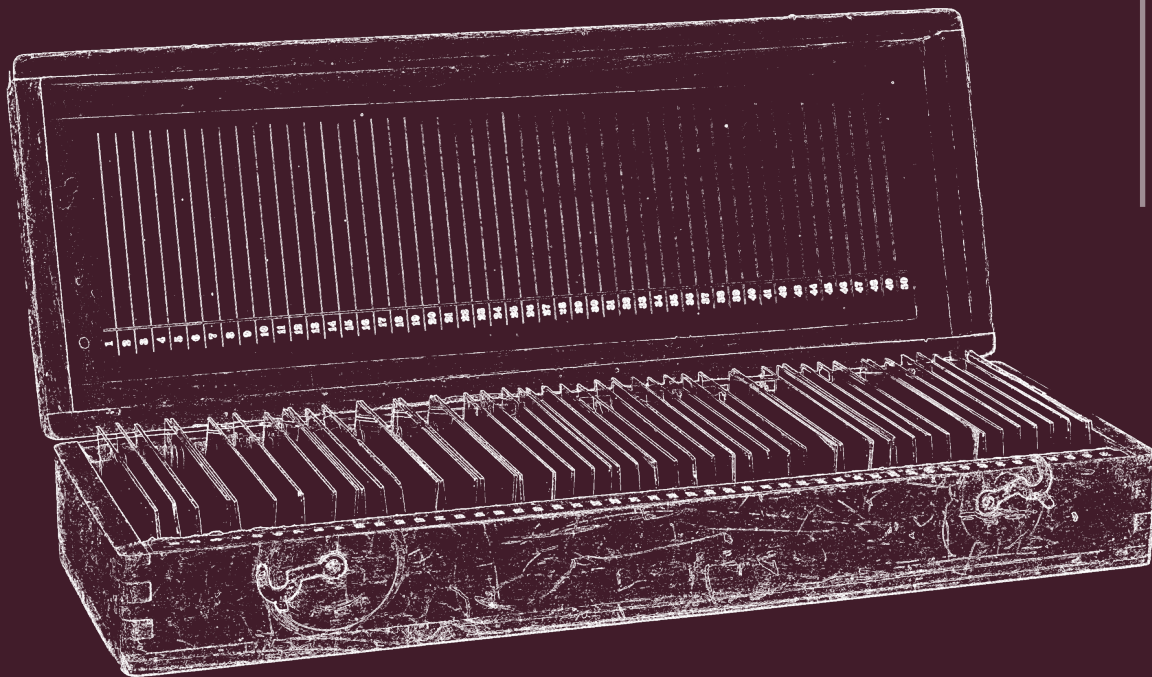


Stereoscopy History Series

Countries & Cities

Tobacco from Java

ANDRÉ RUITER



Tobacco from Java

A three-dimensional visual narrative of a plantation owner in the former Dutch East Indies.



The *Stereoscopy History Series* explores the history of stereoscopy in Europe between 1850 and 1930, unveiling the stories of the people, companies and their remarkable instruments and images that captured the imagination of an era.

History of Dutch East Indies

The Dutch East Indies was a former Dutch colony and comprised present-day Indonesia. In 1602, the States General of the Dutch Republic created the Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie or VOC), giving it a monopoly over Asian trade. From its base at Batavia (today's Jakarta), the VOC built a network of forts and alliances and, through warfare and coercive treaties, gained control of key ports and spice-producing islands.

When the VOC collapsed at the end of the 18th century, its possessions passed to the Dutch state. After a brief French and British interregnum during the Napoleonic era, the restored Kingdom of the Netherlands rebuilt its authority from 1816 and gradually extended direct rule across the archipelago through campaigns such as the Java War and the protracted Aceh War. By the early 20th century, most of today's Indonesia had been brought under the colony officially known as the Dutch East Indies.

