

CONTACT AND COLONIALISM IN THE BANDA ISLANDS, MALUKU, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Preliminary archaeological evidence from the Banda Islands of eastern Indonesia suggests that there were significant divisions within Bandanese society prior to and during the period of European contact (15th-17th centuries AD). Two distinct settlement types are identified, which may correspond to economic and religious factions within Banda's past social system. This evidence, which is now being analyzed, is used to re-evaluate historical documents from the period, and to propose future directions in the rewriting of the history of the colonial conquest of these historically important islands.

The Banda Islands, while insignificant in contemporary geopolitics, played an outsized role in the early period of European expansion and the spice trade. As the world's sole source of nutmeg and mace, these eleven small islands, located in the Maluku province of what is now eastern Indonesia, were the keys to vast wealth for those who could control their production (Figure 1). The first Europeans to set foot on the islands were members of the Portuguese D'Abreu expedition, which was sent out from Malacca in 1512 (Villiers 1981, 1990). A century later, the islands were the site of strategic maneuvering and fierce battles, as ascending Dutch and English trade companies sought to gain monopolistic control over the production and trade of the spices from the mostly uncooperative Bandanese (Abdurachman 1978; Hanna 1978; Loth 1995a, 1995b). In 1621, Dutch East India Company (VOC) soldiers and hired Japanese mercenaries, under the command of Governor General Jan Peeterszoon Coen, seized the islands, killing, enslaving or forcing to flee as much as 90% of the original population (Masselman 1963; Hanna 1978). The islands were then radically altered, both culturally and environmentally, by Dutch colonists, who converted them into Dutch-

managed spice plantations worked by Asian slaves imported from other regions (Loth 1998). Some Bandanese refugees set up new communities on other nearby islands in Maluku and many continue to identify themselves as Bandanese to this day.

While the history of this important chapter in the beginnings of colonialism is relatively well known from European historical documents, the story from the point of view of the Bandanese remains hidden, and their pre-colonial history is almost unknown. We do know that Europeans arrived in Island Southeast Asia at the end of three centuries of religious, political and economic change, as Islam was being adopted by the people of the islands along the routes of Muslim traders from the Middle East and South Asia (Ricklefs 1979, 1993). There is archaeological and documentary evidence of trade and exchange between Island Southeast Asians and "foreigners" from mainland Asia to the west for at least a millennium preceding the arrival of the first Europeans in the region (Tibbetts 1979; Reid 1988; Ray 1989; Chaudhuri 1990; Manguin 1994). Less understood, but perhaps just as important, is archaeological evidence of extensive trade networks that extended east into Melanesia for more than three thousand years (Bellwood and Koon 1989; Swadling 1996).

I have divided Banda's past into three periods for the purpose of this analysis: Pre European contact (before 1512 AD), although Europeans such as di Varthema may have contacted the islands earlier (Jones 1863), European contact period (1512-1621) and the colonial period (1621-1945, although some vestige of the contact period Bandanese society survived into the 1640's at least, and many cultural elements "survive" to this day in Banda (Loth 1998)). While first European contact and the subsequent century of sporadic European presence may have had some affect on Bandanese society, the massacre of 1621 was and still is the significant turning point in Banda's past. This periodization scheme relies too much on the actions of Europeans, but

