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Hotel Simpang
Surabaja, East Java
Indonesia
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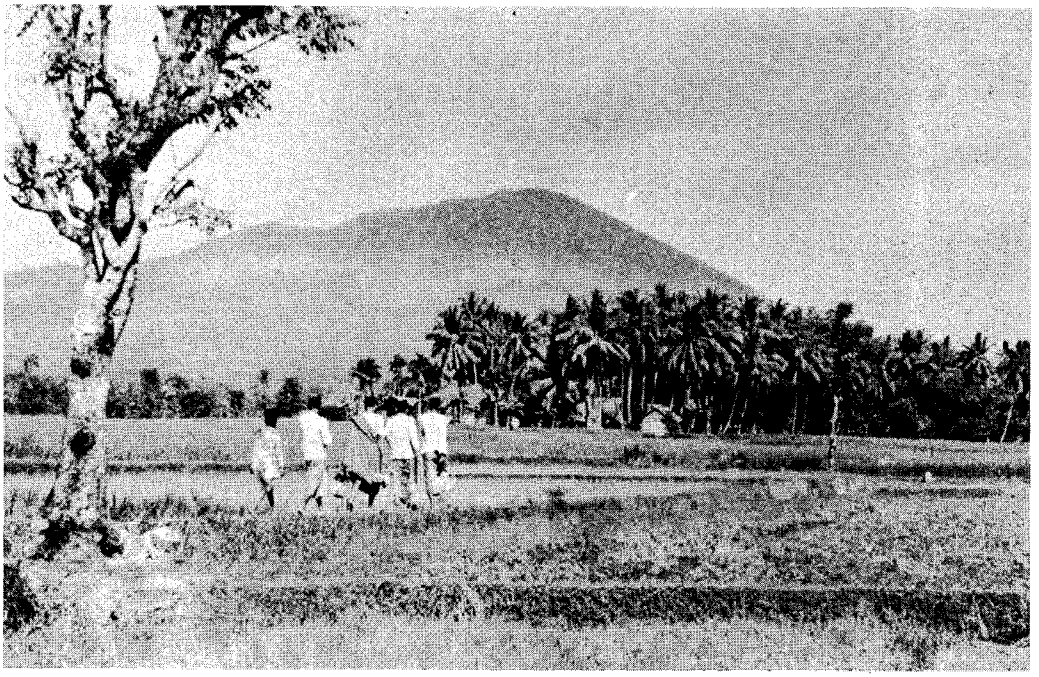
Mr. W. S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Mary and I are now in Surabaja, quite safe after our 500 mile trip from Djakarta. The going was bouncy, but this was due more to our jeep's wobbly underworks than the condition of Java's asphalt roads. Along one stretch up in the bandit country--where road work has nearly come to a halt--it got so bumpy that Mary had trouble hitting the right chords on the little guitar we had picked up at a tiny factory, hidden away in a jungle of banana trees along the Djakarta-Bogor highway. Generally, though, the music was fine, and the roads were good.

Before I turn the task of description over to my snapshots, I would like to say a word about (1) police, (2) rebels, and (3) temples.

From beginning to end, our trip was controlled--though not obstructed--by the ubiquitous, polite State Police. Since the registration and control of foreigners began in earnest last fall, contact with the State Police has become an everyday thing for foreigners. They say that the control measures were



instituted to keep track of Indonesia's large Chinese population, but foreigners of all colors and origins are suspended in the net of checks and controls.

At every hotel and inn along the way, we had to sign a special register for the local D.P.K.N. (Police Security Bureau). We were obliged to surrender our passports and other identification, state our business, our purpose in travelling, our home, and our destination. In some places, we were expected to produce a kind of travel permit, though I later found that law does not require a permit for internal travel. The new control measures give the government information on the whereabouts of nearly a million foreigners. For hotel clerks and the police, it has meant writer's cramp, too much paper work, and an occasional opportunity to practice the magical English language.

In several places, I was interviewed personally by the D.P.K.N., in Bandung for three hours. I had stepped out of my role as tourist to call on the local Masjumi headquarters for an interview with Isa Anshary, organizer of the spreading Anti-Communist Front. When I returned to my hotel, I found a slip telling me to appear at the D.P.K.N. at eight the next morning.

