ARTICLE

# Masks of Sumatra

*Karen Kartomi Thomas*

*In this article I focus on the performance practices of one of Sumatra's little-known mask varieties, that of* sakura *theater, performed in the southernmost province of Lampung. I also draw attention to four other Sumatran mask types, namely, those used in funeral ceremonies of the Karo Batak in North Sumatra,* mak yong *theater of Bintan,* gobang *ritual of the Anambas islands, and* mendu *theater of Natuna. In order to gain a greater understanding of the Sumatran mask images and to illuminate their use in performance, I first trace the history of Sumatran mask design, sourcing relevant iconographical and archeological data dating back to the migrations to the island in the Dongson era (500–1000 BCE) and the subsequent Hindu-Buddhist period (first to fourteenth centuries CE). The masks' facial features and their functions in Lampung personify animals, gods, demons, and humans and resemble carvings of supernatural beings on Buddhist temple remains throughout Sumatra. The ancestors are believed to have traveled along South Sumatra's and Lampung's extensive river system to Skala Brak in West Lampung along the southwestern Bukit Barisan mountain range, bringing with them their cultures and artistic skills. Moreover, the later interethnic contact between southern Sumatrans and the Benanek Dayak community in Kalimantan may have influenced the designs of the masks, given the similarities between them in the two areas. Today Lampung* sakura *masking in its various forms, dating back to the pre-Hindu-Buddhist period in Skala Brak, takes place in mystical healing and village cleansing ceremonies, at pole-climbing festivals, and in street processions on the Muslim feast day of Idul Fitri. As an indirect means of affecting the people's mindset,* sakura *processional performance practices and their allure affirm the Lampung worldview.*

*Karen Kartomi Thomas is an adjunct senior research fellow in the Performance Research Unit, Centre for Theatre and Performance at Monash University. Her primary research projects focus on theater in Sumatra, including the Riau Islands.*

Oral histories indicate that *sakura* masks are linked to pre-Hindu-Buddhist spirits (I.: *roh*)[1] residing in trees, stones, mountains, and certain sites (Mustika 2011: 33). They act as repellents to evil spirits

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believed to play havoc in the human world by causing illness and natural disasters, and are also worn to invoke the assistance of benevolent spirits. Legend has it that the ancestors of *sakura* maskers are descendants of the Buay Tumi ethnic group once living in the kingdom of Skala Brak near Liwa (West Lampung regency) at the foot of Mount Pesagi, southeast of Lake Ranau (see maps of Sumatra [Fig. 1] and Lampung [Fig. 2]). Elders say that the Buay Tumi ritually wore *sakura* masks when calling up ancestral and nature spirits to seek protection from the elements and the spirits of the supernatural world during the rice-harvesting season in the pre Hindu-Buddhist period (Mustika 2011: 149).

*Sakura* masks depict a range of human character types, including kings, warriors, soldiers, old men, farmers, pregnant women, children, and clowns. They also depict a range of gods, demons, ogres, and villains, as well as animals such as monkeys, civets, and tigers. Masks are made from roughly carved wood, and some are painted. Though the origin of the word *sakura* or *sekura* (meaning "mask") is unclear, *sakura* masked activities were traditionally a people's ritual, a spiritually charged performance led by a shaman and embraced by a largely farming population (Mustika 2011: 21, 258). The masks' magical powers were evoked by shamans (I.: *dukun*) through their knowledge of magic.

The history and performed function of masks in Sumatra, in particular in the southernmost province of Lampung, have been neglected in the Southeast Asian literature and artistic practice. Schnitger describes the antics of two masked clowns in a ceremonial procession near Krui (West Lampung regency) who expressed "clumsy jokes . . . (and) the coarser their actions the better the festival" (1964: 199). Van Dijk and de Jonge make brief reference to masked clowns at ceremonial processions in Lampung (1980: 21). The only study of the contemporary use of *sakura* masks is my own, in which I focus on the dramatic devices of *sakura* masked performance and introduce the Indonesian term *pesona* (performative allure) to the research of theatre in Sumatra (Thomas 2013a).

The performance contexts in which *sakura* masks are worn are first at healing ceremonies, which are led and performed by shamans, and second at village cleansing (I.: *bersih desa*) processions of up to dozens of maskers, an event that can commemorate annual holidays such as Independence Day or the Idul Fitri at the end of the fasting month. Skala Brak village communities come together to express thanks at Islamic social gatherings for family and/or friends (I.: *silaturahmi*). Third, the masks are worn by adolescent males at pole-climbing *sakura* festivals (*sakura cakak buah* or *sakura nyakak buah*), also on the occasion of regional or national celebrations.