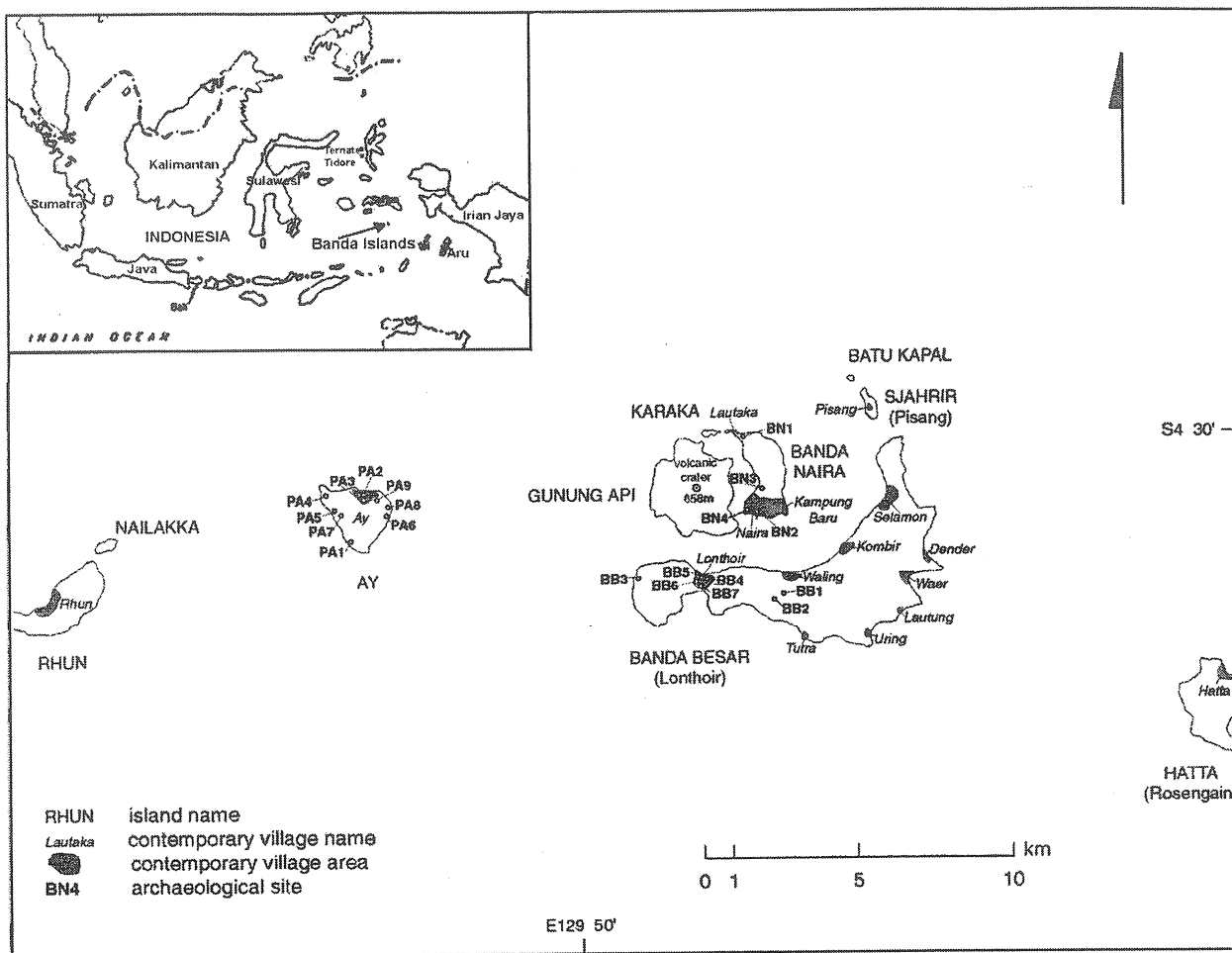


Figure 1: Map of the Banda Islands, Maluku, Indonesia.

my aim is to transcend it by investigating the role of other players in Banda's past, not the least the Bandanese themselves.

My approach is to use archaeological research to better understand socio-political structures in the era leading up to the 1621 massacre and conquest of Banda, and to use this understanding to re-evaluate the period of Euro-Banda conflict and conquest in the 17th century. Islam was an important aspect of Bandanese society during its encounter with Europeans and is a focus of my research into Banda's past. A central research question for the project is whether there were non-Islamic settlements in the islands during the European contact period (as is suggested by some historical accounts) and what role they played in the overall political, economic and social structures of Bandanese society. This paper describes preliminary results from this research. I completed fieldwork in Banda in August 1998, and am currently analyzing this data. This paper is being written before the completion of the analyses thus many of my

conclusions are tentative. My forthcoming PhD dissertation will present final results of the analyses.

ISLAM AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE IN ISLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA

The reasons for rapid spread of Islam through the Indonesian archipelago beginning in the 13th century have long been a central question for Southeast Asian historians. Islamization appears to have accompanied an increase in maritime trade between Island Southeast Asia and the Muslim world to its west. This increased trade was sparked by the emerging demand for spices in late medieval Europe and a decline in Chinese merchant activity due to internal politics and political instability along the Silk Road. These new market opportunities were met by maritime traders from the Middle East and South Asia (Chaudhuri 1990; Glover 1990; Miksic *et al.* 1994).

