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The colonial encounter told twice

Parallel accounts of Carl Bock's 1879 expedition to Borneo

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Abstract

When the Scandinavian explorer Carl Bock, commissioned by the Dutch colonial authorities, undertook to make an expedition overland through Borneo in 1879, the island retained a sense of the exotic in the European imagination. Audiences were especially hungry for tales of the island's headhunting Dayak inhabitants, a demand that Bock was happy to meet. In fact, he wrote two distinct narratives of the expedition: the Dutch-language report he had been tasked to write for the Dutch but also a longer, more entertainment-focused English-language travelogue for a broader audience. Comparing the two accounts, clearly based on the same underlying text but differing in many details and tone, provides critical insights into the unstable and unreliable nature of the colonial encounter as recounted in written sources. Such an analysis also reveals how these narratives were shaped retrospectively, to meet the expectations of different assumed audiences and quickly changing literary fashions.

Keywords

Exploration, Borneo, colonization, nineteenth century, Netherlands East Indies, Dayaks, narratives, encounters.

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Introduction

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Borneo held a position in the European imperial imagination as an especially exotic island, associated with more than a dash of adventure and mortal risk. This was partly due to the island's position on the relative outskirts of two imperial powers, Britain and the Netherlands, whose power in the region was centred on Singapore and Java, respectively. Comparatively, Borneo appeared as an unknown, land of mysteries where shocking discoveries could still be made and exciting adventures pursued. A trickle of European accounts both fictional and supposedly factual grew to a steady flow towards the end of the century, feeding the myth; and the aura of mystique was enhanced by sensationalist stories of the island's infamously headhunting, perhaps even cannibalistic inhabitants, that circulated in Europe in the thriving print culture of the time (Douglas Kammen 2021: 237-238; Gabor Pusztai 2016: 51). A particularly famous example, of the Austrian celebrity traveller Ida Pfeiffer's encounter with the dreaded Dayaks, was reprinted countless times in a variety of languages (Toivanen 2019: 57; see also Rick Honings's contribution in this issue). Nor has that aura completely disappeared today: in fact, the headhunting trope has even been playfully repurposed into a positive element of local identities and postcolonial tourist imageries (Flory Ann Mansor Gingging 2007: 14).

Those stories, though popular, were of dubious reliability, and Borneo's exoticisation only really made sense from a limited European perspective. In the region, the island was both geographically and culturally central, a lynchpin of the interconnected Malay world that spanned much of maritime Southeast Asia (James T. Collins 2001: 385-386). And far from being an accurate ethnographic descriptor, it is likely that the term "Dayak" with its strongly derogatory associations emerged as a Dutch catch-all designation for what is, in reality, a disparate and diverse group of inland, non-Muslim communities (Kenneth Sillander and Jennifer Alexander 2016: 96). In fact, the different communities of the coastal and inland areas engaged in sophisticated patterns of trade and exchange that connected the local with the regional, even the global. Yet the populations of the interior, in particular, also engaged in mobile non-land-owning lifestyles that made their society largely illegible to the colonial administrations, giving rise to crude accusations of barbarism and cultural inferiority (Amity A. Doolittle 2004: 825-827). The colonial "encounters" that took place in Borneo and were recounted in the European travel writing of the period, should therefore be read critically as the product of a highly charged ideological process, although not one without internal contradictions and ambiguities.

This article will analyse the cultural construction of the colonial encounter through a close analysis of one European traveller and author, the Scandinavian explorer Carl Bock (1849-1932) who visited Borneo in 1879 and received moderate fame back in Europe after the publication of his travel account (Figure 1). What makes Bock's expedition a particularly fruitful object of analysis is the fact that two versions of his travel account were published,

one in Dutch and the other in English, each designed for a different audience and addressing different concerns. The analysis thus follows the insight of Mary Louise Pratt, that the explorer's discovery "has no existence of its own" and "gets 'made' for real after the traveler [...] returns home, and brings it into being through texts" (Pratt 1992: 204). Beyond that, however, Bock's parallel accounts provide solid evidence that not only does the textual encounter have primacy over the "real" one, but moreover it is actively and consciously shaped and reshaped in the editorial offices during the publication process to meet changing audience expectations and political goals.

Figure 1. A portrait of Carl Bock, published in the 1883 Norwegian edition of his travel account, *Hoved-jægerne paa Borneo* (Bock 1883) (scanned by: Nasjonalbiblioteket/ National Library of Norway).

The analysis that follows is divided into three sections. The first of these provides an introduction to the contemporary colonial context of Bock's expedition as well as an investigation of Bock's ambiguous persona as a Scandinavian national and a servant of two empires. This is followed by a close examination of the publication process that led to the appearance of the separate versions of Bock's expedition account, which serves to explain the differences in format and content between the two. Finally, the last section will provide a close reading of key passages that diverge from each other in the two accounts and thus reveal the editorial and ideological motives that shaped the different iterations of Bock's narrative. In particular, the focus is on three aspects of the accounts: firstly, their portrayal of the danger and risk, especially in the encounter with the Dayaks; secondly, on the depiction of occlusion of the expedition's dependence on local political support, labour, and knowhow;

and finally, on the narrative crafting of specific interpersonal relationships between Bock and his Chinese and Malay guides and head servants. What emerges from this side-by-side reading is that Bock's colonial encounters were in fact, to a significant degree, the product of editorial decisions in the metropole, freely reinterpreting events and experiences on Borneo to serve, not just the needs of two distinct literary genres, but also the interests of two different imperial powers.

