

‘I am Ali Wallace’: The Malay Assistant of Alfred Russel Wallace

JOHN VAN WYHE* AND GERRELL M. DRAWHORN**

*The famous naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace collected natural history specimens throughout Southeast Asia from 1854–1862. One of the least known of the players in Wallace’s story is his Malay assistant Ali, from Sarawak. This article combines the surviving evidence to bring Ali and his role in the expedition out of the shadows. Several corrections to traditional accounts are emphasized; these include the fact that Ali was not always a collecting assistant, but at first a cook; Ali did not travel with Wallace for the rest of his voyage, but left him for an entire year; and Ali may have collected the majority of Wallace’s bird specimens. In addition, Ali’s wages and itinerary are reconstructed for the first time. It is concluded that Ali made a major contribution to Wallace’s scientific understanding of the Malay archipelago, not just with new ornithological discoveries like Wallace’s Standard Wing (*Semioptera wallacii*), but by his contributions of knowledge.*

Introduction

Alfred Russel Wallace’s eight-year expedition in the Malay archipelago is one of the classic tales from the history of science. As a professional specimen collector, Wallace and teams of assistants procured 125,660 natural history specimens between 1854 and 1862. In addition to discovering hundreds of new species of insects, birds and mammals, Wallace also identified the zoological discontinuity now known as the Wallace Line and, independently of Charles Darwin, formulated a theory of evolution by natural selection.

Wallace’s story has been recounted thousands of times in books, articles and documentaries. Another character in this story who is usually mentioned is his Malay assistant known only as Ali. He accompanied Wallace from December 1855 in Sarawak, Borneo until February 1862 when Wallace returned to Britain from Singapore. Wallace clearly developed a stronger attachment for and trust in Ali than any of his other assistants. Yet Ali remains a shadowy and unknown character in the story of Wallace in the Malay archipelago. This article attempts to shed as much light as possible on Ali by bringing together all the known records of him in Wallace’s

* John van Wyhe (BA, MA, PhD (Cantab)) is a historian of science and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Biological Sciences and a Fellow of Tembusu College at the National University of Singapore, 14 Science Drive 4 Singapore 117543. Email: dbsjmvw@nus.edu.sg.

** Gerrell M. Drawhorn (AB, MA, PhD) is a biological anthropologist and Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at Sacramento State University.

publications, journals, notebooks and letters and other sources. By doing so, Wallace's own work is revealed in further detail.

Wallace left England for the Malay archipelago in March 1854, taking with him a teenage London lad as a collecting assistant, Charles Martin Allen (1839–92).¹ They arrived in Singapore on 18 April 1854. Allen assisted Wallace with collecting birds and insects in Singapore, Pulau Ubin and then at Malacca and Sarawak. As Wallace's letters make clear, he was exasperated with Allen's carelessness, untidiness and failure to improve.

Sarawak, Borneo

In October 1854 Wallace and Allen sailed to the territory of Sarawak then ruled by the charismatic Englishman, Sir James Brooke, known as the White Rajah of Sarawak. Wallace and Allen collected in various parts of Sarawak before heading north to a mining works at Si Munjon in March 1855. It was here that Wallace encountered orangutans. Wallace and Allen returned by separate routes to Kuching, the capital of Sarawak, in early December 1855.

Shortly after Christmas 1855 Wallace first mentions Ali (although retrospectively): 'A few days afterwards I returned to the [Serambu] mountain with Charles and a Malay boy named Ali.'² Writing in his autobiography many years later, Wallace described Ali:

When I was at Sarawak in 1855 I engaged a Malay boy named Ali as a personal servant, and also to help me to learn the Malay language by the necessity of constant communication with him. He was attentive and clean, and could cook very well. He soon learnt to shoot birds, to skin them properly, and latterly even to put up the skins very neatly. Of course he was a good boatman, as are all Malays, and in all the difficulties or dangers of our journeys he was quite undisturbed and ready to do anything required of him. He accompanied me through all my travels, sometimes alone, but more frequently with several others, and was then very useful in teaching them their duties, as he soon became well acquainted with my wants and habits.³

As will be shown below, Ali did not actually accompany Wallace through all his travels. The term 'boy' does not necessarily refer to Ali's age; the term meant servant in the colonial east.⁴ Ali is very often referred to by modern commentators as if he was a collecting assistant from the start. However, as Wallace here states, and as the

¹ On Allen, see Rookmaaker and van Wyhe (2012).

² Wallace (1869: 1, 132).

³ Wallace (1905: 1, 383).

⁴ Thomson (1865: 32).

contemporary evidence substantiates, Ali was at first a cook and servant, and only gradually became a collecting assistant. Eventually he would become Wallace's chief assistant or 'head man'.

The ethnography of Sarawak peoples is very complex.⁵ It is not known exactly which group of people Ali came from. We cannot be sure that what Wallace meant by calling him 'Malay' would be exactly the same as current usage. It does mean that we can exclude peoples distinct enough for Wallace to have called by a different name, such as the indigenous Dayak. To be called 'Malay' by Wallace it is likely that Ali was from the groups of Muslims living in various small villages of houses on stilts along the Sarawak River (Fig. 1).⁶ He may also have come from the village of Santubong where Wallace stayed in February 1855. Ali was perhaps about 15 years old, dark, short of stature with black hair and brown eyes. He would have grown up on and around boats. He would have spoken the local dialect of Malay and was probably unable to read or write.

A contemporary English resident described the dress of the Malays at Sarawak.

The clothes worn by the Malay men and women are very graceful, and suitable to the climate. The men use a handkerchief of some dark colour, edged with gold lace or fringe, twisted into a turban, round their heads — loose trousers, of striped cotton or silk, according to the wealth of the

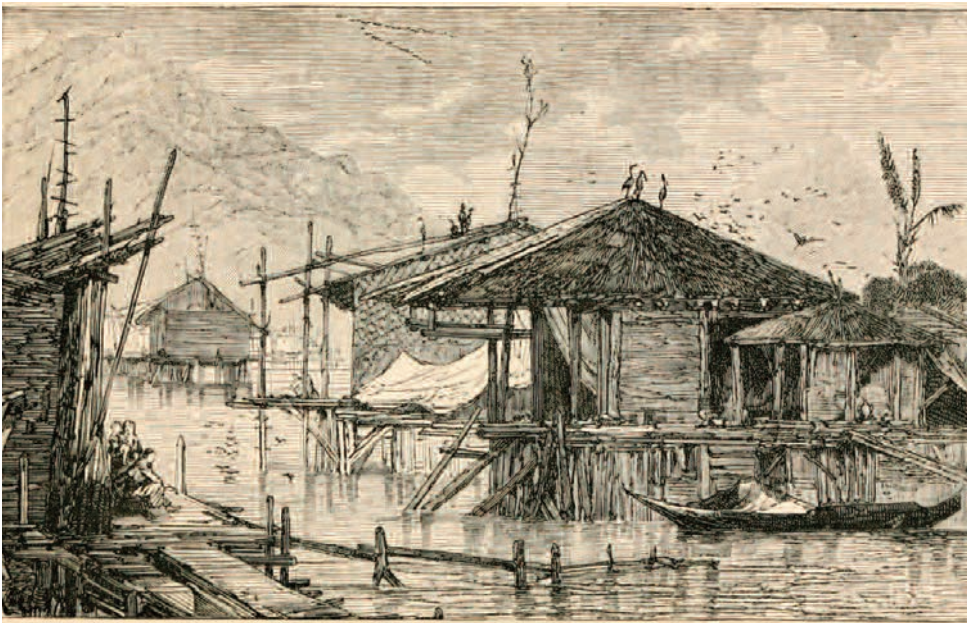


FIG. 1. 'A village in Borneo' (Source: Kingston 1871: 550)

⁵ King (1993).

wearer — a white calico or silk jacket — and a sarong or long scarf, sewn together at the ends, which the Malay women weave in pretty checks or tartans, gathered in graceful folds round the waist — and, sticking up from this last, is the *cris*, without which no Malay gentleman would consider himself dressed, though the poorer sort sometimes wear a *parang* or long knife, for cutting jungle, in its stead. They use neither shoes nor stockings.⁷

Singapore

On 10 February 1856 Wallace departed forever from Sarawak. Charles Allen chose to stay behind and try to become a teacher at the Christian mission. Wallace wrote to his sister about the loss of Allen: ‘I must now try and teach a China boy to collect and pin insects.’⁸ This underlines the fact that Ali was not doing such duties. Wallace took Ali with him to Singapore. We have no information about what Wallace and Ali might have discussed. Was Ali prepared to leave his homeland for several years or even forever? We don’t know.

