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Writings of Borobudur: Making sense of an Early Modern Javanese manuscript within the production of archaeological knowledge in Indonesia

Tulisan-tulisan tentang Borobudur: Menempatkan naskah Jawa Modern Awal dalam produksi pengetahuan arkeologi di Indonesia

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ABSTRAK

Kata Kunci:
Borobudur;
produksi
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Babad Tanah Jawi

Kawasan Borobudur sebagai situs warisan budaya saat ini dapat diterjemahkan sebagai sebuah konstruksi cerita tentang keagungan masa lalu, penyesalan akan kehilangan, dan penyelamatan oleh otoritas kolonial, yang terarahkan oleh estetika yang dibangun pada masa kolonial. Tulisan ini membahas proses pembentukan pengetahuan historis tentang Borobudur dengan metode dekonstruksi sejarah berdasarkan analisis terhadap Babad Tanah Jawi, yang disusun dari akhir abad ke-18 sampai dengan awal abad ke-19 oleh kraton Jawa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pada masa Jawa Modern Awal Borobudur memiliki kualitas spiritual dalam kehidupan masyarakat, berbeda dengan sudut pandang otoritas kolonial.

ABSTRACT

Keywords:
Borobudur;
knowledge
production;
Babad Tanah Jawi

As a heritage site today, Borobudur is arguably constructed from stories of ancient grandeur, regrettable loss, and colonial rescue, infused with lingering aesthetics of colonial construction. This paper discusses the historical deconstruction of the process of historical knowledge production of Borobudur by analysing the Babad Tanah Jawi manuscript produced from the late 18th century to the early 19th century by Javanese courts. The result shows that during the Early Modern Java, Borobudur held significant spiritual quality for the local communities, unlike the previous interpretation by the colonial authorities.

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INTRODUCTION

A certain Ki Mas Dana had started an uprising against the court of Mataram located at Kartasura around 1709/1710. He launched his action from the village of Enta-Enta and managed to block the military operation organised by Jayawinata, the regent of Mataram. Upon defeat, Jayawinata went to Kartasura to seek assistance from the royal court. Pakubuwana I, responding to the request, ordered Prince Pringgalaya to bring half of the regents in Kartasura to capture Dana, possibly alive, so that the monarch could make a spectacle of his punishment for the public ([Anonymous, 1940](#), p. 41). Dana was overwhelmed by Pringgalaya's attack, and following the defeat, he took refuge in Borobudur. Quickly Dana was captured and brought to court by Pringgalaya. Upon Dana's arrival at Kartasura, the court officials tied him to the twin sacred *beringin* trees in front of the palace. Then the officials invited the city inhabitants to stick needles into Dana's body as punishment for his action. Later, he was beheaded, with his head put on a stake at the royal square, and his trunk was buried in the mountain ([Anonymous, 1940](#), pp. 40–42).

This story, taken from one of the many episodes in the *Babad Tanah Jawi* manuscript, has been cited in several contemporary publications about Borobudur, mainly by Indonesian archaeologist Soekmono and Singapore-based John Miksic. Both archaeologists have used the example from *Babad Tanah Jawi* – along with a story on the crown prince's visit to Borobudur in 1758 from the so-called *Babad Mataram* manuscript – to argue that Borobudur was never entirely forgotten by the local community even after the temple was out of use since the 10th century ([Miksic, 1990](#), p. 28; [Soekmono, 1976](#), pp. 4–5). Notwithstanding, Soekmono and Miksic have labelled the narratives in *Babad Tanah Jawi* and *Babad Mataram* as superstitious, even though Miksic remains ambiguous by assuming that for the Javanese, the name Borobudur "only meant a hill with a large collection of sculpture" ([Miksic, 1990](#), p. 17). In such labelling, these archaeologists undermine the historical value of such stories not to be on par with the Western-construct disciplines of history and archaeology. We can trace back this epistemological attitude toward local manuscripts to colonial time, whereby socio-political structure and assumed expertise underpinned archaeological knowledge production for Borobudur from the 19th century onwards.

