Raymond Corbey, *Raja Ampat Ritual Art: Spirit Priests and Ancestor Cults in New Guinea's Far West*. Leiden: C. Zwartenkot Art Books, 2017, 163 pp. ISBN: 9789054500186, price: EUR 45,00 (hardcover).

Raja Ampat Ritual Art is an attractive book about objects, people, and collecting. At its center stands a significant group of sculptures held by the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam. Raymond Corbey's book provides provenance and contextualization to these museum objects, and to other similar items. Through illuminating examples from different periods, Corbey explains how and why these ritual objects from the Raja Ampat islands and Geelvink Bay on mainland Papua found their way to museums and private collections in the Netherlands. The emphasis is more on collectors and collecting than on the people who once produced and used the objects. While Corbey does raise ethical issues, these aspects do not come across as the main purpose of the publication.

Corbey engages with two categories of anthropomorphic sculptures, both types represented in the aforementioned Tropenmuseum sculpture collection. One kind of sculpture is the *mon*, 'a figurine incorporating a spirit' (p. 25). The *mon* are rather tall standing figures, up to 150 centimeters high, with spread out arms, representing mythical deities or distant clan ancestors. *Mon* are associated with the autochthonous population in Raja Ampat. Stylistically they resemble sculptures from Maluku and beyond.

The other objects are *korwar*, woodcarvings that represent a specific deceased person. A *korwar* was the earthly habitation of an aspect of the soul that remained while another aspect travelled to the Abode of the Dead, located in the Milky Way (p. 22). *Korwar* range in size from miniature amulets to figures 60 centimeters high. Some contain the skull of the deceased person. The effigies were made towards the end of an extended series of mortuary rites among the Biak-speaking peoples in Geelvink Bay, and by Biak-speaking groups that had settled in Raja Ampat.

While the *mon* sculptures through their stylistic expression connect Raja Ampat westwards, the *korwar* point to influences from the east. Together they situate Raja Ampat between Indonesia and Melanesia, which in itself is an interesting position where peoples, languages, and material cultures have long intersected. It is in this in-between place that the book *Raja Ampat Ritual Art* is situated: between the literature on material culture in Maluku and that on Papua.

Corbey has devoted the first chapter, after the introduction, to three groups living in Raja Ampat. These are the 'foragers,' the label he uses for the originally animist sago-producing inland groups, such as the Ambel; next are the 'traders'

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or the *ma'ya*, which are sea-oriented groups who embraced Islam, some of whom are autochthonous, while others are migrants from Maluku engaged in fishing and trading. Thirdly, there are the 'raiders,' a term which designates the Beser from Biak, who settled in Raja Ampat as fishermen, traders, raiders, and travelling blacksmiths. While patterns of interaction between inland-coastal groups exists all over Southeast Asia, the third group seems more specific to the Raja Ampat case. It is this third group, the Beser Biak, which dominates Corbey's analysis. This can be explained both by his focus on the Tropenmuseum sculpture group, which is attributed to a Beser-Biak settlement, and by the nature of the source material. Corbey relies heavily on Dutch missionaries who spent long periods in the area, learned local languages, and engaged in religion and spiritual matters, which was the original sphere of the *mon* and the *korwar*.

Corbey highlights different periods when *korwar* and *mon* were collected or documented. The earliest period is represented by French scientific expeditions in the 1820s. The next period is the late 1880s when the main example of an active collector is the Dutch colonial administrator F.S.A. de Clercq. Another period is the 1930s, when the missionary Freerk Kamma personifies the collecting of the time.

In fact, Corbey's most prominent source is the missionary Freerk Kamma (1906–1987), to whom the book is dedicated. Kamma lived in Raja Ampat in the 1930s, was interned by the Japanese during the Second World War, returned to the Netherlands after the war and published prolifically in the following years. Corbey refers both to these published works and to Kamma's unpublished materials held by the Utrecht Archive (*Het Utrechts Archief*), where many of the Dutch Protestant mission papers are kept. The book includes a number of drawings made by spirit priests from Raja Ampat that were recently located among Kamma's papers in the archive. While there is very little documentation to go with the drawings, they are fascinating illustrations of indigenous cosmology.

Kamma had a legacy to build on when he arrived in Manokwari in 1931. Before moving on to his own posting in Sorong he stayed one year with the missionary Frans van Hasselt and learned to speak Biak. Van Hasselt had begun to serve in Papua in 1894 when he joined his father Johannes who had been a missionary in the area since 1863. Father and son Van Hasselt compiled a Biak-Numfor dictionary that includes words describing the Biak spiritual world. Corbey has included a selection of key terms from this dictionary in his book, which is commendable. Van Hasselt Junior acquired many hundreds of *korwar* and other religious items. He shipped the objects to the Netherlands to be sold at missionary exhibitions, presumably to fund further mission activities. This

is ironic, as the sculptures in their original setting and use were associated with heathen practices. As Corbey points out, *korwar* and *mon* are objects collected from people who were put under great pressure to give up their old ways.

The individualized approach that Corbey applies in describing collecting is in some ways useful, since stories about the collectors illustrate different periods and make for a vivid reading—but it also generates a disturbing dissonance. While Europeans are individuals with names, Papuans are collectives that remain anonymous. The only named person from Raja Ampat I have found in this book is a man called Moro (p. 72). He was from the Ayau Atoll and, maybe coincidentally, he appears in the only quote I have found from a woman, Rose de Freycinet (1794–1832) who, against French navy regulations, went on the ship *Uranie* where her husband was commander to join him on a three-year circumnavigation of the world.

Raja Ampat Ritual Art is in many ways a treasure trove, generous with illustrations, information and ideas. It is edited with care. I appreciate the work that has been put in to make exact cross references within the volume, which really helps the reader. Corbey has written the book in an easy, clear, and transparent style. In some instances, there is a bit too much speculation when the author tries to establish the provenance of objects. Some exclamation marks in the text are excessive. More problematic are remarks such as those in the passage where Corbey states that ‘Anthropologists have wasted a lot of ink’ (p. 102) when writing about cargo cults. Cargo cults, or whatever one chooses to call these movements, are important to the subject of the book. During the kind of religious fervor that was part of cargo cults, many indigenous people parted from their sculptures representing ancestors and deities. Corbey chooses to brush over the anthropological discussions on the subject. This reflects his overall focus on collections and collectors, rather than the original makers and owners of the collected items.

Emilie Wellfelt

Stockholm University

emilie.wellfelt@historia.su.se