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The Ghosts of Christmas (Island) Past: An Examination of its Early Charting and Naming

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For some three centuries confusion existed among Europeans over the location and name of the Indian Ocean island now referred to as Christmas Island. Maps appeared charting the island with no name, with one of three names, with two names simultaneously, or as two or three adjacent islands. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that it was consistently charted as Christmas Island. The origin and meaning of its other appellations, Moni and Selam, is the subject of this article.

KEYWORDS Christmas Island, Moni, Monij, Mony, Selam, Selan, Sanskrit, Arabic, Javanese, Dutch.

Christmas Island is located only 400 km south of the western head of Java (i.e. at the southern entrance to the Sunda Strait), approximately 2800 km west of Darwin, and 2600 km northwest of Perth. It has a total land area of 135 km, and its 80-km coastline is an almost continuous sea cliff, ranging up to 50 m in height, making a seaborne landing on the island hazardous if not challenging. This situation is graphically expressed by Charles Andrews who spent 10 months surveying the island:

Nearly the whole of the coastline is formed by limestone cliffs, varying in height from about 15 to 150 feet or more. The latter height only occurs at Steep Point [...], in other places the...
height seldom exceeds 50 feet. The cliffs are nearly everywhere much undercut, and sometimes overhang to the extent of 30 feet or more.3

The island has been depicted on maps from the late sixteenth century onwards and initially appeared without a name; however, after some 20 years the island was variously labeled Moni, Mony, Monij, Selam, or Selan.4 Then, in 1643, Captain William Mynors, master of the British East Indiaman Royal Mary, named the island Christmas Island when he sailed past it on Christmas Day. He had come upon what he thought was an uncharted island, of which he gives the following account:

The 25th ditto in the morning I saw an island, of which I cannot find any mention either in English, Dutch, or Portugall plaits. It lyes in lattytude 10d. 27; S. ¼ E. from the head of Java, distance 75 leaus; and longitud from the said head 00d. 31 E. To see to, tis a fine smooth island of 7 leaus longe. I came not neerer it then 6 leaus, but caus’d the lead to be hove but found noe ground. There I lay becalm’d two dayes; which did heartlyly greeve me, in regard of the many sicke men I had then aboard, beinge noe less then 20. But the 29th ditto it pleas’d God to send a fresh gale.5

Mynors does not say what name he gave to his new “discovery.” However, the name is supplied in another document, a log kept on board the Royal Mary, now forming volume 65 of the India Office Marine Records. In this document, the writer says, during 24–25 December 1643 he “[a]t 3 howers morne had sight of an iland [sic] bearing, the body of it, S.W. b. W. about 7 lea. of; and because it was Christmas Day we called it by the name of Christmas iland.”6

The first recorded landing on Christmas Island was on 28 March 1688 by the British privateer William Dampier, aboard the Cygnet. He landed at what is now called The Dales (on the west coast), and found the island unoccupied:7

We met nothing of remark in this voyage beside the catching two great sharks till the 28th day. Then we fell in with a small woody island in latitude 10 degrees 20 min. Its longitude from New Holland, from whence we came, was by my account 12 degrees 6 min west. It was deep water about the island, and therefore no anchoring; but we sent two canoes ashore; one of them with the carpenters to cut a tree to make another pump; the other canoe went to search for fresh water and found a fine small brook near the south-west point of the island; but there the sea fell in on the shore so high that they could not get it


4 Moni and Selam will be used as the default spellings throughout this article, unless when quoting directly. The form Moni is the closest orthographic representation of how it is actually pronounced. It is interesting to note that on the 1753 map of Johannes van Keulen (Table 1, map reference 51), an island to the southwest of Java, near Cocos, is labeled I. d’May. Even though this is not near any of the islands labeled Moni or Mony, I assume I. d’May refers to it nevertheless.


6 Cited in Foster, “The Discovery of Christmas Island,” pp. 281–2. Foster also cites a Ralph Cartwright, the ex-President of Bantam, who in a letter recounted the voyage back to Britain in 1646. Cartwright writes: “The 13th [January] about no one we saw Nativity Iland, soe called by Capt. Mynors. The 14th we had sight of the iland againe.”

7 Dampier’s account of his visit can be found in chapter 17 of his A New Voyage around the World. http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks05/0500461h.html.
off. At noon both our canoes returned aboard; and the carpenters brought aboard a good
tree which they afterwards made a pump with, such a one as they made at Mindanao.
The other canoe brought aboard as many boobies and men-of-war birds as sufficed all
the ship’s company when they were boiled.

