

## Medicine and Money: Advertising for Malaria Medicines in the Final Years of the Netherlands East Indies

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During the first decades of the 20th century, the lives of ordinary Indonesians were changed dramatically as part of larger global transformations. The great advances in tropical medicine and public health beginning in the late 19th century and intensifying in the 20th century are particularly striking. Medical research by Eijkman on beri-beri and Swellengrebel's groundbreaking work on malaria and mosquito varieties are only two examples. The scientific understanding of various illnesses also led to changes in housing and management of the environment. At the same time, there were major improvements in medical education and greater roles for native Indonesian doctors both in research and in providing first-line medical treatment.

This same-time frame witnessed an explosive growth of publishing in Indonesia. Not merely limited to the popular press, scientific and professional journals appeared in Dutch, and during the first decades of the 20th century, as the number of Indonesian readers increased, a variety of publications for non-Dutch readers also appeared. One consistently important area of publication was modern scientific knowledge.



Illustration 1: Publications of the D.V.G. from the early 1920s

Perhaps nothing illustrates the changes in the nexus of publishing and medicine in Netherlands East Indies

better than the covers of the publications of the D.V.G., the Public Health Service, about Malaria c.1920-1939. It's not so much that the old publications were unappealing, as that by 1940 the covers of the old editions were relics of the past, not yet old enough to be beautiful again. It wasn't so much that the medicine changed, although that was gradually changing too.



Illustration 2: Malay, Javanese and Sundanese editions of the D.V.G. book on Malaria (1939)

These works were what might once have been called public health propaganda, initially managed by medical professionals seeking to educate and protect the public. The 1939 books betray the involvement of Edward Bernays' professional "new propagandists" (Bernays 1928). If these new propagandists were at work, their advertising expertise would soon be at work for wealthy corporate clients.

This article will focus on advertisements about Malaria in a medical journal and in more "popular" publications during the final five years of Dutch colonial rule (c.1937-1941). Because of its acceptance of advertising to cover publication costs, the *Geneeskundig Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië* [Medical Journal for the Netherlands Indies] is an ideal subject for this study. In a brief survey of Malay language periodicals, advertisements for malaria medicines almost exclusively appeared in publications of the government publisher Balai Poestaka, which provide a second area of focus.

## Advertisements in the Medical Journal of the Netherlands Indies

In 1926, a new synthetic drug, pamaquine, was proved to be effective against malaria in birds, and research started on its effectiveness in humans. Subsequently it was marketed by Bayer as Plasmochin. In 1931, Bayer researchers were successful in synthesizing mepacrine, better known as Atebrin. These two discoveries had a significant impact on Malaria research, but also changed the marketing situation for malarial drugs in Indonesia.

From early 1932, Impl, a major medical product importer who handled Bayer products in the Netherlands Indies, was not only advertising Atebrin, but also the combination of these two synthetic drugs as a potential treatment for problematic types of malaria. Not surprisingly, there was a corresponding flurry of research on usage and effectiveness of these medicines by researchers, including early studies led by Dr. Raden Soesilo.

Deel 72 Aftelving 14 5 Juli 1932

**GENEESKUNDIG TIJDSCHRIFT**  
VOOR NEDERLANDSCH-INDIË

1 2 1 4 8

Vereniging tot Bevordering der Geneeskundige Wetenschappen in Nederlandsch-Indië

**ADVERTENTIE-TARIEF**

1/4 pag. f 25; 1/2 pag. f 45; 3/4 pag. f 65; 1 pag. f 100. Op bijzondere plaatsen met verhoging. Reclameaanvragen f 1.- zonder teken gratis. Nadere inlichtingen bij G. KOLFF & Co. Peijssersweg 72 Batavia C.

Abonnement voor niet-leden der Vereniging f 21 per jaar. Bij voorafbetaling. Afzonderlijke afleveringen voor leden f 0.50, voor niet-leden f 1.-, verhoogd met porto.

**De Combinatie**

van

10 deelen **Atebrin - Plasmochin** 1 deel  
(tegen schizonten) (tegen gameten)

genoest  
alle vormen van

**Malaria**

Bayer-Beiteler-Laboratorien LEVERKUSEN a. M.

Importeur: N. V. „IMPLA“ Batavia (C), Soerabaja.