The police commissioner was a serious, intelligent young man with the latin good looks often seen around Bandung. While I searched my memory for facts to illustrate my objectivity in viewing Indonesian affairs, he led me through a maze of questions about my political views. He wanted to know about all my contacts in Bandung. I told him I had no 'contacts', I had friends and acquaintances. I named everyone I knew. As I talked, he checked my information against a dossier bulging with reports, apparently on my activities.

We parted on very good terms. He returned to his paper work, and I went out trying to remember what he had said: "People have become suspicious of your contacts with the Masjumi Party. Why do you go to their office?" "You must remember that Indonesia is a very young country facing its first election. Our political knowledge is not yet perfect, and the political struggle has become very bitter. People are not only suspicious of foreigners, but also of each other." "If a member of the Chinese Communist Embassy staff comes here, I assure you that we follow his activities as closely as we do yours, just to see if he contacts the local communist party." "I advise you not to go to political party offices again. If you want to meet political leaders, go to their homes. There you can talk about politics, weather, or women, I don't care. But if you go to their offices, people won't understand your purpose. They'll come to us, and we'll have trouble explaining. Remember, our country is young and still stupid."

I wondered about that fat file of reports after I left his office. I had been in Bandung a total of three weeks in the past two years. Their observers have been busy!

From my own experience, I cannot complain about Indonesia's State Police. They have been polite, thorough, and intelligent. Several of my friends say that the police often arrest native suspects and hold them for days incommunicado without a specific charge. There are also stories of police brutality toward political prisoners. I wonder how true the rumors are. With these problems in mind, I have slipped a card into my file marked, "Police: check (1) apparent anti-political attitudes, (2) rumor: Police want independence from Ministry of Internal Affairs, (3) political intelligence function."

Insecurity and Rebels

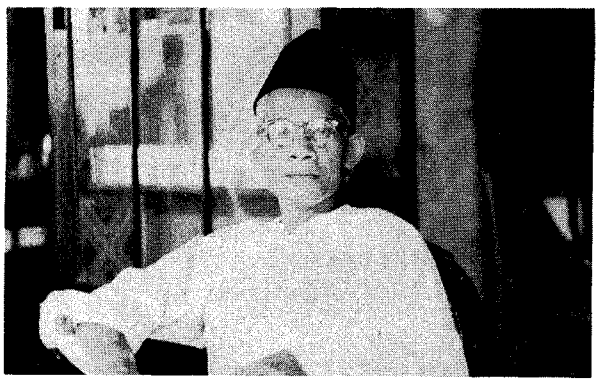
For fifty miles in West and Central Java, we followed the inland highway along the edge of the sphere overrun by the Darul Islam rebels. The revolt--which started in 1948 when local Muslim guerillas refused to accept the cease-fire agreement with the Dutch--is still alternately raging and spluttering. We saw no rebels, only soldiers.

The strip of road from west of Tasikmalaja well into Central Java winds through rugged mountains, canyons, and passes. It is ideal country for rebels, expecially if they are Muslim: sparsely populated, it is near to the richest rice-growing valleys in Indonesia; a good part of the area is fanatically Muslim; and in keeping with an old pattern of rebellion in the Far East, it lies in a "border region", where the competence of two provincial governments and army commands conflicts.

Even under the Ali cabinet, with its well advertised policy of "supression by force", the Darul Islam bands have continued their work of terror and tax collection in the harrassed villages. The army has made the main highway safe during the daylight hours, and sections of the back country have been brought under control by the establishment of garrisons and the work of combat patrols. But at night, the army retires to its stockades and a traveller anywhere is in mortal danger.