Under the section entitled “A land-animal like large crawfish,”8 Dampier continues that
They got also a sort of land animal somewhat resembling a large crawfish without its great
claws. These creatures lived in holes in the dry sandy ground like rabbits. Sir Francis Drake
in his Voyage round the World makes mention of such that he found at Ternate, or some
other of the Spice Islands, or near them. They were very good sweet meat and so large that
two of them were more than a man could eat; being almost as thick as one’s leg. Their shells
were of a dark brown but red when boiled.
This island is of a good height, with steep cliffs against the south and south-west, and a
sandy bay on the north side; but very deep water steep to the shore. The mould is blackish,
the soil fat, producing large trees of divers sorts.

Another, rarely mentioned, early visitor to Moni was Willem de Vlamingh in 1697.
After exploring and charting most of the southern half of the west coast of Australia,
de Vlamingh headed for Batavia:

[March] the 5th Tuesday […] In the afternoon, eight glasses having passed, saw land which
was an island […] before sunrise braced up to call at ditto island […]
[March] the 6th Wednesday in the morning after breakfast the wind ESE, topgallant breeze.
Our upper-steersman went ashore to examine how the bottom was and to see if there was
any possibility to land, since as far as we could see from the ship the shore was altogether
steep and sounded no bottom a cannon-shot from shore. In the forenoon sent our third mate
with the other boat to another place. At noon the estimated course and distance in 24 h was
N½W 12 ½ miles, according to which the position by dead reckoning was 10 deg. 13 min. S
lat. And 124 deg. 2 min. long. In the afternoon got our boats on board, reported thus: that the
under-steersman and third mate, having a carpenter with them, found some trees which were
suitable for making masts from, and also many palmité-trees, some of which they brought
on board; braced round again and made sail […], found the island which we were confident
to be Mony [Christmas Island].9

The samples of timber were subsequently sent to Amsterdam for analysis, and as a result
of de Vlamingh’s report, the VOC officials in Batavia sent de Vlamingh’s son, Cornelis,
back to Moni to gather more intelligence on this timber. However, Cornelis was unable
to make a landing due to rough seas.

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8 In all probability, Dampier is referring here to the “coconut” or “robber crab” (Birgus latro). Christmas Island holds
the largest and densest population of coconut crabs in the world.
(Sydney: Royal Australian Historical Society, 1985), p. 142. De Vlamingh’s reference to “12 ½ miles” refers to a
German mile which was the unit of measurement used by Dutch mariners at the time. A German mile was four
Admiralty nautical miles (i.e. 7,412.7 m, 24,320 ft., 4.666 1 miles, or 1/15 of a degree of latitude). See Russ Rowlett,
One of de Vlamingh’s crew, Victor Victorszoon, was enlisted by the VOC’s Chamber of Amsterdam as the “conoler of the sick” aboard the Geelvinck.\footnote{A person in the employ and service of the VOC who cared for the spiritual well-being of its soldiers and ships’ crews, known in Dutch as a ziekentrooster.} He was also commissioned to accurately chart and paint profiles of every coastline sighted during the expedition. He did a remarkable job, painting accurate and striking watercolor profiles of the coasts of Tristan da Cunha, St. Paul, Amsterdam, and Moni, as well a truthful depiction of the west Australian coast from the Swan River and Rottenest Island to north-west Cape. All drawings are still extant except, unfortunately, that of Moni. Undoubtedly, his drawing would have been much superior to that drawn by the next visitor to Christmas Island, Captain Daniel Beeckman, aboard the East India Company’s Eagle-Galley in 1718. Beeckman declares that “[o]n the 5th of April we made Christmas Island (so called it’s being first discovered on that Day.” (Figure 1)

Beeckman’s sketch is quite extraordinary in that the hills are grossly exaggerated. For instance, the highest points are depicted as a mountain with three peaks. Moreover, like Mynors, his estimate of the island’s length of seven leagues (39.2 km) is also exaggerated.\footnote{In nautical contexts, a league is three nautical miles (approximately 5.6 km).} To be fair to Mynors, though, he did not venture any closer to the island than about six leagues (approximately 33 km), making any reasonable estimation of its length difficult. Its actual length is nine km, and its breadth 14.5 km, with its highest point being Murray Hill at 361 m above sea level.

There is an uncanny resemblance between Beeckman’s sketch of Christmas Island and that of an island depicted on the late Ming watercolor map of East Asia, better known as the Selden Map of China currently held at Oxford University’s Bodleian Library.\footnote{Bodleian Library, MS Selden supra 105. A dedicated website can be found at \url{http://seldenmap.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/map}. See also Robert Batchelor’s web page \textit{Thinking Past}, in which the map is treated. \url{www.thinkingpast.com/projects/seldens-map}.} At the extreme bottom of this map are depicted Java and its southern coast. Adjacent to this coast several islands are shown. The most southern of these looks remarkably like Beeckman’s illustration. On many early maps, uncharted coastlines and islands were often imaginatively depicted. However, the Selden map is generally considered to be remarkably accurate, and indeed the historian Timothy Brook considers the southern half of the map to be the most “geographically informed.”\footnote{Timothy Brook, \textit{Mr. Seldon’s Map of China: Decoding the Secrets of a Vanished Cartographer} (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), pp. 159–63, 69, 86.} Could the Selden map’s depiction of this southern island be the first representation of Christmas Island, or is the resemblance mere coincidence?