Illustration 3: Atebrin-Plasmochin for Malaria (*GTvNI*, 1 January 1932). Source: Delpher.nl

While the most critical element seems to have been bringing the new drugs to the attention of medical professionals in Indonesia, one subsequent advertisement includes a visual image of pills, presumably targeting doctors who might prescribe the medicine to their patients.

10

**ATEBRIN**

Het nieuwe middel tegen malaria met een specifieke werking op de ongeslachtelijke vormen der malaria-parasieten, speciaal op de TROPICA-SCHIZONTEN.

Met de combinatie **ATEBRIN-PLASMOCHIN** (in de verhouding 10:1) kan elke vorm der malaria, speciaal malaria tropica, met volkomen succes worden bestreden.

Behandelingstijd: 5 dagen.

In den handel:  
Atebrin-tabletten à 0.1 g. — Pl. met 15 en 300 tabl.  
Plasmochin simplex — tabletten à 0.01 g. — Pl. met 15 en 500 tabl.

Bayer-Beiteler-Laboratorien LEVERKUSEN a. M.

IMPORTEURS: N. V. „IMPLA“ BATAVIA C., SOERABAJA

Illustration 4: Atebrin (*GTvNI*, 16 August 1932). Source: Delpher.nl

Later publications present readers of the *GTvNI* a rather different set of images, an explicitly modern professional image along with a more subtle set of images targeting the subconscious. Pictures of watery areas, including pleasant looking, but potentially malarial areas, was one common element of some of these advertisements.

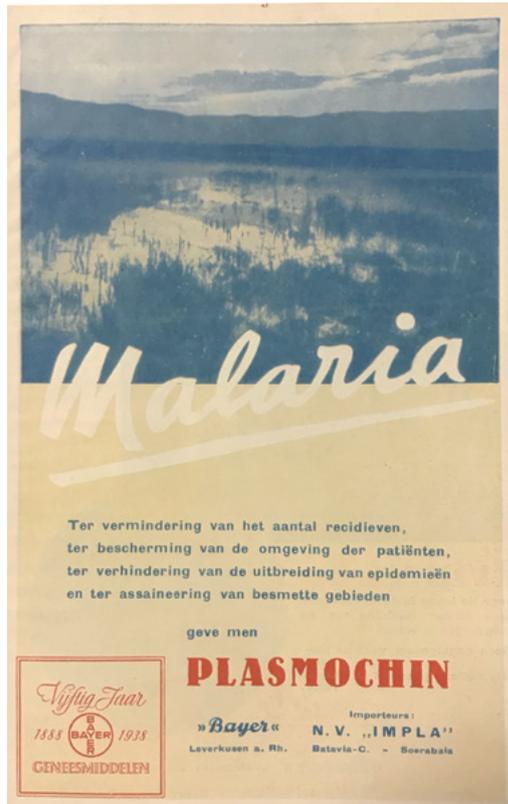


Illustration 5: Plasmochin for Malaria, a common advertisement in *GTvNI*, appearing multiple times in 1937-38.

One common advertisement for Plasmochin (Illustration 5) simply touted its effectiveness in preventing relapses, while presenting an image of a wet area which was likely filled with mosquitos.

The intensity of the advertisement for Plasmochin suggest that Bayer or the importers felt there was substantially more potential income to be gained from this product, and they did not hesitate to pay both for design of the advertisements or for prime advertisement space on the cover of the journal. A beautiful, but potentially malarial scene combined with suggestions for doctors and public health specialists provides one of the more “professional” ads of the era (Illustration 6).



Illustration 6: A cover Plasmochin advertisement (*GTvNI*, 5 April 1938)

Bayer's primary competitor, the Bandung Quinine Factory [Bandoengsche Kininefabriek], published much simpler, cheaper advertisements in 1937-1938. One of these addressed doctors, telling them if their patients have quinine in their homes and just take a tablet before sleeping, they will wake up in the morning fit!



Illustration 7: Stay fit in the East! (*GTvNI*, 3 August 1937)

A second advertisement quoted a physician writing in a Dutch medical journal in 1937 in which he described one apparently successful case of using quinine as a prophylactic for the flu. No mention was made of malaria in this advertisement, nor was there any commentary from the sponsor. This advertisement appeared regularly.