To finance the costly wars against local rulers and the suppression of uprisings, the Netherlands imposed the Cultivation System (*cultuurstelsel*) from 1830 to 1870, obliging peasants, especially on Java, to devote part of their land and

labour to export crops like sugar and coffee. This system generated huge profits for the Dutch treasury but contributed to famine and hardship, and was eventually dismantled. Around 1901, a new "Ethical Policy" promised greater attention to education and welfare. It unintentionally helped create a Western-educated Indonesian elite that would lead a modern nationalist movement and the founding of organisations such as Sukarno's Indonesian National Party.

Japan's conquest of the Dutch East Indies in 1942 shattered Dutch colonial authority. The occupiers mobilised Indonesian labour and politics while sidelining Dutch administrators. After Japan's surrender, Sukarno proclaimed Indonesian independence on 17 August 1945, triggering the Indonesian National Revolution, a four-year struggle of armed resistance against Dutch attempts to restore colonial rule. International pressure and United Nations mediation culminated in the Dutch–Indonesian Round Table Conference, where the Netherlands transferred sovereignty to the United States of Indonesia on 27 December 1949. This settlement marked the formal end of the Dutch East Indies and the emergence of Indonesia as an independent state.

The Collection

The collection consists of 50 glass stereoviews in the Vérascope format, the compact 45 × 107 mm size that was introduced by Jules Richard in 1893. Most slides carry a handwritten number.

The slides are preserved in a wooden box and accompanied by two sheets of paper containing handwritten descriptions of the stereoviews. The numbered entries correspond directly to the numbers on the slides.

The sheets list 52 descriptions, meaning that two stereoviews are missing from the collection (nos. 7 and 51). Of the 50 surviving views, 48 bear their original numbers. The slides 27 and 32 are unmarked, yet their position in the sequence can be determined through the accompanying descriptions. One slide (no. 43) survives only as a single half of the original stereo pair.



N^o 1.

Een kujukje is de afdeeling zooals de koelies die vanden by hun komst. Eenige der grootste boomen zijn nog blyven staan, deze worden nog later weggekapt. zooals te zien ligt er een aardig stukje hout tegen de heuvels (boekjes) op.

" 2

Een ander stukje. Op de achtergrond mijn huis, met een droog schuur.

" 3.

Idem - Dit is een stukje omgekapt oerwoud, zooals te zien zeer grote stammen. Reekts heeft te een trap om tegen de heuvel op te komen. Het is echter niet duidelijk. Het heeft 152 treden!

" 4

Nog een stukje oerbosch. Daar de boomen te groot zijn om met wortel en al uit te roeien worden ze op een hoogte van ± 4 meter afgekapt. De grootste boom die nog niet gekapt is heeft een middelen $\pm 4\frac{1}{2}$ meter beneden.

" 5.

Dit is weer een stukje gewoon jong bosch zooals te zien ligt ook hier nog al een houtje. De koelies zijn reeds begonnen het jong opgekomen gewas plat te kappen, waarna dit na gekompets te zijn weggebrand wordt. Te zien 2 koelies reeds werken tegen de heuvel op. Zooals te zien ook weer een paar aardige kujukjes.

" 6.

Dit is een smerig raaijnje (gat). Wie zou 'n vetd krygen als koelie



Jules Richard's Vérascope stereo camera for 45 x 107 mm glass plate negatives. The shown device is a model 6bs.



Vérascope 45 x 107 mm hand-held stereoscope.

The Story

The auction description of the collection stated:

Images from Gerrit for his mother, including the beginning of planting tobacco – circa 1907 on Java.

It concerns a plantation owner named Gerrit, who created a visual record of the establishment and operation of his tobacco plantation on Java. His glass plate negatives were developed on site and, together with the descriptions on paper, sent to his mother in the Netherlands. She evidently owned a stereoscope, allowing her to experience her son's life in the Dutch East Indies in three dimensions.

The proposed date of 1907 corresponds with the rise in the number of Dutch citizens leaving for Dutch East Indies at the beginning of the 20th century. This increase was a direct consequence of legislation that enabled the establishment of private enterprises in the colony.

