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VIARO, Mario Alain

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Ceremonial Sabres of Nias Headhunters in Indonesia

Alain Viaro
Situated on the borders of the Javanese Empire, the last bastion of Asia before the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean, Nias Island has produced a civilisation noted for its complex social structures and architecture, wooden and stone statuary, and remarkable weaponry.

**Warlike Society**

Although agriculture had stood its ground and, in the past, was an occupation carried out by either free men or a servile labour force, the Niha have traditionally been warriors. The society gave greater importance to the culture of war (fig. 1) and to manufacturing weapons (spears, swords, shields, armour) than to agriculture and making farm tools; and to constructing defensive structures rather than sowing crops. The Niha protected their villages by locating them on steep slopes or by surrounding them either with multiple rows of stinging bushes or by a moat, lined with earthen ramparts and blocks of stone. Village gates were customarily closed at night and, to this day, a night sentry keeps watch over the town to warn against fires or unwanted incursions. This bellicose environment permeates throughout Niha social and political structures.

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**Fig. 1.** Southern warriors posing for Dutch photographer Anton Willem Nieuwenhuis at the beginning of the twentieth century. Crocodile-skin or a metal vest traditionally served as a coat of mail. Also worn was a metal "helmet" and a bark loincloth to which was attached a sabre decorated with pig’s teeth and a pommel suggesting a protective lasara head. A spear and shield, whose designs vary from region to region, complete the warrior’s ensemble.

Barbier-Mueller Archives.
Education was warlike and violent. In the south of the island, youths trained very early on to jump over a two-metre-high stone pyramid (fig. 2), or to clear a ditch filled with sharpened bamboo. Passage into adulthood, and therefore incorporation into society, traditionally required young warriors to take heads. In exchange for this act, a Niha chief bestowed on the successful headhunter the title of iramatua (warrior) and gave him the calabubu necklace (fig. 3) during a time of festival. Only after this investiture would the young warrior take part in the orahu gathering of village men and in the owasa ceremonial cycle of pig-trading. Included in the owasa is jewellery-making, where gold ornaments provide men access to positions of rank in accordance with clan rules.

Fig. 2. As part of their education, young warriors learned to jump over a two-metre-high truncated stone pyramid called batuhömbo. Bawömataluo. Photo by the author, 1982.
Recorded accounts of Nias Island date back to the period of trade by Baghdad merchants with India and China, by way of Southeast Asia. Suleyman (851) first wrote about the island and described it “to contain an abundance of gold. The inhabitants live off the fruit of the coconut tree, from which they make palm wine, and cover their bodies with coconut oil. When someone wants to get married, he must bring the head of an enemy. If he has killed two enemies, he may take two wives. If he has killed fifty enemies, he may take fifty wives.” Other early accounts of Nias Island include: The Book of Indian Wonders (Kitab adaib al-Hind), dated by Van der Lith to the year 950; the writings of the famous geographer Edrisi (1154); a description of cannibals inhabiting the island by Kazwini (1203–1283); accounts by Rasid Ad-Din (1310); and descriptions of a large island city by Ibn Al-Wardi (1340).

Fig. 3. Nobleman (si’ulu) from southern Nias wearing a calabubu necklace and ceremonial garments. Photo taken prior to 1914 in Bawomataluo. Photo courtesy of Kon. Inst. v.d. Tropen, Amsterdam.
Nias Social Organisation

Throughout the island, the most important social unit is the clan (mado), whose name derives from an eponymous ancestor. The most prestigious clans are those that claim direct descent from the original ancestors; other clans branch out from these. Prestige is measured by seniority. Clans and families are divided into social categories that include: “nobles” (an approximate title, as it differentiates those of higher rank); “people” (sato or ono mbanua, literally meaning “village children”); and, until the beginning of the twentieth century, “slaves”. The organisation of these social categories differs in the north, the centre, and the south, and is closely connected to the political structure and the festive practices that give rhythm to the life of the Niha. It is at these festivities that they erect stone monuments.

