

Ritual and Ceremony in Rumphius' *Amboinsche Rariteitkamer* and *Kruid-boek*

The connection between ritual, material, and space

One of the secular rituals of European travelers in Southeast-Asia was publishing a book after their return, oftentimes telling sensational stories to satisfy demand, for example "The Six Voyages of J. Baptista Tavernier".¹ The author related events that had taken place on Java, and the Dutch version of the book included not only the depiction of a *kanjar*, a large double-edge dagger, but also one of how an angry *fakir*, just returned from the *hadj*, killed 13 Dutch sailors with such a dagger.² Artifacts and religion play an important role in these eyewitness reports, but they are often confined to the spectacular as in Tavernier and to general practical information for the public as in Valentijn's *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*.³ This is different in the books on the flora and fauna of Ambon by G.E. Rumphius: Because the merchant and naturalist worked on the island for decades, he was embedded in daily life between the beach, Fort Victoria of Kota Ambon, and the mountain gardens on the island. To make the link between cultural expressions and commercial possibilities in his texts, he documented religious rituals and ceremonies in the different communities present in the Moluccas.⁴ Therefore, many entries go beyond descriptions of taxonomy and *materia medica* to include descriptions of objects – how these were fashioned from the specific organism in question, and in which contexts they were used.

1 De zes reizen van de Heer J. Baptist TAVERNIER. Tweede Deel. Door J.H. GLAZEMAKER vertaalt. Met veel kopere Platen verciert. Amsterdam 1682.

2 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 400–01 and 402–03.

3 Cf. François VALENTIJN, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*, Dordrecht 1724–1726.

4 Cf. Romain BERTRAND, The Interplay of Identities in Contacts Between Europe and Insulindia in the 16th and 17th Centuries, in: *Concilium 1* (2017), pp. 41–52 on the Asian perspective on the encounters and confrontations with Europeans; and Keebet von BENDA-BECKMANN, Ambon, a Spicy Hub. Connectivity at the Fringe of the Indian Ocean, in: *Connectivity in Motion. Island Hubs in the Indian Ocean World* (Palgrave Series in Indian Ocean World Studies), ed. Edward A. ALPERS, Burkhard SCHNEPEL, Cham 2018, pp. 421–46 on the colonial legacy of the spice trade.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, the Dutch East India company had established its *gewest* or district of Ambon to control the lucrative trade in cloves and nutmeg between Southeast Asia and Northern Europe.⁵ At the same time, the company was a player in the interregional so-called “country trade” as well, negotiating other commodities than spices and access to markets with other actors like the Chinese established on the Indonesian islands, Bugis from Sulawesi, or Arab merchants.⁶ In the *Ambonese Herbal*, Rumphius mentioned many different groups – according to politics like “our nation” (*onze natie*) or the “Malay nations” (*maleytsche natien*), to religion like Christians, heathens, and Muslims, or to geographic origin, like *Macassaren* or *Javanen*.⁷ Especially if these groups were settled in communities on Ambon under Dutch control, Rumphius referenced their ritual objects not only in spaces of public interaction, but also in the more confined place of the household. Especially the interface between shared space and personal household could be regulated by the company, for example in (by-) laws on clothing, travel, or business⁸, and information on collectives could feed into this process.

In Rumphius’ representation, these objects sometimes shifted between the European order of *artificialia* and *naturalia*⁹, depending on their perceived place of origin and their ascribed value – i.e. within the described communities themselves, and in relation to the Dutch.

5 Cf. the map and commentary “Ontwerphinge van Amboyna (1623)”, in: Grote Atlas van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie. Part III Indische Archipel en Oceanië, ed. Arend de ROEVER, Bea BROMMER, Voorburg 2008, p. 267.

6 Cf. Heather SUTHERLAND, *On the Edge of Asia. Maritime Trade in East Indonesia, Early Seventeenth to Mid-twentieth Century*, in: *Commodities, Ports and Asian Maritime Trade Since 1750*, ed. Ulbe BOSMA, Anthony WEBSTER, London, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2015, pp. 59–78 on trade routes; and Jürgen NAGEL, *Abenteuer Fernhandel. Die Ostindienkompanien*, 2nd edition with updated bibliography, Darmstadt 2011, pp. 154–59 on competitors.

7 Cf. Book VII *Containing Potherbs Used For Food, Medicine, and Sport*, in: Georgius Everhardus RUMPHIUS, *The Ambonese Herbal*, translated, annotated, and with an introduction by Eric Montague BEEKMAN, 6 vols. New Haven/London: Yale University Press/National Tropical Botanical Garden 2011, here vol. 4. Dutch original: Georgius Everhardus RUMPHIUS, *Het Amboinsche Kruid-boek: Dat is, Beschryving van de meest bekende Boomen, Heesters, Kruiden, Land- en Water-Planten, die men in Amboina, en de omleggende eylanden vind, Na haare gedaante, verscheide benamingen, aanqueking, en gebruik [...]*, 6 vols., Amsterdam: François Changuion, Jan Catuffe, Hermanus Uytwerf; Den Haag: Pieter Gosse, Jean Neaulme, Adriaan Moetjens, Antony van Dole; Utrecht: Steven Neaulme, 1741–1750.

