



## Nyai Rara Kidul

### The Antecedents of a Cosmopolitan Queen

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**Abstract.** – This article explores the background and origins of the Javanese court traditions about Nyai Rara Kidul, the goddess of the Southern Ocean. It evaluates several proposed Indian prototypes and asks whether Indian influence on the myths may not have been ex-post facto rather than primary. It considers some alternative sources for the court traditions about the Queen, who only appears in her present role in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. Her roots, however, go further back in Southeast Asian history and include core elements of the Cambodian foundation myth, as well as possible adaptations of Chinese folk beliefs. Applying Javanese magical/literary methods for discovering the meanings of words used by Javanese court poets (*kérata basa* or *jarwa dhosok*), to both the Cambodian and Javanese myths, the article shows how the court myths as these are told in the Javanese court chronicle *Babad Tanah Jawi*, could be derived from the Cambodian ones. Having shown the possibility of a direct link between the two mythologies, the article then looks at the parallel relationships of secondary figures and circumstances in the mythologies and considers that this literary court construction may well have been mapped onto a pre-existing coastal sea spirit. It further looks at Chinese influences in Java, focusing especially on the goddess Mazu, and the emphasis in the Javanese myths on her association with the southern ocean. [*Mataram, Cambodia, China, India, Babad Tanah Jawi, Nyai Rara Kidul, nagini, jarwa dhosok*]

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#### Introduction

The court tradition<sup>1</sup> concerning Nyai Rara Kidul, the Javanese Goddess of the Southern (Indian) Ocean,<sup>2</sup> is especially known from two rather different episodes in the Javanese court chronicle *Babad Tanah Jawi* (Olthof 1987). In recent discussions of this court tradition one focus of attention has been on especially Indian prototypes on which one of these episodes could have been modeled (e.g., Appel 2011; Chandra 1995; Jordaan 2011a, 2011b). India is, indeed, an obvious contender as the source of such a prototype, given that the Javanese courts, which the Queen is said to protect, were, like courts elsewhere in Southeast Asia, traditionally organized along Indian cosmological lines (cf. Heine Geldern 1942; Wessing 2003).<sup>3</sup> This makes possible Indian prototypes tempting, as such a model was both fa-

- 1 As was pointed out elsewhere (Wessing 2006a: 48–50), there are actually two separate traditions about the queen, one relevant to and told by fishermen along the south coast of Java, and the other focused on the Javanese courts of Yogyakarta and Surakarta, both inheritors of the throne of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Sultanate of Mataram.
- 2 In the literature she is commonly called a goddess, although in current Indonesian writings she is more often referred to as a queen (cf. Yongki Y. 2003; Sholikhin 2009), e.g., Ratu Laut Kidul (the Queen of the Southern Ocean). The ocean south of Java is the Indian Ocean, though in the tales about the Queen it is referred to as the Southern Ocean. The reasons for this will become clear later.
- 3 Some have maintained that this Indian influence was due to an actual transplanting of people or invasion from South Asia to Indonesia (cf. Chandra 1995: 200). More likely, however, is that Indian ideas were brought to and applied in Indonesia

miliar and seen as somehow a legitimate form for even a Muslim court to follow. For instance, Sultan Agung of the Sultanate of Mataram<sup>4</sup> (r. 1613–1646) attempted to maintain an India-like ambiance by creating a synthesis between the new Islamic cosmology and the India-derived one.

These discussions, however, have tended to pay less attention to the other episode in the *Babad Tanah Jawi*, which, even though it has some similarities to its counterpart, has far less affinity with the proposed Indian prototypes. I wonder, therefore, if we should necessarily be searching for a single prototype for the Queen, or whether we have here an amalgamation of two or more traditions in which preexisting entities, such as coastal spirits that are thought to be present all along the South, Southeast, and East Asian coasts, were partially Indianized. If we assume the latter, it is possible that the Queen was Indianized after the link between her and the Javanese court was created, and that other influences may also have helped form her as she is known today.

As Smith (1963: 165) observes, religious narratives, among which we can include the Javanese tradition about a relationship with the Queen, are historical constructs that are potentially always under revision by the participants. They are cumulative traditions, narratives that may have things added to them while older parts may temporarily or permanently fall out of favor. The religious narrative, therefore, may change its appearance to suit local or temporal needs, although less emphasized aspects are seldom quickly or permanently lost and may, at need, be revived (cf. Smith 1963: 160). The participants, therefore, participate in a rich and varied tradition to which “men at successive stages in its accumulating development have contributed each his share to making it so” (Smith 1963: 166).

These traditions are constructions over time, through which communities, including religious ones, define both themselves and the values that underlie them (cf. Fisher 1987: xi; Niles 1999: 3, 8): their reality is contained within the tales that they tell, and participation in these narratives marks one as a member of the community (Wessing 2001). This should not be taken to mean that all members of the community hold all the stories and the realities they weave to be true, or that all members have equal knowledge of those stories. Indeed many participants may know only parts of the tales, or their

general outline. People also do not always agree on the details, and may on occasion quarrel about them, though for the sake of harmony people will often not emphasize their differences (cf. Beatty 1996). Yet, even if its members disagree about the details, a community is defined by and obtains coherence from the reality woven by its stories: they create the symbolic reality that they live in.

Such symbolic realities may include both local and foreign elements, and recent as well as ancient details. Gaudes (1993: 333, 348) writes about a Cambodian myth to be discussed later, that this story contains both indigenous and Indian mythical aspects, in which local water-spirits merged with the Indian *nāga*. As will be seen, he might well have added Chinese influences.

In the case of the Javanese Queen of the Southern Ocean, this process of accumulation is further complicated by the appearance of Middle Eastern / Islamic influences in her make-up (cf. Intisari 1991: 129). Thus, she shares the ruling of the sea, an affinity with the color green, and constant rejuvenation with the Muslim saint, Nabi Khidir,<sup>5</sup> who symbolizes fertility and the renewal of life, and is the patron saint of seafarers (Hooykaas 1937: 182). On the other hand, Khidir, who is well known among seafarers in Islamic Southeast Asia,<sup>6</sup> protects people from drowning (Boratov 1986: 5), something the Queen is not particularly known for, she preferring to take especially young men into her underwater palace to serve as her lovers and servants (Wessing 2007: 533; 1997a: 99, 100). This article, then, looks at some alternative sources for the Javanese court tradition about the Queen, who only really came to prominence in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, although her roots go further back in Southeast Asian history. In order to do this, it is necessary to first highlight some prominent features of her myth and personality, in order to then compare these with possible influences.

## Nyai Rara Kidul

As was pointed out, the *Babad Tanah Jawi* contains two episodes that deal with the Queen, the best known of which tells of her relationship with

in the course of trade, and for cultural and political reasons (cf. Vlekke 1959: 24; Munoz 2006: 57–58).

4 Also designated Mataram II, to distinguish it from the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE Hindu state of Mataram I.

5 Arabic *Khidr*. Also Kilir, Al-Chadir (Boratov 1986: 5; De Graaf and Pigeaud 1984: 136; Hooykaas 1937: 181–182). It is said that Khidir acquired his green color after he dived into or drunk from the spring of life, which in some tales he is said to have done together with Ilyās (Elijah) (Wensinck 1971: 1156; Hooykaas 1937: 182).