They arrived at Singapore on 17 February 1856 and stayed for 96 days. We have no record of what Ali thought of the bustling and exotic entrepôt of Singapore. It was far bigger and more complex than anything he had ever seen before. But as the lingua franca on the streets was Malay, he would have had little difficulty communicating. We know from a recollection by Wallace (mentioned below) that at some point during their stay Ali saw a live tiger. This was likely the tiger captured alive on Bukit Timah on 10 May and put on public display.⁹ This and possibly other tiger sightings formed the basis of some tall tales Ali would later tell in the Moluccas.

Lombok

Wallace’s next voyage was from Singapore to the island of Lombok, stopping en route at Bali for two days. Wallace noted that he took with him ‘my two servants, Ali, the Malay lad from Borneo, and Manuel [Fernandez], a Portuguese of Malacca accustomed to bird-skinning’.¹⁰ They arrived at Ampanam, a trading town on the west coast of Lombok, on 17 June 1856. Wallace was assisted by a resident English merchant named Joseph Carter. On 22 June Wallace noted in his *Journal* that together with Carter and ‘Mr V. (the dutchman) & my men Manuel & Ali with other servants to the hills at the N. side of the bay for a picnic. Similar country, numerous rivers – Pretty place – A few birds & insects – Home evening.’¹¹

⁷ McDougall (1854: 37–8).

⁸ Wallace to F. Sims, 20 Feb. 1856, in van Wyhe and Rookmaaker (2013: 58).

⁹ *Straits Times*, 13 May 1856, p. 5. See van Wyhe (2013: 142–4).

¹⁰ Wallace (1869: 1, 242). A ‘plant collector’ named Emanuel Fernandez from Malacca was mentioned by the botanist William Griffith (1847: xxix–xxx).

¹¹ *Journal* 1, 7. Linnean Society of London MS178a.

Once the collecting operations got under way, Fernandez shot and skinned birds but, as far as Wallace recorded, the young Ali cooked, collected wood and fetched water. A few days later, Wallace went south to a sheltered harbour called Labuan Tring where he stayed in a house built on six-foot stilts owned by a Malay man named Inchi Daud from Amboyna. Wallace wrote later:

One evening I heard Manuel, Ali, and a Malay man whispering earnestly together outside the door, and could distinguish various allusions to ‘krisses’, throat-cutting, heads, &c. &c. At length Manuel came in, looking very solemn and frightened, and said to me in English, ‘Sir—must take care;—no safe here;—want cut throat.’¹²

A rumour was abroad that the local Rajah had ‘just sent down an order to the village that they were to get a certain number of heads for an offering in the temples to secure a good crop of paddy’. It should be noted that Fernandez, as Wallace takes care to indicate, spoke in English, perhaps because it was a language unintelligible to everyone else around. Because of the rumour, Fernandez wanted Wallace to accompany him out shooting birds and ‘Ali was afraid to go and look for firewood without a companion, and would not even fetch water from the well a few yards behind the house unless armed with an enormous spear.’¹³

In August Wallace and his team together with another Westerner, named Clunies Ross, set off to visit the village of Coupang in the interior of the island. Ali and Fernandez followed later in the day on foot, guiding the packhorse with Wallace’s supplies. When leaving the following day, Wallace wished to ask their host for ‘a horse for Ali, who was lame’.¹⁴ When they departed, Wallace noted ‘I gave Ali my horse & started on foot, but a little way on he mounted behind Mr Ross’ groom & we got home very well though rather hot & tired.’¹⁵

Near the end of August Wallace wrote in his *Journal* that Fernandez had left his employ: ‘I was now therefore again left alone to work at all the various branches of Natural History in which I feel interested.’ Note that Wallace says he was thus alone in collecting and preparing. Yet it is at this point that we hear for the first time of Ali helping in the operations. ‘However Ali has learnt to skin a little & I must make him work exclusively at it when I get to a productive ornithological region.’¹⁶ Thus it seems that Ali first contributed to the specimen assembly line, if only tentatively, in Lombok.

¹² Wallace (1869: 1, 252). Almost identical to the original *Journal* passage.

¹³ *Journal* 1, 13. Linnean Society of London MS178a. On Clunies Ross see van Wyhe (2013: 153).

¹⁴ Wallace (1869: 1, 262).

¹⁵ *Journal* 1, 24. Linnean Society of London MS178a.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*: 29.

Macassar, Celebes

Wallace and Ali left Lombok on a trading schooner heading for the Dutch port of Macassar on Celebes. There were no hotels, so they stayed at the Societeit De Harmonie, a gentleman's club. Later they moved inland to a hut called Mamajam near the estate of a Dutch merchant friend named Willem Leendert Mesman. Wallace recorded in his *Journal*:

This is not a very healthy season to arrive in Macassar. My boy Ali had hardly been a day on shore before he was attacked by fever, which put me to more than usual inconvenience as at the house where I was staying nothing could be got from the servants but meals at certain hours. After having cured Ali & with much difficulty got another servant I was no sooner settled in my country house that he was attacked with the same disease, & having a wife in town left me. Hardly was he gone when I fell ill myself with strong intermittent fever every other day. In about a week I got over it by a liberal use of quinine, when scarcely was I on my legs that Ali again became worse than ever. His fever attacked him every day, but early in the morning he was pretty well and then managed to cook me enough for the day. However now after another week I have cured him.¹⁷

Ali was thus still a cook, at least partially. Wallace presumably treated him with quinine. Wallace hired two additional local servants, including one to shoot, but he noted: 'Ali had by this time become a pretty good bird-skinner, so that I was fairly supplied with servants.'¹⁸

So far there had been no mention of Ali shooting or collecting anything himself. Yet it was about this time that Ali seems to have taken to shooting. In the *Malay Archipelago* Wallace described setting out from Mamajam with 'Ali and Baderoon with a gun each, Baso carrying our provisions and my insect-box, while I took only my net and collecting-bottle and determined to devote myself wholly to the insects'.¹⁹ This became the usual practice for the rest of the voyage. Wallace normally left the shooting of birds to his assistants, whereas he concentrated on insects. It has sometimes been claimed that Ali collected or pinned insects.²⁰ This is entirely possible, but Wallace never mentioned Ali doing any collecting or preparing of insects.

Macassar was an unhealthy place for Ali. The fever struck him again. 'My Malay boy Ali was affected with the same illness, and as he was my chief bird-skinner I got on but slowly with my collections.'²¹

¹⁷ Ibid.: 34.

¹⁸ Wallace (1869: 1, 337).

¹⁹ Ibid.: 339. See van Wyhe (2015).

²⁰ Brackman (1980); Camerini (1996).

²¹ Wallace (1869: 1, 348).