8 Cf. the collection of sources in J.A. van der CHUIJS, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkatboek, 1602–1811. Tweede Deel 1642–1677*, Batavia/Den Haag 1886.

9 Cf. Horst BREDEKAMP, *Antikensehnsucht und Maschinenglauben. Die Geschichte der Kunstkammer und die Zukunft der Kunstgeschichte*, Berlin 4th edition 2012, pp. 38–39, on the order of Curiosity Cabinets.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a nation's level of civility was determined by examining religion, morality, type of government, material culture, manner of making war, and cultivation and preparation of food, among other things. The distinction between Christian and non-Christian was, however, the real litmus test for distinguishing 'us' versus 'them' for most Europeans.¹⁰

Even though these parts of Rumphius' early modern texts can be characterized as ethnographic, they were (and are) still contained within the confines of zoological and botanical book publications. From a material culture perspective on rituals and ceremony, then, the relation between the taxonomical categories of the natural historian and the classifications of the historian/ethnographer comes to the foreground.¹¹ Which kind of rituals did Rumphius record? While the books were edited by Joan Burman in contact with Linnaeus' taxonomical system from the 1730s onwards, Rumphius wrote or dictated his texts about a hundred years before the *homo sapiens* was named in the 1766 edition of *Systema naturae*.¹² How did Rumphius describe and order the ritual objects he had encountered? If "ritual practices are themselves the very production and negotiation of power relations"¹³, might the power asymmetry between him and the people he studied have changed rituals and spaces?

The description of rituals in the context of knowledge production in natural history

Georg Everhard Rumpf or Rumphius was born in 1627 in a small town in the German territory of Hassia. He grew up in a Calvinist environment and attended the Gymnasium in Hanau. In 1653 he joined the Dutch East India Company and was stationed on Ambon in the Moluccas, first as a soldier and later as a civil servant. He stayed there until his death in 1702. Beside his administrative occupation, in the course of which he advanced to the position of *koopman*, merchant, he devoted himself to studying the local flora and fauna. He planted a garden and started collections of plants, shells, crustaceans and minerals. In the early 1660s he began to build a library containing the canonical literature about natural history of his time. His superiors supported his efforts. Rumphius had

10 Rebecca Parker BRIENEN, *Visions of Savage Paradise*. Albert Eckhout, Court Painter in Colonial Dutch Brazil, Amsterdam 2006, p. 80.

11 Cf. Barbara STOLLBERG-RILINGER, *Rituale* (Historische Einführungen, 16), Frankfurt/New York 2013, pp. 17–43, on the "ritual turn" in the academic discipline of history in Germany, which does not explicitly touch on questions of colonial history.

12 Cf. Jakob TANNER, *Historische Anthropologie zur Einführung*, Hamburg 3rd unchanged edition 2017, pp. 37–38.

13 Catherine BELL, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. Paperback edition Oxford et al. 2009, p. 196.

not yet made much progress with the systematic documentation of the results of his research in texts and illustrations, when, in 1670, he went blind. The Dutch East India Company sent secretaries and draughtsmen to Ambon so that Rumphius could concentrate completely on the continuation of his research. Rumphius wrote in Dutch and reached a wide audience in the Netherlands and in South East Asia. All his texts were written or completed after 1670. Except for a few short texts, they did not appear in print during his lifetime, but were only published decades or even centuries after his death.

The *Amboinsche Rariteitkamer* or *Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet*, a description of shells, crustaceans and minerals of Ambon and its surroundings, was published in Amsterdam in 1705. The six volumes of the *Amboinsche Kruid-boek* followed between 1741 and 1745. These books and Rumphius' correspondence, in as far as it has been passed down to us, convey an impression of the production of knowledge in a third space in between South East Asia and Europe as well as of the knowledge transfer between South East Asia and Europe. Rumphius was not the typical traveller visiting East India for a limited period, just passing through and returning to Europe after having collected his samples. He settled down on Ambon permanently, married a local woman, started a family and lived there for many decades until his death. He also acquired knowledge of the local languages and developed into a migrant who sometimes even possessed a 'double vision'. These circumstances not only allowed him to make precise observations of the natural environment but also granted him the possibility to become acquainted with and study the cultures of the region in which he lived. Many of his descriptions of rituals and ceremonies were not only based on observation but also on personal exchange with the actors performing them. Thus, in his descriptions of plants and animals, Rumphius did not confine himself to their appearance, names and habitat, but in many cases also detailed their ritual function and symbolic meaning in the context of local cultures. What do his descriptions reveal about his perspective on the rituals and their cultural context, as well as about his attitude towards their actors? Are his texts merely describing or are they also evaluating? In which way is the perspective implicit in the text concerning the described rituals influenced by the European and Christian background of the author and his position in the colonial hierarchy?

