

From Distant Tales

From Distant Tales:
Archaeology and Ethnohistory
in the Highlands of Sumatra

Edited by

Dominik Bonatz, John Miksic, J. David Neidel,
Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz

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P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION

The chapters in this volume represent a selection of papers given at a workshop entitled “From Distant Tales - Archaeology and Ethnohistory in the Highlands of Sumatra”, which took place in late September 2006 at the Free University of Berlin.¹ The meeting was a highly successful one, attracting 26 regional specialists from ten different countries who joined together for three days to discuss the historical dynamics of the interior region of this large and strategically important island. Representing a range of key academic disciplines, the participants drew upon a rich array of materials: anthropologists primarily relied on oral sources but also reassessed historical ethnographies, linguists and historians presented newly translated documents, while archaeologists and art historians highlighted the material culture and their excavated finds. This interdisciplinary approach provided multiple angles of illumination, allowing maximum light to be cast on the societies of the island’s interior, which have until now remained in the shadows of regional, historical scholarship.

The conference organizers designed this event to examine the dynamics of the highland societies within the larger regional context, particularly in relation to their lowland neighbours. Until now the highland-lowland relationship has been viewed as one in which the lowlands were the centres of civilization, dominating the culturally-fragmented, more egalitarian settlements of the highlands. This development of “complex societies” and “tribal or segmented groups” have been interpreted according to a number of theoretical models. Unilinear evolutionary perspectives, which have long been present in Indonesian archaeology (Miksic 2004a: 235-236), explain these two types of social organization as reflecting different stages along the transition from primitive to more advanced civilizations with diffusion from the Indian Sub-Continent typically serving as the agent of change. More popular in anthropology and archaeology today are models of centre-

¹ The workshop was staged with generous financial support from several institutions. We gratefully acknowledge the Volkswagen Stiftung, the Free University of Berlin, and the Asia Research Center of the National University of Singapore.

periphery relations which draw upon World Systems Theory. The benefit of this interpretive approach is that different societies are linked through economic and political processes as parts of a single spatio-temporal system, with the characteristics of each society emerging as a result of that relationship.

Recent comparative studies, however, have demonstrated that centre-periphery concepts are not necessarily consistent with forms of unequal exchange (cf. Rowlands; Larsen/Kristiansen 1987; Champion 1989; Kardulias 1999). Instead, they have shown that the nature of exchange is often complex and accompanied by the pursuit of profits and avoidance of risks by all actors in the system. It is therefore necessary not only to develop an appropriate analysis for the economy of the core area, but also to find ways of characterising the economy of the periphery and describing transformations that are largely internal to it. Because none of these studies touched upon the Indonesian archipelago, the conference organizers thought that the analysis of long-distance relationships in Sumatra, especially between highland and lowland societies, with their markedly different patterns of social or economic organisation, could prove to be an important contribution to the understanding of centre-periphery relations within the Southeast Asian regional context.

Complicating these theoretical ambitions, however, is a more basic, underlying question of whether conventional wisdom about the nature of pre-colonial highland societies is indeed correct. To what extent were the lowland polities really politically and demographically dominant to the highlands as typically supposed? Or is this characterization in fact a historical misrepresentation, resulting from the biases and errors of earlier generations of scholars? There is significant geographical, archaeological, and ethnographic evidence to support this latter interpretation, but the jury remains out with scholars representing both sides of this debate present in the following chapters.

In order to provide the context for exploring these broader theoretical and empirical issues, the introduction continues with a brief overview of the geography of Sumatra. It then turns to an overview of the history of scholarship, which enables us to see how research evolved, and how intellectual biases, which this volume strives to rectify, crept into the study of this large island. Finally, it provides summaries of the chapters in this book, all of which contribute to these central concerns. With such a wealth of new materials and analyses, the conference and these proceedings reveal a much more complex history of this region than was previously understood and point to topics in need of future research.

Geographical Context

Sumatra is the sixth largest island in the world (fig. 1-1), measuring approximately 1800 km in length and a maximum of 450 km in width. The entire island, which is bisected by the equator, is tropical in nature. It is affected by a monsoonal wind system, which leads to wet and dry seasons, though rainfall remains high year round in most locations. The island supports a number of different ecosystem types, with extremely high levels of species richness - though much has been lost in recent years due to rampant, wide-scale exploitation.