The stereo photos of Gerrit were taken over an extended period, ranging from the clearing of the land to the harvesting of the tobacco plants. The descriptions on the handwritten sheets are written in an informal tone. He regularly speaks of his labourers in a denigrating manner, referring to them as "Koelies, a contemptuous term for low-skilled workers. His remarks reflect the unequal relationship between the colonial overseer and the local population employed on the estate.

Gerrit's stereo photos are of modest quality. Many images are general views taken from a considerable distance, and the lack of depth results in only a limited stereoscopic effect. The compositions are seldom compelling, and the exposures are not always successful. In printing the negatives onto glass, the two images forming each stereo pair were not always properly aligned. Gerrit clearly understood how to run a tobacco plantation, but he was not the most accomplished photographer.



No. 2

"In the background my house, with a drying shed."



No. 11

"The Chinese barber. It's rather nice here! Those fellows are simply shaved during working hours. The barber just comes by and does the whole unit."



No. 13

"The preparation of seedbeds."



No. 24

"Javanese women in the river."



No. 26

"A Batak carpenter. These people are considered the most uncivilised here."



No. 27

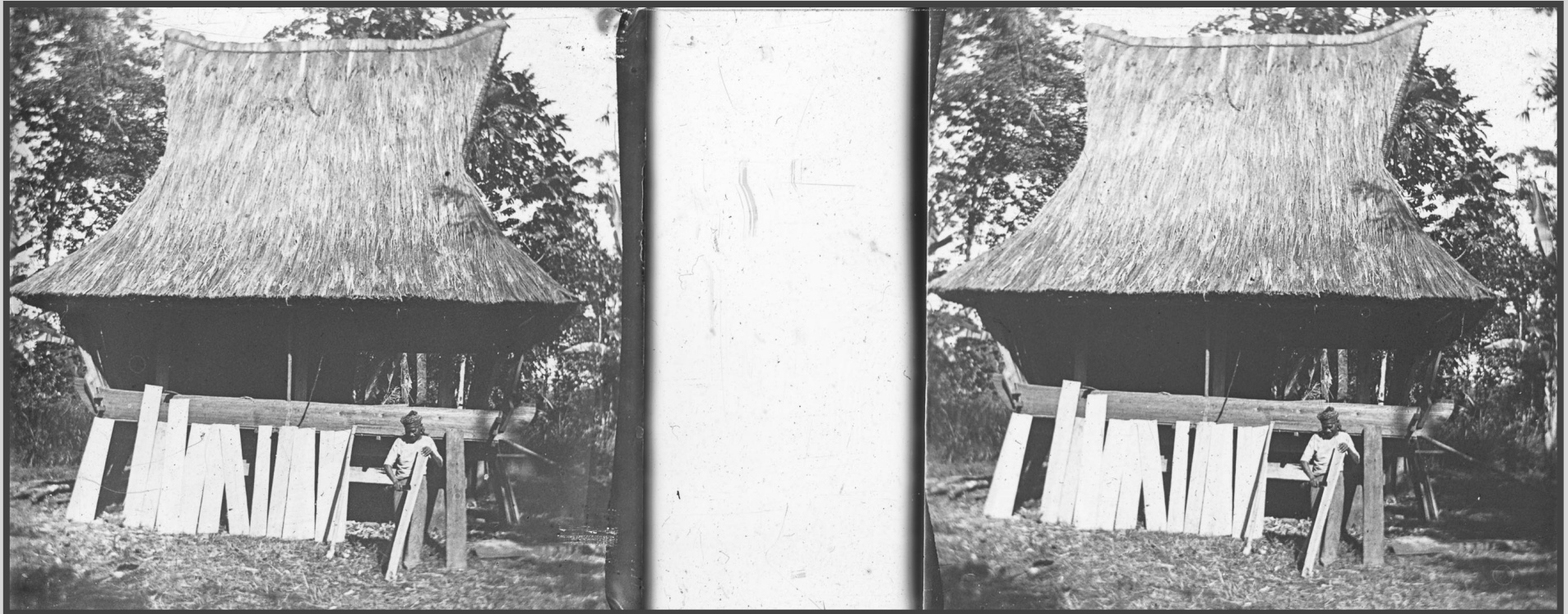
"A Batak woman cutting paddy (rice). She is a very beautiful woman (though you will surely think otherwise)."