There is considerable debate among historians about the mechanisms behind Islamization, however. As the

process has been ongoing for nearly 800 years, these mechanisms are undoubtedly complex and ever changing. The apparent fact that the first regions in Island Southeast Asia to convert were coastal merchant communities has been used as evidence that Islam was an especially attractive and suitable belief system for increasing numbers of Southeast Asian merchants. While spirit worship or animism relied on a home landscape for referents, the symbols of Islam were universally valid, and adaptable for traveling traders (Reid 1993a:151). But what motivated individuals to convert to Islam? Some theorists believe that sufi mystics like *ulama*, who performed marriages and funerals in villages played a key role, especially in the 16th and 17th centuries (Johns 1975). Others emphasize the religious-political role of the sultan and raja, especially during the early period of rapid Islamization in the 14th and 15th centuries (Johns 1995). Sultanates were first established in the Middle East in the 11th century, and soon spread eastward, with Aceh in western Sumatra establishing its first sultanate in the 14th century. In this model, powerful people (particularly reformist-minded people who control trade in some way) use a new cosmological scheme (introduced by traders) to both legitimize and expand their power. These leaders concurrently solidify their relationship with the foreign traders who share their belief system, which further boosts their control of trade, often expanding it to adjoining regions (Wolters 1967; Reid 1993b; cf. models for earlier Hindu-Buddhist polities in Hall 1985). This politicized “top-down” model for Islamization (as opposed to a grassroots conversion by traveling mystics or traders) would appear to better explain conversion where Muslim traders primarily interact with the leaders who control the production of trade goods. This model integrates well with the “shipshape society” that Manguin (1984) describes as a common element among the (primarily Islamic) maritime trade societies of Island Southeast Asia, and is intriguingly similar to the development of chiefdoms in Polynesia theorized by Kirch (1984).

In 1512, Tome Pires reported that “It is thirty years since they began to be Moors in the Banda Islands” (Cortêsão 1944:206). But Banda was different from other Islamic societies the Portuguese encountered at the eastern edge of the Islamic world, such as those in the clove islands, Ternate and Tidore, to the north of Banda. Those societies had developed into competing sultanates, each island ruled by a single powerful leader who controlled a well-defined territory (Andaya 1993). In the Bandas, however, a different situation prevailed. According to the earliest Portuguese accounts (Dames 1918; Cortêsão 1944), and descriptions throughout the European contact period, each village (numbering several hundred inhabitants) was ruled by a

council of high status men, called *orang kaya*. This Malay term (meaning literally “rich person”) was used widely throughout the Malay trading world, and probably denoted a leader who acquired status through trade (Ellen 1986). While villages sometimes formed alliances with others, there is no evidence that a single ruler attained supreme status in the archipelago, or even over a single village.

Without a single powerful ruler with whom to negotiate, foreign traders used a variety of methods to gain access to Banda’s valuable nutmeg and mace trade. Pre-colonial Javanese traders became semi-permanent residents of Banda, often marrying local women and joining a special social class of high status foreigners; the office of *syahbandar*, or port authority, was usually held by Islamic Javanese men or at least “Javanized” residents (Villiers 1981; Ellen 1986; Reid 1993a). Europeans, who for the most part stayed for shorter periods and separated themselves socially, had to resort to different strategies, which meant making separate trading arrangements with each group of village leaders, and often with individual spice collectors. The decentralized political structure in Banda probably contributed to the inability of the Portuguese to establish a viable military presence on the islands, and in the end frustrated Dutch traders, who eventually engineered the massacre of 1621 (Hanna 1978; Loth 1995a). In the more politically centralized islands to the north, indigenous leaders were able to successfully negotiate with Europeans, and Islam provided an important ideological tool for resisting European cultural influence and political control. While these islands conceded some trading freedom, they retained most of their political autonomy, and often played competing European powers off of one another to their own advantage, staving off final (although incomplete) capitulation to the Dutch for another century (Andaya 1993).