The island lies on the western edge of the Sunda Shelf, a large extension of continental Southeast Asia, consisting of Sumatra, Borneo, Java, and other islands of western Indonesia. During glacial periods, when ocean levels were lower, portions of the Sunda Shelf that are currently submerged under the South China Sea connected these islands to one another and the mainland, making one large land mass. At current times, Sumatra lies separated from the Malay Peninsula by the Straits of Malacca, Java by the Sunda Strait, and Borneo by the Karimata Strait.

The island of Sumatra can be roughly divided into three major geographical regions: the central Barisan Mountains (Bukit Barisan), the western coastal strip, and the eastern plain. The Barisan Mountains run like a backbone along practically the entire length of Sumatra on the western side of the island. The range was lifted and folded by the subduction of the Indian Ocean plate under the Sunda Shelf, giving rise to much volcanism in the region. The Barisan Mountains actually consists of two parallel ranges (Verstappen 1973; Whitten et al. 2000). The western range is more or less continuous, with elevations averaging about 2000 m, while the eastern one is more broken with elevations ranging from 800 to 1500 m. Between the two ranges lies a series of rift valleys, which a number of highland groups consider their original homelands (Miksic 1985: 425; Scholz 1987: 460; Reid 1997; Neidel 2006). This region is the central concern of this book.

The western coastal strip is a narrow shelf of land that lies to the west of the Barisan Mountains, disappearing completely in places where the mountains drop directly into the sea. Rivers that cross the western coastal strip tend to be relatively small and rapid, limiting their utility for transportation. This coast also has relatively large waves and poor harborage due to a deep ocean depression that lies between Sumatra and the series of small western islands, including Enggano, Mentawai, and Nias (Whitten et al. 2000). Nevertheless this coast has played an important role in interregional trade dating back to at least the 10th century, as

evidenced by Tamil and Arab inscriptions (Drakard 1990; Guillot 1998). Exchange goods have historically made their way from the west coast to the highlands by way of a series of mountain paths, though the steepness and potential hostility of highland peoples have seriously limited access to the interior regions throughout history.

The eastern side of the island consists of a broad plain which was formed over the millenia by alluvial sediments carried from the Barisan Mountains by the great Sumatran rivers, including the Musi and Batanghari. These rivers are navigable for hundreds of kilometers upstream. Much of the communications and transportation between the highlands and lowlands in the past happened by way of the rivers, which formed natural highways to the foothills of the Barisan range, where they connected with footpaths that headed to the highlands. Major conjunctions of these rivers were typically picked as settlement sites, including those associated with Srivijaya and the other kingdoms that began to form around the 7th century CE.

The History of Research in Highland Sumatra

Sumatra has been known to outsiders for 2,000 years. The first-century AD Greek cosmographer Claudius Ptolemaeus (Ptolemy) included data on “Baroussae”, corresponding to the northern and northwestern coasts of the island. Chinese and Indians of the same period were aware of the rare and precious commodities found in Suvarnadvipa, the “Isle of Gold”. The first foreigner to document a period of residence there was Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Yijing who spent several years studying Buddhism and Sanskrit in Palembang and Malayu between 672 and 695. It was several hundred years later before medieval travellers such as Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta described their stays of several months in its ports.

These writers are no doubt representative of all early visitors to Sumatra: they saw only swampy estuaries where they were quarantined in specially reserved enclaves. The first Europeans to establish themselves in Sumatra were similarly restricted to the tidal zone. The Dutch established a trading office in Jambi in 1616 and in Palembang during the following year. The English tried to establish a base on Pulau Lagundi, Lampung, in 1624, but abandoned it the next year. The Dutch built an office at Padang on the west coast, which was burned in 1669 (Lekkerkerker 1916: 319), and another in Siak on the east coast in 1755. During this long period they seldom ventured out of sight of the sails of their ships.

The first eyewitness accounts of the Sumatran hinterland were set down in the late 18th century. In 1770 a British botanist, Charles Miller,

journeyed to the watershed between the British base in Bengkulu and Palembang (Marsden 1966: 363). Then in 1778 he travelled from the west coast of Tapanuli into the Batak region. During this second journey, his party reached a “very extensive plain, on the banks of a large river which empties itself into the straits of Malacca.” John Marsden, son of William, the East India Company employee and author of the first *History of Sumatra* (first published in 1783), later visited the same area, and mentions seeing “two old monuments in stone, one the figure of a man, the other of a man on an elephant” (Marsden 1966: 373). These observations suggest that Miller and Marsden reached Padang Lawas. In 1800 another British company servant, Charles Campbell, reached Lake Kerinci (Marsden 1966: 304-306). These were feats of exploration, but did not result in substantial publications.