In 1866, a review of the then recently published \textit{Een Nieuwe Atlas Van Nederlandsch-Indië} (A New Atlas of the Dutch East-Indies), the Dutch scholar and public intellectual Robidé van der Aa makes the following comments on the lack of knowledge of Christmas Island:

> It is surely strange that so little is known of this apparently uninhabited island. Of all the geographic works that I have examined during my lifetime, both old and new travel narratives, I cannot remember that I have ever read that it was visited or even sighted. Therefore,
without remotely pressing for annexation, I think it, nevertheless, appropriate, that this land lying adjacent Java’s west point be officially surveyed.\footnote{“Het is toch vreemd, zoo weinig als men van dit waarschijnlijk onbewoonde eiland afweet. In mijn levensloop heb ik nog al aardrijkskundige werken, zoo oude als nieuwe reisbeschrijvingen, ingezien, maar ik kan mij niet herinneren, dat ik ooit gelezen heb, dat het bezocht of zelfs gezien werd. Zonder daarom in de verste verte op annexatie aan te dringen, ware het toch, dunkt mij, niet kwaad, dat dit het naast bij Java’s westpunt gelegen land eens behoorlijk van regeeringswege werd opgenomen,” p. 117. Also see Pierre Jean Baptiste Charles Robide van der Aa, “Een Nieuwe Atlas Van Nederlandsch-Indië,” Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 35.1 (1886), pp. 220–45.}
As if to embrace van der Aa’s proposal, the British Admiralty sent Captain John Fiot Lee Pearse Maclear, master of the hydrographic survey ship HMS *Flying Fish*, to call at Christmas Island and to survey it on his return voyage to Britain from Australia. In the same year, 1887, the survey ship, HMS *Egeria*, captained by Pelham Aldrich, also visited the island. Both expeditions made detailed surveys of the coastline, the result of which is the first recorded coastal chart of the island (Figure 2). Aldrich found no evidence that it had ever been occupied.

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Other early visits that were made to Christmas Island include: the East Indiaman Pigot in 1771, the crew of which attempted to secure an anchorage, but failed; the 1857 visit of the frigate HMS Amethyst, from which a boat crew was landed with the object of attempting to reach the island’s highest summit, but the inland cliffs proved an insurmountable obstacle and the ascent was abandoned; and the 1872–1876 Challenger round-the-world scientific expedition during which the naturalist Dr. John Murray discovered large deposits of phosphate. This discovery impelled Britain to annex the island in 1888. A settlement was established at Flying Fish Cove by George Clunies-Ross, after which the island became an Australian territory in 1957.

The maps

Table 1 catalogs a selection of 76 early European maps and one Chinese map, dating from c. 1540 to 1904, of South-East Asia that shows Java and the Indian Ocean region to its south. For each map, the table displays the author’s number assigned to the reference; the map’s year of publication; the cartographer, title, and publisher of the map (when known); the library shelfmark or author’s source; and a description of the Christmas Island region as represented on the map.

Unsurprisingly, early maps depicting Java only showed the north coast of the island. The south coast and the seas beyond were imagined or left empty, respectively. It was not until about the 1620s that the map of Java and the seas to its south became more completely elucidated.16

Although the earliest map to identify the island as Moni is usually said to be that of Pieter Goos of 1666, a 1899 facsimile of a 1618 map showing the islands of Indonesia, as well as the western and southern coasts of Australia charted by the Dutch, shows the island of Monij (see Table 1.10).

Moni appears on maps until approximately 1875. After its first use in 1618, it seems to have fallen into disuse until about 1685 after which it reappears on maps more regularly. It generally appears together with Selam, or as an alternative name for Christmas Island. Sometimes, the three names appear as labels for three closely located islands (see Table 1.28, 31, 32, 37, 40, 42, and Figure 4). The appearance of three differently named islands in close proximity is evidence for the likelihood that there was confusion over the location and appellation of the island. Table 1 further illustrates how the use of Moni and Selam was slowly abandoned during the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Selam appears on maps between about 1600 and 1630, but quickly seems to fall into disuse for some 30-odd years until about 1666. It disappears from use again around the mid-1700s, as evidenced by the Reiner Ottens map of 1745 (Table 1.45). However, Pierre Mortier’s 1700 map and Joachim Ottens’s map of 1701–1741 (Table 1.31 and 32) depict three nearby islands, one of which is labeled Celan. Subsequently, Selam appears (probably for the last time) on a 1813 map by John Pinkerton (Table 1.62). Of the 75 European maps cataloged in Table 1, Selam, Selan, Celam, or Celan are charted on 30

