


Provenance report regarding Wayang bèbèr plaat [Wayan beber scrolls]

Klaas Stutje

 <p>Photo: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll.no. RV-360-5255, 5256 and 5257</p>	Custodian	NMVW Museum Volkenkunde
	Current possessor	Dutch State
	Inventory number	RV-360-5255 RV-360-5256 RV-360-5257
	Material/technique	Paper; wood
	Size	70 x 283 cm 71 x 289 cm 71 x 275 cm

Summary of findings

These three *wayang beber* scrolls were created in the mid-seventeenth century and belong to a set of six scrolls (RV-360-5254 t/m 5259) in the collection of the NMVW Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden.

They arrived in the museum in 1883 as part of the collection of the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden (KKZ). Correspondence in the archives of the Rijksmuseum voor Oudheden (RMO) and KKZ reveals that Adolph François Henry van de Poel (1816-1875), Assistant-Resident in Kebumen, in the residency of Bagelen on Java, donated the scrolls in 1851 to the Archaeologisch Cabinet der Hoogeschool. However, its director decided that the scrolls were better placed in the collection of KKZ. About the provenance of the scrolls, Van de Poel remarked that he had recently “found” them in the village Sampang in the house “of the guardian of the Pamambahans Sampang.” The Dutch sources at our disposal do not reveal who the *dalang* and scroll keepers were, nor the circumstances in which Van de Poel had obtained them. Based on contemporary and historical knowledge about similar *wayang beber* scrolls in Gedompol and Gelaran, it seems unlikely that the *wayang beber* scrolls of Sampang were simply given away to A.F.H. van de Poel.

Mentioned this transfer by adding another subactivity

I don't know how to model that

Reconstruction provenance

Seventeenth century – [no date] PRODUCTION

[...]

Book Saiful Bakhri, Isamu Sakamoto and Muhammad Nurul Fajri, 'Collaborative Efforts to Preserve Wayang Beber in Indonesia', 2018.

[no date] - [no date] TRANSFER OF CUSTODY

The guardian of a cemetery of the Panembahan in Sampang

NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter from the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet to the Minister of Interior Affairs, dated 10 January 1852.

[no date] - November 1851 Acquisition 1

A.F.H. van de Poel (1816-1875)

NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter from the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet to the Minister of Interior Affairs, dated 10 January 1852.

November 1851 - 2 March 1852 Acquisition 2

Archeologisch Cabinet der Hoogeschool

NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter from the director of the Museum voor Oudheden to the director of the KKZ, dated 2 March 1852.

2 March 1852 - 1883 Acquisition 3

Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden

Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde, inventory card series 360, no. 5254-5257.

1883 - today

Rijks Ethnografisch Museum (today NMVW Museum Volkenkunde) Don't know how to specify renaming of institution

Introduction and context

These three *wayang beber* scrolls belong to a set of six scrolls (RV-360-5254 t/m 5259) in the collection of the NMVW Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden. *Wayang beber* is a Javanese oral tradition, developed in the fourteenth century in the Majapahit era, in which a *dalang* (storyteller and spiritual mediator) tells a story about the legendary prince Panji Asmoro Bangun, accompanied by *gamelan* and *rebab* musical instruments. The *dalang* tells his story while unrolling (*membeberkan*), long painted scrolls between two wooden sticks depicting scenes from the Panji tales. In Javanese culture, the *wayang beber* scrolls are connected to the ancestral world and are only unpacked and used by the *dalang* with due observance of certain rituals and offerings.¹

¹ Marina Pretković and Tea Škrinjarić, 'Reviving Javanese Picture Scroll Theatre', *Etnološka Tribina* 40, vol. 47 (2017), 201-202.