Illustration 8: Dr. Peters on quinine for flu. (*GTvNI*, 4 January 1938)

Another regular advertisement quoted a report on the important Intergovernmental Conference of Far Eastern Rural Hygiene which had been held in Bandung in 1937, which in turn had accepted the conclusions of the Malaria Commission of the League of Nations in 1927 that distribution of quinine to the public was “a public duty.”

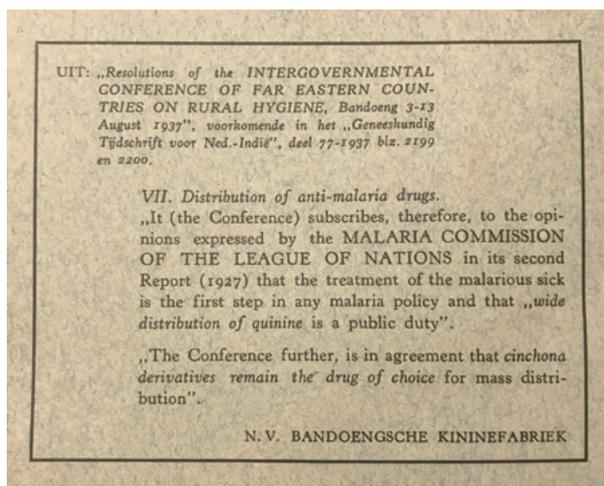


Illustration 9: League of Nations Commission advertisement (*BTvNI*, 29 March 1938)

Around the same time as these advertisements were published, advertising strategies for Atebrin and Plasmochin changed further, now emphasizing their modern, scientific character, and explaining in more detail their medical advantages and recommended dosages. Befitting a modern medicine from a modern

scientific company, the advertising was designed professionally to be appealing to the eyes of the educated reader, and naturally stand out from the rest of the journal with its vivid colors and image of a mosquito biting.

**ATEBRIN**

- de behandeling duurt kort (minder verpleegkosten, minder verlies van arbeidsdagen).
- geeft in de volle dosis geen bijwerkingen als oorsuizingen, duizeligheid, gevoel van slapte enz.
- het gunstigste aantal recidieven (nog meer kostenbesparing).
- zwangerschap, zwartwaterkoorts en kinine-idiosyncrasie vormen geen contra-indicaties.

**ATEBRIN pro injectione:**

De werking is de snelste, die ooit door een malaria-middel bereikt is kunnen worden.

Op de intramusculaire toediening kan men de orale doen volgen, totdat de totale dosis voor volwassenen, parenteraal en oraal samen, ± 1500 mg bedraagt.

*Belangrijk: Thans is Atebrin pro injectione ook verkrijgbaar in doozen met ampulles aq. dest.!*

**PLASMOCHIN**

specifiek gametendoodend middel

- maakt assineeringen van besmette gebieden mogelijk.
- beschermt de omgeving der patiënten.
- verhindert de uitbreiding van epidemieën.

*Plasmochin vermindert het aanzienlijk aantal recidieven bij een kinine-behandeling.*

Toediening: Gedurende 3 dagen 20 mg p.d. in aansluiting op een Atebrinkuur, of in den vorm van **Chinoplasmin**.

Verkrijgbaar: Atebrin per os: tabletten à 50 mg en 100 mg.  
Atebrin pro injectione: ampulles à 100 mg en 300 mg in doozen met of zonder ampulles aq. dest.  
Plasmochin simplex: tabletten à 10 mg.  
Chinoplasmin: tabl. bevattende 300 mg sulf. chin. + 10 mg Plasmochin.