Why did Banda develop this unusual political structure, and what were its implications during European contact and conquest? My approach is to look for archaeologically detectable (and historical) factors that may have contributed to the formation of a decentralized political system in Banda in the 15th-16th centuries, despite the powerful centralizing influence of Islam. The most important ones, as I see them, are: (1) settlement organization that divided the Bandanese into specialized autonomous villages, (2) a crucial trade network incorporating non-Islamic islands to the east of Banda, and (3) the interaction between religious identity and foodways in the Banda ecosystem. Below I will address these three factors using historical, geographic and ethnographic evidence, and then discuss how the archaeological evidence alters that picture, providing a potentially new way to envision Banda’s encounter with Europe.

THE ORGANIZATION OF SETTLEMENTS IN BANDA

Historical sixteenth and seventeenth century European written documents provide some clues as to settlement location, trade networks and religious identity in Banda, but this evidence is incomplete and sometimes misleading. For example, European maps and descriptions list villages in Banda, but usually just the ones with which Europeans had contact. Villages on the outer Banda islands such as Ay, Rhun, Hatta and the south coast of Banda Besar are usually not differentiated (e.g., Jones 1863; Markham 1877; Dames 1918; Keuning 1942; Cortesão 1944). Because Europeans (initially guided to Banda by Islamic pilots from Malacca) interacted and traded with the Bandanese villages linked to the Islamic world system, they may not have been aware of non-Islamic trading and settlement networks, or considered them unimportant. In some cases, maps may have deliberately left off villages that refused to sign treaties with the VOC in order to convey the impression that there was unanimous Bandanese consent to Dutch sovereignty and trade controls. The documents do, however, provide some interesting clues. The earliest Portuguese descriptions refer to the presence of animist people in the "hills" of the islands (Cortesão 1944:206). Certain maps (e.g., the Janssonius map of the early 17th century, made by a non-VOC map maker) show many more villages than others. Later documents often describe fierce battles between villages, or alliances of villages, in which religious and economic conflict may have played a role (The Journal or Daly Register 1601:30; Purchas 1625 passim). Elsewhere in Maluku, the Islam/non-Islam dualism is a central aspect of settlement patterning and cultural systems both historically and today. For example, *pela*, which is a system of traditional cooperation alliances between villages in central Maluku, often organizes villages into Islamic/Christian village pairs. (Bartel 1977). However, histories of the colonial conquest of Banda, and of the rest of the Maluku region, de-emphasize the importance of non-Islamic settlements and trade networks and their role in the political structure (Hanna 1978; Villiers 1981, 1990; Andaya 1991; Ptak 1992).

Banda's varied topography and its situation in relation to monsoon wind and water current cycles invite geographical analysis. Some places have much better access to the sea and maritime trade than others, and this access varies with the season. Access to drinking water may have also been a factor in settlement patterning. The outer islands of Hatta, Ay and Rhun have little or no ground water and rely on collected rainwater for drinking; periodic droughts leave Banda without significant rainfall for several months or more (Loth 1998; Stasiun Meteorologi Bandaneira-Banda 1989-98). The contemporary sacred landscape in Banda has many references to water sources. For example, during

droughts people from Pulau Ay are allowed to get water from the sacred well *perigi dua* on Banda Neira. Water access may have formed part of the basis for inter-village alliances in the past.

Banda's landscape favors a settlement system that is fractured and specialized, as is reflected in the contemporary settlement pattern. Even with technological improvements like motorized boats, villages can be isolated from each other for extended periods under certain weather conditions. Settlement sites would have had widely different levels of access to resources and trade routes. On the one hand, this differential in access would have encouraged the formation of alliances, such as the traditional water alliance between Pulau Ay and Banda Neira discussed above. But these alliances were potentially unstable as new resources and outside influences were introduced, such as increased spice trade with the Islamic world to the west.