In the section on the material culture of rituals and ceremony, the qualitative case studies are drawn from entries on shells in Book II and gold, glass, and fossilized coral in Book III of the *Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet*, as well as on two species of trees from Book II *Containing the Aromatic Trees: Being Those That Have Aromatic Fruits, Barks or Redolent Wood* in the *Ambonese Herbal*.

The texts discussed in the section on the medial representation of rituals and ceremony come from the *Ambonese History*, whereas the entry on the *Canna indica* is taken from the *Ambonese Herbal*. Entries on a shell can be found in

Book II of the *Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet*, while those on Ambonese quartz crystal, metal, thunder stones, bezoar stones and other concretions found in animals or plants are taken from book III of the same work.

Materials between prayer and sacrifice: Ritual objects and their colonial entanglements

In the above-mentioned illustrations by J. Baptista Tavernier, the ships in the background of the illustration on the *amok* incident signified European trade and colonialism. In the *Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet*, Rumphius made the same connection in the chapter about “How they falsify gold in these countries” which starts the third book “of the Minerals, Stones, And other rare things”.¹⁴ In this chapter, he first drew an explicit connection between money and ritual, reaching deep into the Moluccan households:

*But no matter there be little, everyone wants to have some of it in his house, for no family counts itself happy where this House God is not present, and this is the reason why the small amount, that one can find today, is thinned, stretched, beaten, and falsified, so that it will at least resemble gold.*¹⁵

With the categorization of gold as a “House God”, he then drew an implicit distinction between these locals and the Protestant Christian worshipping in a plain Church without the baroque splendor of Catholicism. While he did mention the spiritual pursuit of “happiness” as the reason for the modification of the material, the emphasis on “falsification” devalued not only the gold in question, but also the rituals around it. The discussion of a specific form of craftsmanship finally fed into the perception of local people as potentially deceptive trade partners – especially if Rumphius followed mercantilistic thought and considered coins made from precious metal served to conserve the value of work.¹⁶ This interpretation is supported by a passage on iron where he wrote about *the*

14 Georgius Everhardus RUMPHIUS, *The Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet*. Translated, edited, annotated, and with an introduction by Eric Montague BEEKMAN, New Haven: Yale University Press 1999, p. 231 f. Dutch original: Georgius Everhardus RUMPHIUS, *D’Amboinsche Rariteitkamer, Behelzende eene Beschryvinge van allerhande zoo weeke als harde Schaalvisschen, te weeten raare Krabben, Kreeften, en diergelyke Zeedieren, als mede allerhande Hoorntjes en Schulpen, die men in d’Amboinsche Zee vindt: Daar beneven zommige Mineraalen, Gesteenten, en soorten van Aarde, die in d’Amboinsche, en zommige omliggende Eilanden gevonden worden*, Amsterdam: François Halma 1705.

15 RUMPHIUS, *Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet* (n. 14), p. 231.

16 Cf. Wolfgang SCHIVELBUSCH, *Das verzehrende Leben der Dinge. Versuch über die Konsumtion*, Frankfurt/Main 2016, p. 114.

ignorance of the Natives, who do not know how to extract it from various iron stones.¹⁷

With plants, on the other hand, the knowledge on derivatives that could be extracted from leaves, fruits, or seeds was much more detailed on the side of the local population. Throughout the Ambonese Herbal, the entries' last section on "use" or "uses and powers" included information on plants for food, *materia medica*, packaging and building materials. Sometimes Rumphius had keenly observed embodiments of rituals while researching plants and recorded the materialization of prayer in seeds. In the case of *The Rarak or the Soap-Balls Tree*¹⁸ (today's *Sapindus saponaria*, in English soapberry or washnut), the botanical categorisation led to the use of the seeds as washing detergent and then to the prayers of imams: *The black seeds remain whole in washing and are thrown away or given to Moorish Priests, who make Paternosters from them, for if they are turned and polished they are as beautifully black as Ebony, but much lighter [...].*¹⁹ Similarly to the text on gold, the material only resembled a valuable commodity on the outside. While Rumphius employed rhetorical devices to stress blackness and therefore otherness here, he included the Latin term *paternoster* for rosary that compared prayer beads to a Catholic practice as well. Put into context with the anti-Catholic passages in his *Ambonese History*²⁰, this functioned not as an endorsement, but as interpretative help for his Dutch/European audience.

Similarly, in the Curiosity Cabinet, Rumphius drew a line from Chinese altars to the reveration of Christian saints in the entry on the *Conchae Univalviae* with the third part reading: *III. Balani, Acorns, Weals, in Malay, Gindi laut, and opening Tulips, have the shape of a burst tumor, they grow together in bunches [...] The Chinese take the biggest clumps, place them before their House gods, and put small candles in them, like a candelabra [...].*²¹ In the accompanying illustration, these *Gindi laut* (today's *Balanidae* family of sessile barnacles²²) can be seen in the upper left-hand corner as part of a collection of shells ordered on paper, two small feather-like tentacles alluding to the living organism. In the second book of the Curiosity Cabinet, there are no depictions of artificialia, so that the image of objects and scenes is formed in the mind of the reader, perhaps on the basis of previous studies. Comments on Chinese rituals and habits seem to be more neutral throughout all of Rumphius' books than those on other eth-

17 RUMPHIUS, *Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet* (n. 14), p. 238.

18 RUMPHIUS, *Ambonese Herbal* (n. 7), vol. 2 = Book II, chapter 51.

19 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 199–200.