Aru Islands

Wallace’s next expedition was to take a passage on a native prau which would sail 1,000 miles to the east to the remote Aru islands between New Guinea and Australia in search of Birds of Paradise. Wallace’s team of assistants consisted of ‘my three boys’ whom he described in the *Malay Archipelago*:

My own servants were three in number. Ali, the Malay boy whom I had picked up in Borneo, was my head man. He had already been with me a year, could turn his hand to anything, and was quite attentive and trustworthy. He was a good shot, and fond of shooting, and I had taught him to skin birds very well. The second, named Baderoon, was a Macassar lad, also a pretty good boy, but a desperate gambler.²²

Wallace mentions at this point that Ali and Baderoon ‘were about sixteen, I should suppose’.²³ Baderoon gambled away his advance wages before they embarked so that: ‘He had come on board with no clothes, no betel, or tobacco, or salt fish, all which necessary articles I was obliged to send Ali to buy for him.’²⁴ This pattern would be seen again and again. When things went wrong or when a trustworthy person was needed, Wallace relied on Ali.

En route to Aru they stopped at the Ke islands. Ali and Baderoon accompanied Wallace into the interior and shot birds for him. However, in some places the jagged rocks were extremely sharp so that ‘my boys, who had gone barefooted all their lives, could not stand it. Their feet began to bleed, and I saw that if I did not want them completely lamed it would be wise to turn back.’²⁵

On reaching the Aru islands on 8 January 1857 the collecting continued. At one locale Wallace rented accommodation in ‘a house or rather small shed’ and ‘My boys had fixed a cookery place under a tree close by, & the boat served for all our stores & for them to sleep in.’²⁶ At another locale Wallace and his team stayed with some natives in the interior. Wallace rented accommodation in a large house. The landlords and their friends and relatives crowded the house to see the strangers, making an incessant din. Ali remarked on this to Wallace, who wrote it in his *Journal*. It is the only preserved quotation of Ali’s words in Malay: ‘My boy Ali says “Banyak quot bitchara orang Arru” (the Arru people are very strong talkers) never having been accustomed to such eloquence either in his own or any other Malay country we have visited.’²⁷

²² *Ibid.*: 2, 164.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*: 182.

²⁶ *Journal* 2, 69. Linnean Society of London MS178b.

²⁷ *Ibid.*: 77.

They settled into the familiar collecting routine. In the early morning 'Ali and Baderoon are up and getting ready their guns and ammunition, and little Baso has his fire lighted and is boiling my coffee'.²⁸ It was Baderoon who shot their first prize, a King Bird of Paradise, to Wallace's great joy (Fig. 2). Not to be outdone, 'Ali arrived triumphant one afternoon with a fine specimen of the Great Bird of Paradise' (Fig. 3).²⁹ From this remark it is clear that Ali took some pride in his work, or perhaps felt a competitive spirit with Baderoon. At one point Wallace recorded in his *Journal* that: 'The next day my boys being both ill, one with fever & the other with a wounded foot, I took the gun myself.'³⁰

At one profitable locale, Wallace wished to stay longer. He sent the trusted Ali back to the trading settlement of Dobo for provisions. Their living conditions were not ideal as the local dogs were voracious scavengers who would steal anything edible if unattended. 'Ali had just finished skinning a fine King Bird of Paradise one day, when he dropped the skin. Before he could stoop to pick it up, one of this famished race had seized upon it, and he only succeeded in rescuing it from its fangs after it was torn to tatters.'³¹

Some time later Wallace scolded Baderoon for laziness. The young man took his wages and left Wallace's employ. Baderoon took to gambling again. Wallace recorded:

At first he had some luck & Ali told me he had got plenty of money & had been buying ornaments but he afterwards lost everything ran into debt, & has now become the temporary slave of the woman who has paid the amount for him ... he will now most likely stay here, the year round & if as very probable he gets deeper into debt may remain a slave for life. He was a quick & active lad when he pleased but his idleness & incorrigible propensity to gambling made me not very sorry to part with him.³²

This was the last we hear of Baderoon who, as Wallace recalled in 1867, 'remained behind a slave for a gambling debt'.³³

Wallace trusted Ali to make his own expedition into the interior which was partially successful.

My boy Ali returned from Wanumbai, where I had sent him alone for a fortnight to buy Paradise birds and prepare the skins; he brought me sixteen glorious specimens, and had he not been very ill with fever and

²⁸ Wallace (1869: 2, 226).

²⁹ *Ibid.*: 244.

³⁰ *Journal* 2, 70. Linnean Society of London MS178b.

³¹ Wallace (1869: 2, 259).

³² *Journal* 2, 99. Linnean Society of London MS178b.

³³ NHM WP9/2/3 Lecture 3. On the Races of Man in the Malay Archipelago (1867), transcribed by C. H. Smith http://people.wku.edu/charles.smith/wallace/Races_of_Man.htm.



FIG. 2. Ali would have shot specimens of the King Bird of Paradise (*Cicinnurus regius*) on Aru. This bird inspired one of the most moving passages in Wallace’s *Malay Archipelago*. (Source: Sharpe, 1891–8).



FIG. 3. Male Great Bird of Paradise (*Paradisaea apoda*). Ali collected Wallace’s first specimens on Aru in 1857. (Source: d’Orbigny 1849)

ague might have obtained twice the number. He had lived with the people whose house I had occupied, and it is a proof of their goodness, if fairly treated, that although he took with him a quantity of silver dollars to pay for the birds they caught, no attempt was made to rob him, which might have been done with the most perfect impunity. He was kindly treated when ill, and was brought back to me with the balance of the dollars he had not spent.³⁴

At the beginning of July 1857 Wallace and Ali departed from Aru on the same prau as before and returned to Macassar. From c.11 September–8 November 1857 Wallace visited Maros to the north of Macassar. However, ‘My boy Ali was so ill with fever that I was obliged to leave him in the hospital, under the care of my friend the German doctor, and I had to make shift with two new servants utterly ignorant of everything.’³⁵ There is no indication that Ali joined Wallace at Maros.

The Moluccas

On 19 November 1857 Wallace and Ali departed Macassar on the Dutch mail steamer on her monthly circuit of the Moluccas. Eventually they found themselves collecting

³⁴ Wallace (1869: 2, 280).

³⁵ *Journal* 2, 107. Linnean Society of London MS178b. The German doctor was J.R. Bauer.

in the middle of the island of Amboyna. It was here that Wallace noticed a giant python in the rafters of his hut. He called out to his two boys who were skinning birds outside. “Here’s a big snake in the roof” but as soon as I had shown it to them they rushed out of the house and begged me to come out directly.³⁶ Wallace found a local man to despatch the snake. This episode is depicted in the dramatic illustration ‘Ejecting an intruder’ in the *Malay Archipelago* (Fig. 4).



FIG. 4. ‘Ejecting an intruder’, a woodcut from the *Malay Archipelago*. Ali is presumably one of the figures standing nearby although this was drawn by an artist in Britain after the voyage.

(Source: Wallace 1869)

Ternate

Their next base was the picturesque volcanic island of Ternate where they landed on 8 January 1858. Here Wallace rented a spacious house above the small Dutch town. Their stay here would have as profound an effect on Ali’s life as it so famously would for Wallace’s. It was here in February 1858, whilst Wallace was again suffering from a bout of fever, that he conceived of his version of evolution by natural selection and wrote up an essay on the topic which he later sent to Charles Darwin.³⁷ It remains one of the most famous episodes in the history of science. Presumably Ali tended Wallace during this famous fever, as imaginatively depicted in the 1983 BBC television film ‘The Forgotten Voyage’.