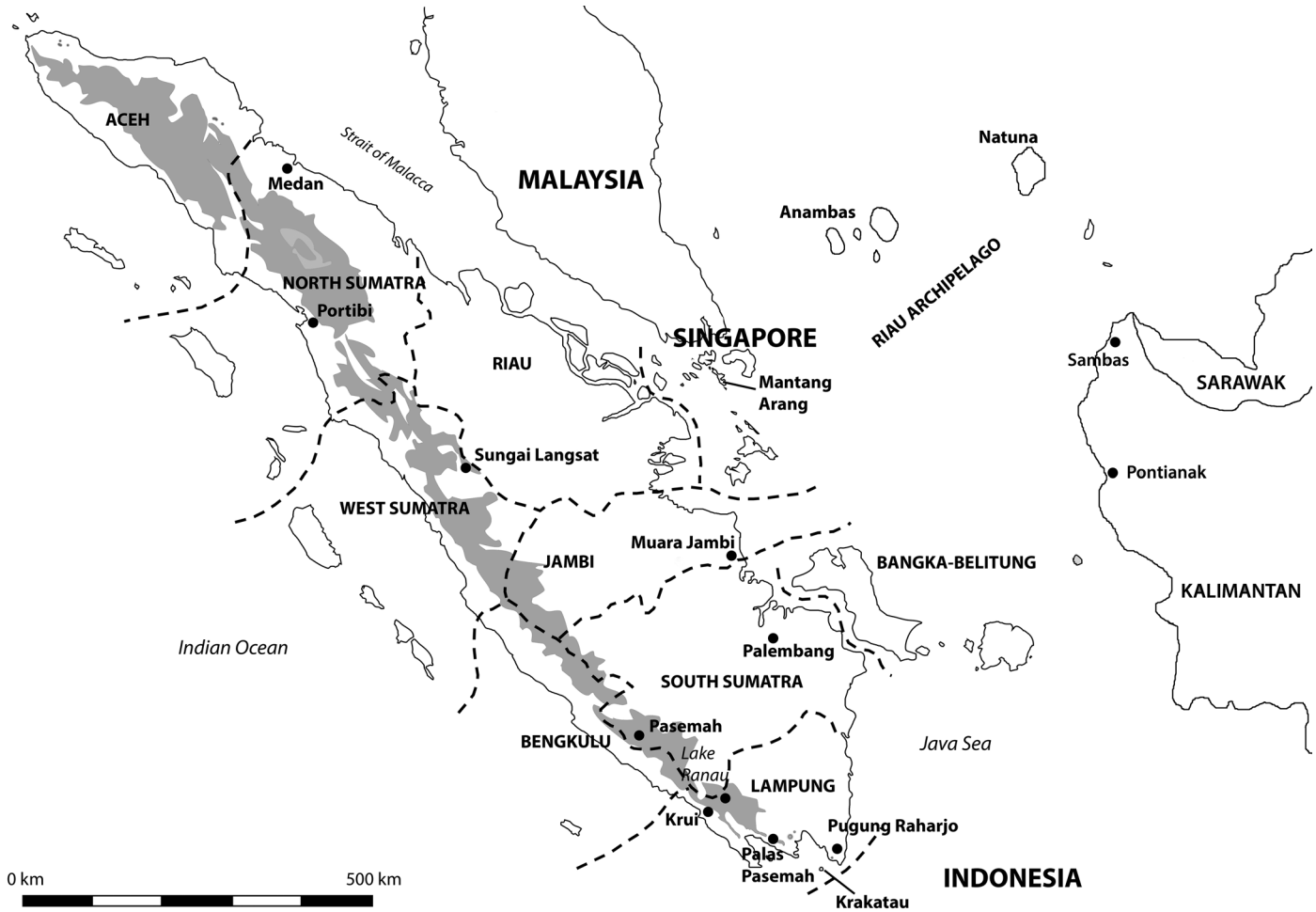


FIGURE 1. Map of Sumatra.

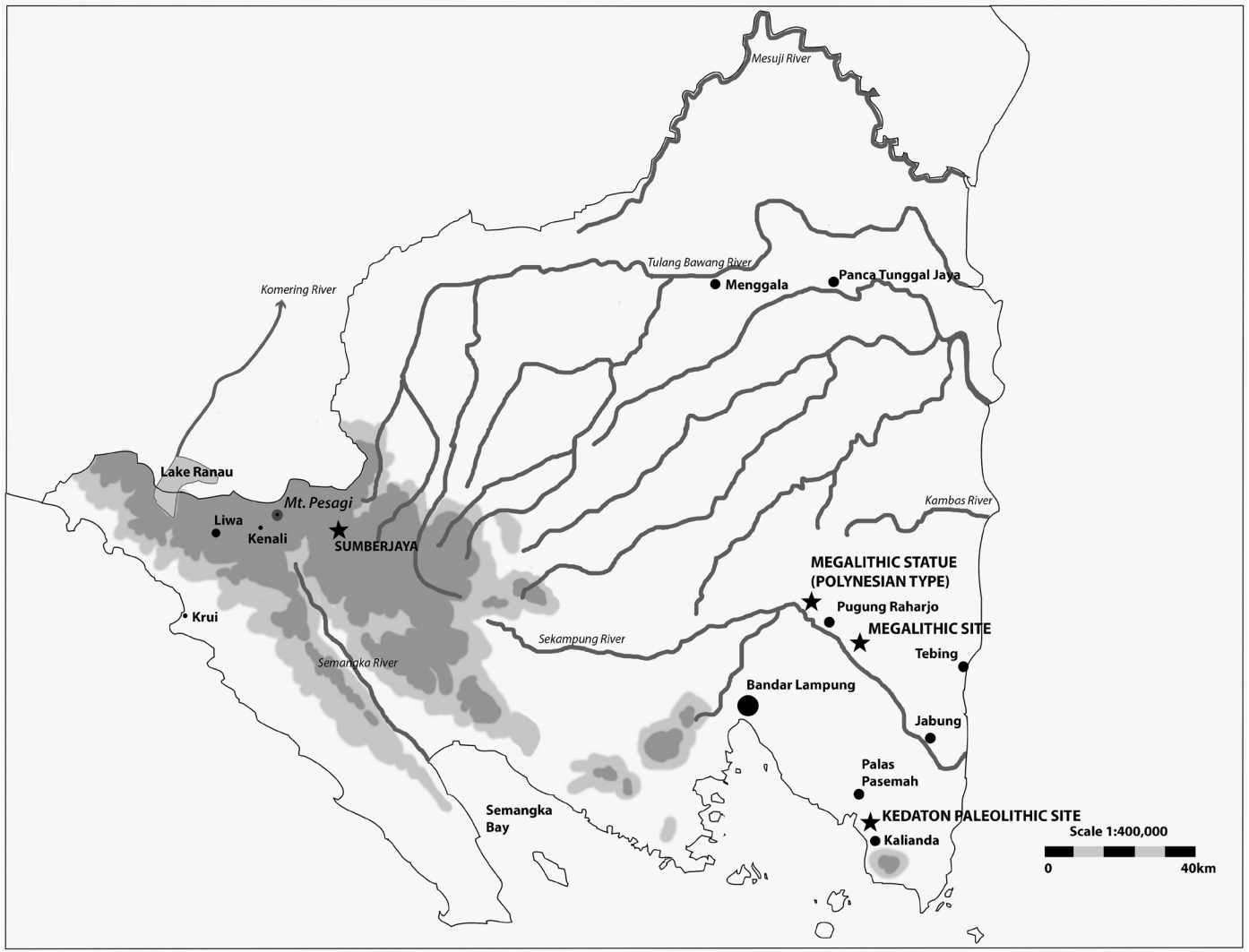


FIGURE 2. Map of Lampung.

