

MIAP Group Project – Footage: f20140429A3_SE_Asia_MIAP
(Erica Gold, Rochelle Miller, Luke Moses, Cesar Solla)

In the following paper we outline our methods and reasoning for suggesting the period and territory within which our assigned movie was filmed. We then go on to position the film within it's cultural and historical context and conclude by making the case for its preservation.

1. Dating the Film
2. Determining Where the Film was Shot
3. Cultural Context
4. Historical Context
5. Intellectual Questions and Case for Preservation

1. Dating the Film.

In order to determine the age of the film stock, it was necessary to carefully jog through the film, frame by frame, to determine the markings on its edge. Our job was made simpler by discovering that Eastman Kodak was the manufacturer. Besides the company name appearing on the edge of the film, additional text appeared indicating that it was panchromatic black and white and nitrate stock. Noting that there were four sprocket holes on each side of the frames and knowing that smaller gauged films were only produced on safety stock, we knew that this film was shot in 35mm. As it was on nitrate stock, we also knew that it was manufactured before 1950. There were no other markings or additional edge codes on the film, which would indicate that this copy was not reformatted from another print but possibly struck from the original negative.

Since 1917, Kodak has printed geometric shapes on their film stock to indicate the production year. These shapes repeat themselves in twenty-year cycles.

What was unusual about the markings on this film was that there was a circle and a shape that was halfway between a circle and a plus sign. According to the Eastman Kodak Date Code chart, a circle and a plus sign would indicate a production year of either 1931 or 1951.¹ As nitrate was no longer manufactured by 1951, 1931 had to be the correct year. But as the second shape was not quite a plus sign, we also looked up the year for two circles. That year was 1939, but the shape on the film was not consistent with the one on the chart. We finally got a definitive answer by visiting markpritchard.com where there was a picture of a Kodak edge from 1931 that matched the date code on our film. The unusual shape appeared to be a one-off for that year.

2. Determining Where the Film Was Shot

The title of the film already informed us that the movie had been shot in South East Asia. From our collected rudimentary knowledge of Indonesian culture we had a sense that the film's locale might be somewhere in Indonesia so we cautiously took this as a starting point. From here, we simultaneously explored several paths in order to determine where the movie could have been filmed. One clue that reveals itself within the film led us to follow a certain path, while another path we took involved identifying the architecture that the film records. We also examined the masks and dances performed by the indigenous people as captured on our film. The masks and dances will be discussed in a later section entitled "cultural context" (see below).

¹ Paul Read, & Mark-Paul Meyer. *Restoration of Motion Picture Film*. (Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann, 2000): 63

One of our first discoveries that helped us to determine where the film was shot came from analyzing the frames between 1:45-1:47. In the foreground of the shot a man appears wearing 1920's- 30's expedition attire. This man seemingly repositions the indigenous people before the camera. The people follow his directions and take a step back, seemingly aware of the camera's field of view. The man in white may be assisting and translating for the cameraman, or he may indeed be the cameraman. In his hand he holds what appears to be a camera lens. Before walking out of shot the man pauses and smiles into the camera as if responding to someone else behind the film apparatus. Employing local assistants to help visiting filmmakers shooting in Indonesia seems to have been common practice. An article written in 1933 by filmmaker Andre de la Varre, states:

When visiting Bali, and especially when making motion pictures there, a very important consideration is securing the assistance of a guide. The K.P.M. furnished us with the services of Tan Hock Ban, a Chinese gentleman who was born in Bali and spoke English without a trace of an accent as well as all the languages spoken on Bali. He was with us constantly throughout our entire stay and made possible filming pictures, that, without his thorough knowledge of the people and his courteous way of approaching them, never could have been taken. We called him our "official de-shirter," for he was kept busy getting the men and boys to take off their gaudy western undershirts (worn outside) when they appeared before the camera....a more intelligent production assistant I have never had anywhere.^{2&3}

De la Varre then goes on to note that you can hire a good car and a driver in Denaspar, Bali, for ten dollars a day. Clearly the sequence in which the man in white appears to direct the indigenous people reveals how the people performed to and

² Andre de la Varre, "Bali Adventure," *Moviemakers*, (April, 1933): 148

³ It might be interesting to see if a photograph of Tan Hock Ban exists in the Andre de la Varre Collection at the Smithsonian, or in (his travelling partner's collection) the Burton Holmes collection.

for the camera. We return to questions of performance and performativity in a later section concerning the interest in filming in this locale.

