COLLECTION-BASED RESEARCH ON A KAMPILAN SWORD IN JAMBI PEOPLE’S STRUGGLE MUSEUM

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Cover Page Footnote
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COLLECTION-BASED RESEARCH ON A KAMPILAN SWORD
IN JAMBI PEOPLE’S STRUGGLE MUSEUM

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ABSTRACT
This article discusses the kampilan sword in Jambi People’s Struggle Museum. Kampilan is a traditional weapon originating from the Philippines but has spread to several regions in Indonesia, including Jambi. The kampilan sword collection is often overlooked, and there is not much information regarding these objects, despite the museum’s primary function is research and communication. Therefore, we conducted a study of a collection of kampilan swords to explore information related to these objects, allowing the museum to utilize and develop them in the future. The research model was based on the material culture study, using the social life of things and object biography approaches. Results indicate that, through these two approaches, new information and narratives about kampilan swords were successfully compiled. In the future, the museum can use these narratives to create new programs, create meanings and ideas related to struggle, and serve as the first step towards further research.

KEYWORDS
Museum, collection-based research, Kampilan, material culture.

1. INTRODUCTION
Indonesia has a lot of well-known traditional melee weapons for hand-to-hand combat such as keris, mandau, badik, kujang, and klewang. However, there are still many lesser-known weapons that have not yet been acknowledged, such as kampilan. This cutlass-like weapon, with a unique name and shape, has significant value from archaeological and historical points of view. It is a traditional weapon from Jambi and Riau Provinces in the island of Sumatra but has its origins from the Moro tribe in the Sulu and Mindanao, Philippines (Rahmat 2010, 44). Perhaps only a small number of Indonesian people are familiar with this type of weapon, some of which were found at Jambi People’s Struggle Museum in Jambi Province. The swords are displayed in a glass vitrine or cabinet along with other collections under the exhibit panels in the museum’s main room. It is evident that the museum curator had provided a caption for the collection stating “This sword is considered a slashing weapon. Kampilan is the traditional weapon owned by the Malay ethnic
group in Eastern Jambi. The handle is made of wood shaped like a dragon’s head, decorated with a tassel at the bottom of the mouth. This sword was used by the Red Scarf (Selempang Merah) troops when they faced the Dutch Army in Kuala Tungkal during the Republic of Indonesia’s War of Independence in 1949. While using this sword on the battlefield, the troops often recited the name of Allah, Ya dzal jalali wal Ikram (Jambi People’s Struggle Museum 2022). However, based on the above explanation, kampilan is used only as an object that complements the storyline of the exhibition, with a very basic description. However, the potential of kampilan as a museum exhibit can still be optimized, so the item may gain better recognition and utility. It holds values as a form of material culture as a representation of the concept of ancestral beliefs, as evidence of human migration in Indonesian seas, and as a symbol of struggle against oppressors.

It is widely accepted that the essence of a museum lies within its collections. Museums are home to hundreds or even thousands of objects that provide new experience, knowledge, a sense of wonder, and a source of inspiration (Freedman 2018, 1). Even the “cabinet of curiosity” or wunderkammer—an antiquarian’s hobby of collecting unique and exotic objects, such as art, culture, and customs within a room or cabinet (Amsel-Arieli 2012, 40)—which served as the pioneer of museums, was designed to those who saw it, although it was limited for rich people only. A museum’s collection has a vital role as a source of energy to run the museum, enabling it to carry out its main functions as an institution that provides a diversity of nature, culture, history, and art through educational narratives and entertaining attractions (Freedman 2018, 2; Wells 2012, 1). In general, each object is unique due to its important features, such as its form, the spatial or geographical location where the object originates, and its time or period dimensions (Freedman 2020, 2). Therefore, museum organizations must be able to tap into all of the object’s potentials, and the only way to achieve this is through collection-based research. This approach aligns with the three main functions of museum, which is research, conservation or maintenance, and communication (Van Mensch, 2003). Interestingly, on the pyramid chart of a museum’s three functions, Van Mensch places “research” at the top. It shows that research has the most significant role in a museum’s operation.

Despite its significance, collection-based research takes a back seat in many museums’ priorities. In some cases, such research is not even conducted at all. Museum tends to exhibit collections to convey information based on the curator’s knowledge. This is why museums often classify their collections into several groups, such as archaeology, ethnography, nature, geology, and many more (Magetsari 2016, 183). However, Magetsari (2016, 184) argues that merely storing, preserving, and exhibiting objects are insufficient, hence its label as storage for ancient goods. Museums should strive to discover meanings in their collection, thereby increasing knowledge, providing identity, and revealing cultural roots that reside within the collective memory of a society. This perspective aligns with the new museology concept that emphasizes the interests of the community from social, cultural, and economic development with a focus on people (Fitriany 2016, 32). Collection-based research can be an effective way of presenting interpretations and meanings of an object. Wells (2012) describes three key reasons why research on museum’s collections is important: (1) it increases the value of the object, (2) it benefits future research, and (3) it strengthens the relationship between society and the object. Therefore, the primary purpose of this research is to collect information related to kampilan in order to increase its value. Ultimately, this research aims to improve the description provided in the vitrine and redefine the sword, not only as a collection, but also as a source of inspiration for designing museum programs that are more communicative and understandable, enabling visitors to understand the intended meanings.
1.1. Literature Review