Before describing the complex meanings of the facial features of *sakura* masks and their performative affects (I.: *pesona*) in current processional performance practices in Lampung, I will describe the Lampung worldview and the Dongson-style motifs that are strongly evident not so much in the masks' facial features themselves as in the ceremonial artifacts used in a fourth context in which *sakura* masks were once worn, that of life-stage processions such as weddings and title-giving ceremonies (see Van Dijk and de Jong 1980: 21). It is possible to suggest that sculptors of temples, murals, and statues during the Tantric Buddhist period in Sumatra were influenced by masked performance, and that therefore masked dancers could very well have performed at ceremonial occasions, including processions. Historical and cultural changes and continuities discussed illustrate the many artistic, cultural, and historical strands that come together for annual festivities, such as the commemoration of Idul Fitri and other significant holidays in northwest Lampung's *sakura* processional performance practices, which is the main focus of this article (see further Thomas 2013a).[2]

**The Lampung Worldview**

The Lampung worldview consists of an upper world, middle world, and underworld. Carvings of the mythical hornbill *(bala-bala*), which Lampung people *(ulun* Lampung) view as protectors of their community from the upper world are often placed at the entrance of homes and buildings, and smaller wooden carvings of the same bird are presented to the guest of honor at life-stage celebrations.[3] Similarly, ceremonial carriages (*rata*) used in official events are built in the shape of a hornbill. The sea serpent (*naga*) from the underworld as depicted on intricately designed heirloom (*palepai* and *tampan*) cloths (also famously known as "ship cloths" unique to Lampung, which are either worn, displayed or used as ceremonial artifacts at life-stage ceremonies) is a reminder of dangers that surround humans (see Van Dijk and de Jong 1980: 14).

The bird and *naga* motifs play a significant role today in ceremonial occasions that normally entail processions, such as weddings, title-giving ceremonies, and funerals (and, more recently since the advent of Islam, circumcisions and tooth-filing ceremonies). These supernatural beings living in the context of a middle world inhabited by humans link both the Saibatin and Pepadun people with an ancient belief system and heritage on which their cultural identity rests.[4]

It is likely that Dongson-style (bronze) artifacts and decorative friezes widely found in mainland Southeast Asia and southern China were brought to Sumatra at least from the beginning or the middle

of the first millennium CE or earlier (Bellwood 1997: 269). One of the earliest stone artifacts discovered among dolmens, monuments, and other statues at Pasemah near the border of Lampung and South Sumatra just north of Lake Ranau is the well-known elephant stone relief (I.: *batugajaḥ*) that shows a side view of the mask-like face and body of a male warrior said to be carrying a bronze Dongson kettledrum of type Heger I (Van der Hoop in Caldwell 1997: 170). The Heger type I bronze kettledrum, a specimen of which was found at Menggala in northeast Lampung and is displayed at the Ruwa Jurai Museum in Bandar Lampung, shows etched geometric and star shapes typical of Dongson style (see McKinnon 1993: 229; Bellwood 1997: 281, 288).

Ornamental designs of human, animal, and geometric shapes, including flying birds and sailing ships with bows in the shape of stylized birds' heads and sterns in the shape of birds' tails, are visible on Dongson finds and related artifacts. The human procession, itself viewed as a metaphor for a ship,[5] is given the task of transporting the guest(s) of honor, believed to be in a liminal state, with the protection of ceremonial artifacts that have been previously blessed (see further below). The Dongson link to *sakura* lies in the stylistic elements of objects used in Lampung processions in which *sakura* masks, until recently, were worn (see Van Dijk and de Jong 1980: 21).

### Sculptors of the Past

The masks' facial features and their functions in Lampung personify humans, gods, demons, and animals, and resemble carvings of supernatural beings on Buddhist temple remains dotted around Sumatra. The ancestors are likely to have traveled along the extensive river systems to Skala Brak along the southern Bukit Barisan mountain range, bringing with them their cultures and artistic skills.[6] Migratory patterns through Lampung, beginning at least in the first century CE, are shown by a stone inscription dated 686 CE found in Jabung (central Lampung) that bears an imprecation not unlike that on inscriptions found in Palas Pasemah at South Lampung, Jambi, and Bangka island (Boechari 2012 [1979]: 383).[7] Anthropomorphic figures and animals appear on various items (such as the stone trough in Tebing village) in central Lampung.[8] The unearthing of a Polynesian-type megalithic statue, the Kedaton Palaeolithic site, and others illustrate that the ancestors of Lampung people traveled to the southern tip of Lampung either by foot or by boat along Lampung's complex network of rivers, including the Semangka River (and its tributaries), and the eastern Way Kanan and Way Kiri river system in the Tulangbawang region.[9]

Past rulers in Lampung displayed their prosperity, wealth, and power with their regalia possessions of ceremonial objects, weapons, and royal heirlooms, and their religious convictions through elaborate performances orchestrated by sophisticated performing artists; they held regal ritual occasions to legitimize their authority (see Gittinger 1976: 122). From the seventh to the thirteenth centuries in Sumatra and Java, they dramatized their magico-religious powers in elaborate royal ceremonies. Such thinking was likely promoted by Tantric Buddhist rulers who empowered themselves through enactments of ceremonial performance (see Foley 1995: 529).[10]

There is no clear documentation of whether Tantric Buddhist rulers in this period invited masked dancers to perform in their rituals or not. However, the many depictions of supernatural beings in the form of masked animals, humans, gods, or demons that appear on archaeological finds of carved sculptures or etchings in megaliths and stone monuments all over Sumatra suggest that stone sculptors may have drawn inspiration from the facial features of masks and the gestures, movements, and stage settings of masked performance.

In Lampung, for example, portrayals of masklike facial features of animals, humans, gods, and demons are found on megalithic carved stones dating to Sriwijaya times (650–1377). The sites at Sumberjaya located in the vicinity of Skala Brak (at Kebuntebu, Batukbrak, and the Megalith Pekon Purawiwitan) contain examples of Hindu-Buddhist temples and carved stones depicting various forms of statues with distinct mask-like faces. In the south stands a statue of a deity in the *naivedya mudra* pose[11] near the Pugungraharjo site commonly found in Tantric variants.