20 RUMPHIUS, *De Ambonse Historie* (see below n. 34).

21 RUMPHIUS, *Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet* (n. 14), pp. 174–76.

22 Cf. entry "Balanidae Leach, 1817" in *World Register of Marine Species (WoRMS)* at marinespecies.org, visited 17 April 2017.

nicities. As he had a common law wife of mixed Asian-European descent, it is possible that she acted as a mediator between Rumphius and the Chinese community around Fort Victoria in Kota Ambon, making the interaction more familiar and the ritual objects less threatening.²³

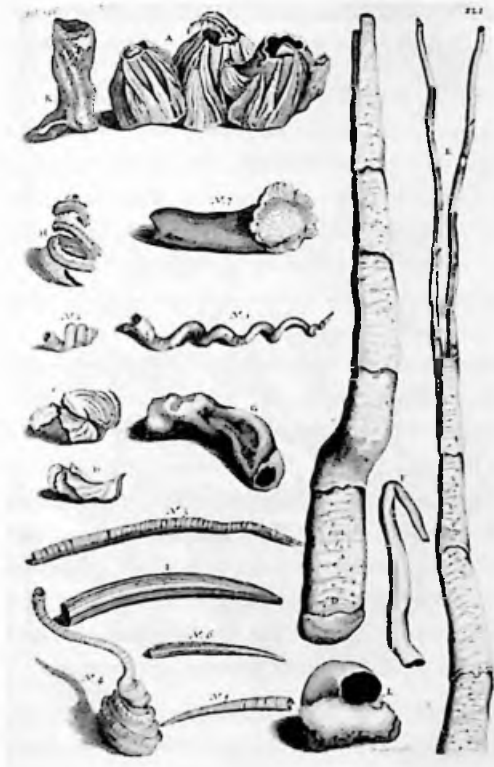


Illustration 1: *Gindi laut* from the *Amboinsche Rariteitkamer*, via the digitized version by the Göttinger Digitalisierungszentrum, <https://gdz.sub.unigoettingen.de/id/PPN372428037>, visited 17 April 2018.

On the other end of the spectrum, Rumphius portrayed the so-called mountain people living on the Western part of the neighboring island Seram as the unknown, and almost unconquerable, other.²⁴ In different chapters of the Herbal, the *Alphorse* men appeared as the “wild” counterpart to the company soldiers in

23 Cf. Eric Montague BEEKMAN, Introduction, in: *The Ambonese Herbal* (n. 7), vol. 1, pp. 1–169, here pp. 64–65 on Rumphius' wife and family.

24 Cf. Gerrit KNAAP, *Kruidnagelen en christenen. De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie en de bevolking van Ambon 1654–1696*, Leiden 2004, on Seram as the “periphery” of Ambon.

the military campaigns of the later seventeenth century. In the Curiosity Cabinet, Rumphius concentrated on a sacrifice ritual in the entry on *Mamacur* or *Macur*.²⁵

*[...] a thick, lumpish Armet [...] made of glass [...] The Mamakur is [...] hung from a high beam in the nook of the house, because, as they say, it will not be locked down in any trunk: They take it down with the new moon, and sacrifice a chicken to it; [...] when they go on war or raids, they consult it, and want to foresee good or bad luck in it [...].*²⁶

Then Rumphius used a Greek compound noun to categorize the next step in the ritual as an ethnographer – “divination by means of a mirror” according to the editor²⁷ –, probably drawing on the association of Greeks observing barbarians in the borderlands of ancient Europe. For the Alphorese, the sacral ritual of sacrifice formed the community and led to collective action. For Rumphius, the belief in the power of a glass armband separated not only the Alphorese, but also the Javanese *who have become quite shrewd from dealing with Europeans for a long time*²⁸ from the producers of glass in the Dutch Fatherland and their secular outlook on demand and profit.²⁹

Finally, the example of sandalwood (today’s *Santalum album*) shows how rituals lead to the categorisation of materials, especially when these are connected with smell, which is directly linked with the emotional center of the brain and the production of memories, as we know now.³⁰ The illustration of the tree showed stem and leaves according to botanical norms and does not connect with coveted items crafted from the wood. Perusing the text the reader found out that for Rumphius, sandalwood was an object of intense scientific interest, as shown by his correspondence about the correct identification of the tree, as well as a luxurious household good serving a hygienic habit.³¹ For the Macassarese and Malay communities, though, it belonged solely to their funeral ceremonies:

*The sawdust of Sandalwood, sewn into small pillows and placed among clothes, gives the same a good and lasting smell, but the Macassarese and Malay (I don’t know why) do not want to have the pure Sandalwood or the smell near their clothes, perhaps because they sprinkle their corpses with it, wherefore they call it a dead smell.*³²

Here Rumphius almost casually contrasted the liminal ritual with individual consumption. It becomes clear that in his Ambonese books, the function of

25 RUMPHIUS, *Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet* (n. 14), pp. 276–78.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 276–77.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 276–77, and footnote 8 on p. 493.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 276.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 277.