Society in the south divides itself into “nobles” (si’ulu) and “people” (sato). Passage from one category to another is impossible. Social distinction is primarily made on the basis of genealogy: the si’ulu sometimes trace their ancestry back dozens of generations. Wealth, knowledge of customary law (adat), and, formerly, valour as a warrior all play parts in reinforcing one’s birthright. Although the title of si’ulu is hereditary, it requires confirmation by means of prescribed festivities. Supreme power belongs to the man from among the si’ulu who organised the greatest number of feasts, in full pomp and splendour, laid down by customary law. In theory, the title of village chief (balö si’ulu or salawa, figs. 4, 6, and 18) was contested by each generation; however, in practice, the chief’s eldest son retained a number of crucial advantages in the battle for power.
Alain Viaro

descendant. He bore the title of balugu, bestowed for having attained the highest levels of prescribed feasts. Contrary to the social organisation in the south, there was no prominent “noble” class among the people of the central region. Any villager might gain access to the highest social positions from the moment he showed himself capable of promotion, as in the accomplishment of sufficient feasts and the consequent construction of monuments (the latter providing explanation for the abundance of megaliths in the central region villages). In fact, the central region was also where warriors most assiduously hunted for heads and slaves—customarily raiding villages in the south or other central villages with whom they had conflict.

The north and the centre have different social and territorial systems of organisation, characterised by the primacy of the clan as a reference to identity. In the north, this reference correlated to physical and political territory, or the öri. Literally “circle (of villages)”, the öri is composed of villages belonging to the same clan. A tuhen’öri, the clan patriarch, traditionally ruled this circle of villages, although a chief alone governed each village without guidance or competition from any council. Since 1930, the öri has ceased to exist in its original form.

The central region applied a system of social and political organisation based on clan and lineage. The village was traditionally placed under the leadership of a chief who was either the village founder or his descendant. He bore the title of balugu, bestowed for having attained the highest levels of prescribed feasts. Contrary to the social organisation in the south, there was no prominent “noble” class among the people of the central region. Any villager might gain access to the highest social positions from the moment he showed himself capable of promotion, as in the accomplishment of sufficient feasts and the consequent construction of monuments (the latter providing explanation for the abundance of megaliths in the central region villages). In fact, the central region was also where warriors most assiduously hunted for heads and slaves—customarily raiding villages in the south or other central villages with whom they had conflict.
Festive Practices

Festive practices continue to be essential elements in the social structure and aesthetics of the Niha. Many authors at the turn of the twentieth century mention a particular type of festivity, the “feasts of merit”, under which title the Niha categorise all feasts that involve the ostentatious outlay of pigs and the erection of a megalith, practices still witnessed today.

Festive cycles in the south include up to eleven feasts for the si’ulu. The sato, or non-nobles, gained access only to the first levels. Among these feasts, two demanded heads. The first celebrated the construction of a chief’s house (folau omo), which allowed those thereafter to be called omo lasara. The second was the funeral ceremony of a chief or, sometimes, a si’ulu or a noble person, whose tomb was decorated by a lasara, or an effigy. Informants mention no other festivities that required heads, although some may have incorporated head-taking in the past, as the series of festivities varied from village to village.

The festive cycles in the north were directly related to the process of founding the öri, and do not appear to have required severed heads. As a result of earlier and more intense missionary activity and colonisation in the north, headhunting in this region was the first to disappear in Nias.

Festive practices in the island’s centre can include up to ten feasts. Each man has the possibility of accomplishing not only one owasa but all the others, including feasts of the highest levels. A stone monument is erected at each celebration and can reach up to six monuments at one time. Such occasions required that golden ornaments be made (fig. 8) and two heads, one male and one female, be buried at the foot of the largest stone to honour the celebrant and, as required by tradition, “to prevent the behu from falling”. Heads were also necessarily part of the inauguration of the harefa, a stone terrace where justice was dispensed. Two heads were imperative for a chief’s funeral ceremony. It is only in the centre of the island where one finds such an abundance of stones and, thus, severed heads for as many honoured individuals.

Fig. 7. The lasara, a hybrid animal serving a protective role, is also depicted on the façade of houses (amo ada). Lahusa. Photo by the author, 1977.
The Hunt for Heads and Slaves

Before Dutch colonisation, the hunt for slaves was a fundamental part of the warrior and chieftain society in Nias. Although slave traffic before the seventeenth century was limited to Sumatra and Aceh, the arrival of European merchants in the region created a much greater demand for them. This growth in the market, which now extended to Batavia and the Bourbon Island, must have brought about a multiplication in the number of raids and, consequently, an increase in trading revenue for the island's chiefs. One can suppose that owning slaves, once a privilege for a few powerful chiefs, became a prerogative of numerous noblemen and created greater competition in the trade. This hypothesis is supported by an increased number of monuments erected during the nineteenth century, both in the south and centre of Nias.³

Parallel to the growth in slave traffic was the increase in the scale of headhunting, to the further detriment of the poor and delight of the privileged, and—in this author's opinion—an early stage of globalisation. Figures obtained by foreign visitors at that time enable us to form an idea of the extent of these changes.

