embassies in and out of the Southeast Asian region could do little more than point to Nias on a map. All this changed, however, in 1973 when agents of the Holland-America Lines cruise ship company arrived on Nias, looking for a new port of call for their Singapore-based tours. A survey of the island convinced the agents that Bawömataluo, a village of 4,000, 15 kilometers (9 miles) from Telukdalam, was the most suitable tourist destination on the island. The village had some of the best

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* an Indonesian traveler's hostel

preserved traditional southern Nias architecture on the island, including an impressive raja's house (traditionally, every southern village had one large, especially magnificent home for the raja; with the demise of the monarchy system, these structures were reduced to oversized family heirlooms, handed down through the generations; headmen, chosen from the royal families occupy their own homes) with a fine collection of Niah weapons and artifacts. The village was also heir to some impressive stone monuments. More importantly, Bawömataluo was accessible, reached by one of the few asphalt roads on the island.

But houses and megaliths weren't enough; the tourists would need entertainment. How about those legendary Niah war dances? The villagers considered;such dances hadn't been performed since the 1940's. Nevertheless, a few elderly villagers remained who remembered the old steps. In fact, some of the villagers had kept their old dance costumes. Given enough time, young villagers could be taught the dances of old. It could be done!

The villagers of Bawömataluo, led by their headman, agreed to produce a one-to-two hour dance show, plus a few leaps over the hombo, for Rp. 100,000 (in those days about US$220). Thus, on January 19, 1974 the MS Prinsendam docked off Telukdalam and disgorged some 300 passengers. Every available vehicle in the town was rented by local Nitour* tourist personnel to ferry the tourists from Telukdalam up the steep, bumpy road to Bawömataluo. The village, and the performance, proved a success. The Prinsendam called a total of 25 times that year and 13 times each year thereafter until 1979 when she sank off the coast of Alaska. Ship service resumed only in 1982 with the visits of the MS Scandanavia and later the MS Mahsuri. Other ships, such as the Eropa, have also visited the island, but on an occasional basis.

Cruise ship tourism has proved a boon for Bawömataluo. Today a performance-visit fetches Rp. 150,000 ($214 at today's exchange rate). This sum is divided between the eighty or so dancers (Rp. 1,000-$1.40), the five hombo jumpers (Rp. 3,000-$4.30), the village government, the Nias government and a special fund for the restoration and improvement of the village's traditional homes. Negotiations with the cruise companies are handled by the village headman, who also disburses payment. Local transportation and other tour arrangements are now taken care of by his nephew, the Bawömataluo representative for Nitour.

These days, Bawömataluo is one of the most prosperous looking villages in the south. The houses are in good repair. Many of the rooftops glitter with brand-new corrugated iron. The village store is stocked with imported tinned sardines, soap, vinyl table cloths and other relatively expensive items. One entrepeneur has installed a generator and wired the village for electricity; for a fee, villagers can revel in the luxury of lightbulbs, rare except in the port cities.

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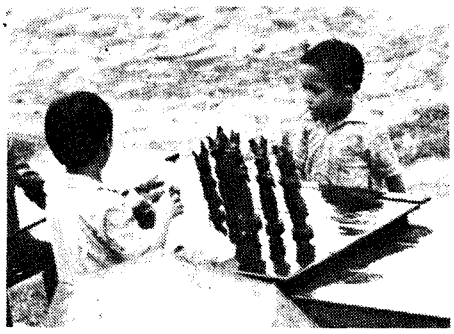
* an Indonesia-wide tour agency



29. Setting up souvenir tables in Bawömataluo.

Tourism may be only partially responsible for such affluence; it is, however, the prime reason for the village's thriving souvenir business. Villagers now manufacture a variety of full size and miniature reproductions of Niah weaponry; spears, knives, gare, and shields. A wide variety of wooden statues, similar to old-style Niah carvings are also made, either reproduced from remaining originals, old photographs, or the villagers's fertile imaginations. Other items include stone statuettes, necklaces, rings, opium scales and duridanga, a pair of resonated bamboo tubes that, when struck on the knee or other hard surface produce a buzzing sound not unlike the Australian aborigone didjeridoo. Kalabubu, by far the most popular tourist item, are manufactured in neighboring Lausa village and imported to Bawömataluo for the twice monthly cruise-ship visits.

