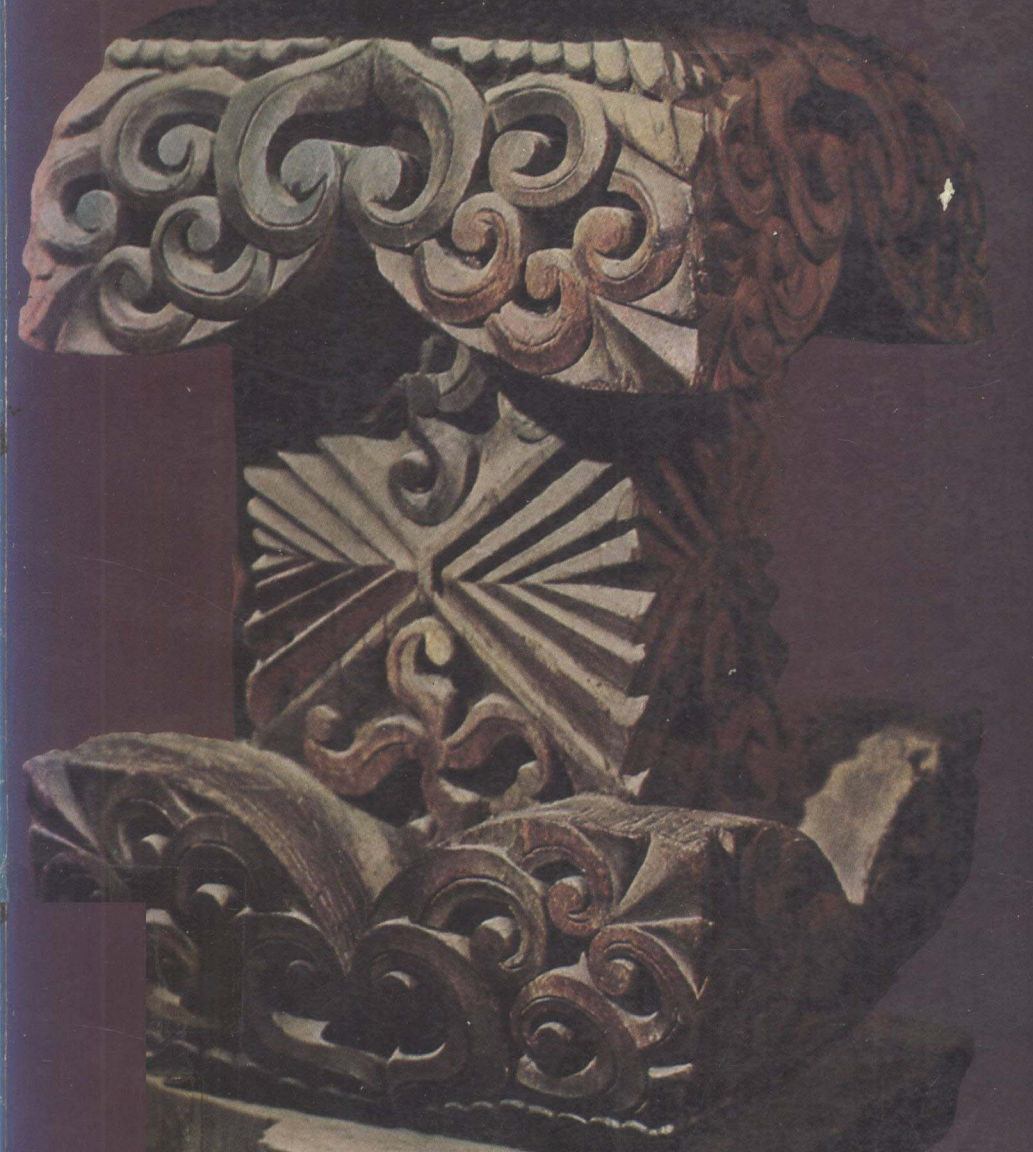


OXFORD IN ASIA PAPERBACKS

# SUMATRA

ITS HISTORY AND PEOPLE BY EDWIN M. LOEB



# SUMATRA

## ITS HISTORY AND PEOPLE

EDWIN M. LOEB