One of the (endorsed) reasons for waging war against other villages or clans was to procure slaves and to plunder their treasures for gold ornaments. The relation between war and slavery is patently obvious, whether it be from the viewpoint, “we attack to obtain slaves”, or the other way around, “you took slaves from us, therefore we wage war against you as revenge and to take them back to us”. Elio Modigliani, Italian entomologist and author of the first scientific ethnography on Nias (1890), constantly refers to the permanent state of war in Nias.
All early texts by Arab merchants mention the passion for gold and its commerce (fig. 8). Gold in Nias came from mines in Sumatra. This deficit created a demand by Sumatrans for slaves provided by the Niha as payment for their gold. Slaves also provided labour (most often obtained as a result of debt) to tend to pigs, cultivate rice fields, and, if needed, act as warriors to seize other slaves. In this latter case, care was taken not to set soldier-slaves against their own village or clan!

**Headhunting**

As mentioned earlier, numerous ceremonies related to the cycle of chiefs’ festivities required the severing of heads. Chiefs paid warriors to perform this task on their behalf; during peacetime, these hired warriors would hide at a bend in the path and take as victim the first person to pass by, whether it be a man, woman, or child. When warriors were unavailable, the chief slave was instead set to the task. The aim of headhunting was to take possession of the dead person’s soul, or life-force, and to offer it as a gift to the spirits. In this way, the chief acquired a form of guarantee for his afterlife. A victim's soul also served as a substitute for a sick man's soul and was used to heal the latter and appease the vindictive spirit, who was thought to have caused the illness.

H. Sundermann (1884) notes that the ownership of heads is linked to power and, traditionally, the show of power relates directly to the giving of feasts and the taking of heads. In fact, no other usage for heads, outside of these feasts, have been recorded. Although severed heads were expensive commodities—their ownership and use in feasts came beyond the reach of the average person—there

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**Fig. 8.** Woman’s golden ornaments comprised of a crown (takula an’aa), a pair of earrings (gaule), and a flat necklace (nifatofato). Southern Nias. Height of crown: 15.5 cm. Width of earrings: 12 cm. Width of collar: 22 cm. Inv. 3265-A, 3265-B 1 and 2, and 3265-C. Barbier-Mueller Museum.
developed a genuine and profitable market for them. Head-taking was a practice that directly led to the show of power because, like owning slaves, the ownership of heads meant that one had the financial means to acquire them.

Heads of enemies killed in battle, as well as those brought in by young warriors, were displayed on the front wall of the assembly house (bale, fig. 9). Heads taken that were ordered by a chief were hidden in trees or buried, to await use in later festivities. This contradicts the old idea that heads were used for sacrifice, whose climax was the moment of decapitation.

Occasions for which heads were required varied between different regions of Nias Island, but, generally speaking, included the following:

- When a dying chief requested an honourable funeral (a certain number of skulls would later hang in his house, often those of slaves).
- When a stone bench (darodaro) was laid before the chief's house.
- When a chief constructed his house (heads were buried beneath the main supporting pillars).
- In the last mobinu feast, when a big chief, who wished to obtain a great name, invited all his allied villages (a head was buried under the ladder to the house and, after two months, dug up and cleaned to hang from the roof).
- When a bale was constructed, a site where the statues of the village "gods" would be kept.
- When a new village was founded (fondrakö).
- When healing was requested in cases of grave illness.

Additionally at these feasts, as at others where beheading was not required, the chief would demonstrate his power by appearing before the people and his allies in full splendour, wearing the gold ornaments of his rank and bearing his ceremonial sabre (fig. 18).
Weapons and Sabres

Mastery in the fabrication of arms (knives, sabres, and swords, figs. 10–14) is recognised throughout Indonesia. Fine examples of this proficiency are found in the sabres of Nias.

Although there is no iron ore in Nias, the Niha acquired the metal through commercial exchange with traders who docked at the island’s bays. As gold, copper, and tin, iron was considered a precious metal. As Nias Island has been intermittently cited since the ninth century in Arab and Chinese accounts and, later, in the seventeenth century by Europeans, it can be argued that the production of iron weaponry began at least a thousand years ago. There is reason to believe that the type of warrior society characteristic of the Niha has remained, more or less, unchanged since these remote times.