16 See for example Günter Schilder’s informative article, “The Charting of the South Coast of Java,” Archipel 22.1 (1981), pp. 87–104, for an account of the charting of Java’s southern coast.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Map reference number</th>
<th>Year of publication</th>
<th>Cartographer, map title, publisher (if applicable), source</th>
<th>Number of islands depicted &amp; their labels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 1544</td>
<td>Sebastian Münster. <em>Neuw India / mit vilen anstoßenden lendern /besunder Scychia / Parchia / Arabia / Persia etc.</em> Basle: Heinrich Petri. [<a href="http://www.raremaps.com/gallery/detail/40737/Neuw_India_mit_vilen_ansto%C3%9Fenden_lendern_besunder_Scychia_Parchia/Munster.html">www.raremaps.com/gallery/detail/40737/Neuw_India_mit_vilen_anstoßenden_lendern_besunder_Scychia_Parchia/Munster.html</a>]</td>
<td>Line of imagined islands along south coast of Java</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 1600</td>
<td>Theodor de Bry, [Map of the world showing Drake's voyage]. Frankfurt am Main: Matthaeum Becker. NLA MAP RM 2507. [<a href="http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-231864862/view">http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-231864862/view</a>]</td>
<td>2 islands adjacent west coast of Java, both unnamed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 ca. 1608</td>
<td>Selon Map of China. BL MS Selden supra 105. <a href="http://seldenmap.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/map">http://seldenmap.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/map</a></td>
<td>Several islands adjacent south coast of Java</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Ghosts of Christmas (Island)

1 island adjacent west coast of Java, unnamed
Cluster of islands south of Java, unnamed (Cocos-Keeling Islands?)
2 islands south of Java; closest named Selam, farthest Mony

1 island south of Java, named Christmas I

2 islands south of Java; closest named Selam, farthest Mony

2 islands south of Java; closest named Selam, farthest Mony

2 islands south of Java; closest named Selam, farthest Mony

1 island just south of Java, I. Selam

2 islands south of Java; closest named I. Mony, farthest I. Christmat [sic]
2 islands south of Java; closest named I. Mony, farthest I. Christmat [sic]; 1 island adjacent Java, named I. Selam
1 island adjacent Java, named I. Selam; 2 islands south of Java, both unnamed
2 islands south of Java; closest named Selam, farthest Mony

(Continued)
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Map reference number</th>
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<th>Number of islands depicted &amp; their labels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>1690</td>
<td>Vincenzo Coronelli. <em>L’Asie selon les mémoires les plus nouveaux</em>. Paris: Jean Baptiste Nolin. BNF ark:/12148/btv1b530890106. <a href="http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b530890106">http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b530890106</a></td>
<td>1 island adjacent Java, named <em>Selan I</em>; 2 islands south of Java; closest unnamed, farthest named <em>Christmas I</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>1696</td>
<td>Nicolas de Fer. <em>L’Asie suivant les nouvelles des couvertes dans les points principaux sont placez sur les observations de Mrs. de l’Académie royale de science</em>. Paris: chez l’auteur. BNF ark:/12148/btv1b530530197. <a href="http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b530530197">http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b530530197</a></td>
<td>3 islands south of Java; closest named <em>Celan Isle</em>, farthest <em>Mony Isle</em> and <em>Isle of Christmas</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>1701</td>
<td>Herman Moll. <em>The Principal Islands of the East Indies</em>. London: Timothy Child. Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, NYPL 97–6063 LHS 34;; atlas cases. <a href="http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e1-ce92-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99">http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e1-ce92-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99</a></td>
<td>2 islands south of Java; closest named <em>Selam</em>, farthest <em>Mony</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Ghosts of Christmas (Island) Past

1. Island south of Java, named E Selam
2. Islands south of Java; closest named Selan; others Mony & Christmas
3. Islands south of Java; closest named Selam, farthest Mony
4. Islands south of Java; closest named Selam, farthest Mony
5. Island south of Java, named Noel ou Moni

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1747? Emanuel Bowen. A new and accurate map of the East India Islands : laid down according to the latest discoveries, and agreeable to the most approved maps and charts, the whole being regulated by astronomical observations. London: E. Bowen. NLA MAP NK 1553. http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-230592625/view