From the early 19th century, Europeans popularised antiquarian study and reconstrued it into the professional discipline of archaeology on the back of Enlightenment rationalism ([Diaz-Andreu, 2007](#), pp. 41–59). In this context, *The History of Java*, published in 1817 by Thomas Stamford Raffles (1751–1826), marked the beginning of a scientific inquiry into the already-in-ruins *Candi* Borobudur with its description of an ancient structure called *Bóro Bódo*. During Raffles' time in Java, he was informed of the existence of this ruined *candi* while residing in Semarang in 1814 ([Raffles, 1817](#), pp. 29–30). Concerning Raffles and other contemporary British commentators on Javanese temples, art historian Sarah Tiffin ([2016](#), p. 201) notes that they had primarily disregarded the Javanese *babad* literature because such a chronicle was considered over-elaborated, mystifying, and, most importantly, historically inaccurate and deficient in its scholarship quality. Historians Marieke Bloembergen and Martijn Eickhoff ([2013](#), p. 88, [2020](#), p. 116) have explored how local superstition and mythology are often avoided in

the production of knowledge about Hindu-Buddhist temples in Indonesia. This is the hierarchical underpinning in writing the history of Borobudur, which privileges modern archaeological construction of the site, often based on Indic sources. Though they have also noted that some ambiguities between what can be considered as “scientific” and “superstition” are present to this day, with the temple of Prambanan often called 'Loro Jonggrang' (Bloembergen & Eickhoff, 2020, p. 25).

In the process briefly discussed above, the enterprise set out by Raffles was to be presented as a ‘discovery’ of the existence of the Borobudur temple. This narrative is still broadly accepted today, including by the Indonesian government. In 2014, both national and local authorities celebrated the ‘200 years of the discovery of Borobudur’, most notably by the issuance of special edition stamps (see Figure 1) highlighting the figure of Raffles (Fitriani, 2014). In this regard, the term 'discovery' indicates a complete disregard of Early Modern Javanese relations to Hindu-Buddhist period temple ruins. The discourse on 'discovery' embodies a hegemonic aesthetic perception of Borobudur as a site to be appreciated for artistic achievement and as an archaeological object. As Anderson noted, in this colonial construction, the temple was stripped of its spiritual value while being "museumised. . . [and] repositioned as regalia of a *secular* [original emphasis] colonial state" (Anderson, 2006, p. 182).



Figure 1. Stamps were issued to celebrate 200 years after the 'discovery' of Borobudur by Raffles (Source: Rinta Adita, 2014)

Dealing with these apparent hierarchies of knowledge, recent studies on the development of art history and archaeology in Indonesia have highlighted the multiplicity of voices towards Hindu-Buddhist remains in Java. In doing so, they mainly focus their attention on the early-19th-century *Serat Cethini* manuscript, which provides descriptions of various Hindu-Buddhist temples. Observing the local appreciation recorded in *Centhini*, Bloembergen and Eickhoff conclude that the "narrative anchors to reimagine the temple as part and parcel of the local historical landscape" (2020, pp. 32–33). While this observation is accurate in some sense, for the local people, the temples were not just objects from the past. Tiffin (2016, pp. 108–109) has noted that Cabolang, one of the pilgrims in *Cethini*, felt

spiritually engaged with Borobudur and its surrounding landscape. She presents the story as an example of the ongoing spiritual admiration of the temple. However, she falls short in providing the specifics on how this spiritual quality came about for the 19th-century Javanese.

With those studies in mind, this paper aims to present a contextual analysis of the spiritual meaning of Borobudur when it appears in the *Babad Tanah Jawi* manuscript produced from the late 18th century to the early 19th century, lead to revisiting the historical knowledge produced for Borobudur. The story from *Babad Tanah Jawi* cited here was already identified as late as the early 20th century (see [Brandes, 1901](#), pp. 73–84). However, this local manuscript is either only acknowledged as a side note or simply not mentioned, such as in the official historiography written for the site management's website (see [Borobudurpedia, 2020](#)). Thus, the purposes of this paper are twofold: to trace an alternative path for writing the history of Borobudur by way of an in-depth reading of *Babad Tanah Jawi* text; and to demonstrate how and why that path has been repeatedly suppressed by the structure of archaeological discourse in Indonesia.

METHODS

The discussion begins by proposing a reading of a passage concerning Borobudur in the Surakarta Major version of *Babad Tanah Jawi*. Historian M.C. Ricklefs identified this text as the source for the Meinsma-edited text published in 1874 ([Ricklefs, 1972](#), p. 289). The significance of this historical juncture Meinsma publication, which will be explained below, necessitates a new consideration of the Surakarta Major *Babad* text within the historiography of Borobudur. To gauge the importance of this passage, including its brevity, a cue from historian Bambang Purwanto is taken in his call for the inclusion of Javanese manuscripts as a source for writing history. While the dating precision of events described in the Javanese manuscript tradition is debatable, we can read the texts as representations of socio-cultural realities at the time of their production ([Purwanto, 2006](#), p. 96). They are part of a historical tradition seeking to document, transfer memory to the next generation, build political legitimacy, and express intellectual achievement ([Purwanto, 2006](#), p. 98).