30 Cf. for example Lauren DAVIS and Lucienne THIYS-SENOCAK, *Heritage and Scent. Research and Exhibition of Istanbul’s Changing Smellscapes*, in: *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 23 (2017), pp. 723–41.

31 RUMPHIUS, *Ambonese Herbal* (n. 7), vol. 2 = Book II, Chapter 16.

32 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 69.

rituals as collective production of institutions³³ time and again refers to religion on the side of the Asian communities and to the economy on the side of the company and its Dutch or European actors.

On the one hand, Rumphius observed and recorded the use of objects in ritual performances like an ethnographer. On the other hand, as they became part of his project to classify and categorize the Moluccan environment, these field studies *avant la lettre* fed into his own performance as naturalist via the books as objects and the ritualistic aspects of academic publication in Northwestern Europe.



Illustration 2: *Sandel-hout* from the *Amboinsche Kruid-boek*, Book II, via the digitized version by the Göttinger Digitalisierungszentrum, <https://gdz.sub.uni-goettingen.de/id/PPN369546628>, visited 17 April 2018.

33 Cf. STOLLBERG-RILLINGER (n. 11), p. 41.

Shaping identity by constructing otherness: Rumphius' perspectives on local rituals

In his texts Rumphius primarily communicates the results of his observations of nature. However, in nearly all of his descriptions he also pays attention to the cultural context of the natural objects with which he is dealing. The *Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet* in particular, a book that is primarily addressed to European collectors of curiosities, provides very detailed ethnographical information. The value of most of the objects described is obvious – they look beautiful and are rare. Yet many of these objects are valuable above all because of their use in their original cultural context. A great number of the stones described in the third book of the *Curiosity Cabinet* only acquire meaning as collector's items through anecdotes that Rumphius tells about their use in ritual contexts. As such, the exoticism of 'foreign magic' changes inconspicuous stones into precious commodities or gifts. By adding narratives to certain objects, Rumphius transfers knowledge about rituals beyond cultural, national and religious borders.

Nearly none of the rituals to which Rumphius refers is connected to Islam. The practices performed using shells, stones or objects made of metal are always called *heathen superstitions* by Rumphius. He reports that these rituals are practised by the inhabitants of the islands in spite of and in addition to their religions.

In his *Ambonese History (Ambonse Historie)*, which he wrote on behalf of the Dutch East India Company as a source of information for newcomers among the local Company staff,³⁴ Rumphius describes the arrival of the Portuguese in the Moluccas in the early 16th century and the efforts of Portuguese missionaries to establish Christianity. Nearly at the same time, from the early 16th century onwards, Islam spread among the indigenous population of the Moluccas. The island of Ambon is subdivided into two parts: While the inhabitants of the peninsula Hitu were Muslims, governed by four leaders, and remained independent until the middle of the 17th century, the inhabitants of the peninsula Leitimor had been converted to Christianity by the Portuguese and became subjects of the Dutch immediately after the latter had taken over Fortress Victoria and other commercial settlements in 1605.

Rumphius writes that, in spite of all the efforts of the Dutch, the Moluccans

34 The *Ambonese History (Ambonse Historie)* was written between 1675 and 1678 and covers the period 1500–1664. The Company shut the manuscript away so that the text was printed for the first time in 1910 as a historical source: Georgius Everhardus RUMPHIUS, *De Ambonse historie: Behelsende Een kort Verhaal Der Gedenkwaardigste Geschiedenissen zo in Vreede als oorlog voorgevallen sedert dat de Nederlandsche Oost Indische Comp: Het Besit in Amboina Gehadt Heeft*, in: *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië* 64 (1910).

were always prone to return to *their old savageness and heathens' superstitions*.³⁵ A consistently recurring reproach against the Moluccan Muslims in the *Ambonese History* is that they are not trustworthy. *The deceitful manner of these local Moors*,³⁶ as Rumphius puts it in one of the first chapters, is a dominating topos in his *Ambonese History*. This attitude of distrust underlies his mentions of rituals and magical practices of the local people.

One exceptional instance of collaboration between local Muslims and the Dutch authorities against religious practices which they unanimously regarded as improper can be found in the *Ambonese Herbal*. In his description of the *Canna indica*, Rumphius also mentions that prayer ropes are made from the seed of this plant. This reminds him of an incident with a *foreign Moorish Priest* whom the Dutch arrested in 1685, finding *3 incredible long Rosaries or Tassibehs on him, whereof the longest had a thousand kernels, and the middle one 300*. This man had tried to establish a sect,

*which demanded that one must use such long Tassibehs, but it was so harmful to the People that our Magistrates had to forbid the new doctrine, even the old Moors requested it, for while these Priests were forcing the men to say those long Rosaries, while telling them to abstain [from relations with] their Women, these Priests were abusing the Wives; nor was there any time left after all that lengthy mumbling to do a day's work, and make a living.*³⁷

In the *Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet*, a great number of anecdotes or reports can be found concerning objects that men tuck in their belts and tie around their waists in order to become invulnerable in war. The frequency and prominence of these references can be connected with the political circumstances in the Moluccas that were characterized by frequent military conflicts between local leaders and the Dutch.