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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Map reference number</th>
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<th>Cartographer, map title, publisher (if applicable), source</th>
<th>Number of islands depicted &amp; their labels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>1751</td>
<td>Jacques-Nicolas Bellin, Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon d’Anville &amp; Jean-Baptiste-Nicolas-Denis d’Après de Mannevillette. <em>Carte réduite de l’Océan oriental ou Mers des Indes [2nd edition]</em>. BNF ark:/12148/btv1b59627344. <a href="http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b59627344">http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b59627344</a></td>
<td>1 island to the south-west of Java, near Cocos, named I. d’May [sic]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Maps not depicting any islands south of the Sunda Strait, Java are not included in the Table. Of course, there are many more maps and charts that could have been included in this study, but it was felt that the collection of 76 maps embodied a reasonable representative sample of maps over the period in question. Abbreviations for library shelfmarks include: National Library of Australia (NLA), Library of Congress (LOC), Bodleian Library (BL), Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal (BNP), Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), New York Public Library (NYPL), State Library of New South Wales (SLNSW), and University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries (UW-ML).
(40 percent) of them. Since there is no island currently bearing this name, nor any island of its depicted size anywhere in the vicinity, it seems likely that its charting is a case of mistaken identity. Like the position of Moni, the position of Selam on maps varies considerably (Table 1.5–62), though Selam’s position varies more widely than that of Moni. Nevertheless, it usually appears close to the southwestern tip of Java (near the southern entrance to the Sunda Strait), where it might have been confused with Prinsen Island (variously charted as Princess Island or Prince’s Island on other maps) currently known as Pulau Panaitan. Indeed, on the return leg of James Cook’s first voyage (1768–1771), Joseph Banks remarks:

Princes Island as it is calld by the English, in Malay Pulo Selan, and in the language of its inhabitants Pulo paneitan, is a small Island situated in the Western mouth of the streights of Sunday; it is woody, and has no remarkable hill upon it, tho the English call the small one which is just over the anchoring place the Pike.\(^{17}\)

Cartographic confusion over position and identity of Selam is also clearly articulated by Cook himself:

Some few days after we left Java, we saw for 3 or 4 evenings succeeding one another Boobies fly about the Ship, now as these birds are known to roost every night on land they seem’d to indicate that some Island was in our neighbourhood, probably it might be the Island Selam which Island I find differently laid down in different Charts, both in name and situation.\(^{18}\)

Banks provides further evidence of the enigma of Selam:

We enquird much for the Island of Anabao or Anamabao mentiond by Dampier.\(^{19}\) He [Mr. Lange] assurd us that he knew of no Island of that name any where in these seas. I since have observd that it is laid down in several charts by the name of Selam which is probably the real name of it.\(^{20}\)

Although Christmas Island, Moni and Selam occupy a variety of positions on early maps, their relative positions indicate that they probably all refer to the same island. This apparent confusion is most likely due to one or more of a number of factors, the first being the inability to calculate accurately longitude during this era and the concomitant conflicting recorded coordinates of the island. Other factors include the conflicting physical descriptions of the island and/or the island having more than one appellation.

Table 1 illustrates that there are numerous maps that depict two or three closely located islands variously named Moni, Selam, and Christmas (also see Figures 3 and 4), and that this confusion endured for some 150 years, beginning with the early seventeenth century and ending in the mid-eighteenth century.


\(^{19}\) This is the island Oetefu Kecil, just off Kupang, West Timor.

The earliest map that assigns the name *Christmas* to the island is that of John Seller in 1671 (Table 1.16), some 30 years after it was named thusly. It was not until after the mid-nineteenth century, however, that this name became its established designation. There are also many maps that do not depict any islands in the region south of the western tip of Java; after 1666, however, most maps do. Despite this fact, even as late as 1842 (e.g. Table 1.68) there were published maps of the region that did not depict Christmas Island, or any island in the vicinity. Many such maps were the colonial Dutch maps of the late nineteenth century. This situation may be because the maps of its east India colony were of its own possessions, and Christmas Island had been claimed by Britain in 1888. Apart from Robidé van der Aa’s 1866 proposal to survey the island, the Dutch never seemed to have shown any interest in it. On the one hand, this lack of interest seems strange, given the island’s proximity to Java, but on the other hand, the inaction is quite in character because the Dutch were only interested in trade and making a profit. They never showed the slightest interest in New Holland, so it is unsurprising that they should be interested in an uninhabited island that proffered no easy landing, let alone trade.