6 Firth (1966: 102), De Graaf and Pigeaud (1984: 136), Jordaan and De Josselin de Jong (1985: 265).

Panembahan Senapati, the founder of Mataram II. It is this episode that features most prominently in the search for prototypes. The extensive literature on this episode and on the Queen herself does not need to be fully recapitulated here, as this has been adequately done before (cf. Jordaan 1984; Wessing 1997a, 1997b): a summary of her most salient features will suffice. Other than the aspects mentioned above, she is said to rule the Southern Ocean where she lives in a sumptuous underwater palace.<sup>7</sup> In the court tradition this palace is where she took Panembahan Senapati, the founder of the 16<sup>th</sup> century CE state of Mataram II, to whom, between bouts of love making, she taught the arts of statecraft.

There are several popular tales concerning the origin of the Queen, all pertaining to her role as ruler of the Southern Ocean and, later, her alliance with the court of Mataram II.<sup>8</sup> In one of these she was a princess who suffered from a vile skin disease,<sup>9</sup> sometimes said to have been brought on by the machinations of a jealous co-wife (Yanto Dirdjosuwondo 1983–84: 123). As a result she was exiled to the forest, where she wandered until she reached the Southern Ocean. There she heard a voice telling her that if she was to be cured she must jump into the waters. She did so, regained her former beauty, and became the ruler of the ocean and all the spirits of Java.

Alternatively she was a princess in the court of Pajajaran in West Java, who refused every suitor that came to ask for her hand. Her obstinacy angered her father who banished her from the palace, causing her to wander in the forests, until she came to the south coast. There she jumped into the water with the same results as before (Wessing 1997b: 318 f.). In yet a third tradition the princess was meditating in the forest, where she gained great powers,

including the ability to change her form between male and female. Some say that it was this love of meditation that caused her to refuse all those suitors, and thus led to her exile (Sri Sumarsih et al. 1989–90: 490).

In all three traditions the princess deviated from the expected norm. In the first version her beauty, a must for a princess,<sup>10</sup> was spoiled by disease, while in the second she remained a virgin, and did not conform to the cultural requirement that she marry. This last feature seems to clash with her reputation as a voracious lover, but it is told that in the course of her continual rejuvenation<sup>11</sup> she also regains her virginity.<sup>12</sup>

Both her refusal to marry and the skin disease<sup>13</sup> led to her exile in the forest, a place to which she also removed herself while meditating in the third version. In the first two tales her deviance<sup>14</sup> is resolved when she enters the waters of the Southern Ocean and becomes its ruler: she is now in her proper element, and functions as she should. The sto-

7 The fishermen's traditions, being less relevant to this article, can be summarized as follows. Nyai Rara Kidul is the ruler of the sea and the owner of all the creatures in it. She is the source of the fishermen's luck: good catches depend on her disposition, which can be influenced by annual rituals of both thanksgiving and propitiation (Wessing 1997a). There are rules that govern the fishermen's behavior, such as not wearing green on the beach or at sea. The men must be polite, and may not be boastful and loud. Ignoring these rules could anger the Queen who then takes the offender to serve in her palace. Similar restrictions pertain to swallows' nest gatherers along Java's south coast who also see their fortunes as depending on the Goddess' good will (Tempo 1982: 75 f.).

8 In the coastal tradition the origin of the goddess is rarely mentioned, it is as if she has always been there.

9 This theme is found elsewhere in Indonesia as well (cf. Matthes 1869: 2 ff.; Brandstetter 1896: 1 ff.) and is part of a wider set of allusions to e.g. rulers not being in their proper place or in improper relationships (cf. Jordaan and De Josselin de Jong 1985; Jordaan 1984, 1987).

10 Platenkamp (2010: 194) reports from Laos that prior to its attachment to a person, the human spirit is associated with the light of the stars and the moon. This may be the putative source of the highly valued bright complexion, also by Javanese women, which makes them look like *widadari*, and increases their attractiveness.

11 Her beauty is said to wax and wane with the phases of the moon (Intisari 1991: 128).

12 According to female informants, virginity, or at least the physical suggestion of this condition, is preferred by Javanese men, even in their wives. To this end herbal remedies (*jamu*) are sold that are said to tighten the vagina and keep it dry, simulating virginity.

13 Great beauty is a sign of noble descent, so that suffering from a skin disease would cast doubt on one's status.

14 The Queen's title *nyai* could also be an indicator of her marginal or even sacred status. Those designated *nyai* are often ambiguous persons: in coastal towns the appellation was used for the temporary wives of transitory, usually Chinese traders (Reid 1992: 205; Tim Penyusun Kamus 1988: 619; Echols and Shadily 1989: 392), a rather ambiguous social position. However, it is also a respectful form of address for older women, e.g., persons who are closely associated with the spirit world (Hasan Ali 2004: 298; Robson and Wibisono 2002: 514; Wessing 2006b: 60, 80 f.), or are in some places even seen as increasingly spirit themselves (Trompf 1995: 154). On the other hand, the title *nyai* is also used for women of the court and for the wife of a *kiai*, a religious leader. The second term in her name, *rara*, is often also written *lara*, which means ill, as e.g. with a skin disease. *Pelara-lara*, on the other hand, can indicate a serving girl at court, or a man's mistress (Robson and Wibisono 2002: 427). The category old person, as well as the courts, are, of course, liminal, transitional spaces, the occupants of which may be specially marked for ambiguity. The wife of a *kiai* is called *nyai* because of her association with a religious leader, a man who most probably has undertaken the pilgrimage to Mecca. Nyai Rara Kidul herself is, as we have seen, ambiguous as well, occupying the liminal position of a courtier-in-exile, and an entity that is at once human and spirit.

ry of her meditation does not mention this resolution as such, although in one of the episodes in the *Babad Tanah Jawi* (Olthof 1987), she implies that the Southern Ocean is her destination (see below).

The central point of the tale about the princess' skin disease has been well analyzed by Jordaan (1984, 1987), who concludes that the goddess is an ancient chthonic being, a snake goddess or *nāginī* connected with water, the underworld, fertility, crops, and the founding of royal dynasties. These features, and the princess-as-mediator, appear again in the tales concerning the founding of the Sultanate of Mataram II.

While the Queen's affinity with water and the sea has often been discussed, less emphasis has been placed on her association with the sky. Pigeaud (1960–63, IV: 80), however, characterizes her as the "Goddess of the Ocean and the Sky". In Java she manifests as a rainbow that may take the form of a two-headed *nāga* (snake), which drinks water from both the Java Sea and the Indian Ocean to then spit it out as rain, fertilizing the land (Uchrowi et al. 1988: 51 f.; Hooykaas 1956: 304; Pleyte 1894, pt. 1: 98). The rainbow links Nyai Rara Kidul with the Indian god Indra, whose bow the rainbow is (Dowson 1972: 125), and on whose palace Javanese rulers model their residences (*kraton*) (Wessing 2003: 209 f.). The rainbow and the two-headed snake are also associated with the Chinese dragon (*nāga*), however (Eberhard 1968: 384 f.).