Referring to a shell called *Bia Trompet* by the locals and *Buccinum* by Rumphius, he writes:

On Tombucco or Celebes' East Coast, this kind is called Honka, and is much sought after by their champions, when they want to go to war, not without superstition (...); and then they tuck Ginger along with various other small roots in it, also little notes with char-

35 [...] is het gebeurd, dat d'Inlanders allenskens tot haar oude wildigheid en Heijdensche superstition wederom vervielen. Ibid, p. 34.

36 [...] de bedriegelijke aerd dezer Inlandse Mooren [...]. Ibid., p. 15. See also pp. 17, 29, 30, 32, 44, 45, 52.

37 RUMPHIUS, *Ambonese Herbal* (n. 7), vol. 4, p. 80. Cf. on this Islamic movement Barbara WATSON ANDAYA, Yoneo ISHII, *Religious Developments in Southeast Asia, c. 1500–1800*, in: *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia, vol. 1: From Early Times to c. 1800*, ed. Nicholas TARLING, Cambridge 1992, p. 553.

*acters on them, and then they tie them into their belts which they fasten around their loins, believing, that they will henceforth be lucky and invulnerable in Battle.*³⁸

This quotation shows a typical characteristic of the way in which Rumphius speaks about these rituals. He always makes a clear distinction between the actors of the ritual and their intentions and beliefs on the one hand, and his own vision on the other hand. From his point of view, the belief in the effect of these rituals is *superstition*. In his effort to provide his readers in Europe as much information as he can, he does not filter it according to the criterion of credibility. Elsewhere in his book he writes: *About the use of Thunder stones I will only relate what I have learned from the Natives, not disputing whether any of it is superstition.*³⁹



Illustration 3: *Dondersteen* from the Amboinsche Rariteitkamer, via the digitized version by the Göttinger Digitalisierungszentrum, <https://gdz.sub.uni-goettingen.de/id/PPN372428037>, visited 22 April 2018.

38 RUMPHIUS, *Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet* (n. 14), p. 135.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 243.

With this judgement Rumphius proves himself to be an “intellectualist” *avant la lettre*. In the debate about the rationality of ritual among anthropologists in the 1960s, the “intellectualists” concentrated upon the intentions of the actors in the ritual process and analysed rituals as instrumental and pragmatic action, even though they may have appeared to be ineffective and irrational. The “symbolists”, who regarded rituals as expressive and symbolic action that should be interpreted, reproached the intellectualists for judging rituals of foreign cultures as irrational on the basis of western purposive rationality.⁴⁰ This allegation levelled at the intellectualists is a rather precise description of the framework within which Rumphius argues. If he thinks that these rituals are superstitious and ineffective, what then is the purpose of his mentioning them in his descriptions of natural objects? Firstly, these anecdotes serve to make the shells or stones more interesting, that is, more valuable and costly as collector's items or gifts. Secondly, these narratives construct “otherness”. A mostly distorted picture of the other is delineated in order to function as the negative of an ideal self-portrait.

In the chapter about Ambonese quartz crystal he describes *Batappa* or *Bertappa*, a withdrawal from the world to a life of austerity. This is a kind of asceticism, originally practised by Hindu recluses in India to obtain purification.⁴¹ In this case it serves as a way of obtaining magical powers:

*Batappa is a Godless relique of their Heathendom, which the Moors perform against their law, and, therefore, in secret: when they desire something from a Djing, that is, Daemon (which they distinguish from Satan or the Devil) [...] how to be lucky and invulnerable in warfare, how to rob, steal [...] they go to such distant places and high mountains, stay for a while, day and night, and bring some offerings to the Djing [...] and so the Djing finally gives them a small piece of wood or a little stone, which they are supposed to wear in order to get the things they prayed for, and this is why they call these crystals Batu Djing.*⁴²

Here, Rumphius speaks as a Christian, filled with the belief that he belongs to those who are blessed with the grace of God, and looking down upon the “godless heathen”. More than once Rumphius emphasizes that, although his informants felt well protected by the stones in their belts, according to his own observation most of these magic objects turned out to be ineffective when their bearers had to fight against the Dutch. Among other examples, this holds for the iron rings, which a priest-king, who is regarded as a holy person by the local people, gives to

40 Cf. Johannes QUACK, *Ritus und Ritual*, in: *Ritual und Ritualdynamik. Schlüsselbegriffe, Theorien, Diskussionen*, ed. Christiane BROSTIUS, Axel MICHAELS, Paula SCHRODE, Göttingen 2013, pp. 197–204.