A typical visit goes something like this: On the morning of the cruise ship's arrival tables are set up at the town "junction," the intersection of Bawömataluo's two main streets (a departure from the usual one-street village tradition; from the air the village looks a bit like a cross). Souvenirs are neatly arranged on the tables, each vendor specializing in a different craft. When arrival is imminent, the headman, decked out in his best gray safari suit, climbs upon a megalith and admonishes the villagers to be polite and sell from the tables. Order lasts until the first tourists come puffing up the hundred or so steps that lead to Bawömataluo. Children grab an armful of souvenirs from the tables and hurl themselves at the unfortunate bule, hoping to make a quick sale. Other tourists arrive, other vendors join the fray, and the orderly market is quickly transformed into a mass of shouting, pleading, cajoling Niah and, here and there, a bewildered, harassed tourist trying to shake off those children that insist upon hanging on to clothes and camera bags to make a sale.

30. The arrival of a hip tourist in Bawömataluo. Though this particular woman came from the ship MS Scandanavia, her costume is typical of those Westerners who attempt to "go native" on their visits to Indonesia. Unfortunately, such attire, a sarung tied under the armpits, is usually worn only to bathe or sleep, certainly never to visit. The Niah occasionally throw rocks at Western women so dressed.

31. A typical cruise-ship tourist, minutes after arrival in Bawömataluo.

32. A Niah war dance, Bawömataluo.

33. A Bawömataluo dancer, part of one of two differently-costumed dance "teams" that perform in the village's mock battles.

A semblance of order is restored only when the headman's nephew, in his Nitour uniform, mounts a stone table and, bullhorn in hand, tongue-lashes the villagers for their aggresiveness. The tourists are eventually herded to the edges of the junction so that the hombo jumpers* can perform, two jumps per man. Then come the male dancers, their dances explained by Nitour and the ship's tour guide, each using the bullhorn in turn. The latter-day warriors, ranging in age from 18 to 50 run through a series of mass mock-battle dances, shaking their spears and shields, leaping and shouting, moving in generalized rows and circles. The overall effect is not unlike a Hollywood interpretation of a Sioux war dance. The women, next on the agenda, perform in quite a different manner: slow, stately line dances of welcome and celebration. Eyes are downcast. Expressions are immobile. The tourists soon become bored with this slower choreography and begin to consider the souvenirs. Throughout the dances the vendors, knowing they have but two hours to sell their wares, keep the pressure up. Eventually, as always, a few tourists succumb, perhaps purchasing a kalabubu or two, some statues and a few necklaces. Thus the hard-sell is vindicated and will be repeated two weeks hence.

When not selling to the cruise tourists, some of the vendors comb the beaches for surfers at loose ends with their cash, or the docks for the daily load of passengers from

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* these days, jumpers have only to contend with the hombo; bamboo stakes are no longer used.

34. Niah dancer, Bawömataluo.

35. Niah dancer, Bawömataluo.

36. Female dancers, Bawömataluo.

Gunungsitoli and the occasional ship from Sibolga or Padang. Most, however, put away their souvenirs for a few weeks and return to their nilam, rice, coconuts and rubber until the next cruise ship pulls into Telukdalam.

Bawömataluo's prosperity has aroused the ire and jealousy of other villages that have, so to speak, missed the boat. Says Samasai Laoli an elder of nearby Hilisimaetanö:

> In the past we, not Bawömataluo, were the most renowned village in Nias. In battle we always won. Bawömataluo always lost. They copied many of their customs from us. We still have dancers. We still have öröba, kalabubu, gare and fonduru. What we don't have is a raja's house - ours burned down fifty years ago and it was never rebuilt. But the tourists should be coming here.

37. Fahombo stone-jumping, Bawömataluo.

But few tourists come to Hilisaematanö. Occasionally a small group of foreigners, touring the southern villages, will ask to see some dances. But this is rare and other than heirlooms (the headman's assistant has an extensive collection), Hilisimaetanö has little to offer the casual foreign tourist.

