

THE LADY'S GEOGRAPHY.

[Kelly Plante](#) August 30, 2021

AS we have before observed that it shall be our endeavour in the progress of this work to render it as interesting as possible, and to reject every thing that does not tend in some measure either to instruct or entertain, we shall consequently be very short in our descriptive part of the particular countries we may have occasion to conduct our fair readers through; since the general face of nature varies little more in different countries than the face of man. Air, earth, and water, hills and valleys, woods and open plains, are the universal features every where; and therefore would produce continual and tedious repetitions, were we to attach ourselves to such descriptions: but the peculiar variations in those features, together with the particular complexion which the mind of man appears to wear in every place, is what alone we shall think worthy of our notice. For this reason we shall constantly divide our investigations of different countries into three parts, viz. first, such general description as may be absolutely necessary for the knowledge of its situation, and to give some idea to the reader of the prospect he might expect to meet with if he was on the spot, but in this we shall be as concise as possible; secondly, the natural history, or a detail of the productions and curiosities of nature peculiar to it; and lastly, the civil history, or an account of the manners, laws, and customs of the inhabitants; in which, as well as in the preceding article, we shall aim at preserving all imaginary novelty, by taking no notice at all of those things of either kind which are universally possessed in every country; making only a bare mention of such as they have in common with some others; and extending more amply on such alone as are peculiar to the very individual spot or nation which is the subject of our immediate consideration. In pursuance therefore of this kind of plan, we shall now proceed to

A DESCRIPTION of AMBOYNA, AND OF The other ISLANDS dependent on it.

This cluster of islands, which are numbered by some authors amongst the Moluccas, were first discovered by the Portuguese, in 1511; but were taken from them by the Dutch in the beginning of 1605, in whose possession they remain to this day. They are situated in about the fourth degree of south latitude, and about the one hundred and forty-fifth of longitude from the Canary Islands.

Amboyna in itself, although the capital, is by no means the largest of the islands which are connected under the same jurisdiction: yet as it is the most populous in proportion to its size, the most regularly cultivated, the most carefully strengthened with many fortresses, and beautified with a very handsome city, it claims the preference of being first mentioned.

It is an island, or rather two joined together by a small isthmus of about a quarter of a league in breadth, and which forms on one side of it a gulph of upwards of six German leagues in length, and about a league over in the broadest part, capable of containing an infinite number of vessels, and on the other a very fine bay. This isthmus lies so low, that by only cutting a canal of about six feet depth the two gulphs would communicate with each other. The two parts of the islands separated by it are of different sizes; the northern part, which is called Hitto, is much the largest, being eight leagues and a half long, and two and a half broad; the other, named Leytimor, is but about five leagues in length, and its breadth at most not above two, gradually diminishing almost to a point at one end; at two leagues and half from which, on the northern coast, stands the town of Amboyna.

Hitto is divided into seven cantons, each of which for the most part contains about five villages, and is defended by a fortress and garrison. Leytimor

would of itself be very inconsiderable, were it not for its being the seat of the capital town and fortress in the island, viz. Amboyna and Fort Victory.

The town stands in a fine plain on the coast of the larger gulph, and is about a quarter of a league in length, and fourteen hundred paces broad. The streets are wide and regular; and altho' they are not paved, yet the soil is so very spongy, that the heavy rains, which frequently sail there, do them much less damage than one would be apt to expect. It contains about a thousand houses, exclusive of the public buildings: amongst which the castle, the market-house, the church, the guard-house, the town-house, the hospital, the orphan-house, governor's palace, the old and new Dutch churches, and the company's linnen magazine, are the most considerable, and some of them very magnificent.

The number of inhabitants of the island of Amboyna are thought to amount to between seventy and eighty thousand souls, all of whom are Moors or Mahometans, excepting the people of Leytimor, who, most of them profess Christianity, and about five or six villages of the other part of the island.

Under the government of Amboyna are included ten other islands, viz. Bouro, Amblau, Manipa, Kelang, Bonoa, Ceram, Ceram-Laout, Naussa-Laout, Honimoa, and Boangbesi.

The external aspect of all these islands present at first sight the appearance of the rudest desert. On whatever side you turn your eyes, you see yourself surrounded with lofty mountains, whose tops are lost in clouds; with frightful rocks riding on one another's heads; with horrid caverns, thick woods, shading with almost a continual darkness numbers of very deep valleys; and at the same time your ears are struck with the noise of rivers rushing into the sea with horrid roar, especially towards the beginning of the eastern monsoon, the time at which the European vessels most commonly arrive

there.

Yet foreigners who stay there till the western monsoon find infinite beauties in the prospect. The mountains abounding with seago and with cloves; the forests cloathed in verdure, and adorned with blossoms; the vallies laden with fertility; the rivers rolling with waters pure and chrystalline; the very rocks and caverns, which seem but as the shadows in a picture; all these objects diversified in so many ways render it one of the finest countries in the world.