TRADE WITH NON-ISLAMIC REGIONS

While much historical research downplays the volume of trade with the eastern non-Islamic regions, such as New Guinea (e.g., Reid 1993a:315), documentary and circumstantial evidence suggests that at least in Banda, this trade was of central importance. Trade items from the non-Islamic islands to the east were crucial to Banda's economy. Early chroniclers describe how forest products, such as shipbuilding wood, aromatic tree barks, birds and feathers, and the staple food sago, were bought from Aru, Kei and New Guinea to the east in trade for cloth, rice, metals and glazed ceramics from the west (Dames 1918; van Leur 1967; Ellen 1990; Glover 1990). Thus, Banda served not only as a spice producer, but also as an entrepôt, buying and reselling goods between the Islamic trading world and the non-Islamic eastern regions. The existence of a second trade network or system, oriented towards these non-Islamic regions, may have been a factor that prevented the coalescing of a centralized Islamic political system. This crucial trade would not have relied on an Islamic religious personal network for its operation (though perhaps another religious system, such as the pre-Islamic belief system present in Banda prior to the 14th century, linked these eastern regions), nor would its successful traders have been necessarily appropriate Islamic political leaders. Entire villages may have opted out of the Islamic sphere in Banda, choosing instead to specialize in this other profitable trade network.

There is documentary evidence supporting the view that each village in Banda specialized in trade with a certain specific region. Some villages, for instance, were known to send trading ships out to certain islands in the eastern regions such as Seram, Kei, Aru and New Guinea each year (Valentijn 1724:29). My own initial ethnographic research in

Bandanese refugee communities in Kei and Seram revealed some correspondence between these historical connections and contemporary mythological and/or ceremonial practices, the sacred landscape and social structure. All of this evidence suggests that the relationship between trade and religion in Banda was complicated by its situation on the eastern boundary of the Islamic world.

FOOD IN AN ISLAMIZING ECOSYSTEM

Ellen (1979) theorizes that Banda and other spice producing islands became increasingly reliant on the spice trade for survival over time. In his model, as spice growing and trading became more lucrative, other food crops were replaced with nutmeg trees which increased both nutmeg supply and the demand for food imports, creating a positive feedback loop which eventually made Banda almost completely dependent on imported food. This was certainly the situation during most of the colonial period, when spice production was maximized (Loth 1998). However, while the pre-colonial Bandanese probably imported significant amounts of foods such as sago and rice by the 16th century (Banda is ill suited for rice and sago cultivation), it is likely that locally produced foods continued to be important for Bandanese subsistence. Many of these foods can be grown in conjunction with nutmeg trees, or gathered from wild resources not impacted by increasingly intensive silviculture. These included domesticated plants such as taro, and wild plant foods such as *kenari* and other nuts, as well as animal foods such as fish, cuscus, birds, turtles and their eggs, goats and pigs (Latinis 1996; Stark and Latinis 1996).

One factor not discussed in the literature may have significantly influenced pre-colonial agriculture in Banda. In Banda's small island ecosystem, the Islamic prohibition of pig eating probably had significant effects. Not only did this exclude (in law, if not always in practice) an important food from the diets of Muslim converts, it also removed the pig's sole predator from the ecosystem. While there is some debate about the level of compliance of newly converted Island Southeast Asian Muslims with Islamic doctrine, renouncing pork was a public gesture of central importance, along with circumcision and prayer (Reid 1993a:141).

Feral pigs are a major pest in Banda today, causing serious damage to agricultural crops, particularly in the vicinity of Muslim villages. The pigs tend to avoid Christian settlements in Banda where they are actively hunted. During the period of initial Islamization, pigs may have been a factor in reducing the viability of local agriculture in Islamized settlements. As increasing numbers of Bandanese observed Islamic mores, they would have been more dependent not only on rice imports from Java, but also on food grown by non-Islamic farming communities within Banda who would have suffered less from pig damaged crops.

PRELIMINARY ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

In 1997-8, I conducted surface surveys and excavations on three of the Banda Islands: Banda Neira, Banda Besar and Pulau Ay (see Fig. 1). The archaeological work was designed to locate and identify habitation sites in two distinct areas: (1) areas corresponding to villages as described in 16th-early 17th century European maps and descriptions; and (2) areas in natural harbors that were not listed as villages on most European maps and descriptions. Neither complete coverage nor random plot survey was attempted due to the dense foliage coverage, steep relief of the islands, and small crew size, although some experimental shovel testing and coring was completed in interior sections of the islands in search of non-coastal settlements (none were discovered).