**Bayer**  
Leverkusen a. Rh.

*Wijngaard*  
1888  
MAY 1938  
**GENEESMIDDELEN**

Importeurs:  
**N.V. „IMPLA”**  
Batavia-C. – Soerabaja

Illustration 10: Atebrin and Plasmochin advertisement (*GTvNI*, 5 July 1938)

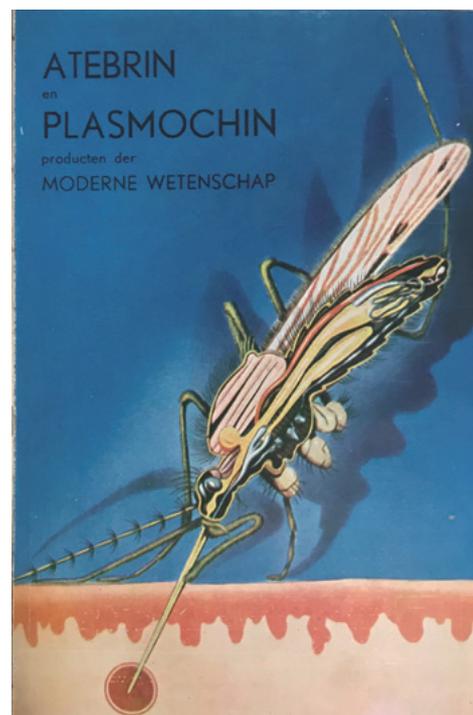


Illustration 11: Atebrin and Plasmochin: Product of Modern Science (*GTvNI*, 5 July 1938)

In other advertisements, images of the various forms of Plasmochin were also used together with a brief explanation of the treatment and advantages for using Plasmochin.



Illustration 12: Plasmochin (*GTvNI*, 20 October 1938)

Another advertisement appearing on the cover of *GTvNI* simply asserts that Atebrin is the surest treatment of malaria. The accompanying illustration shows a medical chart with variations in body temperature disappearing, normalizing to 37°C within a short period.

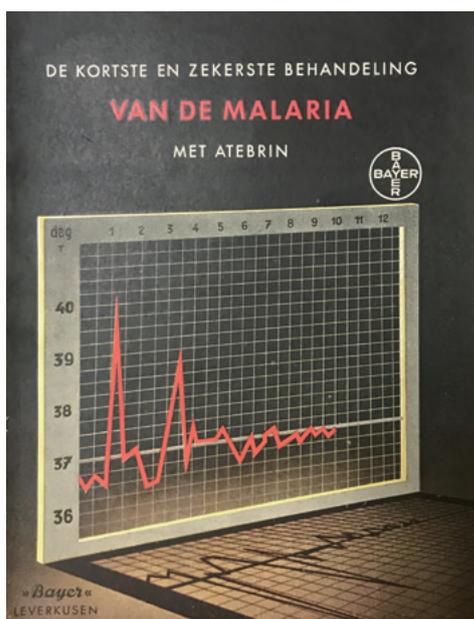


Illustration 13: The Surest Treatment of Malaria with Atebrin (*GTvNI*, 17 January 1939)

A new injectable form of Atebrin appeared in 1939, triggering a new advertising campaign, again emphasizing the modern characteristics of Atebrin and Bayer. This issue of the journal begins with a peaceful rural image and a claim that the “patient also prefers it [Atebrin].”



Illustration 14: Cover of *GTvNI*, 11 October 1939.

Inside this issue, on special thick paper, is an advertisement for the new injectable product, with images of a syringe and boxes filled with ampoules of the new medicine.



Illustration 15: Atebrin for Injections (*GTvNI*, 11 October 1939)

Going one step further to promote the new Atebrin *pro injectione*, a postcard was attached to request further medical literature.

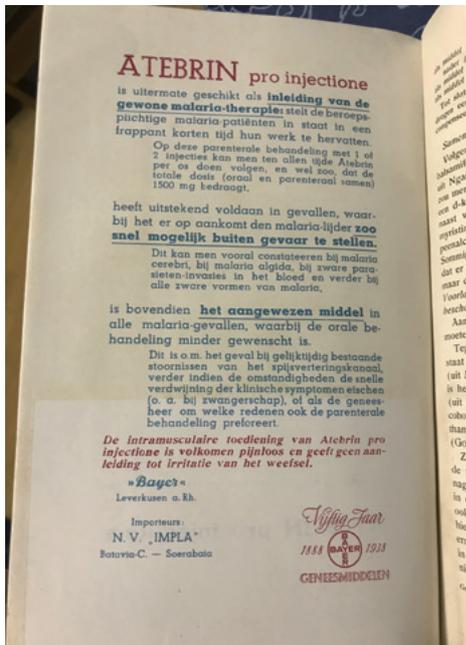


Illustration 16: Atebrin for Injections (*GTvNI*, 11 October 1939), reverse side with postcard attached below.

