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SITTING AT THE FEET OF GURUS: THE LIFE AND DANCE ETHNOGRAPHY OF CLAIRE HOLT. By Deena Burton. Edited by David Simons and Lisa Karrer. N.P.: Xlibris Corporation, 2009. xv + 231 pp. 25 illus. Cloth \$29.99; Paper \$19.99 on demand.

In *Sitting at the Feet of Gurus: The Life and Ethnography of Claire Holt*, Deena Burton shines a light on one of the most gifted and least understood chroniclers of twentieth-century Indonesia. Claire Holt (1901–1970) did much more than record Indonesian culture). She embodied it. She was a pioneer of dance ethnography before it had a name (a self-described “choreologist”) and a Javanese dance practitioner. Holt’s lived experience is self-evident through her writing. The title of this biography comes from a 1967 *Christian Science Monitor* interview wherein Holt remarked that she was spending her life “sitting at the feet of gurus.”

Burton, who catalogued Holt’s papers, photographs, and films gifted by Cornell University to the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, was well-suited to contextualize the archive. Burton also examined correspondence at Cornell’s Kahin Center for Southeast Asian Studies, and materials provided by Holt’s family and colleagues. Burton positions Claire Holt as a great mind in twentieth-century Indonesian studies and examined her professional life, creative impulses and dreams. The book is organized geographically, beginning with Holt’s childhood through early adulthood (Latvia, Moscow, New York, 1901–1929); her work in Europe and colonial Java (1930–1939); her stay in New York during wartime (1939–1944); her government posts in Washington, DC (1945–1953); and Indonesia (1955–1957); and teaching at Cornell (1957–1970). The book closes with a chapter devoted to Holt’s tour de force, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), published three years before her death.

Claire Holt was born in Riga, Latvia, to a wealthy Jewish family. She

was part of a dedicated network of Euro-American scholars and practitioners who sought to understand East Indies culture from the inside. Her colleagues included dance scholars Curt Sachs and Beryl De Zoete; anthropologists Franziska Boas, Ray Birdwhistell, Jane Belo, Margaret Mead, and Gregory Bateson; ethnomusicologists Alan Lomax and Colin McPhee; and painters Miguel Covarrubias and Walter Spies. Holt went on to hold many important yet eclectic posts, including worker at the American Museum of Natural History; founder of the East Indies Institute (renamed: Southeast Asia Institute); scholar at Columbia University's Navy School for Military Government (1942); and as a policy analyst at the U.S. Office of Strategic Services (later renamed Central Intelligence Agency) from 1944– to 1953, before resigning in protest over McCarthyism. She finally located her intellectual and spiritual home at the Cornell Modern Indonesia Project (CMIP).

Holt's early interest in performance began when attending special programs of ballet and opera in Latvia. In early adulthood she was a dancer and journalist in Paris and New York, where she covered dance for the *New York World*, with the byline Barbara Holveg (her articles on politics appeared under the name Claire Holt). Her aestheticism was informed by relationships with visual artists, including her brother-in-law, the Russian-American documentary photographer Roman Vishniac (1897–1990), best known for his portraits of Eastern European Jewry before World War II. Burton contends that the most influential person on Holt's artistic development was her lifelong friend, Alexander Archipenko (1887–1964). The Ukraine-born cubist sculptor and printmaker emigrated in 1923 and set up his studio in New York, where Holt was his assistant. His invention of a "boxed mechanism that created the illusion of a moving painting through the use of movable slats," which he named the Archipentura, likely sparked her lifelong pursuit of movement analysis through the lens of visual arts (pp. 20–22).

Holt's ethnographic work began with her first trip to colonial Java in the 1930s. This was a fertile time in cultural dance scholarship, when the American dancers La Meri, (Russell Meriwether Hughes, 1998–1988), Katherine Dunham (1909–2006), and others began studying dance on distant shores. Claire studied Javanese dance with the dance master and prince of the Yogyakarta court, Gusti Pangeran Ario Tedjokusumo in the 1930s. Those dances were central to a series of lecture-demonstrations Holt gave in Europe, the United States, and in Japan in the mid-1930s. She also developed a deep friendship with Susuhunan Mangkunegara VII (1916–1944), the head of the Solo court, Mangkunegara, and an important innovator of Javanese dance. The eminent Dutch archeologist, Willem F. Stutterheim (1892–1942)—a Javanese language expert for the Archaeological Service of the Netherlands East Indies introduced her to Mankunegara VII when Holt was his research assistant and his romantic partner. Claire and Stutterheim's relationship was laced with tragedy: Stutterheim was still married to a woman in the Netherlands from whom he was unable to secure a divorce, which restricted their having a fully open relationship. Holt's ambivalence about being a single parent to her son, Tolly (from her former marriage), further complicated matters. One of

her darkest hours was when she was stranded in the United States in 1945 and learned that Stutterheim had died from a brain tumor in a Japanese camp in Java three years earlier.

