

# **The crocodile in the life of the people of Poso**

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translated by  
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2020

**Sulang Language Data and Working Papers:  
Translations from the Dutch, no. 20**



Sulawesi Language Alliance  
<http://sulang.org/>

## LANGUAGES

Subject language : Pamona  
Language of materials : English

## DESCRIPTION

Based on years of living in the Poso region of Central Celebes, the author Alb. C. Kruyt describes the significance that crocodiles played in Poso (Pamona) culture, including beliefs that crocodiles and people can be related (e.g. so-called crocodile twins); crocodiles as avengers sent by the gods; occasions when crocodiles could rightfully be killed; crocodiles as the epitome of bravery; and possession by crocodile spirits. Along the way the author relates four Pamona folktales about crocodiles, and two historical incidents involving crocodiles that he used to explain aspects of the Christian message.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. The crocodile and the animal world of Celebes; 2. The crocodile as a blood relative of people; 3. The crocodile in dealings with people; 4. The crocodile and the spirit world; 5. The crocodile and justice; 6. The crocodile in folktales; 7. The crocodile and the statecraft of the Poso people; 8. The crocodile and the proclamation of the gospel; Postscript.

## SOURCE

Kruyt, Alb. C. [1937]. *De krokodil in het leven van de Posoërs*. Oegstgeest: Zendingsbureau. Original pagination is indicated by including the page number in square brackets, e.g. [p. 1].

## VERSION HISTORY

Version 1 [16 April 2020]  
Version 2 [29 May 2020] Minor updates.

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# The crocodile in the life of the people of Poso <sup>1</sup>



BY DR. ALB. C. KRUYT

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<sup>1</sup> [translator's note: This is an English translation of Kruyt, Alb. C. [1937]. *De krokodil in het leven van de Posoërs*. Oegstgeest: Zendingsbureau.

This booklet in turn was a compilation of eight articles that appeared in the journal *Wolanda Hindia* in 1935:

- 'De krokodil en de dierenwereld van Celebes' (8/2), 16–19.
- 'De krokodil als bloedverwant van den mensch' (8/3), 25–27.
- 'De krokodil in de omgang met menschen' (8/4), 37–39.
- 'De krokodil en de godenwereld' (8/5), 52–53.
- 'De krokodil en de rechtspraak' (8/6), 67–69.
- 'De krokodil in de volksverhalen' (8/7), 73–76.
- 'De krokodil en de staatskunde der Possoërs' 1935 (8/8), 85–88.
- 'De krokodil en de verkondiging van het Evangelie' (8/9), 98–100.

Images have been inserted at a convenient paragraph break near where they were placed in the original. A 'Plate 9' did not occur in the original.]

[p. 2]



Evening on the northern shore of Lake Poso, which puts us in a mood to listen to what the people of Poso have to tell about the crocodiles that live in this great pool.

## CONTENTS

1. The crocodile and the animal world of Celebes
2. The crocodile as a blood relative of people
3. The crocodile in dealings with people
4. The crocodile and the spirit world
5. The crocodile and justice
6. The crocodile in folktales
7. The crocodile and the statecraft of the Poso people
8. The crocodile and the proclamation of the gospel

Available from:

THE MISSIONS DEPARTMENT AT OEGSTGEEST, Postgiro 6074.

OFFICE OF WOLANDA-HINDIA, 2e Constantijn Huygensstraat 32,  
Amsterdam-West, Postgiro 87801.

[p. 3]

## THE CROCODILE IN THE LIFE OF THE PEOPLE OF POSO

By Dr. ALB. C. KRUYT

### 1. The crocodile in the animal world of Celebes

I will tell you about the crocodile. You have to expect stories from encounters with these sinister animals, which keep you in suspense and fill you with horror. I will tell of the great place that this unsympathetic animal occupies in the imagination of the Poso people; how it plays a role in all parts of their lives. I will tell you how these cold-blooded creatures have had a part in the torment of the people.



1. The Laa River near Sampalowo, where it is crossed by a ferry.

Occasionally I've been asked, "Have you never had any troubles with wild animals on Celebes?" I could answer to that: "No, because on Celebes there are no wild beasts in the sense of mauling animals." However, this answer applies only to animals on land. In the waters of Celebes live many crocodiles, which have already devoured many people.

Let me first tell something of the danger that these beasts pose to men, for if we know anything about it, we can only sympathize with the awe and fear that the Poso people harbor toward these animals, and which naturally and so easily lead human beings into worship.

Not all rivers are equally inhabited by crocodiles. The Laa River at Sampalowo (plate 1) is notorious for crocodiles. The river is wide at this point, and the traffic between the two banks takes place by means of a ferry. The Poso River is also full of these brutes. And on the Lariang River I saw basks of them lying on the sand. They lurk near the villages that are located on the rivers. At night they come ashore and remove dogs, pigs, and goats. During the day they lie hidden in the water, ready for bathing children. As long as a young person bathes in shallow places in the river or in rapids (plate 2), then the danger is not so great. The crocodiles know the places where people come to bathe, and there they lurk for their prey. Therefore, barriers of bamboo are made in the water, behind which people [p. 4] can safely bathe and wash clothes (plate 3).



2. Children bathe and happily splash about in river rapids.

Many times it has happened that a woman, without suspecting anything, walked into the river to fill her bamboo tubes with water (plate 4), then a crocodile grabbed her by the leg and dragged her into the depths. Or that a man fell prey to such a beast while standing quietly [p. 5] in the river, bathing his horse (plate 5). I felt my heart in my throat sometimes, when I saw a bunch of people *mosango* (plate 6). This is done at times when because of drought the water level in the lakes and rivers isn't so high. Then the villagers set aside a day when they go *mosango*. The fishers, each one with a plunge basket, place themselves in a wide circle in knee-deep water. Quickly moving the plunge basket into the water, they walk towards each other. When the plunge basket lands over a fish, this is immediately noticeable, because the fish is floundering against the wall; then the fisher reaches through the opening at the top of the basket and pulls out the fish. It has happened before that a crocodile took its chance with such a company, but then it remained an injury, because the animal had to let go, because fellow fishers came to the aid of the person who was attacked. Moreover, such a fishing expedition is usually accompanied by

a lot of noise and splashing, and crocodiles fear for themselves, because they are cowardly animals.