AN AGENT OF TWO EMPIRES

It is no coincidence that Bock's expedition occurred at a time of territorial and administrative consolidation on Borneo by the region's two dominant imperial powers, Britain and the Netherlands. Since the 1840s, the Dutch had been moved to make their presence felt in the interior of the island, partly as a reaction to the establishment of Sarawak on the north coast as a personal fealty of the British James Brooke, which led to concerns that the British had broader designs on territory that Dutch considered their own (Reed L. Wadley 2001: 625; Michael Eilenberg 2014: 14). These concerns were significantly exacerbated from the late 1870s onward as British speculators worked to secure a foothold in North Borneo through what became, in 1881, the chartered British North Borneo Company (M.C. Cleary 1992: 171-172; Graham Irwin 1955: 203-204). This development led to sustained protest and alarm on the side of the Dutch (Nicholas Tarling 1978: 222, 239-242). It is this geopolitical context that was both the initial spur to Bock's expedition and a determining factor in reactions to it afterwards. Though Bock had made his way to the Netherlands East Indies by private means, it was the Dutch colonial administration, in the person of Governor-General Van Lansberge, that sent him to Borneo on an official government mission. Detailed intelligence on local conditions was essential to the Dutch as they sought to expand their military and administrative control into the interior of the island where European presence had thus far been highly limited.

Bock should therefore be seen as an agent of empire first and foremost, rather than a neutral scientific explorer, regardless of his personal styling. It is clear that he approaches the landscape with the mindset of the coloniser, imagining "a not far distant future when the river would be crowded with smoke-begrimed 'colliers'" and noting that, if tended properly, the "rich and fertile" ground "could support a large agricultural and manufacturing population" (Bock 1881: 46). Such evident designs on the wholesale replacement and reorganization of the island's current communities and cultures are justified with a perfunctory claim that "the Oriental nature is not compatible with financial progress, or good government generally" (Bock 1881: 38). The dependence, in such passages, on long-established colonial dogma is more than apparent.

Yet Bock's position was also an ambiguous one, due to his background. Though a native of Scandinavia, the fact that Bock's adopted homeland was Britain could be seen to cast doubts on his motivations in the colonial sphere

of the archipelago, especially on Borneo, then in the process of being divided between two imperial powers. While those doubts do not seem to have directly affected Bock's travels, there were at least rumours that the Dutch had soured on his exploits in the aftermath of the expedition, as detailed in the preface to the Norwegian edition of his account (Bock 1883). Those concerns probably stemmed at least partly from Bock's decision to publish his experiences separately in English, in a version distinct from the report given to the Dutch. There were also reports in the press in early 1881 that Bock was planning a further expedition to the north-eastern parts of Borneo, where the British North Borneo Company was then seeking to establish a presence, although such a journey never materialised ("Nederland" 1881).[1] Nevertheless, such rumours would have certainly served to raise questions regarding his allegiances.

While therefore holding at least some – overlapping and perhaps conflicting – allegiance to two different imperial powers, Carl Bock's personal identity itself is a matter of some ambiguity, as well as an exemplary case study in the blurred boundaries that held imperial Europe together in the nineteenth century. He was born in Copenhagen in 1849 but, not unusually for the time, saw his life divided between the Scandinavian countries. His father's family hailed from Kristiansand, Norway, and at the moment of his birth the family were on their way to Höganäs, Sweden, where the father owned a cotton mill (Bock 1883: v). This led to some understandable confusion regarding his own nationality: the preface to the Norwegian edition of his travel book recounts, with some outrage, how the press and publishers in different countries variously labelled him as a Dane, a Swede and even a German – and the Norwegian editors were naturally keen to set the record straight, claiming the famous explorer for their own country (Bock 1883: viii). Notably, Bock refers to himself in passing by the label "Scandinavian", which may be the most truthful denomination (Bock 1881: 88).

If there was some dispute about Bock's identity, this only served to underline the diversity of national backgrounds that undergirded both the British and the Dutch imperial projects, which can rightfully be seen as truly transnational, pan-European enterprises rather than strictly delimited national ones (Bernhard C. Schär 2022: 2-4). Yet what is not under question is Bock's close affiliation with and involvement in European imperialist designs on late-nineteenth-century Borneo. It was the British that sent him to Southeast Asia, after Bock had moved to England in 1868 to work at the Swedish-Norwegian consulate in Grimsby: more specifically, the Marquess of Tweeddale Arthur Hay, a colonel of the British army and Fellow of the Royal Society in London, provided the funds for his initial expedition, with a view to furthering his own zoological researches through the collecting of specimens (Bock 1883: v-vi). Bock was therefore firmly in the employ of British imperial interests and colonial science before he even left Europe.

Once arrived in the Dutch East Indies, Bock initially toured the inland of Sumatra, an account of which he appended to the Borneo book and made up

[1] *Java-Bode: Nieuws, Handels- en Advertentieblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 29-3-1881, p. 6.

its second volume. From here, however, Bock's plans of travelling further to the more remote islands of the archipelago's eastern part ran aground for lack of funds. His travels gained a new purpose through the intervention of the Dutch governor-general Johan Wilhelm van Lansberge, who commissioned Bock to undertake an expedition to Borneo instead, in order to "furnish the Government with a report upon the native races of the interior, and to make observations upon, and collections of, the fauna of that part of the island" (Bock 1881: v). Van Lansberge, like Marquess Tweeddale, was himself an enthusiastic amateur naturalist, which naturally facilitated the connection between the two men. It is here, then, that Bock became an agent of the Dutch empire, although as will be seen he simultaneously continued to pursue his work of collecting and writing for British interests as well. This ambiguity caused some discomfort among contemporary Dutch observers: an acerbic piece published in the periodical *Nederland* in 1882 lamented how foreigners – namechecking also the Italian botanist Odoardo Beccari and the Russian Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay as well as the British Alfred Russel Wallace – made the most of opportunities to explore the outer reaches of the archipelago while the Dutch themselves remained idle and unadventurous (W.F. Margadant 1882: 83).