In 1818 Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, British governor of Bencoolen (modern-day Bengkulu), made two expeditions into the hinterland. These were both justified by political concerns related to the British settlement on the coast, but he took the opportunity to collect information about the people and environment. His first journey took him to Pasemah, now known to have been the home of one of Sumatra’s most important prehistoric societies. Relations between the British and Pasemah inhabitants had been hostile, but Raffles felt that the fault lay with the British rather than the local population, and so he set out to repair them. This expedition resulted in the famous discovery of the gigantic parasitic flower now known by the botanic name of *Rafflesia arnoldi*, after Raffles and his botanist.

Raffles formed a very favorable impression of Pasemah.

We found ourselves in an immense amphitheatre surrounded by mountains ten and twelve thousand feet high; the soil on which we stood rich beyond description and vegetation luxuriant and brilliant in every direction. The people, too, seemed a new race, far superior to those on the coast - tall, stout and ingenuous. They received us most hospitably [...] I was not a little gratified to find everything the reverse of what had been represented to me. I found them reasonable and industrious, an agricultural race more sinned against than sinning [...]. (Wurtzburg 1984: 440-441)

Shortly after returning from Pasemah, Raffles sent Captain Salmon on another expedition to cross the island from Bencoolen, on the southwest coast, to Palembang, on the east, the first time that this journey had been documented. Even before the results of this expedition were reported, he himself went to make the first study of the Minangkabau highlands, the home of the kingdom regarded at that time as the most ancient and important in the island, to which other Sumatran kings sent envoys to

request recognition. William Marsden had devoted much attention to this region, recording the presence of a large inscription at Priangan (Marsden 1966: 352), but all his information was based on secondary sources. Raffles set off from the port of Padang with 50 soldiers, 200 porters, all his servants, his wife Sophia, and his friend Thomas Horsfield, a medical doctor and naturalist. He was escorted by two Minangkabau princes and about 300 of their followers.

In the Minang highlands, he found “quite classical ground”, and refers to “the ruins of an ancient city”, “the wreck of a great empire”, “traces of a former higher state of civilization”, etc. (Wurtzburg 1984: 445-446), but unfortunately does not give further details. The Minang highlands came under Dutch authority in 1833, but it would be decades before any information could be added to Raffles’ descriptions of Minangkabau history and culture.

The north coast of Sumatra had attracted numerous foreigners with the camphor and gold found in the mountains, but, probably repelled by tales of cannibalism, the visitors never ventured into the highlands. No outsider saw the great lake of Toba in the North Sumatran highlands until Dr. H. Neubronner van der Tuuk found his way there in 1853. It was another 15 years before the next European, the *controleur* J. A. M. Baron Cats van de Raet, became the second.

The mountain-climber and volcanologist Frans Junghuhn wrote an early account of the Batak in 1847. Two years later, an article appeared in English about the Bataks of the Padang Lawas region (Willer 1849). In 1865, the Dutch sent a military expedition to Asahan, where Lake Toba’s outlet runs to the Straits of Malacca. Then in 1872, they made contact with the Karo (Cats van de Raet 1875). A provisional outpost was formed at Tarutung in 1872, but only exerted real authority from 1890.

The plateau south of Lake Toba was a stronghold of organized resistance to the Dutch. They established a representative at Portibi, Padang Lawas, during a brief period of influence in 1839-1841; then ensued a period of 40 years during which Dutch made only occasional military forays before a *controleur* was stationed there in 1879. The Dutch exerted nominal control of the Angkola-Sipirok-Mandailing region from 1832 to 1837, then evacuated it during the Padri Wars. A Christian mission was set up there in 1857. A rebellion erupted in the name of a local ruler with the title Sisingamangaraja from 1877 to 1889, against whom the Dutch mounted four military expeditions before finally subduing the area. *Controleurs* were appointed for the area northeast of Lake Toba in 1892, but their offices only became operational in the period between 1896 and 1906. The Dutch attacked the Daiiri area inland from the

ancient port of Barus numerous times before finally establishing administrative control there in 1904. Other officials were stationed at the now-popular tourist resort on the island of Samosir in 1906; Sidikalang in 1906; and Habinsaran in 1908.