*With an additional chapter by*  
ROBERT HEINE-GELDERN

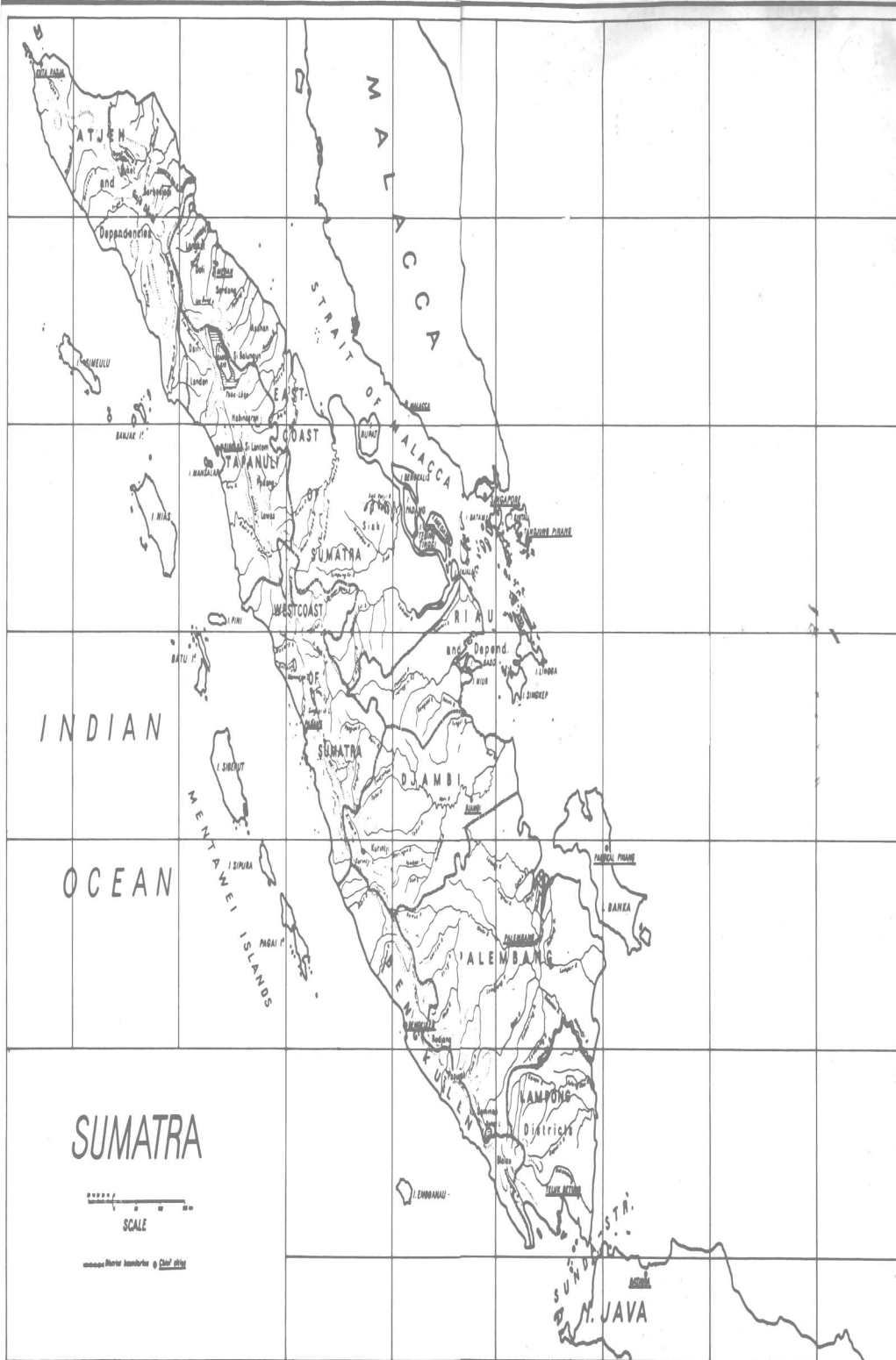
SINGAPORE  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
OXFORD NEW YORK