While *nāgas* are usually characterized as guardians of the mineral wealth of the soil (Stutley and Stutley 1977: 198), links are also made between them and, especially, rice agriculture. Thus the rice goddess Dewi Sri appears from a tear shed by the *nāga* Antaboga (Hidding 1929: 28),<sup>15</sup> while elsewhere she herself manifests as a snake (Kats 1916: 181). Such links are made elsewhere in Southeast Asia as well (cf. Jordaan 1987: 124 f.).<sup>16</sup> Since rice and fertility depend on rain, the link with the Queen as rain-giver is clear (see Wessing 1997b: 331 f.).

To summarize, the essential features mentioned here depict the Queen as a passionate, virginal *nāginī*, associated with the color green,<sup>17</sup> the rainbow,

and fertility, who lives in an underwater palace where she rules the Southern Ocean and the spirits of Java. There are other things, specifically linking her to the Javanese courts that are related in one of the episodes of the *Babad Tanah Jawi*. This narrative purports to (retroactively) predict the rise of the Sultanate of Mataram II, and tells of the Queen's relationship with Panembahan Senapati, the sultanate's founder in 1575. This we will examine next.

## The Queen and Panembahan Senapati

The tale in the *Babad Tanah Jawi* (Olthof 1987) that most clearly names her (Olthof 1987: 80–83) concerns Nyai Rara Kidul's relationship with Panembahan Senapati<sup>18</sup> during the latter's quest to become ruler of Java. In search of spiritual powers and God's blessing on his endeavors, Panembahan Senapati came to the shore of the Indian (Southern) Ocean and prayed to Allah. The power of his prayer caused a terrible storm to rise with thundering, mountain-high waves. The energy he loosened made the sea boil, killing the fish.

Seeing the destruction caused by Senapati's devotions, the beautiful virgin queen Rara Kidul came to the surface, standing on the waves. Attributing the chaos to the power of Senapati's prayer, she asked him to stop, saying she was the protector of the sea. Being able to read his mind, she told him that his prayers had been granted, and that he and his descendants would rule Java. Even the spirits would be under his authority, and would help in the defense of his kingdom.

Pleased to hear this, Panembahan Senapati stopped his devotions, and nature was restored. As

11, 14), and the color green represents the clouds (Doolittle 1876, II: 117).

18 Jos Platenkamp (email 24 February 2014) suggests that figures like the Goddess come into being in the context of failed affinal relations, as a result of which a marriageable woman loses her social identity [e.g., is exiled] (cf. Platenkamp 2008: 6 f.), and then becomes associated with non- or pre-social fertility. This differentiation between a social man and a non-social woman, he continues, seems analogous with the contrast between social land and natural water, a disjunction a founder must bridge in order for a state to come into being. It could be argued, however, that precisely through her exile the Goddess brings into being the contrasting realm that is the necessary counterpart to the social realm the prospective ruler represents, himself, like Panembahan Senapati, equally an outsider (Sahlins 1981, 2008). It is up to him to socialize his counterpart's (uncontrolled) sexuality (Wessing 1997b: 335–336), which is indeed often considered a source of danger (Mandelbaum 1988; Wessing 2014). The resulting state would then come into being in the intersection of the male and female realms represented by these two cosmological opposites.

she returned to her palace, the Queen gave Senapati an amorous glance and he, smitten, followed her into the sea. After some preliminary flirtation they made passionate love for three days and nights.<sup>19</sup> In between the Queen taught Senapati statecraft, and once more promised him the aid of her spirit armies if he should need them.

Senapati then returned to the sea shore and, arriving at Parang Tritis, found the Muslim *wali* (proselytizer, saint) Sunan Kalijaga waiting for him. The Sunan told him to not just rely on his invincibility and *sekti* (cosmic power; cf. Anderson 1972),<sup>20</sup> as this would anger God and the other *wali*. They then went to Mataram where Sunan Kalijaga noted that Senapati's home had not yet been walled. Pointing out the dangers of this situation, he told Senapati to build a wall called *pager bumi* (fence of the world or earth). Sunan Kalijaga then took a coconut shell filled with water and sprinkled a circular line around Senapati's base saying "follow this line when you build your wall".<sup>21</sup> After that they parted.

### Proposed Indian Prototypes

Having looked at the Queen and her relationship with the rulers of Java, we can now compare her with some proposed Indian prototypes. It has long been known that Southeast Asian rulers or their court poets were skilled in synthesizing local cultural symbols with ones derived from elsewhere. This was commonly done to underpin the legitimacy of the ruler's position. In doing so, they often used Indian symbols as sources of inspiration (Hall 1985: 83). Indeed, Basham (1963: 487) states that "The whole of Southeast Asia received most of its culture from India", a statement that conveniently ignores sources such as e.g. China, which also played a significant role in the area. Basham notes that In-

dian historians refer to Southeast Asia as "Greater India", and mention Indian colonies in the area (compare Chandra 1995: 198, 200), though Basham tempers this by implying that Indian influence was mainly cultural, resulting from commerce rather than conquest (cf. Vlekke 1959: 24; Munoz 2006: 57 f.). Real evidence for colonization has in any case never been found, and Southeast Asians were active participants in a trade network that linked China and India and reached as far as the Middle East (Kulke 1991: 17; Manguin 2001: 289; Rivers 2005: 3, 5, 8). Yet, it cannot be denied that Indian cultural influence in Southeast Asia and specifically Java was considerable.

### Manimekhalā

One candidate that has recently been mentioned as a possible Indian prototype for Nyai Rara Kidul is the South Indian<sup>22</sup> goddess of the sea, Manimekhalā (Chandra 1995; Appel 2011), although as Jordaan notes (2011a: 199; 2011b: 257), none of these discussions has added much to what was already known. This goddess, who is mentioned in neither Dowson's (1972) nor Stutley and Stutley's (1977) dictionaries,<sup>23</sup> is known from the Pali canon as a "goddess who presided over the ocean ... to protect virtuous people who might suffer shipwreck".<sup>24</sup> She, like Nabi Khidir, is reputed to have rescued people from the sea (Appel 2011: 161). In doing this she claimed to do the bidding of the god Indra, the god of the waters. She is said to be the guardian of the sea as well as the city of Puhār, although when this city's ruler forgot to celebrate the festival of Indra, she destroyed the place (Appel 2011: 161; Shulman 1988: 301).

According to Thai traditions Manimekhalā's abode is studded with gems, and the jewel she carries is the source of lightning (Lévi 1931a: 173 f.). Lévi thinks her an old Thai deity who was Indianized with the introduction of Buddhism to Thailand. She is said to guard a sacred Buddhist relic (Lévi 1931b: 372–374). Her role as guardian of the seas also symbolically links her with the Buddhist goddess Tārā, who aids her worshippers "across the ocean of various dangers", "the ocean of existence" (Dasgupta 1967: 115). Jordaan (1997) has shown

19 These days some writers deny the sexual relationship (Poerbatjaraka 1962, I: 21; Muljana 2005: 266). Berg (1955b: 127, note 36), on the other hand, speaks of an actual wedding, which is not mentioned in the *Babad Tanah Jawi*.

20 This can be seen as a sub-text on Islamic vs pre-Islamic practices, both of which were current and vying for supremacy in in the early days of Mataram II (cf. Berg 1955a: 236, 250).