**Linguistic candidates**

There are a number of credible candidates for the linguistic origin of *Moni* and *Selam*, including Malay, Sundanese, Sumatran, Javanese, or other indigenous Indonesian language; and Portuguese, Dutch, Arabic, or Sanskrit. All these languages have left numerous lexical and toponymic legacies in the Malay/Indonesian archipelago. In Sanskrit, the toponyms *Srīvijyāya, Madura, Java, Malaka, Kalimantan,* and *Sumatra* survive via the Hindu/Buddhist Srivijaya period between the first and sixteenth centuries. In Arabic/Hadrami, *Al Fatah, Al-Malaimalaya,* and *Al-Qumrkarimun* survive via the Islamic penetration into the region between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries, whilst in Portuguese, the toponyms *Flores, Eng[g]ano, Porta de Santiago at A Famosa, Timor-Leste,* and *Cristo Rei* (in Dili) survive via their occupation between 1511–1850. Moreover, some of the Dutch names used during the Dutch occupation between 1602–1942 include *Prinsen Eiland,* later becoming *Pulau Panaitan; Weltevreden,* becoming *Batavia* and then *Jakarta; Hollandia,* transforming to *Jayapura; Buitenzorg,* later becoming *Bogor; Schilpad Eiland,* then known as *Pulau Togean; Sandalbuit Eiland,* later *Pulau Sumba; Nassau Eiland,* later *Banda Neira; and Oosthaven,* which became *Bandar Lampung.*

The remainder of this article will consider these linguistic candidates for the origin of *Moni* and *Selam.*

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22 J. G. de Casparis (ed.), *Sanskrit Loanwords in Indonesian: An Annotated Check-list of Words from Sanskrit in Indonesian and Traditional Malay* (Jakarta: Universitas Katolik Indonesia Atma Jaya, 1997), vol. 41.
There are a number of entities in the region that currently have the name Moni. One is a small town on the island of Flores, some 50 km to the east of the volcano Kelimutu. The meaning of the town’s name is currently unknown. In West Papua, there is also a group of people and their language called Moni; however, any reasonable connection between the island name and these people is untenable.

There are also four populated places or settlements named Muni in the Indonesian archipelago — three are found in Nusa Tenggara Timur and one in Yogyakarta. Evidence is given below illustrating the significance of this geographical distribution.

There are a number of different linguistic possibilities that gave rise to these toponyms. The strongest linguistic candidate for the toponym is perhaps Sanskrit because, up until the late sixteenth century, Hinduism and Buddhism had a profound influence upon the cultures, legal practices, and languages of the Malay/Indonesian archipelago. Many Sanskrit words were adopted in the local languages. By the fifth century, Brahmanist cults worshipping Shiva had sprung up in Java, and by the ninth century, syncretism appeared, and in the tenth century, students were sent to the great Buddhist university of Nalanda in northeastern India. The Sriwijaya Buddhist kingdom rose in southern Sumatra during the seventh century and exercised a wide sphere of influence over all of South-East Asia. In Java, early Hindu states rose and fell — Pajajaran, Sailendra, Kediri, and Singosari. Significantly, most of these were coastal powers.

Bearing this in mind, we find that in Hinduism and Buddhism, a wise ascetic — a renunciant, a hermit, or sadhu, especially one who has taken a vow of silence — is known as a muni [mʊni]. The term is also used as an honorific title, and derives from the Sanskrit múni (literally an adjective and adverb meaning “silent”). This term is tantalizingly similar to Moni, and given the remoteness and isolation of the island, such an appellation is seen as quite befitting. However, this conclusion is sheer conjecture. Moreover, the existence of four settlements with the toponym Muni in the region also lends some support for Sanskrit. If, for the moment, this premise is accepted, the term’s appearance on early Dutch maps in the form Moni and not Muni needs explanation.

In 1997, Geraghty and Tent published two articles on early Dutch loanwords in Polynesia. They explain how the seventeenth century Dutch words bos [bɔs] (a box; a container), trommel [trɔml] (a metal box; a container), pompen [pɔmpən] (a vulgar term

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45 A resident of the village Moni, Mr. Richard Lorin, made extensive enquiries for me of the local inhabitants as to the meaning of the name, but no indigenous resident knew its meaning.

46 The amalgamation of different (often seemingly contradictory) beliefs and traditions, in this case Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism.


48 Many authors refer to the island’s remoteness and inaccessibility. See, for example, Heng and Forbes, “Christmas Island,” pp. 69–72. Alexander George Findlay writes that “[i]t is a lonely spot, standing as a sentry before the Straits of Sunda, is the Christina Island [sic] of the old charts. Its [sic] was also called Money Island [sic].” A Directory for the navigation of the Indian Ocean, with Descriptions of its coasts, islands etc, 2nd edition (London: Richard Holmes Laurie, 1870), p. 488.

meaning “to copulate”), and *schop* [sxɔp] (a shovel) are all nativized into Polynesian languages as *puha/pusa, tuluma/turuma, pupa*, and *kope*, respectively. The change from the [ɔ] vowel in the Dutch donor words to [ʊ] in the nativized Polynesian words is accounted for thusly: the Dutch /ɔ/ phoneme (spelled with an o) had, prior to the twentieth century,
two allophonic variants — an open [ɔ] and a close [ɔ̞]. The latter variant occurred after labial consonants (i.e. /p, b, m/), whereas the open variety occurred after all other consonants. The close variant also occurred before nasal consonants (i.e. /m, n, ŋ/). The close

Open is a phonetic term referring to a vowel articulated with the body of the tongue relatively low in the mouth, whilst a close vowel refers to one articulated with the body of the tongue high in the mouth, close to the hard palate.
variant [ɔ] would have sounded quite similar to the close Polynesian vowel [ʊ]. The reason kope retained its o spelling or /ɔ/ phoneme is that the vowel in schop is of the open variety.