1.1.1 Kampilan Sword

The literature review concerning this topic will be divided into two main aspects: (1) kampilan as the main object of focus and (2) the concept of the new museum and collection-based research, which provides the framework for this research. As a cutlass sword, Kampilan has an average length of approximately 44 inches or 110 cm. This type of sword was used by the native Filipinos prior to the arrival of the Spanish and is still produced by some Muslim ethnic communities in Manguindanao and Maranao Moros regions (Laurence 2009, 18–19). Although not many records and research on kampilan have been established, one of the earliest sources can be found in a Dutch-language book by A. B. Meyer (1899) entitled *Publication aus dem Königlichen Ethnographischen Museum zu Dresden*. The book describes collections of traditional Filipino weapons owned by the Königlichen Ethnographischen Museum, including kampilan swords with various shapes and variants.

Furthermore, there is a book by Herbert W. Krieger (1926) entitled *The Collection of Primitive Weapons and Armor of the Philippine Islands in the United States National Museum*. Similar to Meyer’s book, this book contains traditional weapons owned by the United States National Museum. However, Krieger’s book provides more detailed explanation than Meyer’s, including the description of those objects’ materials, uses, distribution, and function in the Filipino culture. The latest literature on kampilan can be found in research conducted by Bulkhia Panalondong (2018) and presented in her thesis entitled *Kampilan: Cultural and Historical Significance to the Mëranau*. Her research focuses on the characteristics and functions of Mëranaù’s kampilan based on oral and written records. She also adds an analysis of how kampilan reflected the life, land, and identity of the Moro people during the pre-Islamic, Spanish, American, Japanese, and post-colonial era in the Philippines.

![Figure 1. Catalogue of Kampilan in the Königlichen Ethnographischen Museum. (Source: Meyer 1899, *Publication aus dem Königlichen Ethnographischen Museum zu Dresden*. Verlag von Stengel & Co).](image)

Apart from that, recent research has also been conducted by Noralia Ibrahim (2022a; 2022b), presented in her two articles entitled “Meranau Traditional Weapons and Warfare and Their Relevance” and “An Interpretation on Embossed and Embedded Symbols in Lanao Traditional and Historic Implements of War (The Sundang and Kampilan)”. The first article discusses the relevance of Meranau’s unique weapon
and armour with kampilan being one of the main items discussed therein. Meanwhile, the second article discusses the symbolic meaning of two traditional Lanao weapons, particularly sundang and kampilan. Panalondong’s (2018) and Ibrahim’s (2022a; 2022b) works prove that kampilan still interests contemporary researchers.

Based on the above literature review, it is clear that previous studies on kampilan were mainly carried out by foreign researchers, with a focus on its relevance with the Filipino culture and tradition. At the same time, kampilan itself exists not only in the Philippines but also in Indonesia as it has found its way to be part of the collection of Jambi People’s Struggle Museum. Unfortunately, it gains little to none attention from cultural humanities researchers such as archaeologists, historians, or anthropologists, despite their potential to reconstruct cultural processes and interactions between Indonesia and the Philippines. Therefore, this research seeks to construct stories and spark discourses about kampilan from an Indonesian perspective.

1.1.2. New Museology and Collection-Based Research

Peter Vergo (2000) in his book entitled The New Museology as quoted by Daniel Haryono (2011, 1–2) explains that “new museology” is the term used to describe a new approach in the activities and studies of museums. Unlike traditional museums that focus only on the collection, maintenance, and exhibition methodology, new museology emphasizes the interest of society. New museology also aims to promote inclusive participation, pluralistic perspectives, and cultural development (Kokkinos & Aleakis in Chourdakis et al. 2019, 8770; Allam and Yulianto 2020, 2). From the description above, it seems that the new museology paradigm is community-oriented. Therefore, the storylines, exhibitions, and programs at museums must be connected to existing discourses in the local society, all the strength of that lies on how they treat the collections. The importance of conducting collection-based research comes from the two main functions of museum, namely research and communication. Nonetheless, some museums have not yet done their homework as an institution that has multiple roles as a bureau of aesthetic standards, a library of materials, a source for future rediscoveries, a venue for exhibitions, and a research centre. That is why a collection must be appropriately curated to identify rooms for improvement. In doing so, ongoing research and publication is one of the aspects that define a museum, as well as its storage facilities, curator, and caretakers (Stebbins 1991, 15). Pinar Durgun et al. (2018, 1) also adds that studying museum collections is an ethical responsibility, especially for those that are acquired through improper means such as looting, art market purchases, improper excavations, or incomplete documentation. Further research about such objects can re-contextualize their function and meaning by providing new information and interpretation.