21 This action and the wall that was to be built are reminiscent of the ploughing of a furrow around the capital city's wall at a ruler's ascension to the throne. This furrow and the wall, which were symbolically identical with the outer boundaries of the state, formed magical circles that served to stop the ruler's and the state's cosmic powers from dissipating (Paranavitana 1970; Berg 1955b: 127, note 36). A breach in this wall was considered calamitous (cf. Stange 1975: 171). Roy Jordaan (personal communication) observes that this drawing of a watery line is also reminiscent of the division of Air-lingga's realm by Mpu Barada.

22 Trade contacts between Java and India were, early on, primarily with South India (Wessing 2011).

23 Stutley and Stutley (1977: 180, 190) gloss *mani* with "a magic pearl or jewel, used as an amulet" and *mekhalā* with "a gir-dle or belt", their combination giving us "a jeweled belt."

24 <<http://www.palikanon.com/namen/ma/manimekhalaa.htm>> [17 August 2016].

symbolic linkages between Tārā and Nyai Rara Kidul.<sup>25</sup>

Chandra (1995: 198) thinks Manimekhalā reminiscent of Nyai Rara Kidul in her function of goddess of the Southern Ocean, which calls to mind

... South Indian migrations across the ocean. These Indians *must have* worshipped a Goddess for a safe and successful journey. In Cambodia, the Goddess of the Seas is Mani-mekhalā .... Mekhalā and Kāñci both mean a “waist-girdle”. I venture to suggest that Manimekhalā *must have been* worshipped as the city-goddess (*nagara-devata*) of Kāñci. The migrants from Kāñci and its state *could have* constituted a sizeable proportion and worshipped Her on the high seas. They *must have* consecrated landings by extensive rituals of the goddess, on arrival at a sea coast after a long and exhausting voyage. *They were faced by tribal people, not only inhospitable but hostile.* As time went by, they married local women to adjust to the new space, as they gained the respect of the local rulers by a higher civilization. (italics added)

Chandra, however, offers no concrete data to back up these suppositions, and furthermore attributes the origin of the veneration of Nyai Rara Kidul to the 8<sup>th</sup> century kingdom of Mataram I. He does not document this attribution, but only claims that the founder of this kingdom “must have consecrated the wholeness of his state with the holiness of this Goddess of the Southern Seas alive with veins of sacred time”.

Manimekhalā also has a namesake, Manimekhalai, an illegitimate daughter born to a family of ship owners (Appel 2011: 161), who is said to have traveled to Java where, similar to Nyai Rara Kidul, she instructs the ruler in statecraft (Appel 2011: 163). It is unlikely that in the process they, like the Queen and Panembahan Senapati, made passionate love, since Manimekhalai was to “destroy the power of the god of passions so completely that he would remain without strength and disoccupied” (Appel 2011: 161, citing Daniélou 1989: 31, 151).

Comparing Manimekhalā and Manimekhalai to Nyai Rara Kidul, we note that both are goddesses of the sea who live in sumptuous palaces. Yet, while Nyai Rara Kidul at times becomes angry, she does not destroy the capital city of Mataram II, nor does she do Indra’s bidding.<sup>26</sup> She is, in fact, said

to have entered the Islamic faith,<sup>27</sup> although at the time of her dalliance with Panembahan Senapati she had not yet done so. She also does not save people from drowning. Rather than destroying the god of passions, Nyai Rara Kidul is said to fully indulge in them. Manimekhalā is also nowhere said to be a *nāginī*. Indeed, it was the king of Pukar’s love for a *nāginī* that ultimately led to the destruction of his city by Manimekhalai (Shulman 1988: 301).

### Hikayat Sri Rāma

Lately Jordaan (2011a, 2011b) has looked at aspects of the Hikayat Sri Rama, which indeed shows some interesting parallels with parts of the tale of Panembahan Senapati and Nyai Rara Kidul. Briefly, the relevant part of the Hikayat Sri Rāma story relates that Rāma wants to build a causeway to Lanka in his quest to free his beloved Sītā. This endeavor is thwarted as the waters boil in turmoil, and fish and other water creatures threaten the work. Rāma prays to Sagara, the God of the Sea, but this does not alleviate the problems, as Sagara does not put in an appearance. Rāma then angrily fires an arrow into the water, leading to the death of many fish and *nāgas*. The situation is finally resolved by the appearance of a young woman (a substitute for Sagara?) that emerges from the sea. She has a sexual encounter with Rāma’s ally, Hanuman,<sup>28</sup> whom she advises on how to proceed. Jordaan (2011a: 197–200; personal communication) notes that this young woman, who in the Prambanan reliefs is depicted facing south,<sup>29</sup> has much in common with some Southeast Asian mermaid-like creatures whom he classifies as *nāginī*. He wonders whether the one that dallied with Hanuman might not be “the archetype of Nyai Rara Kidul”.

However, although there indeed are several tempting parallels between the Hikayat Sri Rāma tale and Senapati’s relationship with Nyai Rara Kidul, these only partially concur with the details of the *Babad Tanah Jawi* account. Thus, while Rāma attempts to contact the God of the Sea to solve his problem (Jordaan 2011a: 184), Senapati is approached by Nyai Rara Kidul while praying to

25 We should be careful in laying such links, however, remembering Wong’s (1993–94: 267) critique of Cravath (1992): “‘The Goddess’ of [Cravath’s] title is no more than his own construct: he discusses a number of female deities and divine beings who are considered manifestations of the same deity neither by Southeast Asian in general nor Cambodians in particular.” See also Ricklefs (1974b: 409).

26 She is said to occasionally destroy coastal communities, but this is due to an insult to herself, rather than to a deity like

Indra or even Allah (cf. Wessing 1997a: 100; 1997b: 338, note 8).

27 It is told that she urged the Javanese to read the Koran and to pray to Allah (Ricklefs 1974b: 203).

28 As Mary Brockington (2012: 202f.) observes, Hanuman makes rather a habit of such seductions, though perhaps only in Southeast Asian versions of the story, the Indian tradition attributing celibacy to him (J. L. Brockington 1984: 303).

29 E.g., toward the Southern Ocean.

Allah. In both these tales, the waters boil in turmoil, causing great damage. However, in the Hikayat Sri Rāma this is caused by sea creatures that attempt to hinder Rāma's venture, while in the Javanese case Panembahan Senapati's prayers and meditations lead to the disturbance. Rāma indeed shoots an arrow into the water, killing many fish and *nāgas*, but this is in frustration at being hindered: he did not cause there to be a "tumultuous ocean filled with threatening fish" but rather threatened "to destroy the ocean and all the creatures inhabiting its waters" because of the tumult (Jordaan 2011a: 180, 184; Brockington 1984: 202, 268, 292). In both tales there is a romantic interlude with a maiden that emerges from the sea, though in the Thai version she is the daughter of the Queen of the Ocean rather than the Queen herself. In the Hikayat Sri Rāma, furthermore, she is seduced by Rāma's ally Hanuman,<sup>30</sup> while in the Javanese case the attraction is both mutual and between Senapati himself and the Queen of the Southern Ocean – if, indeed, she did not seduce him.