Only some *wayang beber* experts seem aware of the existence of the set in Museum Volkenkunde.² It is one of three original *wayang beber* sets currently known. The other two are kept by families in the villages of Gedompol (Pacitan, East Java) and Gelaran (Wonosari, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta). The style of the *wayang beber* set in Leiden is more similar to the set in Gelaran than to the set in Gedompol, which has a more densely decorated background. On the basis of radiocarbon dating Saiful Bakhri, Isamu Sakamoto and Muhammad Nurul Fajri conclude that the scrolls in Leiden were created between 1633 and 1669, and are a few decades older than the scrolls in Gedompol (1690-1739) and Gelaran (1700-1735).³ Other *wayang beber* sets were created in the twentieth century.⁴

Wayang beber researchers Marina Pretković and Tea Škrinjarić write that the scrolls are made of “beaten tree bark paper named *daluang* (or *dluwang*, also known as *kertas* Ponogoro or Ponogoro paper), and are painted with colours composed of natural pigment powder (animal bones, tree bark or leaves) and glue.”⁵ The bamboo sticks that are used to unroll the scrolls are slightly charred, as are the edges of the scrolls. In 1852, Conrad Leemans (1809-1893), who was the director of the Archaeologisch Cabinet, speculated that these burn marks may have been the result of candles [“lichtjes”] used to illuminate the scene.⁶ Leemans numbered the scrolls from 1 to 6. According to Juynboll’s (1867-1945) catalogue of the Rijks Ethnografisch Museum, the Javanese text on the scroll number RV-360-5255 refers to the Javanese days of the week.⁷

Provenance report

According to the inventory cards of Museum Volkenkunde (today part of the National Museum of World Cultures), this set of six scrolls was originally in the possession of the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden (KKZ).⁸ This cabinet was established in 1816 by the Dutch King William I (1772-1843) to accommodate the old stadtholder’s collections. 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

² Cf. Walter Angst, *Wayang Indonesia, Die phantastische Welt des Indonesischen Figurentheaters* (Konstanz: Stadler Verlagsgesellschaft, 2007) 57-58; Mally Kant-Achilles; Friedrich Seltmann; Rüdiger Schumacher, *Wayang bèbèr das wiederentdeckte Bildrollen-Drama Zentral-Javas* (Stuttgart: Steiner 1990); Marianna Lis, “Contemporary Wayang Beber in Central Java,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 31-2 (2014) 505–523; Benedict Anderson, “The Last Picture Show: Wayang Beber,” in: *Proceedings of the Conference on Modern Indonesian Literature*, Jean Taylor et al., eds. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Center for SE Asian Studies, 1974) 33–81.

³ Saiful Bakhri, Isamu Sakamoto and Muhammad Nurul Fajri, “Collaborative Efforts to Preserve Wayang Beber in Indonesia,” conference paper for the 7 December 2018 symposium “Recent Advances in Barkcloth Conservation and Technical Analysis,” Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, United Kingdom.

⁴ Pretković and Škrinjarić, “Reviving Javanese Picture Scroll Theatre,” 200, 204. Three other story rolls in the collection of Volkenkunde have also been described as *wayang beber* sets, but were later identified as Balinese *ider-ider* story textiles. It concerns objects numbers RV-37-567, RV-37-567a and RV-37-693. Cf. H.H. Juynboll, *Catalogus van 's Rijks Ethnografisch Museum*, XIII Java, derde deel (Leiden: E.J. Brill 1918), p. 207-8.

⁵ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter of the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet, to the Minister of Interior Affairs, dated 10 January 1852; Pretković and Škrinjarić, “Reviving Javanese Picture Scroll Theatre,” 200n6, 206.

⁶ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. nr. 845, “Javaansche voorwerpen van lateren tijd” by Leemans.

⁷ Juynboll, *Catalogus van 's Rijks Ethnografisch Museum*, XIII, 208-209; NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, “Javaansche voorwerpen van lateren tijd” by Leemans.

⁸ Museum Volkenkunde, inventory card RV-360-5254 to RV-360-5257.

its collection was divided between various Dutch museums. The *wayang beber* scrolls were transferred to the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum, the predecessor of Museum Volkenkunde.