Bock left Java from the port of Surabaya and, after a brief supply stop at Makassar on Sulawesi, arrived at the town of Samarinda in Kutai on Borneo's east coast on 16 July 1879. From here, Bock made two trips into the island's interior (Figure 2): first, a trip of seven weeks up the Mahakam river to Longwai, between 10 August and 3 October. And the second, longer trip across the island from Kutai to the major port city Banjarmasin on the south coast, starting on 21 November and reaching the destination on the very last day of 1879. The two journeys that made up the expedition were therefore not of noticeably long duration, each less than two months, and their novelty was based instead on the relatively unexplored nature of the territory that was traversed. A commentator in a Makassar-based Dutch newspaper commended Bock's courage for intending to carry out a journey that had not been attempted since 1864 ("Plaatselijke berigten" 1879a).[2]

Particularly noteworthy, at least according to Bock's presentation, was his success at making direct contact with a Punan community in the interior. Some contemporary observers in the press suggested that no European had managed this before ("Nederlandsch-Indië" 1880).[3] Others disagreed: Harry de Windt, a rival explorer and brother-in-law of Rajah Brooke, indignantly claimed that achievement for himself (Dianne Margaret Tillotson 1994: 57). The field of nineteenth-century exploration was relentlessly competitive and scrutiny could be fierce, even if real expertise was rare. A scholar of a markedly higher calibre, the famous naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace, offered a largely subdued appraisal, commending the volume's illustrations but deemed "much of Mr. Bock's volume a repetition of what has been more fully and accurately described St. John, Grant, and other writers" (Wallace 1881: 4). Critical voices in

[2] *Makassaarsch Handels-Blad*, 2-9-1879, p. 3.
[3] *De Locomotief: Samarangsch Handels- en Advertentie-Blad*, 16-3-1880, p. 3.

the Dutch sphere even suggested that Bock had exaggerated his achievements, claiming to have seen more and travelled further than was actually the case (U 1882: 1). Such charges remained unsubstantiated, but they do testify to the fundamental unreliability of a genre as politically charged and hotly contested as colonial travel writing.

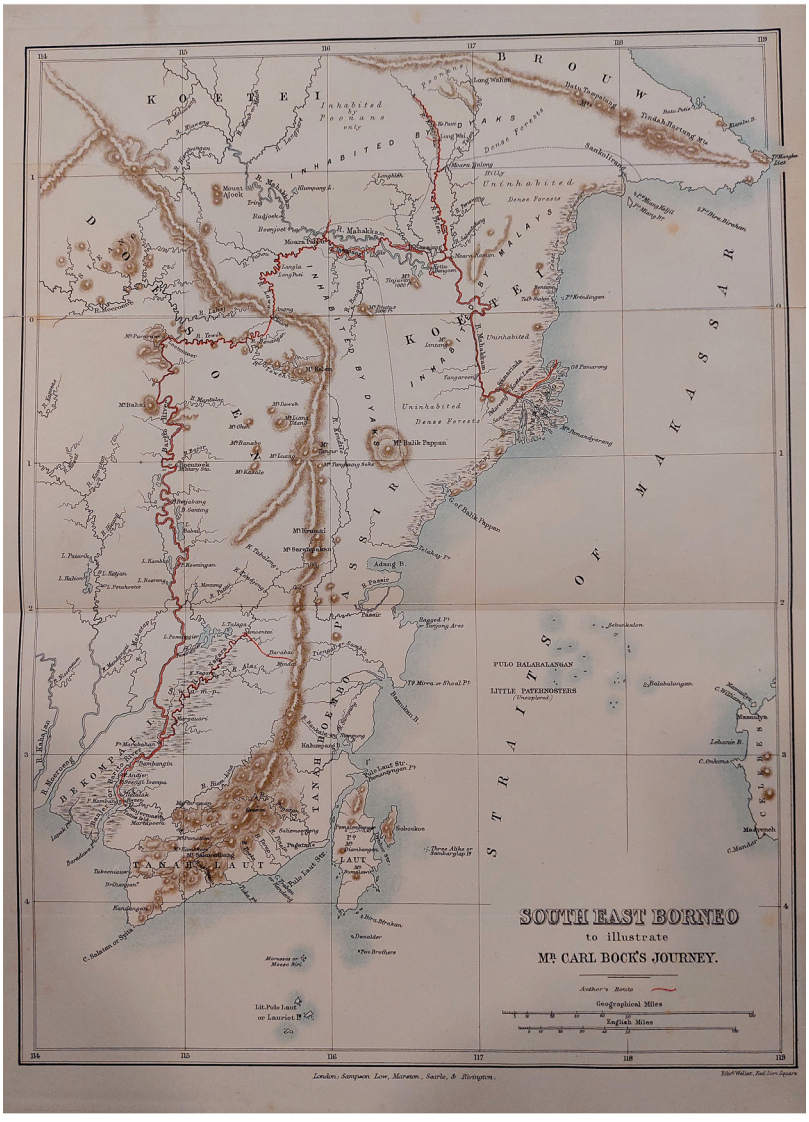

Figure 2. A map of southeast Borneo, outlining the route of Bock's travels through the inland, published in his 1881 English-language travelogue (photograph by Mikko Toivanen).