The administrator Baron Cats van de Raet (1875) conducted some of the first journeys through the highlands north of Lake Toba in 1866 and 1867, but the Simelungun and Karo areas were only brought under Dutch administration in 1915 (Lekkerkerker 1916). In 1894, books with sensationalistic titles such as *Besuch bei den Kannibalen Sumatras* by Joachim Freiherr Brenner von Felsach were still being published in Europe, but by the early 20th century scholars such as M. Joustra were compiling systematic ethnographies and dictionaries of Batak groups (Joustra 1912, 1926).

Frans Junghuhn (1847), H. von Rosenberg (1855), and J. B. Neumann (1855) provided the first detailed information about the very important Padang Lawas area of North Sumatra. This region of approximately 1,500 square kilometers lies at the source of the Panai River, which flows east to the Straits of Malacca. The easiest land route across Sumatra leads from here to the port of Sibolga on the west coast via Gunung Tua and Padang Sidempuan. This geographical situation made the Padang Lawas area economically strategic. The kingdom of Panai is mentioned in the Tanjor inscription of 1030 which commemorates the Chola empire's conquest of Srivijaya, and the *Desawarnana*, a 14th-century Javanese text, claims Panai as a dependency of the Javanese kingdom Majapahit (Wolters 1967: 193). Dutch sources began to record the presence of antiquities here in the 1880s.

Further south, the Rejang valley came under Dutch rule in 1860. Only thereafter was it discovered that Rejang and the nearby Lebong valley had for centuries been exploited by indigenous gold miners. The Pasemah plateau was annexed in the years 1864-1866. The Central Sumatra Expedition under the leadership of P. J. Veth of 1877-1879 collected much information about the people of Rejang-Lebong in Bengkulu, the Rawas area of the upper Musi, the Minangkabau, and the Batanghari in Jambi. The report of this expedition contains descriptions of clothing, houses, and language (Veth 1881). These were not based on long-term research, but they recorded the first data on a broad range of subjects relating to the Sumatran highlands.

The important archaeological site of Muara Takus on the upper Kampar River was mentioned in the *Notulen* (minutes of the meetings of the Batavian Society) in 1876, and by several other scholars in the 1880s, including R. D. M. Verbeek, one of the major scholars who took an interest in Indonesian archaeology in general before the Batavian Society's

Committee in Netherlands India for Archaeological Research on Java and Madura was formed in 1900.

After Raffles' description of his journey to Pagarryung, there was a lull before Dutch officials stationed in the Minangkabau highlands began submitting reports to the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences (*Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kusten en Wetenschappen*) in the 1860s; reports appeared occasionally in the minutes of the Society's meetings. G. P. Rouffaer, a well-known historian of ancient Indonesia, wrote about the West Sumatran antiquities in his article in the *Encyclopedia van Nederlandsch-Indie* on Sumatra (Rouffaer 1905). Another major expedition crossed central Sumatra in 1907, travelling from Padang to the Kampar, the upper Batanghari, and Siak (Maas 1910).

The first systematic report on West Sumatran archaeology and ancient history appeared in the *Oudheidkundig Verslag* ("Archaeological Report" of 1912. Nicolaas J. Krom, the author of the report (Krom 1912), acknowledged that much of the data had been compiled by the Assistant Resident of Fort de Kock (modern-day Bukittinggi), Louis C. Westenek (This official contributed numerous important publications on highland Sumatra; see for example Westenek 1921, 1922, 1932). Krom concentrated on the epigraphy of the region. This subject had been pioneered by Dr. R. Friederich, but the first person to write extensively about the inscriptions of West Sumatra was Hendrik Kern, who published his first article on the Minangkabau region in 1872, and continued to contribute articles on the subject for 40 years (Kern 1916, 1917).

Krom listed 24 inscriptions and 31 other types of sites, from findspots of single objects to brick ruins. His inventory covered a huge area, from Padang Roco in the south to Muara Takus in the northeast. This density of ruins and artefacts indicates intensive activity over a period of several centuries. Subsequent scholars, particularly members of the Indonesian government's archaeological research center and the staff of the office of archaeological preservation in Batusangkar, have added many more sites to this list. Although the pace of discovery is accelerating and any attempt to compile a new inventory would become almost instantly obsolete, there is a great need for a synthesis of what is now known of West Sumatra's archaeology and epigraphy.