Depressing symptoms of disorder are the recently built refugee settlements along the highway. Several of the nearby districts have been nearly depopulated during the time of trouble (they are called the "empty districts"), and their inhabitants have fled to nearby refugee centers or joined the flood of newcomers in the swollen cities of Bandung and Djakarta. As our jeep crept through one refugee settlement--a cluster of thatch shacks spread out on a naked spur near Tjiawi--I felt the grim, sullen stares of the Sundanese refugees, sitting on the steps of their shacks or standing in quiet groups in the street. These are "hill people", always grimmer and tougher than their fellows from the watered valleys, but I thought I felt an added ingredient of unfriendly resentment. At the guard station, we were flagged down by a young soldier. He

hopped on top of the baggage in the back seat and asked if he could hitch a ride to the next garrison. He warned us solemnly not to be caught at night on the road or in one of the refugee villages, "These people are not to be trusted. Get to Tasik tonight and stay there."



"Papa Wirjo"

Before Tasikmalaja, we bumped into the town of Tjiawi and stopped at a little restaurant run by Papa Wirjo. I was delighted to learn that Papa Wirjo is a renowned bow and arrow maker. While he showed me his stock of bamboo shafts being seasoned in a rack above the smoky stove, he told a quick and unhappy story. Tjiawi's rich tapioca industry is dead. The little town has been overrun by refugees from the hills and from the overcrowded Javanese areas to the east. Living is hard. He's along now; all his friends are in jail as suspected Darus Islam sympathizers. I looked around at the whitewashed walls of his restaurant: a picture of a mosque, an arabic inscription, two poor watercolors of the breathtaking hill scenery, two superbly made bamboo bows of simple design. I paid in advance for a hunting bow (which has already arrived in Surabaja), politely refused his offer of lodging for the night, and we rode on toward Tasikmalaja.

Descending into the valley of Tasikmalaja, my thoughts about the beaten, impoverished population of Eastern Priangan were given a jolt. To all outward appearances, this is the most prosperous valley in all of Java. Rich red soil sculpted in high terraces, water everywhere in channels, sluices, and bamboo conduits bridged over the road or even over larger channels running at right angles, neat villages almost hidden in the thickest tangle of palms, bananas and fruit trees. Solid cement-brick-stucco houses gave the look of solid wealth to the smallest villages. The town of Tasikmalaja was buzzing with the noise of commerce and activity, even at the traditionally lazy hour of five in the afternoon.

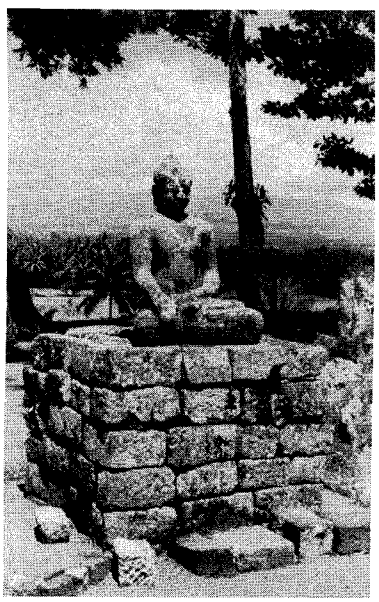
The next morning we had our second blow-out in the low hills past the Central Java border. We were surprised to learn from a passing road inspector that we were still in Darul Islam country. I got busier trying to elevate the jeep, using a small

wrench in place of the jack handle that had been stolen in Bandung. He saw my trouble, signaled a nearby road gang to unhitch the oxen from a big two wheeled cart. With a foreman's concentration, he had the front end of the cart placed under the rear of the jeep. Four workers jumped up and pulled down on the other end. The jeep bounced four feet into the air, our friend quickly slipped a log section under the axle and there we were, elevated and very impressed by the talents of itinerant Indonesian engineers. He warned us to get on to the next big town before dusk.

Buried Temples

One of the glories of Muslim Java is its inheritance of temples and religious sculpture from the Hindu-Buddhist age (approximately 600-1400 A.D.). Sometimes I wonder how beneficial the cultural transition has been: Islam and its pragmatic, legalistic, equalitarian view of life in exchange for Hinduism, which emancipated and glorified the genius of the Javanese for plastic arts.

