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## **Possessions of *Sarongs* and other Textiles in Batavia and Malacca in the 18th Century**

The *sarong*, an ankle-length tube skirt wrapped around the waist, formed together with the *kebaya* (an open blouse fastened by brooches or pins) a widespread garment of clothing in South East Asia. *Sarongs* and *kebayas* originated in the Malay world and were appropriated by people coming into contact with the area. *Sarongs* and *kebayas* were worn by women and men of all ages and all ethnic communities. My paper will use the probate inventories of Batavia and Malacca as well as the visual evidence to examine the role of *sarongs* in 18<sup>th</sup>-century clothing, in comparison with other Asian and European textiles.<sup>1</sup>

Let us begin with a visual evidence, which comes mostly from Batavia. Here already in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century pictures from travel journals as well as paintings show people from Batavia with their typical clothing. For example the watercolor “A mestiza” in Caspar Schmalkalden’s travel report shows a lady from Batavia. She wears a *sarong*, probably of Indian cotton, produced for the South East Asian markets. Furthermore, she wears a transparent waist-length blouse, the so-called *bayu*.

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<sup>1</sup> P. Lee, *Sarong Kebaya. Peranakan Fashion in an Interconnected World 1500-1950*, Singapore 2014, pp. 25-29.



Figure 1: Caspar Schmalkalden, A Mestiza, 1647. Watercolor on paper, from Schmalkalden's travel journal. Forschungsbibliothek Gotha [Chart. B533, fol. 227R.].

A similar Eurasian lady appears on the famous Beeckman painting “The Castle of Batavia seen from West Kali Besar” where he depicts the various ethnicities living in Batavia, according to their typical dresses. Here in the forefront we see a Dutchman under a parasol together with his lady, dressed in a similar fashion.



Figure 2: Andries Beeckmann, The Castle of Batavia seen from West Kali Besar, ca. 1656. Oil on canvas, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam [SK-A-19].



Figure 3: Jan Brandes, Tea Visit, 1779-1785. Watercolor over pencil sketch on paper. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam [NG-1985-7-2-15].

The famous “Tea Visit” by Jan Brandes also displays the material world and the fashions of Batavia from the 1780’s. Batavian ladies of European and Eurasian origin meet in a lavishly decorated reception room (*zaal*) filled with the latest objects of material culture. On the wall between the fashionable sashed windows we find Chinese paintings and gilded mirrors, imported from Europe. Marble tables and a “dernier cris” guéridon for the tea cups underline the elite household equipped also with Chinese porcelain, Tonkinese waterpots and a copper spittoon.<sup>2</sup> The dresses of the ladies provide evidence on our topic. While the slave girls wear *sarongs* and *bayus*, the ladies wear *kebayas*. The mistress of the house additionally wears a white *kin*, a long skirt, while the guest has a European style skirt. Another Brandes watercolor depicts a wedding. Here the majority of the ladies wear French gowns while only two wear *kebayas* and local skirts, so called *sayas*. The slave women in this picture are dressed in *bayus* and *sarongs*. Although on these occasions European and Eurasian ladies don’t seem

<sup>2</sup> M. de Bruijn/R. Raben (ed.), *The World of Jan Brandes, 1743-1808*. Zwolle 2004, pp. 193-196; Lee, *Sarong*, pp. 66-67; M: North, *Towards a Global Material Culture: Domestic Interiors in the Atlantic and Other Worlds*, in: V. Hyden-Hanscho/R. Pieper/W. Stangl (eds.), *Cultural Exchange and Consumption Patterns in the Age of Enlightenment: Europe and the Atlantic World*, (The eighteenth Century And The Habsburg Monarchy International Series, Vol. 6), Bochum 2013, pp. 81-96.

to have worn sarongs, the language/items of the inventories mention sarongs as well as *kebayas* and *bayus* in enormous quantities.



Figure 4: Jan Brandes, Dutch Wedding, 1779-85. Watercolor over pencil sketch on paper. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam [NG-369].