The frequent attacks of the palsy in these islands, and the yellowness of complexion which many persons bring from thence with them, have made it be concluded that the air of them is unwholsome: yet these disorders are rather to be attributed to the imprudence of travellers, than to the temperament of the climate, the air of which is clear and healthful. Many have lost their limbs by sleeping in their shirts by moonlight in cool evenings; and the excessive drinking of the Saguweer, fixes that yellowness so much complained of: but these are disorders to which the natives, who take the same liquor in moderation, and do not expose themselves to the air in cold nights, are not subject to.

Earthquakes and heavy rains are the greatest inconveniences of these climates. During the time of the eastern monsoon, which begins in May, and ends in September, it will sometimes rain for several weeks together: yet notwithstanding the vast quantity of water which falls direct, and the impetuous torrents which pour down from the mountains into the lower grounds, the land being so very spungy the fields soon become dry again. But what is very remarkable is, that the season for these rains is not the same throughout all the islands: when it rains at Amboyna, it is frequently very fair at Bouro, Manipa, and other of the lands to the west. This season is often accompanied with violent hurricanes; but earthquakes are more

common during the western monsoon, which also lasts for five months. In April and October they have no regular winds. The easterly ones bring rain; the westerly ones a drought: yet both these, as well as the very plentiful evening dews, are of service in tempering the excessive heats which are sometimes so great in the middle parts of the day as to dry up rivers and cause the earth to open in clefts of twenty feet deep. In these seasons of drought they are also incommoded with violent storms of thunder and lightning; and earthquakes are very frequently attendant on the rains which follow these heats.

NATURAL HISTORY of the Islands of AMBOYNA.

The principal and general product of these islands are rice, seago, and cloves: they have, however, great quantities of cocoa nuts, nutmegs, and other vegetable productions. As to animals they have very few peculiar to themselves, excepting some of the bird kind We will now take a little circuit through the several islands, and remark what is to be found worthy of notice in each.

AMBOYNA. In Hitto, or the northern part of this island, are two mountains almost inaccessible; one of which, called Tanita, is the highest in the whole island. The top of it is so extremely cold that no kind of animal is to be found on it, excepting some black lizards, which live in a very thick moss, wherewith the ground, and even the barks of the trees, are entirely cover'd; and which is so extremely moist, that the water will run out of it with the slightest pressure.

BOURO. This island is many times larger than Amboyna, being about eighteen leagues in length, and upwards of thirteen in breadth. It is remarkable for its very fine woods, amongst which three kinds of ebony, the black, the white, and a bastard kind between both, are the most

distinguishable.

The internal parts of this island are fill'd with high mountains and vast forests in many places inaccessible, and which are the habitations of many large serpents and other venomous animals; and the banks of the rivers are infested with crocodiles. But what is the most wonderful is a large inland lake which is at the top of a mountain about the middle of the island. This is almost inaccessible, the way to it being over steep craigs and forests, so thick as to be scarce passable. It is about two leagues and an half over, and nearly round. Its depth in the middle is fifteen or sixteen fathoms, and it is supplied by a very rapid river. It produces no fish but eels, some of which are as thick as a man's thigh. There are great number of wild ducks and plover about its borders, and the woods near it abound with a kind of bird, about the size of a Canary bird, with a black head, red neck, with a ring of white around it, and the wings of a bright gold colour. In short, by the description, they seem much to resemble our goldfinches, and sing delightfully. There are also in this island two other hills each almost in the form of a sugar-loaf, open at the top, and fill'd with water.

On the coast of the island of Ceram, which is the largest of them all, being sixty leagues in length, and in some places fifteen in breadth, is a prodigious large rock, at the foot of which Nature has formed several caverns, which give it the outward appearance of a walled town with its gates. These caverns sometimes serve for shelter to persons who happen to be overtaken by the night, tho' the retreat into them is frightful and even dangerous, being very much infested with serpents and other venomous reptiles.

In the little islands of Noussa, Laout, and Honimoa, but especially in the latter, is found a kind of soap earth, which the women of that country, when pregnant, devour greedily, from a persuasion that it has virtue to make their children fair, altho' experience most generally has contradicted that opinion.

The island of Oma is remarkable for a spring of hot water, the sulphureous steams of which are received thro' a wooden grate, by way of bath, for the relief of gouty and paralytic persons; and the ground every where about it is also extremely hot.

But the most amazing particular in this island is a kind of fiery vapour, which is conveyed in the air with certain winds, and by which all the herbage for a large tract of ground will be almost instantaneously consum'd, and the cloaths, hair, and sometimes the faces of persons expos'd to it, extremely scorch'd. Nor have they any means of escaping suffocation from the smoke produc'd by it, but by throwing themselves flat on the ground with their faces to the earth.