Andrea Hauenschild (1988) in Andini Perdana (2011, 3) defines a collection on display as a living heritage that serves the community. It must be intended not only to preserve the material culture, but also to provide a set of knowledge, historical stories, social perceptions, collective memory, and identity. Nunus Supardi (2017, 339) quotes Abraham Maslow’s statement in Kotler and Kotler (1998) that museum collections should have the power to provoke a “peak of experience” in visitors. This experience involves a process of inner enrichment where someone absorbs the information contained in the objects, leading to a new understanding, insight, and feelings that ignite their imagination. Achieving such impacts requires extensive research on these collections. Megan Rosemary Wells (2012, 34) explicitly defines collection-based research as an activity that aims to expand new knowledge by doing certain actions such as (1) examining the physical objects, (2) developing contexts and enriching the relationships with other objects or sources of information, and (3) conducting research on a sustainable basis. Meanwhile, Jan Freedman (2020) also added how
collection-based research could open up various opportunities, ranging from adding information in exhibition and displays to developing new methods over time.

Research on museum collections is basically linked to the study of material culture (Wells 2012, 5). One of the concepts in this field is “the social life of things” by Arjun Appadurai (1986), which states that objects are not simply passive but rather active participants in a complex social relationship and cultural networks. Every object has its own social life shaped by a range of cultural, economic, and political processes. The social life of these things involves a process of commodification, in which objects are transformed into subjects in certain situations. Their meanings and values are constantly negotiated and transformed through human interaction (Appadurai 1986, 3). Furthermore, Appadurai (1986, 3–5) also completed his hypothesis by dividing the social life of things into five different dimensions as follows.

- **The “object/thing itself”**
  It is the physical properties of an object, such as its material composition and design, which give it a unique identity and meaning in different cultural contexts.

- **The “value”**
  The value of an object is not simply determined by its physical properties, but also shaped by social and cultural factors, such as its rarity, history, and symbolic significance.

- **The “use”**
  Objects are often designed and produced for specific functions, but their use can change over time and across different cultural contexts.

- **The “exchange”**
  Objects are often exchanged in social and economic transactions involving a complex system of negotiation, valuation, and symbolic exchange.

- **The “meaning”**
  Objects are not passive entities but are interpreted and given meaning by individuals and communities, which can vary widely across different social and cultural contexts.

The concept of “social life of things” is in line with the “object biography” approach proposed by anthropologist Igor Kopytoff (1986) in his book chapter entitled “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process”. This theoretical approach is frequently used by so many curators and researchers to construct the life of objects before and after they are stored in museum, especially for those with unknown or orphaned condition; i.e. without any clear information regarding their management, acquisition, and origin (Friberg & Huvila, 2019, 1–2). Object biography examines the life history of things, from their production to consumption and disposal, by asking typical questions found in human biographies to the object (Wells 2012, 79). Igor Kopytoff (1968, 64–65) argues that objects are not static and unchanging; rather, their value and meaning are constantly changing throughout their life cycle. Object biography helps researchers gather information about the object’s physical characteristics, such as its material, size, and shape, as well as its provenance, i.e. the history of its ownership and use. It may also help them examine the object’s role in shaping a society’s cultural, social, and economic landscape.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study is intended to enrich the information and interpretation of kampilan as a museum artefact. However, this kampilan has lost its context for quite some time. No record or note could tell us where and how Jambi
People’s Struggle Museum acquired this sword. In order to dig up further information, this research employed an object biography approach to identify (1) the physical characteristics of the kampilan, (2) the value of the kampilan, (3) the uses of the kampilan, (4) the distribution of the kampilan, and (5) the meaning of the kampilan. To get these pieces of information, we need specific methodology to gather internal and external information about the object. Samuel Lunn-Rockliffe’s (2019) book *The Analysis of Material Culture* notes that the study of material culture cannot be separated with the archaeological research methodology. The research can be carried out using various methods, ranging from simple classification and typology to more complex approaches such as ethnoarchaeology, analogy, structuralism, semiotics, and social and symbolic approaches, depending on the object’s characteristics.