Fig. 10. An imposing sabre with a long, broad blade (more than twice the width of most other pieces). Strips of brass decorate the sheath, with one strip running the entire length of both sides of the wooden scabbard. Two cylindrical strips of brass with circular incisions bind the wooden hilt. Starting from the corner of the mouth, finely engraved ferns around the horn decorate the head. The rattan ball supports eight human figures. Height: 73 cm. Inv. 3252-C. Barbier-Mueller Museum.

Fig. 11. Sheath decorated with brass strips. Brass incised with circular patterns binds the part of the handle nearest the blade. A headhunter’s calabubu necklace—with a highly fanciful animal whose open mouth bears the teeth of a warthog, the antlers of a stag, and a small monkey clinging to the antlers—decorates the hilt’s head; a piece of cloth (once red) and brass wire attach the rattan ball to the sheath. A cylindrical wooden piece elongates the teeth and gives the latter a stronger appearance (amulet in the form of a wooden plate). Height: 69 cm. Inv. 3252-B. Stéphane Barbier-Mueller collection.

Fig. 12. Brass strips decorate the sheath; cast and crudely reprocessed brass make up the hilt and pomme1. Patterns are similar to those on fig. 11, incised patterns of zigzags, circles, and cane plaits decorate the faceted hilt; braided cane attaches the rattan ball to the sheath; and a piece of cylindrical wood elongates the teeth. Height: 70 cm. Inv. 3252-A. Barbier-Mueller Museum.

Fig. 13. Brass strips decorate the sheath; faceted hilt of red-brown wood. Brass incised with circles bind the hilt’s base, note highly stylised and modern lasara head; rattan thread binds the rattan ball with two types of teeth. Height: 69.4 cm. Inv. 3252-F. Barbier-Mueller Museum.
The machete or knife (balatu) is the Niha weapon *par excellence*. It is not only a technical marvel and a powerful weapon, being very light and well balanced, but also a *sculptural chef-d'oeuvre* with respect to its handle. Called *balatu ide* in the south and *si oli warasi* in the north, it is used for both domestic chores and work in the fields or forests. Every man always carries one with him. The blade has only one cutting edge, with the point curving towards the top or the bottom, depending on the model, and the blade becoming thicker and wider at its extremity. The sheath is made of two wooden parts hollowed out to make room for the blade. These two parts are joined together using braided rattan or copper bands.
The headhunters’ ceremonial sabre (telogu, balatu sebua) has a longer and, in rare cases, wider blade than the domestic knives. The sheath is closed lengthways by strips of copper and entirely covered with copper bands. The sabre’s handle is decorated with the open mouth of a “dragon” or the lasara, a hybrid animal attributed a protective role (figs. 15a and b). The animal also appears on the façades of houses in the north and south of the island and on tombs in the south (fig. 7). It is sometimes symbolically depicted by two jaws and a central stem of metal suggesting the tongue of a snake or varan. In its more complex representation, the lasara can have protruding upper and lower lateral canines on either side of the mouth (a reference to the boar or warthog), teeth at the back of the throat, scrolled eyes, small tusks situated on top of the head (probably suggesting the antlers of the stag), a neck with engraved scales (a reference to the crocodile, snake, or varan), and fern leaves for decoration. It can also be represented in the headhunters’ calabubu necklace.

Western authors have interpreted the lasara’s head in many differing ways. For Horner, it is the fantastic lawôlô bird (1849: 346); Schröder claims it to be a niôbawa lawôlô, an animal whose function is to increase the strength of the sabre’s owner (1917); Modigliani sees a boar’s head (1890: 246); Mittersakschmöller interprets it as a Chinese dragon (1998: 171); and, recently, Kalpana Kartik Sulaiman speaks of a composite dragon-head evoking the makara, a dragon-fish-elephant from Hindu-Javanese mythology (1991).

We can, however, be sure that this head had a protective function (lawôlô) for the owner of the sabre (Raap 1903: 172; Rosenberg 1878: 164).