Other parallels include the appearance, in some versions of the Rāma tale, of a mermaid named Golden Fish Maiden (who, again, submits to Hanuman's advances) (Jordaan 2011b: 254; Cravath 1992: 83) and a golden clothed *olor* fish that offers to carry Senapati to his place of meditation (Olthof 1987: 79 f.).<sup>31</sup> The *olor*, however, whose life had once been spared by Senapati (Olthof 1984: 79 f.), only serves as a possible vehicle and does not indulge in dalliance.

Although, as Hildebeitel (1988: 202 f.) points out, liaisons with creatures of the waters are often an essential factor in the founding of dynasties in India, China, and Southeast Asia, and the world of the waters is the source of the powers of gods, saints, and kings, it must be remembered that in the Hikayat Sri Rāma, it is Hanuman rather than Rāma who indulges in such relationships. Rāma, exiled to the forest like Nyai Rara Kidul, concentrated on rescuing Sītā and, having done so, became king of Ayodhyā (Stutley and Stutley 1977: 246).

One final difference between Rāma and Panembahan Senapati is their location vis-à-vis the sea: Rāma, like prince Kaundinya of Cambodia, whom I shall discuss below, remains firmly above the water. Rāma wants to build a causeway to reach his beloved Sītā, and fires his arrow while standing

on the shore. Panembahan Senapati, on the other hand, besides riding on a fish also ventures below the waves and remains there for a time. The difference may be due to Islamic influence, travelling below the waters being not-uncommon in its mythology: the various myths about Iskandar Zulkanain that are current in the Malay world have him travel under water and, in one recension, marry a sea princess (Braginsky 2013: 376). Both Nabi Khidir and his counterpart Ilyās, who are said to rule the seas, are reputed to have dived into Mecca's sacred zam-zam well, thereby gaining eternal life (Wensinck 1971: 1156; Boratov 1986: 5). In one Banten tradition Sultan Haji did so to travel from Mecca to his home in Banten, though he aged in the process rather than gaining eternal life (Drewes 1995: 121).

### Cemara Tunggal

Neither the Manimekhālā nor the Hikayat Sri Rāma data, furthermore, relate in any way to the second story about the Queen told in the *Babad Tanah Jawi* (Olthof 1987: 16 f.; see also Djajadiningrat 1983: 259), one that affects to precede the tale of Nyai Rara Kidul and Panembahan Senapati by several centuries. This tale tells of the adventures of Raden Susuruh, a prince of West Java's Pajajaran. This prince, having lost a power struggle, fled eastward, eventually coming to Mt. Kombang. There he found the clairvoyant ascetic *ajar* Cemara Tunggal, who was the ruler of the spirits of Java. This *ajar* advised Raden Susuruh to head straight east to a place where he would find a *maja* tree<sup>32</sup> bearing a single fruit with a bitter seed. There Raden Susuruh was to settle, and the place would become a large city where he would be king, and become the ancestor of the rulers of Java.

Cemara Tunggal was actually a princess of Pajajaran who had secretly left the kingdom because she refused to marry. Instead she became an *ajar* on Mt. Kombang. On this hill there grew a single *cemara* tree,<sup>33</sup> from which she derived her name Cemara Tunggal ("single *cemara*"). Telling Raden Susuruh of her adventures, the *ajar* resumed her previous beauty, causing Raden Susuruh to fall in love and desire her. At once the woman disappeared and the *ajar* reappeared. Raden Susuruh apologized, and the *ajar* predicted that they would meet again in the future, when he had become ruler of Java. S/he would then move to the Sand Sea,<sup>34</sup> and be the

30 Though Jordaan (2011b: 257) raises the possibility that a relief on the Prambanan temple may suggest that it was Rāma who had the affair.

31 This is a parallel with Nabi Khidir, who is also said to have travelled on the back of a fish. See <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khidr>> [18 August 2016].

32 *Aegle marmelos*.

33 Casuarina tree: *Casuarina eqnisetifolia*.

34 Probably the Tengger Sand Sea (Ind. *Laut Pasir Tengger*).

ruler of all the spirits in Java. After this s/he would move to Pamantingan<sup>35</sup> and submit to Raden Susuruh's authority. Promising him the aid of an army of spirits, s/he advised Raden Susuruh to head for the state of Singasari. Raden Susuruh did so, and on the way found the predicted *maja* tree with a bitter fruit. There he founded a settlement, which he named Majapahit. This settlement became the kingdom of Majapahit, which existed from the late 13<sup>th</sup> to the early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>36</sup>

Several parallels can be noted between Cemara Tunggal and Nyai Rara Kidul of whom Cemara Tunggal is indeed commonly considered to be an earlier manifestation (Ricklefs 1974a: 239). Her promise to Raden Susuruh is seen as the prototype of Nyai Rara Kidul's agreement with Panembahan Senapati (Ras 1986: 266; 1987: 350; Bogaerts 1990: 7; Kumar 2009: 139; Appel 2011: 163). Like Nyai Rara Kidul, Cemara Tunggal refused to marry, leading to her exile. Both are clairvoyant, command the spirit armies of Java, and promise to marry the successive rulers of Java. Their locations on the south coast are also nearly identical. As Kumar (2009: 139) observes, while in this tale she is not yet spoken of as the Goddess of the Southern Ocean, "there can be little doubt that Cemara Tunggal is the future Goddess" (compare Ras 1987: 351).

Bogaerts (1990: 6) writes that it is difficult to establish when the Queen of the Southern Ocean first appears in the Javanese sources. She is mentioned in Javanese texts like the *Serat Centhini* and the *Aji Saka* tales (Poerbatjaraka 1962, I: 23), but these both date from the mid to late 18<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Pigeaud 1967–70, I: 228 f.; II: 70; De Graaf and Pigeaud 1984: 166). Attempts have been made to link her with the pre-Hindu veneration of the sea and mountains, a veneration that was later incorporated in imported belief systems, such as Javanese Hinduism and, later, Islam (Bogaerts 1990: 6).<sup>37</sup> Pigeaud (1960–63, IV: 211) writes of an "ancient Javanese Mother-Goddess cult" that he

assumes to have existed "from time immemorial", though he cannot name or identify the ancient goddess. He goes on, however, to suggest Nyai Rara Kidul<sup>38</sup> as the *probable* modern Javanese equivalent of the ancient figure, basing himself on the similarity of the names used for the various goddesses, which *perhaps* were also used in Majapahit times. It is clear from his use of the words "perhaps" and "probable" that Pigeaud was uncertain about the connection. Ras (1987: 353) assumes that the tradition of sacrifices "in honor of Ratu Kidul" likely preceded the founding of Mataram II. However, while it is likely that along the south coast of Java there existed a belief in sea goddesses or spirits, as is the case throughout coastal Southeast Asia, it is by no means certain that such a spirit was named Nyai Rara Kidul, even along the stretch of coast where the meeting between the Queen and Senapati is said to have occurred. As Bogaerts warns us, considerable caution should be employed when using data from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries to identify the goddess, and it is only in the Mataram II court literature that she is explicitly mentioned, and there, as we have seen, under different names (Bogaerts 1990: 6 f.).