Based on the above, the method used in this study involved some archaeological formal analysis to collect information about the object’s physical characteristics, including the motifs and shapes of the handle, the blade, and other features. Then, the research proceeded with contextual analysis using a historical method, comprising a heuristic study to gather relevant sources such as books, journals, and reports. Once all of the sources are gathered, external and internal criticism were conducted to get an authentic and coherent information about (1) its primary function and meaning, (2) the activities that cause the cultural diffusion, and (3) how it has become a symbol of struggle. As a result of the formal and contextual analyses, these pieces of information were then utilized to construct a biographical narrative of the object, tracing the life cycle of the weapon from its physical characteristics, origins, and ultimate status as a museum artefact. Finally, an explanatory conclusion was drawn about the kampilan sword, and a more appropriate and communicative new narrative description was made for Jambi People’s Struggle Museum’s visitors.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Characteristics of the Kampilan

Regarding its morphology, kampilan can be divided into two components: the handle (*sundi*) and the blade (*tungo*). The handle is designed to be long enough to counterbalance the heavy blade. It can also be divided into three parts: (1) the upper part called “guard” (*sanpok*), a curved rectangular shape with geometric tendrils decoration that serves as a barrier between the blade and its handle; (2) the middle part which functions as a handle, usually wrapped with a spool of thread dipped in resin to ensure a strong grip while it is held; and (3) the lower part (*palungpong-kulili*) which is generally carved in the shape of a creature’s head with its mouth wide open. These creatures can be a crocodile, hornbill, cockatoo, and the Philippine’s mythological sea monster called *bakonawaa* or dragon-like creature. However, some kampilan types have the lower part carved in the shape of a swallow or swiftlet bird (Lawrence 2009). As additional adornment, a kampilan is often decorated with animal feathers or even human hair as per the tradition of decapitating an enemy’s head called *ngayau*. In more recent times, it has changed into the wool of sheep and horses (Ibrahim 2022a; 2022b; Krieger 1926, 13). According to the elders, the best kampilans are those passed down from father to son, while the most powerful ones can incite fear and dread in those around them. The presence of a kampilan user can be known by the sound of a small bell attached to the weapon’s lower handle (Scott 1995, 143).
The blade or *tungo* is a single-edged sword called *galngan* or *garangan*. It features a dynamic shape that narrows towards the bottom and widens towards the top. Most of them are sometimes designed with protruding spikes near the point and a series of small circular holes (Lawrence 2009). Sometimes, the spikes are very obvious and they look like a dual-pointed sword. Some experts suspect that the spikes at the sharp edges serve decorative and ceremonial purposes, while others believe they are intended to deceive opponents. Mark Lawrence (2009) also adds that the blade would be smeared with poison, making it extremely deadly. The forging technique is similar to the Damascus style, shown by the distinctive patterns of banding and mottling reminiscent of flowing water that are visible on the blade’s surface (Lawrence 2009). It shows that the people of Mindanao have mastered advanced iron forging techniques.

### 3.2 The Value of Kampilan

In archaeological research, the study of material culture or artefacts can be done in a various ways and from different points of view. One of them is the functionalism approach developed by Lewis Binford (1931–2011), where he believes that artefacts are part of a cultural system that can be categorized based on their functions (Lerner 1994, 59). These categories include techno-facts, which are ordinary tools used in everyday life to interact with the surrounding environment; socio-facts, which are objects that reflect or indicate the structure of a social system; and ideo-facts, which are tools that have a symbolic meaning of beliefs and ideology within the society (Hasanuddin 2002, 6). Interestingly, kampilan can fit into those three functional frameworks. As a techno-fact, Kampilan is a weapon used for trimming bushes in the forest, hunting animals, or even slashing the enemy’s head in a battle. On the other hand, it can also function as a socio-fact. In some cases, this sword is also a symbol of prestige and a representation of datu or tribal chief’s power (Lawrence 2009). Noralia Ibrahim (2022b, 13) also adds that for the Meranau tribe in Lanao region, kampilan is a symbol of power, recognition, and respect for a sultan. Even when the sultan died, the sword remained a venerable piece of regalia.
Apart from the two functions mentioned earlier, the ideo-fact function in of kampilan is also quite prominent, particularly in the carving of animal heads or tails and tendrils (okir) around the hilt. For instance, the hilt of the kampilan in Jambi People’s Struggle Museum was carved in the shape of a dragon’s head with its mouth wide open. Based on the literature study, carvings of animals and tendrils do not only serve as an ornament and decoration. In fact, they are related to indigenous religions and traditional beliefs that have developed since prehistoric times before the advent of Islam and Christianity. In order to acknowledge the intent and purpose of making decorative tendrils and body parts of animals on kampilan, it is important to understand the religious concepts held by ethnic communities in the Philippines. The Philippines’ indigenous people can be identified as an Austronesian-speaking community since prehistoric times. Austronesia is the world’s most widely distributed language family, consisting of 1,200 branches and spoken by over 300 million people across vast regions such as Taiwan in the north, New Zealand in the south, Easter Island in the east, and Madagascar in the west (Leihitu and Permana 2019; Tanudirjo and Simanjuntak 2004; Bellwood 2002). However, the primary distribution centres are found in the Southeast Asian region, both on the islands (ISEA) and the mainland (MSEA) (Leihitu 2020). As an Austronesian-speaking community, the Philippine’s indigenous people, especially in Mindanao, generally preserved prehistoric beliefs that continued to influence subsequent religions (based on data from the www.pulotu.com, a website that maps Austronesian-speaking religions around the world (Watts et al. 2015) as a database).