Oxford University Press  
Oxford New York Toronto  
Kuala Lumpur Singapore Hong Kong Tokyo  
Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Karachi  
Nairobi Dar es Salaam Cape Town  
Melbourne Auckland  
and associates in  
Beirut Berlin Ibadan Mexico City  
OXFORD is a trademark of Oxford University Press  
© Oxford University Press 1972  
Reprinted by kind permission of  
Verlag des Institutes für  
Volkerkunde der Universität, Wien  
First published in 1935  
First issued in Oxford in Asia Paperbacks 1972  
Reprinted 1981, 1982, 1985

*All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,  
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,  
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise,  
without the prior permission of Oxford University Press*

ISBN 0 19 638240 8

*Printed in Malaysia by Peter Chong Printers Sdn. Bhd.  
Published by Oxford University Press Pte. Ltd.,  
10, New Industrial Road, Singapore 1953*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS.

**Edwin M. LOEB**

	Page
Preface .....	1
Introduction .....	4
The geography and geology of Sumatra .....	4
Climate .....	5
Fauna .....	6
History .....	7
The races and peoples of Sumatra .....	14
Political and linguistic divisions .....	17
Population .....	19
Chapter I. The Bataks .....	20
The people .....	20
Economic life .....	21
Villages and houses 21, Food 23, Clothing and decorations 25, Artifacts 26, Games 29, Daily life 29, War 30, Cannibalism 34, Time reckoning 36.	
Society .....	37
Government and classes 37, Land rights 42, Laws 43, Oath and ordeal 44, Inheritance 46, Marriage restrictions 46, Totemism 48, Cross-cousin marriage 49, Levirate and sororate 49, Kinship usage 51, Marriage and courtship 54, Engagement 57, The bride- price 58, Forms of marriage 60, The wedding ceremony 62, Poly- gyny 62, Pregnancy 63, Childbirth 63, Names 64, Teknonomy 65, Treatment of children 66, Puberty ceremonies 67, Divorce 68, Position of women 70, Death 72.	
Religion .....	74
Introduction 74, Cosmology and cosmogony 75, The soul con- cept 78, The afterlife 80, The shaman and priest 80, Magic staff 86, Sacrifice and prayer 88, Taboo 93, Sacred number 96.	
Chapter II. Minangkabau .....	97
The people .....	97
Economic life .....	99
Houses 99, Clothing 100, Weapons 100, Musical instruments 100, Industries 100.	
Society .....	102
Government 102, Social classes 107, Property 108, Land 109, Criminal law 110, Kinship usage 111, Marriage restrictions 113, Marriage 114, Divorce 116, Childbirth 116, Treatment of chil-	

	Page
dren 117, Puberty ceremonies 117, Names 118, Death and burial 118, The patrilineate and the matrilineate 119.	
Religion .....	120
Cosmology 120, Sou belief 121, Rice Mother 122, Eschatology 123, Doctors 125.	
Chapter III. The Islands West of Sumatra .....	128
Introduction .....	128
Part I. Nias .....	129
Introduction .....	129
Economic life .....	130
Villages and houses 130, Food 132, Clothing and decorations 135, Trade and artifacts 136, Megalithic culture 138, Time reckoning 139, Games and dances 140.	
Society .....	141
Government and classes 141, Law 143, War 144, Birth 146, Marriage 146, Divorce 148, Death 148.	
Religion .....	150
Introduction 150, Mythology 150, The soul and the after-life 152, Sacrifice 154, Priesthood 155, Sickness 156, Curing 156.	
The Batu Islands .....	157
Part II. The Mentawai Islands .....	158
Introduction .....	158
Economic life .....	161
Villages and houses 161, Food 163, Clothing and adornment 167, Trade and artifacts-169, War 172, Calendar 172.	
Society .....	173
Introduction 173, Government 176, Marriage and kinship 180, Pregnancy and childbirth 185, Child adoption 186, Names 188, Death and burial 189.	
Religion .....	192
Spirits and souls 192, Curing and witchcraft 194, Tribal initiation 205, Conclusion 207.	
Part III. Engano .....	208
Introduction .....	208
Economic life .....	209
Houses 209, Food 210, Clothing and decoration 211, Weapons and artifacts 212.	
Society .....	213
Government 213, Marriage 214, Childbirth and names 215, Death and mourning 215.	
Religion .....	216
Gods and spirits 216, Sickness 217.	