3. Women wash clothes and bathe behind a bamboo barrier in the river so as not to be ambushed by crocodiles.

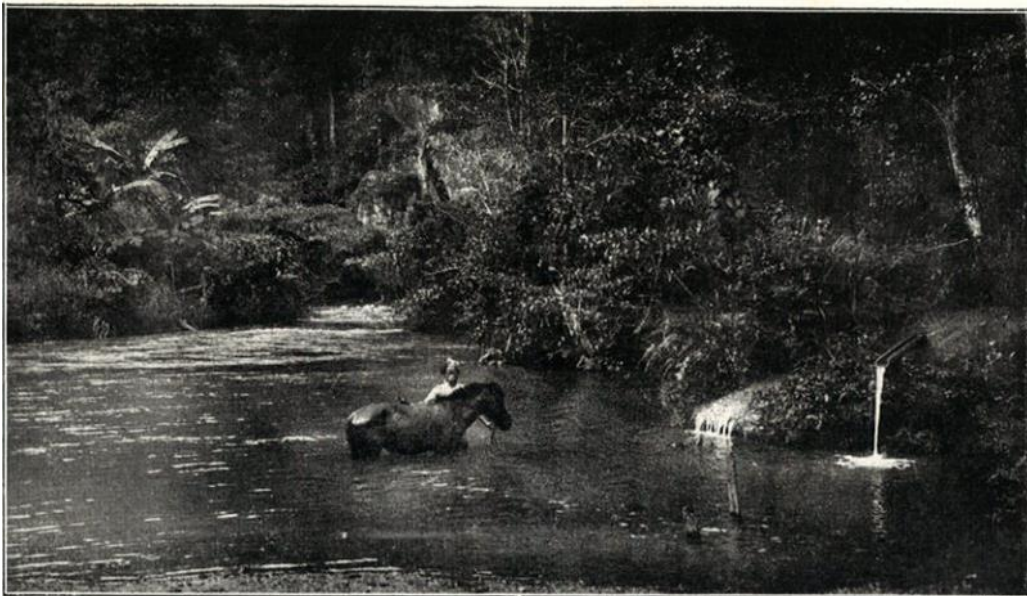


4. Women fetch water from the river with bamboo tubes.

When you see them swimming in the water, only two black dots are visible, slowly moving. These are the eye sockets that protrude like bulges, the periscope of the underwater monster. Usually a ways before that, a little bit of its nose can be seen, raised like a pig's snout, with which it takes in air, and then remains underwater for quite some time. Occasionally it also raises part of its serrated back above the water. No matter how many times a Poso person has seen such a sight, as soon as one is spotted people follow the animal's movements with rapt attention.

When a person does get caught, usually it's because of carelessness. Then the whole village is in turmoil. Men go out in boats in all directions to search for any remains of the unfortunate. Usually none are found. When crossing a river, the necessary precautions are taken; the rotten barricades at the bathing places are rebuilt; when fetching water, one looks to every side; people do not venture in small boats. But after a month the impression made by the incident has completely faded, and people are once again as carefree as before.

[p. 6]



5. When bathing his horse, a man has to be careful not be crept up on by a crocodile.





6. *Mosango*, fishing with plunge baskets, which must be thrust quickly into the water.

[p. 5] In addition to the terror that the [p. 7] accident caused, I noticed that it also gave a certain relief, if someone had been killed by a crocodile. People had the feeling: Now the powers of the water have had their sacrifice; now they are happy and will not have one of us removed by a crocodile any time soon.

There are times when these animals can act very brutally. Then they even pull people out of a boat by grabbing them by the arm with which they are paddling through the water. This also happened to one of our Minahassan teachers. In the blink of an eye, he was pulled out of the vessel and disappeared into the depths. But no Poso person was surprised that this had happened; this teacher had shot so many crocodiles that the tribesmen of the slaughtered animals had avenged themselves.

The reason why this man had hunted crocodiles was a provision made by the administration at the time when these beasts caused so many casualties, that an adult crocodile killed would be paid a bounty of *f* 10.–, for smaller specimens *f* 5.– and *f* 2.50, and for a crocodile egg a quarter. These high bounties did not lead Poso people to hunt these animals. We'll learn the reason for that later. It was just outsiders who were seduced by it.

Such measures by the administration were often taken completely the wrong way. So it also went with the bounties on crocodiles. Once the following happened to me:

For a few days it had rained heavily, so that the water level in the Poso River was high. Then I received a visit from a man who shared his distress with me that the high water had caused him a great loss. When I asked more about the nature of his damage, he said: "I had caught a nest of at least twenty newly hatched crocodiles. I thought, I'll raise them, and when they're grown, I'll sell them to the administrative officer. So I made an enclosure in the river and let the critters loose in it. I enclosed it on the top too, otherwise they might work their way over the edge. But then the water rose, submerging even the top underwater; Then the critters couldn't breathe, and now they're all dead."

## 2. The crocodile as a blood relative of people

Celebes has always attracted the attention of naturalists, because the fauna on this large island has its own character. Some animal species are only found on Celebes. With regard to the crocodiles, it is remarkable that these animals also occur in Lake Poso, which is 500 meters above sea level, while the water from this lake forcibly breaks its way through the mountains, and in several places plunges from great heights. It cannot therefore be argued that these animals would have walked through the mountains from the mouth of the river, and thus populated the lake.

Now geological research has shown that lake Poso had not been there before. Where it is now, there used to be an inlet of the sea. The Kodina River, which now flows into the lake, its waters used to empty into the sea. There were crocodiles, as they can be found in all the estuaries. By a great force in the earth, the bottom at the exit of this inlet was lifted above sea level, and as a result a bowl was formed, in which the crocodiles were trapped. The salt water in it gradually became sweet.