When studying indigenous religions originating from prehistoric beliefs, the terms that first come to mind are animism and ancestral worship (Handoko 2016, 2). The term “animism” itself is derived from the words anime (soul) and ism (belief); meaning the recognition of the existence of souls beyond the human world. These souls have specific powers typically greater than humans and possess the will to determine the life of those who worshipped them (Akbar 2011, 92). Edward B. Tylor (1920, 417–425) first introduced this term in his book entitled *Primitive Culture*. He explained that animism is a natural religion rooted in the primitive philosophy from the mind of prehistoric people and inherited to the native people until now. Consequently, Taylor often characterized these people as naturally religious. Animist beliefs generally have several stages or categories such as (a) extensive natural worship such as the ones directed towards the sun, the moon, lightning, and mountains; (b) natural being worship such as the ones directed towards animals or plants; (c) objects worship; (d) ancestral spirit worship, also known as dynamism; and (e) worship of the highest beings (Ibrahim 2022b, 16; Menzies 2015, 29–30; Akbar 2011, 92–99).

![Figure 3. The Hilt of Kampilan. (Source: https://www.riaumagz.com/2022/01).](image-url)
Anthony Giddens (1989) in Jim Grant (2001, 138) defined religion as a set of symbols that triggers emotions and feelings. It manifests in activities such as rituals, practices, and celebrations, as well as in the creation of objects or artefacts. For Austronesian peoples, animism and the three cosmic realms are the two main foundations of their ancient beliefs. They believe in the cosmological concept of three worlds: the upper world, the middle world, and the underworld. Each of these worlds is inhabited by magical creatures or gods that sometimes manifested in the form of natural objects, animals, and plants, such as

1. the Upperworld: the sun god; the thunder god; and birds
2. the Middle-earth: leaves; trees; the mountain god; and flowers
3. the Underworld: snakes; fish; turtles; and crocodiles

(Lasco 2020, 142–143).

These natural objects, animals, and plants are depicted in every decoration or artefact such as tattoos on the body, clothing, amulets, and weapons. They are believed to bring luck. The images of crocodiles, swallowtails, and okir carvings on kampilan are representations of beings from the three worlds intended to provide luck and protection (Lascos 2020, 142–143). In Mindanao, the crocodile is an animal figure which the indigenous people encounter every day. As a matter of fact, some of them even consider crocodiles as a grandfather figure, so offerings are often given as a form of respect (Ibrahim 2022b, 11; Scott 1995, 72). That is why most of Kampilan hilts from Minadano generally depict crocodile’s head, symbolizing these beings as a spirit helper and ancestor’s guide.

The concept of belief manifested in objects, particularly weapons, is also found in traditional tribes and ethnicities in the Indonesian archipelago. For example, the handle of the mandau weapon from the Dayak ethnic group, Kalimantan, is made from deer antlers and carved with hornbill or wild boar motifs. Michael Makianggung (2020, 74) explained that the hornbill represents the warrior soul and majesty as it always perches on the highest peaks of trees, cliffs, and mountains. Meanwhile, Manurul Hidayat (2021, 57) also believes that in the cosmology of the Dayak people, the hornbill is a creature that plays an essential role in creating the universe and the birth of humans on earth. Therefore, crafting the hornbill motif on mandau handles symbolizes hope for survival and life after war. Interestingly, the motifs on the kampilan and mandau
handles define the owner's personality. However, above all else, these weapons symbolize masculinity for their users (Ibrahim 2021b, 13; Malinggung 2020, 70).

3.3 The Origin and Distribution of Kampilan

The mobility and distribution of kampilan across Southeast Asia are worth examining. It is widespread not only in the Philippine Islands such as Luzon (Meranaw) and Marawi (Mindanao), but also in Sulawesi (Talaud Islands, Sangihe, and Minahasa) and Sumatra (Jambi and Riau). In anthropological and archaeological studies, two factors can account for the distribution of cultures and artefacts. The first one is migration, which is a movement of population involving a change of permanent residence for a substantial duration. The second one is diffusion, which, according to Koentjaraningrat (2009, 199), is a process of spreading cultural elements from one place to another by migratory groups of people. He further explained that the spread of one or two cultural elements could also occur without the movement of groups or nations on a large scale, often facilitated by specific individuals, particularly traders and sailors. In Jambi, Riau, and Northern Sulawesi, it is believed that the individuals or agents responsible for this spreading were the lanun or pirates who wandered the Indonesian oceans for a certain period of time (Alamsyah et al. 2023; Angga 2022; Lapian 2021, 117–120; Ali 2019; Antony 2013). This hypothesis is supported by some experts who have noted that kampilan is one of the primary weapons used by this group of pirates (Iranon or Ilanon) from Mindanao, the Philippines, around the 18th and 19th centuries (Ibrahim 2022, 20; Alamsyah et al. 2023, 15).