The question is of course senseless, for the temple country of central and eastern Java is uniformly Muslim and the ruins of temples to the glory of Vishnu, Shiva, and the Buddha have literally sunk into the rich earth. As I scrambled through the temples of Borobudur, Prambanan, Kalasan, Sewu, and several others--awed and excited by the superb quality of the bas reliefs and the stone architecture--I saw, here and there, flower offerings to the ancient gods. But the same offerings are made to Muslim graves and banyan trees, and the bright cut-flowers are for sale in any large market place.



There is still a gap of centuries between the modern Indonesia of Revolution, mosques, and the "moral crisis" and the older Indonesia whose genius is still for the most part buried in silt and volcanic ash. The guide at Borobudur told me that, on the average, thirty-five Indonesians visit the temple every day. While I was taking my snapshots, part of the days quota began scrambling noisily over the resurrected ruin: a group of joking high school students on an outing, a Chinese family--

Buddhist of course--coming to pay homage.

Following the policy of the Dutch before them, Indonesian officials continue the painstaking, painfully slow work of restoration. Prambanan and Borobudur have risen again. A remarkably large marble plaque tells the tourist, in gold letters,

Prambanan Temple
restored
etc,etc.
Dedicated
by
HIS HIGHEST EXCELLENCY

ENGINEER DOCTOR SUKARNO

Orthodox, serious Islam cannot place high value on the civilized idolatry of Hindus and Buddhists, but the syncretic philosophy of President Sukarno apparently does.

It is too early in Indonesia's new history to judge the present or future role of the Hindu-Buddhist culture represented by Central Java's ruins. To the outsider, the ancient culture seems to be more of a memory than a living influence. Here the foreign tourist meets a common paradox; he is inspired and moved by an echo from the past, but the echo is hardly audible to young native students bent on learning the magic of the west, or to the native farmer who bends his furrows around the magnificently carved temple guardian, half buried in his field.

My snapshots follow.

Yours sincerely,

Boyd R. Compton

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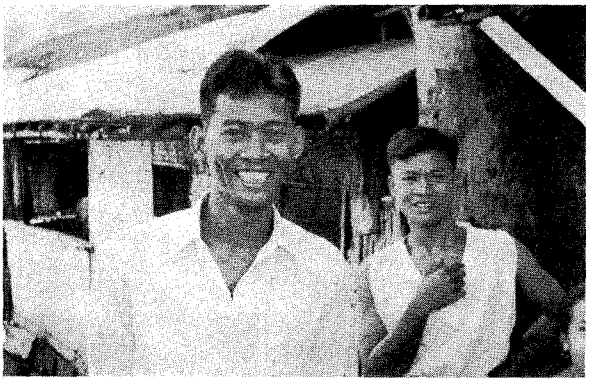
People along the way.

A kampong lane at midday. House rent, about $1.00 U.S.

Children are loved, spoiled, and extremely numerous.



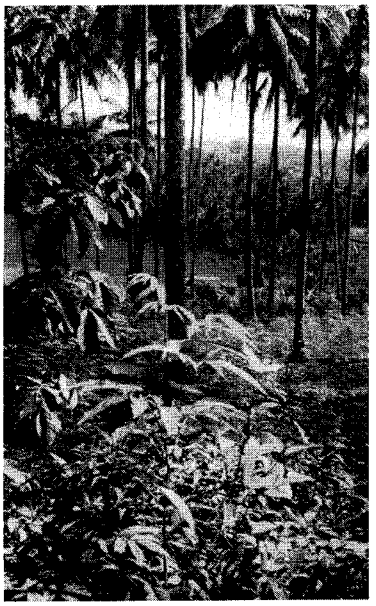
Sarmad wants to become an ulama (Muslim scholar). At eighteen, he is married to a girl of his family's choice. He works as a grammar school teacher.

Kampong people have small jobs.

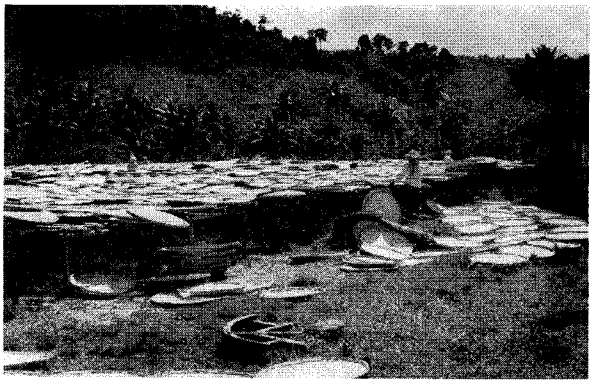
Banded agates (some from Arabia) are popular in the kampongs as ring settings. There is a special stone to bring each type of good fortune.