The second part of the discussion will historically trace and deconstruct how archaeology as a scientific discipline has often disregarded local perspectives in the historiography of Borobudur. In doing so, the reading of *Babad Tanah Jawi* will be bolstered by an examination of colonial construction of knowledge on Borobudur concerning the work of Michel Foucault on rationality and regimes of truth ([Rouse, 2003](#), pp. 95–122). The discussion draws from Foucault's insight into the complex ways political power is drawn from knowledge construction. The process is not necessarily centrally orchestrated but can be borne out of "discursive alignment from heterogenous text and performances" ([Rouse, 2003](#), p. 188). Archaeologist Laurajane Smith ([2006](#), p. 11) argues that this power/knowledge alignment has been used to authorise technical and aesthetic expertise on heritage discourse.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The study shows that while a narrative of dispossession was being written in European colonial historiography, the Javanese Islamic community continued to appreciate the ruins of Borobudur. The brief reference to Borobudur in the late-18th-century/early-19th-century *Babad Tanah Jawi* provides an exciting example. It is presumed that Sultan Agung (r. 1613–1645) began the original text's composition; according to Dutch historian J.J. Ras, the main narrative was already crystallised by the late 17th and early 18th centuries ([Ras, 1987](#), pp. 343–356). It is of note that Sultan Agung is known for his efforts to harmonise Javanese Hindu-Buddhist traditions with pious Islamic characters in his palace ([Ricklefs, 1998](#), pp. 469–482). Other interests have shaped the form of the text best known today. Today's title for this manuscript is taken from an edited book by J.J. Meinsma in 1874, published as *Sērāt Babad tanah Djawi, wiwit saking Nabi Adam dumugi in taun 1674*. It is a heavily edited and redacted version of the Surakarta Major *Babad* made with the specific intent of rendering the text a legible historical resource according to Western standards ([Ricklefs, 1972](#), p. 286). In 1941, the Meinsma text was translated into Dutch by W.L. Olthof under the title of *Babad tanah Djawi in proza: Javaansche geschiedenis*. It should be noted that Dutch philologist-cum-archaeologist J.L.A. Brandes commented on the reference to Borobudur in the Meinsma edited text (see [Brandes, 1901](#), pp. 73–84). However, the reading provided was brief and has not been discussed further either by him or other archaeologists.

Frameworks of historical research, paradigms of royal legitimacy and the politico-religious matrix within and beyond the text of *Babad Tanah Jawi* must be considered when reading this pre-colonial reference to Borobudur. The quote and synopsis given below are taken from the transliterated 31 volumes of *Babad Tanah Jawi* published by Balai Pustaka, a colonial publishing house in the Dutch East Indies, between 1939 and 1941. This multi-volume publication was selected because it comprises the first half of the Surakarta Major *Babad* ([Wieringa, 1999](#), p. 246), the same *Babad* used as the source for the Meinsma edited text. The Surakarta Major *Babad* was initially composed in the reign of Pakubuwana IV (1788–1820) and finalised during the reign of Pakubuwana VII (1830–1858), with a copy of this version now available in Leiden (L.Or. 1786). Ricklefs believed that the revisions were mainly undertaken to legitimate then rulers, usually immediately following coronation or when legitimating the throne. Such revisions primarily included updating dynastic histories ([Ricklefs, 1972](#), p. 289).

In the *Babad Tanah Jawi* text from Balai Pustaka, Borobudur appears during the account of the reign of Pakubuwana I (r. 1705–1719) in canto 110, lines 90–99; the name *Barabudhur* is mentioned in line 96.

Ki Mas Dana wus malayu gêndring, gya ingêsuk mring wong Kartasura, mring Barabudhur loroge, ardi sigra kinêpung, pan kacandhak Ki Dana aglis, binānda wus ginawa, mring Kartasurèku, wong cilik kèh binoyongan, sigra budhal Pangeran Pringgalayèki, myang sagung pra punggawa ([Anonymous, 1940](#), p. 42).