	V Page
Chapter IV. Northern Sumatra .....	218
Part I. Atjeh .....	218
History .....	218
Economic life .....	220
Villages and houses 220, Clothing and adornment 223, Food 224.	
Society .....	224
Government 224, Slavery 230, Marriage 231, Engagement 234, Wedding 234, Bride-price 236, Avoidance 237, Marriage prop- erty 238, Divorce 238, Law administration 239, Moral etiquette 241, Childbirth 241, Names 243, Puberty rites 244, Education 245, Death 246.	
Religion .....	246
Part II. Gajo and Alas .....	247
Introduction .....	247
Economic life .....	248
Agriculture 248, Houses and villages 248.	
Society .....	250
Government 250, War 254, Criminal law 255, Marriage 257, Totemism 262, Puberty ceremonies 262, Inheritance 262.	
Religion .....	263
Chapter V. Southern Sumatra .....	265
Part I. Lampong .....	265
Introduction .....	265
Economic life .....	266
Agriculture 266, Villages and houses 266, Clothing and orna- ments 267, Economic life 268, War weapons 268.	
Society .....	269
Government 269, Feasts 272, Laws 273, Inheritance 275, Marriage 276, Circumcision 279, Burial 279, Conclusion 279.	
The Orang Abung .....	280
Part II. Primitive Peoples .....	281
The Kubu .....	281
Introduction .....	281
Economic life .....	282
Society .....	284
Religion .....	286
The Orang Mamaq .....	289
The Sakai and Akit .....	290
The Lubu and Ulu .....	295
The Orang Benua .....	299
The Races and Cultures of Sumatra .....	301

VI

<b>R. HEINE-GELDERN</b>	<b>Page</b>
The archaeology and art of Sumatra .....	305
The stone age .....	305
The art of Nias .....	308
The megalithic art of South Sumatra .....	312
The art of the Batak .....	316
The archaeology and art of the Hindu-Buddhist period .....	322
Mohammedan archaeology and the art of the Moslem peoples ....	327
Conclusions .....	328
* * *	
Bibliography .....	335



## PREFACE.

A book dealing with the history and people of Sumatra can no longer be offered as a novelty. Yet it is true that the only book on the subject which we have in English, that by Marsden, published in 1783, can at the present time be regarded as somewhat of an antiquity. Everything that Marsden set down is reliable. On the other hand, most of Sumatra and the western islands were as yet unexplored in the 18th century, and the technique of an observer was not as well developed then as now.

In quite recent years we have been fortunate enough to have two new general summaries on the people of Sumatra, the first in Dutch and the second in French. I refer to the books by Lekkerkerker and Collet. These have proven invaluable in the present English compilation. The first work is sound, solid, and a treasure mine of digested information. The second combines the scholarship of the first with brilliancy, wit, and a mastery of French diction.

However, ethnology is unending in its exactions and no work is so good that it cannot be bettered by the addition of further pertinent details. Then, also, it is desirable to have as many theoretical thinkers as possible write their conclusions on the same group of facts. Many, perhaps most, of our present theories will prove wrong, perhaps even puerile, to the philosophers of the future. But even these men of clearer vision and fuller knowledge will be glad to read the opinions of workers in the field who were able to observe the last remnants of primitive culture.

In most of our present general works on comparative ethnology the Dutch East Indies have been either entirely or partially neglected. This has not been due to lack of material, for Dutch scientific ethnological journals date back over two centuries in comparison with the average twenty-year life of many similar German and English publications. Nor has there been entire lack of general books on the Dutch possessions from the time of the great comparative Dutch ethnologist Wilken onwards. Furthermore, this neglect has not been due to the non-importance of the region, for no writer should consider himself

competent to speak of Asiatic traits in Oceania unless he has more than superficial knowledge of intervening Malaysia.