The sea wherewith these islands are surrounded present at particular times, viz. during the new moons of June, and August, a very amazing sight. The surface of it appears in the night-time as it were striped with large furrows as white as milk, although in the day time no difference is to be seen. This white water, which does not mingle with the other, has more or less extent according as it is increased by the rains, which the south-east winds bring along with them: no one has been able to discover from whence it comes, or whereby it is occasioned. Some have attributed this whiteness to little animalculae; whilst others imagine it to proceed from sulphureous vapours rising from the bottom of the sea, and spreading on its surface. It is true there are many mountains of sulphur in this part of the world; but was it occasioned by them, the like phaenomenon would be met with in other places where such mountains are; which is not the case. When the white water is gone, the sea discharges a much greater quantity of froth and foam than usual. This water is extremely dangerous for small vessels, as the breakers cannot be distinguished through it; ships which are exposed to it also rot the sooner, and it is remarked that the fish constantly follow the black water.

Another object worthy of notice in those seas, is a kind of reddish worm, which appears every year at a certain time along the shore in many parts of the island of Amboyna. The use the inhabitants make of these worms we shall shew hereafter.

The MANNERS and CUSTOMS of the Inhabitants of AMBOYNA.

The inhabitants of these islands are of a middle stature, rather lean than fat, and extremely swarthy: their features are regular, and there are both men and women of them who are far from unhandsome. There is however a sort of them, which are called Cakerlaks, who are almost as white as the Europeans; but it is a sort of paleness which has something frightful in it when one is near them: they are very red hair'd, have large freckles on their hands and faces, and their skin is scursy, rough, and wrinkled. Their eyes, which are perpetually winking, seem in the day-time half shut, and are so weak that they can scarce bear the light; but in the night they see very clear. The women of this kind are very rare. These Cakerlaks are a kind of lepers, and are held in great contempt by their country folks—They take their name from certain flying insects, which cast their covering every year, and whose skin resembles that of these people.

Their habitations are for the most part extremely poor and wretched: some indeed which belong to the principal persons are built of boards; but the generality are constructed of gabba-gabbas, or branches of the seago tree, the bark of which is extremely smooth and polished. These houses make no bad appearance when they are new; but in a short time, when the gabba-gabbas begin to rot, and the nails and fastenings which hold them give way, they form great gaps which render them extremely inconvenient.

Nor is their furniture more commodious or more plentiful—A few shelves to serve by way of canopy, some matts to sit on, a little earthen ware, a frying-

pan, a copper bason to put their pisang in, a lamp of the same mettle, and two or three boxes made of the leaves of the nipa, ornamented with white shells, compose the principal part of it. The leaves of the pisang serve them by way of table cloths and napkins, and the shell of the cocoa nuts for spoons. The use of knives is unknown to them, but they do every thing with a kind of cleaver, which they manage very dexterously: besides these implements, for domestic use, they have also some arms in their houses, such as helmets, bucklers, sabres, and javelins.

Their habits are neither more diversified nor more magnificent: the men wear a kind of close-bodied coat and breeches, made of cotton, or some other stuff, of a blue colour, and for the most part unlined. The women in the house wear a sort of petticoat sewed up, but without plaits, and equally open at both ends: this they fasten at their waists to their under habit, which is a kind of shift with the sleeves very long, and a little open before, and which reaches down somewhat below the navel. When they go out they put on a second petticoat, which they throw over their left shoulder, in the manner of a cloak; so that only the right side is to be seen.

As fashion is unknown to the people of this country, all the difference of cloathing amongst them consists in the difference of the stuffs. The Moors have no other distinction in their dress from the Christians of the island but that of wearing a turban instead of the hat, or sometimes red or white handkerchiefs, which the latter fasten on their heads.

The grandees however are particularly fond of distinguishing themselves by the magnificence of their dress and the number of their slaves. They also wear robes of brocade, silk stockings, and slippers, as marks of their nobility; whereas the commonalty, both men and women, go barefooted, or in wooden sandals. The wives of the principal magistrates have the privilege of a kind of mantle, with hanging sleeves which comes down to their knees, is

generally made of rich flowered silk, and gives them great consequence among the people. They also adorn themselves with ear-rings, bracelets, and necklaces of many kinds, which are mostly made of gold. They wear a hat cut in three or four points, and hold a handkerchief in their hands by way of a fan, which they put before their faces whilst at prayers in the church, where they have chairs; whereas the common women sit cross-legged on mats upon the ground.