Ki Mas Dana sprinted without looking back, after being defeated by the soldiers of Kartasura, [he] retreated to Borobudur, the mountain was rapidly surrounded, Ki Dana was immediately captured, brought hand-tied, to

Kartasura, [his] commoner-army were captured and taken, Prince Pringgalaya quickly departed, went [with] all of the soldiers (English translation by the author).

It should be noted that *Babad Tanah Jawi* had been reproduced from time to time and doubtlessly preserved in several versions originating from the courts of Yogyakarta and Surakarta (see [Ricklefs, 1972](#), pp. 285–315). The act of text copying was often performed to preserve a manuscript, given that the writing support is perishable in Java's tropical climate ([Wieringa, 1999](#), p. 252). In particular, historian Ann Kumar ([1984](#), pp. 223–247) has noted that copying the *Babad* genre allowed significant narrative variation from one version to another as part of a living literary tradition considered the opposite of archival keeping of records. Nonetheless, in this *Babad* genre, specific historical figures and episodes can easily be identified, and the same main narrative is generally deducible. With this issue, historian Bambang Purwanto ([2006](#), p. 90) has critiqued the scholars' dismissal of the Early Modern Javanese manuscript as a viable historical source for the historiography of Indonesia because of this literary character. More recent developments in Indonesian, as well as Javanese historical scholarship, have brought a greater appreciation of Javanese perspectives and belief systems narrated within the passages from these various texts and of their pertinence to historical research (see [Purwanto, 2006](#), pp. 88–126; [Sastrawan, 2020](#), pp. 2–23).

DISCUSSIONS

Borobudur as Sacred Space

In the passages from *Babad Tanah Jawi*, we can see how Borobudur was remembered and accepted as part of the Javanese socio-political geography concerning the power dynamics within Mataram polity and its descendants. In this sense, Ki Mas Dana appeared as an obscure figure within Mataram royal historiography. Beyond this text, not much is currently known about him, and, to the author's knowledge, there is no mention of him in other manuscripts. The location where Dana started his rebellion, the village of Enta-Enta (or Ngenta-Enta), is of particular interest. According to Javanese historian Soemarsaid Moertono, the name comes from the word *ngenta*, meaning to imitate or copy something. Its exact geographical position is unknown today, but the location was used previously by Raden Surjakusuma in starting his revolt against the Mataram king. Surjakusuma built a palace complex complete with its public square while launching a failed rebellion against Amangkurat III of Mataram (r. 1703–1708) ([Moertono, 2009](#), p. 89).

On the other hand, Dana's capturer, Prince Pringgalaya, seems to be an important figure inside the palace of Mataram. He was installed as deputy *patih* (equal to grand vizier) during the reign of Pakubuwana II (r. 1726–1749), giving him a position as one of the leading confidants of the current ruler. The prince was also known for his sympathetic view of the Chinese community when rebelling against VOC (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* / The Dutch East India Company) in the 1740s ([Ricklefs, 1983](#), pp. 268–290). Nonetheless, it is unclear whether he took his own life or was poisoned by his enemies following a court intrigue in 1755

([Kumar, 1997](#), pp. 330, 341). Thus, Ki Mas Dana seems to be one of the many rebels who took up arms in the never-ending and complicated contest for royal power within the realm of Mataram. Placed within this broader historical context, Borobudur comes into our sight for a split second in a much larger genealogical narrative from the royal historical tradition.

The reference to *Barabudhur* in the *Babad Tanah Jawi* is very rapid. It could be taken as a passing reference to a toponym like any other whose only historical value would lie in the dating usage of the name. However, there is more to the reference here because Borobudur appears as a place of refuge in political and military conflict. Does Ki Mas Dana need to take refuge at *Barabudhur* when retreating from a battlefield? Or, perhaps more precisely, why do the authors of *Babad Tanah Jawi* need to have him take refuge there?