Moreover, in areas north of Lampung, such as at the royal ceremonial and Buddhist complex at Kedaton temple in Muara Jambi, are located pairs of stone *makara* mythical creatures, which portray combined snake-like bodies and elephant-like trunks decorated with a series of carved, monkey masks.[12] The Buddhist temple mural in Portibi in North Sumatra features two masked dancers, the first is an elephant character and the second most likely the fierce giant Kala-Makara.[13] A Bhairava stone statue in West Sumatra at Sungai Langsat with skulls carved around its base has the mask of an ogre etched into the figure's sarong tied around the waist.[14]

It is possible to speculate that due to the variety of supernatural beings illustrated in a performance context on stone temples, murals, and other monuments, sculptors may have been influenced by their viewing (and possibly participation in) the act of masking taking place at ceremonial occasions and rituals and royal events.

### Islamic Praxis

Conversions to Islam in some coastal areas of Lampung are likely to have begun in the seventeenth century (Funke 1961: 261–267). The arrival of Islam in the mountainous and internal areas of Skala Brak probably occurred later in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Until then the local traditional customs (I.: *adat*) of the West Lampung indigenous population over time had integrated with Hindu-Buddhist beliefs, as is evident in the archeological remains and performance traditions.

The art of current-day *sakura* performance, a remnant of an old form of shamanic healing, in recent times altered to suit the requirements of imam (I.: *ulama*). Women once participated alongside men in masked procession at transitional rites including weddings and title-giving ceremonies (see Van Dijk and de Jong 1980: 19–21). They may have worn masks in healing and harvest rituals in the pre-Muslim and the pre-Hindu-Buddhist period (see Mustika 2011: 195). It is probable that stronger Islamic influences brought shifts in women's roles that excluded them from such theater forms as *sakura* masking in the last decades of the twentieth century.

Ninety-five percent of Lampung's population today is Muslim (Badan Pusat Statistik 2010: 200–202, 421–424). Yet at the same time that Muslim practices are held, belief in spirits that roam and threaten the world remains strong. During my visit to the Lampung Museum in Bandar Lampung in April 2012, for example, I was told that anyone handling the old wooden *sakura* masks must either wear gloves or be prepared to scrub their hands afterward to avoid illness or personal disaster; it is accepted that masks continue to contain evil spirits that can inflict sickness or bad luck on individuals (Kherustika 2012). This resonates with broader practices across Indonesia in which:

> Ancestors are . . . benevolent; they protect their descendants, they guarantee their prosperity and guide them in all important actions of life, on condition that they are honored and fed. If the living neglect their duties towards the ancestors, the latter will punish them by inflicting all kinds of calamities; illnesses, bad crops, accidents. . . . Many, including normative Muslims, Christians or modernisers who deeply disapprove of such connections, believe that these powerful dead connect Indonesians to their local place and to their past. (Chambert-Loir and Reid 2002: xv–vi, xi, xxi)

The continued veneration of ancestors, widely regarded as a characteristic of Islamic praxis in Indonesia and borne out in Lampung today,

probably is similar to performance being central to Muslim (Sufi) practices of healing and other magic (Mabbett 1993–1994: 10).

## Contemporary Mask Design and Performance in Sumatra

I shall now provide a brief overview of some contemporary masked theater forms in Sumatra that embody common Hindu-Buddhist spirit-based belief systems before narrowing down my discussion to performance practices of *sakura* masks.

The function of such masked theater performances are typically for healing, ceremonial, and/or entertainment purposes, and masks normally characterize supernatural beings (in the form of animals, humans, gods, or demons). Funereal maskers among the Karo Batak in North Sumatra, for example, accompany hornbill effigies to convey the souls of the dead to the hereafter (Holt 1967: ix, 103, 106), and *sakura* masks are associated with ancestral spirits and with village cleansing. Masks in *mak yong* theater performed in Mantang Arang in east Bintan Island portray the often comical spiritual helpers of the king (Sumardi 2004),[15] and *gobang*[16] masks are traditionally worn in exorcisms performed on the beaches of the Anambas islands north of Sumatra (Syafarrudin 2013). The function of these masks in turn relates to *mendu* theater masks (Natuna islands east of Anambas), which bring alive the supernatural assistants (*jin*) to kings both benevolent and evil in humorous and entertaining fashion (Thomas 2013b).

The physical appearances of these masks in their respective regions, however, differ markedly from each other in design, finish, and facial features. The smooth finish and design of Karo Batak funereal masks bear no resemblance to the stylistically distinguishable roughly carved *sakura* masks. The facial features and heavily painted finish of *mak yong* masks are unlike either the smooth painted *gobang* masks or the *mendu* masks made of mesh or other material tied messily around the head and the face of the performer.[17] Despite the fact that Sumatran masks have the common function of connecting with the supernatural world, their physical appearances show significant diversity in design and finish.[18]

One type of *sakura* mask, however, that of a nobleman, does bear a likeness to a type of mask from the Benanek Dayak ethnic group in Kalimantan (see Heppell 1992: 22–38, 49–67). The arts and cultures of southern Sumatran ethnic groups have been shown to link directly with those of some Dayaks ethnic groups.[19] Lorm, for example, concludes that the design of samples of Lampung ceremonial textiles produced in Krui just west of Skala Brak when compared with those from Dayak groups stylistically portray Dongson-type ornamental represen-

tations of humans, animals, plants, and other shapes (1938: 137–141). Zahorka highlights the motifs of boats, the *naga*, the crocodile, and the hornbill prevalent in the burial rituals and associated symbols of the Tumon Dayak, who believe themselves to be direct descendants of the Minangkabau cultural hero, Datuk Parpatih Nan Sabatan of Sumatra (2001: 84–91). As in Lampung, the Dayak worldview encompasses three worlds: the hornbill represents the upper world, the water serpent or snake creator represents the underworld, and human characters represent the middle world. Masks are worn to provide entertainment and to "frighten away . . . extraterrestrial pests" (Heppell 1992: 22).

The *sakura* mask that resembles the Benanek Dayak mask type shows darkened wooden facial features with protuberant eyes permanently closed by elongated eyelids. Hairy eyebrows made from goat hair have been glued onto the face above the eyes of both types. Each depicts a bald man with nostrils and a long nose that is carved using stylistically corresponding techniques. Both masks show striking similarities in facial features, carving technique, and finish. They each show stylistically similar smiling mouths adorned with a fiber moustache and two comparable, well-defined rows of teeth visible beneath slightly opened lips.