According to archival documents of the Rijksmuseum voor Oudheden (RMO) and KKZ, KKZ had acquired the scrolls on 2 March 1852. On that day, they were brought in from the Archaeologisch Cabinet der Hoogeschool, the old name of the Rijksmuseum voor Oudheden.⁹ This transfer was preceded by extensive correspondence between Leemans, the director of the Archaeologisch Cabinet, A.A. van de Kastele (1814-1893), who was the director of the KKZ, and J.R. Thorbecke (1798-1892), who was the Minister of Interior Affairs. This correspondence mainly concerned the question whether the *wayang beber* scrolls were part of a living tradition in Java or had disappeared, as some contemporary European authors had argued.¹⁰ If *wayang beber* ceremonies were still performed, the scrolls belonged to the field of ethnology, making KKZ the appropriate place of storage. If the tradition had died out, the scrolls would belong to the domain of archeology and antiquity and had to be placed in the Archaeologisch Cabinet. Director Leemans of the Archeologisch Cabinet, who managed the scrolls, consulted various experts, including professors Gz.J. Pijnappel (1822-1901) and T. Roorda (1801-1874), restorer T. Hooiberg (1809-1897), and an unnamed Javanese servant who was "very familiar with the [Javanese] interior."¹¹ Even though Pijnappel and Roorda could not accurately date the *wayang beber* scrolls, they concluded that they "rather belong to the present time."¹² According to the Javanese servant, such displays were still very common and he had attended them regularly.¹³ Therefore, Thorbecke decided on 15 January 1862, on the advice of Leemans, that the scrolls had to be transferred to the KKZ, with an attached invoice of fl. 36,42½ from Hooiberg for the restoration costs already incurred.¹⁴ The Dutch government gazette of 19 March 1852 stated: "Because these or similar scrolls are still in use by the people of Java, and therefore belong more to the field of contemporary ethnology [than to antiquity], they are being transferred to the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden in The Hague."¹⁵

A.F.H. van de Poel

A report from Leemans to the Minister of Interior Affairs Thorbecke, dated 10 January 1852, shows how the Archaeologisch Cabinet had obtained the *wayang beber* scrolls before they were transferred to KKZ. In this report Leemans writes that he had received the scrolls in the second half of November 1851 from Adolph François Henry van de Poel, Assistant-Resident in Keboemen [Kebumen], in the

⁹ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter of the director of the Museum voor Oudheden, to the director of KKZ, dated 2 March 1852.

¹⁰ Most notably Thomas Stamford Raffles, *The history of Java*, Vol. 1 (London: J. Murray, 1830) 379; J.A. Wilkens, "Het Wajang verhaal Pregiwo," *Tijdschrift voor Neërland's Indië*, 8-2 (1846) 3.

¹¹ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter of the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet, to the Minister of Interior Affairs, dated 10 January 1852: een 'vluggen en met het binnenland zeer bekenden' Javaanse bediende.

¹² Archief Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (NL-LdnRMO), Verzonden brieven 1818-1906 (17.01.02-74), 1850-2, letter of Gz.J. Pijnappel to the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet, dated 5 December 1851: "meer tot de tegenwoordige tijd behooren."

¹³ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter of the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet, to the Minister of Interior Affairs, dated 10 January 1852.

¹⁴ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter of the Minister of Interior Affairs, to the director of KKZ, dated 15 January 1852.

¹⁵ *Nederlandsche Staatscourant*, 19 maart 1852, p. 5: "Daar deze schermen of soortgelijke thans nog bij de bevolking van Java in gebruik zijn, en dus meer tot het gebied der hedendaagsche land- en volkenkunde behooren, zijn zij aan het Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden te 's-Gravenhage overgegeven."

residency of Bagalen [Bagelen] on Java.¹⁶ Van de Poel donated the scrolls to the Archaeologisch Cabinet to be added to its collection or, if more appropriate, to one of the other national collections. Leemans also writes that he had first spoken with Van de Poel 11 to 12 years earlier, when the latter was on leave in the Netherlands. Leemans had asked Van de Poel “to promote the interests of the Museum once he had returned in Java, and to collect and send antiquarian objects.” Consequently, Van de Poel had already sent a few statues and bronze objects that he had bought at “public auctions.”¹⁷ Where possible, Van de Poel received compensation for the purchase and shipping costs incurred, but it also happened that not all costs could be compensated and that Van de Poel paid for the loss, which, according to Leemans, Van de Poel “gladly” did. Leemans therefore concluded the report with a plea to the minister to grant Van de Poel a “special recognition.”¹⁸ The RMO archive shows that Leemans and Van de Poel corresponded on a regular basis in the period between 1846 and 1875 about donations to the Archaeologisch Cabinet/RMO. These letters also show a growing personal bond between the two, with objects ending up in their respective private collections.¹⁹