Thirty-five kilometers (21 miles) inland, a bone-jarring, two-hour motorcycle ride along one of Nias's many stone tracks, is the village of Hilinawalömazinö, host to one of the biggest old raja's homes on the island (and host to the inhabitants of Orahili when their village was decimated by the Dutch, earlier this century). The current owner, Ondalita Buulölö, is bitter:

> Ten years ago, a representative of the Indonesian government came here and told us this village had been declared a national treasure, on a par with only one or two other villages in all of Indonesia. The government was going to help us restore this house and other village houses, too. The road would be paved. Tourists could come.
>
> So I held a big feast and sacrificed many pigs, as is our custom. The government official left. It has been ten years now,

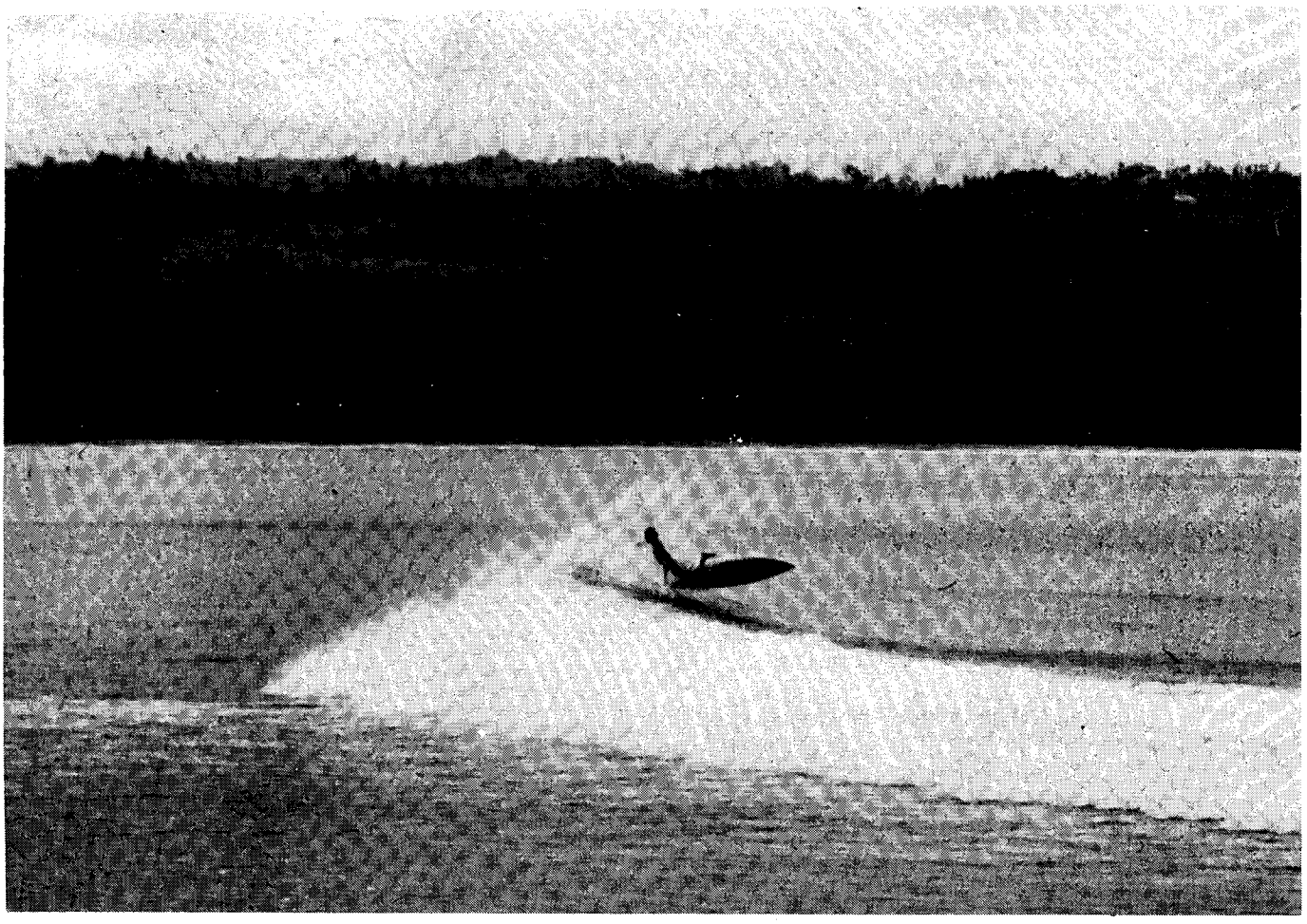
> and nothing has happened. No help. No road. At the most, one or two tourists a year. We have few crafts, but no wonder with so few tourists. Why carve statues if no one is going to buy them? Bawömataluo gets rich while our houses rot.

Hardly a self-starter, Mr. Ondalita's attitude is not uncommon among the Niah, both in his dislike of Bawömataluo's material success and fame and insistence that craft production requires a pre-existing market.