41 RUMPHIUS, *Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet* (n. 14), p. 486, note 7.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 267.



Illustration 4: *Crystallus Amboinica* from the Amboinsche Rariteitkamer, via the digitized version by the Göttinger Digitalisierungszentrum, <https://gdz.sub.uni-goettingen.de/id/PPN372428037>, visited 22 April 2018.

all who come to visit him on the hill Giri on Java. *Upon closer examination, Rumphius adds, this all proves to be superstitions and Moorish deceits, because that Priest makes them from rusty nails which he pulls from his Temple.*⁴³ Warriors wear these rings on their fingers, believing they will be lucky in war. To prove that such a ring does not develop any protective effect when their bearer is fighting against the Dutch, Rumphius includes a description of a war during which the Dutch conquered the hill Giri and killed the priest-king in 1680.⁴⁴ The local people are well aware of this fact. Malay and Macassar soldiers liked to wear ornaments of the metal *Suassa* on their weapons, *thinking they will be lucky in war, as long as they do not encounter the Dutch, because they believe that even*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 239, see also p. 473, note 11.

*their Devils cannot last against them.*⁴⁵ It is not only the military superiority of the Europeans that Rumphius stresses, but also their cultural superiority as Christians. In his article on the Thunder Stone (*Ceraunia, Dondersteen, Gighi gontur*), Rumphius writes: [...] *nor should it be unbeknownst to a Christian, that he cannot attribute his triumphs to any creature, not to mention a lifeless stone, but only to a steadfast trust in the Lord.*⁴⁶

In the article about *Mesticae*, stones found in plants, wood or other plants that serve as magical fetishes, he first calls the belief in the protective effect of these stones *a superstition and a fancy*. Yet he also conveys the observations of fellow Dutchmen (he calls them *honest officers*) *that they have seen people who could not be killed with any kind of weapon, until one or more of those little stones had been cut out of their bodies, where the same had been pushed in.*

Then he adds explicitly and in a resentful tone:

*But every healthy Christian knows full well, that such powers cannot be produced naturally by a stone or a piece of wood, but only by the devilry of the children of ignorance (be they Moors or Nominal Christians): Therefore, when we proceed to write such things about some Mesticae, it does not mean that one should believe them, for it was only done to show what the Natives say about them, and why such stones of which we disapprove are so valuable to this nation [...].*⁴⁷

After Rumphius has admitted that even trustworthy Europeans are convinced of the magical power of talismans, the text immediately re-establishes a clear distinction between “us” – healthy Christians – and “them” – the children of ignorance practising devilry. However, a few lines further Rumphius tones down his harsh verdict so that the boundary that has just been accentuated becomes fluid again: *We Europeans should not mock the Natives, because we too have been infected at times by the same disease: For how else did the Bezoar come to be esteemed so highly in the past and is now so much despised.*⁴⁸

The bezoar stone, a concretion from the digestive tract of goats or other mammals, had been ascribed all sorts of medical effects, especially as a cure against poison, in European popular medicine since the middle ages. In the 16th century, the Portuguese started exporting bezoar stones to Europe from their trading posts in Goa. The Dutch and English trading companies expanded upon this practice.⁴⁹ The Dutch East India Company, however, only traded in bezoars

45 Ibid., p. 236.

46 Ibid., p. 244.

47 Ibid., p. 327.

48 Ibid., pp. 327–28.

49 Beate FRICKE, *Making Marvels – Faking Matter: Mediating Virtus between the Bezoar and Goa Stones and Their Containers*, in: *The Nomadic Object. The Challenge of World for Early Modern Religious Art*, ed. Christine GÖTTLER, Mia M. MOCHIZUKI, Leiden/Boston: Brill 2018, pp. 342–67, at p. 349. See also Peter BORSCHBERG, *The Euro-Asian Trade in Bezoar*

when requested because of the high risk of fraud. Although the medical effectiveness of bezoars was doubted by many authors, they remained popular as a remedy as well as collector's items until the 18th century. In his article about the bezoar, Rumphius describes what to him is a new kind of bezoar still unknown to the Europeans, the Monkey stone *Culiga kaka* from Borneo.⁵⁰ He writes: *The Bezoar enjoyed far greater esteem in former times; today it has greatly dropped in price, partly because one did not find the great powers which had been ascribed to it, and partly because it is so often falsified.*⁵¹

From the middle ages to the 17th century it was popular among European nobles, who often lived in fear of being poisoned, to wear a bezoar stone inlaid in a precious piece of jewellery around the neck.⁵² Certainly, this was a way to show would-be assassins that precautions against poison had been taken. Having read Rumphius' reports on shells, metal objects and stones carried around as talismans by local people in Southeast Asia, there are striking resemblances. "Might the aesthetics of 'marvelous' bezoars not be understood as references to sacred objects?", Beate Fricke asks in an article on bezoars and the precious containers in which they were kept in European collections. According to her, "these objects [the bezoars] ignite a desire and are precious because of their rarity, a quality that also incites a demand for stories that explain the objects' mysterious origins, their use, and potential effects."⁵³ It is exactly this need that is fulfilled by the stories about marvels and the magic beliefs and practices of the locals in Rumphius' *Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet*.