Barabudhur in *Babad Tanah Jawi* can be compared with *Budur* in the *Deśawarṇana*, a 14th-century Old Javanese manuscript of Majapahit. Both referred to the site of Borobudur in passing, but unlike *Deśawarṇana*, which designated *Budur* as a Buddhist sanctuary ([Krom, 1927](#), p. 7), *Babad Tanah Jawi* makes no sectarian reference. At first sight of *Babad Tanah Jawi*, it might not discern any religious or cultural dimensions to the reference. The notion of refuge can only, however, beg this question. Some might reduce the refuge here to pragmatics: the ruin might represent a labyrinth-like structure, which could serve as the perfect hide-out to defend oneself from an enemy's attack. In this reading, *Barabudhur* would have figured in the story for its position as a strategic location providing a hiding place for those on the run. Brandes considered this when discussing the reference of *Barabudhur* in *Babad Tanah Jawi* but dismissed it as he did not find evidence that the stones had been used to make a fortification on or near the monument ([Brandes, 1901](#), p. 80). Strategically speaking, one would not be wholly protected inside the monument because the structure of Borobudur would remain open to attack from its four gates. Brandes also mentioned that Diponegoro, during the Java War (1825–1830), fought battles in areas near Borobudur ([Brandes, 1901](#), p. 80). However, it is thought that he had never used the structure of Borobudur as a defensive shelter.

The lack of obvious usage of the temple in strictly military terms leads us to consider other reasons why Ki Mas Dana is said to have taken shelter specifically in *Barabudhur*. Examination of the Javanese word *ardi* may prove helpful here, a term used in the phrase "*ardi sigra kinepung*" following the reference to *Barabudhur* (see *Babad Tanah Jawi* line 96 canto 110 above). In a general sense, *ardi* means mountain. It comes from an older Javanese form ([Horne, 1974](#), p. 37) originating from a Sanskrit loanword *adri* ([Bratakesawa, 1928](#), p. 89). In a literal sense, it seems like straightforward usage since we know that *Candi* Borobudur sits on the top of a slight elevation.

Zoetmulder's Old Javanese-English dictionary ([1982](#)) indicates another layer of meaning for *ardi* with use found in the 15th-century *Tantu Pagelaran*, in line 24 canto 92: *atapa nūnīn ardi* (meditate in the mountain). *Atapa* comes from the root *tapa*, and according to the Horne Javanese-English dictionary ([1974](#), p. 592), *tapa* means "to withdraw to a secluded place and live in solitude for holy meditation, in order to purify one's being of all outside matters and concentrate the will towards a goal". Within *Babad Tanah Jawi* text, there are many occurrences for the

usages of different words for 'mountain' adjacent with and closely related to the concept of *tapa*. For example, in line 20 canto 6, one reads *atêtapa ana in ardi* (meditate in the mountain) ([Anonymous, 1940](#), p. 39), and line 28 canto 7 narrates *ri kang tapa ing arga* (those who meditate in the mountain) ([Anonymous, 1940](#), p. 58). *Tapa* and mountains are very frequently associated in South and Southeast Asian contexts. 'Mountain-temples' like Borobudur, pyramidal sacred refuges built atop elevations or to resemble such an elevation in and of themselves, are one expression of this association. It seems possible, even logical, to read the reference to Borobudur in *Babad Tanah Jawi* as a *refuge* in this context: a rebel would have sought refuge in the mountain in order to protect himself magically as well as physically, and to gather, through meditation, his forces – again magical as much as physical (see [Acri, 2020](#), pp. 273–290) .

For *tapa*, the Gericke and Roorda dictionary ([1901](#), p. 679) notes that ascetics performing the practice aim to achieve higher spiritual power or do a favour for the deity. Regarding the story of Ki Mas Dana in *Barabudhur*, there is a similar context in various texts, whereby rebels go to a secluded location, but not only in a mountain, to prepare themselves spiritually and strengthen their bodies internally. A well-known 17th-century rebel figure, Untung Surapati, is said to have hidden inside a cave in the mountains of Ngantang, East Java, while another 17th-century insurgent Raden Punta is said to have meditated at the burial grounds of Tegal Arum ([Moertono, 2009](#), p. 90). Caves are thought to carry potent magical power and have a spiritual connection with local spirits ([Roxas-Lim, 1983](#), pp. 107–175). Similarly, burial grounds were often considered spiritually potent because of their spatial function as a meeting point between ordinary beings and supernatural forces ([Tiffin, 2016](#), p. 242). Funerary markers in the forms of terraces, altars and images located deep in the forest and high up on the mountain also indicate such perceptions in related contexts. Sasaka Domas of Baduy in the western part of Java is one of them. Constructed in elevated terraces with arranged stones, the only access to the site is through an annual pilgrimage to pay respect to the ancestral spirit called *Batara Tunggal* in the fifth month of the lunar calendar ([Wessing, 1999](#), pp. 64–66). This perception of supernatural power in specific places drove rebels to those places: they believed they could gain the inner peace necessary to acquire the mythical power necessary to defeat royalty. This process is presumed as the case of Ki Mas Dana in retreating to *Barabudhur*.