Though visitors to Bawömataluo might come away with the impressions that the arts and crafts of Nias are thriving, in fact the opposite is true. The "souvenir versions" produced at Bawömataluo and some of the surrounding villages are the only versions. The originals have long since disappeared. Outside of Bawömataluo, the villages are bare, save for an occasional bark jacket, knife or basket, and even these last remnants the villagers eagerly offer for sale. When asked if such work is still being produced, the invariable answer is, "we used to, but no longer." Perhaps, without the tourist traffic to Bawömataluo, southern Nias might not have any crafts at all.

Bawömataluo's pre-eminence has not gone unchallenged. When David Attenborough's BBC "Spirit of Asia" production came to Nias to film the dances and fahombo of Bawömataluo, the villagers of nearby Hillinawalö decided to steal the limelight for themselves. Attenborough arrived some weeks before his film crew, took some preliminary shots and negotiated a fee with the headman of Bawömataluo. Then he returned to Britain. When the film crew arrived, without Attenborough, police officers at Telukdalam - native sons of Hillinawalö - directed the crew not to Bawömataluo, but to their own village. The word was spread in Hillinawalö, as far as the film crew was concerned, this was Bawömataluo. Since southern Nias villages have a similar appearance and as the film crew spoke no Niah and little Indonesian, the ploy was easy enough to pull off. While the headman of Bawömataluo waited and fumed, the villagers of Hillinawalö performed their dances and fahombo, a bit rusty, however, from lack of practice. Bewildered by these amateur antics, the film crew packed up after only three days, though they'd planned to stay a week. Still, until they arrived in London and compared their film with Attenborough's photos, they were unaware they had filmed the wrong village. The first inkling of foul play came earlier, however, over Radio Republik Indonesia, which announced the departure of the crew "after filming the dances of Bawömataluo.' This was news to the headman of Bawömataluo; he was still waiting. He fired off a letter to Attenborough, but the damage was done: Hillinawalö had the fee and Hillinawalö was on film. Victory for the underdogs.

Not far from Bawömataluo is the other center of south Nias tourism: Lagundri. Here, however, the emphasis is not cultural but environmental. The tourists that visit Lagundri come for the beach, the coral reefs, the palms, the inexpensive food and accomodation. Mostly, they come for the surfing.



38. Surfing at Jamborae beach, Lagundri, southern Nias.

Few of the tourists that come to Lagundri also visit the villages of the interior. Their interest in culture is peripheral, more as a backdrop to their seaside activities than anything else. A souvenir or two from the beachside peddlers is usually sufficient evidence of their visit to bring home, or for the adventurous, a photograph in front of Botohili, a traditional village only a mile from Lagundri. A former port town, Lagundri has no traditional homes of its own.

The Lagundri-bound tourists trickle in throughout the year: Australians, Europeans, Japanese, an occasional American. In June and July, however, when the big waves break on Nias, the island is innundated with Aussies. The traveler's grapevine, shoestring guides like the Indonesia Handbook and articles in the surfing magazines have spread the word that Lagundri, like Kuta Beach, Bali, is one of the great surfing spots of Southeast Asia.

Lagundri has suffered much. Once the main port of southern Nias, this small Muslim village was wiped out by a tidal wave caused by the explosion of Krakatoa in 1883. Shipping moved to Telukdalam, but Lagundri rebuilt , a smaller, quieter place. Almost

a century later, a portion of the village was burnt to the ground in a feud with Botohili (see page five). Again the village rebuilt. Throughout the trials they remained a tightly knit community, a Muslim island in a Christian sea.