During the late 1930s, Indonesia’s quinine producing company also produced advertisements with visual images, seeking to reinforce quinine’s position as the medicine of choice for Indonesians suffering from malaria, and making the claim that it was the more cost-effective cure.

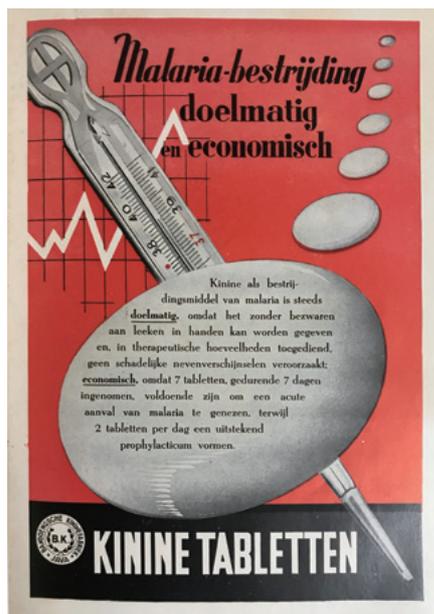


Illustration 17: Quinine tablets: effective and cost-effective. (*GTvNI*, unknown date)

One of these advertisements (Illustration 17) combines images of a thermometer showing an elevated temperature (39°), a temperature chart, and seven tablets on a red (feverish) background. Quinine tablets are described in Dutch as “practical and economical.”

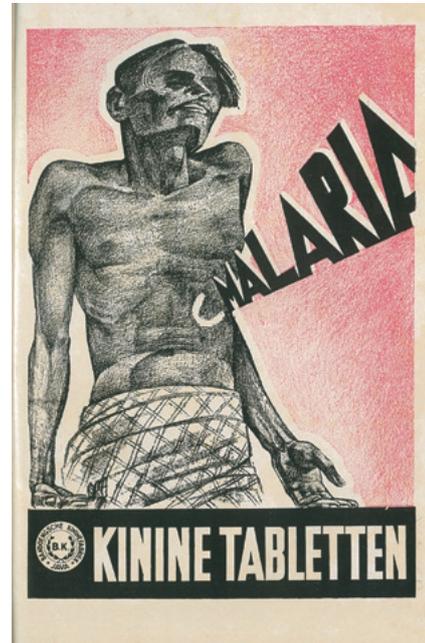


Illustration 18: Malaria: Kinine Tablets (*GTvNI*, 17 October 1939)

### Balai Poestaka and a Consuming Market

Rather than advertisements, from the beginning, Malay language publications were educational texts, like the D.V.G. publications shown above (Illustrations 1-2). It was also common for almanacs and general health publications to include sections on malaria. However, these were not designed to promote a particular product. They also were not sponsored by the producers or marketers of the medicines. However, given that quinine was the one effective medicine, these would still have helped the manufacturer by convincing more Indonesians that they could effectively combat this illness.



Illustration 19: Lah Poenika! (*Volksalmanak Djawi* 1934)

Advertisements for quinine or other malarial medicines targeting native Indonesians were rare, but one early advertisement appeared in the *Volksalmanak Djawi* for 1934. The illustrated page shows a hand receiving pills from a box, while the text notes that besides its use for malaria, it is also good for influenza and the flu. A second page explains dosages.

TJARANIPOEN NEĎA KINA KANGGĒ ANJARASAKEN SASAKIT MALARIA						
7 Dinten teroes-teroesan saben dinten.						
OEMOER:						
1 taoen	2-3 taoen	4-5 taoen	6-7 taoen	8-9 taoen	10-11 taoen	12 taoen sa- panggihil
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TABLET KINA BISULFAS à 0.2 GRAM.						
TJARANIPOEN NEĎA KINA KANGGĒ NANGGOELANGI MALARIA, GRIEP LAN INFLUENZA:						
Toemrap tijang diwasa :						
SABENDINTEN TABLET 2 à 0.2 Gr.						
Toemrap laré: Sapalihipoen.						