It is of note for these discussions that Borobudur's terraced pyramidal structure is similar to graves of respected rulers in Java. Two such revered sites can be taken as examples: Sunan Gunung Jati's grave in Cirebon and Sultan Agung's tomb in Yogyakarta. While the latter is attributed to the greatest ruler of Mataram, who successfully led the state to its peak, the former figure is considered as the founder of both Cirebon and Banten states in the 16th century, aside from being counted as one of *Wali Sanga* (Nine Muslim Saints) members. Sultan Agung died in 1645 and was buried in Imogiri royal cemetery. He and his family are placed on the highest platform of three elevated terraces, considered the most sacred sanctuary within the complex. Meanwhile, Sunan Gunung Jati presumably died in 1570 and was buried in Cirebon, where his tomb is kept in the inner and highest courtyard, a compound made of elevated terraces. Both sites nowadays are famous popular pilgrimage destinations for Islamic communities, particularly

from Java. The topographical plan of these revered tombs evokes the illustration of Borobudur by Cornelius in 1814 (see [Figure 2](#)). In this context, it is rather difficult not to imagine that 18th- and 19th-century local Javanese elites did not consider Borobudur a source of mythical power.

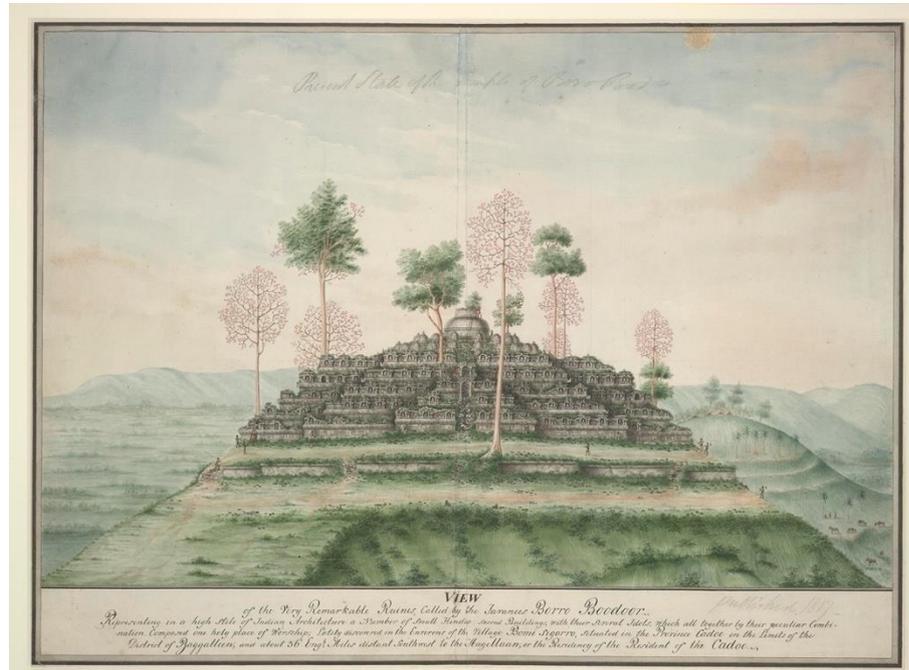


Figure 2. General view of Borobudur, drawn by H.C. Cornelius or his draughtsmen, watermark by J. Honig and Zoonen, c. 1814–1816
(Source: *The Trustees of the British Museum*)

While it is still unclear that the perception described above was also followed by communities outside the palace wall, particularly those living near the site, it is clear that Borobudur was not a dead monument. There are passing evidence, here and there, albeit in differing manners, that Javanese people continued to appreciate and appropriate Borobudur before and during the consolidation of colonial power in the 19th and early 20th centuries. A colonial report states that, in a festive ritual in the mid-19th century, the Javanese would cover the Buddha images stored inside the perforated stupas at the top of the monument with yellow ointment ([Miksic, 1990](#), p. 28; [Scheurleer, 2007](#), p. 81). A particular statue, the first Buddha inside the perforated stupa on our right when climbing from the eastern stairway, was venerated by the Javanese, Chinese and Europeans alike and was named *Sang Bimo*, from the name of the second brother of Pandava ([Scheltema, 1912](#), p. 270). By the late 19th century, heaps of flowers and burning incense were often found surrounding the image on the upper terraces ([Miksic, 1990](#), p. 28; [Scidmore, 1897](#), p. 198). This practice was performed in search of blessing to avoid misfortune such as illness or stillbirth ([Bloembergen & Eickhoff, 2020](#), pp. 45–46). The contemporary desire of the local community and general public alike to re-use and create new meanings for the site is, therefore, not without historical precedence. Acknowledging this continued appreciation contributes to thickening the historiography of Borobudur. In turn, it is obligatory