### Performing in Procession and the *Pesona* Affect

The concept of *pesona* in Lampung, as in Southeast Asia generally, is widely used in many contexts to refer to the performative allure or enchantment of a person, object, or event. The wonder of nature; the attraction of cultural heritage destinations; the appeal of resorts; the beauty of women and men; the charm of art, poetry, literature, dance, and music; and the magnetic quality of pop stars, movie personalities (*pesona bintang*), and public speakers are often described in terms of their *pesona*.[20]

It is the *pesona* of artists that attracts large audiences in Lampung (Hi Nasrun Rakai in Thomas 2013a: 412). The allure refers to the captivating, performative[21] impact of people or objects—static or moving—on an audience. It is a unifying and an indirect means of affecting the mindset of the people, affirming the people's belief system and declaring their view of the world. Through psychologically dazzling means it celebrates and asserts the people's ethnic identity. This resembles Gell's "psychological warfare" evoked by the warriors' use of the canoe prow board in the Trobiriand islands off the east coast of New Guinea, but without the destructive intentions of stripping away community morale. Gell argues that "enchantment of art objects" is explained by the presence of the "halo-effect," which emerges out of the meaning of the object and lies in "associated magical ideas" (1992: 44–46). Pesona

encompasses charisma but with the added nuance of a force field (of spirits) emanating from a person, an act, a movement, and/or other dramatic device that is not necessarily relevant in a Western context.[22]

The performative allure fills the gap between performers and the performance to which participants are drawn: As a glow, the *pesona* travels between performers and the performance with an adhesive quality that endeavors to close or at least diminish the space between performers and participants.[23]

As a culturally constructed device, the aim of Lampung processions, made even more captivating by the use of masks, aims, as mentioned, to transport the guests of honor undergoing a rite of passage, transitioning through the individual life stages of birth, circumcision, adolescence, reaching marriageable age, marriage, receiving a title (*pemberian adok*), and death. Performers and participants act out the communal journey together accompanied by fellow actors playing the roles of guardian "passengers" of elders and relatives, guards who carry ceremonial weapons and martial arts duelers, dancers (both male and female), and musicians either playing on the percussion ensemble (*talo balak*)[24] or pounding rhythms on frame drums (I.: *rebana*). The *pesona* of procession can be compared to the conjunction of a ritual's separate features that gives rise to the event's uniqueness (see Rappaport's description of ritual among the people of New Guinea [1979: 175–178]).

That processions are so significant in Lampung was brought home to me by my participation in four processions in 2011–2012 including a title-bestowing ceremony organized by the governor of Lampung in Bandar Lampung, the second day of a seven-day wedding held at Pakuanratu in Way Kanan, a circumcision and tooth-filing ceremony[25] that took place in Kampung Mesir Illir in East Lampung, and another title-bestowing ceremony organized by the regent (*bupati*) of Way Kanan in in Blambangan Umpu. Each of these processions was assigned the important task of creating a safe passage to (and after the central ritual from) the main ceremonial stage (*lunjuk* and/or I.: *sesat*).

In *sakura* procession, the whole group undergoes a processional rite together at Idul Fitri. Village participants join in as they hear the sounds and see the sights of the procession approaching, drawn in by the performative allure emanating from movement and dance, rhythm and music, the theatre of masks and the masked character types combined. The length and width of a *sakura* procession fluctuates as it advances in a snakelike fashion, winding slowly around the village streets. The stately stature of a procession as a vehicle of traveling humans slowly moving between destinations emphasizes the purpose and enormity of the event. Villagers walk beside or behind the mask-

ers, and children may weave in and out of the processional space. The whole community charges maskers with the task of averting disaster (*bala*) and driving away potentially malevolent spirits from the parading community and the spirits of their ancestors (Mustika 2011: 195). *Sakura* processions are living, breathing, alluring structures whose changing and elastic snakelike dimensions surround performers and participants in accordance with the traditional Lampung worldview.[26]

### Masks and Their Facial Features

In *sakura* processions, performers put on intentionally deformed-looking masks of distinct styles and types, some with large crooked noses, others with unevenly shaped faces, yet others with facial hair, wrinkles, and/or facial blemishes, to depict a range of grimacing, scowling, or humorous expressions. The masked procession is interspersed with the occasional appearance of male dancers wielding swords and shields executing martial arts (I.: *silat*) duels and mimed skits performed by unmasked male and female dancers. Performers do not perform a story with a plot on a proscenium stage or an act at a comedy festival as in conventional Western theatre. Rather, the scene is staged in the middle world from which humans negotiate with the supernatural beings of the upper world and underworld. Actors don *sakura* masks for their instant comic entertainment, but they also do so to hide their identities from spirits while playing out their roles in annual village-cleansing processions at Idul Fitri celebrations (Mustika 2011: 195). The *pesona* of masks in processional activities aims at two distinct but closely entwined audiences: the village people and the ancestral spirits.

I shall now discuss the facial features of *sakura* mask types in more detail, to illustrate the complexities of personalities that each character type portrays. Their design adds to the overall *pesona* affect of the masks and the processions in which they appear. *Sakura* masks measure anywhere between eighteen and thirty centimeters long and between thirteen and twenty-five centimeters wide. They depict the faces of males, females, children, and animals. Differences between the faces of females and males are slight. Of the dozens of *sakura* masks I saw in the Ruwa Jurai Lampung Museum, none portrayed the features of a typical female character type. Many of them were unisex, and the sex of the character became clear in the costume.[27] Most of the performer's body, except for the hands and feet, is covered up with a Malay-style bodice and long skirt (I.: *kain kabaya*) for female characters or trousers and shirt (I.: *teluk belanga*) with a short sarong for male characters (Mulyawan 2010). The bodies of ogres and animals are enclosed with old clothes and may be decorated with leaves and branches from

coconut trees or coffee plants. The mask conceals only the front of the face, while the rest of the head and neck is covered completely by a piece of cloth (I.: *kain*) tied around the top, sides, and back of the head and neck. It helps the actor to express his feelings and achieve a full metamorphosis into the character (Mulyawan 2012). Closing a face is not a negative act of concealment but a positive act of becoming and acquiring a different identity. Once in costume, maskers play out their mask's character type, including kings, warriors, old men, farmers, pregnant women, children, clowns, animals (monkeys, civets, tigers, and others), gods, ogres, villains, and other evil characters. Masks are made from roughly carved wood, and some are painted. The belief in the existence of a pantheon of spirits means that the number of masks with unique combinations of facial features is potentially endless.