The lakes of Celebes are wonderful. Lake Poso is so big that it is hard to get an impression of it in its totality. But smaller parts of it are particularly beautiful. For example, the so-called Funnel, that part of the lake where the banks approach each other and lake water discharges into the Poso River (plate 7). Or when you experience a sunrise, where you can enjoy an indescribable play of colors (plate 8). At these times it is hard to imagine that this large, beautiful pool houses monsters, which have already victimized so many people, and who prevent us from swimming around uninhibited in the lake. Then we cannot imagine that this smooth, beautiful water surface can turn into a wild, dark, mass of water swept into tall waves, which has also become the ruin of Europeans.

The Poso people also consider the [p. 8] crocodiles with interest, because they feel related to these animals. This sounds very strange to us, but for groups like the Poso people who live so intimately with nature, this is very common. For them, nature and everything that lives in it is one whole. Everything is animated by one and the same spirit. The forms which occur in nature are different, but inwardly, spiritually, everything to the natural man is equal to each other. A crocodile is actually the same as man, only the outer shape differs, inwardly they are the same. They think, consult, and speak just like men.



7. The place where water empties out of Lake Poso and flows through the Poso River to the sea.

The Poso person feels akin to the whole of nature, including particularly crocodiles. But not all crocodiles are equal. The Poso people say that some crocodiles have four toes on the front and hind legs, but there are others with five toes. The latter are related to men. The crocodile in the plate on the first page is such a one, because it has five toes. Therefore, these animals will not be harmed if they themselves have not been guilty of anything. Once, Papa i Wunte, a Poso headman, went to inspect his traps to see if he had caught any fish. In one of his traps he found a small crocodile that had squeezed its way into it, to help itself to the fish.

The old man recounted, “Immediately I saw that the animal caught in the trap had five toes. That’s why I didn’t kill it, but I strongly admonished it, and I told it, ‘You’re still related to me, and that’s why I’m not going to kill you. I’ll let you off now, but if you come again to steal my fish, I’m going to call the soldiers from Poso, and they will shoot you dead!’ Then I opened the trap so that the animal could escape.”

On another occasion I sailed on the Kodina River in a boat, in the company of the same chief. He shot his rifle at a heron, hunting on the shore for fish. But then at once, not far from our vessel, a giant crocodile surfaced above the water. We were all shocked. The headman immediately put the gun in the boat, placed his right hand on his left, as one always does when one asks for forgiveness in a serious matter, and said, “It was not aimed at you, Grandfather, but at heron. Excuse me for disturbing you at your rest, now please calmly go back to sleep!”

People feel so at one with [p. 9] these animals that they firmly believe a woman can produce a crocodile. I have met three people in my life who were completely convinced to

have a crocodile as a twin brother. The village chief of Bo'e, located somewhat more than four kilometers from Pendolo, is one of them. Several very old people assured me: "When that man was born, his mother also gave birth to a small crocodile. At first the animal was kept in a bowl of water; when it became too large, it was transferred to a pig trough filled with water; when it became too big to move about, an old boat was filled with water, and therein it was able to enjoy itself to its heart's content. Finally when this space also became too small for it, we let it go into the lake."



8. When the sun rises over the lake, you can enjoy an indescribable play of colors.

The crocodile rendered great services to his close relatives. When the crocodile's parents or twin brother wanted to celebrate an offering feast, or to hold an agricultural feast, where the participants are invited to a meal, someone from the family went to the shore of the lake the night before, and shouted in a loud voice: "Butu, tomorrow we celebrate a feast of sacrifice (or: an agricultural feast)." When one went back to that place the next morning, there was always a deer or a wild pig, killed by Butu and laid there.

"But now this doesn't happen anymore," the crocodile's twin brother said sadly. "After the soldiers came into the land and shot crocodiles wherever they could, without the animals being guilty of anything, they have withdrawn, and they don't want to have anything more to do with us."

### **3. The crocodile in dealings with people**

Once there was a war between the crocodiles and people, the Poso people say. But the blame for that was entirely on the human side. A boy had killed a boy crocodile, cut it

into pieces, and hung it on a sugar palm frond torn into strips, the same way people usually did with a captured human head. All the crocodiles were inflamed into rage about this, and prepared to fight the people, Crocodiles from the Laa River in the east, from the Poso River in the north, and from the Lariang River in the west came [p. 10] and besieged Barana, the then capital of the Tojo region. The animals killed so many people that at last no one dared to venture outside. Finally a chief of the people made peace with the crocodiles. He brought a goat to the mouth of the river and called the crocodiles. They came out, took the goat, and after that time they bothered people less.

Indeed in the old days, when men and crocodiles still knew that they were related to each other, the interaction between the two was much more intimate, and people took more pleasure in their relatives in the water. Suppose for example you were traveling and suddenly came to stand in front of a wide river. You wanted cross over, but there was no boat. However, in the old days this was not an obstacle. In the group of travelers there was always someone who had a crocodile as grandfather or uncle. All men are related to the crocodiles, but not everyone knows this very well anymore; not everyone is sufficiently aware of this.

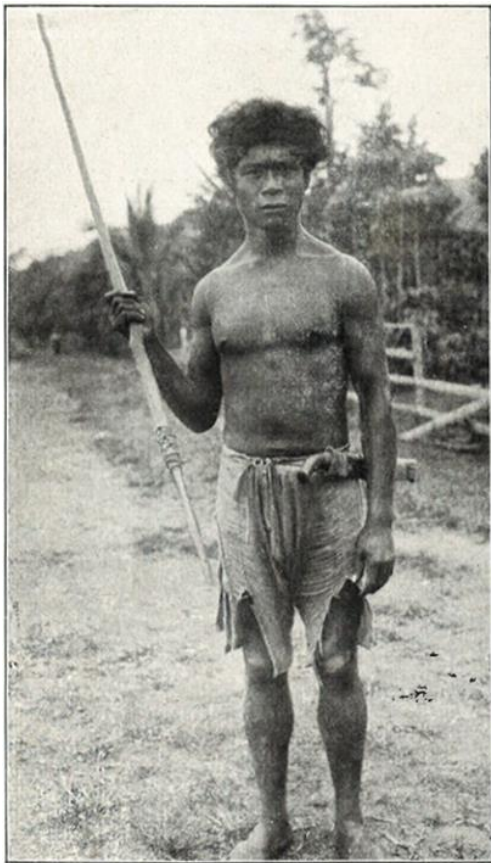


10. Old style hanging rattan bridge over the Kaluna near Mangkotana.

As already mentioned, there's always someone who still knows the name of his crocodile ancestor. And on this name it approaches. If you know it, then you also have power over the crocodile that goes by that name. Two of the names of crocodile ancestors have become known to me: Wuntu and Torio-rio. The concerned person then stood on the