In the middle and late 19th century, several internationally-known scholars brought Sumatra to the forefront of scientific inquiry. The first to do so was Alfred Russel Wallace, who spent some time in Sumatra during his decade-long research in the "Malay Archipelago" in the 1850s. Inspired by Wallace's speculations on the Southeast Asian origins of humans, Eugene Dubois decided to begin his search for early human

fossils by joining the Dutch colonial army and arranging to have himself sent to Sumatra. He spent several months exploring caves near Bukittinggi, but became discouraged by the lack of results and moved to East Java, with memorable results when he discovered the site of Trinil.

The next major scholar to devote attention to Sumatra was the French historian George Coedès, who in 1918 published his identification of Srivijaya as kingdom rather than a king. This realization led to a long and fruitful exploration of the history and archaeology of this early trading kingdom, which played a major role in the economies of ports from the Red Sea to China for several centuries (Coedès 1918, 1930, 1964).

In the 1920s, archaeologists devoted considerable effort to the study of major complexes of ancient ruins in both highland and lowland Sumatra, South Tapanuli and Muara Takus. In 1920 P. V. van Stein Callenfels travelled overland from Padang through the Minangkabau highlands, including the Padang Roco area, thence to Padang Lawas and then to Medan (Callenfels 1920). In 1930 Frederik D. K. Bosch sailed from Jakarta to Padang, then travelled by road to Fort de Kock, then to Kota Nopan, and thence northward to Padang Lawas, then south to Muara Takus, as well as Pagarruyung and Pagaralam. In the lowlands, his visits were confined to Bengkulu and Palembang (Bosch 1930). He reported that “the Palembang Lowlands district belongs to the areas poorest in antiquities from Sumatra.” While this evaluation is ameliorated by his references to several sites where large brick complexes had probably existed but had been completely destroyed by recent construction, often at the instigation of Dutch administrators, the contrast between the rather impoverished lowlands and the highlands, relatively rich in remains, is clearly implied.

The archaeological record of the highlands became richer still in the 1930s due to the explorations of Abraham van der Hoop at Pasemah and Kerinci (van der Hoop 1932, 1940), and Friedrich Martin Schnitger. Schnitger was not a member of the archaeological establishment; he was something of a free-lancer, an Austrian whom the Dutch tolerated but never admitted to the Batavian Society. He was allowed to become the first conservator of the museum in Palembang in 1935. He began his archaeological pursuits there, but moved progressively further inland: to Muara Takus, Padang Lawas, and Rambahan (Schnitger 1936a, 1936b, 1937, 1938, 1939, 1989; Miksic 1989).

After 1939, it might be said that Sumatran studies became a peripheral concern for archaeologists and historians, though not for anthropologists. Sumatra became a source of comparative material, rather than a central focus for the development of theoretical perspectives to which other areas

are compared, rather than vice versa. Since 1920 research on the history and archaeology of the Sumatran highlands has languished in a peripheral position. Most historical and archaeological research there has been conducted by scholars whose main geographical interest lay elsewhere. Ethnologists, though, continued to find many more interesting subjects to pursue among the major ethnic groups inhabiting the highlands than in the coastal areas.

Major syntheses of Sumatra's ancient history compiled in the last 40 years have concentrated on lowland polities, depicted as outposts of civilization at the edge of jungles inhabited by barbarians. This characterization was shaped by assumptions about the importance of external communication for the development of Southeast Asian civilization rather than by concrete data. The dissonance between the density of hinterland ruins and population, on one hand, and the attribution of inspiration to foreign contact mediated by the harbour polities of the lowlands, on the other hand, was not recognized. One may detect here the typical colonial desire to glorify the role of foreigners, but also perhaps the role of the lowland dwellers themselves, whose archival sources emphasized the political dominion which they pretended to exercise over the highland groups. Whether this dominion actually existed, and if it did, when and how it was exercised, are important subjects for future study. This balance of power in the past has been simply assumed to exist rather than demonstrated.

There are of course exceptions to any generalization. A few excellent historical works deal with the relations between the Sumatran highland and lowland groups. These include Christine Dobbin's fine study of the Minangkabau over a period of several centuries, but unfortunately she did not pursue the subject further after her excellent book appeared (Dobbin 1983). Jane Drakard's excellent study of upland-lowland relations in the Barus region of North Sumatra (Drakard 1990) can be compared with the archaeological volumes edited and partly written by Claude Guillot (Guillot 1998, 2004). The archaeological research which he directed on the ancient settlement in Barus is a major contribution to the field, but one may suggest alternative interpretations of the relations between the ancient coastal port and the population in its hinterland (Miksic 2001, 2004b).