to examine why historical Javanese accounts have been frequently de-legitimised and so rarely been acknowledged in 'scientific' writing on Borobudur and what impact that has had on our knowledge of the site; 'our' here including Indonesians schooled or not in history and archaeology.

Continuity/Rupture in the Archaeology of Indonesia

As Bloembergen and Eickhoff (2020, p. 15) have highlighted, the term 'dead monument' was in the 1992 Indonesian Law on cultural heritage to stipulate that any site already abandoned at the time of its discovery could not be brought into use again. While the law was updated in 2010, this directive is still widely followed by heritage managers in Indonesia. This is a stunning result of the hegemonic colonially inspired view of Borobudur as only an archaeological object. Tiffin (2016, p. 107) has argued that the problem with 'discovery' is that it "credits the remains [Hindu-Buddhist temple ruins] with an interest or importance that dates only from their sighting by Europeans and so completely ignores local knowledge and practices".

As mentioned in the opening, the *Barabudhur* reference in the *Babad Tanah Jawi* has been recognised since the early 20th century. Brandes was the first to publish this material in his 1901 short article in *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, one of the academic journals published by the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences (hereafter the Batavian Society). He recognised the name from reading the Meinsma edited text of *Babad Tanah Jawi* (see Brandes, 1901, pp. 74–75). Brandes' brief study was quoted by Dutch journalist and adventurer J.F. Scheltema in his book, *Monumental Java*, to argue that "the natives knew of the existence of the *chandi Boro Budoor* long before Cornelius' discoveries" (Scheltema, 1912, p. 266). Based on his journalism and cultural commenting works, Scheltema was an outcast figure in the Dutch East Indies archaeological circuit.

On the other hand, one of the most prominent Dutch archaeologists, N.J. Krom, published his magnum opus, *Beschrijving van Barabudur: Archaeologische Beschrijving* (Borobudur: Archaeological Description), in 1920; it was translated into English in 1927. While he briefly mentioned the *Barabudhur* passage in the Meinsma edited text, he did not address its significance (see Krom, 1927, p. 3). Krom did summarise two local stories about the temple, but he believed they were "of little importance to the history of the temple" (Krom, 1927, pp. 19–21). The quick dismissal by Krom derived from and contributed to the discourse at the time, where the sole focus was on the original construction, coupled with presumptions of the unreliability of modern Javanese oral and written traditions. The knowledge produced disengaged the Early Modern Javanese people from Borobudur; a process traced back to Raffles' *History of Java*.

Raffles glorified the Javanese Hindu-Buddhist architectural ruins alone. His chapter on Javanese religion includes not a single example of Islamic architecture while providing lengthy commentary on numerous Hindu-Buddhist monuments (Raffles, 1817, pp. 1–64). He often employed 'Sepoys,' Indian contract foot soldiers, whose knowledge of Indic culture was used to interpret Javanese reliefs and statues. Raffles wrote that "... nor did he [the Sepoy] fail to draw a very degrading and natural contrast between the ancient Javans, as Hindus and artists, and their degenerate sons, with scarce a remnant of arts, science, or of any religion

at all" ([Raffles, 1817](#), p. 27). This very utterance served to disrupt the cultural engagement of local peoples with the temple ruins in reinforcing "the idea that the Javanese had turned their backs on the superb cultural legacy that the *candi* represented" ([Tiffin, 2016](#), p. 110). In his book, Raffles' prejudice was apparent when he argued that the contemporaneous Javanese, whom he homogenously labelled as Mahometans (a standard term used by Europeans in the 18th and 19th centuries to name Muslims), were less civilised because they could not construct monumental structures such as those characteristics of Hindu-Buddhist cultures ([Aljunied, 2005](#), pp. 10–12). This discourse has been widely recycled and distributed to become the very foundation of understanding the formation of the Hindu-Buddhist heritage of Indonesia. In our case study, Borobudur, as a heritage site today, is constructed on this foundation, with stories of ancient grandeur, regrettable loss, and colonial rescue infused with a lingering aesthetics upon which present state management has consolidated its authority over the local community. In turn, it created a perception of neglect by the Early Modern Javanese for the legacy of ancient temple architectures, a perception which continues to impact research, conservation, and management of Borobudur today (see [Borobudurpedia, 2020](#)).