Perhaps less noticeable in these frames are the two cars that appear in the background of the shot. We believe these cars are Cadillac V8 Phaetons made between 1930-40. The dating of the film stock suggests that these two cars were fairly new purchases. The cars proved Cadillac's most expensive product at this time. American cars were by no means a rarity in Indonesia, especially by the late thirties. An American newspaper article from 1936 refers to one enterprising Balinese woman who employed a fleet of forty American automobiles for her business operations.⁴

It is possible in a few frames to make out the registration plate on one of the cars, which we believe, reads either "DK- 361," or "DK- 367." Each Indonesian island's license plate employs a different two letter prefix. DK, the first two letters on the car plate in our film, place the car in Bali. The white letters on black background may establish the vehicle as owned by a resident of the island as opposed to, for example, a diplomat or embassy.⁵ We contacted the Indonesian Historical Society and even the Indonesian Classic Car Society to see if there was any way to trace the owner of the car from existing vehicle registration records. People have been happy to offer their help, but as yet we have not made any further discoveries from the license plate information.

⁴ Crete Cage. "Beauties of Island of Bali Described in Illustrated Lecture by De Cou." (*Los Angeles Times*, April 08, 1936), A8

⁵ "Vehicle Registration Plates of Indonesia," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vehicle_registration_plates_of_Indonesia.

The presence of these cars reveals that the village would likely have been accessible by a nearby road. An article written in 1938 describing a driving tour of Bali outlines how only three roads in Bali existed at this time. All three roads stretched from north to south of the island.⁶ Of course there may have been less than three roads in and around 1931, when we believe our film was shot.⁷

Having identified that the movie was shot on the Island of Bali we thought we would be able to locate the village through the architecture that appears in the backdrop of many of the shots. The film's establishing shot presents an almost symmetrical temple, surrounded by a courtyard and crumbling walls. In the later shots we see women laying fruit before a Hindu-Balinese shrine. We attempted to match these structures to available images of Balinese buildings in books and on Google images. At times we came close to matching the image. See how Burton Holmes's shot of a temple from 1932 appears very similar to the temple in our film, but there are noticeable differences.⁸ We began to realize that trying to match the image of the temple in our film to an actual existent temple in Bali would prove difficult, if not impossible.

In an article discussing Balinese temples, Natasha Reichle, the curator of the first major Balinese exhibit in a U.S. Museum, stated: "There are tens of thousands of them...They range from towering structures with elaborate depictions of Hindu

⁶ Captain M. M. Corpening. "Bali Eternally Green and Huts Need only Roofs." (*Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 27, 1938).

⁷ de la Varre in *Moviemakers* claims that there were 500 miles of road on Bali in 1933.

⁸ "Burton Holmes Archive" <https://www.flickr.com/photos/burtonholmesarchive/3250642943/>

deities to village temples devoted to various nature gods and modest ancestral shrines." ⁹

Adding to the problem of trying to identify the structures in our film from among thousands of temples, we found a further obstacle. Philip Hanson Hiss writes in his book *Bali* published in 1941, that he found the fragmentary architecture in Bali "firmly rooted in the past yet being constantly renewed and augmented – one which is alive." ¹⁰ In *The Life of a Balinese Temple* (2004) Hildred Geertz describes how a massive temple renovation project occurred in the late nineteen twenties and throughout the thirties.¹¹ The likelihood is that even if we could locate the village that the was film shot in, the temple today would not resemble the temple that appears on film. As unsatisfying as it may be we can make no greater claim than that our film was shot on the Island of Bali in a village that was accessible to cars.

3. Cultural Context

An additional path we took to determining that the film was shot in Bali involved examining the masks on display and the dances performed by the people in the film. We began by conducting online image searches with help of google image tools and quickly discovered matches to masks associated with Balinese ceremonies. The Barong mask featured at 1:04 appeared the most searchable and popular mask. Identifying the masks led us to understand them in association with

⁹ Steve Winn. "Everything is Divine in Bali." *Humanities* 32. No. 4, July 2011): 17

¹⁰ Philip Hanson Hiss. *Bali*. (New York: Sloan and Pearce, 1941), 85

¹¹ Hildred Geertz, *The Life of a Balinese Temple: Artistry, Imagination, and History in a Peasant Village*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004): 6-7

the traditional dances described below. What occurs in the clip can be split into two parts: the Topeng dances and the Gebogan.