Sampang

The report of 10 January 1852 is also insightful because it contains a full quote of Van de Poel by Leemans about the exact origin of the *wayang beber* scrolls. Van de Poel, in Leemans’ words, said: “I recently found in the dessa Sampang in the house of the guardian of the Pamambahans Sampang, a set of Wayang wrapped in a pisang leaf and drawn on tree bark paper, the colours and drawings of which also bear the markings of the art that used to exist on Java. The drawing has been well preserved, but has hung over smoke.”²⁰ In an abbreviated extract by Leemans of the report of 10 January 1852, Leemans writes: “These Wajang scrolls come from the house of the guardian of the tomb of Panambahans Sampang in the dessa Sampang (Assistent Residentie Keboemen?) where they

¹⁶ Adolf/Adolph François Henri/Henry van de Poel, also occurring in the sources as F.A.H. van de Poel and A.F.H. van der Poel, was a government official who between 1847 and 1873 had a career in the colonial service as ‘controleur eerste klasse’ in Bagelen, assistant-resident in Bonjonegoro and Kebumen, and as a resident in Kediri, Cheribon and Semarang. In 1853, as can be gathered from the *Almanak van Nederlandsch-Indië voor het jaar 1853*, he was awarded the French Légion d’Honneur and knight in the Order of the Netherlands Lion. In Semarang, he was also president of the Maatschappij tot Nut van t Algemeen (Society for Public Welfare). In 1873, Van de Poel returned to Europe.

¹⁷ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter of the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet, to the Minister of Interior Affairs, dated 10 January 1852; “na zijne terugkeer in Java de belangen van het Museum te bevorderen en oudheidkundige voorwerpen te verzamelen en te verzenden.”; “openbare veilingen.” In the museum’s information system we can indeed find objects that Van de Poel sold to RMO in the years 1846-47 and which were adopted by the Rijks Ethnografisch Museum: RV-1403-1846, -1853, -1854 and -1855. These objects all originated from the Dieng plateau.

¹⁸ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter from the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet to the Minister of Interior Affairs, dated 10 January 1852; “bijzondere erkenning.”

¹⁹ See for instance: NL-LdnRMO, Verzonden brieven 1818-1906 (17.01.02-78), 1861-1862, letter of A.F.H. van de Poel to the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet, dated 11 November 1862.

²⁰ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter of the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet, to the Minister of Interior Affairs, dated 10 January 1852: “Ik heb onlangs in de dessa Sampang in het huis van den bewaker des Pamambahans Sampang, een stel in een pisang blad gewikkelde en op papier van boombast geteekende Wayang gevonden, waarvan de kleuren zoo ook de teekeningen kenmerken dragen van de kunst die weleer op Java bestond, het geteekende is goed bewaard gebleven, maar heeft boven rook hangen.”

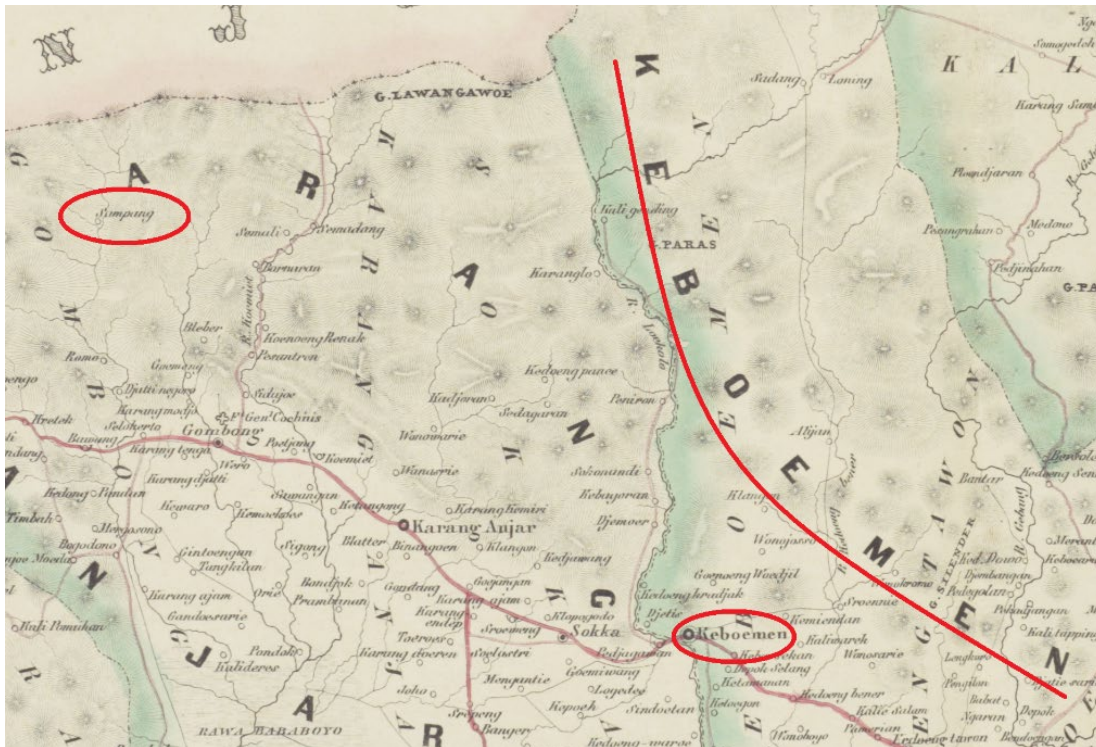
are wrapped in pinang leaves, stored, found by mister Van de Poel and obtained in property.”²¹ The Dutch government gazette of 19 March 1852, quoted earlier, stated that the scrolls were “kept wrapped in pinang leaves by the guard of a cemetery, and were obtained in property by Mr. van der Poel.”²²