Two books, one intertwined publication process

As noted above, Bock's account of this expedition appeared in two different versions, in the Dutch and English languages, respectively. It is necessary to

first understand the rather complicated and intertwined publication process of these two parallel texts in order to be able to properly analyse their similarities and differences, and to understand how they arose. As part of his official mission to Borneo, Bock had committed to delivering the Dutch minister of colonies a full report of his expedition, intended for publication through the Leiden-based Koninklijk Instituut voor de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië (Royal Institute for the Linguistics, Geography and Ethnography of the Dutch East Indies; commonly known as KITLV), a scientific institute that specialised in the scholarly study of the Dutch colonial possessions. By contrast, the English version was published by the London-based generalist publisher Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington. The two were therefore evidently catering for different audiences: the former for a relatively limited group of Dutch science enthusiasts and colonial professionals, and the latter for a broader market of armchair travellers and consumers of popular travelogues.

The two editions were developed in parallel, as becomes clear from the minutes of the monthly meetings of the KITLV executive board. Bock's English-language report was originally handed over to the institute during its meeting of May 1880 ("211de bestuursvergadering" 1880: cxxxiii). This was readily accepted for publication, with the Ministry of Colonies agreeing to take up the cost of printing the illustrations, and arrangements made to prepare an appendix recounting earlier Dutch missions to Borneo; a delay, however, was occasioned by Bock's request to have a reworked, more detailed report published instead ("213de bestuursvergadering" 1880: clii–cliii). This expanded report, and Bock's failure to deliver it in a timely fashion, then evidently became something of a stumbling block, with a decision made in the meeting of January 1881 to contact Bock once more to urge him to finish the job ("215de bestuursvergadering" 1881: lxxiii). By March 1881, the board was finally informed of the arrival of the promised reworked report, which was then sent immediately to be translated into Dutch for publication ("220ste bestuursvergadering" 1881: cv–cvi).

With the materials now ready at hand, a further problem cropped up to occupy the institute's leadership: it had become apparent that Bock was preparing an imminent English publication of his experiences, and it was considered desirable to make every effort to have the Dutch version appear first, in order to protect the work's impact and novelty value as well as, one suspects, to justify the investment of government resources in the mission in the first place. It was therefore decided that the Dutch report would have to appear in instalments, with the first part that had already been cleared for publication to appear already in the spring of 1881, while the later instalments were still being translated ("220ste bestuursvergadering" 1881: cvi). Finally appearing in June of that year under the title *Reis in oost en zuid-Borneo van Koetei naar Banjermassin*, the first instalment did indeed beat the English edition in the race to print. The latter, under the noticeably more sensationalist title *The head-hunters of Borneo; A narrative of travel up the Mahakkam and down the*

Barito, appeared only in September 1881, although of course with the noticeable advantage of taking the form of a single, complete and self-contained text.

With the race to print technically won by the Dutch and the complete English text now in the world, there was no further sign of urgency on the side of the KITLV to finish their own version of Bock's report. This lack of evident interest was exacerbated by the ill health of Pieter Robidé van der Aa, co-founder of the institute and the person in charge of the editing of Bock's account, which further delayed the work. Indeed, the full Dutch publication of the report took place only years later in 1887, after the death of Robidé van der Aa. What is more, this bare-bones edition, although containing the complete text, left out the illustrations that had been included with the first instalment, presumably to cut costs. In addition to the editor's health issues, the delay of the publication is explained in the book's preface by reference to ambiguous "circumstances entirely independent of the will of the leadership" as well as the institute's "many activities", a phrasing that suggests that the work quite simply dropped drastically down the list of priorities as soon as the English version was out.[4] There were also rumours that the author quickly fell out of favour with the Dutch authorities due to concerns raised about his return in England coinciding with the founding of the British North Borneo Company, a rival colonial enterprise (Bock 1883: vii).

While Dutch interest in the report waned, the opposite happened in Britain and elsewhere in Europe. The English-language travelogue was evidently a success, with a second edition following already in 1882, while further translations – based on the English text – quickly appeared in German (1882), Norwegian (1883), Danish (1883), and Swedish (1884). It is evident that Bock's Scandinavian background helped attract attention among publishers and reading audiences in that region, while his literary fame no doubt also played a role in his appointment in 1886 to become the Swedish-Norwegian vice-consul in Shanghai, which led to a distinguished diplomatic career. Personally, then, Bock had done well for himself out of his scientific exploits and explorations. Yet it is the context of competitive imperial politics that provides the more interesting backdrop to a close reading of his account. Both Dutch and British interests – whether private or state-backed, scientific, commercial, or political – sought to take advantage of this opportunistic outsider for their own ends. They provided support and concluded agreements with Bock, as with many others like him, in order to advance or entrench their respective claims on the island of Borneo, which was then in the process of being divided up between imperial powers in a scramble that showed little concern for the needs and interests of its local communities. It is that colonial context, and the imperial politics behind it, that also inevitably coloured the representation of Borneo and its inhabitants in the different versions of Bock's account, as will be seen below.

As is suggested by the intertwined nature of the two editions' publication processes, both versions of the account are unquestionably based on one and

[4] All translations from Dutch to English are mine unless otherwise noted.

the same primary text. This is clear from the close, nearly word-for-word coincidence of large segments of the prose, although elements frequently appear in slightly different order and individual sentences sometimes seem to have been replaced from one immediate context to another. Comparing the Dutch text with the English-language manuscript segments held at Leiden University that appear to have served as its basis, it is clear that the translator Robidé van der Aa himself made only minor changes directly in the text: for example, in Bock's description of Banjarmasin as "a peculiar town with a thrifty and prosperous population", the Dutch omits the second part, reproducing just "a peculiar town" (*een eigenaardige stad*) – a notable but minor stylistic change, possibly made to save space and maintain focus (Bock 1880: 1, 1881: 50). Instead, Robidé van der Aa used extensive and critical footnotes as his preferred mode of editorial intervention, pointing out places where Bock had, in his opinion, erred.