These links to ancient cults, then, are speculative at best, as are the attempts to link the Javanese Queen with Indian prototypes. One problem with symbolic correspondences is that symbols are variously interpretable, allowing mythmakers to draw parallels between previously unconnected tales and depictions.<sup>39</sup> This does not necessarily mean, however, that the Javanese themselves originally based the tale of Nyai Rara Kidul on them; though they could, of course, have been used later to further embellish the tradition. Jordaan (personal communication) refers to a pool of related tales, "indigenous throughout monsoon Asia" "from time immemorial", the sources of which cannot now be traced (Jordaan 2006: 15; 2011b: 259), to which the court scribes had access when writing the *Babad*, the "rich and varied tradition" mentioned earlier. In this he is supported by Berg (1955a: 241–244, 252, 256–258; 1955b: 103; 1955c: 375; 1962: 29), who furthermore thinks that the author(s) of the *Babad Tanah Jawi* primarily referred to works of the Central Javanese tradition. As we will see, Berg was not totally correct.

35 This is located on the south coast of Java, near Parang Tritis, the place where Panembahan Senapati and Nyai Rara Kidul are said to have first met.

36 East Javanese tradition claims Majapahit to have been founded by Raden Wijaya (Djafar 2009: 165), and Berg (1955a: 256) feels that the basic outline of the tale of Raden Susuruh's adventures is based on the story of Raden Wijaya's flight from Singasari in 1292.

37 King Hayam Wuruk (1334–1389) is said to have regularly visited the south coast of Java in connection with the veneration of the sea (Bogaerts 1990: 6; Pigeaud 1960–63, IV: 211). Yet Nyai Rara Kidul is not mentioned in this regard, and the veneration could have been of any one of the many spirits even now thought to populate the sea and south coast (cf. Sutarto 2011).

38 He also mentions Dewi Sri, the goddess of rice and fertility.

39 We must differentiate between a prototype and a symbolic linkage: a prototype is necessarily temporally prior while a symbolic linkage can be made at any time. Note the ease with which myths about the origin of rice are integrated into the complex of tales about the Goddess: having been refused re-entry to heaven, the *widadari* Nawang Wulan is made a *patih* (chief minister) to Nyai Rara Kidul (Kumar 2009: 117).



What we have as a solid datum, then, is the appearance of the Queen in the *Babad Tanah Jawi*, a text that attained its definitive form toward the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Ras 1987: 344).<sup>40</sup> Among many other stories it contains the ones related above about Cemara Tunggal and the meeting between Nyai Rara Kidul and Panembahan Senapati. These are the ones we must therefore start with.

There is, however, something rather curious about the story of Cemara Tunggal. Since it purports to account for the founding of as important a state as Majapahit, it is strange that neither the Book of Kings, *Pararaton*<sup>41</sup> nor the *Nagarakertagama* (Pigeaud 1960–63) mentions her. Given the prominent role ascribed to this *ajar* in these events, one might have expected at least a mention. Indeed, the only place where Cemara Tunggal is spoken of is in the *Babad Tanah Jawi*, a text dating from long after the 14<sup>th</sup> century founding of the kingdom of Majapahit.

It is likely, therefore, that this episode was created specifically for the *Babad Tanah Jawi* in order to link Mataram II with Majapahit.<sup>42</sup> This is something that Senapati's grandson, Sultan Agung (r. 1613–1646), is said to have been at pains to do in order to boost the legitimacy of the new state (Reid 1993: 179 f.; Berg 1955a: 232, 236; 1955b: 125; Carey 1997).<sup>43</sup> But why not have the Queen immediately appear as herself, rather than take the form of the *ajar*? And where did the author of the *Babad Tanah Jawi* obtain his inspiration for this episode? No Indian parallels have been suggested for it.

40 Berg (1955a: 232, 237, 239) thought it dated to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Others, on the other hand, date it even later, claiming one version to have been published in 1722, and a second one in 1788 (<[http://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babad\\_Tanah\\_Jawi](http://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babad_Tanah_Jawi)>; [18 August 2016].

41 The only mention of Mt. Kombang was in a comparison made by Krom (1920: 110) between the *Pararaton* and stories told by the Javanese, rather than in the text of the *Pararaton* itself.

42 Ras (1987: 349) points at the “lengthy genealogy” in the *Babad Tanah Jawi* tracing Senapati's descent from Adam via the royal house of Majapahit. Even today, the throne of King Hayam Wuruk of Majapahit is one of the heirlooms that confer legitimacy to the Surakarta court, an inheritor of the court of Mataram II (Wessing 2003: 222). As Beatty (2012: 173) writes, “[T]he continuity of Javanese history consists precisely in an *emphasis* on continuity, each ruler assuming not simply the temporary reins of power, but its lasting symbols” (cf. Schrieke 1957: 7, 10–12).

43 Schlehe (1991: 200) attributes the Sultan's relationship with Nyai Rara Kidul to the fact that as a Muslim he could no longer be a Deva Raja, but this ignores the fact that relations between rulers and *nāgini* had long been part of the founding myths of Southeast Asian and even Indian states.

## The Cambodian Myth

It has been noted (Jordaan 1984: 113, note 8; 1987: 124 f.; Wessing 2009: 92; 325 f.), however, that a close parallel with the Nyai Rara Kidul and Senapati tale exists in the story of the founding of Cambodia by prince Preah Thong<sup>44</sup> (a.k.a. Kaundinya) and a *nāga* princess. This story, versions of which possibly date to the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE (Gaudes 1993: 339),<sup>45</sup> would have been familiar to Javanese court poets through Java's long-lasting connections with Cambodia. Trade between Java and mainland Southeast Asia and China had flourished for centuries, some of the earliest contacts dating from before 300 B.C.E. (Shaffer 1994: 4).<sup>46</sup>

Political contacts between the two existed as well. Thus, king Jayavarman II is said to have defected from Mataram I's overlordship in 802 CE to become ruler in Cambodia (Griffiths 2013: 43). Jayavarman's name is indeed linked with Kaundinya's: a king Kaundinya Jayavarman, who lived or ruled between 475 and 514 CE, is thought to have been a “descendant – perhaps a great-grandson” of Kaundinya II who lived late in the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Gaudes 1993: 341). Given that Jayavarman II sailed from Java, it could be argued that the tale could just as easily have come to Cambodia with this conquering prince, were it not for the fact of the existence of a 3<sup>rd</sup> century version long predating this conquest:

The sovereign of Fu-nan was originally a female called Liu-ye. There was a person called Hun-tian of Mo-fu. He was a staunch devotee of a Brahmanical god who was pleased with his piety. He dreamt that this god gave him a divine bow and asked him to take to sea in a trading vessel. In the morning he went to the temple of the god and found a bow. Then he embarked on a trading vessel, and the god changed the course of [the] wind in such a manner that he came to Fu-nan. Liu-ye came in a boat to plunder the vessel. Hun-tian raised his bow and shot an arrow which pierced through the queen's boat from one side to the other. The queen was overtaken by fear and submitted to him. Thereupon Hun-tian ruled over the country. (Gaudes 1993: 339)

44 Also Prah Thong.

45 I want to be careful about this date. Gaudes (1993: 339) writes that “these accounts go back to the Chinese official Kang Tai ... who visited Fu-nan in the middle of the third century ... Perhaps the most faithful of his reports is preserved in the tenth-century encyclopaedia *Tai-ping-yulan* ...” It is of course difficult to determine whether changes crept into the story over the intervening seven centuries.