Batavia was multiethnic and multicultural: The Dutch part of the population consisted of Company servants and so-called freeburghers, who were often former Company personnel. The men in this population either cohabited with indigenous concubines or else took Asian-born wives. Through married Asia-born woman joined the European community often bearing her husband names. In the seventeenth century Asian-born woman could easily and quickly rise from slavery to mistress of a household. Although toward the end of the seventeenth century the upper echelons of Dutch society succeeded in marrying European women, in the long run company members and free burghers preferred marriage with Eurasian girls, leading over the course of the eighteenth century to a significant increase in the number of descendants of Eurasian or Indo-Asian parentage.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> J. Gellman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: Europeans and Eurasians in Colonial Indonesia (New Perspectives in Se Asian Studies)*, Madison 2009, pp. 16–17; U. Bosma/R. Raben, *Being “Dutch” in the Indies: A History of Creolisation and Empire, 1500–1920*, Singapore 2008, pp. 33–38.

*Ethnic composition of Batavia in 1679.*<sup>4</sup>

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Numbers</b>	<b>percent</b>
Dutchmen	2,227	6.93
Mestizos/Bastards	760	2.36
Chinese	3,220	10.02
Mardijkers	5,348	16.64
Javanese	1,391	4.33
Malay	1,049	3.26
Balinese	1,364	4.24
Slaves	16,695	51.9
Total	32,142	100.00

The Chinese, who outnumbered the Europeans, fell into several categories. They had settled in Jacatra since the sixteenth century before the Dutch came. Then there were Chinese craftsmen who satisfied local demand for their skills. Furthermore, Chinese landowners played a crucial role in sugar production. The sizeable group of Mardijkers were Europeanized Christian ex-slaves of Bengal or Tamil origin. Most of them had been freed by the Portuguese; they bore Portuguese names and spoke that language. Others had been given Dutch names on the occasion of their baptism. As a general rule, Mardijkers tended to marry into Eurasian families. An important component of Batavian society was formed by free Asian groups such as the Bandanese or the Balinese, who served as auxiliary troops in Dutch military campaigns. The Malay formed a closed group of Muslim traders and shipowners. They were related to the “Moren” (*Moors*), a term applied to Muslims, often of Tamil origin, who had arrived from Southern India. Members of all these groups owned land in the surroundings of Batavia, with the Dutch and a few Chinese occupying the manor estates. The Dutch and the Chinese - but also Mardijkers and traders from the free Asian population - competed in the slave trade, importing slaves from the Indian Ocean littoral and around the Indonesian Archipelago to Batavia. Only a small number was owned by the VOC; in fact most slaves were privately owned, even by modest Chinese households. One can easily imagine that they formed a sizeable proportion of Batavia’s population.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> H. E. Niemeijer, *Calvinisme en koloniale stadscultuur; Batavia 1619–1729*, Amsterdam 1996, p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> Bosma/Raben, *Being “Dutch”*, pp. 37–89. See also Gellman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia*.

Before this backdrop, I will have a look to a sample of inventories of various ethnic groups with respect to clothing. As I have shown earlier,<sup>6</sup> European and Asian styles mingled in the material world and domestic interiors of Batavia. The working hypothesis would be, that we witness similar trends in clothing as well. A sample of Batavia inventories seems to support this assumption:

*Inventory of the possessions of Oey Tjoenio, a Chinese women, Batavia 11 August 1790<sup>7</sup>*

3 ps Kleedjes	3 pieces of garments (or cloths)
16 Paar witte Koussen	16 pairs of white stockings
4 baadjes in Soorten	4 assorted bajus
3 [ps] Kinder baadjes met Zilver Klinkan	3 child's bajus with silver attachments
1 Lap witte Linne en 1 lap zey damast	1 white linen cloth and 1 silk damask cloth
1 Aangesneede rol zey damast	1 cut roll of silk damask
9 ps Kinder baadjes	9 child bajus
10 Chineseese baadjes en an broek:	10 Chinese bajus and trousers
7 Kleedjes in Soorten	7 assorted garments
2 Gordyne, 2 paar Chineseese Koussen en Eenige Lapen	2 curtains, 2 pairs of Chinese stockings and some cloths
26 Paar Chineseese Kousen	26 pairs of Chinese stockings
11 Paar kousen, 8 baadjes en 7 broeken	11 pairs of stockings, 8 bajus and 7 trousers
20 Chineseese Cabayen	20 Chinese kebayas
2 Rokke, 2 Camisools, 1 broek en 1 Sas	2 skirts, 2 camisoles, 1 trousers and 1 sarasa

<sup>6</sup> See M. North, Art and Material Culture in the Cape Colony in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, in: T. DaCosta Kaufmann/M. North (eds.), *Mediating Netherlandish Art and Material Culture in Asia* (Amsterdam Studies in the Dutch Golden Age), Amsterdam 2015, pp. 111-128.