banks of the river, and called out to his crocodile ancestor: “O, Wuntu, I’m your offspring, I want to cross over!” Then it didn’t take long, they say, for a crocodile to surface and swim to the shore. If the beast held its mouth open, one could readily limb on its back and be brought safely to the other side. But if Wuntu kept its mouth closed, it would be better not to use it as a vehicle, for the closed snout was a sign that one of the ‘descendants’ had done evil, and for that evil he would be punished. It also happened that when the help of the crocodile was enlisted, people saw a tree trunk drifting down the river, that would run aground somewhere on the shore. This was then the crocodile ancestor, who had turned itself into a tree trunk. People could then sit on it and use it to boat to the other side. [p. 11]

This is now all in the past, and men were forced to build bridges over the rivers so as not to run the chance of being dragged by the current or seized by a crocodile. Such a bridge was made of a kind of thick rattan. When the river to be bridged was not too wide, a rope was swung to the other side at the end of which a rattan line was attached. If the river was too wide, a strong man had to bring the lines swimming to the other side. These rattans were firmly attached to trees: four or five lines were lashed to each other, creating a floor where the feet could tread. A similar set of lines was strung at a man’s height above the first. These two lines were connected with hoops to which handrails were attached, and then you had a fine tube bridge (plate 10).



11. Armed to strike.

In that ancient age people and crocodiles lived in peace with each other; the inhabitants of different villages did not harm each other, if no party had given rise to it. The bounty that the Government paid for the death of crocodiles could not entice the real Poso person to hunt these animals and thus invite the revenge of these monsters on their heads.

Otherwise it happened, when a fellow villager had been caught by such an animal, or when it repeatedly took domesticated animals, then blood revenge had to be taken. Animated by a sense of revenge, for several days they were sent with spear in hand to places where crocodiles tended to congregate, in order to immediately thrust the weapon in its body if such an beast showed itself (plate 11). Thus a man once surprised a crocodile in a creek, along which the animal always approached the village to catch a dog, a pig, or a goat. Immediately he struck, but the weapon didn't pierce the hard skin. Then again, but again in vain. The man immediately thought, a magic force must be making the animal invincible. Then he shouted, "You have great guilt, because you stole my dog, my pig and my goat!" He struck again and the spear penetrated the animal's body and killed it. The man was convinced that his accusation had rendered the crocodile powerless; and the outcome also showed that he had rightly accused the animal (plate 13).

People standing on guard soon get bored, and once the first violent sense of revenge has cooled, people also lack the strength to continue such work. But people try to get the culprit in another way. At the spot where there appear to be traces of the crocodiles arriving at night on land, a sturdy pen is made of pieces of wood pounded into the ground, closed above with cross-lying trunks. The pen is wide and long enough to fit a crocodile of great size. On the one end is built a small pen, in which a dog is secured; the opposite end is equipped with a trap door. A crocodile is attracted to the dog's cries. It walks around the trap to see where it can penetrate to catch the dog. The only access is the side equipped with a trap door. There the beast crawls through. Right [p. 12] where the dog is trapped, is the hook to which the line is attached, which keeps the trap door open. In its desire to catch the dog, the crocodile pushes the line of the hook; the door closes and the animal is caught.

The dog's pitiful weeping alerts people in the village that something is going on. Some men armed with lances go down and stab the prisoner through the openings between the bars of the trap door. One cannot wait until day, because the trapped animal works mightily with its tail, in which it has great power, and it could easily break the trap.

Once the dead monster is taken out of the trap, there comes the decisive moment for which all the villagers are standing around the animal, namely the cutting open of its belly. In it are hidden the evidence of the beast's guilt. Almost always out come copper and shell armlets and anklets, beads, tufts of hair and other things, all from people who have been devoured by the beast. Then the villagers rest assured that the crocodile was really guilty. They thus had every right to kill it, and they need not be afraid of blood revenge.



12. A snapshot not of Poso but from Asahan, eastern coast of Sumatra, where men think about crocodiles the same way they do in Poso.

#### 4. The crocodile and the spirit world

So the Poso person thinks the crocodile is related to him. The same rules governing the treatment of men are also considered valid with respect to the relationship between men and crocodiles. But it is as if people treat crocodiles higher than themselves. In general, the natural man ascribes to animals abilities which he himself does not possess. Birds know more about the plans of the gods than men. After all, they rise high up in the air every day; they can easily take a look at the gods' place above; they hear the gods talking about what they want to do with the people. The gods use the birds as their emissaries to make this known to the earthlings, warning them of imminent danger. Therefore one must pay close heed to the calls and the movements of birds, for they almost all have something to communicate to [p. 13] the people who live so far away from the gods.

A similar relationship exists between the crocodiles and the gods of the underworld. At any rate beneath the earth, which people conceive of as a flat plane, is also an atmosphere in which gods live. To that underworld also go the souls of the dead. To this end, corpses are buried in the ground or they are placed in caves and caverns, as these are all entrances to the underworld. The rivers also give access to the underworld. It happens that someone falls into the water and is retrieved unconscious. After he has recovered, he relates that under the bed of the river he found a village inhabited by spirits of the underworld.





13. The village of Buyumpondoli with Lake Poso in the background. The story told in the previous chapter about the man who stabbed a crocodile to death, took place at the mouth of the river that flows past this village.