46 At this early date the ships were mostly Southeast Asian, the Chinese themselves only venturing southwards in the 12<sup>th</sup> century C.E., after their invention of the compass, the south-pointing needle, stimulated them to explore the areas to the south (Reid 1992: 182; Shaffer 1994: 11).

Gaudes (1993: 340) explains the name Liu-ya as a transcription into Chinese of a native name, and considers Hun-tian to “surely represent the Indian name Kaundinya”. He considers both of them to be historical personages.

The waxing and waning of political relations between Java and Cambodia need not detain us, suffice it to say that during times of good relations there seem to have been exchanges of princesses between the courts. Whether this was a regular pattern or an occasional occurrence is not clear, but tradition has it that at least once this led to a marriage between a princess of Champa, the Putri Champa, and king Brawijaya of Majapahit (Olthof 1987: 18).<sup>47</sup> A princess would of course have been accompanied by an entourage, and with them also would have come at least some knowledge of Cham myths, especially the important one about the founding of Cambodia (cf. Wessing 1997b: 334f.). There are various versions of this myth, a representative one of which from the royal annals tells how Prince Prah Thong is exiled and

... arrives at Kouk Thlok,<sup>[48]</sup> where a Cham ruler reigns. The prince usurps the throne. One day the tide comes up sooner than expected and the prince has to pass the night on a sandbank. A *nāgī* of great beauty comes to play on the beach. Prah Thong falls in love with her and obtains her consent to marriage. The king of the *nāgas*, her father, enlarges the land area by drinking the water that covers the land, builds him a capital, and changes the name of the land to Kambujā. (Gaudes 1993: 335–336)

Kaundinya is also said to have planted a javelin that he had received from Aśvattharman, the son of Droṇa, at the place where he was to found his capital (Hall 1964: 26; Gaudes 1993: 341, 347).

In another version (Cravath 1992: 82) Prince Preah Thong came upon a beautiful *thlok*<sup>49</sup> tree in the area where he landed. He climbed it, but as he

did so the tree grew, so he descended again. This led him to a hollow in the tree, where he found a wonderful grotto. There he met the *nāga* king's daughter, whom he subsequently married. Cambodian school-texts give the following composite version:

Formerly, all the land that presently forms Kampujā (Kampuchea) and South Vietnam was covered by the sea. The water extended in the east to the Tuong Son or Annam Highlands, in the north to the Dangrek Mountains, and in the west to the Kravanh or Cardammon Mountains. From the sediments of the Mekong there came into existence near the present Angkor Borei [a town in the south of Cambodia] the island of Kouk Thlok, “land of the thlok tree.” The Chinese called this land Fu-nan ... The people had a queen, called by the Chinese Liu-ye ... In [or about] the year 68 A.D. a Brahman by the name of Hun-tian ... arrived by ship from India. He conquered Kouk Thlok, married Lui-ye as his queen, and gave her the name Somā, i.e., “moon daughter” or “moon born.” The land was given the name Kambujā. Hun-tian is also called Kaundinya, and, in ancient Khmer narratives, Preah Thaong; Queen Liu-ye is called Neang Somā or Neang Neak. The land is also called by the names Takkasilā, Indapattayasodhara, and others. (Gaudes 1993: 338)

The name of the country, Cambodia (Kambujā), is said to be based on the name of the ancestor of the Khmer rulers of the land, the *rsi* (hermit) Kambu Svāyambhuva who married the nymph Mera (Coëdès 1967: 88f.). The line of rulers that sprung from this union, and by extension all the people of the country, are their symbolic descendants: “*Kambu-ja* (Kambu-born, offspring of Kambu)” (Gaudes 1993: 344). Gaudes, however, considers this “pure poetry”, and thinks it equally plausible that the figure Kambu was invented to explain the name of the country.

## Literary Magic

The question is, then, how this and the other versions of this story fit into the “pool of tales” proposed by Jordaan: did one or more of the Cambodian tales draw upon some version of the models discussed earlier, or were the Cambodian narratives indeed the model for the foundation myth of Mataram II? While I agree with Jordaan that we can perhaps never be fully certain, I am inclined to the view that some version of the Cambodian myth was the model used by the Javanese *Babad* writer to create Mataram II's foundation myth. It has, indeed, long been maintained by some that the story of Nyai

*tingia calabura* L; Jamaican cherry; <<http://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kersen>>, [18 August 2016].

47 She is also mentioned as being a Muslim and having played an important role in the spread of Islam in Indonesia (Tan Ta Sen 2009: 174), although according to De Graaf and Pigeaud's sources (1984: 61) she was not the queen of Majapahit. It is possible, of course, that such a marriage was not just a one-time occurrence (De Graaf and Pigeaud 1984: 70; Manguin 2001: 293f.), leading to a proliferation of overlapping tales about princesses from Champa and China, if these were not in fact the same person. The “boundary” between Southeast Asia and China was, after all, a rather fluid one (Abalahin 2011). As an aside, it may be noted that the late president of Indonesia, Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) claimed to be a descendant of the Putri Champa/China who married king Brawijaya (Jawa Pos 2009: 8).

48 An island. Kouk Thlok is a Khmer name, *kouk* meaning dry or higher land while *thlok* is the name of the tree *Parinarium amanense* (Gaudes 1993: 337f.).

49 Also *thalok* or *talok*. In Java it is also known as *kersen* (*Mun-*

Rara Kidul was a fiction created by Senapati or Sultan Agung to convince the people that Senapati was the rightful occupant of the throne of Mataram. The people, it was assumed, would not bother to ask how all this was possible anyway (Intisari 1991: 134; Poerbatjaraka 1962, II: 19).

The reason for my hypothesis that the Cambodian myth stood model for the Javanese one is based in the first place on some interesting linguistic correspondences between the two that seem to me to indicate a translation of ideas from the Cambodian text to the Javanese one: the former narrative was translated into a Javanese idiom. The tools with which to do this were readily available in Javanese literary practice, namely a way of analyzing words to seek their hidden meanings called *kérata basa* or *jarwa dhosok*.<sup>50</sup> This is done by dividing words into syllables, which are then each glossed to reveal the meaning of the original word (Arps 1992: 364; Keeler 1987: 251). Keeler (1987: 251–252) notes that this kind of etymologizing is an important aspect of Javanese culture, and figures importantly in mystical practice (*ngelmu*). Persons aspiring to be teachers of mysticism must be especially adept at this. In Majapahit times<sup>51</sup> the court poets, *bhujangga* or *pujangga*, were philologists who played such spiritual roles (Gonda 1932: 253; Zoetmulder 1982: 268). Berg (1955a: 232, 240, 246), writing about Mataram times, refers to them as priests who performed literary magic through the “secret language of the Javanese literary tradition” (cf. Berg 1955c: 361). It can be logically assumed that such a “master of the literary art” (Robson and Wibisono 2002: 602) would not only be able to reveal hidden meanings, but could also do the reverse, namely hide truths in seemingly ordinary words.<sup>52</sup>

The historical accuracy of the *Babad Tanah Jawi* has been questioned,<sup>53</sup> and it is quite likely that this and other such texts must be seen as works of “literary magic, created by a priest who by writing it

was continuing an age-old tradition” (Ras 1987: 347), and who through his narrative attempted to bring into being or maintain a desired reality, here the realm of Mataram II. If my hypothesis is correct, therefore, we must read both the Cambodian myth and the *Babad Tanah Jawi* through the eyes of a Javanese court poet. It is, of course, impossible to prove that the process I propose below is exactly what happened. To paraphrase Giffeths (2013: 52), just because something *can* be shown to be possible does not necessarily mean that *has to have* happened that way.

