PHILIPPS, NIGEL. *Sijobang, Sung Narrative Poetry of West Sumatra.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981. ix+255 pp. Maps, plates, appendixes, glossary, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth £22.50, ISBN 0-521-23737-8.

This book offers a careful and considered analysis of a tradition of narrative poetry known as *Sijobang* from the Minangkabau highlands of West Sumatra. As a form of oral entertainment performed on ritual occasions, especially at weddings or, by request, for customers at local coffee shops, *Sijobang* relates the adventures and romantic exploits of a hero known as Anggun Nan Tungga. Although recitation is permitted, performances are invariably sung. The narrative is introduced by a half-hour of assorted introductory pantun after which the storyteller, with eyes closed in intent concentration, launches into his tale accompanied either by the rhythmic tapping of a half-empty box of matches or the strumming of a steel-stringed kucapi. The narrative is divided loosely into episodes and an evening's performance will consist of only certain episodes, often specially selected for the occasion. The singing of the full narrative would, by the common estimation of most storytellers, take at least seven nights, or approximately 50 hours of performance.

For the fieldwork on which this book is based, Dr. Phillips has focused on the Payakumbuh area of kabupaten Lima Puluh Kota, roughly 50 miles inland from the coastal region of Tiku where many of the main events of the *Sijobang* narrative are believed to have taken place. In the Tiku region, the adventure of Anggun Nan Tungga (who is known as Nan Tungga Magek Jabang) are less frequently narrated but instead are dramatized in public performances with a singer, and as many as 20 male actors who dance and mime to the accompaniment of pipes and songs. By contrast, around Payakumbuh in 1974–75, Dr. Phillips found that there were 15 practising storytellers (*tukang Sijobang*), some of whom were called upon to perform as often as ten times a month, especially during the wedding months preceding Ramadan. From among nine of these storytellers whom he interviewed, Dr. Phillips chose to study with the respected storyteller Munin from Kuranji, and was able to persuade him to recite the whole of his version of the *Sijobang* narrative. At the time, Munin was training an apprentice, As; and like As, Dr. Phillips was obliged to present the traditional gifts to a teacher known as *syarat baguru* to be accepted as Munin's pupil. The recording of the narrative was done over a two-month period in 16 sessions of up to two hours each, resulting in 23 hours of tape recording, or approximately 40,000 metrical lines of verse which, with the help of an assistant, took three months to transcribe.

Dr. Phillip's book is divided into four chapters with two appendixes and extensive notes. The first chapter gives a brief introduction to the social and literary context of *Sijobang;* the second the background to his recording of Munin's narrative and a short summary of and commentary on the various episodes that comprise the narrative; the third chapter provides a transcription and translation of two episodes, both involving a lively verbal exchange between Nan Tungga and one of the women with whom he becomes involved, followed by a discussion of linguistic and literary features of *Sijobang;* the final chapter examines variations in performances, comparing in detail segments of two performances by Munin, and two by As. Appendix 1, consisting of nearly 60 pages, gives a comprehensive English summary of the Munin narrative, while Appendix 2 provides notes on dialect and spelling and a short glossary of Minangkabau words. The result is an admirable introduction to a neglected but important tradition of Indonesian oral literature.

The problem with this book is that it confines its attention primarily to displaying the formal structures of the *Sijobang* narrative, and as a consequence merely hints at the richness of the tradition of which *Sijobang* forms a part. Without this wider reference, the work offers suggestions rather than insights. Much too little consideration, for example, is given to cultural context, and in particular to the cultural position of Payakumbuh, which is renowned within the Minangkabau region for its preservation of traditional values. Thus Payakumbuh is well known not only for its cultivation of the verbal arts, but also the visual arts, especially textiles. It is tempting therefore to see, in a variety of references a clearly drawn cultural analogy between the weaving of a fine cloth and the telling of a good tale. Thus Munin begins one of his performances with these words of an introductory pantun:

Worn is the thread, the silk is tangled
Trailed over the heddles . . .
Like a workman performing his task
This is just what I want to do. (p. 43)

And he pauses in this performance with another pantun that draws the same analogy:

The silk is extended to the gold-threaded cloth,
Join the thread to the velvet,
Before Tungga goes to Tanau,
I will cease from words for a while,
I will stop the story here. (p. 69)

Similar references (cf. p. 73) also occur in Dr. Phillip's excerpt translations, and the analogy is seemingly extended to denote a contrast between the detailed expositions in *Sijobang* narratives which are referred to as *rapek*, " closely woven," and dramatic performances by troupes of mainly male actors which are said to be *jarang*, " loosely woven." An exploration of the implications of this and other cultural analogies might elucidate the significance of *Sijobang* performances for weddings, or the reputed " supernatural powers " (p. 14) of the *tukang Sijobang*—their ability to charm women, cure illness or cause storms—or the possibility of women becoming *tukang Sijobang*.

A cultural contrast between two communicative systems—the one visual and represented by textiles and food offerings that women produce for public display at ceremonies, and the other, oral and dominated by the formal, verbal virtuosity of men—is a common feature of other Indonesian cultures. Unfortunately, however, Dr. Phillips does not attempt to situate his study within the broad cultural context of Indonesia's varied oral traditions or even within the context of Malay oral traditions. Hence he is occasionally oblivious to points of comparison that might well have enhanced his study. For example, Dr. Phillips notes the importance of parallelism in *Sijobang*, describes how Munin would proudly reel off strings of synonyms to demonstrate his capacity to produce the parallel expressions necessary for the mastery of the *Sijobang* tradition, and how his assistant would comment critically on the quality of parallelism in the verses he was transcribing, but instead of pursuing the evident suggestions of his informants, he concludes that " the subject is clearly in need of further research " (p. 115). The fact is, however, Hardeland first noted the importance of parallelism in an Austronesian oral tradition in 1858; Kern pointed explicitly to the comparative significance of parallelism in Malay *penglipur-lara* tales, Middle Malay *andaj-andaj*, and Minangkabau *kaba* in his commentary on the *Salasilah of Kutai* (1956: 18) and the subject has been raised and examined by a host of researchers investigating other Austronesian languages. Sadly, no mention is made of any of these investigations (for a brief survey, cf. Fox 1971, 1977) which define one of the crucial foci of research on Austronesian and other oral literatures. Yet despite these compara-

tive short-comings, *Sijobang* is a marvellous, though circumscribed, contribution to the growing literature on the oral traditions of the Austronesian peoples.

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CASINANDER, REX A. *Miner's Folk Songs of Sri Lanka*. Ethnologiska Studier 35, Göteborg: Etnografiska Museum, 1981. 78 pages.

The purpose of this collection of folk songs is to preserve a select group of Sri Lanka's graphite-miners' song as a cultural relic for posterity. As the old mining industry is changing and gradually fading away, so also the old culture of the miners is vanishing and giving way to the new technological culture. Technology in its relentless march is sweeping away old values and their traditional expressions in folklore. The process is irreversible not only in Europe and America but also in Africa and Asia. The best anthropologists can do in this situation is to preserve the old artifacts in museums and the evanescent oral traditions in printed books. This is what Rex Casinander has done well in his *Miners' Folk Songs of Sri Lanka*. In his introduction, Casinander has tried to analyse many of the folk songs in their social context with the purpose of describing the miners' culture. The author, indeed, has been successful in his collection of the folk songs. He deserves our gratitude. I wonder whether Casinander has deliberately left out Tamil miners' songs. Of course, it is true that the author's research has been exclusively among the Sinhalese miners; it is not, however, true that only the Sinhalese are graphite miners, for on page 24 Casinander refers to a folk song which " is a mixture of Sinhalese and Tamil and is difficult to translate." More work needs to be done among the Tamil miners. The analysis and interpretation of the folk songs are sketchy and very incomplete. This reviewer is interested in knowing more about the formulaic composition and the origin of the miners' songs: how many of the folk songs are new songs, how many of them are adaptations of " Nelum Kavi " songs? Indeed, there is more room for further research and writing for Casinander himself. Hopefully, he will carry on and finish the good work he has begun by publishing articles on the miners' folk songs in journals like *Asian Folklore Studies*.

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