<sup>7</sup> National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia (ANRI), Schepenbank Nr. 751, published in Lee, Sarong, pp. 302-303.

13 baadjes en 5 doeken	13 bajus and 5 cloths
6 Chinese baadjes, 3 broeke en 4 lape, 2 broeke en 2 baadjes in zt.	6 Chinese bajus 3 trousers and 4 cloths, 2 trousers, and 2 assorted bajus
Ps Chinese baadjes en 10 P ditto broeke	Pieces of Chinese bajus and 10 pieces ditto trousers
12 Ps ditto Cabayen	12 pieces ditto kebayas
6 ps vrouw kleedjes	6 women's garments
4 swarte en 2 Citse vrou Cabayen	4 black and 2 chintz women's kebayas
3 ps Swarte Hoeden	3 black hats
2 Chinese kabayen	2 Chinese kebayas
7 ps Swarte baadjes	7 pieces black bajus
4 baadjes en een buykband	4 bajus and a waist band
7 Cabayen en eenige Lappen	7 kebayas and some cloths
11 baatjes in Zoorten	11 assorted bajus

*Taxation of the mobile goods of Djanoedien Abdul Manap, Batavia 9 July 1811<sup>8</sup>*

<b>Objects</b>	<b>Price in Rijksdaalders</b>
2 long chintz kebayas	20
1 short dito	10
3 long bajus	25
1 short kebaya	5
3 long trousers	6
2 short trousers	2
3 batik headscarfs	8
2 sarongs	12
1 slave called Bosa van Mangary	150
1 slave called Poesa	200

<sup>8</sup> ANRI, Boedelkamer, Nr. 79.

*Inventory of the burgher Hendrik Du Pon, Batavia 1791<sup>9</sup>*

<b>Objects</b>	<b>Price in Rijksdaalders</b>
4 black trousers	4
4 kebayas	4
15 assorted camisoles	8
4 coats	11

*Inventory of Margaretha Creasta Fiers, Batavia, 7 November 1794<sup>10</sup>*

<b>Objects</b>	<b>Price in Rijksdaalders</b>
6 pieces of old skirts	12
5 camisoles	10
4 long and 13 short kebayas	14
4 sarongs	-

*Inventory of the commander of the Westside Javanese Mohamat Tayeer<sup>11</sup>*

2 songket (Indonesian brocade) sarongs
2 songket (Indonesian brocade) ditto
2 songket (Indonesian brocade) clothes
1 kebaya
1 silk ditto
1 ditto

*Inventory of Salomon Pieters and Elisabeth Piot, Batavia 1792<sup>12</sup>*

<b>Objects</b>	<b>Price in Rijksdaalders</b>
16 short kebayas	18
10 sarongs	28
6 sarasa clothes	30

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<sup>9</sup> ANRI, Schepenbank, Nr. 756.

<sup>10</sup> ANRI, Schepenbank, Nr. 756.

<sup>11</sup> ANRI, Schepenbank, Nr. 749.

<sup>12</sup> ANRI, Schepenbank, Nr. 749.

8 shirts	8
3 coats, 3 camisoles and 5 trousers	15

*Inventory of Moor (Muslim) Bappoe Ibrahim Poele, Batavia 1792<sup>13</sup>*

5 men's kebayas
2 new chintz kebayas
2 sarongs
5 assorted kebayas
3 white kebayas and 5 pieces clothes
1 kebaya and two pieces chintzes

*Inventory of Moohamat Aboe Bakar, Batavia, December 1789<sup>14</sup>*

<b>Objects</b>	<b>Price in Rijksdaalders</b>
3 pieces kebayas and 4 pieces coats	24
1 silk kebaya (worn)	6
2 kebayas	10
3 white bajus	4
1 baju and 2 sarongs	6
1 baju (worn)	10
1 camisole and two trousers	9
1 cap	3
1 coat, 1 trousers and 5 camisoles	21
1 coat and 1 woolen kebaya	5
1 coat	5
2 kebayas	7
2 ditto	10
2 ditto	6
6 pieces of underpants	3

<sup>13</sup> ANRI, Schepenbank, Nr. 749.