As the Amboynians in general are not looked on as the best soldiers, they are also but indifferently provided with arms. They have however some, which if they did but dare to look their enemies in the face, might be rendered extremely useful. I have already, under the article of their furniture, mentioned the principal of them. Nothing more therefore is necessary but to say something in regard to their structure.

Their helmets are of brass adorned with the feathers of the bird of paradise. Of bucklers they have two kinds; one sort, which are three or four feet long, and about one broad, and adorned on the outside with some rows of white shells: the other kind is only a small target made of rushes, very completely interwoven, about two or three feet diameter, with a spike in the centre, which renders them at the same time equally commodious for offence. Of both these shields they avail themselves very skilfully in parrying off the strokes of their antagonists. Their right hand is armed offensively either with a fabre or a javelin: some of them substitute, in the room of these, the bow and arrow, which are in more familiar use amongst the Alfourians, or mountaineers. Their fire-arms, which they acquired the knowledge of from the Europeans, they employ only in sporting; nor have they any heavy artillery, excepting a few patteredoes on the walls of their fortresses.

The ordinary navigation of the Amboynians is in a kind of canoes cut out of the trunks of trees, which are ten, twelve, and sometimes even twenty feet

long by one or two broad. To either side of these vessels they fix a large wing, which, falling on the surface of the water, keeps it always in equilibrium amidst the waves; and as long as these wings are able to resist their force, the lightness of the vessel enables it to make a considerable progress in a very small time; but if once they happen to give way, the canoe infallibly oversets. These little barks are manned with one or two rowers, besides the person who takes care of the helm. Their fishing-boats are broader, being about three or four feet wide, but without any covering, which would be very troublesome and inconvenient for that use. Of the same form as these, but larger, are the vessels they make use of in their parties of pleasure. In the middle of them, however, is fixed a square tent or pavilion, with benches and curtains all round, large enough to contain fifteen or twenty persons, in proportion to the size of the boat; by which also is determined the number of the rowers. The smaller Orembayes (for so are these vessels called) carry ten or twelve, and the larger ones from thirty to forty. These rowers are arranged towards the head and stern of the boat on planks which project from its two sides: the oars are broad and short, almost in the form of a baker's peel, and the strokes of them are regulated by the time of certain instruments of music played on by two men for that purpose.

A third kind of bark, which they make use of, is called the Champan, carries a mast, and is covered; is about ten or twelve tons burthen; and is made great use of for the conveying goods from one island to another. The last sort of shipping which these people employ are their Coracores, which are large vessels of sometimes an hundred feet in length, and twelve or fourteen in breadth. The meaning of the name is the Sea-tortoise, which is given to them from their being very heavy and slow, altho' with a fair wind they are very convenient, as they have the assistance of sails as well as oars. Some of these galleys have two, some three, and others four rows of oars, extending from fifty to near an hundred, with room for lodging about the same number

of men, exclusive of two or three very elegant little apartments for persons of particular distinction. Of these vessels, form'd into fleets from fifty to sixty-five, provided with proper arms, and a few pateraroes, they defend their own coasts from incursions, and frequently make attacks on their neighbours.

From what we have said of the habits, dwellings, and furniture of these people, it appears, that their necessities can be but few; one would therefore imagine that with a little application, join'd to a very small degree of oeconomy, it would be easy for them to increase their means, and even to amass great riches. But altho' there are several of them who enjoy a very considerable income by the profits arising from the produce of their cloves, yet they, for the most part, expend it all in feasts, presents, and law-suits, in the latter of which they make nothing of throwing away an hundred ducats in the defence of a controverted clove-garden. It is, however, remarkable that in a country where poverty is in a manner the fashion, there are, nevertheless, no such thing as beggars: but the wonder will in some degree cease when it comes to be consider'd, that the trees produce in very great abundance certain fruits, the use of which is not denied to the passers-by; and that besides, no one there ever refuses to a poor man the liberty of cutting as much fire-wood as he has occasion for in one day, whilst it is very easily in his power, with no extraordinary industry, for him to make three shillings a-day by the sale of those faggots, two pence of which will amply suffice for his day's subsistence.

We have observed above that feasting is one of the articles which ruin the Amboynians, and by which they are perpetually kept in penury and distress. In short, there are many various occasions on which they are obliged to give great and sumptuous entertainments. Of these they have ordinary and extraordinary ones. At those which are given on marriages, christenings, burials, &c. all the relations are invited; but no one comes empty-handed. Every person thinks himself obliged to contribute a certain number of dishes:

and these presents are carried with great ceremony and abundance of ostentation by their slaves, one following another, in large brasen basons, each cover'd with an embroidered handkerchief, thro' which, however, it is easy to distinguish what is underneath.

Besides this, three or four persons are constantly employed for what might easily be performed by one; each endeavouring to outshine the other in the quantity of his presents and the number of his domestics.

[To be continued.]