

Re-embarking for ‘Banten’.

The Sultanate that Never Really Surrendered

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In the historical culture of the Netherlands at the start of the twenty-first century, there are remarkable differences and changes in people’s understanding of former heroes of the Dutch colonial expansion in Asia. For example, Jan Pieterszoon Coen (1587-1626) is vehemently criticised because of his excessive use of violence, especially directed against the population of the Banda islands.¹ In 2011 in Coen’s birthplace, Hoorn, the discussion got an extra impetus after a crane accidentally pushed the statue of Coen, dating from 1893, from its pedestal.² After a much-contested restoration, the statue’s new plaque now informs the public that the figure is not ‘undisputed’ because of the ‘violent trade policy’ of Coen.³ On the other hand, the brothers Cornelis (1565-1599) and Frederick de Houtman (1571-1627), famous for their voyage to Bantam in 1596, and often considered to represent the start of the Dutch colonisation of Indonesia, are scarcely mentioned in critical post-colonial discussions. Like Coen, the De Houtman brothers made it into the Dutch news in 2011 after the ‘De Houtman-monument’ in their birthplace of Gouda was damaged, in this case by a truck. One of the gate pillars of the monument – dating from 1880⁴ – was destroyed during a public event of culinary character, named ‘Gouda Culinair’. A few days later the bronze ornaments (depicting the bows of the 4 ships – Mauritius, Hollandia, Amstelredam, Duyvken – used by the De Houtman brothers during their travels to Java) were stolen, probably because of the value of the metal involved.⁵ Soon afterwards the monument was restored to its original state, including the text on the pillar, praising the two brothers as ‘natives and citizens of Gouda’ and ‘founders of the covenant of the Netherlands with the Insulinde’.⁶

This absence of critical reflection, where the site of Bantam (today’s Banten in Indonesia) marks the beginning of Dutch adventurous entrepreneurship, has long characterised Dutch historical culture. The De Houtman brothers representing this site are not known for excessive violence against Indonesians. Their role as ‘starters’ and ‘enablers’ of Dutch empire continues to generate pride, thereby bringing into oblivion actual, meaningful, and typical Dutch colonial violence, taking place at the site of Banten later on. The first journey to Java might not have brought much violence or direct

profit, but the fact that the brothers explored the route to Asia did make clear that the Portuguese could be surpassed and as such they gave an important stimulus to the later Dutch colonial expansion in the area. Their deed, thus, secured a place in the Dutch nationalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, that at that time had gained a strong colonial blend. 'Banten' only served as exotic background. A well-known history wall chart of the early twentieth century depicts the De Houtman brothers and their crew in Banten greeting the local sultan – who for this occasion is transformed into a Black Pete like figure – just after they have landed. The Dutchmen are described as 'the first sailors for the East-Indies'.⁷

A direct line of this type of nationalist appropriation can be drawn to the year 1996. That year a Dutch (80 cent) stamp commemorates Cornelis de Houtman as an explorer.⁸ In 2005, in a popular journal devoted to 25 important days for the Netherlands, the arrival of De Houtman in Bantam is described as a 'decisive moment in the history of the Fatherland'.⁹ That same year the well-known Dutch historian and journalist Jan Blokker and his two sons gave a new 'egalitarian' twist to the nationalist image of the De Houtman brothers in their book *Het Vooroudergevoel* (Ancestral Feeling). They called them real ancestors of the Dutch because of their non-elite background (unlike French, English, Portuguese, and Spanish traders, who were often noblemen).¹⁰ But the fates of the Bantenese were beyond their imagination, and thus that of their readers.

In our project 'Sleeping Beauties, Hidden Forces', we study the history of archaeology and heritage formation in colonial and post-colonial Indonesia. We focus on historical and archaeological sites – like Banten – as a methodological starting point to understand local, national, and transnational dynamics of heritage formation.¹¹ Our analysis deliberately starts at the sites. By studying the encounters and interventions that took place there, and under what constraints, we try to get beyond the 'first in Europe and then elsewhere in the world' perspective.¹² In addition we trace the appropriation of site-related objects, documentation and images from a local to a global level, and back. This site-centred approach helps us to understand how both European concepts and indigenous appropriations of historical and archaeological sites contributed to the development of heritage awareness. There were complex multilayered power-hierarchies at work at these sites, in which European and indigenous knowledge interacted, (sometimes) profited from each other, or developed parallel.¹³