Illustration 20: Dosages for Malaria and Flu (*Volksalmanak Djawi* 1934)

In the late 1930s, the Bandung Quinine Factory (BK) began to systematically target the general public on Java with advertising in the almanacs published by the government publisher, Balai Poestaka, seeking to create or expand its potential market. The BK also used the periodical "Reader's Guides" issued in Malay,

Sundanese and Javanese. In its earlier efforts (1936, 1938), it directly spoke to Indonesian readers in Malay. Rather merely than promoting quinine as a medicine for Malaria, its primary medical purpose, the advertisement proposed using quinine for masoek angin, general sick feelings which obtained its name from popular perceptions of links with uncomfortable drafts. The ads also clearly stated that quinine was effective (*mandjoer*) for fevers, common flu and influenza, and one offered to send a sample of 100 pills for f1.-!

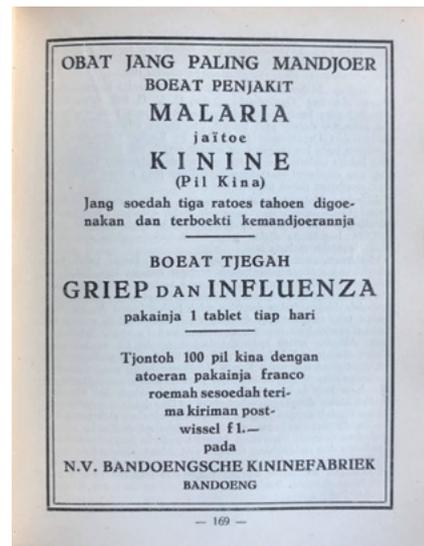


Illustration 21: 1936 Advertisement for quinine with 100 pill sample offer



Illustration 22: Quinine Tablets for effective for general colds and influenza. *Volksalmanak Melajoe* 1938<sup>1</sup>

One visual theme which runs through the advertisements for quinine is the sick Indonesian man wrapped in a sarong (illustrations 22-25), and these advertisements often appeared not merely in Malay

1 The same advertisement also appeared in the 1939 *Volksalmanak Melajoe*.

language publications, but Javanese or Sundanese, which might be read by a wide rural audience.



Illustration 23: Everything about quinine (Pedoman Pematja no. 13, June 1939)



Illustration 24: Kinine Djampi Malaria (Volksalmanak Djawi 1940)

The 1941 advertisements focus on the 7x7 treatment, which in some versions becomes 7 pills for 7 days, but sometimes is 7x7 cents, thus very cheap. Through the 7x7 slogan, readers were encouraged to visualize their improvement each day, until on the seventh day they are ready for normal life.



Illustration 25: 7x7 cure for malaria (Pedoman Pematja no. 17 (June 1941)

The cover of the 1941 Javanese language almanac carried a similar advertisement for quinine. This advertisement showed the same man wrapped in a sarong, clearly suffering from malarial chills, and a large number 7 in the background. Like the earlier advertisements, a picture of a tube of quinine bisulfate pills was pictured with the Bandung Quinine Factory seal. The text focused on medically confirmed use of quinine for Malaria, explaining that recommended dosage of 7 days x 7 tablets will cure Malaria, and that for those who live in areas with Malaria, 2 pills a day provide immunity. A note at the bottom refers to an attachment to the almanac which unfortunately is missing from the copy used for this study.



Illustration 26: cover of the 1941 Volksalmanak Djawi. The same ads appeared on a 1941 Kolff-Buning Javanese language almanac.

Just before the war began in December 1941, a new advertisement for quinine appeared on the covers of Volksalmanak Djawi 1942 and the teacher’s almanac for 1942. These now featured pictures of 7 dose blister packs.



Illustration 27: Cover of the *Almanak Goeroe* 1942.

The quinine factory also produced other popular medicines. One of the more frequently advertised medicines is Joodkali pills (Illustration 26-27), which according to these advertisements, cleans blood and provides for a stronger, healthier body.



Illustration 28-29: Joodkali Pillen (*Volksalmanak Melajoe* 1938), (*Volksalmanak Djawi* 1940)

During the Japanese occupation, advertisements for quinine largely disappear. Short articles appear in 1942-1943 in various Javanese newspapers announcing the provision of quinine pills to particular areas with epidemic levels of malaria. Quinine pills find their way into film in 1943 as well, with both production and distribution being depicted in a Java Eigasha film on Malaria, clearly with the dual aims of reassuring the population there is enough medicine available, and encouraging everyone to take the medicine when distributed.