At the same time, Rumphius presents himself as a scholar who rejects superstition. Although he does not believe in any protective effectiveness of stones and other fetishes, he is well aware of their psychological power. He advises several times that these objects should be taken away from the local population:

*I knew full well that their pretense was nonsense, nor did I see anything unusual or rare about those Stones, but I took them off their hand in order to deliver those simple folk of their superstition, while I am also well aware that in war, victory does not come from such paltry Stones, but I think it advisable to get such things out of the hands of the Natives, because it will make them bold from time to time, which often causes them to wage war on us quite easily.*⁵⁴

Stones (approx. 1500 to 1700), in: *Artistic and Cultural Exchanges between Europe and Asia, 1400-1900. Rethinking Markets, Workshops and Collections*, ed. Michael NORTH, Farnham/Burlington 2010, pp. 29-43.

50 RUMPHIUS, *Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet* (n. 14), pp. 336-38.

51 RUMPHIUS, *Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet* (n. 14), p. 337.

52 Cf. BORSCHBERG (n. 49), pp. 33, 42; cf. FRICKE (n. 49), pp. 350-57.

53 Cf. FRICKE (n. 49), pp. 353, 361.

54 RUMPHIUS, *Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet* (n. 14), p. 363-64, see also pp. 244.

Here, Rumphius chos a functionalist approach towards ritual. This approach was developed systematically centuries later by Emile Durkheim based on the conviction that ritual stabilizes society and is constitutive of identity.⁵⁵ Rumphius' long-term experience with the inhabitants of the Moluccas and his keen observation of their daily life, habits and rituals enabled him to change perspectives and regard things from their point of view. Of course, when it concerned the estimation of the rituals, he remained steadfastly by his European and Christian standpoint.

However, when he touches on the question of what will happen when a magical fetish becomes a commodity and is bought or sold, a question of great importance to his European readers, he reveals an ambivalent attitude towards these objects. Telling the story of an armllet made of black stone, which was supposed to have fallen from heaven and then grown, he seems to conform to the local beliefs and practices. He refers to the man who offered him the armllet, *assuring me, and I completely agreed with him, that they would no longer have any powers with me, which they say of all Curiosities which one has not found oneself or that were not given as a gift, but were bought with money.*⁵⁶ However, this is most likely merely a sideswipe addressed to the European collectors who used to beg him constantly to continue sending them rarities for their cabinets.

From the sacred to the mundane: Rituals, trade, and colonial power

In Rumphius, the role of the natural scholar and ethnographer cannot be separated from his role as merchant, because the latter gave him the power and resources to conduct his research.⁵⁷ Much like imperial ethnologists in the 19th and 20th centuries⁵⁸, he actively took part in the commodification of ritual objects, removing them from the performative religious context and placing them in his own value and knowledge system based on writing:

*In the year 1681 a Coral Rock was hauled from the Sea in Ambon Bay. [...] The Natives had already hidden it in the forest and would probably have made it into some idol: [...] but I cleverly got that figure out of their hands by paying them 1 Rixdollar, and it makes a fine show now in my garden [...].*⁵⁹

55 Cf. Paul TÖBELMANN, *Wirksamkeit*, in: *Ritual und Ritualdynamik* (n. 40), pp. 222–28.

56 RUMPHIUS, *Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet* (n. 14), p. 279, see also p. 328.

57 Cf. the dedication to the *Heren XVII*, that is the leaders of the Dutch East India Company in Amsterdam, at the beginning of RUMPHIUS, *Ambonese Herbal* (n. 7).

58 Cf. KOENTJARANINGRAT, *Anthropology in Indonesia*, in: *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 18 (1987), pp. 217–34, for an overview on European research (before the circulation of postcolonial theory).

59 RUMPHIUS, *Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet* (n. 14), p. 365.

In contrast to the later researchers, however, the framework of natural history allowed him to combine reflections on biology with those on religion and economy. While he usually did not describe objects as *exotica* because of his close proximity to their place of origin, he did regard people in the different communities around him as epistemic objects different from the company's subjects.⁶⁰ He did not regard the objects they used in rituals and ceremonies as "process of articulation", as ethnology would do today, but as the expression of an essentialist identity.⁶¹

The above-mentioned coral rock had the shape of a woman, and was connected to the local story of a wife drowned when her husband's ship sank. Making a "show" of this figure in his house is a fitting metaphor for the colonization of religious spaces in the Moluccas by way of trade. Rumphius re-ascribed the rock's quality as a curiosity and staged it as a collector's item in a secular setting.

60 Cf. TANNER (n. 12), p. 50, on Foucault's work about the early modern/modern divide in disciplines and epistemologies.

61 Cf. Hans Peter HAHN, *Materielle Kultur. Eine Einführung*, Berlin 2005, pp. 152–53 and 155.