In a lecture Wallace delivered a decade later he recalled that Ali told tall tales to the natives of Ternate or elsewhere in the Moluccas.

One of my servants, a native of Borneo, who had been with me in Singapore and had there seen a live tiger and heard a good deal about those animals, made much of his knowledge when we reached the Moluccas, where such animals are totally unknown. I used to overhear him of an evening, recounting strange adventures with tigers, which he said had happened to himself. He declared that these tigers were men who had been great magicians and who changed themselves into tigers to eat their enemies,—that they often first appeared by the side of a benighted traveller as a small cat or dog, and gradually grew bigger and bigger, —or they appeared first as a man and talked with the traveller, till they came

³⁶ Wallace (1869: 2, 466).

³⁷ van Wyhe (2013: 225–6); van Wyhe and Rookmaaker (2012).

to some lonely place, when they dropped down on all fours, changed into a huge tiger and devoured him. These tales were accepted as literal facts by his hearers, and listened to with breathless attention and awe.³⁸

This was probably based on the tiger in Singapore mentioned above and perhaps other encounters. Maybe Ali managed to impress the lady who would become his wife with these tales.

Wallace and Ali then visited the neighbouring island of Gilolo (Halmahera) for a short collecting trip of about two weeks. Wallace later recalled in the *Malay Archipelago*:

my boy Ali shot me a pair of one of the most beautiful birds of the East, *Pitta gigas*, a large ground-thrush, whose plumage of velvety black above is relieved by a breast of pure white, shoulders of azure blue, and belly of vivid crimson (Fig. 5). It has very long and strong legs, and hops about with such activity in the dense tangled forest, bristling with rocks, as to make it very difficult to shoot.³⁹

When they returned it was time to prepare for another major expedition—and the reason that they had come to Ternate. They were to take a passage on a trading schooner that would sail to the almost inaccessible island of New Guinea, the main home of the Birds of Paradise.



FIG. 5. The Ivory-breasted Pitta (*Pitta maxima maxima*) which Wallace called ‘one of the most beautiful birds of the East’, shot by Ali on Gilolo. (Source: Westerman 1850).



FIG. 6. A White-bellied Cuckooshrike (*Coracina papuensis melanolora*). A bird skin probably prepared by Ali on Ternate in 1858. Now in the Netherlands Centre for Biodiversity Naturalis, Leiden.

New Guinea

Wallace took four servants with him: ‘my head man Ali, and a Ternate lad named Jumaat (Friday), to shoot; Lahagi, a steady middle-aged man, to cut timber and assist me in insect-collecting; and Loisa, a Javanese cook’.⁴⁰ They sailed on 25 March 1858.

³⁸ NHM WP9/2/3 Lecture 3. On the Races of Man in the Malay Archipelago (1867), transcribed by C. H. Smith http://people.wku.edu/charles.smith/wallace/Races_of_Man.htm.

³⁹ Wallace (1869: 2, 16). *Pitta gigas* should be *Pitta maxima*, the Ivory-breasted Pitta.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: 299.

When they reached the remote harbour of Dorey (Manokwari, Irian Jaya), Wallace and his team erected a house and began collecting. Wallace was to regret his stay here as he and his team spent much of it ill and the collecting never approached his expectations. The Birds of Paradise he assumed could be found at Dorey were nowhere to be seen.

He again sent Ali on an expedition.

I succeeded in getting a boat and six natives to take Ali and Lahagi to Amberbaki, and to bring them back at the end of a month. Ali was charged to buy all the Birds of Paradise he could get, and to shoot and skin all other rare or new birds; and Lahagi was to collect insects, which I hoped might be more abundant than at Dorey.⁴¹

In his *Journal*, Wallace recorded:

My boys returned from Amberbaki a few days before the steamer left but alas! brought almost nothing. They visited several villages & even went two days journey into the interior, but could find not a single Paradise bird to purchase except the common kind & very few of that. The birds generally were the same as at Dorey but more scarce. None of the natives any where near the coast shoot or prepare birds. They come from far in the interior over two or three ranges of mountains, passing by barter from village to village till they reach the coast.⁴²

So, as it is all too easy to overlook, Ali brought not only specimens, but intelligence.

On 26 June Jumaat died of dysentery. Wallace later recalled: 'As my men were all Mahometans, I let them bury him in their own fashion, giving them some new cotton cloth for a shroud.'⁴³ This is described in the *Malay Archipelago*, but not in Wallace's original *Journal*. Wallace would later remark that respecting Malay servants and their beliefs was important. 'Malays make admirable servants if due regard be paid to their feelings and prejudices; they readily become attached.'⁴⁴ Up to this point Wallace had never explicitly referred to Ali as a Muslim. Perhaps he thought it too obvious to mention. He had already noted that Malays were Muslims.

Ali's Standard Wing

After returning to Ternate in mid-August 1858 Wallace and Ali, sometimes accompanied by Lahagi or other servants, collected on the nearby islands of Gilolo, Tidore, Kaióa and Batchian. It was on Batchian that Ali made his greatest discovery. They arrived by boat on the evening of 21 October 1858 and set up house near the edge of the village where there was a Dutch administration and mine works. Once the house

⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 317.

⁴² *Journal* 3, 142. Linnean Society of London MS178c.

⁴³ Wallace (1869: 2, 322).

⁴⁴ Bunbury (1906: 237–8).

was in order they began collecting on the 24th. As usual, Ali took a gun to shoot birds and Wallace collected insects. Wallace recalled the end of the day in the *Malay Archipelago*:

Just as I got home I overtook Ali returning from shooting with some birds hanging from his belt. He seemed much pleased, and said, ‘Look here, sir, what a curious bird,’ holding out what at first completely puzzled me. I saw a bird with a mass of splendid green feathers on its breast, elongated into two glittering tufts; but, what I could not understand was a pair of long white feathers, which stuck straight out from each shoulder. Ali assured me that the bird stuck them out this way itself, when fluttering its wings, and that they had remained so without his touching them. I now saw that I had got a great prize, no less than a completely new form of the Bird of Paradise, differing most remarkably from every other known bird.⁴⁵



FIG. 7. Wallace's Standard Wing (*Semioptera wallacii*), discovered by Ali. (Source: Gould 1869)

The bird would later be named by George Gray at the British Museum *Semioptera wallacii* or Wallace's Standard Wing because of its outstretched white feathers like flags or standards (Fig. 7). It was standard practice to consider the captures of assistants as the discoveries of their employers.⁴⁶ This was also done with the discoveries of Charles Allen.

Five days later Wallace wrote a letter to his London agent Samuel Stevens:

I have already the finest & most wonderful bird in the island. I had a good mind to keep it secret but I cannot resist telling you. I have got here a new Bird of Paradise!! of a new genus!!! quite unlike any thing yet known, very curious & very handsome!!! When I can get a couple of pairs I will send them overland to see what a new Bird of Paradise will really fetch. I expect £25 each!⁴⁷

In fact Wallace sent Ali back to Ternate, and presumably also the letter to Stevens, the very next day. The new birds were a major discovery and no doubt would bring a great price. If Ali made it in time, the box of birds could make the

⁴⁵ Wallace (1869: 2, 40–1). The date 24 Oct. is recorded in *Notebook 5*, p. 1. Natural History Museum (London) Z MSS 89 O WAL.

⁴⁶ This and other aspects of the relationship between Wallace and Ali are discussed in Camerini (1996).

⁴⁷ Wallace to Stevens 29 Oct. 1858, in van Wyhe & Rookmaaker (2013: 186).