The earliest historical records mentioning the presence of pirates in Indonesian waters probably came from Chinese records by Faxian (Fa-Hsien) in the 5th century, during his expedition from China to India in 413–414. These accounts describe a lot of pirates around the Southeast Asian seas, noting the deadly danger posed by these pirates (Lapian 2021, 122). Another record came from Jidan in 8th century, who mentions that all citizens of Gegesengzhi Kingdom on the northwest of Sriwijaya Kingdom (probably around Riau Islands and the Malacca Strait) were known as pirates who terrorized passing ships (Lapian 2021, 122). It appears that piracy was a lucrative business at that time. According to Antony (2013, 25), being a pirate was a way of life for maritime communities in Southeast Asia. Even Raffles (1976, 232) in his famous
book entitled *The History of Java* stated more precisely that pirate activities in the Indonesian archipelago was a custom of the Malays that had been going on for a long time. During the 12th century, some records have reported that a small kingdom under Sriwijaya’s rule called Fo-lo-an successfully defended themselves from a pirates attack. The local people regarded this incident as a truly miraculous event, considering it as a gift and blessing from the holy Buddha. The same problem persisted in 14th century, as noted by a Chinese visitor named Wang Dayuan, who mentioned that a pirate’s nest can be found in Long Ya Men or the strait of Singapore (Lapian 2021, 123).

During 15th and 16th centuries, the pirates in Southeast Asia underwent a significant change with the arrival of European ships and sailors. Tomé Pires’ (1513) book called *Suma Oriental* also mentions the existence of pirates in Nusantara, particularly concentrated in the eastern archipelago around the west coast of South Sulawesi, even though he never came to that area (Lapian 2021, 124). The tradition of piracy still persisted until the 18th and the 19th centuries. During this period, pirates primarily attacked European ships, viewing these actions as a form of resistance against colonialism and the trade monopoly imposed by the Europeans.

**Figure 6.** Distribution Map of Illanon Pirates in the Indonesian Archipelago. (Source: A. B. Lapian, 2021).

Pirates’ areas in Indonesian waters were evenly distributed. In the western region, these seafarers can be found in the waters of the Malacca Strait, the east coast of Sumatra, and the Riau Islands (Angga 2022, 17), as well as the central region in the west coast of Borneo, areas between Sarawak waters and the Sulu Sea (Ali 2019, 58) and the Java coast. In the eastern region, pirates were located in Mindanao, Talaud Islands, Minahasa, Gorontalo, Makassar, Tobelo, Sumbawa, Bima (Alamsyah et al. 2023, 6), and the west coast of Papua (Lapian 2021, 128). Each group of pirates were known for their ferocity, toughness, and courage. However, the pirates from the Sulu Sea, Mindanao, known as the Lanun people, had the widest coverage area compared to others. The word *Lanun, Illanun, or Iranun*, are derived from the Mindanao language, meaning “people from the lake” (Alamsyah et al. 2023; Lapian 2021). This word was later absorbed by the Indonesian and Malaysian languages and came to mean ‘pirates’, which is quite different from its original meaning.

The presence and activities of Mindanao pirates in Sumatra are evident in A. B. Lapian’s records (2011, 202–203) in Angga (2022, 17). Lapian noted that the pirates group moved from the Malaccan coast and Riau Islands to the east coast of Sumatra and then set up a base in Reteh, an area between the estuary of the Jambi and Indragiri Rivers. Reteh pirates’ quarters were quite large at the time, and the Dutch East
Indies Government reported that pirates in this area could deploy 10 to 12 ships with 1,000 fully armed crew members. Vlekke (2008, 230) in Angga (2022, 17) also explains how this pirate group has built a fort in southern Sumatra as a stepping stone to expand their territory.

Meanwhile, in Sulawesi, the pirate activities developed increasingly in the 17th century, particularly after the Sultanate of Makassar was conquered by the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) in 1669. Most of the pirate groups in Sulawesi waters came from the people of Makassar, Bugis, Mandar, Tobelo, Papua, and Mindanao (Alamsyah et al. 2023, 5–6), and they usually wandered the northern and southern coasts of Sulawesi. These pirates sometimes cooperated with regional authorities or sea lords and even the sea people, especially when facing European fleets such as British, Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese ships. These facts alone can explain why kampilans could spread to Riau, Jambi, Minahasa, and Talaud Islands. It is obviously a consequence of the rampant pirate activity in Indonesian waters and the massive interaction between the local people driven by shared interest, particularly in opposing European fleets, and causing a cultural diffusion.

