INTRODUCTION

For one who published relatively little in his lifetime, the late J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong (1896-1964) had a remarkable impact on the thinking both of his contemporaries and of his successors. He was a major force in the development of the distinctive Leiden orientation in structural anthropology, and the originator of the 'field of study' concept which continues to stimulate debate and to influence the work of social anthropologists in The Netherlands, and occasionally elsewhere (see for instance P.E. de Jong 1977, 1984). At the same time he was an international figure whose scientific contributions more often than not were written in English so as to reach the widest possible reading public. Moreover, his anthropological interests were coupled with an abiding interest in language both as a practical tool in fieldwork and as a model for the analysis and description of culture.

According to his own description De Josselin de Jong received support from the Rockefeller Foundation to conduct ethnological and linguistic fieldwork in eastern Indonesia during the early 1930's (De Josselin de Jong 1937:1). From February 1933 until February 1934 he visited five islands: Buru in the central Moluccas, and Wetan (Babar Archipelago), Moa (Leti Archipelago), Wetar and Kisor (Southwestern Archipelago) in the Lesser Sundas. Under the circumstances his stay in some locations was necessarily brief. To ensure that these limited but priceless opportunities were not squandered on an over-ambitious attempt to collect more data than could be checked with what he regarded as the proper controls, De Josselin de Jong adopted a data-collection strategy that was heavily dependent on the recording of vernacular texts - an approach to fieldwork which had striking points of resemblance to that of Franz Boas and his students in North America.

The first published result of De Josselin de Jong's eastern Indonesian fieldwork, Studies in Indonesian culture I; Oirata, a Timorese settlement on Kisor, appeared in 1937. The second published result, Studies in Indonesian culture II; The community of Erai (Wetar), appeared ten years later. De Josselin de Jong evidently intended to publish all of his remaining field materials. Despite the generally high quality of his work, he was no unrealistic perfectionist. He frankly admits the difficulty of arriving at a phonetically accurate transcription of Oirata in the short time that he had access to informants, and he remarks - not unreasonably - that 'I fail to see any objections in the fluctuations of pronunciation heard by me, rightly or wrongly, in living speech, being manifest in this written reproduction as well' (1937:4). It was, then, apparently not the real or imagined imperfections in his record of the other communities which he visited that prevented him from publishing his other fieldnotes, but rather practical limitations on
his time. Whatever the reason, De Josselin de Jong's fieldnotes on Buru, Wetan and Moa remained unpublished at his death, when they were donated by his heirs to the Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology (KITLV) for its manuscript collection.

The present manuscript was the only one of the De Josselin de Jong collection that was sufficiently ready for publication. Like his earlier published studies on eastern Indonesia, it includes annotated texts with appended grammatical notes, an alphabetically arranged vocabulary of native words, and an English index to the vocabulary.

The area represented here is among the least known in the whole of Indonesia - the Babar Archipelago. Located east of the Sermata Islands and west of Tanimbar, the Babar Archipelago consists of the main island of Babar (between one fourth and one fifth the area of Bali), and a number of smaller satellites, most notably Wetan immediately to the west, Masela in the southeast, Dauera and Daweloor in the northeast and Dai in the north. Very little has previously appeared in print on the linguistic or cultural situation in these islands, but according to James T. Collins, who has conducted an extensive linguistic survey of the central and southern Moluccas, five distinct languages reportedly are spoken on Babar. These are: Wetang, Marsela, Daulor, Dai, and Yatoki, the first four evidently identical to the similar island names. Collins has collected a still unpublished vocabulary of Yatoki. In addition, he has obtained a vocabulary of 'Wetang', a language spoken in two villages (Laveni, Isu) on the island of Teun, some 110 km. to the northwest of Babar. His informants reported that the same language is spoken in six villages on 'Babar': Tepa Kata, Wetota, Letsiara, Yeltubung, Manuwui, and Imnoin. In the more detailed maps of Indonesia the village of Tepa is indicated on the west coast of Babar facing Wetan across the narrow strait that separates the two islands. The location of the remaining villages is unknown, but presumably some of them are on Wetan island itself.

A preliminary inspection would appear to confirm what the language names and informant reactions suggest: that Wetan of the Babar Archipelago (which Collins' informants called 'Wetang') and Wetang of Teun are dialects of a single language. Moreover, it is apparent that this language has undergone a number of distinctive changes in common with Leti-Moa. Perhaps the most noteworthy of these is the addition of supporting vowels to original final consonants, followed by syncope of the resulting medial vowel, as in * kulit > kuli Iti > kulti > Moa, Wetan uliti 'skin' (for details of the Leti-Moa development see Mills and Grima 1980). A similar change evidently occurred in Kisar (Stresemann 1927:211-24). Jonker (1932) includes a Letinese vocabulary of approximately 2,300 entries, with comparative data from other languages of the Lesser Sundas. These data indicate that the languages of Roma (or Romang), Kisar, the Leti-Moa and Luang-Sermat Archipelagoes and Wetan/Wetang probably form a relatively close-knit subgroup. It is unclear whether this group includes any of the other languages that reportedly are spoken in the Babar Archipelago, but it does not appear to include Erai of Watar, any of the languages of Timor or any of the languages of the Tanimbar Archipelago.

We are fortunate that, although J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong died
over 20 years ago, new works from his hand are still forthcoming. It is to be hoped that this will not be the last.

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