The Balinese are performing Topeng dances, or masked dances that tell a story. These masked dancers are considered to be messengers of gods, so these dance-dramas serve a religious purpose. Topeng dances were traditionally performed at Odalan,¹² or a temple anniversary celebration.

The first dance we see is the Tari Topeng Telek, which is a battle between Telek, or temple guardians, and Jauk, or demons. This dance precedes the main dance, which is the Barong Dance. It depicts the constant battle between good and evil. Good is personified by Barong, which is a creature that's a combination between different animals like a lion, an ox, and a tiger. Evil is represented by Rangda, a demon or witch. This dance is considered sacred as it is performed to protect the village.¹³ There are many versions of the Barong dance. This one is the Barong ket.

Warriors accompany Barong to help defeat Rangda. The problem is that Rangda has power over them, so they cannot attack her unless her back is faced towards them. She puts a spell over them that puts them into a trance so they try to stab themselves with the kris. They aren't hurt because Barong protects them from injury.

¹² "Topeng Dance," History of Masks, Accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.historyofmasks.net/mask-history/history-of-dance-mask/>.

¹³ "Tari Topeng Telek / Telek Dance," YouTube video, 15:28, Posted by "TheBalineseDance," May 23, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mdj6RtffC3c>.

The percussive instruments resembling xylophones played by the Balinese people are called metallophones, and the drums are known as kendang. The orchestra play the traditional ensemble music known as Gamelan.

When we did the research to understand what was in the clip, we stumbled on Margaret Mead's documentary called *Trances & Dances in Bali*, which shows a version of the Barong dance. Her film was shot in 1937 - 1939 and exemplifies the growing interest that occurred in Bali and its culture in the 1930s.

The last sequence of the film shows a procession of women carrying tall pyramids of assorted fruit on their heads to what appears to be a shrine or a temple. Then, the camera cuts to the fruit on a table with the women preparing for a feast. In Bali, this ceremony is part of an observance called Odalan, a celebration that commemorates the anniversary of a Hindu temple.¹⁴ Odalan occurs every 210 days and can last anywhere from a day to longer than a week. It is a very social occasion for the community that includes feasting, music, dance and theatrical events. As part of the ritual, the Balinese people commemorate the occasion by offering towers of fruit called gebogan. The women carry these offerings in a procession on their heads supported on platforms made of either wood or metal. After the gebogan has been offered to the Gods and the prayer services are over, they are removed from the temple and taken home for feasting.

4. Historical-Cultural Context

There is a possibility that this footage was meant to be part of a travelogue, or travel film. In the 1930s, "travel" was an omnipresent theme in popular

¹⁴ Wayan I. Dibia. "Odalan of Hindu Bali: A Religious Festival, a Social Occasion, and a Theatrical Event." *Asian Theatre Journal* 2.1 (1985), 61

entertainment. Burton Holmes, the quintessential travel lecturer personality who claimed to originate the term travelogue, was quite famous during his time. "Many current performers trace their origins to Burton Holmes, who gave over eight thousand illustrated travel lectures, using slides and, later, motion pictures, from the 1890s to the 1950s."¹⁵ Andre de la Varre was Holmes' longtime cameraman before making films of his own. The most direct predecessor to the travelogue was the illustrated travel lecture, which relied on still images and the popularity of the lecturer. The lecturers were considered experts in their field not simply through scholarship, but from having voyaged into an exotic land. As the medium transitioned into moving images, common practice was for the lecturer to travel with a single print, projected to the point of disintegration.¹⁶ Few of these films remain as a result, making identification difficult.

By the late 1920s Bali had become a popular destination amongst the cultural elite, with artists and filmmakers such as Charlie Chaplin flocking to the region. The painter Walter Spies, along with a few others, acted as a go-between for friends and colleagues wishing to visit the region. Spies guided Mexican artists and married couple Miguel Covarrubias and Rose Rolando on an exotic trip through Bali, the inspiration for Covarrubias' return in 1933 to work on his landmark novel *Island of Bali*. The surge of Bali tourism in the late 1930s is credited in part to the book's publishing in 1937.¹⁷ Spies was instrumental in guiding Mead and Bateson during their excursions in Bali, and although they filmed in the 1930s, it is worth noting

¹⁵ Jeffrey Ruoff, "Show and Tell: The 16mm Travel Lecture Film," in *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel*, ed. Jeffrey Ruoff (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 220.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 217-8.