William A. Collins' work on oral history in Sumatra (Collins 1979, 1998) indicates another very important line of research. There is a surprising lack of stories in the Pasemah hinterland about Srivijaya, whereas those about Majapahit are more common. Why is this so? Is it because Majapahit was a more recent kingdom, or did Srivijaya in fact have less impact on the hinterlands than Majapahit or its predecessor,

Singasari? This is a critical area for research, because people able to recite the old legends are rapidly fading from the scene. No doubt much has already been irretrievably lost, but it may still be possible to preserve a few more fragments of this type of information.

In a related vein is the linguistic research focused on indigenous manuscripts. P. J. Voorhoeve conducted important basic research on highland Sumatran languages in the 20th century, and collected a large number of documents, some produced locally and others originating in the lowlands, which had been retained as community heirlooms (Voorhoeve 1927, 1955, 1961, 1970). A team led by Dr. Uli Kozok has continued this work, having identified a manuscript in the Kerinci area which Voorhoeve listed in his inventory as the oldest surviving Malay text written on a form of paper (Kozok 2004). This type of research is of the utmost importance because these documents are highly susceptible to the elements and a thriving black market in antiquities.

One factor which may have deterred additional scholars from giving the hinterland peoples their due is their division among several major and many smaller groups, as opposed to lowland people, the majority of whom had by the 19th century assumed a generalized Malay identity. The lowland societies of Sumatra over the past 1,500 years have tended to represent themselves as polities with long-term chronological continuity like kingdoms or states. It is extremely difficult to piece together a coherent narrative for the many loosely-organized polities, often based on the principle of egalitarianism, of the highlands. Conversely, even though the 14th century highland kingdom of Adityawarman issued a large number of lithic proclamations, there have been few attempts to use them to piece together a history of his reign, and no sustained efforts have been made to use archaeology to augment the written record of the Minangkabau zone.

Another factor handicapping scholarship on Sumatra is that, whereas researchers from various disciplines who study Java, Borneo, and Maluku have long been affiliated in more or less formal organizations, no such organization currently exists for Sumatra. In the 1970s Mervyn A. Jaspan of Hull University attempted to form such an association for Sumatra. He edited the *Berita Kajian Sumatera* ("Sumatra Research News") for several years in stenciled format. With his untimely death, however, this publication met its demise, and no subsequent forum or discussion group has emerged to facilitate communication among scholars working in Sumatra.

This volume touches upon several new directions for research on highland culture in Sumatra which need to be further pursued. The nature of the relations between highlanders and lowlanders can be seen to have a

common structure, a fact which is striking given the extreme variety of culture and history in this 2,000-kilometer-long island. This suggests that environment may play an important role in this dialogue. While an array of studies of human-environment interactions could be pursued, one important initiative which measured anthropogenic disturbance on the vegetation of highland Sumatra through pollen analysis was begun in the 1980s (Morley 1982; Flenley 1988), but has not been continued.

Future studies of trade may also help us to achieve a clearer definition of the highland-lowland relationship, which is clearly quite different from that observed in mainland Southeast Asia (although many scholars seem to have reached erroneous conclusions about Sumatra on the basis of the assumption that they were in fact similar). A related area which has been much less examined concerns warfare and fortification. David Neidel's research indicates the progress which further inquiry into this subject may yield (Neidel 2006).

Another subject which still awaits proper examination is the Tamil connection with the Sumatran hinterland. This is documented by inscriptions in Padang Lawas and the Minangkabau heartland. The ancient Tamil inscriptions have long been unstudied despite acknowledgement of their great importance. This is due to the lack of old Tamil linguistic expertise in this region, and lack of interest on the part of scholars based in India (Christie 1998). The penetration of Tamils far into the hinterland, at both Padang Lawas and Minangkabau, is a possibility which cannot be discounted, despite the fact that it seems difficult to reconcile with the resistance faced by early European and other foreign visitors to Sumatra. Other than the Bandar Bapahat inscription, there are few traces of Tamil penetration into the Minang area, but the area from Medan to Portibi is rife with various kinds of traces of significant Tamil communication with Batak groups, including rock-cut chambers, lineage (*marga*) names, and vocabulary.