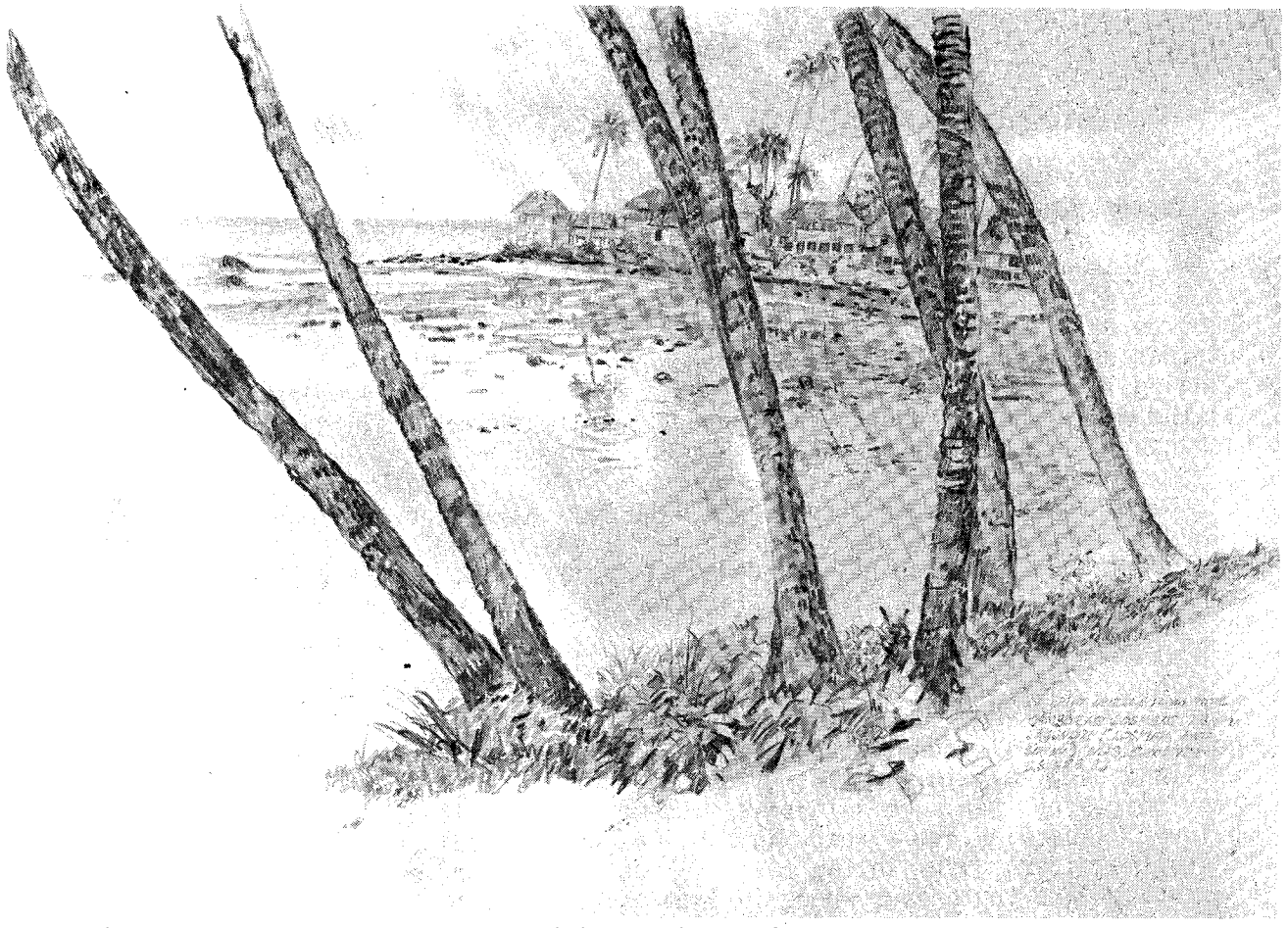
This latest attack has proven harder to resist. The surfers have money, lots of it, and spend it freely. The villagers of Lagundri, like those of Bawömataluo, have been eager to tap this new source of rupiah and thus, have eagerly accomodated tourist demands. Four years ago, Lagundri had only a few losmens. Today the village has nine. Just down the beach, on land owned by the villagers of Botohili a sort of thatch-roofed Waikiki has sprung up. This new Jamborae village is virtually wall-to-wall losmens, some barely ten feet apart, with names like "Honest, No Problem," " Ya' howu" (a Niah greeting meaning "strength") and "Jamborae Villas." More are being built by the month.

39. Australian and Japanese surfers enroute from Gunungsitoli to Lagundri.

40. Jamborae beach, Lagundri, southern Nias.

41. Losmen Ama Yanti, Lagundri

42. Losmen Ama Soni, Jamborae



43. Jamborae beach from Lagundri, southern Nias.

A losmen costs about Rp. 700,000 ($1000) to build, including the cost of the land. A well-to-do Niah farmer, with perhaps twenty hectares of coconut palms, can save such a sum in a year. Those with nilam can gather the necessary capital even faster. And, in the Lagundri/Botohili area quite a number of villagers already have the requisite beachfront property. They have only to knock down their coconut palms and build. Most losmens are of split bamboo and thatch. A few in Lagundri town are of plank and corrugated iron. The new Government losmen (under construction) is of concrete and corrugated iron, a steamy hot-box in this tropical climate.