20

No. 30 - picture of Gerrit

"This is me."



No. 32

"The same Batak carpenter at work. He built the entire house using just two tools."



No. 34

"A few Batak people, captured while riding in my carriage."



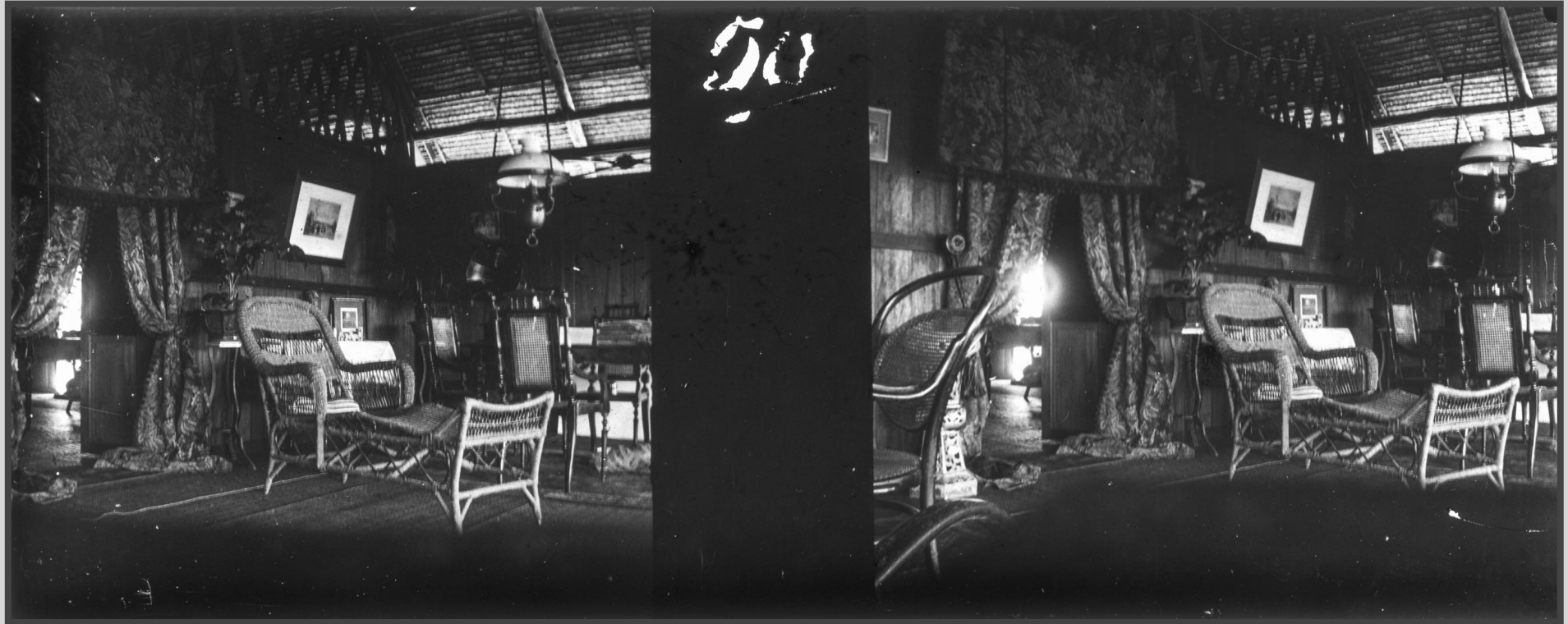
No. 37

*"A few more Batak people. In the background, a Batak woman carrying her child.
They place their child in a klendang (a long, cloth sling)."*



No. 49

"One of my colleagues."



No. 50

"My interior. On the little table you just can see your portrait that Simon made."



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Website: stereoscopyhistory.net