The close congruence of the earlier, unpublished version of Bock's manuscript with the Dutch publication also shows that the majority of the differences between the two published texts do not derive from Dutch intervention; instead, they represent two distinct versions of Bock's manuscript, with the latter emerging out of editorial decisions made between the author and the publisher in London. The purpose of these decisions was presumably to rework the account into a more appropriately popular and engaging form for the general audience – a tonal preference reflected above all in the two distinct titles. Notably, the English edition actually contained two volumes, the second recounting Bock's earlier travels on Sumatra – chronologically earlier but displaced to a secondary status due to the perceived greater novelty value of Borneo as subject matter.

Whether Bock was planning to create two separate versions of the manuscript from the beginning, or if the differences between the English and the Dutch versions of the Borneo account represent accumulative changes made in the half-year after the submission of the Dutch manuscript, it is clear that expected audience interests played a role in the calibration of the two accounts. Indeed, after the publication of the English edition, the KITLV council members were relieved to find out that it was "more extensive" but "without however containing more scientific detail", meaning that it did not represent a superior version of the kind of text the institute had been promised and had committed to publish ("225ste bestuursvergadering" 1881: cxxxii). That the issue was raised and discussed in the institute's November meeting, only a couple of months after the English publication, speaks to the anxieties felt by Dutch colonial institutions of being trumped by their British competitors in their own field of specialisation.

The London-published travelogue was indeed longer, and noticeably so: as a rough measure of the difference, the Borneo volume in the English comes to a total of 256 pages, against the mere 104 (excluding appendices) of the Dutch. Partly the discrepancy is explained by the lengthy sections in the former that set up the context of Bock's expedition, detailing his arrival and

excursions in Java as well as preliminary preparations for Borneo. It is written in the style of a popular travel book of the period, with lavish descriptions of hotels, sights, and conveyances, subject matter that would have been deemed completely superfluous for the more specifically scientific reportage of the Dutch edition. There are also a number of scenes from Borneo itself that have not been included in the Dutch edition, apparently due to their irrelevance for the scientific ends of that text. One such example is a lengthy anecdote of a pirate-hunting expedition on the onboard the Sultan of Kutai's steamer on the river Mahakam, which makes up a whole chapter in *Headhunters* but does not appear at all in the Dutch. Other additions are purely aesthetic, such as a poetic depiction of a firefly-lit night scene and the accompanying sounds of nocturnal jungle.

Such material, apart from playing into well-established stereotypes of the lawless nature of Borneo's inhabitants or the wild exoticism of its jungles, naturally made for an exciting read for the general audience but provided little of interest for the more scholarly-minded. Yet these sections, in the English, serve the purpose of framing the adjoining expedition scenes and presenting them in a very specific light: Bock's authorial persona here is that of a literary storyteller and a celebrity traveller in the likeness of an Ida Pfeiffer – whom he notably does not cite despite her earlier travels on Borneo – or even a Mark Twain, "ironized and modernized" to borrow Mary Louise Pratt's phrasing (Pratt 1992: 201). The colonial encounter becomes fully embedded within that dialectical framework of global leisure and adventure, both in appropriate measure, as embodied in the volume's closing words, written as if from the deck of a luxurious homeward-bound steamer: "[t]he voyage home, with its attendant pleasures, was a grateful compensation for the dangers and hardships of a tour among the Head-hunters of Borneo" (Bock 1881: 256). The homelike comforts of the ship work to return, on the one hand, Bock himself to Europe, but on the other also the reader, back to the reality of his reading room after the far-away exploits just imagined.

By contrast, the Dutch edition engages in an entirely different, but no less overbearing, form of framing, although in the handiwork of the Dutch editors rather than Bock himself. Apart from the many footnotes already noted, which provide clarifications and references to pre-existing Dutch literature, the book is also prefaced by a lengthy, seventy-page introduction that sketches out the history of the Dutch arrival and presence on Borneo from 1635 onwards as well as their relations with the island's rulers and populations, with the help of numerous and extensive direct quotations lifted from relevant sources in the Dutch colonial archive. Bock's discursive subjugation to Dutch colonial scholarship is underlined by several pages of notes at the end of the book, containing critical remarks such as correcting the name of the ruling Sultan of Kutai from "Mohamad Soleman" to "Mohammed Adiel", or the translated meaning of the Malay word *muara* from 'confluence of rivers' to 'mouth of a river' (Bock 1887: 124). The effect, apart from simply underlining the informative and scientific nature of the text, is seamlessly to tie Bock's expedition into the long history of Dutch colonial exploration and expansion

in the archipelago, as just one additional step in that centuries-long process of ever-increasing knowledge and control.

Reading the colonial encounter

The most revealing differences between the two editions of Bock's account are, however, those that are apparent in their respective treatment of the material that both texts cover. The deliberate choices to adopt a different tone, phrasing or framing in specific scenes provide reliable indications of the motives that underpinned the process of editing and rewriting. There is also some reason to suspect that that process was not carried out by Bock alone. In particular, the English text contains a number of stylistically loose colloquialisms that do not have counterparts in the comparatively sober Dutch, and which fit in poorly with Bock's status as a second-language author who only moved to Britain in late adolescence and, even then, initially to work in the Scandinavian environment of the Swedish-Norwegian consulate. "I determined to take French leave", Bock writes idiomatically, referring to his decision to venture into a Dayak village without permission; elsewhere, he refers to the Sultan of Kutai's "shilly-shally and vacillation" over his intention to join Bock on his travels, where the Dutch merely reports "some hesitation" (*eenige aarzeling*) (Bock 1881: 60, 148, 1887: 44). The rainforest sight of tree roots rising into air above ground is described as "this, to English eyes, abnormal growth" – even though Bock nowhere identifies as English himself (Bock 1881: 151)! Whether or not such stylistic touches were ghost-written for him or merely agreed upon based on editorial advice, the authorial voice that results is a distinctly native British one.