The neglect of Dutch ethnographic material has arisen from two main causes. First, the fact that relatively few ethnologists have a reading knowledge of Dutch, and secondly because there has been insufficient compilation of Dutch sources. As an example of the second point I may refer to our material on Batak social organization. These people have a surprisingly well developed primitive social system, and it has been fully described by German and Dutch missionaries who have spent a great part of their lives in the region. Yet this material has been allowed to remain undigested in journal form, often in periodicals difficult to obtain outside of Leiden.

The present book, therefore, is written in the hope that it will stimulate further research on the same lines, and that other Indonesian islands, such as Borneo, may receive like attention. Field work then, always so dependent on compiled material, will doubtlessly take a new lease of life.

The author of a book of compilation should, if the book be of merit, take a position far in the background. The interest of the reader is directed to the facts under discussion, and often he will look at the preface, which explains why and how these facts are presented, last or not at all. Yet the correct presentation of ethnological facts is so dependent on the previous training and experience of the compiler that I cannot forbear adding a word concerning my competency and the manner in which this task was accomplished.

My actual field work in Indonesia was performed in the years 1926—1927, when under a grant by the Guggenheim Brothers of New York City, I spent five months in the Mentawai Islands. In the course of these years I likewise became acquainted with Christianized Bataks, and had the pleasure of a brief trip to the Minangkabau Highlands.

In 1928—1929 I was granted a fellowship by the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation for the purpose of working in Austria and Holland and completing a book on Sumatra. Due to the magnitude of the task, and the fact that other work, which I had previously started, had first to be finished, the actual completion of the present book was delayed until the end of the year 1933.

As a result of my field work in Mentawai I gained sufficient knowledge of Malay and the Malaysian languages to verify their

usage among other peoples of Sumatra. A writer on Indonesia should also be acquainted with Arabic and Sanskrit. In this regard, however, I have for the most part relied on the works of the Dutch writers.

While I have not written this book for the purpose of proving any particular doctrine, and have at all times emphasized cultural fact rather than theories of culture, yet facts must be interpreted according to one theoretical bias or another, unless they are left totally uninterpreted. In theory I have chosen from the evolutionary school, which I came into contact with at Yale University under Prof. Keller; from the Americanist school, having lectured for nine years at the University of California under Prof. Kroeber and Prof. Lowie; and finally from the Kulturkreise school, since the writing of the book was done in Vienna in contact with Prof. Schmidt, Prof. Koppers, and Prof. Heine-Geldern. The last named ethnologist has been of the greatest help in the present undertaking, and indeed is a pioneer in modern Indonesian comparative ethnology.

Without wishing to estimate the comparative values of these three schools of thought, I may briefly say that from the evolutionists I learned to think in terms of nomenclatures, such as totemism, clans, avoidance customs. In short, to see similarities behind all differences. From the Americanists I learned to look at culture as being to a certain extent localized to areas, and to re-examine certain catchwords such as "matriarchate", dividing them into their component parts. From the Kulturkreise school I learned again to regard cultural facts as occurrences of world-wide distribution. I consider, for example, the underlying principles of tribal initiation to be the same, whether the custom is studied in California, Australia or Ceram.

In the preparation of the present volume I wish to acknowledge my thanks to Prof. J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong for his aid during my stay in Holland, to the Colonial Institute of Amsterdam for most of the illustrations used. Certain of the Mentawai pictures, however, were taken by myself and then presented to the Institute. The topographical map I have taken from Lekkerkerker, and the linguistic map from Collet. Most of my information regarding the social organization of Minangkabau comes from Willinck, as well as a chart of genealogical organization. To the American Anthropologist I am indebted for permission to make use of articles I wrote on Mentawai and on the social organizations of the Bataks and the Minangkabau.