Even for us, who have escaped the childlike representations of the natural man, it is easy to understand that the Poso person thinks this way: Under the earth are gods; that's where the dead people go; crocodiles live in the water, and so come into contact with those gods and the dead on a daily basis. They cannot be anything other than the manifested form of the dead, or they are the servants, the emissaries of the gods. But this function differs from that of the birds. Birds are sent by the gods to inform or warn man of something, whereas crocodiles are sent to punish some evil, which man has done, which his fellow villagers know nothing about, but that the gods below have seen.

Thus, on the one hand the Poso person treats crocodiles as his relatives, and applies to them the same rules as his peers. On the other hand in these beasts he sees beings with a loftier calling. We can imagine his thinking as follows: "I come every day next to, in, or on the water; I have often seen crocodiles; I've lived so long, and never before has any of those animals hurt me, or even tried to do me harm. And then you have my cousin, who lives almost exclusively on his field, and rarely gets to water, who got caught by a crocodile there yesterday, while he was merely washing out his shirt in the water. Surely he must have done something evil, violated one [p. 14] or another *adat*,<sup>2</sup> for which the ancestors or the gods punished him. It is also self evident that nothing happens to me, because I haven't done anything evil."

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<sup>2</sup> [translator's note: Malay for customary law, including cultural prohibitions.]

The Poso person knows very well that carelessness is the reason why someone gets caught by a crocodile. But there are so many who are careless, yet who do not get caught. It is very good to be careful, but that in itself doesn't count for anything if the ancestral gods are looking for you, because you have done evil. They'll still find you some day.

This idea comes out clearly in the stories that people tell about predestination. The people of Poso think that at the birth of each person it has already been determined the way in which he will die. When the mother sits by her infant's cradle, she wants to know ever so much whether her child will die a natural death, or whether he will meet his end in some other way. When the others from the house have all gone to the field, and she is left alone with the little one, she whispers to it, "Will you die from a disease?" She looks intently for a minute at the face of her darling. If the infant continues to sleep quietly and shows no change on his face, she remains convinced that her child will not die by a disease. Then she asks, "Will you die of old age?" Once again there follows a time of intense staring. When a smile appears on the infant's face, the mother is happy, because then she thinks, "So I will keep my child with me for a long time; It will take care of me when I grow old and can no longer carry on."

So it happened a child was born, a son of the headman. The mother had asked her infant again about the way it would die, and to her horror it had laughed at her question, "Will a crocodile catch you?" Now all measures were taken to make sure that the child never got close to water where there was a chance he would be caught by a crocodile. No one, however, thought about the father's talisman that he wore when he travelled to the land of the enemy. Among other things, he had attached two large crocodile teeth to that talisman, expecting that he would now be as strong as the owner of those teeth when he went after the enemy. That talisman was hanging in the house on a wooden peg, which had been pounded into a beam. It hung so high that the children couldn't reach it, for if a child touched the talisman, one of two things would happen: either the wonderful power would be removed from the object by the touch (it would become powerless); or the power in it would make the child sick.

Then it happened once that the headman's son, tired of playing, fell asleep on the floor directly below where the talisman hung from the beam. The wooden peg came loose, and the object fell on the child. One of the teeth penetrated the boy's chest, making such a deep wound that the boy died of it a few days later. So a crocodile had taken the boy anyway, and the decision of the ancestral gods had been fulfilled.

## **5. The crocodile and justice**

So we have come to know the crocodile as the one who punishes man for the evil he has done. Now the crocodile does this on its own, as the incarnation of an ancestor; the crocodile in turn is merely the executor of the will of the gods, who use the crocodile as a court servant. This role suggests to us that the crocodile will also play a part in the judiciary. This is really the case. Just listen!

When something suspicious has happened, the elders of the village come together to investigate and try the case. Let me share an incident I've been through:

Atusi works hard to catch fish. He has set out traps in different places, and each morning he spends a lot of time inspecting them. He has noticed several times that someone had stolen from his traps. A few times he encountered Binge coming from the bank where the traps had been set out. In those encounters, Binge had always been remarkably shy. This was reason enough to convince Atusi that Binge was stealing his fish. An indictment against Binge was filed, and now the elders were gathered to discuss the case.



14. A quiet place where crocodiles like to hang out and where on occasion someone has fallen sacrifice to the justice of the gods.

Binge is asked if he took the fish. He denies it. All kinds of circumstances are brought forward that, in the eyes of the Poso people, probably convince them that he is the thief. But he knows how to save himself from out of all his difficulties. The man is immovable, while the judges are convinced that he is guilty. But they don't know. Those who do know are the gods down there, to whose sphere also belong the fish. "Dare you risk your life by calling the gods as witness?" asks the chief. "Yes," replies Binge. The judge is a serious man. He warns Binge. He says, "Binge, if you've actually taken the fish, confess, pay a fine, and the case is over. But if you call on the gods to testify to your innocence while you are guilty, you risk your life."

Binge maintains his innocence. He shouts, “The gods up there, and the gods below may hear it. If I stole the fish, may the crocodiles take me!” Then there was nothing left to do; the decision was left to the gods, and the elders disbanded. They had spent most of the day talking back and forth about this case.

Two days later at dusk, Binge goes down to the Kodina River to fetch water, just as he had done countless times before. Barely had he put the bamboo tube in the water to let it run full, than a crocodile grabs him by the arm and pulls him into the water. Was Binge really guilty? Not a single Poso person would doubt it.



15. The district head Tadale, who earnestly warned the suspect about making a solemn oath.

So it also went with Tawuri from Napu, a country up in the mountains where there aren't any crocodiles. Tawuri was a brave warrior, a leader of his tribesmen in war. He was accused of a great evil that no one could prove. He tried to exonerate himself against the accusations of his tribesmen by calling a curse on himself: “If I have truly committed that evil, may the crocodiles catch me when I return to the land of the enemy!” [p. 16]

Three months after he had spoken those words, a troop of warriors led by Tawuri went to Ondae, with which land Napu was at war at the time. When the men waded through the first large river in the lower country, the Puna, Tawuri was grabbed by a crocodile and dragged along.

