


Provenance report regarding Lans

Klaas Stutje

 <p><i>Photo: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll.no. RV-360-5839</i></p>	Custodian	NMVW Museum Volkenkunde
	Current possessor	Dutch State
	Inventory number	RV-360-5839
	Material/technique	Iron; wood (pelet); brass
	Measurements	Length 184 cm; shaft 2 cm

Summary of findings

This lance in NMVW's Museum Volkenkunde once belonged to the collection of the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden (KKZ) before this Kabinet was abolished in 1883. The lance appears on a sales list in the archive of KKZ that can be dated around 1836-1837. The identity of the selling party, a resident, could not be established. Consequently, nothing is known about its earlier provenance, acquisition, or moment of donation. Its stylistic characteristics and material qualities indicate that it is the product of a hybridization of Borneo and Malay cultures.

Reconstruction provenance

[no date] - 1836/7

A resident in the Netherlands Indies

NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 839, sales list and draft receipt notes, no author, no date.

1836/7 - 1883

Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden

NL-LdnRMV-A3-26 t/m -67, handwritten inventory books of the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum, no. 5838-9.

1883 - today

Rijks Ethnografisch Museum (today NMVW Museum Volkenkunde)

Museum Volkenkunde, inventory card RV-360-5839

Object information

According to Albert van Zonneveld, an expert of weapons from Borneo, the three-pronged lance number RV-360-5839 in NMVW's Museum Volkenkunde is a royal lance.¹ It is a trident with a long barbed middle prong and two smaller outside prongs, also with barbs. The shank of the middle prong is squared and decorated with circular patterns. The lower end of the shank and the brass socket are decorated with rings. According to the inventory card, the long shaft is made of *kayu pèlèt*, Timoho wood (Kleinhovia hospita).²

As we will read below, the stylistic characteristics and used material of this lance led to confusion among Dutch curators regarding its cultural background. Present-day experts also point to its hybrid character. According to John Klein Nagelvoort the motif on the shank is more often seen on Borneo, while the lower end of the shank and the socket are often seen in Malay weapons from Sumatra. Mansyur Sammy also considers this trident a Javanese or Sumatran *pusaka* rather than a royal weapon from Borneo. Hans van de Bunte points out that tridents in general, and the use of brass and *kayu pèlèt* in particular, are rather uncommon in Borneo. A possible explanation may be the presence of weapon producing Javanese and Malay communities in towns such as Pontianak, and the lively exchange of weapons and weapon parts between various cultures and communities in the larger Nusantara area, leading to hybridization of styles.³

Provenance report

The inventory card of Museum Volkenkunde of this lance indicates that it had belonged to the collection of the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden (KKZ).⁴ This cabinet was established in 1816 by the Dutch King William I (1772-1843) and contained the old stadtholder's collection. In the course of the nineteenth century, the collection grew considerably with historical and ethnographical objects from all parts of the world, mainly from Japan and China, but also from the Netherlands Indies. In 1883, KKZ was disbanded and its collection was subdivided over several Dutch museums. The ethnographic collection of the Netherlands Indies was assigned to the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum, Museum Volkenkunde's direct predecessor in Leiden.

¹ Albert G. van Zonneveld, *Traditionele wapens van Borneo, de uitrusting van de koppensnellers. Deel II, speren en blaasroeren* (Leiden: Sunfield Publishing, 2017), 55-56.

² H. H. Juynboll, *Catalogus van 's Rijks Ethnographisch Museum, II Borneo* (Leiden: E.J. Brill 1910), 297-298.

³ Personal communication of the author with John Klein Nagelvoort, 26 April 2021, Hans van de Bunte, 15 April 2021, and Mansyur Sammy, 22 June 2021.

⁴ Museum Volkenkunde, inventory card RV-360-5839.

In 1876, the director of KKZ, David van der Kellen (1827-1895), attempted to retroactively register the cabinet's acquisitions of previous decades, after a long period of neglected administration under his predecessor. To reconstruct the incoming donations and acquisitions, Van der Kellen used the KKZ's archival records at his disposal. Object number 5839 in Van der Kellen's inventory book is registered as "a dito of dito, 1,84 [meter]" referring to the previous number (5838), which has the following description: "A pike with three prongs of *pellet* (?) Javanese, 2,31 [meter]."⁵ A donor or seller is not mentioned, but a comparison of these and preceding and following inventory numbers with incoming correspondence about donations and acquisitions in the archive of KKZ, kept as part of the Rijksmuseum archives in Haarlem, shows a match with a sales list of nine pages.⁶ From an accompanying draft receipt the sales list can be dated around the end of 1836 or January 1837, and ascribed to an anonymous resident of the Dutch colonial administration of the Netherlands Indies. Unfortunately, further archival research in the archives of KKZ, Rijksmuseum voor Oudheden, and the Ministry of Interior Affairs has not led to information regarding the identity of the selling resident. In total, 46 objects of the sales list can be retraced in the collection of Museum Volkenkunde, between object numbers RV-360-5751 and RV-360-5910. It concerns weapons, boat models, and a few curiosities. A large majority of objects was from the Indonesian archipelago, but the objects show a large variety in regional origin.⁷ The lance was priced at 40 guilders and has a similar description as Van der Kellen's inventory book: "A pike with three throngs of Pellet Wood (Jav.)."⁸

Van der Kellen's registration in the inventory books was copied on the inventory card of the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum a few years later. However, in 1910 museum director H.H. Juynboll (1867-1945) studied the lance again for the museum's new catalogue and suggested, probably on the basis of its characteristics, that the weapon was from West-Borneo.⁹ This suggestion was noted on the inventory card, with a question mark, and as such it is still registered.

Suggestions for further research

The number of Dutch residents in the years 1836/1837 is not very large, and further archival research may result in the identification of this resident.

⁵ NL-LdnRMV-A3-26 t/m -67, handwritten inventory books of the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum, nrs. 5268 to 5287: "Een piek met drie tanden van pellet (?) Javaansch, 2,31". 'Pellet' refers to *kayu pèlèt*, Timoho wood that was often used for weapons and had mystical qualities. See also NL-HaNA, BiZa / Kunsten en Wetenschappen, 2.04.13, inv.nr. 1962, inventory KKZ, nr. 5839.

⁶ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 839, sales list and draft receipt notes, no author, no date.

⁷ NB. Even though the entire 1836-1837 list was copied and numbered in Van der Kellen's inventory book, not all the objects were actually acquired. Moreover, some objects such as the trident of RV-360-5838 seem erroneously attributed to the sales list.

⁸ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 839, sales list and draft receipt notes, no author, no date: "Een piek met 3 tanden, van Pellet Hout (Jav.)."

⁹ Juynboll, Catalogus van 's Rijks Ethnographisch Museum, 297-298.