## INTRODUCTION.

*The geography and geology of Sumatra.* — Sumatra is the westernmost, and next to Borneo, the largest of the great Sunda Islands in the Malay Archipelago. If we do not consider Greenland as an island, Sumatra is, according to its area, the fourth largest island of the world. Its length is about 1,060 miles, its extreme breadth 248 miles, and its area, including the neighboring islands, except Banka and Billiton, is 180,380 square miles. Thus Sumatra is nearly four times as large as Java, almost as large as Spain, and thirteen times the size of the Netherlands.

The northern half of Sumatra runs roughly parallel to the Malay Peninsula, from which it is separated by the Strait of Malacca, and the southern end is separated by the narrow Sunda Strait from Java. Unlike Java, Sumatra has a series of considerable islands arranged like outworks in front of the west coast, which faces the open Indian Ocean.

In relief Sumatra consists of a high mountain chain, which runs along the western coast, descending eastwards to a huge tract of flat, alluvial land, seamed with many large rivers and their scores of tributaries. The chain extends for a distance of over 1,000 miles and contains numerous volcanic peaks of heights from 5,000 to over 12,000 feet. The whole system is known as the Barisan Mountains, and consists in general of two or more folded chains running parallel to each other with an intervening valley. Along this valley lies a string of mountain lakes; from south to north, Ranau, Kurintji, Singkaran, Maninjau and Toba. Lake Toba is the largest, and in its midst the large island, Pulau Samosir, is situated.

The river system of Sumatra is extensive and of great value to the country. Owing to the proximity of the mountains to the west coast, the rivers there run in valleys with a steep slope, have a very short lower course, and are in general unnavigable except near the mouth. The eastern rivers, however, run through alluvial plains, have extensive drainage areas, and form the principal and often the only

means of communication. They are of such value to the community that many of the districts they water are named after them.

South of three degrees north, the following are the important rivers, in the order named. The Asahen drains Lake Toba. The Panei, with its two tributaries, the Bila and the Barumon, and the Rokan, flow into the Strait of Malacca. Then comes the Djambi, the largest and most beautiful river of Sumatra. Below this flows the Musi, the only other river of the island which compares in size to the Djambi. Below Palembang, the Musi splits up into a number of channels which spread out amidst a vast unhealthy swamp covering an area of some 4,600 square miles.

The entire east coast of Sumatra is of such low formation, that it is difficult to say in the case of many broad stretches whether they belong to the land or to the sea. But there are no bare mud flats and banks as in Holland. All is overgrown with tropical plants. Viewed from the sea one can only distinguish the land from the water by the thickets of long evergreen mangrove trees which sprout out of the mud. This low alluvial coast grows rapidly. The rivers bring down mud and the tree roots hold it fast. At the river mouths round banks are formed, which hinder navigation. Often the rivers overflow inland discharging their muddy contents over the swampy land.

Sumatra, like Java and Borneo, is formed largely of strata of the Tertiary period, although it contains also two schistose formations, one of which is anterior to the Carboniferous period. The Tertiary series are more complete than in Java. The numerous volcanoes, so characteristic of the whole archipelago, are due to the Quaternary period.

*Climate.* — The climate of Sumatra resembles that of Java and is hot and extremely moist. The wind system of North Sumatra differs from that of the great part of the Dutch East Indies, the northeast monsoon blowing from December to March, and the southwest monsoon from May to October.

Southern Sumatra has the highest temperatures, and the mean annual temperature for the lowlands is about 80 degrees. At Toba, at an elevation of 3,772 feet, this is 69.6 degrees, and higher altitudes show a corresponding reduction. On the whole, the temperature of Sumatra is slightly higher than that of Java. March, April, and May are the hottest months; January and February are the coolest, but the difference does not exceed two degrees. The different wind

distribution causes a variation of the seasons. Thus in North Sumatra, October is the wettest month and February and March are the driest, whilst elsewhere the wettest months are December, January and February, and the dry period extends from July to September. Accordingly the rainfall varies considerably. The normal average rainfall for North Sumatra is 95.71, for East Sumatra 106.27, and for West Sumatra 122.32 inches. The west monsoon gives the heavier rainfall, and the fall is accentuated in West Sumatra by the high mountains.