<sup>14</sup> ANRI, Schepenbank, Nr. 750.

1 trouser, 1 camisole and 1 piece of linen	3
1 piece of red cloth, 1 red cloth, 1 trousers (worn)	9

This sample of clothes in Batavian inventories shows a great variety of *sarongs* and *kebayas*, not only for women and men, but also with respect to the materials and the provenance. The inventories of Malacca confirm the situation, that men and women owned and probably wore *sarongs*. In the inventories of Malacca and Batavia we also find the traditional European camisoles, a kind of jacket or coat (worn by Europeans but also by Moohamat Aboe Bakar and Oey Tjoenio).

*Inventory of Intje Poelabaj, Malacca, 1773-76. In her will she is described as Banian, that is, a Gujarati Muslim, although the archival summary calls her a "Malay Women"<sup>15</sup>*

A chest with:
5 white women's bajus
12 assorted cambayas
1 sarasa baju
2 sarasas
1 Acehnese lungi (loincloth)
1 stitched handkerchief
4 assorted selandangs

<sup>15</sup> India Office Records (IOR), R/9/12/5, p. 24, published in Lee, Sarong, pp. 294-296.

*Inventory of Jan Hendrik Schaewart, soldier in the service of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), who died 17 September 1768. Malacca, 12 November 1786<sup>16</sup>*

<b>A chest with:</b>
A hat with gold panels
2 blue skirts
A blue jacket (camisole)
Blue trousers
Red trousers
A Chintz cloth
2 red Siamese sarongs
A blue sarong
A red cambaya (cloth from Cambay, Gujarat)
A red sarasa (dyed Indian cloth)

A curious example arises from the auction protocol of the late and bankrupt Armenian merchant Cosorop Petrus, whose belongings were sold off in November 1798. In addition to a large stock of Madeira wine this rich household was brought under the hammer with Dutch, British, Chinese and Muslim bidders purchasing different objects:<sup>17</sup>

<b>Object</b>	<b>Buyer</b>	<b>Price in Rijksdaalder</b>
14 caps	Frans Bauman	4
14 shirts	Jan Jurgen Pietersz.	27
6 new shirts	Poey Lacko	10
1 men's sarong	Tantiako	11
1 ditto	F. H. Touscham	12
1 ditto	Piro Mochamat	13
6 night kebayas	Gouw Latkong	20
10 long trousers	Keegel	9

<sup>16</sup> IOR, R/9/11/8 published in Lee, Sarong, pp. 291-291.

<sup>17</sup> ANRI, Schepenbank, Nr. 1718.

Unfortunately, we know very little about the successful bidders on this and other estates sales. Most of the buyers seem to have been in the business of purchasing in any case, as merchants or small traders. Others probably tried to obtain some clothing and decorative objects for their homes. Whether family connections (as documented in other estate sales)<sup>18</sup> played a role, is not always evident or conclusive. A couple of buyers seem to have been active on this secondary market. Piro Mochamat (who might be a Muslim or possibly even a Christian *Mardijker*, according to his first name Piro = Pero) purchased an expensive copper lantern and a precious table clock encased in glass for 74 Rd. That is why, we can only assume, that Piro Mochamat bought the men's *sarong* for himself.

This and other auction protocols supply us with prices for the clothing. Although historians have speculated about an capital investment in clothing, the prices taxed and paid in Batavia would only partially support this assumption. *Sarongs* and *kebayas* were not particularly expensive, but more expensive for example than a bottle of Madeira wine or an average painting or print. However, they were not in the range of furniture or decorative objects, such as clocks and mirrors. In general, research on items of clothing, such as *sarongs*, *kebayas* and *bajus* in Batavia and Malacca, reveals the interconnected worlds of South East Asian material cultures that deserve further study.

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<sup>18</sup> T. Randle, Patterns of Consumption at auctions: A case study of three estates, in: N. Worden (ed.), *Contingent Lives. Social Identity and Material Culture in the VOC World*, Cape Town, 2007, pp. 53-74.