Literacy is on the increase. School enrollment is more than double that of the Dutch colonial period.

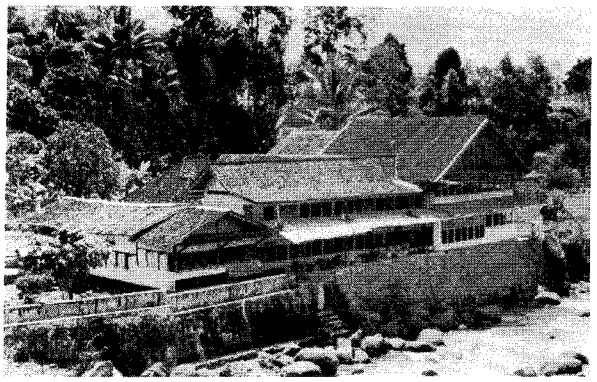
The Indonesian middle class is mostly Chinese.



Hilly country near the West Java border.



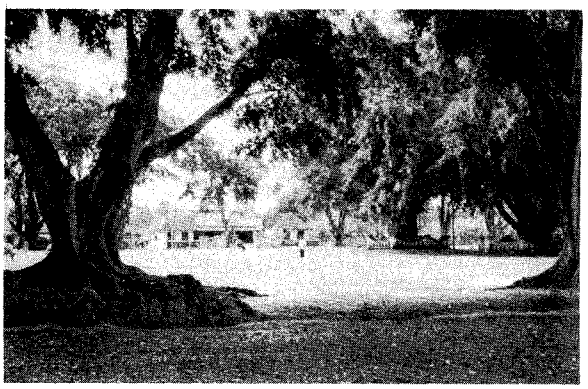
Topioca has a bad smell drying. The scene is in Central Java.



A country inn in Java, run by a Sumatran. Food and service many times better than in the Dutch-style city hotels.

In every town and hamlet, a mosque.

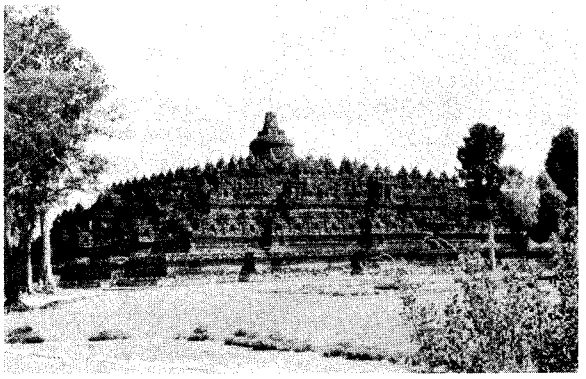
Bottom land is in rice, the hills in cassava and coconuts.

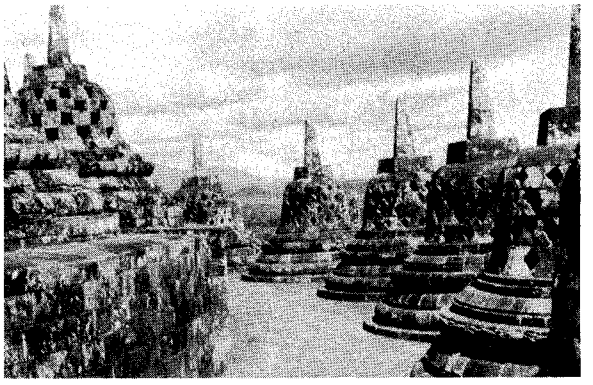


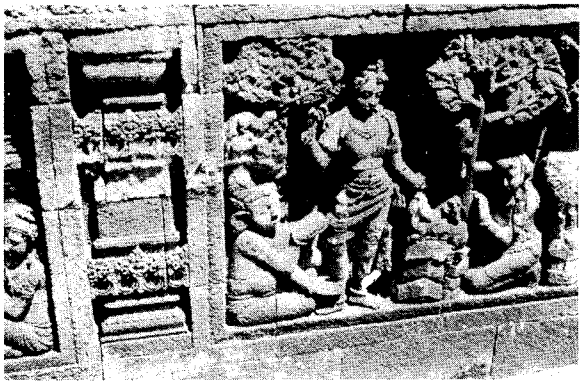
The town square is called the alun-alun. You always find the mosque on one side, the officials office opposite, and one or several waringin trees within.