Ternate monthly mail steamer due the second week of each month. Sending the birds ‘overland’ meant that they would travel along the P&O company mail steamer route that used an overland connection between Suez and Alexandria. It was the fastest, but also the most expensive, route to Britain. It could have made it back to Britain in 77 days. The normal practice of sending specimens back via sailing ship involved rounding the Cape of Good Hope and would take about 4 months.

Around the same time the Dutch Government had introduced a new copper coinage. Wallace sent his old coins to Ternate and the new decimal ones were sent back to Batchian. As one would expect, Wallace sent Ali to collect the money when the boat arrived. ‘When Ali went to bring it, however, the captain required a written order.’⁴⁸ So apparently Wallace trusted Ali more than the Dutch captain was prepared to assume, or perhaps he was simply not authorized to hand over the money to anyone other than the owner.

Ali’s Gap Year

On 20 April 1859 Wallace and Ali were back at the house on Ternate. And already on 1 May Wallace departed on a steamer heading south to Timor. No assistants, including Ali, were ever mentioned during Wallace’s journey and stay. At the end of May Wallace headed back north on another steamer. He stopped briefly at Ternate and presumably saw Ali there, before the steamer continued on to take Wallace to Menado at the north end of Celebes. Again there is no mention of Ali or any servants going with Wallace. He collected there, sometimes with locally hired assistants, until 23 September when he took another steamer back to Ternate for two days (25–27 September) where he packed up all the collections that remained in his house there as well as ‘a nice collection of birds brought by my two boys from E. Gilolo’.⁴⁹ One of these boys was Ali, who may have collected at a place called Maba on the east coast which is listed in Wallace’s *Notebook 2–3*.⁵⁰

Writing much later in the *Malay Archipelago*, Wallace noted that: ‘I made but few and comparatively short visits to this large and little known island, but obtained a considerable knowledge of its natural history by sending first my boy Ali, and then my assistant, Charles Allen, who stayed two or three months each in the northern peninsula, and brought me back large collections of birds and insects.’⁵¹

In other words, Wallace acquired more than just specimens, but also considerable information about the habits and so forth of the animals from Ali as well as Allen. Wallace continued with the steamer south to Amboyna where he alighted to explore the nearby island of Ceram.

⁴⁸ Wallace (1869: 2, 45).

⁴⁹ *Journal 3*, 193. Linnean Society of London MS178c.

⁵⁰ ‘Maba, N.E. Gilolo’, *Notebook 2–3*, p. 73, Natural History Museum (London) Z MSS 89 O WAL. Maba is due east of Ternate, not northeast Gilolo.

⁵¹ Wallace (1869: 2, 14).

Writing to his agent Samuel Stevens from Ceram on 26 November 1859, Wallace remarked rather mournfully:

My three best men have all left me — one sick, another gone home to his sick mother, and the third and best is married in Ternate, and his wife would not let him go: he, however, remains working for me, and is going again to the eastern part of Gilolo.⁵²

The ‘best’ man was Ali. This seems to indicate that Ali married sometime in early 1859. Wallace never provided any information about Ali’s wife or her family. One might presume that she was a Ternate-born Malay. In his autobiography, Wallace noted: ‘During our residence at Ternate he married, but his wife lived with her family, and it made no difference in his accompanying me wherever I went till we reached Singapore on my way home.’⁵³ In the letter to Stevens, Wallace also mentioned that Ali was going *again* to Gilolo.

Wallace made journeys to further islands, especially Waigiou near New Guinea. He finally returned to Ternate on 5 November 1860. One month later, on 2 January 1861, he was off again on his next expedition, to Timor. Again Ali stayed behind. After four months on and around Timor, Wallace took a mail steamer back north. After stops at the islands of Banda and Amboyna Wallace arrived at the island of Bouru on 4 May 1861. But we now find that Ali and an unnamed ‘other hunter’ were with him.⁵⁴

Bouru

But how? As Ali had stayed in Ternate, how did he arrive with Wallace at Bouru? Ali and the other hunter must have travelled to Amboyna to join Wallace as he headed north from Timor. How could Ali know to meet Wallace at Amboyna and at the right time? Presumably some form of written communication was sent by Wallace to someone in Ternate who could read and give the information to Ali.⁵⁵ It is possible that Charles Allen may have helped. He was in Ternate in mid-December 1860 before heading to New Guinea. More likely, Wallace would have written to a resident European whom he knew. The immensely wealthy Maarten Dirk van Duivenbode seems unlikely as Wallace could hardly expect such a senior figure to inform Wallace’s servant where to go. A more likely candidate is Johann Alexander Jungmichel (b.1823), the son of the deceased vicar. Wallace’s accounts reveal that

⁵² To Samuel Stevens, 26 November and 31 December 1859, in van Wyhe and Rookmaaker (2013: 221).

⁵³ Wallace (1905: 1, 383).

⁵⁴ Wallace (1869: 2, 136).

⁵⁵ Wallace mentioned his expected trip to Bouru in a letter to T. Sims, 15 March 1861. ‘In about a month I leave here for Bouru where I spend 2 months to complete my Zoological survey of the Moluccas.’ See van Wyhe and Rookmaaker (2013: 241).

Jungmichel was entrusted by Wallace to carry out financial transactions for him during his absence.⁵⁶

Alternatively, Wallace may have arranged the meeting time and place with Ali before setting out for Timor. But it seems unlikely that Wallace was aware of the precise steamer he would take to Bouru five months in advance. The length of his stay at any one place was usually, but not always, related to how productive the locale proved to be. A locale that did not provide a good supply of specimens was soon abandoned. At any rate, Ali was back with Wallace after a year's absence. This gap has never been sufficiently noticed. Indeed, many commentators claim that Ali accompanied Wallace during his entire voyage after Sarawak.⁵⁷

On 10 May Wallace sent Ali to a place called Pelah (Pela) to see if it was good collecting ground. Wallace recalled in the *Malay Archipelago*:

It became evident, therefore, that I must leave Cajeli for some better collecting ground, and finding a man who was going a few miles eastward to a village on the coast where he said there were hills and forest, I sent my boy Ali with him to explore and report on the capabilities of the district. ... by mid-day reached Cajeli, where I waited Ali's return to decide on my future movements. He came the following day, and gave a very bad account of Pelah, where he had been. There was a little brush and trees along the beach, and hills inland covered with high grass and cajuputi trees—my dread and abhorrence.⁵⁸

On 15 June 1861 Ali went to a place called Telaya and returned the following day. He bagged a colourful new bird. Wallace recorded it emphatically in his notebook as 'Ali back. 1 Pitta!!!' (Fig. 8).⁵⁹ This is apparently the bird Wallace described in the *Malay Archipelago*.



FIG. 8. The Red-bellied Pitta (*Erythropitta rubrinucha*) from Bouru. Taken by Ali. (Source: Elliot 1893–5)

⁵⁶ See Rookmaaker and van Wyhe (2012: 30).

⁵⁷ For example, Bastin (1986), Fichman (2004) and Fagan (2008).

⁵⁸ Wallace (1869: 2, 129–30). See *Notebook 5*, p. 45. Natural History Museum (London) Z MSS 89 O WAL.

⁵⁹ *Notebook 5*, p. 49. Natural History Museum (London) Z MSS 89 O WAL.

Soon after we had arrived at Waypoti, Ali had seen a beautiful little bird of the genus *Pitta*, which I was very, anxious to obtain, as in almost every island the species are different, and none were yet known from Bouru. He and my other hunter continued to see it two or three times a week, and to hear its peculiar note much oftener, but could never get a specimen, owing to its always frequenting the most dense thorny thickets, where only hasty glimpses of it could be obtained, and at so short a distance that it would be difficult to avoid blowing the bird to pieces.