Holt was a leading voice at the CMIP. The Project was launched in the 1950s during the first decade of Indonesian sovereignty against the rumblings of civil war. A sharp ideological division had been drawn between the colonial-era scholars—many of whom had been Dutch colonial administrators with their emphasis on philology and Hindu-Buddhism (for example Stutterheim) and the predominantly humanistic, left-leaning Cornellians, whose collective enterprise swiftly became the dominant discourse in post-World War II Indonesian studies. Burton correctly identifies Holt as an important counterweight to CMIP's looming academic figures in the 1960s and 1970s, who included George Kahin, Ruth McVey, Benedict Anderson, and James Siegel. Even though she lacked the proper credentials to receive the title "professor" at Cornell (she was named "senior research associate"), Holt single-handedly carved a vibrant space wherein the performing and visual arts were on equal footing with history, anthropology, and political science.

The final chapter is devoted to Holt's *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*. Published in 1967, it was based on Holt's 1955–1957 research in Indonesia under the auspices of Cornell and supported by a Rockefeller grant. It was the first serious study of modern Indonesian art by a non-Indonesian and elegantly bridges pre- and post-war ethnography. (p. 170). Burton draws the reader's attention to how *Art in Indonesia's* chronology parallels Holt's trajectory as an Indonesianist, beginning with Indonesian archaeology, moving on to the "living traditions" of dance, *wayang* (puppetry), dance-drama, and Balinese sculpture; and concluding with the modern art movement, which Holt took up late.

In her examination of dance, Holt sought historical and cultural traces of the past in a variety of Indonesian dance forms spanning from Java and Bali to Nias, South Sulawesi, West Sumatra, and North Sumatra. Her fascination with classical forms such as *serimpi* was omnipresent, but she was always forward-looking in seeking to understand how "traditions" were transformed into something distinctively post-war Indonesian. In her writing, she boldly situates contemporary arts on an equal footing with the Hindu-Javanese and Buddhist-Javanese shrines such as Central Java's Loro Jonggrang and Borobudur, respectively. This was significant. When *Art in Indonesia* was published in 1967, most scholars still had one foot firmly planted in the past, but for Holt, independence was the pivot point and marks her most important contribution: in privileging local voices, she demonstrated the internal workings of political regimes. And while *Art in Indonesia* is not without flaws, it set the gold standard of post-war Indonesian art analysis. More than forty years after its publication, one is hard pressed to argue with Holt's assessment of politics as a powerful instructor in Indonesia's post-World War II visual culture.

Burton clearly identified with Holt: both women were Jewish, had spent years studying Javanese dance, had an unshakable connection to Java, and became academics late in their careers. Furthermore, they were emblem-

atic of the “foreign.” The book’s cover drives home this point. Here, Burton and Holt appear in full-costume as near-mirror images performing the court dance *serimpi*. Their refined symmetry signals how complicated the Other can be, as well as displaying the connection Burton felt for her subject. This bond is made palpable in a quirky, though highly enjoyable interlude in the book. In 1997 Burton retraced Holt’s footsteps to Rantepao in the heart of Torajo land, in southern Sulawesi, in hopes of locating the funerary rite Holt documented nearly sixty years prior. Holt conducted a ten-day dance-collecting tour in southern Sulawesi in 1938 accompanied by Rolf de Mare (1888–1964), co-founder of the Ballets Suédois and Les Archives Internationales de la Danse in Paris, and his assistant, Hans Evert. The whirlwind tour resulted in Holt’s treatise, *Dance Quest in Celebes* (first published in Paris in 1939). Rantepao was not on tourists’ radar in 1938, but by 1997, Burton points out, they were a common sight on the funeral circuit (p. 65). Undeterred by the apparent lack of romance in her post-modern adventure, Burton and her husband shared transportation to Rantepao with three Belgian tourists they met along the way. Deena accomplished her mission by locating and documenting a contemporary version of the funerary rite Holt referred to as *Ma’randing* (locally known as *paqranding*) (pp. 64–71).

This book grew out of Burton’s dissertation in performance studies (*Sitting at the Feet of Gurus: The Life and Ethnography of Claire Holt*, New York University, 2000). As her dissertation chair, Marcia B. Siegel, points out, Burton’s tragically early death in 2005 precluded her from making the necessary revisions for publication. A great debt is owed to Burton’s late mother, Beatrice Soloway; her husband, Skip LaPlante; and her friends, David Simons and Lisa Karrer, for their labor of love in seeing this project through to publication.

Since the editors elected to keep Burton’s text true to the dissertation, *Sitting at the Feet of Gurus* is in need of an index. Burton’s original research was neither updated nor fact-checked prior to publication. “Millie Wagermann” and “Mildred Wagerman,” respectively, should read “Mildred Wagemann” (pp. xii; 14 n.11); the correct spelling for “William Frederic Stutterheim,” alternately, is “Willem Frederik Stutterheim” (p. 3). It is a shame that an academic press was not involved as these problems would have been solved. Such quibbles aside, there is much to be thankful for. The appendix of Holt’s published works (including three book reviews and five translations) and bibliography of her unpublished work, are boons to Indonesianists and performance scholars (pp. 60–61). Among those unpublished works housed at the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center is the only known copy of her 1930s manuscript, “Dancers and Danced Stories,” described in detail by Burton. Most importantly, this text brings to light the internal workings of a true pioneer in dance ethnography and post-war Indonesian cultural studies. It is thus an important contribution to Southeast Asian and performance studies.

Laurie Margot Ross

Independent Scholar, New York City