Fig. 14. Brass strips decorate the sheath; the head is identical to that of fig. 11; red fabric and rattan thread attach the rattan ball to the sheath; notable features include fossilised fish teeth, a button (possibly of Dutch origin), and numerous teeth, either normal or elongated, around a rattan ball. Height: 72.5 cm. Inv. 3252 G. Barbier-Mueller Museum.
Fig. 15 a et b. Sabre handles reproduced in H. W. Fischer’s Die Inseln ringsum Sumatra, Katalog des ethnographischen Reichsmuseums (vol. 4, Leiden, 1909: 39); and 15 b, in Elio Modigliani’s Un viaggio a Nias (1890: 240).
Among the most beautiful pieces is a sabre that bears a small person or monkey sitting on the head and clinging to lasara’s tusks. The image represents bechu zöcha, a spirit who hunts and feeds on men’s shadows, just as men feed on pigs (Modigliani 1890: 249). By biting the boar’s head, he takes on the role of a man. This image can be regarded as a talisman working against the misfortunes that the bechu zöcha spirit would ordinarily bring (Brenner-Felsach 1998: 174). Because of the spirit’s thirst for blood and its prominence on the headhunter’s sabre, the image was believed to have increased the warrior’s strength.

The sheath of sabres belonging to chiefs and nobles in the south of Nias supported a rattan ball (raga iföboaya) on to which are attached amulets of different kinds: the teeth of warthogs or pigs, fossilised fish teeth, so-called tiger’s teeth, strips of fabric (usually red, the colour of nobility), small figures (adu nori), and other symbolic items to which the Niha attributed power (figs. 10–14). They believed that amulets provided them strength and protection against enemies (Horner 1840: 346; von Rosenberg 1878; Raap 1903: 172; Holt 1939). These long knives, indicating their owner’s rank, were customarily kept in chests hidden inside the house and displayed only at feasts (Schröder 1917: 240).

Sabres with a rattan ball covered with the teeth of animals and other amulets are common, and many examples exist in private and public collections. Although old photographs of chiefs from the southern Nias show them bearing similar sabres at their belts, many sold in the 1970s were made for tourists as a consequence of the first cruises that called on the island to observe the warrior dances of the village of Bawömataluo in the south of Nias. Others have remained in situ, however. The former village chief of Bawömataluo possesses a remarkably beautiful example, locked away in a chest in the most withdrawn part of his house. He agrees to display it only on rare occasions (fig. 4).
Rarer still are sabres with small human figures, adu nori, attached to the rattan ball. Surprisingly, no known photographs of such sabres in situ exist and this author has never seen any in the field. Kleiweg de Zwaan (1930), who visited the island at the beginning of the twentieth century, tells us that “at feasts and at war, the men wear a short sabre to whose sheath we often find a small basket attached, onto which are sewn a bevy of small objects such as stones of particular shapes, shells, pig’s teeth, tiger’s claws imported from Sumatra, and, quite often, small wooden figures. It is these amulets that make the warrior believe himself to be invincible. The weapon’s hilt is often artfully worked and is shaped to form the head of a fantastic animal.” An ancestor statue from the south of Nias, currently at the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden (fig. 16), shows a highly expressive chief, with his ornaments and headdress, holding a blunderbuss and bearing such a sabre at his side.

Modigliani wrote:

In the south of the island, the sabre evokes moments of glory in the mind of the warrior-headhunter and is girded with precious idols that have protected him and will continue to protect him in the future. . . . The idols are always attached to a ball of braided rattan which is bound to the sheath with pieces of vegetable cord. . . . The amulets are sometimes inserted inside the ball, and are always wrapped with pieces of cotton and firmly tied. They are very jealous of their decorated knives and their mystical
properties, and never spontaneously go without them. Where they do go without their knives, they are careful to first remove the ball so as not to divest themselves of idols. I occasionally expressed the desire to have one myself, but I was presented with a fake ball decorated with only pig's teeth. They consider it a grave misfortune to be deprived of their protective idols and talismans, for they believe to be thus exposed to the vengeance of the parents of those whose heads they have cut off and fear that the evil spirits invoked by their victims may bring about their death.

As there was no way for me to acquire such a knife, I decided to obtain one at any cost and asked one of my men to steal one and to carefully hide it. One must see the rage of the injured party, and the threats he uttered, to understand the importance placed upon the idols.

(1890: 242)

To increase the strength and invincibility of the warrior, these figurines were likely made prior to wars or headhunting raids (Sulaiman 1991). Rituals were performed and offerings made to solicit blessing, strength, and protection, in similar fashion as ritual offerings for ancestor statues kept in the house. Remains of offerings in the form of dried leaves, cotton soaked with coconut oil, and pig’s hair may still be seen inside the sabre’s rattan ball.