FIG. 9. The Buru Dwarf-kingfisher (*Ceyx cajeli*) from Bouru. Likely taken by Ali. (Source: Wallace 1863)

Ali was very much annoyed that he could not get a specimen of this bird, in going after which he had already severely wounded his feet with thorns; and when we had only two days more to stay, he went of his own accord one evening to sleep at a little hut in the forest some miles off, in order to have a last try for it at daybreak, when many birds come out to feed, and are very intent on their morning meal. The next evening he brought me home two specimens, one with the head blown completely off, and otherwise too much injured to preserve, the other in very good order, and which I at once saw to be a new species, very like the *Pitta celebensis*, but ornamented with a square patch of bright red on the nape of the neck.⁶⁰

This anecdote gives a glimpse of Ali's personality. He was ambitious to get this new bird and had risked his feet and even gone on his own account to try to secure one. Perhaps he also took pride in his skill and cunning as a hunter. Clearly he did not just work for money. He entered actively into the spirit of the expedition.

⁶⁰ Wallace (1862) elsewhere named them: 1. *Pitta rubrinucha*, new species, from Bouru. This is now recognized as a subspecies of the Red-bellied Pitta, *Pitta erythrogaster* Temminck, 1823, and the combination is *Pitta erythrogaster rubrinucha*. Thanks to Kees Rookmaaker.



FIG. 10. The Black-tipped Monarch (*Monarcha loricatus*) from Bouru. Likely taken by Ali. (Source: Wallace 1863)



FIG. 11. The Rufous-necked Sparrowhawk (*Tachyspiza erythrauchen*) collected by Ali on Bouru. (Source: Wallace 1863)

Ali's Monster Snake

Wallace might have enjoyed having Ali back with him. In Bouru he recorded more details of Ali's stories and behaviour than he had before.

One day my boy Ali came home with a story of a big snake. He was walking through some high grass, and stepped on something which he took for a small fallen tree, but it felt cold and yielding to his feet, and far to the right and left there was a waving and rustling of the herbage. He jumped back in affright and prepared to shoot, but could not get a good view of the creature, and it passed away, he said, like a tree being dragged along through the grass. As he had several times already shot large snakes, which he declared were all as nothing compared with this, I am inclined to believe it must really have been a monster.⁶¹

Wallace several times sent his 'men' to Cajeli for letters and to bring him some new shoes.⁶² Charles Allen landed at Bouru on 10 June to hand over his collections to Wallace and get instructions for his next destinations. Eleven days later, Wallace jotted in his notebook: 'Charles left'. They would never meet again.⁶³

⁶¹ Wallace (1869: 2, 132–3).

⁶² van Wyhe (2013: 291).

⁶³ Rookmaaker and van Wyhe (2012).



FIG. 12. A Crested Jay (*Platylophus galericulatus coronatus*). A bird skin probably prepared by Ali on Sumatra in November 1861. Now in the Netherlands Centre for Biodiversity Naturalis, Leiden.

On to Singapore

Wallace and his team left Bouru on 3 July 1861 and took the monthly mail steamer which passed through Ternate on 6–7 July. It was the last time that Wallace and Ali would be at Ternate together. They continued with the steamer to Menado and Macassar before arriving on Java for more inland collecting trips, first from Surabaya on 16 July 1861, and in mid-September they arrived by steamer at the large Dutch capital of Batavia (Jakarta). On 8 November 1861 they arrived in Sumatra via Banka, again on a Dutch mail steamer. This would be Wallace and Ali’s last collecting trip. They travelled upriver by boat to Palembang and then inland using the excellent Dutch roads as far as Lobo Ramen.

Returning to Palembang downriver by boat, they stopped at a place called Sungei Rotan on 7 January 1862 to repair the boat. According to the *Malay Archipelago*, while Wallace waited, he sent Ali and another hunter off to see what they could find. They returned with a large male Great Hornbill that they had found passing food to its mate through a narrow slit in a tree where the female and chick were walled in for safety. A local man later brought Wallace the female and chick and these are illustrated in the *Malay Archipelago*.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ There is a record of collecting a family of Greater Pied Hornbills (*Buceros bicornis*) in *Notebook 5*, p. 69 in late October or early November 1861. However, the locality mentioned in *The Malay Archipelago* as ‘a village’ is identified in *Notebook 5*, p. 81 as ‘Sungei Rotan’. But the brief list of birds collected there on 7 January 1862 does not list *B. bicornis*. The only other *B. bicornis* recorded as collected in Sumatra was a male at Goembang (*Notebook 5*, p. 72), on 17 November 1861. That citation has a pencil addition indicating a female was perhaps collected as well, and provides their differentiating sexual characteristics ‘iris blood red’ and ‘Iris white. orbits yellow white’.

Leaving Sumatra on 15 January 1862, they arrived back in Singapore on 18 January. Wallace prepared to return home. His friend Frederick Geach from East Timor was now in Singapore, so Wallace had a photograph taken of the two together. It is the only known photograph of Wallace in the East. In his autobiography Wallace recalled Ali at this final hour:

On parting, besides a present in money, I gave him my two double-barrelled guns and whatever ammunition I had, with a lot of surplus stores, tools, and sundries, which made him quite rich. He here, for the first time, adopted European clothes, which did not suit him nearly so well as his native dress, and thus clad a friend took a very good photograph of him. I therefore now present his likeness to my readers as that of the best native servant I ever had, and the faithful companion of almost all my journeyings among the islands of the far East.⁶⁵ (Fig. 13)

There is no evidence that Wallace knew any photographers in Singapore. He did know the photographers Walter Woodbury and James Page who were based in Batavia. There were by then commercial photographers in Singapore who advertised in the *Straits Times*, such as T. Heritage, John Thomson, W. H. Honiss and O. Regnier. The original photograph of Ali still survives in the Wallace Collection at the Natural History Museum (London). It was later reproduced, slightly cropped and edited, in Wallace's autobiography with the caption 'My faithful Malay boy—Ali'.⁶⁶ The original photograph is reproduced here (Fig. 14),



FIG. 13. 'My faithful Malay boy—Ali' (Source: Wallace 1905 Vol.1:382)



FIG. 14. Photograph of Ali in Natural History Museum WP/6/8/19. (Source: courtesy of the Natural History Museum (London))

⁶⁵ Wallace (1905: 1, 383).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*: 382.

perhaps for the first time, for comparison with the 1905 published version. On the back of the photograph Wallace wrote ‘Ali — my Malay Boy’.

Wallace made other references to Malay assistants or Malays in general, some of which might well be based partly on Ali. For example, Wallace gave some generalizations about the characteristics of Malays in his 1865 article ‘On the varieties of men in the Malay Archipelago’:

[the Malay] is particularly sensitive to breaches of etiquette or any interference with the personal liberty of himself or another. As an example, I may mention that I have often found it very difficult to get one Malay servant to waken another. He will call as loud as he can, but will hardly touch much less shake his comrade. I have frequently had to waken a hard sleeper myself when on a land or sea journey.⁶⁷

Another character sketch of Malays, although of course a composite of many people, may also reflect something of Ali.

In character the Malay is impassive, reserved, and bashful. His feelings of surprise, admiration, or fear are not readily manifested, and he has little appreciation of the sublime or beautiful. He is somewhat taciturn, is deliberate when he speaks; he but seldom laughs, nor does he openly express his gratitude for a favour. He revenges an insult more quickly than an injury. He is honest and trustworthy in many matters, but prides himself upon his capacity for lying. His intellect is but mediocre; he is deficient in the energy necessary to acquire knowledge, and his mind seems incapable of following out any more than the simplest combinations of ideas. He is quick in acquiring mechanical arts, and therefore makes a good servant for simple routine duties.⁶⁸

There are other stories in Wallace’s writings which only mention a vague ‘my boy’ or ‘my boys’ which could record Ali, but equally could record one of the other assistants. For example, on the sea voyage from Batchian to Ternate Wallace found a coiled snake in their cabin in the night. ‘I cut him quietly across the back, holding him down while my boy with another knife crushed his head.’⁶⁹ Not every instance of events involving the ‘boys’ which did include Ali has been detailed here.