3.4 The Meaning of Kampilan

In the collective memory of the Filipinos, kampilan is not just a weapon but also a symbol of heroism and struggle against invaders. According to their historical records, Chief Lapu-Lapu and his warriors were able to quell the Portuguese fleet and even kill their commander, Ferdinand Magellan. This legendary event is known as the battle of Mactan, occurring on 27 April 1521 (Ibrahim 2022b, 19; Angeles 2007, 4). Interestingly, in every illustration such as painting, statue, or even monument, Lapu-Lapu and his warriors were always depicted holding a mighty kampilan sword. Naturally, history repeated itself in 1596 when a Spanish colonial army leader named Captain Esteban de Fugieroa also experienced the same thing as his predecessor. His head was successfully cut off using a kampilan by Mindanao warriors while fighting and defending their land (Ibrahim 2022b, 19).
Furthermore, not only in the Philippines, kampilan is also regarded as a symbol of the struggle and independence in Sumatra, Indonesia, particularly in Kuala Tungkal, Tanjung Jabung, Jambi Province. This association between kampilan and struggle is particularly strong among members of the Red Scarf Troops or Laskar Hizbullah, i.e. a rebel group associated with Islamic mysticism under the leadership of Guru Abdul Shamad, also known as “Panglima Adul”. These troops fought for their rights during the second aggression of the Dutch back in 1949. These troops performed guerrilla-raid operations to expel the American allied joint forces affiliated with the Netherland Indies Civil Administration (NICA). One of their hallmarks is the red scarf worn across their bodies (Arsanti et al. 2022, 1). They had very limited weapons because the supply of firearms from the Indonesian government was not available to them. Once again, kampilan appeared to be the weapon used by this resistance group against colonialists and oppressors.

Figure 9. Lapu-Lapu vs. Magellan in the Battle of Mactan. (Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MactanShrinePainting2.jpg).

Figure 10. Red Scarf Troops from Kuala Tungkal, Jambi. (Source: https://www.jambiupdate.co/).
From the above historical overview, many interpretations and meanings can be drawn about the Jambi people. Jambi People’s Struggle Museum should initiate the notion that kampilan is one of elite weapons symbolizing Indonesia’s struggle. Its importance can be compared to the Siginjai keris representing the history of Sultan Thaha’s struggle in the Jambi war, the Gajah Dompak keris used by Sisingamaraja XII in the battle of North Sumatra, and the Ardawalika keris held by Dewa Agung Jambe, the King of Klungkung during the Puputan War in Bali.

3.5 The Usage of Kampilan

Previously, we discussed various historical uses of kampilan as a weapon by Mindanao pirates, Chief Lapu-Lapu, and their troops, as well as the red scarf troops’ rebellion in Jambi, Indonesia. However, in some traditional Islamic communities in Meranau, the Philippines, these weapons are also used as an heirloom from parent to child as a talisman for protection and good luck (Ibrahim 2022b, 15). Interestingly, the tradition of storing heirlooms is also practiced by several ethnic communities in Jambi.

From the pre-colonial period to the mid-20th century, the function and use of kampilan as a weapon did not change. Only recently has its function changed into an heirloom containing deep historical values, deep-rooted culture, and even magical significance. When Jambi People’s Struggle Museum acquired its kampilan through purchase, it also became a commodity with an economic value. Now, it serves as an artefact, playing a significant role as an educational tool, museum exhibit, and research object. The kampilan is a fairly important collection for the Jambi People’s Struggle Museum as it is placed in the main exhibition room on the 1st floor of the museum to support the exhibition’s storyline. As long as the museum keeps the same concept floor, the Kampilan will remain a top priority. From the description above, the kampilan has definitely undergone significant changes in terms of usage. Despite its physical characteristics as a mere weapon, it has changed into an heirloom, a commodity, and a museum exhibit, depending on its owners’ social and cultural background.

4. THE BIOGRAPHY OF KAMPILAN: THE SYMBOL OF SPIRITUALITY, PIRATE LIFE, AND RESISTANCE

The kampilan is one of many exhibits in Jambi People’s Struggle Museum. This 110-cm-long sword-type weapon has a distinctive and unique shape. Its physical characteristics can be divided into two parts, namely the blade and the hilt, both of which are interrelated. The design of the blade is quite ornate, with a single sharp edge. The shape is smaller at the bottom (close to the handle) and widens towards the end of the blade. In addition, it features non-sharpened thorns on the other side, creating an impression of dual sharp edges. This sword is deadly because it has a wide, sharp, and spiked tip.

A kampilan’s blade is long and heavy, requiring a strong handle as a counterweight. This handle can be divided into three parts. The first is the guard or cross rod which serves as a barrier securing the handle to the blade. The second is the trade in the form of a vertical cylinder wrapped with copper thread and smeared with resin to provide a secure grip that does not easily detach when held. Lastly, the lowest part is an ornament carved with a dragon head motif with an open mouth and supported by a base on one side. Right below the runway, there are several black hair ties. It is said that, in the past, the hair on the pommel was obtained from the heads of defeated enemies in a battle. However, with the current influence of Islam and Christianity in the Mindanao community, the human hair has been replaced with animal hair. The kampilan in the museum is found in East Tanjung Jabung Regency, Jambi Province, but it actually originated from the Philippine
Islands, particularly the Meranau and Mindanao regions. Kampilan as a traditional weapon has been in use since prehistoric times by the ancestors of the Filipinos and Indonesians, namely the Austronesians. This is indicated by the shape of the ornament on the kampilan’s handle, which consists of a combination of animal motifs (such as crocodile, hornbill, cockatoo, bakonawaa (dragon), and swallowtail heads) and geometric motifs (such as leaves, branches, and tendrils). According to experts, these motifs are entities in ancient animist and cosmological beliefs and served as an amulet to bring luck, safety, and life, which are represented by the object itself, i.e. kampilan.