One's attention is also drawn to numerous occasions where the English text relies upon cultural and geographical points of reference that would only be familiar to British readers. A peculiar rock formation is compared to "the celebrated Logan Rocks of Cornwall and the Scilly Islands", and a field of stones to "a newly macadamized street in London before the steam roller had been set to work"; some biscuits in his provisions are "still as crisp as if fresh from Huntley and Palmer's factory", referencing the reading-based maker (Bock 1881: 59, 156, 159). All of these turns of phrase, or comparable instances of colourful detail, are absent from the Dutch edition, suggesting their deliberate addition here for the benefit and entertainment of the British reading audience. They also work both to relativise Bock's Borneo adventure as one link in the chain of an Anglocentric globetrotting lifestyle, and to centre the figure of the explorer, with biscuit in hand, as the representative and agent of the British industrial world order – even if occasionally in possession of a foreign passport.

While stylistic choices and turns of phrase in the English helped establish Bock's persona as an intrepid and good-humoured explorer, this impression was ultimately grounded in the descriptions of specific encounters with the inhabitants of Borneo's inland, longstanding objects of fear and fascination in the European imagination. The English edition notably plays up the sense of danger in Bock's dealings with the locals, in passages that differ notably from

the Dutch. One good example is provided by Bock's first arrival at a major Dayak settlement in Longwai, the "capital town of the most powerful Dyak tribe in Koetei" (Bock 1881: 57). Bock was made to wait in his boat while his Malay guide Ké Patti went ahead to arrange permission for the group to land as well as accommodation for the night. The latter's long absence is narrated in the English in tones of increasing terror: "Could Ké Patti have lost his head, as well as his clothes and silver buttons, among these savages? Had Rajah Dinda, or one of his wives, given the order, once so familiar in fiction, if not in fact, among more civilized rulers, 'Off with his head!'?" The remark naturally plays on the Dayaks' reputation as infamous headhunters, but nothing of the sort is conveyed in the Dutch, which skips the whole scene with a curt "Ki Patti therefore went on shore, and several hours passed without his return" and later "As Ki Patti would not return, and half the day had already passed, I sent to fetch him back" (Bock 1881: 57, 1887: 15-16).

Similar exaggerations of the threat of violence occur frequently in the English. A large, unexplained meeting at Longwai a few days later is introduced in the English with the following:

> On the 12th September there was unusual commotion in Long Wai, which seemed to betoken a sudden termination to my friendly relations with the Rajah and his people. […] Could it be that the Rajah had taken sudden offence at my intrusion? or could the coming of the Sultan's wives be regarded as proof that the Sultan himself was meditating some unfriendly action towards me? (Bock 1881: 68).

The Dutch likewise reports on the gathering – the passage starts with the identical "on the 12th September there was an unusual commotion in Longwai" – but with none of the sinister asides. Quite the opposite, as, after describing the scene, Bock goes on immediately to assure the reader: "I was not in the least afraid that the Dayaks had any misgivings whatsoever regarding me or my crew" (Bock 1887: 21).

An overnight stop at a fortified position at Muara Anan is described in similarly divergent styles, giving another example of how Bock reframes specific details to achieve different effects. In Dutch, the arrival is noted in relatively optimistic terms: "Sikamandri welcomed us, he had already waited for us for some days. One of his Dayaks had been murdered, but otherwise there was, at the moment, no sign of enmity between the groups" (Bock 1887: 43). This statement of the present peacefulness of the area is however flipped in the English into an ominous threat:

> The Dyaks of the surrounding district are noted, even among Dyaks, for their ferocity, and Sikamandrie informed us that one of his party had been killed by natives just before our arrival; fearing a night attack from some of the tribes – who because they were not at war among themselves were the more likely to attack strangers – he had taken the precaution to erect outside our encampment [...] four look-outs. (Bock 1881: 146-147).

Apart from adding an aside about the special "ferocity" of the locals, the English turns the Dayak's peaceful relations into a particular threat against Bock. Not so in the Dutch, which does note the guard posts and admits the possibility of attacks, but brushes this aside: "However, I often told the Sultan: 'You really have nothing to fear; You are the strongest, and what is more I do not believe that there is one Dayak who wishes me any ill'" (Bock 1887: 43-44).

While the concrete details of these encounters are more or less exactly the same in both versions, the English deliberately provides space for internal monologues and speculation that opens up the possibility of danger, of any moment turning unexpectedly into violence, as befits the Dayaks' bloodthirsty reputation (Figure 3). Moreover, it effaces specific thoughts and statements that Bock ascribes to himself in the Dutch, which serve to dispel any acute sense of danger in the latter version. It is not immediately obvious what interest Bock would have had to downplay the threat in the Dutch report, if not to simply emphasise his own intrepidness as an explorer. Clearly, however, his London publisher felt such a framing was less than optimal and opted instead for a far more open-ended and sensationalist approach to the dangers of exploration in the English version.

Figure 3. "On a head-hunting tour". Lithograph based on Bock's original drawing, published with his 1881 English-language travelogue (photograph by Mikko Toivanen).