In our project 'Banten' plays a pivotal role, since at the start of the twentieth century local elites (acclaimed family of the sultan's dynasty), Dutch colonial archaeologists and engineers 're-discovered' the site and turned it into a place of nostalgia that would have to refer to local *and* colonial grandeur. In this way, they ignored the fact that at the start of the eighteenth century especially, it had also been a place of extreme colonial violence and

destruction. Meanwhile 'Bantam' – as represented by the De Houtman brothers, and symbolising the beginning point of successful colonial entrepreneurship – was about to become an integral part of European historical cultures of imperialism. In that context, the emphasis came to lie on ethical responsibility of colonising powers for the welfare and development of the colonial subjects. Revealing examples are the sculptures of the journey of the De Houtman by Louis J. Vreugde from the mid 1920s in the Colonial Institute in Amsterdam (now: 'Tropenmuseum'/Tropical Museum) or the painting of Hendrik Paulides made for the Dutch pavilion at the Colonial World Exhibition in Paris of 1931. These show Cornelis de Houtman in Banten, received by the sultan who, now, looks remarkably sophisticated in comparison to the Black Pete on the earlier wall chart.¹⁴ As expressions of colonial propaganda they secured the place of the Dutch in the colonial mission that the European nations envisioned for themselves in the rest of the world.¹⁵ Against that backdrop 'Banten', represented by the De Houtman brothers, and symbolising the start of colonialism, can certainly be regarded a *Lieu de Mémoire of Europe beyond Europe*. Yet, the question *What's Left Behind* is less easy to answer, especially when we (re)turn to the actual site itself.

So let us therefore follow the example of the De Houtman brothers and re-embark for Banten, the Sultanate that, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was a centre of Islam and became one of the biggest trade cities of Southeast Asia.¹⁶ After it was completely destroyed – like a modern Carthage – by Dutch colonial force in the early nineteenth century, how, in which forms, and for whom, did this once powerful city transform into a site of memory and heritage?

Banten as part of the Dutch East Indies

In the early nineteenth century, after the bankruptcy of the Dutch East India Company (voc) and the Napoleonic invasion of the Netherlands, the already complex relation between the sultanate of Banten and the colonial rulers in Batavia had become even more tense, especially because Daendels, who had been governor-general since 1808, started preparing the defence of Java. Expecting an English invasion, he dismantled the old Dutch fortress Speelwijk at Banten and at the same time counted on the support of the Sultan of Banten in building up the general defence, including a new harbour. After his envoy was murdered in the Banten court, Daendels conquered the city in 1808 and banned the Sultan to Ambon.¹⁷ Daendels also decided to destroy the kraton (court), named 'Fort de Diamant' (known as Surasowan).¹⁸ This was, however, easier said than done; people from Bantam simply refused to obey the destruction orders. Only after the colonial

authorities bribed ‘priests’ could the demolition work start.¹⁹ The mosque of Banten and the sultan graves were officially excluded from the demolition work.²⁰ The colonial authorities were obviously well aware of the special religious meaning of these places and buildings for the Javanese. In the following years Banten, the sultan’s family, and the newly assigned sultan continued to cause troubles in the eyes of the colonial rulers in Batavia. In 1813 T.S. Raffles, who was lieutenant-governor of Java between 1811 and 1816, therefore decided to abolish the Sultanate.²¹ Nearby Serang now became the administrative centre of the region, although on location, in Banten, some traces of the former court remained visible. Its central building was only demolished in 1832. This was the year that the colonial authorities banned the last member of the sultan’s family still living in Banten because, accordingly, he had committed an act of piracy. Until then inhabitants of Banten had refused to touch the building; they considered it sacred.²²