One last topic worth mentioning here is the importance of roads versus rivers, and the related question of the applicability of dendritic versus more central-place-like models. Pierre-Yves Manguin, contributor to this volume, writes:

Had land transport been a true alternative to river transport, rather than only a complement, sites would by now have been brought to light at crossroads in the lowlands, away from rivers. Why would almost all the nodes in the dendritic model described above at different periods, as evidenced by archaeological sites, be situated on river banks, at confluences of navigable rivers, or at transhipment [...].”

One reason which may be postulated is that the rivers ran in one direction (downstream), whereas the roads ran in the other direction (along lines of similar altitude). Although this issue is discussed in several chapters of this volume, more evidence needs to be brought to the table before it can be completely resolved.

A final word may be said regarding the quantity of archaeological research which has been conducted on highland Sumatra but never published. This includes much material in Indonesian language. After the memorable 1954 survey of South Sumatra by the Indonesian scholars Soekmono, Satyawati Suleiman, Boechari, et al., and J. G. de Casparis and L.-Ch. Damais (Soekmono 1955), a more extensive survey was conducted in 1975 (Bronson et al. n. d.). This survey was only printed in a gray-matter format and is not widely available. In a similar vein, one may mention the important research by the late Indonesian scholar Teguh Asmar on painted cist graves in Pasemah paintings, which was never published, and cannot be replicated due to the deterioration of those murals. The list of unpublished reports of later excavations is voluminous; to cite only two examples there are Machi Suhadi and Soeroso (*Laporan Penelitian Arkeologi Klasik di Situs Jepara, 20 Mei-2 Juni 1984*. Jakarta: Puslit Arkenas); Rr. Triwurjani et al. (*Survei Arkeologi di Situs Danau Ranau, Sumatra Selatan*. Jakarta: Bidang Arkeometri, Puslit Arkenas, 1993). Manguin in his contribution to this volume refers to many unpublished reports compiled by Indonesian archaeologists. The Jambi branch of the government organization responsible for conservation and preservation of monuments has also compiled numerous reports. The possibility of posting these on the internet should be seriously considered. The huge amount of work put in by Indonesian archaeologists in recent years to recover the ancient history of highland Sumatra deserves much greater recognition than it has so far received.

Chapter Summaries

The chapters in this book, which provide a broad overview of recent research on the history and cultural heritage of highland Sumatra, are divided on geographical grounds into four main parts: a general category and then sections devoted to northern Sumatra, central Sumatra, and southern Sumatra. Within each section, the chapters are then arranged roughly in chronological order on the basis of the time periods discussed. This division, which is reminiscent of the organization used during the conference, underscores the regional diversity that exists within this vast landscape, while the reoccurring topics and themes that result from the

common geographical setting and shared prehistoric heritage help maintain an overall sense of unity throughout the book.

General

Harry Widanto begins this section by examining the important role that Sumatra played in the human migrations of the Pleistocene. During the so-called glacial periods, when sea-level was 100 m lower than it is today, land bridges formed making migration possible from mainland Asia to Sumatra and the other islands of the Sunda Shelf. This chapter discusses the initial arrival of people on Sumatra, their habitation patterns during the Pleistocene and Holocene periods, and also the patterning of population dispersal up to the present time. Using a palaeoanthropological perspective, Widanto interprets human remains, including pre-neolithic skeletons that were recently discovered in South Sumatra and similar materials from kitchen middens in North Sumatra and Aceh. The possibility that the oldest human traces in Sumatra could be buried in the beds of streams that flowed across the temporarily emerged land during the glacial periods, as can now only be seen on naval charts, is discussed.

The second chapter by Dominik Bonatz focuses on one of the main problems of Sumatran archaeology, the definition of the period commonly designated as the Neolithic. The advent of this period is typically characterized by such achievements as agriculture, domestication, and sedentarization, but Bonatz questions the validity of using common archaeological data for identifying human activities related to one or more of these Neolithic “criteria”. To underscore the problems of classification, Bonatz compares archaeological finds from the highlands of Sumatra with those from other locations on and off Sumatra. He also discusses the relationship between humans and their surrounding landscape during the Holocene as revealed through various types of environmental data. Bonatz concludes by attempting to outline the probable nature of the Neolithic period in the highlands, underlining interactions with the early polities in the lowlands as one of the key factors for economic, material, and social changes in the highlands.