The size and shape of the eyes, nose, mouth, teeth, and tongue, as well as the roughness or smoothness of the carved wood and the

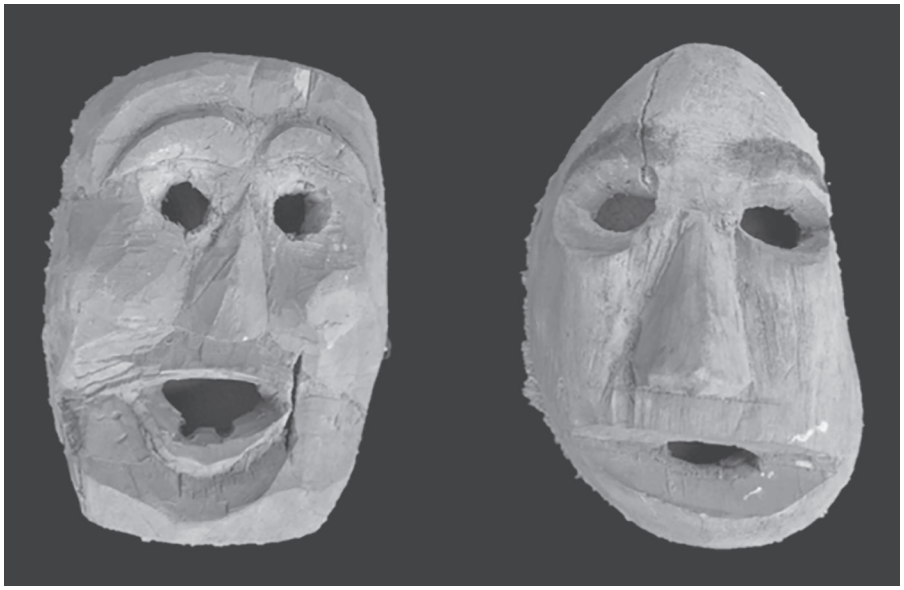

FIGURE 3. These roughly carved masks from the Liwa area (in the Balik Bukit district of West Lampung) indicate clown-type characters. They are often shown with wide, open mouths and round eyes carved out, and with high, rounded, painted eyebrows. Left: A farmer who works in fields or plantations (28 cm long × 20 cm wide). Right: A low-level member of the nobility is indicated by the pale blue color of his face. His slightly parted lips and his round and open eyes illustrate his good-natured and courageous character. (29 cm long × 18 cm wide). Kartomi Thomas private collection. (Photo: Karen Kartomi Thomas)

color(s) the mask is painted (if it is painted at all), determine the status and identity of the character portrayed (Kherustika 2012). Each of the masks' many features manifests the complexities of different personalities as seen in Figures 3 and 4.

The features of the nose, eyes, and lips indicate specific characteristics typical of particular character types (*Katalog Topeng Lampung* 2009: 1). A short nose normally indicates a female character. A medium-sized nose indicates a brave king or warrior, and a big nose also depicts a brave king or warrior but one who is rougher around the edges. A long nose indicates an ogre who is mischievous, and a flat nose

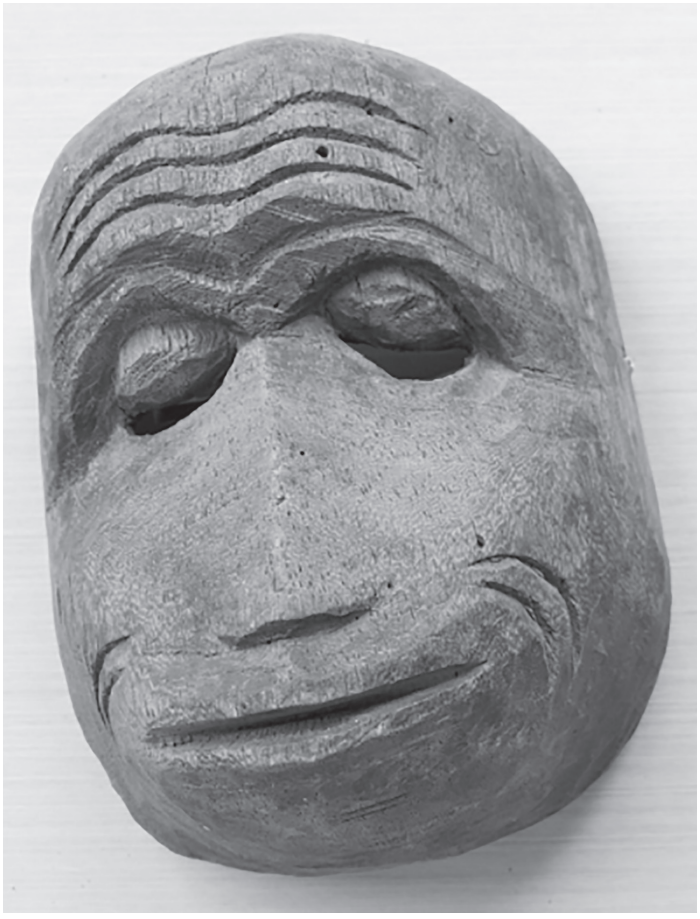

Figure 4. A monkey mask with fine carved features showing a furrowed forehead; downturned, slightly closed eyes; and an expressive mouth. Sukabumi, Belalau (18.5 cm long × 13 cm wide). Ruwa Jurai Museum collection. (Photo: Karen Kartomi Thomas)

is reserved for a monkey. A flat rounded nose refers to a wise, faithful clown type on the side of good, and a snout signals an extraordinary being such as a cross between a giant and a wild animal. Round eyes that are carved or chipped out depict an ogre type who is simultaneously brave, angry, greedy, and frivolous, and has a sense of humor but is despised. *Sakura* masks do not depict frozen and unchanging stares as in some Dayak, Javanese, or Balinese masks. Eyes that are crescent shaped indicate a dishonest, slippery, and lazy character. Eyes in the shape of slits are faithful, subservient, humorous clown types, and oval-shaped eyes where the whole or part of the eyes is visible are honest and physically agile characters, such as a king or a warrior. A face with one sleepy or drowsy-looking eye characterizes honesty and patience. Part moon-shaped eyes indicate a fair, sincere, and humorous character.