Kampilan existed well into the proto-historical and historical times. During this period, the spread of kampilan to various regions in the Indonesian archipelago from the Talaud Islands, Sangihe, and Minahasa in North Sulawesi to the east coast of Sumatra, particularly in Jambi and Riau, was facilitated by a group of pirates from Mindanao known as Iranon or Ilanon, which means “people from the lake”. Later, this term is absorbed into the Indonesian language as lanun which simply means ‘pirates’. This group of pirates once controlled the Indonesian seas in the 18th to 19th centuries. From the Sulu Sea, this pirate group moved to the Sumatran Sea and built a base in the Reteh area (this area is located on the border between Jambi and Riau Provinces today). According to Dutch government records, the Reteh pirate group had up to 10 to 12 boats with 1000 members, all armed with weapons. It might be the answer to the question of how kampilan could be found in Tanjung Jabung Timur, a coastal area in Jambi.

Apart from being the traditional weapon of pirates’ ancestors, kampilan also served as a symbol of the struggle among the people in the Philippines and Jambi, Indonesia. This symbolism can be found in the earliest historical records about kampilan, which illustrates how Chief Lapu-Lapu and his troops successfully defeated the Portuguese troops under the leadership of Ferdinand Magellan on April 27, 1521. This event is known as the Battle of Mactan. However, it did not end there, as history repeated itself in 1949 when the Indonesian people experienced a military aggression by the Allied troops boarded by a group of Dutch army called NICA (Netherland Indies Civil Administration). At that time, a fighting force known as Laskar Hizbullah was formed in Jambi as a resistance movement. The unique feature of this death squad is the red sash pinned on its members’ necks. Due to limited access to firearms, they used makeshift weapons, and kampilan was among the primary choices of weapon for combat.

Currently, the Jambi kampilan is displayed in a glass vitrine in the main room on the museum’s first floor, along with its label and description. Based on the background story that we have constructed, the Jambi kampilan is truly a historical artefact with an extraordinary narrative. However, its existence is often overlooked by visitors who show more interests in the replicas of the Siginjai keris or the Flintlock pistols, which are also displayed in the same room.

5. CONCLUSION

The above discussion proves that collection-based research has successfully enriched the narrative and meaning of the kampilan exhibited in Jambi People’s Struggle Museum. By using this above information as a resource, the museum can present a more comprehensive alternative narrative about the kampilan to the public, consisting of its rich history, its philosophical aspects, its relation to the adventures and bravery of Malay pirates in Indonesian waters, and its role as a symbol of struggle against the colonial rule over their motherland. For this reason, as a form of contribution to the development of a new interpretation of the kampilan, I would like to offer the following new narrative:
“Kampilan is a living heritage from Tanjung Jabung, Jambi. This sword has a long history dating from the prehistoric to modern era. This cutlass sword with a crocodile head carving on its handle has been used by so many brave warriors. With a single slash, it could vanquish its holder’s enemies. Thus, watch out for its sharpness! If you are not skillful enough, you might be hurt by it. Originating from the Philippines, this kampilan was brought to Jambi by the Lanun people, a group of pirates who ruled the Indonesian waters. Kampilan is a weapon that symbolizes the struggle of the Filipinos and Jambi people against all attacks, as it was pointed directly to the chests of the invaders who dared confront them.”

In addition to developing a new alternative narrative, the above results can also be used as a resource for creating educational products such as activity sheets, leaflets, and games. Indeed, Jambi People’s Struggle Museum has many opportunities to make the best use of its kampilan. For instance, it can create a program that aims to unite the community by exploring issues of territoriality and identity, as well as equipping the community with facts regarding the kampilan and understanding its relevance to the modern world. It can inspire fairy tales, shadow puppet shows, or theatre performances suitable for children and their parents. This offers an alternative to simply making regular contests or competitions that may have small impacts on the society. Generally speaking, I hope that the museum can create more relevant narratives for its objects that address current global issues such as sustainable development, climate change, and decolonization. They are also expected to touch national-level concerns such as health problems, stunting, the economy, smart investing, elections, politics, and identity, as well as local-level issues prevailing in Jambi Province, ranging from the pollution of the Batanghari River, environmental damage due to illegal mining, or even traffic congestion and accidents on highways caused by dangerous coal trucks.

REFERENCES