"Sites" in Banda were defined as areas of relatively intense surface scatters of ceramic sherds, and/or areas that had subsurface artifacts. The geomorphology (and recent human history) of the islands made site discovery and definition a challenge. Frequent volcanic activity from the central cone of Gunung Api has caused rapid soil accretion on the islands of Banda Neira and the western part of Banda Besar, deeply burying remains from the period of interest for this project. For example, one site in Banda Neira produced colonial period artifacts such as Dutch clay pipes at depths of over two meters, and pre-16th century artifacts were even more deeply buried. On the outer island of Pulau Ay, which lies about eight kilometers west of the volcano, soil deposition was much less rapid, but intensive farming over much of the island's surface has altered stratigraphy and spread buried remains over large areas. Twentieth century events have contributed to the confusing situation on the ground. At the outbreak of World War II, ethnic Dutch plantation owners abandoned their homes and fled the islands or were captured and sent away from Banda by Japanese soldiers. During the Japanese occupation (1942-45), the remaining residents often entered the abandoned Dutch houses and used household items, such as pottery vessels and plates, which were often heirloom pieces of older Chinese ceramics. Toward the end of the war, allied bombing of the Bandas forced many residents to move out of the villages, which were targeted in bombing raids, and into the forest. Thus some surface scatters were confusing arrays of Ming era and 20th century wares which had no subsurface component.

When sites with pre-17th century components were identified, I conducted stratigraphically controlled excavations to establish chronologies of habitation, and date the abandonment of sites, as well as to collect archaeological remains that would allow me to evaluate foodways and trading activity conducted by the inhabitants of the sites. As stated above, archaeological fieldwork was only recently completed and materials are still under analysis; I still await radiocarbon

dates, the results of pollen and phytolith analysis, and identification of some of the tradewares. Additionally, I plan a trace element analysis of regional samples of earthenware and clay, which may shed light on local trade networks.

Following preliminary analysis, I have placed sites into two distinct categories, type A (sites BN2, BN4, PA2, PA3, BB5) and type B (sites PA1, PA4, BB3). One site (BN1) appears to be transitional, exhibiting both Types A and B features. The remaining eleven sites tested were not classified because pre-colonial occupation could not be firmly established. The identifying features of each type are listed in Table 1.

The existence of type B sites tentatively confirms that there were settlements in Banda unknown to (or considered unimportant by) European observers during the pre-conquest era of European contact from 1512-1621. More importantly, these settlements were different in character from “known” (type A) settlements. There is evidence that people in type B sites ate pig and cremated their dead, which are not orthodox Islamic behaviors. While no human remains were recovered from the pre-colonial levels of type A sites, one of the type B sites, and the transitional site BN1, had burned human bone and teeth in association with earthenware pottery. The inhabitants of type B sites seem to have had less access to glazed ceramics from mainland Asia. Type B sites were located in areas less suitable to year-round access from the sea; during one of the monsoons, their harbors or beaches were difficult or impossible to land on because of heavy surf and high onshore winds. Finally, following the conquest of the islands in 1621, type B villages were abandoned, whereas type A sites were re-occupied by Dutch settlers and their slaves.

One site, BN1, did not fit clearly in either category. In some respects, it was type B: especially notable were its high concentration of pig remains and burned human bone and teeth. However, it fits the type A category in that it had a protected harbor nearby, was “known” by Europeans (as the village of Labbetacca), and because it was situated in

probably the most strategic place in the Bandas, was re-occupied after the massacre of 1621. The contemporary village of Lautaka, built in the ruins of the Dutch colonial plantation of the same name (probably a Malay-ized version of the Bandanese name of Labbetacca) lies several hundred meters to the west of site BN1. Especially intriguing was the depositional sequence of glazed ceramics. This site presented the longest and richest sequence of any in Banda of tradewares, containing Song dynasty wares pre-dating the 11th century AD. However, the density of these tradewares fell off in 15th and 16th century levels, and the site appears to have been abandoned for a short time before the colonial period re-occupation.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS AND HISTORICAL IMPLICATIONS

This evidence confirms (subject to revision by radiocarbon dates) that there were settlements with non-Islamic inhabitants (or engaging in non-Islamic behavior) in Banda during the period of European contact and conflict of 1512-1621. These settlements tended to be located in less than ideal ports, subject to periodic inaccessibility and appear to be less well linked to trade with mainland Asia, as they had fewer glazed ceramics present. If this preliminary evidence is confirmed by later tests, the story of Banda’s relationship with Islam and European trading companies needs to be re-evaluated. It appears as though Europeans were not dealing with a unified Islamic society, but rather one fractured by competing belief systems and economic networks.