It may happen that a crocodile spirit enters into someone to torment him or her, as punishment for some injustice that that person supposedly had done. I once experienced such a case of possession, and it made a deep impression on me. On a trip to Tojo years ago, I spent the night with good acquaintances, considerable people among the Toraja. The housewife was young and robust, pleasant and friendly in her performance, and also

good-natured. Barely had I fallen asleep than I was startled out of my slumber by a huge commotion in the house. I was informed that the lady of the house was possessed; this happened on other occasions and suddenly; a spirit that manifested itself as a crocodile came and took possession of her.

And indeed: there was the woman stretched out and crawling on her hands and knees through the house with the same waddling movement that crocodiles have as they walk on land. But what moved me the most were her otherwise friendly eyes, which had now been reduced to crevices with a greenish hue, quite like crocodile eyes.

Time and again she went at the doorway, which was tightly barricaded to prevent her from leaving. For once out, they told me, she would surely throw herself into the river, and then she would drown or be seized by a crocodile. She bit at the people who tried to stop her, but not once did she use her hands. She worked the barricade with her head and mouth, so ferociously and powerfully that three men had to hold her. Her brother had wound her long loose hair around his arm, and he kept her back with great difficulty. People fed her with a certain kind of banana and with raw eggs, which she devoured shell and all.

## 6. The crocodile in folktales

From everything that has been related about crocodiles so far, we have clearly seen the intimate relationship the Poso person thinks exists between men and crocodiles. In essence, these two creatures are actually not different from each other. A crocodile may very well be a man who appears only in the form of such an animal. This understanding has led people to assume that there are people who put on the skin of a crocodile, and then appear as crocodiles; and who can take that skin off at will, to be completely human again.

Thus it is told that one day people opened up a field on the banks of the Poso River. Every time the villagers gathered there to reclaim the forest land, they saw a young man, whom they did not know. People asked where he had come from, [p. 17] and he mentioned a place far away. People were glad to see the boy, for he was strong and diligent; he did the work of five others. When, after a lot of work, the youth performed chorus dances in the evening, he always participated, but after a while he disappeared, and no one knew where he went. The next morning, however, he always showed up again.

Now the time had come to burn the felled wood, after which one could clean the ground to plant rice there. The wood was good and dry and there was a strong breeze. The fire flared high, and the flames quickly spread. The fire not only burned wood in the field but spread to the dense reeds growing on the banks of the river. From everywhere sounded cries of joy and laughter from the men, because the fire did its work so well. The more the wood was consumed, the less work it would be to clean up the remaining pieces afterwards. [p. 18]



16. Once people have begun harvesting the ripe ears, the time has come when, after the day's work is done, the stories about crocodile and tarsier are told to eagerly listening ears.

But in the midst of the elation, the air was suddenly cut by wailing complaints. Surprised, all looked around; the cries of sorrow were being let out by the stranger. He rolled about on the ground, and cried, "My skin! my skin!" People didn't understand. Finally, the young man calmed down, and then he said "I live in the water, because I'm actually a crocodile. Every morning I came to the shore, took off my skin, and hung it in the reeds, and when I returned at night, I put the skin back on, and went back into the water. But now my skin is burned, and I can't go back to my family!"

The headman of the village invited the youth to stay with him. People enjoyed having him around, for he was good and diligent. He could soon have a wife, because he was good looking. For a long time after that, people could point out who were the descendants of this crocodile-man, but today they no longer know.

The people of Poso also tell many animal stories with tricksters along the lines of our Reynard the Fox. Here crocodiles also play a role. In these animal stories the great and

strong are always overcome by the small and weak. The latter always outsmart the former. Thus in these stories the crocodiles are portrayed as stupid; they always end up being taken in by the tarsier, a small animal no bigger than a rat, who in these stories plays the role of our Reynard (plate 17).



17. The tarsier, who in the animal folktales of the Poso people plays the roll of our Reynard the Fox.

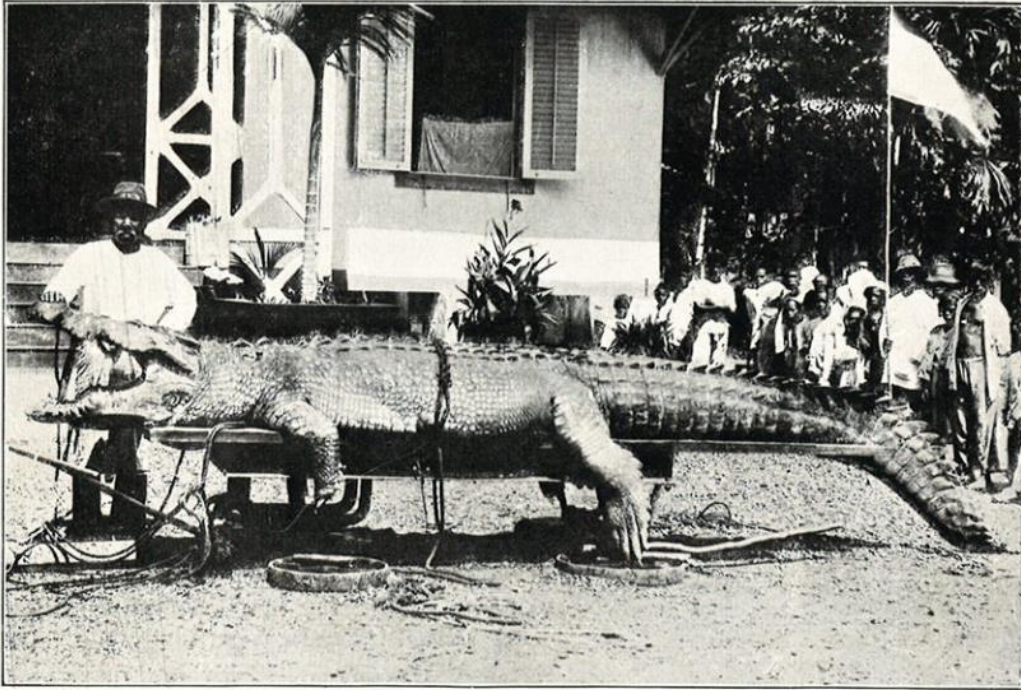
Once the tarsier landed on a sandbar [p. 19] in the ocean, whence he could no longer reach the mainland. While he was thinking about what he was going to do next, a crocodile emerged out of the water, and seeing the tarsier he said, “Ha, now you can’t escape me, boy! I’ll make a meal out of you.” The other, however, replied, “What good would I be to you alone? I’m just a small animal. Besides, your relatives must be hungry too, and it’s no use to them if you eat me. Let’s agree: Go call all your family members, and bring them here in the morning. I’ll also summon all my family members, and then we’ll count, whether there are more crocodiles than tarsiers. I bet there are three of us for each of you to eat.” The crocodile accepted the proposal, and slipped back into the sea to summon his relatives.