Ali The Collector

For many years Wallace’s impressive collecting total has been cited: 125,660 natural history specimens of insects, birds, reptiles, mammals and shells. There was a tendency to attribute this massive collection total solely to Wallace. It has recently been calculated that Charles Allen and his assistants collected about 40,000 of these.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Wallace (1865: 200). Ali’s Aru quote is cited with slightly different words on p. 204.

⁶⁸ Wallace (1864).

⁶⁹ Wallace (1869: 2, 71).

⁷⁰ van Wyhe (2013: 308).

Wallace's records make it impossible to know how many of his specimens were individually collected by Ali or any of the other assistants. In one instance, the expedition to Maba, East Gilolo, visited between the period Wallace sent his earlier collections back and Charles Allen's collections, we seem to have a locale where Ali was the main collector.

Since Ali worked far longer with Wallace than Allen or any other assistant, it is possible that his own total may also be in the tens of thousands. However, we can only be certain that Ali collected birds, which are a much smaller portion of the total collection: 8,050. Ali was not the sole hunter, but considering he worked for Wallace more than any of the others, about four years, and appears to have been particularly skilled and motivated, his collections must make up a large proportion.

At the least we can subtract an estimate of the number of birds taken by Allen and his assistants. Between 1860–2, Allen and his team collected 1,985 birds.⁷¹ His Flores collection is not enumerated but, judging from the amount of money Wallace paid him, may have consisted of about another 300 birds. If Allen collected birds at about the same rate during his first phase of working for Wallace between April 1854 and January 1856, then we might speculate that Allen collected 2,900 of Wallace's total of 8,050. Thus Ali probably collected many of the remaining 5,150 birds.

In addition to all of the birds shot or procured by Ali, there must also be many hundreds, perhaps thousands, of bird skins in museums in the UK and Europe that were prepared by Ali. Although this work is 'unsigned', it remains an enduring legacy of his work. Perhaps some peculiarity of his style of preparing skins might one day be identified that would allow Ali's work to be distinguished from Wallace's other assistants.

Ali's Wages

How much did Ali actually earn working for Wallace? Unfortunately, Ali's wages are not given in Wallace's surviving accounts. Wallace may have kept other accounts that are now lost. In his 1860–1 account for Charles Allen's independent collecting trip 'Expenses of Galela & Moro voyage' (Halmahera and Morotai Islands) Wallace added cryptically between the lines of other items: '? 20 R. too much Ali's wages'.⁷²

The currency of the Dutch East Indies, and used by Wallace, was the *guilder* (in English, guilder). Before 1854 1 guilder equalled 120 doits, a value Wallace sometimes mentioned. After 1854 the currency was decimalized. Thereafter, 1 guilder was worth 100 cents. In his records and publications, Wallace used the terms guilder, florin (which were alternative names for the same thing) and rupee. The florin was abbreviated as f. Rupee was not a term used in the official Dutch monetary system; however, it was a widely used colloquial name for a guilder or florin.

⁷¹ Rookmaaker and van Wyhe (2012).

⁷² *Notebook 5*, p. 41. Natural History Museum (London) Z MSS 89 O WAL.

There are a few other servants' wages given in Wallace's records. An Amboyna Christian named Theodorus Matakana received f.80 for 8 months, or f.10 per month.⁷³ Two unnamed shooters received f.9 per month. Others, such as Jemati, received f.8 per month. If we assume that the period covered by the 'Expenses of Galela & Moro voyage' accounts was about two months, then it appears that Ali's wages were also f.10 per month. One might have expected Ali, as Wallace's head man, to earn more. Perhaps there were other perks or privileges not reflected in these patchy accounts. Therefore, if Ali earned f.10 per month, at the 1859 rate of exchange, this would have been 5 Spanish [i.e. Singapore] dollars or 13s. 4d.

A few contemporary examples will help put this in perspective. The lowest order of native assistant in the Singapore Police Department, a peon second class, earned \$5 per month. Similarly, \$5 per month was the salary paid to privates in the native corps at Singapore.⁷⁴ The phrenologist T. W. Smith offered 'Charts of character, talents &c.' for \$5 each in Singapore in 1855.⁷⁵ Wallace hired a boat for a month at Ternate in 1858 for f.5.⁷⁶ In 1855 a 1-ounce letter from Singapore to London cost \$0.38.

When Allen returned to work for Wallace as a freelance collector in 1860, Wallace seems to have offered him \$10 a month (f.20) plus travelling expenses and payments according to the number and novelty of insects and birds collected.⁷⁷ Allen's finances have been detailed as follows:

The financial accounts kept by Wallace in favour of Allen show that Wallace paid a total of 4480.64 guilders for specimens and 702.07 guilders for travel expenses, making a total of 5182.71 guilders in the account, this translates to about \$1800 or £500 at the time. To put this in context, Wallace (on 14 February 1864) advised Lyell that a (British) mining engineer in Borneo at the time would expect to be paid about £65 monthly.⁷⁸

Assuming that Ali earned f.10 per month as a collector, and less as a servant and cook at first, he might have earned about f.450 or £45 working for Wallace during his voyage. This does not include his final gifts and payments from Wallace in Singapore. Although this is one possible interpretation of what Ali might have earned, it is important to emphasize how conjectural these figures must be given the paucity of evidence.

⁷³ *Notebook 5*, p. 31. Natural History Museum (London) Z MSS 89 O WAL.

⁷⁴ Guthrie (1861: 24).

⁷⁵ *Straits Times*, 4 December 1855, p. 4.

⁷⁶ Wallace (1869: 2, 24).

⁷⁷ *Notebook 2/3*, opposite back cover; *Notebook 5*, pp. 30–1, 36–7, 40–1. Natural History Museum (London) Z MSS 89 O WAL.

⁷⁸ Rookmaaker and van Wyhe (2012: 32–3).

Ali after Wallace

And here the record of Ali comes to an end, almost. Remarkably, Ali was recorded 45 years later during a 1907 visit to Ternate by the American zoologist Thomas Barbour, who consulted Ali as a knowledgeable authority on regional fauna. ‘I showed a Ceram specimen of *L. muelleri* to many intelligent natives of Ternate, including indeed Ali, the faithful companion of Wallace during his many journeys, now an old man, and all agreed that they had not seen such a lizard before.’⁷⁹

In 1921 Barbour mentioned Ali in more detail:

On the day of my walk to the Ternate lake an old Malay spoke to me; he had long forgotten his English, but he tapped his chest, drew himself up and told me he was Ali Wallace. No lover of ‘The Malay Archipelago’ but remembers Ali who was Wallace’s young companion on many a hazardous journey. After my return a letter from Mr. Wallace speaks of his envy of my having so recently met his old associate.⁸⁰

Wallace never mentions that Ali spoke English, so Barbour’s recollection, although interesting, is inconclusive.