*Fauna.* — Notwithstanding the proximity of Sumatra to Java the fauna of Sumatra shows a greater resemblance to that of Borneo than to that of Java, this being especially noticeable with regard to the fauna of the east coast, while that of the west coast and the adjacent islands is more allied to the Java fauna.

The orang-utan, common to Sumatra (in the northeast) and Borneo, is unknown in Java, the siamang (*Hylobates syndactylus*) is found in Sumatra only; there also are ape species common to Borneo and Sumatra. Both Sumatra and Borneo have elephants, tapirs, the Malayan bear, and a two-horned variety of rhinoceros, all of which are not to be found in Java. The one-horned rhinoceros and the wild ox or banteng (*Bos sundaicus*), frequent in Java, are unknown in Sumatra. A species of antelope (*kambing-utan*) lives in the loneliest mountain districts of this island. Though tigers are common in Sumatra and Java there are none in Borneo.

The Sumatran fauna also includes the black baboon (*Cynocephalus niger*) and the hog deer or *babi rusa*, which animals likewise are to be found in Nias and Mentawai to the west of Sumatra. Other animals native to the main island include the fox-nosed monkey (*Tarsius*); the slow loris (*Nycticebus*); the lemur (*Galeopithecus volans*); the flying fox; the civit cat; the Sumatran hare (*Lepus netscheri*); and the wild dog and pig. Species of birds exist in Sumatra which are unknown in Java.

There is a difference between the fauna of North and South Sumatra. The orang-utan, the rhinoceros, and the hog deer are present only in the north, while the tapir and certain varieties of monkeys are to be found only in the south of the island. There even is a difference in the bird world between the north and the south. Volz is of the opinion that the boundary between the two territories should be sought for in the stretch between Padang Lawas and Sibolga, where one can go from coast to coast without ascending over 1,200 feet, and along a

young Tertiary formation. This writer believes that a sea channel existed here until the end of Tertiary times separating North and South Sumatra, and that in this time the two sections received the greater part of their present day fauna.

Tigers are found everywhere in Sumatra and are very numerous in some districts. On the whole they are useful animals, as they keep down the number of boars, which are very harmful to cultivated fields. But when the tiger is old and no longer fleet enough to catch wild pigs, deer, and apes, it has to be satisfied with poorly armed human beings. Such a man-eater spreads terror in the neighborhood and is a hindrance to social intercourse.

The crocodile is much more dangerous to man than the tiger. These animals live chiefly at the mouth of the rivers and only sporadically in their upper stretches. Even where the crocodiles are the most abundant the natives bathe without taking proper precautions, and hence these animals, while less feared than the tigers, claim more victims.

*History.* — The pre-European history of Sumatra is of great importance for the understanding of the complex native cultures of European contact. Unfortunately no uniformity exists in the interpretation of original sources, even among such competent scholars as Krom and Ferrand. Ferrand was one of the first historians to show that it was Sumatra and not Java which gave an early impetus to the expansion of Hindu civilization in Insulinde.

Śrīvijaya in the Palembang River valley in Sumatra was colonized by Hindus at an early date; perhaps between the first and second century A. D. At any rate like Cambodia and Champa, this empire was in full cultural development in the seventh century.

Actually the first Hindu kingdom mentioned in Sumatra was that of Malayu (Malay-Land) in Djambi in 644 A. D. A short time afterwards, however, the kingdom of Śrīvijaya was powerful enough to conquer Malayu and Banka, gain a foothold on the Malay Peninsula and come into close contact with Java. The Chinese royal edict of 695 mentions ambassadors of Śrīvijaya. This kingdom was already the chief one of Sumatra, and held Malayu as a subject state.

The first use of the name Sumatra occurred in 1017. The man who at that time was king of Sumatra (Śrīvijaya) sent ambassadors, a letter, and slaves to China. The treasures consisted of clothing, ivory, and Sanskrit books. The Chinese called this king "haji Sumatra

bhūmi", the king of the land of Sumatra. Krom does not accept any of the explanations as yet given for this name. Most writers believe that the word "Sumatra" is derived from the word "Samudra", which is the Sanskrit name for the sea, and also for a later kingdom in Atjeh. In this case Sumatra is "Sea-land". But Krom claims that it is peculiar to call an island Sea-land, and besides, that this name is of later use than the name Sumatra.

