

**Robert Cribb and Audrey Kahin. *Historical Dictionary of Indonesia* (second edition). Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004. 582 pages.**

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The *Historical Dictionary of Indonesia*, penned by two of the field's most important interpreters of Indonesian culture and society, is a welcome addition to reference works on this huge country. Weighing in at 582 pages, this is a hefty tome, clearly the result of many years of effort. It is one in a series of books by Scarecrow Press on a variety of nation-states, from Azerbaijan to Yemen. This second edition of *The Historical Dictionary of Indonesia* reflects the intervention of Audrey Kahin as a co-editor, alongside Robert Cribb, who compiled the first edition on his own. One wonders how two scholars, let alone ten, could have come up with all of the information that is presented in this volume—the book is a veritable treasure-trove for studying Indonesian history, politics, and society as a whole. The entries are listed alphabetically (as one might expect), and there are maps, charts, and lists that provide easy access to readers looking for information on a great variety of subjects.

A chronology at the start of the book signals some of the phenomena and events that the reader is in for when he or she sits down to peruse the pages of this book. The timeline starts 1.9 million years ago, with Hominids making themselves known to modern researchers through archaeological evidence. The timeline ends on February 4, 2004, when Golkar head Akbar Tanjung is cleared on corruption charges by the Indonesian Supreme Court. In between, the entries give us a sense of the many topics that the dictionary explores: the construction of massive temple structures like Borobodur and Prambanan; the rise of Islamic city-states on the Javanese *pasisir*; the gradual incursion of the Dutch across the width and breadth of the archipelago; and the development of an independent Indonesian nation, through a vast array of individuals and institutions, each of them given a paragraph (or several) to explain how we got “from there to here.” At the present-day end of the timeline, the entries are denser—the time between events is no longer marked by centuries or even decades, but, as of 1900, by months and sometimes just days.

One of the very helpful features of the dictionary is that each paragraph highlights key words in the text that can be followed up on other pages, should the reader wish for more information on a certain subject. Thus a researcher can jump from “Dutch East Indies Company” to “cotton” to “Palembang” to “Raffles”—making an arc across institutions (the Company), commodities (cotton), places (South Sumatra), and people (Raffles). This is very helpful—it shows the reader how all of these aspects of Indonesian history came together at a certain place and time, linking different components of the Indonesian past into one, interconnected web. I followed such circuits several times in reading through this book, and ended up on a different course each time (not unlike surfing the web), where I could survey strange interrelationships. This is a great strength of this book. If one alternates course in the middle of one of these peregrinations, one can end up in a completely different place—as with the above example, by taking a left turn (metaphorically) to “Chinese” after “Palambang,” the reader can end up in classical Srivijaya instead of the nineteenth century. The boldface keywords allow this kind of historical travel and, indeed, fashion a string of

historical possibilities that each researcher can construct for herself or himself. This is a very utilitarian device, and one that has all kinds of possibilities as a research tool.

The entries themselves are numerous and fascinating. A few examples here will suffice. “Censuses” are a conceptual category—since they are neither people, places, institutions, nor events, the editors had to think to include this entry as an important addition worthy of its own analysis. The entry does not disappoint. From it we learn that the idea of censuses in the archipelago goes back to Alfred Russell Wallace’s time, when the naturalist wrote that the ruler of Lombok engaged in such forms of counting. What Lombok started, the colonial Dutch perfected, whereby periodic censuses were taken both in Java and in the “*Buitenbezittingen*” (Outer Islands) every few years. In post-independence times, these periodic exercises in state-based information-foraging took place every ten years, not every five, with a full questionnaire being distributed with the 2000 edition, asking questions of the Indonesian citizenry about a variety of subjects. These latter queries covered fertility, marital status, education, and housing status; the questionnaires were not just simple fill-in’s asking how many people lived in a particular house. The effect of this combined information is a small portrait on how Indonesian information gathering has changed over the course of many centuries, both through local agencies (the ruler of Lombok, the government of independent Indonesia) and through the gears of colonial administration.

The entry on Pontianak, a place in Western Borneo, is also interesting. Many of the large and well-known cities of Indonesia have entries in the book (though not all do); Pontianak is no exception. If one wants to get a sense of how this port came into existence, and then achieved periodic prominence, the *Dictionary* will provide the background and details. Though the description of Syarif Abdurrahman as a “part-Arab pirate” might need further problematizing, it is certainly true that Pontianak gained prominence at the end of the eighteenth century, before which time the area was little known. Chinese miners, Dayak hunter-gatherers, and Malay petty-sultanates thereafter all vied for the region’s abundant resources, which included gold dust, valuable animal parts, and ecological species of flora that fetched high prices on the regional trade routes. By the time of World War II and the contest for independence, we start to see the role of Pontianak in cross-border tensions with Malaya and then Malaysia, predicated on economic and political ties that cross the putative frontier. By the turbulent mid-1960s, the area becomes a killing ground for many of these same Chinese subject/citizens, as pogroms against the West Borneo Chinese killed off the Communist Party (PKI, Partai Komunis Indonesia), which was deemed to have become too powerful. This cycle of violence in Pontianak stretches all the way up to the present, as the tensions associated with *transmigrasi* saw Dayak and Madurese groups killing one another in and around Pontianak in a contest over resources as recently as only a few years ago.

Finally, to move from concept to place to human beings, the entry on Teuku Umar is also worthy of consideration. This is one entry that I wish had been more detailed; Umar was an important figure in the conduct of the Aceh War in the late nineteenth century, and Cribb and Kahin might have provided more than a single short paragraph in this particular case. They rightly point out that Umar was an opportunist and that his motives in the conflict often seem to have been personal; he alternately found favor both with the Dutch and with the Acehense war party, mainly because his

was an important voice, and each side tried to woo him to its cause. Umar understood this clearly and tried to benefit from balancing his interests with both sides' agendas as best he could. As a member of the local Acehense *uleebalang* elite, he was tied to a larger trend of indigenous elites in the archipelago being confronted with tough choices as the noose of Dutch influence tightened in the region. His choices—difficult ones, to be sure, regardless of self-interest—were the choices that many Indonesian princes had to make throughout the islands as the nineteenth century came to a close and absolute Dutch hegemony was achieved. Umar is a figure worthy of some scorn from historians, but one also can sense the hopelessness of his position; he knew (better than most, perhaps) what was coming, and he tried to ride the swell of change with only limited success. This entry might have tied that larger history of collaboration and resistance together, and shown how Umar was an emblem and, at the time, an actor in larger shifting structures throughout the archipelago.

One can quibble here and there on these counts; not every entry will have all the information that each historian wishes it might, but that is to quibble rather unfairly, in my opinion. There is already so much here that it feels far more just to welcome this book as an invaluable research tool for the study of Indonesia as a whole. At the end of each entry, a series of number codes connects the information provided with a bibliography at the back of the book, so that readers can immediately and very easily jump to important literature on a selected topic without having to pore through the list of accumulated sources as a whole. This too is an innovative and very effective use of the *Dictionary*, and one that allows it to be used in conjunction with a wide range of published literature that makes up the historical substrate of the volume as a whole. When this book is taken together with Robert Cribb's earlier contribution, *The Historical Atlas of Indonesia*, the service being done for Indonesian studies becomes very clear. These are two books that every scholar of the country should have in his or her library and consult as invaluable resource tools in penning their own studies of the archipelago. Kahin and Cribb need to be heartily thanked in this regard; they have made all of our jobs easier as a consequence of putting this impressive book together.