The earliest depiction and description of the ruined kraton of Banten dates from the late 1830s and was published as a travelogue in the mid 1840s. The Dutch official C.W.M. van de Velde wrote it. After visiting the city he draws the conclusion that its old grandeur had disappeared. He notices the recent ruination of buildings, including the former sultans palace, and states that they are potentially attractive for antiquarians. He furthermore visits the Sultan graves and the mosque and also notes a Dutch flag waving on the remnants of the former Dutch fortress Steenwijk.²³ A second description dates from 1859 and makes clear how a quarter of a century later the punishment of the sultanate of Banten by the colonial state continued to reverberate on location. In his travel diary *Neêrlands-Oost-Indië – Reizen* the Dutch Minister S.A. Buddingh included a drawing that shows a rather peaceful place with ruined walls and piles of rubble overgrown by vegetation. Buddingh does not mention the destruction of the kraton explicitly. He only incidentally states that it was still there in 1832, whereas now only one wall was left. From local inhabitants he learns that women had built it. Buddingh subsequently describes the mosque and its minaret, the graves of the sultan’s family, and the local worshipping of a Portuguese gun. He also goes on to mention, again incidentally, that the last sultan was exiled in 1832 because he was found guilty of piracy.²⁴ To Buddingh, the site of ‘Oud-Bantam’ (Old Bantam) symbolised ‘our first possession on Java’ which was ‘full of rich memories’. Walking around in the ruins of Banten, which also included the Dutch fortress Speelwijk, he could imagine seeing ‘strolling around the ghosts’ of Dutchman from the era of the early colonial Dutch expansion, such as Houtman, Both, and Coen.²⁵

At the start of the twentieth century Banten, with its old colonial buildings and graves, the ruins of the kraton, the mosque, the holy graves, and its old Chinese temple gained new meanings and attracted the attention of archaeologists. In 1902 the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences, the then

illustrious learned society based in Batavia, dating from 1778, published a map named 'Oud Banten' that included the plan of the former kraton.²⁶ Around the same time, the new regent of Serang, Achmad Djajadiningrat – whose grandfather was related to the sultanate of Bantam – shortly after his instalment as regent in 1901, developed interest in the historical remains of 'the capital of the sultanate' as well. Achmad's interest was fired by the stories about the history of the sultanate, told to him by his grandfather and other family-members. Among these must have been those of his great grandmother, Ratu Situ, who had been brought up in the sultan's kraton, and who had memories of the sultan's abolishment in 1832. Achmad belonged to the privileged Javanese elite-sons of that time who combined a strong Javanese Islamic education with an European education. He had been one of the 'house' pupils of the famous Arabist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, and through that contact, he could invite the Dutch ethnographer C.M. Pleyte to photograph the sultan graves of Bantam. Although this act of documenting the site had no direct results, in Achmad's view it awakened the interest of the colonial authorities in the site.²⁷

In 1911, after governor-general A.W.F. Idenburg visited the place, the colonial state initiated 'care' for the site. Yet, the focus was mainly directed towards the colonial architecture on location, and the result, at least at first sight, of an intriguing collaboration. The Museum of the Batavian Society, the colonial Department of Public Works (Openbare Werken), and Achmad Djajadiningrat, the regent of Serang, collaborated to take measures to stop the decay of the former Dutch fortress.²⁸ In colonial circles this focus was self-evident. The colonial archaeologist V.I. van de Wall described this fortress a few years later as a 'material remnant of the settlement of power of the Company (VOC) in Bantam'.²⁹ However, according to Achmad Djajadiningrat, the general interest in the site, once it was taken up as a project, soon – and at his suggestion – broadened to include the ruins of the kraton, including the so-called Fort Diamant and to the sultan's graves. In 1913, J. Perquin, technical inspector of the newly founded Colonial Archaeological Service (1913), started his works on the restoration of these graves.³⁰

Inspired by their own family histories and local historical culture in Bantam, the Djajadiningrat's family felt strongly connected to the histories and power of the sultanate in itself. They were, moreover, in the position to stimulate and engage with the various religious and colonial interests in the site, and its various components. The sultanate's graves had been, and would remain important sacred sites, attracting many pilgrims, especially during Lebaran.³¹ Achmad Djajadiningrat's younger brother, Hoesein, also a pupil of Snouck Hurgronje, and later on a student of other Leiden scholars, would defend his PhD-thesis on Bantam's history at the University of Leiden in 1913. He became the first Indonesian to do so, and his thesis was, in fact, a critical study of the ancient Javanese chronicle *Sedjarah Banten* (the his-

tory of Banten), denouncing it, following Leiden philological tradition, as an untrustworthy source full of myth-making.³² However, in Solo in 1919, Hoesein retold some of Banten's site-related local memories as local heritage at the first congress of language, geography, and ethnography.³³