Modigliani sought to gain deeper insight into the manufacture and symbolic purpose of these figurines, but he was unable to solicit any response from informants. In fact, no later traveller has elaborated on the subject. Such objects found in museums are old and their descriptions limited to “small idols of protective nature”. The mystery remains unresolved because actual witnesses to this illustrious period disappeared long before their memories could be recorded.
To our knowledge, the most impressive sabre of this kind is the one in the Barbier-Mueller collection (figs. 10 and 17).

The blade is particularly wide in comparison with all the other known specimens. The sheath is decorated with strips of brass. A small chain should enable it to be hung from a belt. The handle, bound by two brass bands, one of which is threaded, ends in a lasara head that combines all the characteristic elements: gaping jaws, incised teeth forming a frieze of triangles along the outer edge of the jaws, teeth inside the jaws, tongue, protruding canines on either side of the jaw, beak from a hornbill, stag antlers encompassed by a frieze of tree-fern, necklace, and lawölö figure clinging to the head.

The rattan ball affixed to the sheath is exceptional (fig. 17). It features eight human figures, each sporting a different headdress, sitting or squatting, their hands holding a pestle and resting on their knees. Eight ancestor figures forming eight protective figurines point to the object’s rarity and magical power.

Virtually nothing is known of the origin of this piece18, and there exists no other specimen like it, to this author’s knowledge.

These sabres, symbols of a system and form of power that no longer exist, are the last remaining tangible expressions of the age of headhunters and the might of the chiefs in the southern part of Nias Island.

Fig. 18. Ama Barafé, chief of a southern Nias village, wearing his gold necklace and bea-ring ancestral weaponry. The stone column to his right symbolises his power. Ama Barafé died at over ninety years of age, several months after this photograph was taken at the end of 1990. Photo by Jean-Louis Soosa. Barbier-Mueller Archives.
ANONYMOUS. “Short notice concerning the island of Pulo nihas from observations made in the king’s library and accompanied by notes by P. Amédée Jaubert (1154), vol. 1, in AHBÂR AS-SÎN WA L-HIND.


RAAF, Hugo. “Reisen auf der Insel Nias bei Sumatra.” In Globus, illustrierte Zeitschrift für Länder und Völkerkunde 82, 10 (12 March 1903): 152, fig. 7, p. 153, fig. 7a.


NOTES

2. A necklace made from a brass structure onto which coconut rings are threaded.
3. Because of recorded genealogies, dates of their erection are known as are the names of those engaged in the competition.
4. Kayser notes that at the end of the nineteenth century, a head brought 100–200 florins (1951: 51).
5. The fear of headhunters remains so deeply rooted in the collective unconscious that, even today, it is inconceivable for a Niha to walk alone or to allow someone to travel unescorted from one village to another.
6. énu means both slave and head.
7. Kruijt 1906; Schrédler 1917.
8. Modigliani published a photograph of this showing a collection of 21 heads hanging in front of the village bale of Hili Djiono (1895).
9. For more on the cycle of feasts, see Viaro and Ziegler in Messages de Pierre (1999).
10. “Slaves constituted the commercial base of Nias, and this promoted the island’s permanent state of struggle and plunder that still exists today.” Modigliani (1895: 26). The island’s other exports were rice and coconut. In 1811, Marsden writes in Histoire de Sumatra, the Niha supplied at least a thousand slaves per year. He adds: “Some of the chiefs managed to accumulate fortunes in the region of 10,000 or 20,000 gold-dollars, kept in the form of silver or gold ingots.” In 1820, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles notes that fifteen hundred slaves were annually exported, not counting those taken by the Chinese or the Aceh (1835: 170). The revenue gathered from slaves amounted to 70,000-80,000 Rs, while rice, coconut, and pepper together amounted to only about 45,000 Rs. In 1853, Rosenberg writes that the slave trade brought in 17,750 florins, rice 12,150, and coconut, 11,400 (1878: 56).
11. Jacob Pits, director of a commercial firm in Padang, Sumatra, wrote the following, on 25 September 1669, to the governor general of the East Indies Company: “Information had arrived from this island that slaves may be obtained for the value of 12 or 16 Rixdallers, payable in iron, steel, or other such metals” (ibid., p. 25). In 1997, during our first trip to the island, the brass taps in the Catholic Mission were systematically stolen to be melted down and used for making sabre handles.
12. Suleyman manuscript (851), Adjaib manuscript (ca. 900-950), Edrisi manuscript (1154), Augustine de Beaulieu (1620), to name a few sources.
14. Liners that took over the Dutch companies’ tradition of cruises in the 1930s.
17. Inventory no. 1691-36.