John Miksic finishes off this section by analyzing the highland-lowland connections in Jambi, South Sumatra, and West Sumatra during the 11th to 14th centuries. Whereas archaeological reports on the island’s early history concentrate on discussions of imported objects and the famous lowland kingdoms known from foreign sources, Miksic suggests that recent discoveries of Chinese ceramics and other archaeological evidence in the highlands indicate that this focus is unduly biased. If this is correct, early historic period settlements in the eastern lowlands, including Malayu and

Srivijaya, do not represent the oldest form of complex society in Sumatra, but rather are comparatively later offshoots of highland agrarian societies. In making this argument, Miksic reformulates an influential model proposed by Bennet Bronson, which was based on the assumption that routes of communication and transport in ancient Sumatra were restricted to rivers. Using spatial analysis and the results of ongoing archaeological research, he attaches greater importance to overland routes and argues that the relationship between highlands and lowlands was more equitable than previous theories have assumed.

Northern Sumatra

Anthony Reid starts this section by asking “Is there a Batak History?” Collectively, the 6-8 million Bataks of North Sumatra are one of Indonesia’s most important and intriguing groups. They have been in Sumatra for a long time and have attracted a large number of studies of religion and missiology, and a few good ethnological and language studies as well. Yet their history remains almost completely unwritten. According to Reid, this has occurred because historians have been overly influenced by the nation-state project of the past century, neglecting peoples who did not organise themselves into states which made claims on the past. Meanwhile, Bataks themselves have sought a state-like simulacrum through exalting the shadowy Singamangaraja dynasty. This chapter discusses the dilemmas of writing a history of highland, stateless peoples such as the Batak, who despite a rich tradition of writing did not generate linear chronicles, and for whom most sources are external ones.

In the following chapter, Edmund Edwards McKinnon explores the coastal-hinterland interactions in the Karo region of northeastern Sumatra. Edwards McKinnon examines these linkages by focusing on the flow of commodities, such as ceramics, cloth, iron, and salt which were undoubtedly in demand and exchanged between the coast and the interior by the 14th century, if not earlier. Passes from the Karo plateau provided access to the riverine ports on the east coast and the plateau itself was the key link between the gold bearing region of Alas as well as the rich forest resin producing areas in the Dairi Pakpak region west of Lake Toba. Edwards McKinnon contends that the archaeological evidence for an established south Indian mercantile presence, initially at Lobu Tua near Barus from the 9th century and latterly at Kota Cina until the late 13th of early 14th centuries, and their involvement in the gold and resin trade on both the west and east coasts of Sumatra may explain the strong “Indian” influences on Karo folk memories and the presence of Tamil words in the Karo vocabulary.

Daniel Perret next examines the relationship between ethnicity and colonization in northeast Sumatra. On standard ethnic maps, the northeastern area of Sumatra is characterized by an ethnic dichotomy between a coastal Malay population and an inland Batak population. Perret's examination of local and other precolonial sources, however, reveals close links that existed between interior and coastal populations for over a millennium, with the term "Batak" seeming to have been primarily a geographical indicator meaning the population living in the interior vis a vis the coastal "Malay". Perret argues that this distinction was altered by the coastal Malay elites when, following the introduction of Islam, they began to use non Muslim people living in the hinterland as slaves, workers for their plantations, and as spouses. The progressive rupture of the traditional links between the coast and its hinterland then continued from the 1860s onwards as Western planters, missionaries, and later the first colonial officials relied on the socio-politic vision of the coastal Malay elite. These developments, Perret contends, paved the way for the emergence of communal feelings and an "ethnic" consciousness in the whole area at the turn of the 20th century.

Completing the discussion of northern Sumatra, Masashi Hirosue examines the emergence of the image of "cannibalism" for which North Sumatra has long been noted. The practice of cannibalism was widely believed by Arabian, Chinese, and European travelers to have existed among the inland people, despite the fact that those foreign visitors did not usually travel to the inland locations where the inhabitants were suspected of being cannibals until the 19th century. Hirosue argues that these images of cannibalism were used by coastal rulers to exert their control over trade relations by frightening foreign merchants from making direct contact with inland people. After those coastal rulers were subjected to European colonial rule during the 19th century, Hirosue contends that inland chiefs continued circulating talk of cannibalism among their villagers, for the purpose of impressing foreigners with the importance of their role in mediating the relationship between foreigners and local cannibals.

Central Sumatra

Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz starts this section by analyzing two elements of the material culture of highland Jambi: megaliths and earthenware pottery. The megaliths, 21 of which were mapped in the areas of Kerinci, Serampas, Sungai Tenang, and Pratin Tuo during investigations conducted between 2003 and 2008, are the most impressive archaeological remains scattered across the highlands. According to their iconography and form,