Most masks depict oval-shaped faces often with a tapering chin or an accentuated jaw; others show a rounder face. Lips that are clenched shut point to a brave warrior, while slightly open lips with a half smile showing teeth refer to a polite noble character, such as a king, warrior, or princess. Wide-open lips with the top and bottom row of teeth showing normally refer to a fierce or angry king or warrior. Clowns generally do not have a bottom lip, and their chins are usually not visible. Wrinkles that are carved in the forehead or around the mouth points to a rough (I.: *keras*) character, who sometimes moves awkwardly. The wrinkles serve to highlight any or all of the facial features, such as the eyebrows, a moustache, a beard, or hair on the chin, and appear around the mouth in order to accentuate the expression conveyed by the lips. Colors determine a character's evilness or goodness. White signifies holiness, dark blue or dark green mean magical powers, and black refers to wisdom. A blue-white color refers to a good-natured character, and blue-green is typical of a good-natured old man. Dark brown refers to a faithful servant, dark yellow to a male or female noble type, and silver to a soldier. Red indicates anger, evil, courage, and/or stubbornness.

Other facial features typical of *sakura* masks include asymmetrical or lopsided faces, crooked noses, bulbous eyes, uneven folds of facial skin, and variations of smiles and grimaces. A carved crown alludes to a kinglike character. Black or white paint lines of various thicknesses may also be drawn, which show the outline of a character's eyebrows, nose, moustache, beard, and/or mouth.

## Conclusion

*Sakura* masks today are worn on the occasion of the most important event of the Muslim calendar year, Idul Fitri, as they evoke a celebratory atmosphere and commemorate the Lampung people's Buay

Tumi ancestral heritage and adherence to Islam. They bring to the Islamic feast and festivities a long-standing tradition that links the community to a historical and cultural past. The masks are continued to be handled with a degree of awe and respect, and they are regarded as significant artifacts by the community used in village cleansing. That the masks in character continue to be enacted annually at such religious events indicates the successful merging of earlier customs and belief systems with Muslim indigenous practice.

The design elements and associated meanings and functions of *sakura* masks are reminiscent of the original stone masked designs of the Dongson and Hindu-Buddhist eras that historically form part of a greater Malayo-Polynesian continuum. The motifs of animal and human faces on megalithic structures and later stone artifacts hint at the possibility that the design of early Sumatran sites for royal ceremony and ritualized veneration may have been inspired by the facial features, figure movements and gestures, and stage settings of masked performance. Early stone sculptors presumably would have been part of audiences viewing or participating in masked performance enacted in the context of ceremonial ritual and royal celebration.

Unlike archaeological evidence, records of the ephemeral, performative aspects of early masking—the enactment of movements and music by masked dancers and musicians as well as the characteristic *pesona* creating the atmosphere—unfortunately do not exist. However, it is possible to suggest that the performative affects resulting from the combination of spectacular visual and aural treats performed for the whole community (including the masks' individual facial features and the complex personalities they depict), evoke a deep psychological connection with an ancient transcendental world. In current practices, the embodied interlocking of performers and participants, static and moving theatrical devices of masks, bodily movements, and rhythms, sound, and melodies played by traditional music ensembles produces an irresistible allure that evokes a longstanding worldview reminiscent of a distant and profoundly significant past.

## NOTES

I am grateful to Ibu Zuraida Kherustika, the head of the Ruwa Jurai Provincial Lampung Museum in Bandar Lampung, and her research team for providing me with information about the museum's large collection of Lampung masks, and to the cultural leader Bp Drs H Mawardi R Harirama for showing me his collection of traditional Lampung ceremonial artifacts. Personal conversations with artists in Liwa and Kenali and researchers at the Ruwa Jurai Museum in Bandar Lampung, and observations of both live (2012) and recorded

(Mulyawan 2010) *sakura* dancing largely inform the descriptions in the masks' section of this article. My fieldwork was made possible by an invitation and much support from Drs HI Sjachroeddin ZP SH, the governor of Lampung Province, and Drs Bustami Zainudin, the regent of Way Kanan Regency, to research the performing arts of eastern, western, and central Lampung in April 2012. Finally, I thank Kathy Foley, Matthew Isaac Cohen, and the anonymous reviewer for *Asian Theatre Journal* for helpful suggestions and insights in the writing of this article.

1. All foreign terms are in the Api speech variety of Lampung language (unless otherwise indicated; e.g., I = Indonesian). Api is spoken by the Saibatin ethnic group, whereas Ngow is spoken by the Pepadun ethnic group.

2. Like Javanese masked *topeng* dance and *wayang* dance-drama, the roots of Lampung masked performance probably lie in the belief systems and cultural practices of the earlier Malayo-Polynesians (Foley 1995: 78).

3. That the *bala-bala* is regarded as the guardian of the community became clear during my visit to the traditional Pepadun-style home of Bapak Drs H Mawardi R Harirama in April 2012, who kindly showed us his collection of ritual objects, including a birdlike carriage, ceremonial dress, and other ritual Dongson-related objects. See further Van Dijk and de Jonge (1980: 9–19, 36) and Schnitger (1964: 197–200).

4. The bird-snake and frigate imagery central to this worldview is found throughout Southeast Asia (and many other parts of the world, including the Pacific and Micronesia) and is often believed to have shamanic origins (Foley 1990: 74–78). Levi-Strauss notes a similar "celestial" and "aquatic" opposition in the masks among the North American Indian groups (1979: 47).

5. The distinct boat-shaped headdress (*siger*) is also typically worn by brides, elder women in rites of passage, and female dancers performing the Lampung welcome dance, "Sigeh Pengutin."

6. Funke's detailed drawings of the history of migratory patterns of Lampung ethnic groups illustrate that migrations probably occurred from northwest Lampung, including around in the mountainous Skala Brak regions to the east along the complex river system in Tulangbawang and in the east and the south along the Semangka and Kambas rivers and their many tributataries.