During the night, the tarsier did nothing but walk back and forth on the sand, so that there was a vast expanse full of footprints. The next morning an entire company of crocodiles came to the small island. The captain of the troop asked the tarsier, “Where are your relatives now?” The other replied, “They waited for you all night, but because you didn’t come for so long, they went back home. You can still see from the numerous footprints in the sand how many of us there were. But let me count you first. Everyone go lie head to tail in a row, from here to the mainland.”

When the crocodiles had done so, they formed a bridge, connecting the sandbar to the land. The tarsier walked over the backs of the animals, counting, “One, two, three, four...” Finally he reached the mainland. Here he quickly climbed into a tree, out of reach of the crocodiles, and laughed at their stupidity.

The crocodiles plotted for revenge, and watched the watering holes where the tarsier was used to quenching his thirst. When the tarsier came to one of the watering holes and put his face down to drink, a crocodile grabbed him by the leg. But immediately the

tarsier laughed loudly, and shouted, “He thinks he has my paw, but it’s just a tree branch!” Disappointed, the crocodile let go of the leg. The tarsier jumped away, and laughed at the other.



18. A captured crocodile, viewed on Sumatra with as much awe as anywhere in the Dutch Indies.

Again at another watering hole, he was caught by a crocodile. This time, the tarsier shouted, “What kind of chap are you? When a brave one defeats a brave one, he always raises the war cry!” The crocodile opened its jaws to let out a war cry, and the tarsier escaped.

“I have to be more careful from now on,” the small animal thought. When once again it wanted to quench its thirst, it shouted at the watering hole, “There is certainly an enemy lurking for me, that my spring does not answer me.” There really was a crocodile lying in wait for the tarsier. When it heard the words of the tarsier, it made a snarling sound, betraying its presence. Laughing loudly, the tarsier scampered away.

So it came about that the crocodiles could never catch the tarsier. He always outsmarted them.

## **7. The crocodile and the statecraft of the Poso people**

I would now like to tell you something, from which it will appear that even for the statecraft of the Poso people the crocodile is not without significance. Although the



crocodile is in fact a cowardly animal, it is esteemed by the Poso people for its bravery, and a man would like to be 'like a crocodile.' Now the way in which a crocodile lurks its prey, dashes at it and grabs it, is much the way the Poso people used to go after their enemies. They didn't fight them in the open field, but they lurked for them hidden in the wilderness. If someone, unaware of danger, passed that place, they would dash at him like a crocodile and kill him.

Nothing about acting in such a way was found to be dishonorable or cowardly. It was simply foolish to expose one's body in an honest and combative battle. For the warrior, the crocodile's tactics were the ideal. Therefore, in the central attic beam of each temple two crocodile figures were carved, one crocodile was depicted stalking a monkey, the other was shown with a monkey between its jaws. In the temple, the patron spirits of the village were revered, especially those who had fallen in battle. Now it could be that those crocodiles were meant to be the ancestral gods. But it seems more likely to me [p. 20] that with these carvings people wanted to convey the characteristics of the crocodile to the men going into combat.

Now in the old days, most of the tribes inhabiting central Celebes were tributary to the ruler of Luwu, whose main town is Palopo. This town is located on the Gulf of Bone. At certain times each tribe sent an emissary to the south to bring the signs of tribute to the prince of Luwu. These gifts consisted of the produce of the land: white rice, white dogs, white fabric, everything white, for white is the color of sincerity and affection. They wanted to say hereby that people were entirely devoted to the lord of the land. Those tributes were not taken directly to the ruler; they passed through quite a few hands. That ruler was far too lordly and exalted for ordinary subjects like the people of Poso to be allowed to approach him, let alone see him. People firmly believed that if someone saw the ruler they would be dead after a few days.

In the old days one of the Poso tribes, namely the Ondae, did not want to recognize the ruler as a lord. As a result, the ruler sent his forces to this country to chastise the insurgents. When they met in battle, the people of Ondae were defeated. People had to flee from one place to another and no longer had the opportunity to grow rice. Finally, the remaining Ondae chiefs came together to discuss what measures could be taken to put an end to this untenable situation.

In this meeting, an old, respected man stood up and addressed the assembled crowd as follows: "My children, we have come into a miserable state, for if we do not make peace soon with our lord, we will soon all be gone from the earth. The only means we can try to escape doom is this: let two of us go to Luwu, and take a slave as our ransom. [p. 21] The two should not turn to the right or left, but go straight to the target, as a crocodile swims, suddenly to the house of the ruler. Only in Burase (a village before Palopo) should they ask the headman to come along and open their way to the lord of these lands. They must say to him, 'Here we are, Lord, and here is a slave as our ransom. If you want to kill us, you are our lord. If you want to let us live, you will be our lord, we will not oppose you again.' "



19. The queen of Luwu in the midst of her court. She is a descendant of the ruler who granted mercy to the rebellious To Ondae.



20. An assembly of district heads from Poso. The bearded man on the right is a descendant of the headman who subjected himself to his lord whether for life or death.

In great silence, the old man had been heard. All felt that this indeed was the only means of escaping their impending demise. This advice was followed and behold, the emissaries were received in grace by the lord. The slave brought with them was hacked to death in the Poso manner as an atonement, and the agreement was made that the people of Ondae would now come directly to Palopo every nine years to bring a slave as tribute.