In his 1943 memoir, Barbour again recollected meeting Ali:

Here came a real thrill, for I was stopped in the street one day as my wife and I were preparing to climb up to the Crater Lake. With us were Ah Woo with his butterfly net, Indit and Bandoung, our well-trained Javanese collectors, with shotguns, cloth bags, and a vasculum for carrying the birds. We were stopped by a wizened old Malay man. I can see him now, with a faded blue fez on his head. He said, ‘I am Ali Wallace’. I knew at once that there stood before me Wallace’s faithful companion of many years, the boy who not only helped him collect but nursed him when he was sick. We took his photograph and sent it to Wallace when we got home. He wrote me a delightful letter acknowledging it and reminiscing over the time when Ali had saved his life, nursing him through a terrific attack of malaria. This letter I have managed to lose, to my eternal chagrin.⁸¹

A 1908 letter from Wallace to Barbour survives in the Harvard University Archives.⁸² In it Wallace briefly thanks Barbour for his letter informing him of meeting Mr van Duivenbode and Ali on Ternate. However, Wallace indicates that he was sent a photo of Dorey natives and regrets not receiving a photo of Ali instead. So

⁷⁹ Barbour (1912: 39).

⁸⁰ Barbour (1921: 43).

⁸¹ Barbour (1943: 42).

⁸² Wallace to Barbour, 21 February 1908, WCP 4257.4369 in Beccaloni (2013).

Barbour's recollection in 1943 might have been mistaken. Barbour's mention of Ali saving Wallace's life is found nowhere in Wallace's writings.

As the attributed quotation 'I am Ali Wallace' is also from memory; even though essentially the same as that given by Barbour in 1921, it may not be entirely accurate. It is unclear if Ali said this in English or Malay or that these were his exact words. It therefore cannot be taken for granted that he had adopted Wallace as his surname, as has sometimes been assumed.⁸³ Indeed, Malays do not use surnames, but patronomials such as Ali bin Mohamed. Ali may merely have meant 'I am Ali who was with Wallace' or 'I'm Wallace's Ali'. Equally it may be a mis-translation from the Malay by Barbour or his assistants. But it is impossible to know for sure.

It makes sense that Ali would return to Ternate where his wife lived. Presumably the parting payment and gifts from Wallace were more than sufficient to get Ali back to Ternate from Singapore. We can only speculate on whether he visited Sarawak on his way or how—or when—he made his way to Ternate. Nothing else is known of his subsequent life, if he had children or if any of his descendants survive. He may, for example, have done further collecting work with the guns and equipment given to him by Wallace in 1862. In 2013 van Wyhe visited Ternate and searched in vain for old Muslim graves of the early 20th century. The creep of modern houses seems to have obliterated all traces of earlier graves. Speaking to local people, showing his photograph and enquiries at the Sultan's Palace were similarly fruitless.

Conclusion

Wallace's praise of Ali has often been quoted. But it is all the more remarkable if we realize the surprising number of assistants Wallace employed in the archipelago. The surviving evidence reveals well over 100 men worked for Wallace during his voyage, as



FIG. 15. 'Man from Ternate, dressed in hunting costume'; photograph by Woodbury & Page, c.1870. (Courtesy of KITLV/Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies). While there is no indication that the man in this photograph is Ali, if he did continue to work as a hunter, this is how he might have looked by 1870.

⁸³ Camerini (1996).

assistants, guides, porters, cooks and boat crews. More than thirty men were paid collecting assistants. Ali was clearly a particularly intelligent, likeable, trustworthy and competent young man. He made significant new discoveries for Wallace, helped him to learn the Malay language, taught new assistants their duties, and much else. Wallace's results during his expedition and his scientific writings that resulted would have been very much poorer were it not for the assistance of Ali.

Ali was not always a collecting assistant, but first a cook and general servant whose abilities gradually saw him change into a hunter and collecting assistant and, finally, to Wallace's trusted head man. Ali was not with Wallace for the entire expedition after Sarawak. A significant percentage of Wallace's impressive tally of 125,660 natural history specimens must have been collected by Ali, perhaps even the majority of the birds. Ali remains a shadowy figure, but no doubt further research will bring more to light. Wallace could not have achieved what he did without his 'faithful companion', Ali.

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Ali's Itinerary 1855–1862

Ali's itinerary is largely identical to Wallace's from December 1855–November 1859. In this list, Ali's trips away from Wallace are noted even if on the same island. Where Ali's itinerary differs from Wallace this is indicated with *. For Wallace's itinerary, see van Wyhe and Rookmaaker (2013) or van Wyhe (2015).

Dec. 1855–10 Feb. 1856	Sarawak, Borneo
17 Feb.–23 May 1856	Singapore
13–15 Jun. 1856	Baly (Bali)
17 Jun.–30 Aug. 1856	Lombock (Lombok)
2 Sept.–18 Dec. 1856	Macassar (Makassar, South Sulawesi)*
c.11 September–8 November 1857	Wallace to Maros*
31 Dec. 1856–7 Jan. 1857	Ké (Kai)
8 Jan.–2 Jul. 1857	Aru Islands: Wamar, Wokam, Maikoor
11 Jul.–15 Oct. 1857	Macassar (Makassar, South Sulawesi)
15–20 Oct. 1857	Kaisa islands (Sulawesi)
20 Oct.–19 Nov. 1857	Macassar (Makassar, South Sulawesi)
24–26 Nov. 1857	Coupang, Timor
28–29 Nov. 1857	Banda (Banda Besar)
30 Nov. 1857–4 Jan. 1858	Amboyna (Ambon)
8 Jan.–c.19 Feb. 1858	Ternate
c.19 Feb.–1 Mar. 1858	Gilolo (Halmahera)
1–25 Mar. 1858	Ternate
26 Mar. 1858	Makian (Machian)
28 Mar. 1858	Ganeh, Gilolo (Gani, South Halmahera)
11 Apr. 1858	Mansinam, New Guinea
11 Apr.–29 Jul. 1858	Dorey, New Guinea (Manokwari, Irian Jaya)
26 May–14 June 1858	Amberbaki, New Guinea*
15 Aug.–13 Sept. 1858	Ternate
14 Sept.–1 Oct. 1858	Gilolo (Halmahera)
2–9 Oct. 1858	Ternate
9–10 Oct. 1858	Tidore
10–11 Oct. 1858	Mare
11 Oct. 1858	Motir (Moti)
11–12 Oct. 1858	Makian (Machian)
13–20 Oct. 1858	Kaióa Islands
21–30 Oct. 1858	Batchian (Bacan)*
30 Oct. 1858	Ali to Ternate*
20 Apr. 1859	Wallace returns Ternate*
1 May 1859	Wallace departs Ternate*
before 25 Sept. 1859 c.2–3 months	Eastern Gilolo*

c.Dec. 1859? c.2–3 months	Eastern Gilolo*
1 Nov.–15 Dec. 1860	Allen Galela and Morotai trip
April 1861	Amboyna (Ambon)*
4 May–3 Jul. 1861	Bouru (Buru)
10–11 May 1861	Pelah*
26–29 May 1861	Cajeli 'sent letter to Com. ^p for shoes &c.' 'men returned with oil.'*
4–6 June 1861	Cajeli 'Sent for shoes to Cajeli' 'Men returned with letter, <u>no shoes!!!</u> '*
10–13 June 1861	Cajeli 'sent letter for shoes & Letters.'*
15–16 June 1861	Telaya*
6–7 Jul. 1861	Ternate
9–10 Jul. 1861	Menado, Celebes (NE Sulawesi)
12–13 Jul. 1861	Macassar, Celebes (Makassar, Sulawesi)
16 Jul.–15 Sept. 1861	Java (eastern part)
18 Sept.–1 Nov. 1861	Java (western part)
2–4 Nov. 1861	Muntok, Bangka (Bangka)
8 Nov. 1861–15 Jan. 1862	Sumatra
15–16 Jan. 1862	Muntok, Bangka (Bangka)
18 Jan. 1862–?	Singapore
8 Feb. 1862	Wallace departs Singapore*
?	Ali returns to Ternate*