Once the British administration handed over Java in 1816, the Dutch colonial authority successfully imposed and legitimised itself as the caretaker of Hindu-Buddhist remains, including Borobudur, through developing Western scientific knowledge in archaeology. The Batavian Society played an essential part in this process of disruption by adopting and assimilating the narrative of rupture into its policies. The society, often considered the oldest of its kind in Asia, was established in 1778 by J.C.M. Radermacher (1741–1783). Radermacher took inspiration from the Dutch Society of Sciences of Haarlem, where he had served as one of the directors stationed in the Indies ([Steenbrink et al., 1993](#), p. 59). The primary purpose of the Batavian Society was to conduct scientific investigations into the cultures of the East Indies archipelago. The society was on the decline before Raffles took over its presidency in 1814 ([Tiffin, 2016](#), pp. 30–31). In turn, Raffles' rejuvenation included recalibrating the Society's focus on scientific inquiries into antiquities originating from Java ([Tiffin, 2016](#), p. 31). The heightened attention to Javanese Hindu-Buddhist temples by the Batavian Society had a profound impact. The Batavian Society later inspired and guided the foundation of the Society for Antiquarianism, Linguistics and Ethnology of the Principality of Jogjakarta in 1885 ([Southworth, 2017](#), p. 251). Its chairman, the physician-turned-amateur archaeologist Isaac Groneman, hosted the visit of King Chulalongkorn of Siam to Borobudur and Prambanan. In this exchange of knowledge, the two had lively discussions on Borobudur as a Buddhist temple ([Bloembergen & Eickhoff, 2020](#), pp. 77–78). The Javanese were present during the visit, yet their voices were silenced. Comparable to this kind of discussion, most inquiries into ancient architectural remains in Java would first and foremost deal with the original meanings and functions of Hindu-Buddhist architectural programs. Underpinned by colonial structure, this disregard of later local perspectives represents epistemic violence, which precedes the way in which the heritage discourse is set for Borobudur today.

CONCLUSION

While historian Denys Lombard argued that the emergence of Islamic practices in Java since the 16th century created a new 'mentality' in Javanese peoples, he also acknowledged the possibility of continuity of pre-Islamic traditions. In particular, he questioned how far the Javanese perception of *kramat* graves has continued to deploy traditional perceptions of sacred space, as evidenced in, for example, the *neak ta* (local tutelary deity) of mainland Southeast Asia (Lombard, 2020, pp. 241–342). This scholarly window is more often than not quickly shut, however. This is partly due to a perception that pre-16th century 'Hindu-Buddhist' and post-16th century 'Islamic' cultures were mutually exclusive. 'Indonesianists' do not take on both; instead, they are divided between 'Hindu-Buddhist' and 'Islamic' specialisms. Historians Andrea Acri and Verena Meyer observe that "scholars of the 'Hindu-Buddhist' period have rarely if ever, taken into account 'Islamic' material post-dating the 16th century, and vice-versa" (Acri & Meyer, 2019, p. 277), which is relevant with what have been discussed above.

In this epistemological context, reading on how *Barabudhur* was referenced in the *Babad Tanah Jawi* aims to sketch an alternative pathway to understanding the history of Borobudur. The text suggests continuation in some form of veneration of the site while also demonstrating an ongoing permutation of meaning. From the account in *Babad Tanah Jawi*, it can be speculated that as late as the late 18th to early 19th centuries, Borobudur was perceived as a source of supernatural power, at least by the Mataram royal elites. This reading supports the discussion of *Serat Centhini* conducted by other scholars to counter the colonial assumption of perceiving Borobudur as a dead monument. Nonetheless, these palace manuscripts, of which *Babad Tanah Jawi* also appeared in the Meinsma edited text in 1874, have been continuously side-lined in the archaeological study of Borobudur. This act greatly supported the rhetoric of discovery so well established by Raffles to have been actively reproduced in the temple's historiography.

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