The reverse of this situation of course operates in the case of muni [mɔni] transformed to moni [mɔni] and its concomitant spelling as Moni. Not only does the word have an initial labial consonant, but it also has a nasal consonant following the vowel. The rendition on French maps as Mouni and Mounis also reinforces this supposition. Given that Moni first appears on Dutch maps, and the ubiquitous spelling of the toponym with o, it may be conjectured that other European cartographers (save the French) copied the Dutch spelling, thus perpetuating the form Moni on most maps.

Other conceivable candidates include Dutch, Arabic, Portuguese, or an indigenous language. The monumental Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal (Dictionary of the Dutch Language) and the Middelnederlandsch Woordenboek (Middle-Dutch Dictionary) list the form moni in reference to money, a term derived from the English word ‘money’. It is marked in these sources as a very rare word.31 The dictionaries also catalog the forms monnik/monik/monic/monec (a monk; a hermit), which derive from Latin, Greek and ultimately the Sanskrit term mūni. Neither of the Dutch forms can genuinely be considered as viable candidates.

One issue about the variant Dutch spelling of Moni as Monij, however, lends some more support to the case of a Sanskrit origin. The final -ij spelling appears on some Dutch maps of the time (Table 1.10, 11, 39, and 68). The digraph ij was the seventeenth- and eighteenth century orthographic representation of a long [iː] (comparable to the vowel in the English word “bee”). It derives from the Middle Dutch period (1100–1500) when the j orthographically indicated the lengthening of the vowel.32 In the course of time, ij became confused with the letter y (known in Dutch as i grec, or the Greek i̯), because the digraph ij was deemed by many writers to be a single letter (i.e. a letter y written with a diaeresis, ÿ). In time, the digraph ij became the representation for the diphthong [εi] (similar to the diphthong in the English word “bay”). Hence, the variants Monij, and especially Mony (on 23 maps representing 31 percent of the series captured in Table 1), regularly appear on seventeenth and eighteenth century maps, and both terms should, therefore, be read or pronounced as [moniː], not as [moni], as Modern Dutch might suggest.

Arabic does not appear to have any transparently discernable lexical candidates nor does Portuguese. While there are no tangible lexical candidates from Portuguese, the language does have the rarely used cognate from Sanskrit, mūni (a pious or wise Indian man). It is unlikely that Portuguese is the source, however, because the only source of supporting evidence for this relationship would be on Portuguese maps drawn prior to the Dutch colonizing the region in the early seventeenth century. Indigenous languages do not provide any satisfactory linguistic candidates for Moni’s origin either. There seem to be only three lexical items that bear any resemblance to Moni, none of which is in the least suggestive of an origin. They

32 The use of e after a in Dutch words of the period performed the same function, e.g. in the name of Tasman’s ship the Zeehaen [ze:han].
include *moni* (to watch), from the Rongga language, Flores;33 *muni* (to produce a sound/noise, let off a gun, or say something), and *muni-muni* (to swear), both from Javanese.34

**Selam**

None of the literature on the history of Christmas Island recognizes *Selam* as a potential early designation for the island; only *Moni* is acknowledged in this role.35 Indeed, as a number of the maps cataloged in Table 1 show, the island is labeled *I. Noël ou Moni* (Table 1.47, 49, 50, 53, 66, 67, and 75), or *Moni or Christmas Island* (Table 1.59, 68, and 70).

*Selam* derives from neither Dutch nor Portuguese.36 The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) provides its etymology as deriving from Arabic *salām*, and refers to the Oriental salutation (as)alāikum (*Peace [be upon you]*), and is applied to a ceremonious obeisance with which this salutation is accompanied.37 The term has diverse spellings (e.g. *salame*, *sallam*, *salema*, *salom*, *selame*, *salam*, and *schalam*; cf. Hebrew *shalom*). The *OED* shows that various spellings were employed in different centuries, with *selam* generally being used during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which is consistent with its appearance on the maps made during these centuries.

