

# THE LADY'S GEOGRAPHY CONTINUED.

[Kelly Plante](#) August 30, 2021

*Of the MANNERS and CUSTOMS of the Inhabitants of AMBOYNA.*

AFTER having given some account of the habits, arms, and festivals of these people, it will be proper to give a slight description of those diversions wherewith the feasts we have mentioned constantly conclude, which are those of music, singing, and dancing.

Of their instruments of music, the principal one is the *Gongue*: this is of very great use throughout the Indies, but is most highly esteemed by the Amboynians, who ever preserve it amongst their most valuable effects. Of these there are two sorts, the one large, the other small. Of the latter sort, they arrange six or seven in a row on a bench, which are struck alternately with two sticks covered over with linen cloth. This instrument, which they call *Tataboang*, serves by way of accompaniment to the former, but is played much quicker, though ever in cadence therewith.

The *Fifa* keeps the same time as the larger *Gongue*, and is

properly a drum. It is distinguished from the *Rabana* by being of a cylindrical figure, whereas the other is flat. Besides which, the manner of touching them is different. There is also a third sort, which resembles a little barrel, slung by a string round the neck, and is covered with parchment at both ends, whereas the others are only covered at top. The figure of these instruments together, with the manner of using them may be seen in a plate, annexed to Numb. III. of this work.

Their dances keep time to the sound of these instruments, with an exactness, and a degree of agility, that is really surprising. Their prodigious leaps, their supple turns, and the extraordinary windings and changes of posture, which they bring their joints to execute, surpass all description or idea. As soon as the feast is over, a man appears drest in the manner of the *Alfourians* or mountaineers, covered with the branches and leaves of trees, and armed with a large buckler, a sabre or javelin, and a helmet, surmounted with a large plume of feathers of the bird of paradise. In this singular equipage, he cries out, for some moments in the air, sometimes alone, and sometimes accompanied by a second of the same class, casting around him looks of the utmost fury and perturbation, and making the most terrible efforts, as if he would beat down the whole world under his blows.

This exercise, which they express by the word *Tsjakali*, is

constantly succeeded by their common dances, which each sex severally executes by two or four together, with great gracefulness and address: some holding a naked poignard in each hand, and sometimes one or two silk handkerchiefs, which they wave around them; others have a fine scarf or sash of the same, or of chintz, which is fastened to the left shoulder, and one end of which trails on the ground. The men wear besides a turban on the head; and the women decorate their hair with flowers. Their dancers are always young unmarried people: when they begin, and when they retire, they salute the company by joining their hands over their heads: but on these occasions it is the custom always to make them a present of certain habits of silk, or some rich stuff, in which some one of the spectators runs to enwrap their bodies, whilst they are yet dancing, by the way of intreating them as it were not to fatigue themselves any longer; and this is one of the expences by which the Amboynians ruin themselves.

The men as well as the women usually accompany these dances with their voices. These songs, which serve as a kind of annals, for want of better historians, contain, among other things, the ancient events of their country; the praises of their heroes; and the glorious deeds of their ancestors. And this vocal and instrumental music is not only made use of in their great feasts, and on other particular occasions, but also on board their boats and barges, in which the rowers keep

the most perfect time to the instruments and voices.