Ama Ji'itah, a Muslim hotelier from Lagundri, already owns three losmens: two on his own Lagundri property and one on bought land in Jamborae. Like most losmen owners, he and his wife, Ina Ji'itah (Ama and Ina mean father and mother. All Niah with children are referred to as the parents of their firstborn, in this case, Ji'itah), charge Rp.500 ($.70) per bed per night in each of their three-room, double occupancy losmen. Food is the usual fare of the Indonesian tourist route: fruit salads, fried rice and noodles, omelettes, coconut cookies and other delicacies designed to please finicky Western palates. Seafood is a Lagundri specialty, and Ina Ji'itah will often cook up steamed red snapper or lobster for Rp.500 per plate. A week's double occupancy, plus meals, can

easily net a losmen owner Rp. 24,000 ($34), a fair sum in Niah eyes. Little wonder Lagundri residents expect to have a total of 200 losmen in the next five years. Outsiders from Telukdalam and Gunungsitoli and bule foreigners are even trying to buy up land in the Lagundri/ Jamborae area to build hotels. And rumors abound about the new international airport the Indonesian government is said to be planning for south Nias. Lagundri is a potential Kuta Beach, with all the money, hotels and social change that implies, if only the Niah can figure out how to make it happen.

Nias has been spared such a fate thus far only because of the island's inaccessibility and lack of tourist infrastructure. Given an airport capable of handling modern jet traffic, a few international standard hotels and some serious promotion by the Indonesian government this situation may change. Rapidly.

Though mass tourism could bring Nias, and the Indonesian government quite a healthy chunk of foreign exchange the social and cultural costs should be seriously considered beforehand. The Niah culture is not a resiliant one, certainly not as strong as that of the Balinese, who, after thirty odd years of intensive mass tourism are finally beginning to collapse. The Niah are already in decline; the old culture is quite moribund. Though the elders glory in the past, few care to preserve the remnants. The young, like youth everywhere in Indonesia, are attracted to the exotica of the West. Lagundri already has a growing cadre of surfers, trying to adopt the casual, permissive beach culture of Australia, Hawaii and California as their own. Instead of Ya'howu, they greet foreigners with a cheery "G'day mate!" as they paddle out to the reef to wait for the outside breaks. Even in Bawömataluo, the prime village marketer is not a traditional youth but a Jakarta-educated, urban sophisticate, the headman's nephew. The old ways are not his concern; like many Niah elsewhere, he would prefer to see his village change and modernize than remain mired in the past.

Before the future comes to Nias, the island desperately needs a museum or other cultural repository to preserve a record of the island's culture for foreigners and future generations of Niah. No such institution yet exists. The old raja's houses of Bawomataluo or Hilisimaetano could provide the foundation. Artifacts remaining in other Niah villages could be purchased by the museum and displayed there, safe from souvenir hunters. Better, the Nias or Indonesian government could carry out their long-delayed plan to create a showcase village at Hilinawalömazinő or elsewhere, a living museum. Such display villages have already been set up in north Sumatra, among the Karo Batak.

But museums require money, and culture is not a top priority on Nias these days. The Niah have roads to build, bridges to repair, coconut groves to open, harbors to deepen, nilam to plant, churches and mosques

to fund and airports to plan. The Niah would do well, however, to consider their island's unique heritage before mass tourism overtakes them. Afterwards, they will have little choice.

Sincerely,

Bryn Barnard

44. The boots of an Australian tourist.

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Acknowledgements

This report is based on information gathered during a ten-day visit to Nias. Two days were spent in Gunungsitoli at the Wisma Soliga losmen. The proprietor, Ama Phillip, a Chinese-Niah, was my original source for the Story of Gomo, and provided a wealth of information on Niah magic. He also introduced me to Ama Rojama, one of the island's premier scholars on Niah culture, and my main source for Niah symbology and rites of passage rituals. From Gunungsitoli I traveled to Telukdalam and to Losmen Ama Yanti in Lagundri. Ama Yanti is an Islamic religious teacher, a dukun (shaman) and member of the Bawömataluo royal family. He had another version of the Gomo story and loads of historical and religious information. Magic too. Samasa Laoli of Hilisimaetanö was my main information source on Niah clothing and weapons. All were generous with their time, information and hospitality. Also important in the realization of this newsletter were Scott Paauw (who produced it) and Swanny R. Gunadharma (who typed it) of American Language Training, Jakarta. Thanks to all.

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