¹⁷ Adrian Vickers, introduction to *Island of Bali* (Singapore: Periplus Editions (HK) Ltd, 2008), xix-xx.

that their seminal film *Trance and Dance in Bali* would not be released until 1952, twenty-one years after the date we propose for our film clip.¹⁸

While Mead and Bateson remain celebrated by ethnographers and archaeologists (albeit, not without controversy), their relatively academic mode of filming was the exception, not the rule. It was more common in travel films for a significant license to be taken, to intentionally highlight the exotic, foreign aspects of the region being filmed. The selected images say as much about the filmmaker and intended audience than they do about the reality of the depicted locale. This “theatricalization” helps to explain the minimal differences between the documentary-leaning travelogues and more openly fictionalized works.¹⁹ *Legong: Dance of the Virgins* (1935), more narrative feature than documentary, was billed upon release as “true - actually filmed in Bali.”²⁰ Although the *kecak* dance (seen in Ron Fricke’s 1992 film *Baraka*) had its roots in Balinese trance dance, most accounts credit Walter Spies with its choreography in 1931, for the film *Island of Demons*.²¹

Our footage is also comprised of two common scenes in the exotic travelogue (the tribal dance and the bare-breasted woman). Although it appears to be the case that the subjects in our film clip are being directed, this is not necessarily an indicator of what this footage was meant for. Nonetheless, there are certain clues that this is travel footage, or at least non-narrative, such as the on-camera

¹⁸ Peter J. Bloom and Katherine J. Hagedorn, “Legong: Dance of the Virgins, 1935,” *San Francisco Silent Film Festival*, accessed October 8, 2014, <http://www.silentfilm.org/legong-dance-of-the-virgins>

¹⁹ Jennifer Lynn Peterson, *Education in the School of Dreams* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 30.

²⁰ Jeffrey Geiger, *Facing the Pacific: Polynesia and the U.S. Imperial Imagination* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 228.

²¹ Eng-Beng Lim, *Brown Boys and Rice Queens: Spellbinding Performance in the Asias* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2014), 17-82.

appearance of a guide (and possibly the filmmaker himself), on-camera persons who pay little attention to the filming (unlikely to be extras in a narrative film), and the automobile.

Alternatively, these may have been “mistakes,” leading to the footage being excised from a film. Proposing this footage as belonging to a travelogue is somewhat problematic, as 35mm eliminates the majority of travelogue filmmakers, for whom 16mm was the logical choice for many reasons (ease of transport, cost, etc.).²² On the other hand, the amount of filmmakers shooting 35mm in Bali in the 1930s may be small enough that is possible to discover the exact filmmaker or company behind the footage.

5. Intellectual Questions and the Case for Preservation

The film appears in remarkably good condition for nitrate stock and considering its age. It captures a moment in time when an American mania for Bali was on the rise. The film shows the Balinese performing dances and rituals just as Balinese culture was becoming popularized and commodified in Western countries. As the decade played out some village dances may have become more elaborate and performative in nature to satisfy filmmakers and tourist demand. The footage distinguishes itself from a lot of the other footage we viewed of Bali from this era through the presence of the cars and man in white which visually underscore the constructed nature of the film and how the Balinese staged performances for tourists and filmmakers. Perhaps the film therefore furthers work in undermining

²² Amy J. Staples, "The Last of the Great (Foot-Slogging) Explorers': Lewis Cotlow and the Ethnographic Imaginary in Popular Travel Film," in *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel*, ed. Jeffrey Ruoff (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 196-7.

Orientalist scholarship and thought. We often questioned whether the film was lost footage, or outtakes from one of the many films shot in Bali at this time. If so it may be possible to match this footage to its companion pieces, thereby helping to provide a fuller picture of a movie's conditions of production. The film could prove of interest to scholars from around the world working in the fields of Post-colonial Studies, Dance and Performance, Anthropology and Film History. This film reminds us of a time when Bali was considered truly exotic and half a world away for the western traveller. What is now easily accessible on the internet took months to travel to see and longer to film, develop and edit.

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