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## Jean-Pascal Elbaz (ed.) (2023), "Surat menyurat Louis-Charles Damais – Claire Holt 1945-1947; Revolusi Indonesia di mata seorang ilmuwan Prancis"

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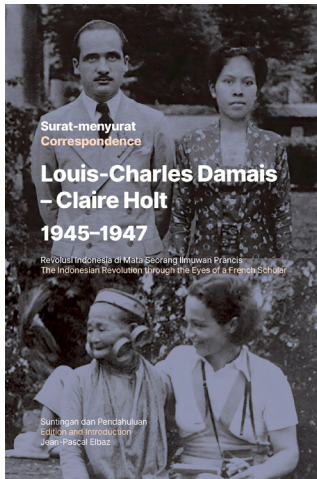
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Jean-Pascal Elbaz (ed.), *Surat menyurat Louis-Charles Damais – Claire Holt 1945-1947; Revolusi Indonesia di mata seorang ilmuwan Prancis* (Correspondence Louis-Charles Damais – Claire Holt 1945-1947; *The Indonesian Revolution through the eyes of a French scholar*). Jakarta: KPG (Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia) in collaboration with École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2023, vi + 393 pp. ISBN 978-602-481-981-1, ISBN Digital 978-602-481-982-8. Price: IDR 94,400 (softcover).



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This book explores the correspondence between Louis-Charles Damais, a French scholar, and Claire Holt, an American colleague. Their works have significantly transformed the fields of Southeast Asian and Indonesian studies. Damais established the centre of archaeological research and Holt helped establish the Center for Modern Indonesian Studies at Cornell University and founded the Cornell Modern Indonesia Project.

Thanks to his exceptional musical abilities, Damais was accepted into the École Nationale des Langues Orientales Vivantes at 18. In 1935, he received a scholarship to study in Leiden and conduct his research in the Dutch East Indies to study Javanese and Malay languages, literature, and civilization. Upon arriving in Batavia, he immediately headed to Solo. It was in Solo that Damais was introduced to Claire Holt on 16 July 1937.

Claire Holt, a Latvian citizen, was born in a middle-class Jewish family in Riga in 1901 as Claire Bagg. When World War I broke out, her family was forced to emigrate to Moscow. Claire grew up amidst the turmoil of the Russian Revolution. In 1921, she left Russia to settle in New York City where she married her English teacher, Bernard Hopfenburg, with whom she had a son. After divorcing her husband, Claire embarked on a career as a journalist and dance critic. She adopted the name Claire Holt for her writings.

Claire Holt left the United States in 1930 to travel around the world. On her journey in Indonesia, she met Willem Frederik Stutterheim. She then decided to cancel her plans to travel the world and stay in Solo, where Stutterheim who then worked as the head of classical oriental studies at the Algemene Middelbare School (AMS). In 1933, Claire Holt deepened her knowledge of Yogyakarta royal court dance by studying under Prince Ario Tedjukusumo,

the son of Sultan Hamengku Buwono VII. In 1936 she began writing about Javanese dance for publication. Since then, she was often invited to give lectures and present Javanese dances as well as her own choreographed dances in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York. In 1939, Holt returned to Paris to hold an exhibition of iconography, masks, costumes, and accessories from the Nusantara. However, the ongoing World War II in Europe prevented Claire Holt from returning to the Dutch Indies. She decided to settle back in New York with her child.

When World War II broke out, Damais was continuing his research. To facilitate his studies, he regularly met Stutterheim, now the head of the Dutch East Indies Archaeological Service. Impressed by Damais's diligence and intelligence, Stutterheim offered him a position as an epigraphic assistant at the Archaeological Service. While working at the Archaeological Service, Damais married a Javanese woman, Soejatoen Arief Poespokoesoemo, and had three children: Soedarmadji, Thamara, and Asmoro. In his first publication, *Études d'épigraphie indonésienne*, published in 1951, Damais dedicated his work to Stutterheim, who passed away on 11 September 1942.