Related to the exaggeration of danger in the English version is a parallel downplaying of the amount and nature of the support Bock received throughout his expedition from others: from the Sultan of Kutai himself, who accompanied Bock for much of his journey, to the Chinese, Malay, and Dayak

workers and guides whose labour and knowhow made the enterprise possible in the first place. Postcolonial scholarship has increasingly shown how totally dependent self-presenting heroic explorers were on indigenous labour but also local know-how and expertise, which often gets occluded in the colonial archive (Edward Armston-Sheret 2023: 59). This process of occlusion is clear in Bock's English account. For example, the expedition group's departure from Muara Pahu is positioned as the beginning of a new chapter in both texts. In English this is straightforward: "Early in the morning of Monday, 15th December, my fleet of five praus left Moeara Pahou, my boat leading, and the rest paddling in single file at short intervals behind" (Bock 1881: 137). The Dutch, however, inserts a few additional sentences into this:

> Monday, 15th December, I left Moeara Pahoe under a refreshing rain shower, a little over six o'clock in the morning. The Sultan was, as usual, very good and obliging; he took care that everything was in order, and that my baggage was well covered. The crew for my boat – I received here new men who knew the way – did not appear on time; His Highness had the fifteen men fetched and I took to the water, followed by four perahus. (Bock 1887: 37).

What is in the former a simple image of a lone adventurer venturing out into the unknown, becomes in the latter a much more realistic scene of labour arrangements that underline Bock's dependence on the helpful cooperation of the Sultan, the real authority in the land.

The Sultan's role in the expedition appears to have been problematic for Bock's authorial designs. It was only certain parts of the journey that Bock undertook in the Sultan's immediate company, due in large part to the latter's leisurely pace and indecision, parting ways at several points only to run into each other again a little later. It is, however, clear that the Sultan with his large retinue numbering in the hundreds treated the trip more as a pleasure cruise than a serious enterprise. This, naturally, provided an awkward counterpoint to Bock's self-presentation as an intrepid explorer of the unknown. A desire to downplay this awkwardness seems to also have led to some light rewriting of certain encounters. A notable example is Bock's meeting with the Sultan at the village of Allo. In the English, Bock reports arriving at Allo, followed "to [his] surprise" a couple of hours later by the Sultan, with whom he then spent the evening before venturing out again in the morning on his own (Bock 1881: 125). In the Dutch, however, Bock first meets the Sultan at a lake only after leaving Allo in the morning, and expresses no surprise at the fact, as if the Sultan's presence in the neighbourhood was a given (Bock 1887: 32). The difference is subtle but significant: in the former version, Bock appears to be breaking new ground on his own, with the Sultan following somewhere behind and occasionally catching up; in the latter, however, it is clear that both are moving on the river more or less in parallel, and far from venturing out alone in the new day, Bock is invited to spend three hours shooting herons and enjoying "coffee and biscuits" with the Sultan.

This reluctance to admit the extent of help received is also apparent

elsewhere. On Bock's departure for his second journey toward Banjermasin, in the Dutch he notes that "it was a real expedition, consisting of 41 men and three perahus" (Bock 1887: 28). In the English, the total number of crew is omitted in favour of the smaller number that manned Bock's own boat: "… we were off, my prau leading, with a crew of nine men in charge of Mantrie Anga" (Bock 1881: 113). When travelling with the Sultan, the size of the – partly armed – retinue could rise to several hundred, though this is only directly addressed in the Dutch; a contemporary newspaper report even mentions a figure as high as four thousand, though this was likely an exaggeration ("Plaatselijke berigten" 1879b).[5] In any case, Bock's advance was far from lonely or unprotected.

The expedition group was also preceded in places by a preparatory advance party, a fact that gets occasionally occluded in the English. "On the way we saw some frames of the shelters that our vanguard had set up to sleep under", Bock notes at one point in the Dutch, an observation that has been deleted from the English even though the preceding sentence is identical in both versions (Bock 1887: 39). At Longwai, Bock received permission to visit and make drawings of a Dayak burial ground; while this scene is much more expansively described in the English, it omits the following passage from the Dutch: "As it was blazing hot, I asked the Raja to have a shelter built out of leaves above my folding-chair, as I could not sit and draw in the burning sun; in a couple of minutes the roof was ready" (Bock 1887: 23). While these are all small details that do not, in themselves, constitute a major part of Bock's narrative, the cumulative effect of these deletions and occlusions is that what comes across in the Dutch as a realistically labour-intensive effort requiring a large group of guides and workers, appears more like a heroically individualistic adventure in the English: a direct encounter between the lone explorer and the unknown, rather than one mediated by several layers of labour and authority marshalled through the intervention of systemic colonial hierarchies.

It is not just the nature of the labour underpinning Bock's expedition that is presented differently in the two versions of the text, the same is true also of the specific individuals doing that labour. The difference is most obviously notable as regards the depiction of Bock's closest helpers, the guides and head servants that act as intermediaries between the European explorer and his crew. These individuals are sketched in greater, more human detail in the English version. For example, Bock's Chinese head servant, Tan Bon Hijok, is never named in the Dutch, even in passages that are otherwise identical to the English, being instead referred to by his title *mandur*. This personalisation does not, however, necessarily mean the depictions are more positive. One of Tan's duties appears to have been to help Bock with the skinning of collected bird specimens, a task that he had to learn on the job. In the English, Bock laments:

[5] *Makassaarsch Handels-Blad*, 23-12-1879, p. 3.

> He had not the least idea where or how to begin; but the birds brought to me were unfortunately mostly common, and I could therefore afford to let him have a number of them to practice upon, so that he eventually became more efficient. Chinamen, as a rule, are handy and skilful at this work, and my ill-luck in getting one so unskilled as Tan Bon was all the more annoying. (Bock 1881: 63).