Broadly speaking, public health efforts, including popular education, continued during the Japanese occupation, and occupied a prominent place in the press of the time during the regular health weeks.

The lack of advertising of quinine for sale could have several reasons. Besides the Japanese military’s need for quinine for troops throughout Asia, it was a valuable tool for international relations (Sakata, forthcoming). Additionally, during this period, quinine was primarily a tool for public health efforts, rather than a commercial product. In fact, quinine was both sold and distributed for free, depending on the context.

Nonetheless, demand for quinine went beyond the ability of the government to provide it, and traditional medicines were encouraged. As early as 1943, advertisements appeared for quinine products, probably using substandard cinchona bark, but claiming to be effective against malaria. On Java, the *jamu* company Bok Basjar sold a replacement for quinine pills called “Asiakinin.” In Medan (Sumatra), Minato “anti-malaria” tablets were advertised in 1944. Some of these may have contained herbal alternatives.

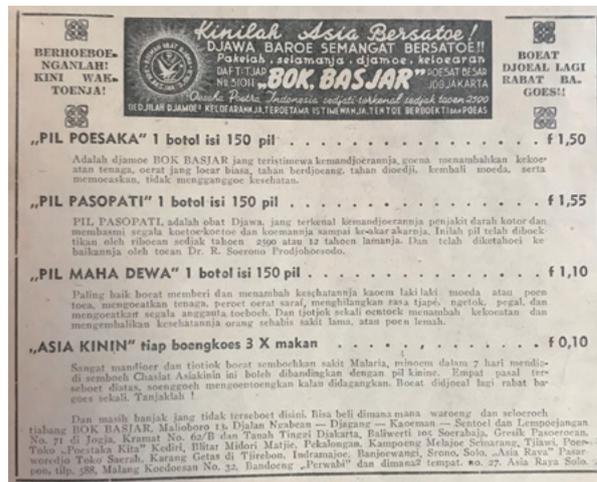


Illustration 30: “Asia Kinin” from Bok Basjar (*Soera Asia*, 1943)



Illustration 31: Minato anti-malaria pills. *Semangat Islam* 2604 no. 4.

## Conclusion

It seems very likely that the marketing of quinine directly to the public was related both to the expansion of the press and the reading public and to the growing knowledge of alternative western medicines among medical professionals. The response of the Bandung Quinine Factory to advertisements for Atebrin and Plasmochin was to build their advertising campaign on authoritative published statements about the importance of quinine as a first-line medicine for mass use. Atebrin and Plasmochin instead pushed an image as cutting-edge medicines. The Bayer medicine advertising campaigns in particular seem professionally designed.

In selecting the various *Volksalmanak* and teachers' almanacs published by the government publisher Balai Poestaka, the Bandoengsch Kinine Fabriek was targeting influential elites in more rural market. There were other potential publications which they could have used: Sino-Indonesian publications like *Sin Po and Star Magazine*, for example, which had large markets, or the newer publications of KB (Kolff-Buning) in Yogyakarta from around 1938. The urban audiences which were reached by these publications were less concerned with malaria than exhaustion or beauty. It is interesting that one exception was a Javanese language almanac from 1941, also obviously targeting the same rural Javanese audience.

This study is merely a preliminary exploration. A more systematic study of all advertisements, in conjunction with a discussion of the prevalence of malaria at that moment, and ongoing research discussed on the pages of the journal may provide additional insights into the extent to which advertising decisions were determined by medical considerations, as opposed to financial or technical abilities. A more detailed examination of alternative medicines during the Japanese occupation also could reveal important changes.

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- Padoman Aosan*, no. 12 (1939), no. 13 (1939), no. 14 (1939)
- Pariwara* no. 12 (1939), 13 (1939).
- Pedoman Pembatja* (10 (1938), 12 (1939), 13 (1939), 17 (1941))
- Semangat Islam*, Boelan III 2604, no.4 (1944).
- Soeara Asia: 1 Tahoen dalam Soeasana Djawa Baroe*. April 1943.
- Volksalmanak Melajoe* (1923, 1927, 1932, 1936, 1937, 1938)
- Volksalmanak Djawi* (1934, 1940, 1941, 1942)