21. Palopo, the main town of Luwu, to which the vanquished To Ondae went 'like a crocodile swims.'

This event is still known to people as 'swimming like a crocodile.' Many times over I have used this story to explain the difference between Paganism and Christianity to people. We people all seek to serve God, but the pagans do it in the way that the majority of tribes formerly brought in their tribute: it passes through many hands, and thus we don't know whether that tribute ends up with the ruler, for everyone takes his own from it. The pagans use all kinds of detours, they go by side roads to all kinds of spirits, they use their priestesses and other middlemen; they rely on magic spells and talismans. They don't come to God.

Now Jesus has come and has told us to do this, as the old headman advised his fellow people: to swim, like a crocodile swims, to God. No more looking to the right and left at other spirits and human means, but straight to God, and surrender to Him whether He will be merciful to us or not. That is the only thing we can do, after we have rebelled against Him and done all kinds of things; what God does not will, that we will do.

Of all the Poso tribes, the people of Ondae were the ones who have seen their lord face to face. That's because they came to him, like a crocodile swims. It is also remarkable that when I visited the ruler of Luwu in 1896 and spoke to him about the Poso people, among whom I lived, he knew only the name Ondae; the names of all the other tribes were unknown to him. This was because the inhabitants of that land had come to him, like a crocodile swims.

Following Jesus we come directly to God. Then we see Him face to face, and He knows us by name.

## **8. The crocodile and the proclamation of the gospel**

Can crocodiles, these sinister animals, still be of service in preaching the gospel? It seems unbelievable, but it really is so. Once, one of those animals gave rise to the reason that the inhabitants of a village opened their hearts to the gospel. I want to tell you about that now.

In 1908 I had placed a teacher-evangelist in the village of Bancea. It was out of the question that people would be eager to become Christian. Slowly their hearts had to be opened by the working of the Holy Spirit.

On my third visit to this place I found a crowd of people gathered on the shore of Lake Poso. The villagers surrounded a man lying there, bleeding from many wounds. Papa i Nika, as the unfortunate man was called, had gone out in his boat to check his traps. As he punted his small boat in fathom-deep water, his pole got stuck in the mud. He couldn't pull it out quickly enough, with the result that the man fell into the water. At the same time, a crocodile seized him; there ensued a violent struggle in the water. Fortunately another fisher had seen the accident. He rowed to the scene of catastrophe and managed to scare the brute by shouting and hitting the water, so that it let go of its prey. But how grievously the man had been battered! In twelve places his body had been torn open; especially a gaping wound in the armpit gave me concern.

The man had been laid on the beach and a fire lit next to him, but no one reached out to the unfortunate man to help him and stop the bleeding. With some effort I got the people to carry him into his house. People were apparently afraid to touch him. They whispered to each other, "He certainly did some great evil, that the crocodile caught him!" Then I could also understand the fear that people had of the man: by saving him from the jaws of the beast, they had stepped in the way of the avenging judicial hero of the gods; now people thought the gods would turn on the rescuers, and they would get sick! It would be better just not to have anything to do with the marked man!

Such an experience of pagan selfishness always requires a lot of self-control so as not to seriously infuriate the uncles and aunts, brothers and sisters, and cousins of the unfortunate one. But this would have been unfair, stricken as they were by their fear of the spirits. Fortunately I had time to regain my composure, as it took quite a while for the teacher and me to clean and bandage all the wounds. While [\[p. 23\]](#) thus engaged, I heard all sorts of comments from those gathered around: "Mister and the teacher are not afraid of blood," "If I had to do it, I'd throw up," "Even though you're not related to them, they're helping you anyway," etc.

When the patient was finally tended to, I addressed those present, and to their surprise I told them that I am also afraid of blood, that I also dislike wounds, just like

them, but that I had learned from Jesus that Papa i Nika (the wounded man) was my blood relative, because we are all children of God. I do not need to go on about this, but I have to say that this preaching made a profound impression on people, because it was so closely tied to an event that had gripped everyone.

This accident also became a ready reason to instill in people something of what is sin to God. For this was a point that was always raised when the conversation came to Papa i Nika: he had surely committed some sin; perhaps no wrongdoing against the gods, perhaps he had only quarreled with his wife; or even less: maybe he had just rinsed out his sleeping mat in the lake. The crocodiles got angry about something like that, and that's why a crocodile had sought to avenge itself.

In a world that passes so evenly, in which so little special happens, a case like Papa i Nika's is quite an event. It soon became known in the surrounding villages. Wherever I went people talked to me about it, and it became a ready opportunity for me to share about God's love that has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

It makes such a big difference whether one speaks to pagans in an everyday gathering, or whether one does so in response to something particular. As far as possible, I began preaching by telling something that had happened in the Poso world. There was mostly interest in this, and once their interest had been aroused, they usually paid attention to what I attached to it in connection with the kingdom of God, and His love for sinners.

How did it go with Papa i Nika? When I had to leave him after three days, he was doing reasonably well and the fever hadn't returned. Once again I had the experience that Poso people have excellent healing abilities, because after a few weeks the man had fully recovered, and according to latest reports he is still alive.

After this experience, he was surely the first to follow Jesus and become a Christian? No. In him, once again I experienced the fact that the sick who are healed through our help, with whom we have spoken heart to heart, often do not become Christians. But of the other people living in the house, with whom we came in closer contact through our visits to the sick, there were always several on whom our conversations made a lasting impression.

So that's how it turned out with Papa i Nika. The gospel did not cause a turnaround in him; but I may say that what happened to him, and the gospel preaching following this incident, was the first opening, which after a few years of Christian education led to the founding of the church in Bancea.

It turns out that crocodiles can help people to better understand God's love.

## Postscript

Some of the plates included in this essay were made from photographs taken by Major L. H. C. Horsting in Bandung and Prof. A. Grubauer in Cologne, for which I hereby thank these gentlemen. The other images were made available to me by the missionaries H. J. Wesseldijk, K. Riedel, and H. Zuppinger. [p. 24]



In the foreground: vessels chopped from a tree trunk; now and then people sitting in such boats were taken by crocodiles.