The three sources seem unambiguous but differ in a number of important details. The first source is the most original of the three, but is a quote from Van de Poel by Leemans in which mistakes could have been made. According to the quote, the *wayang beber* scrolls were wrapped in *pisang* leaves (from the banana tree), the other two sources refer to *pinang* leaves (from the betel palm). They were either kept in the house of the guardian of the Panambahan of Sampang, or the house of the guardian of the tomb of the Panambahan of Sampang, or with the guardian of the cemetery (and not necessarily in his house). “Pamambahan” and “Panambahan” refer to the princely title of *Panembahan*: a position in the hierarchy of nobility above that of the *priyayi* but below that of the sultan. Finally, the village is called Sampang. Leemans wonders whether this village is in the Assistant-Residentie of Keboemen, but according to a detailed map from 1855 there was a village of the same name in the adjacent Assistant-Residentie Karang Anjar, also part of the Bagelen residency.²³ The comments that the *wayang beber* scrolls were “found and obtained in property” raise questions, and as yet no specification has been found of the nature of the acquisition by Van de Poel.

²¹ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, extract of the director of the Museum voor Oudheden, no date; “Deze Wajang bladen zijn afkomstig uit het huis van den bewaker van het graf des Panambahans Sampang in de dessa Sampang (Assistent Residentie Keboemen?) waar zij in pinang bladeren gewikkeld, bewaard, door den heer Van de Poel gevonden en in eigendom verkregen werden.”

²² Nederlandsche Staatscourant, 19 March 1852, p. 5; “bij den bewaker van eene begraafplaats in pinangbladen gewikkeld bewaard, door den heer van der Poel in eigendom verkregen werden.”

²³ P. Melvill van Carnbee, *Kaart van de residentie Bagelen, 1855*, (Batavia: Van Haren Noman & Kolff, 1853-1862). Sampang still exists in the Kecamatan Sempor, Kabupaten Kebumen, Jawa Tengah 54421, Indonesia.



Cut-out with Sampang and Keboemen, from a map of P. Melvill van Carnbee, *Kaart van de residentie Bagelen*, 1855 (Batavia: Van Haren Noman & Kolff, 1853-1862).