7. It is likely that other related forms of masked theatre emerged in the southern Kalianda region and in Jabung in eastern Lampung, where masked performance once took place at transition rites such as weddings and circumcisions after groups migrated to the south and the east by foot and by boat along the Semangka and Way Kambas rivers and their many tributaries (see Funke 1961; Deradjat, Laksito, and Bambang 1992).

8. This trough is located near a stone inscription written in a mixture of Malay and the local language (Djafar and Falah, cited in Brinkgreve and Sulistiningsih [2009: 20]). A similar stone inscription described above in Malay with many Sanskrit words dated 684 CE, found in Talang Tuwo village of Palembang in South Sumatra, proclaims the ruler's concern "for the salvation of all beings (including the supernatural)," which places him and his realm at the center of a form of Tantric Mahayana Buddhism (Andaya 2008: 58).

9. Chinese chronicles noted the significance of Lampung's Tulangbawang region as a mission-sending state in the seventh century CE, referring to the region as "Duolangpohuang" (see McKinnon 1993: 228–230; Wang 1958). In addition, Tulangbawang is said to have been the center of the Menggala kingdom at Pagar Dewa much later in the fifteenth century CE, through which further travel routes to the coasts are likely to have occurred, and which were dominated by Malay port authorities and Malay kings (see Dinas Pariwisata Kebudayaan Pemuda dan Olahraga 2012). Pilgrim Buddhist monks passing through from China to India linked Sriwijaya Buddhism to Sumatra probably from the fifth century onward (Bellwood 1997: 275).

10. The Sumatran polity of Sriwijaya, for centuries an established kingdom and a key player in trade between India and China, found fame as a significant Buddhist center for learning, with one thousand monks studying there by the second half of the seventh century CE (Andaya 2008: 35–47; Wang 1958: 75, 96).

11. See Soekatno in Saptomo (2007: para. 26). The *naivedya mudra* pose is a type of hand gesture used in Indian classical dancing to represent specific feelings; literally, "She (who is) holding sweetmeats" (Coulter and Turner 2000: 47).

12. These are my own observations made during a visit to Kedaton temple in November 2013. The stone *makara* mythical creatures date somewhere between the ninth and thirteenth centuries CE, and are also found in Java, Thailand, and Cambodia but are usually carved with flowers rather than monkey masks (Miksic 2013).

13. This mural was probably built in the thirteenth century or earlier (see photograph in Kartomi [2012: 255]).

14. This Tantric Buddhist deity is believed to threaten those whose thoughts and actions are evil (Brinkgreve and Sulistianingsih 2009: 66).

15. The well-known Malay *mak yong* healing rituals (*main puteri*) performed on the east coast of the Malay peninsular Kelantan and Patani are performed without masks (see also Ghulam-Sarwar 1994: 160). In the lesser-known Indonesian *mak yong* in Mantang Arang, however, comic characters and animals do wear masks.

16. The meaning of the word *gobang* is unknown. I was told that it may originate from the word *bergubang* (I.: to gather together) or *gedubang* (meaning healing ceremony in the local language), or it may have meant "to dance" in the 1700s when *gobang* was linked to the sea nomads (*orang suku laut*) living among the approximately 3,200 Riau islands (Syafarrudin 2013).

17. Nor do any of these masks resemble the appearance of those further afield, such as the Cirebon Panji mask of West Java or Barong or Rangda masks of Bali.

18. This diversity may have developed out of each ethnic group's desire to establish an ethnic identity that is at least visually unique, "a conscious or unconscious wish to declare itself different" (Levi-Strauss 1979: 144).

19. Travel routes between Borneo and southern Sumatra likely occurred in both directions at different times, as noted in early writings (Marsden 1986 [1783]: 197). Movements of the West Malayo-Polynesians took place

from Borneo across to southern Sumatra (and also on to northwest Java, the Malay peninsula, Vietnam, and Cambodia) in the first century CE (Tryon 2006: 37–38; Bellwood 1997: 122), though some argue that coastal Borneo may have received *Malayu* culture only after its development in southeast Sumatra (Adelaar in Andaya 2008: 61).

20. See, for example, the song "Pesona" recorded in the mid-1980s by the popular Indonesian jazz singer Ermy Kullit (1984) in Jakarta, and the poem "Pesona Gonggong" (Beauty of *Gonggong*) published by the contemporary poet Andi Aak Ian (2010: 83).

21. The term "performativity" refers to iterated performance that influences the way the body works or its "interiority" (Butler in Birke 1999: 45). Performativity explains "how the deployments of the body through acts and gestures" are, through a repeated process, "productive of a discursive identity" (Price and Shildrick 1999: 9).

22. See further Benjamin's notion of "aura" that is "never entirely separated from its ritual function" (1968 [1936]: 223–224). This is similar to the special presence (*taksu*) attributed to Balinese dancers, who are said to capture the eyes of the audience and enhance their enjoyment (Swanson 2011: 2), a presence that has been likened to an energy radiating from the performer (either in a religious or simply theatrical context) (Bartow 2006: 194–196).

23. The performer-participant distinction emphasizes the active engagement between the two (Schieffelin 1997: 209) and its critical role in the overall allure produced.

24. *Talo balak* is the name of the percussion ensemble used, and it also means "to expel evil" (Watson 2013).

25. The filing of teeth continues to take place under ceremonial conditions among the people of this isolated area of Lampung today. While the region is nominally Muslim, many of the traditional customs (*adat*) are also strongly Hindu-Buddhist. That such an elaborate set of rituals was staged for us at short notice indicates that they have lost neither the skills nor the knowledge to practice this custom.

26. Processions as a social and ritual space from which to project the worldview of the community take place everywhere in the world. Palm Sunday processions among the Paraiyar Christians in India, for example, are described as "the interwoven nature of religious belief and the lived reality of the local community . . . [where the] . . . community generates its self-perception from its religious belonging" (Jeremiah 2013: 161).

27. An exception was a *tupping* mask from southern Lampung drawn with pencil-thin eyebrows, reddened lips, a small nose and mouth, and black painted hair. This mask is displayed in the Ruwa Jurai Lampung museum.

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