The corresponding Dutch passage is subtly different: "He knew nothing of the skinning of animals; I had to first teach him and, slowly, after some failed experiments with common birds, he began to get the hang of it. I have always come to know the Chinese as very skilled and driven." (Bock 1887: 19). While the basic elements are the same, the overall impression is not. In the latter, Tan's process of learning is presented as a positive, as evidence of the supposed general skillfulness and studiousness of the Chinese. In the former, however, there is only demerit, a failure to meet the expected level in this specific ability. Quite why the Chinese should be expected to be good at skinning "as a rule" is not explained, although it is easy to see how the puzzling notion may have arisen from a reframing of the more general characterisation in the Dutch version, which is in line with contemporary racial stereotypes.

The English version, then, shows a greater willingness to turn Bock's accompanying labourers into recognisable characters, although primarily just to use them as fodder for racialised humour and anecdotes. A similar thing happens to the guide Ké Patti, mentioned above, who is named in the Dutch but remains a largely anodyne character there. In the English, his figure is embellished with a number of humorous asides, such as notes on his inveterate lying, for example, that "[he] amused me very much by representing every house on the way up as belonging to either a son, a brother, a sister, or other relative of his"; or a mischievous passage mocking the uniform he wore to meet the Dayak *raja* – "[o]ne false step, oh Ké Patti, and the glory of your newly-donned suit would be dimmed in the mud beneath!" (Bock 1881: 51, 57). Through a repetition of such casual asides, Ké Patti gradually turns into a comic relief character, a process that serves to downplay the effect of Bock's evident reliance on his services as the direct representative of the Sultan.

Conclusion

European colonial literature could hardly be innocent of the systems that underpinned its writing, nor unbiased in its rendering of the encounter between coloniser and colonised. That much is broadly accepted, and few would seriously contend that these nineteenth-century tales of adventure and exploration can or should be read as neutral, factual accounts. Yet to acknowledge a systemic bias is not the same as to understand it or to be able to explain its functioning. It is here that a close analysis of texts like the parallel narratives of Carl Bock's expedition can provide invaluable insight into the production and reproduction of imperial propaganda. The evident ambiguity of certain facts, the divergent interpretations of the same scenes, although supposedly recounted by the same author at roughly the same time, destabilise the reading process, detaching the text from the experience, the sign from the

signified. What such a reading makes apparent is that the colonial encounter, as recorded on the pages of these books, was to a significant degree a product of editorial decisions made in the offices of metropolitan publishing houses, rather than lived interpersonal experience.

The elements that shaped the crafting of that textual encounter were numerous. In the case of nineteenth-century Borneo, pre-existing literary models were still few, but the corpus was rapidly increasing in size. Even before Bock had made his way into the interior of the island, contemporary commentary was playing up the dangers he was likely to face based on the experiences of earlier adventurers. Of these, none loomed more daunting than the headhunting Dayaks that had already garnered literary infamy through the accounts of earlier travellers, such as Ida Pfeiffer. And the danger was indeed real – a Hungarian explorer crossing northern Borneo was murdered just a couple of years after Bock's trip (Pusztai 2016: 61-62). It is, however, clear that this sensationalist template was bound to define Bock's narrative regardless of his actual experience. In the event, Bock's relations and interactions with the Dayaks were almost exclusively peaceful and business-like: many of them worked as his porters or rowers, helped him with collecting specimens, traded objects of interest. The Dayak chiefs he encountered allowed him access to sensitive locations such as burial grounds and treated him with respect, as an extension of their established relations with the Sultan of Kutai, under whose patronage Bock travelled. And this can all be read in Bock's narrative, in both versions, but always framed with the deliberately mood-setting language of "blood-thirsty" and "warlike" "savages", attributes based on legend rather than direct experience.

What a comparative reading of the two versions of Bock's account reveals, however, is that even within that stereotypical depiction, differing interests and audiences worked to push his narrative in different directions. There was an obvious clash between British and Dutch audience expectations, representing the two imperial powers then busily at work dividing Borneo between them. In the English, Bock presents himself more as a buccaneering and spirited adventurer, an exemplar of the British civilisation that he – through the patronage of the Marquess of Tweeddale – represented, and a kindred spirit of the white Rajahs of Sarawak and the speculators of the North Borneo Company that were expanding British influence on the island. In the Dutch, by contrast, the reader finds a more sober figure, quite literally embedded in the centuries-old discourse of the Dutch colonial archive, a government functionary working to facilitate the expansion of Dutch control into the inland. These two personas, embodied in the pen of one and the same Scandinavian author, represent, on the one hand, the British entrepreneurial approach to colonial expansion; and on the other, the territorial-administrative one of the Dutch.

Relatedly, there is also an evident clash here between representations of the colonial encounter as a literary and a scholarly endeavour. The more florid language and anecdotal nature of the English weigh the scales toward

the former, the rigidity and heavy editorial referencing of the Dutch toward the latter. And indeed, these texts were designed for different audiences, and not just in terms of language proficiency: the mass-market, entertainment-seeking readership of the former versus the selective scholarly-minded few of the latter. Yet both sought to convince their audiences, in their different ways, about the justification and necessity of colonial rule, by depicting the supposed underdevelopment of the island and its inhabitants against the potential benefits of European intervention, from coal mining to international commerce. In that project, that projection of ideologies onto the people and places of Borneo, the space left for genuine encounters was tightly circumscribed by the politics of power. Bock, as an agent of that power despite his seemingly neutral passport, knew not just how to promote empire, but also how to adjust his messaging and reframe his experiences in the service of different, competing imperial interests.

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