The sources are also unclear about the history of the *wayang beber* scrolls before Van de Poel got hold of them. Regarding the question whether the scrolls belonged to the sphere of archeology or ethnology, Van de Poel, Leemans, Van de Kastelee, and Thorbecke were more interested in the age of the scrolls than in their previous owners. Van de Poel and Leemans assumed that the scrolls had “quite a considerable age,” pointing at the damaged condition of the scrolls and what was known in the literature of the time.²⁴ Pijnappel, on the other hand, concluded: “With regards to the age of these pieces there may be other evidence contradicting it, but we have no reason to not believe that they couldn’t have been made long ago. Such antiques belong more to the present day. Furthermore, it must be very obvious that these pieces have nothing to do with *wayang beber*.”²⁵ It is not known what Pijnappel based this conclusion on. Based on radiocarbon dating, present-day experts Saiful Bakhri, Isamu Sakamoto, and Muhammad Nurul Fajri conclude that the scrolls were created between 1633 and 1669.²⁶ This early dating makes it possible to relate the *wayang beber* set in Leiden to the history of the other two original *wayang beber* sets in Gelaran and Gedompol. Benedict Anderson speculated that these sets originated from the Mataram court and ended up in

²⁴ NL-HlmNHA, 476 Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam, inv. no. 845, letter of the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet, to the Minister of Interior Affairs, dated 10 January 1852; “eenen betrekkelijk vrij aanmerkelijken ouderdom.”

²⁵ NL-LdnRMO, Verzonden brieven 1818-1906 (17.01.02-74), 1850-2, letter of Gz.J. Pijnappel to the director of the Archeologisch Cabinet, dated 5 December 1851: “Wat den ouderdom dier stukken betreft mogen er andere bewijzen tegen zijn, maar ons is geen reden bekend waarom wij het er niet voor houden zouden dat zij niet lang geleden kunnen vervaardigd zijn. Dergelijke antiquiteiten behooren meer tot de tegenwoordige tijd. En verder moet het te duidelijk zijn, dat deze stukken met de wajang bèbèr wel niets te maken zullen hebben.”

²⁶ Saiful Bakhri, Isamu Sakamoto and Muhammad Nurul Fajri, “Collaborative Efforts to Preserve Wayang Beber in Indonesia,” conference paper for the 7 December 2018 symposium “Recent Advances in Barkcloth Conservation and Technical Analysis,” Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, United Kingdom.

the respective villages either as a reward for a special service rendered to the sultan or in the context of political turmoil. About the other sets, Anderson stated that “it is inconceivable that they were made in the village” because of their beauty and sophisticated composition.²⁷

The Dutch sources at our disposal do not reveal what role the Leiden scrolls played at the cemetery or with the guard of Sampang, who were the *dalang* and scroll keepers, and under what circumstances Van de Poel obtained them. According to anthropologists Pretković and Škrinjarić, the *wayang beber* scrolls in the villages of Gedompol and Gelaran were not used in funeral ceremonies, but in Javanese purification (*ruwatan*) and healing rituals. They underline the strict traditional rules and procedures determining how and when the scrolls were to be approached, used, interpreted, and safeguarded. Even though the scrolls had communal importance, they were guarded in a special room by guardian families and only the *dalang* could touch, open, and recite the scrolls. Even the location and spatial orientation of the scrolls were subject to strict rules. Within the guardian families, the scrolls were passed on between male descendants.²⁸ The strict adherence to rules and rituals was also observed by the Dutch professor and wayang expert, G.A.J. Hazeu, when he visited a *wayang beber* performance in Gelaran in 1902. The sale of these scrolls, Hazeu mentioned, was out of the question, even when the *dalang* was offered a considerable sum of money.²⁹ Even though these sources concern other *wayang beber* scrolls five decades after 1851, it seems unlikely that the *wayang beber* scrolls of Sampang were simply given away to A.F.H. van de Poel.

Suggestions for further research

Further analysis by Indonesian *wayang beber* experts, in comparison to the scrolls in Gelaran and Gedompol, may result in alternative insights in the social, cultural, and spiritual role of these scrolls in the local society. A local and oral history project in the village of Sampang may bring a better understanding of the historical context in the 1850s and later memory by descendants. Finally, archival research in the Residentie-archives that are held by *Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia* may contain cultural analyses of the region.

²⁷ Anderson, “The Last Picture Show,” 40.

²⁸ Pretković and Škrinjarić, “Reviving Javanese Picture Scroll Theatre,” 208-112; Correspondence of the author with Pretković and Škrinjarić, April 2021.

²⁹ G.A.J. Hazeu, “Eine „Wayang Beber“ Vorstellung in Jogjakarta,” *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie* 16 (Leipzig 1904) 128-135, there 135; see also R. A. Kern, “De Wajang-beber van Patjitan,” *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land en Volkenkunde* 51 (1909) 338-356.