While the site reveals various local engagements, from the late 1920s, a conservative interest in the colonial dimensions of the site seemed to become more dominant. In 1930, during a visit to the site of the Dutch cultural organisation ANV (Algemeen-Nederlands Verbond) a Dutch cavalry call was played 'for the first time after a century', thus stressing its colonial military significance.³⁴ Meanwhile, Banten had become a touristic attraction as well. In 1930 the colonial archaeological service even provided the visitors with a small guide in order to explain the history of 'Oud-Banten' and the structures that could be admired on location. New transportation infrastructures, developed by the colonial state, were an important additional incentive. From Batavia the site could be reached by car in two hours, or by train in two and an half hours. Van de Wall, the author of the guide, described contemporary Banten as 'silent and abandoned', and 'the inhabitants have only former glory to be proud of'.³⁵ He barely mentioned colonial violence.³⁶ For Van de Wall, the indigenous 'quarrel and discord' were, on the other hand, the main factors responsible for the fall of the Banten sultanate.³⁷ The co-author of the reprinted guide, the new regent of Serang R.T.A.A. Soeria Nata Atmadja, did not refer to decadence or despotism of the sultans, but stressed external factors for decline. He argued that the site of Banten, through circumstances, had gained a role comparable to Cinderella.³⁸ His reference to a fairy tale in which achieving recognition after a period of unjust oppression plays a central role, was at that time a rare but also clear anti-colonial statement.

Contemporary Indonesian Banten

In contemporary Indonesian Banten the physical traces of the past are omnipresent.³⁹ The diverse historical sites described in the first tourist guide of 1930 – like the VOC-fortress and the kraton ruined by colonial force – now all have the status of official heritage sites. On location shields mention that they are officially protected on the basis of the Indonesian Monument Act of 2010. Most tourists are Indonesian and visit in the first place the old mosque (Masjit Agung) and the sultans graves.⁴⁰ The ruined kraton at first sight seems to function as a playground for children and a hang-out for local teenagers.

In the 1980s the Indonesian government of president Soeharto, with the help of the Ford Foundation, supported the set-up of a regional Museum Situs Kepurbakalaan Banten Lama (Museum of the Archaeological Site

Old Banten), which opened in 1985.⁴¹ It is an excellent site to study the contemporary Indonesian 'official' historical perspective on Banten. The museum combines, like many other regional museums in Indonesia, archaeological, numismatic, ethnographic, and historical collections. One of the central displays stresses the grandeur of the former city showing Banten as a centre of both inter- and outer-Asian trade, including 'Bengala, Melayu, Belanda, Cina, Turki, Mesir, Abesinia, Gujarat, Inggris, Portugis, Goa'. The De Houtman brothers are not mentioned, but the Dutch are. Yet they figure as one of the many foreign trader groups who came to the city. The following Dutch colonial presence and the later violent destructions of the city are not ignored, but in the first place presented as a backdrop for reconstructing the history and culture of the sultanate. Thus, on location in the regional museum both Dutch colonial pride and Dutch colonial violence are marginalised in an effective way.⁴²

This double marginalisation of the Dutch interventions at the site can also be traced in the Museum Nasional in Jakarta, formerly the museum of the Batavian Society. One of the highlights of this museum is the so-called 'Banten Gamelan' or 'Sukarame Gamelan'. It consists of a number of percussion instruments (drums, xylophones, and bronze gongs) and a two-stringed violin. The wooden frames of the percussion instruments are beautifully carved with twig, flower, and bird motives, and painted in red and gold. In the museum the gamelan is part of the ethnographic collection, particularly the ethnography west-Java.⁴³ The museum plaque explains it as a musical instrument with a Javanese origin. It has 'its own unique musical sound' which, so we read, is 'quite unlike the Western tuning system'. The object thus primarily exemplifies the cultural autonomy of Java. The text mentions further that the gamelan 'belonged to the Sultanate of Banten' but leaves out the glorious history of this sultanate.⁴⁴ There is no information about the transfer of the gamelan to the Museum of the Batavian Society in 1833 following the destruction of the kraton by colonial force.⁴⁵ One might consider the text on the shield a clear example of how the 'musealisation' of objects can turn the history and culture of people defeated by the Dutch into ethnographic 'traditions', in both colonial and post-colonial times.⁴⁶ But in Banten itself an important additional message is conveyed that helps us to understand more thoroughly how local heritage entrepreneurs in the late 1980s, supported by Indonesian and French archaeological research, wanted Indonesians to appreciate Banten and its traditions. The archaeological guide of Banten, published in 1990 in collaboration by the Pusat Penelitian Arkeologi Nasional (National Centre for Archaeological Research) in Jakarta and the Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient introduces the site as follows:

The spirit of Banten is not dead; it is still found in the Muslim schools [...] where this Islamic tradition, with which the Banten civilisation

lives on. It is also seen in the indomitable will of its inhabitants who struggled so often [...] to free their kingdom [...]. There has been a revolt in Banten every twenty years, is a statement still made proudly today [...]: its history, more than that of any other region of Indonesia, is marked by uprisings, sparked off by the belief that control of its original destiny has been lost. This is the spirit for the visitor to capture.⁴⁷

Today, at the local level a new initiative strongly supports this perspective. The Bantenology Foundation at the Maulana Hasanudin Islamic Institute in Serang develops a plan to rebuild the palaces.⁴⁸ The head of this institute, Mufti Ali, stressed in 2013 the need to build replicas of the Kraton Surosawan and Kraton Kaibon palaces on the original site in Banten as symbols of the sultanate's past glory. According to Yadi Ahyadi, a Banten historian, this reconstruction can prove how Banten, between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, had become a melting pot with high tolerance in religious issues but delivering strong resistance against the Dutch colonial government. According to Yadi the sultanate was never defeated despite the absence of the sultans. In an interview in the Jakarta Post he stated:

The character of the Banten sultanate was much different from other regions that still maintain their sultanate as of today. Banten never bowed to the Dutch colonial government so that governor H.W. Daendels began to destroy the Sultanate from 1808 and then burned down the Surosawan and the Kaibon royal palaces.⁴⁹

In the same newspaper, Tubagus Ismetullah Al Abbas, who claims to be a descendant of the sultans, supports the plan. Expressing a fairly typical belief, he has claimed that documents of the original architectural design of the palaces are stored 'in a museum in the Netherlands'.⁵⁰ This is probably not the case, but at the same time the expectation, which we encountered during our research at several sites, is an indication for the continuing power of the image of the Dutch colonial state both as a taker of, and as a caretaker for heritage, instead of a force that time and again deliberately destroyed it.

The start of Dutch colonialism and the unbroken spirit of 'Banten'

'Banten' in the isolation of contemporary Dutch historical culture is – inspired by late nineteenth century nationalism – primarily represented by the successful explorations of the De Houtman brothers in, what is today, South-east Asia. This focus on Banten as the start of Dutch colonialism helped erasing from public memory both the European character of colonialism and the later destructive interventions of the colonial state in Banten (in particular of Daendels). A direct line can be drawn from this contemporary

Dutch historical culture to the heritage policies developed by the ‘caring’ colonial state in Banten since the early twentieth century, which thus disguised its earlier violent interventions on location. Although these policies included the history of Islam and the sultanate, the colonial connection between the Netherlands and Banten was of primary importance.

Re-embarking to Banten leads to a better understanding of the internal dynamics in the contemporary Indonesian national and local historical culture. There the religious traditions, and the cosmopolitan traders’ spirit of the Banten Sultanate are of crucial importance whereas the colonial past (including the destruction by Daendels) has been marginalised. Several factors paved the way for this marginalisation. These included the local inhabitants’ refusal to demolish parts of the kraton in the early nineteenth century, but also, paradoxically, heritage initiatives from late colonial times, based on collaborations between local elites (acclaimed family of the sultan’s dynasty), Dutch colonial archaeologists, and engineers. As a result, there exists a strong perception that ‘Banten’, once a strong trade centre – where the Dutch were one of many participants, and a tolerant melting pot – stands for an unbroken regional, heroic spirit going back to the early history of the sultans and the arrival of Islam. In Indonesia, ‘Banten’ represents far more than a *Lieu de Mémoire of Europe beyond Europe*.

There is an irony in this multi-vocal history of Banten as a site of memory. In the end, both the Dutch and Indonesian historical cultural traditions work in a similar manner. Both emphasise late sixteenth century Banten as the core and starting point to understand and polish local and national histories. Both do so to enable a history of continuous cosmopolitan, entrepreneurial spirit and strength. Violence – overpowering, all destructive violence – has no place in these idyllic site-related histories.