In Malay and Javanese, *selam* refers to either Islam and/or the verb “to dive”, neither of which seem to be functional candidates for the island’s name.38 Nevertheless, the term is an element in Malay words, e.g. *selamat/salam*, and in many Indonesian placenames, e.g. *Selamanik*, *Selamanja*, *Selametan*, *Selamat*, *Selat Selamo*, *Selamben*. Its origin may lie here. However, an intriguing and possible clue to the origin of the toponym is provided by Hobson-Jobson in its entry for “Ceylon”, where an attempt to offer an etymology for the name is made:

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Ceylon […] It has been suggested by Mr. van der Tuuk that the name Sailan or Silan was really of Javanese origin, as sela (from Skt. śilā, a rock, a stone) in Javanese (and in Malay) means “a precious stone”, hence Pulo Selan would be “Isle of Gems.”

Selam is one of the Portuguese spellings of Ceylon. I am not suggesting that Ceylon may have been confused with Christmas Island — to do so would be most implausible and sheer fantasy. Nevertheless, van der Tuuk’s etymology hints at a possible Javanese source for the term Selam that appears to the south of Java on so many European maps of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, given the ubiquitous rocky steep-to coastline of Christmas Island.

Conclusion

Although it is not possible to provide any definitive answers as to who bestowed the names Moni and Selam, when these names were precisely applied, why they were applied to the island, and what the names mean, an analysis of the 75 European maps in Table 1 shows that there was much confusion about the whereabouts and designation of the island. While Moni, Selam and Christmas Island occupy a variety of positions on early European maps, their relatively proximate positions indicate that they most likely referred to the same island. The cartographic evidence also indicates that Moni and Selam are likely former names for the island. Like the position of Moni, the position of Selam varies considerably on maps, on occasions appearing close to the southwestern tip of Java where, as noted above with the case of Cook and Banks, it was confused with Prinsen Island (Pulau Panaitan). The virtual disappearance of Selam from maps from the mid-eighteenth century onward coincides with the more regular appearance of Christmas Island and lends further evidence to the idea that Selam denotes Christmas Island.

There is, of course, the possibility that Selam was nothing more than a phantom island. These sometimes came about from reports by early mariners who were exploring new regions through either mislocation or misidentification of actual islands, navigational errors, or optical illusions (also known as “Dutch Capes”) brought about by such phenomena as fog banks, icebergs, or floating beds of pumice. Alternatively, though...
unlikely, *Selam* may have been an actual island that was subsequently destroyed by a volcanic eruption, earthquake, or submarine landslide.\(^4^1\)

Finally, placenames are very often derived from significant physical features or from local flora and fauna. It was postulated that *Moni* and *Selam* may be exemplars of this practice. Both Charles Andrews in his *A Monograph of Christmas Island* and the British Admiralty’s *Eastern Archipelago Pilot* of 1923 and 1949, respectively, refer to such features on Christmas Island with respect to its steep-to-coast, blow holes, the saddle, and its overall geography, geology, and fauna.\(^4^2\) An extensive search of the likely language sources for words indicating such features and being the possible source of either or both of these two names was carried out, but no candidates — apart from the van der Tuuk etymology of *selam* — were found.

Malay and Javanese abound in toponyms and words of Sanskrit and Arabic origin, so it is further feasible that *Moni* and *Selam* may have their source in these languages. Current cartographic evidence cannot establish unequivocally which of the two names predates the other, or whether both names were used by locals concurrently or successively. Undoubtedly, more cartographic and linguistic research is required to resolve these and other questions.

**Acknowledgement**

I should like to express my gratitude to the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions and corrections. I am especially indebted to the reviewer who alerted me to a number of important references that I had overlooked. Any remaining errors and omissions are my own. Finally, I should like to dedicate this article to my dear friend Moni(ka) Perzlmeier.

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\(^4^1\) There are numerous such cases recorded of phantom islands. See, for example, the Wikipedia entry for “Phantom island,” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phantom_island](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phantom_island) which provide a catalog of such islands. One case in particular is the island of *Bermeja* in the Gulf of Mexico, first charted in 1539 but which mysteriously vanished during the seventeenth century. One theory is that it became submerged due to tectonic movements, supported by the existence of a seamount at the purported location. See also “Mexico’s Missing Island,” BBC World Service Documentaries. [www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/documentaries/2009/09/090910_world_stories_mexico_missing_island.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/documentaries/2009/09/090910_world_stories_mexico_missing_island.shtml); Enrique Méndez and Roberto Garduño, “No encuentran la Isla Bermeja,” *La Jornada*, 24 June 2009. [www.jornada.unam.mx/2009/06/24/index.php?section=politica&article=016n1pol](http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2009/06/24/index.php?section=politica&article=016n1pol); and Christoph Seidler, “Nieht-Insel empört Mexikaner,” *Spiegel Online*, 24 June 2009. [www.spiegel.de/wissenschaft/natur/geografie-posse-nicht-insel-empoert-mexikaner-a-632187.html](http://www.spiegel.de/wissenschaft/natur/geografie-posse-nicht-insel-empoert-mexikaner-a-632187.html).

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