The transitional site BN1 presents a unique and particularly telling body of evidence. Archaeologically, it appears to have been closely linked to the trading world to the west during an earlier period of trade (10th-14th centuries). During this period, though, the inhabitants of this site were not Muslim, nor were many of the visiting traders, in all likelihood. During the subsequent two centuries, this site appeared to decline as a trade center,

Table 1: Site type features

Identifying features	Type A sites (n=5)	Type B sites (n=3)	Transitional (n=1)
Corresponds in location to villages known to Europeans before 1621	yes	no	yes
Colonial period occupation (post 17th century)	yes	no	intermittent, now abandoned
Harbor protected during both east and west monsoons	yes	no	yes
Pig remains in pre-colonial levels	absent	present	present
Burned human bone or teeth	absent	present	present
Relative quantity of glazed ceramics from mainland Asia in pre-colonial levels	high	low or non-existent	high in pre-16th C levels, lower in 16th-17th C

while villages such as Naira (represented archaeologically by sites BN2 and BN4) which showed evidence of Islamic behavior were ascendant. It was during this period that most of the trading ports in Southeast Asia also became Islamic. The brutal battles described by van Neck and others in 1599 between the neighboring villages of Labbetacca and Neira may have resulted from deep divisions within the rapidly changing small island social system (*The Journal or Daly Register* 1601:30; Purchas 1625; Keuning 1942). Interpreted this way, Labbetacca was struggling to maintain its old position as trade center, forming alliances with other non-Islamic villages which specialized in the eastern trade, while an increasingly powerful Islamic alliance was quickly making it obsolete. It was into this milieu that European traders unwittingly brought their new trade goods, treaties and religious systems in the 16th and early 17th centuries.

As Stoler (1989:134) forcefully argues, the anthropology of colonialism has much to gain by "rethinking colonial categories." Constantly shifting divisions of class, race and ethnic identity make it impossible to simply equate "European" with "colonizer" or "native" with "colonized." In fact, by looking at the evolving definitions and conceptions of these categories, one can begin to see how individuals actively navigate and re-invent them, providing a more nuanced analysis of the social processes unfolding within colonial communities. Similarly, Lightfoot and Martinez (1995:471) propose that archaeological studies of culture contact should consider the role of the variety of social divisions or factional groups that cut across "traditionally perceived colonial-indigenous boundaries." This approach, they argue, does not take colonizers and natives as monolithic entities, but rather emphasizes the "varied backgrounds, interests and motivations of individuals on all sides of the frontier."

Historians have generally agreed that the Bandanese resisted European efforts to control their trade, and were massacred as punishment for this resistance; their resistance efforts failed because they were disorganized and under-armed, powerless in the face of well organized Dutch forces. But this is based on a simplified reading of a slim and European-biased body of evidence. Histories of Banda tend to gloss over the intriguing inconsistencies and strange category shifts in the historical documents. Some accounts refer to Bandanese who collaborated with the Dutch, and vice-versa, or had Portuguese names, or were fluent in European languages. Descriptions of inter-village warfare are filled with mixed religious imagery; the severed heads of the enemies are displayed on bamboo poles, but later are wrapped in white cloth and buried according to Islamic doctrine.

The archaeological evidence from Banda raises important questions, and provides new ways to interrogate

the historical data. I believe that the interactions between Europeans and Bandanese were extremely complex; individuals played varying strategic roles within the many fault lines that split this multi-ethnic, rapidly changing society. My goal, which I hope to attain in my forthcoming PhD dissertation, is to better elaborate those lines, so that this fascinating and historically important story of contact and conquest can be re-told.

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