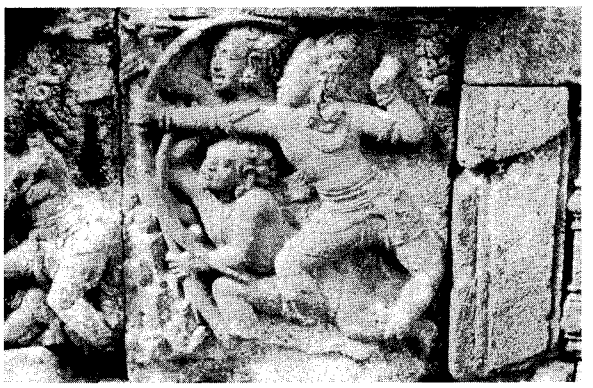
Young people are often bored with rural towns like Banjumas in Central Java. The houses are tucked away in the quiet of the gardens behind white-washed walls.

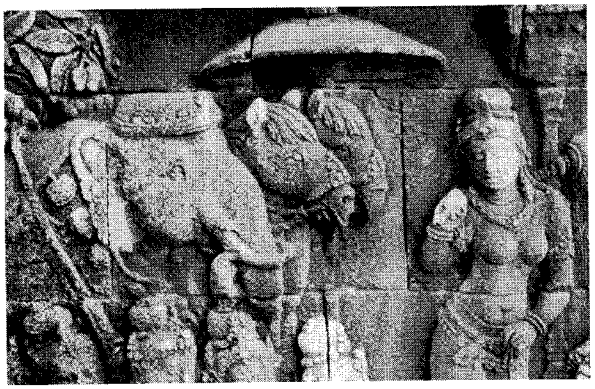
Central Javanese school kids doing their calesthentics. They live within sight of temples like Borobudur.



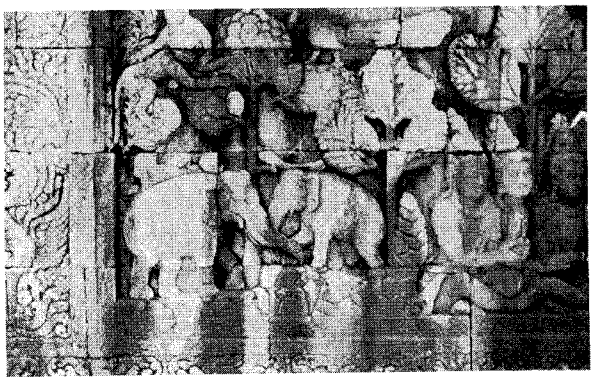


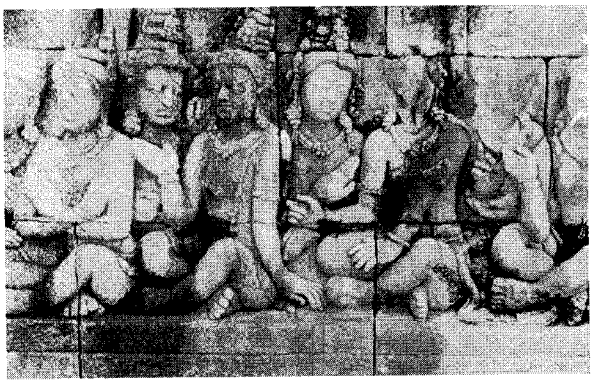






Bas-reliefs of the life of Buddha. Top-left is the work of an exceptional artist. These panels present a fairly detailed picture of life in ninth-century Java.





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