The post-independence period was a particularly fascinating time for Damais. In 1947, he was reinstated to the Archaeology Service. Worrying about a Dutch attempt to regain power, he requested leave to visit his parents, taking his wife and children with him. Due to the difficult conditions in Europe, he accepted a position teaching Indonesian Civilization at a school in Saigon. Damais finally rejoined the *École française d'Extrême-Orient* (EFEO) in Hanoi as Secretary-General for twelve months. When political tensions in Saigon escalated, he proposed to EFEO to stay in Indonesia, and in 1952, he established the Archaeology Research Center in Jakarta. With the improvement of the political situation in Indonesia, Damais was able to write extensively and became a well-known archaeologist in both Indonesia and France. His research papers were widely published in the *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient* (BEFEO). He also successfully translated Raden Adjeng Kartini's letters into French.

Meanwhile, Holt nurtured an intense desire to return to Indonesia. Based on her letter intended to Stutterheim, dated 9 January 1940, she was finally fulfilled when she received a scholarship to study the historical role of art in relation to socio-cultural change in Indonesia. She completed her work titled *Art in Indonesia; Continuities and change*, which was published by Cornell University Press in 1967. Upon her return from Indonesia, she helped establish the Center for Modern Indonesian Studies at Cornell University. One of her many accomplishments was founding the Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, which united studies on contemporary Indonesia and translations of books and documents on socio-political developments in twentieth-century Indonesia.

For this edited volume, Elbaz has compiled selections from the correspondence between Damais and Holt between 1945 and 1947. These two friends shared many similarities in their personalities, interests, and tastes, particularly in music, dance, and court arts from Solo and Yogyakarta. Most of

these letters describe the situation in Jakarta after the Indonesian Proclamation of Independence on 17 August 1945. Both of them despised colonialism, which restricted the social and artistic lives of the indigenous people.

Damaris was not neutral and, as a scientist, he did not want to be swept up in the propaganda. In his correspondence, he always sought evidence for the events he described to Holt and continuously checked his sources. In a letter dated 2 January 1946, Damais eloquently explained the composition of Syahrir I's cabinet. He mentioned that none of the cabinet members had collaborated with the Japanese. During the Japanese occupation, refusing Japanese orders meant facing death. Syahrir, who always rejected Japanese orders, stayed at home and only listened to the radio.

A particularly interesting letter pertains to the events of 19 April 1946. Damais heard news that the Dutch had recently occupied the Pesing area in Tangerang. In the battle around twenty people were captured. Dutch military police arrived and brutally killed all twenty prisoners. He assured Holt that this news was not propaganda by Indonesian youth to fight against the Dutch. He had heard directly from the Dutch captain who led the expedition and witnessed the military police killing the prisoners with his own eyes.

In a letter to Holt dated 28-31 May 1946, Damais expressed his desire to host a meeting at his residence between Indonesian nationalists and Dutch forces. This gathering was successfully organized. His strong anti-colonial sentiments compelled him to take action against the Dutch efforts to reclaim their former colony. He wanted the nationalists to understand that while some Dutch people desired a return to the old order, others sympathized with the Indonesian perspective. Between fifteen and twenty people attended the meeting at his home. During the meeting, Damais could not conceal his anti-colonial feelings and openly declared his opposition to all forms of colonialism.

Damais was deeply troubled and pessimistic about the political developments in Indonesia, which included the radicalization of political parties and the deteriorating economy. He was always saddened by the lying posters plastered on the streets of Jakarta. Although he was constantly agitated to protest the political conditions in Indonesia, his nationalist spirit remained alive until his death on 30 September 1965.

The last letter, dated 27 December 1947, was sent from Paris and discussed the deteriorating situation in Jakarta compared to Paris, interspersed with the writer's plans for future studies and research. Holt always needed the true events because of the Western publications which described the foolish events in Indonesia, especially in Jakarta. Damais agreed to write a long letter describing the real situation in Jakarta.

This book is a valuable document, especially when viewed from the perspective of the Indonesian Revolution as seen through the eyes of a French citizen and an American citizen who shared a desire to eradicate colonialism worldwide. It affirms the indigenous people's right to self-determination, echoing the French ideals of *Liberté, Égalité, et Fraternité* (Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity).

As the collection of letters between Damais and Holt, this book can be used as the primary source to complete the colonial archives of the Indonesian revolution. The richness of these personal archives was looking for the balanced content of historical archives of the Indonesian revolution, which took so many victims of the Indonesian population who fought for independence from Dutch colonialism. Many things hidden in the colonial archives are revealed in the contents of this correspondence. Therefore, this collection of letters complements the events that occurred between 1945-1947.