

INTRODUCTION TO THE BATIK COLLECTION OF KING CHULALONGKORN

Dale Carolyn Gluckman and Sarttarat Muddin
Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles, Bangkok, Thailand

The King's Journeys

During his long reign, His Majesty King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, r. 1868-1910) made three visits to Java. From the first trip it was apparent that His Majesty was fascinated with batik, a quintessential Javanese art form. On each visit, His Majesty seems to have made a point of collecting examples of batik from as many key centers of production as possible.

In 1871, at the age of 18, His Majesty made an official visit to Singapore and Java. This was the first time a reigning king of Siam had traveled outside of the country or its dependencies. One of His Majesty's lifelong goals was the modernization of Siam, and for this reason he wanted to see recent innovations, such as the new rail line between Batavia and Semarang. In addition, he had a deep interest in the shared Hindu-Buddhist heritage of Indonesia and Siam.

The royal yacht docked at Batavia on 26 March 1871. After six days there, during which His Majesty was given all honors by the Dutch Governor-General, the royal yacht departed for Semarang. It was here that His Majesty visited a batik workshop where he apparently also tried his hand at drawing with the *tjanting*. This brief visit to Java lasted only 15 days, but it obviously made a great impression on the young King, for he returned to Java unofficially in 1896 and again in 1901. As a sign of gratitude and Thai-Javanese friendship, His Majesty sent a statue of an elephant to Batavia, which still stands in front of the National Museum.

His Majesty's second visit lasted from 25 May to 28 July 1896, during which he paid visits to Yogyakarta, Surakarta, and

Cirebon, among other cities. On 25 June, His Majesty arrived in Yogyakarta where he was graciously entertained by both Sultan Hamengkubuwono VII and Pakualam V, as well as the Raden Adipati. Among other gifts, the Sultan gave His Majesty a sacred *keris* called *Mangkurat*. H.M. King Rama V presented the Sultan with a Siamese Decoration of Honor, the *Chula Suraporn*. The King also visited both Prambanan and Borobudur as well as Candi Kalasan, Candi Sari, and Candi Mendut. All impressed him greatly, leading to lively discussions with Dr. J. Groneman, chairman of the Archaeological Society—of which His Majesty became an honorary member. At the keraton, the King was entertained with *serimpi* dances by ladies of the keraton and *Bedoyo* and *Langendrian* performances by members of the court, with His Majesty noting the many similarities between Siamese and Javanese plays.

On 5 July 1896, His Majesty, accompanied by Queen Saowapha and a large retinue, arrived by special train in Surakarta where he met with Susuhunan Pakubuwono X and the Ratu, along with Pangeran Ario Mangkunegara V, the Resident and various princes and officials. In his diary, His Majesty makes particular note of the kindness of the Susuhunan in sending a pair of each of 20 kinds of fruit for Their Majesties' enjoyment. The King was photographed arm-in-arm with the Susuhunan, who entertained Their Majesties in the *Pendopo* of the keraton with a tea reception and a *Bedoyo* performance. His Majesty presented Royal Siamese Orders to the Susuhunan and others.

It was during this visit that His Majesty also visited Cirebon, spending the day there on 28 July. His Majesty met with Sultan Sepuh XI, Sultan Anom VIII, and the Raden Adipati, along with other Javanese and Dutch officials. He visited Sunyagiri and met with the Resident. From Cirebon the royal yacht set sail for Singapore and ultimately, Bangkok.

King Chulalongkorn's third journey to Java took place from 5 May to 24 July 1901, when he again visited Yogyakarta and Surakarta. Although His Majesty only spent a few hours in Yogya, he stayed three days in Solo, during which he saw the Susuhunan several times, as they had become good friends during His Majesty's previous visit. The King noted in his diary that photographs were taken of himself with the Susuhunan and the Resident by the royal photographers. His Majesty also visited the home of the Raden Adipati for tea and a *wayang wong* performance. The King also visited the new Mangkunegara VI at his palace.

The King's Batik

King Chulalongkorn purchased batik textiles on all three trips. However, it is likely that the majority of his purchases date from his longest and most extensive visit in 1896. In 1897, some of His Majesty's batiks were briefly displayed in Bangkok, but none have been exhibited or published since. Fortunately, not only have notes and diaries of each trip survived in the National Archives of Thailand, but, even more miraculously, 307 batiks collected by H.M. the King have been preserved in the Treasury of the Inner Court of the Grand Palace, Bangkok, where they were stored after His Majesty's death in 1910. Geographically they represent the styles of the Central Javanese Principalities and the multicultural styles of Java's North Coast. The collection also includes rare surviving examples from West Java.

The Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles (QSMT) is planning an exhibition and accompanying catalogue to tell the story of H.M. King Chulalongkorn's travels in Java and his fascination with Javanese culture, especially batik. The exhibition, scheduled to open at the QSMT in October, 2018, will reveal to the public this true hidden treasure and will be of interest not only to international batik scholars, collectors and aficionados, but to the vast majority of Thais and Javanese.