The initial cause of the fall of Śrīvijaya is said by Krom to have been two expeditions of conquest sent by Candrabhāna, then king of Śrīvijaya. Candrabhāna landed in Ceylon in the year 1251. He pleaded friendship, stating "We are all Buddhists". Then, treacherously, he reduced the native cities to ruins. Some years later the conqueror returned again to the island, but this time he was forced to flee, leaving his harem behind. Among the treasures which the vanquished were forced to leave in Ceylon were mentioned: royal insignia, shell trumpets, parasols, and kettle drums.

Due to this weakening of the power of Śrīvijaya, Krtanagara, king of Singasari in Java, thought that the auspicious moment had arrived to conquer his rival kingdom in Sumatra. So he sent an army for this purpose in 1275.

Traditions of the Malays ascribed a defeat of the forces of Java, due to a trial combat by karabau. But an inscription of King Krtanagara himself has been found engraved in stone, on the upper Batang Hari River on the present site of Minangkabau. This inscription calls for the recognition of the sovereignty of the king of Java, and is addressed to all the subjects of the land of Malayu, whether Brahmans, Ksatriyas, Waiśyas, or Śūdras.

Krom believes that this stone gives evidence that the ancient kingdom of Malayu was revived by Java in opposition to Śrīvijaya, not as an independent state, however, but as an outpost of Javanese influence. As the Javanese influence on Sumatra increased, the boundaries of Malayu became further and further extended, until the name Malayu stood for the entire island.

Already in 1281 Malayu sent its own ambassadors to China, and remarkable to say, made use of two Mohammedan men for this mission, their names being Sumayman and Chamsu'd-din.

At about this time (1281) the Islam kingdoms began to form on Sumatra's north coast. They recognized the higher power of Śrīvijaya as they did later that of Madjapahit, but because of the differences in



religion the bond could not have been a very close one. These kingdoms included Samudra, which was founded some time before 1286, and Perlak which was founded even earlier, and according to Marco Polo's account, was Mohammedan in 1292.

Marco Polo was the first European to visit Sumatra, travelling there in 1292. In the sixth chapter of his third book he mentioned Java as being ruled by a great king, and as being heathen. It was an unusual kingdom, and rich, trading in pepper and all kinds of spices.

Marco Polo knew Sumatra, or rather the northern portion of Sumatra, much better than he knew Java. In spite of the comparative sizes of the two islands, he called Sumatra Java Minor. In North Sumatra he found eight small kingdoms, of which he named six. The first he called Ferlec (naturally Perlak) converted through Mohammedan merchants to Islam; that is to say, the city dwellers, although in the interior the people still lived as "beasts". Neighboring this was located Basma, and then Samara, each under its own king. In the last-named kingdom Marco Polo remained five months. The natives of these kingdoms were still "wild heathen", as well as the inhabitants of the two following kingdoms, Dagroian and Lambri. Lambri is none other than Lamuri (Great Atjeh), and Basma is Pasè. Samara is Samudra. Dagroian remains uncertain, although Marsden believes that it was Indragiri.

From this account Krom concludes that the small states had not as yet been converted in 1292, and that Samudra was converted between 1292 and 1297, the latter date being the year of the death of its Mohammedan founder.

It is noteworthy that Marco Polo mentions a visit to Malayu, but not to Śrīvijaya. He sailed from the north and came to Malayu, which he considered a separate island. This mistake (as Krom and other scholars now believe it to be) of Marco Polo's remains uncorrected in the commentaries on his book of travel. Marco Polo described Malayu as a kingdom with its own king, language, and trade.

In 1292 troops were sent from Malayu to support Java against the Chinese. The troops brought two princesses with them, and one of them was taken as a wife by the king of the newly founded kingdom of Madjapahit. This princess became the mother of the king of Malayu, Tuhan Janaka. After this Malayu commenced to assume the most important rôle in Sumatra instead of Śrīvijaya. In 1299 and