With that caveat in mind, I propose that, when faced with the task of Javanizing the Cambodian tales, the court poet first of all had to link both Majapahit and Mataram II with Nyai Rara Kidul, the then current source of power and legitimacy for the rulers. An obvious place to start would have been the word *Kambujā*, the name of the country where the myth had originated. Dividing this into component parts, one gets *kambu* and *ja*. We already saw that in Khmer this combination stands for descendant of Kambu. In Javanese *kambu* means a swarm of bees, which Berg (1955a: 254) links with souls or spirits.<sup>54</sup> The singular of *kambu* is *kombang*<sup>55</sup> and the syllable *ja* can be analyzed as standing for *ajar*, leading us to Mt. *Kombang* and the *ajar* *Cemara Tunggal* whom we met earlier.<sup>56</sup>

Another possible combination is *kambu* and *buja*. The latter term, *buja*, can be seen as standing for *bhujangga*, the adept master of literary magic, similar to the *rsi* (hermit) that Kambu is said to have been, and whom we see reflected in the *ajar* *Cemara Tunggal*. Another meaning of the word *bhujangga*, however, is serpent or *nāga* (Gonda 1932), calling to mind the *nāginī* that prince Preah Thong found in a cave in the *thlok* tree (or on the beach), and the link between *Cemara Tunggal* and the Queen of the Southern Ocean. On the other hand, it could also be a reference to the court poet himself, reminding us that this narrative is his own creation.

We must also ask why the name *Cemara Tunggal* was chosen for the hermit, reflecting the single *cemara* tree on Mt. *Kombang*. In the Cambodian tale this tree was the *thlok* or *talok*, which also grows in Java and is there also called *talok*. The *cemara* tree

50 *Jarwa*: “meaning, explanation”. *Jarwa dhosok*: “a modern Javanese equivalent of an archaic saying”. Also, “a search for underlying or original phrases from which words are derived” (Robson and Wibisono 2002: 298). For examples see Keeler (1987), Arps (1992) and Zoetmulder (1995: 289).

51 But also, it can be assumed, in Islamic Mataram II since poets were held in great esteem in pre-Islamic Arabia and people had great faith “in the immanent power of the poet’s words ...” (Henninger 2004: 340).

52 It must also be remembered that these tales were commonly meant to be recited rather than read, which would have increased the scope for puns and word play (compare Sweeney 1980: 15).

53 The truth of any historical account is in any case only relative, being a function of the choices of facts that the historian considers relevant and worthy of consideration (cf. Carr 1961).

54 Berg writes that the Javanese word *nyawa* (soul or spirit) via *nyawane* or *eruan* derives from \**nyauan* and is etymologically identical with the Balinese *nyawan* (honey bee), the Sundanese *nyiruan*, and the Madurese *nyaruan*, *nyeruan*, or *eruan*, and is probably related to *tawwan* or *tawon* (wasp). *Nyawa* is, indeed, often glossed with soul, although the gloss spirit might be more appropriate (Wessing 2006b).

55 O. Jav. *Kumbang* (Zoetmulder 1982: 921).

56 Note also that *ajar* is an anagram of *raja* (ruler).

serves two purposes here, however. First, its trunk is tall and straight like a pole or staff (Tim Penyusun Kamus 1988: 159),<sup>57</sup> reminiscent of the javelin Kaundinya is said to have planted. This inference is strengthened by a second meaning of the word *cemara*, namely a pinch of fur from a horse, cow, or water buffalo used to decorate a spear or lance (Tim Penyusun Kamus 1988: 159).<sup>58</sup> As Domenig (2014: 163–177) points out, such tufts or tassels, rather than being mere decorations are in fact used to lure spirit powers to the object to which they are attached.<sup>59</sup> These spirits, Domenig argues, are attracted to the object by the swaying and fluttering of the lures, which is precisely what the leaves of the *cemara* tree are said to do.<sup>60</sup> Seeing the tree as a place that is attractive to spirit powers clarifies its connection with the *ajar*, Cemara Tunggal.

The second purpose of the *cemara* tree lies in the *ajar*'s name. In order to understand this, we must refer back to the meeting between Raden Susuruh and the *ajar*. The *ajar*, who could shape-shift between male and female form (Sutton 1993: 129; Headley 2004: 329, n. 65), showed him/herself to Raden Susuruh as the beautiful princess she once was. When the prince was overcome with desire, s/he shifted back to the *ajar* form. In other words, the princess, the future queen (*ratu*) of the Southern Ocean, was hidden within the *ajar*. This is exactly what we find in the name Cemara Tunggal: the last two letters of *cemara* and the first two of *tunggal* spell out the word *ratu* (queen): she is indeed hidden there through the literary arts of the court poet.<sup>61</sup>

## Other Parallels

Having served its purpose of bringing together *raden* Susuruh and Cemara Tunggal/Nyai Rara Kidul, Mt. Kombang, like the island Khok Thlok, seems to disappear or become difficult to locate (Pigeaud 1967–70, II: 249; Gaudes 1993: 338).<sup>62</sup> The island and the mountain are equivalent because both refer to raised or higher ground, which in the Cambodian case formerly was under water. Such islands, also in Indonesian myths, are often the dwelling place of *nāginī* or, in Islamic areas, *jinn* (cf. Pudjiastuti 2007: 261–263).

Modern Indonesian authors speculate about various locations for Mt. Kombang. Soekirno (1994: 16) places it and Cemara Tunggal's hermitage near the old cities Demak and Jepara, both of which are nearer the north coast of Java. Sunan Kalijaga, he writes, received directions from the hermit there about where he should look for an enormous teak tree to be used in the construction of Demak's mosque. However, he also places (Pa)Mantingan near Demak and Japara, although its location is near Parang Tritis on the south coast. Utami (2008: 221 f.), on the other hand, thinks that Mt. Kombang may have been a mythological hill, the home of various kinds of spirits. She implies that it was located outside of West Java: expelled from Pajajaran, she writes, Raden Susuruh walked east, leaving the West Java. There is, however, a Mt. Kumbang<sup>63</sup> near the south coast of West Java, which may have been the mythological location since Raden Susuruh headed east from there toward Singasari in Java's East Hook.

Next, we should look at the role played by Sunan Kalijaga,<sup>64</sup> in whom we may see an Islamized version of the Nāga King that aided Prince Preah Thong in founding his city. His name Kalijaga was given to him after sat for three years on the bank of a river guarding Sunan Bonang's cane. However, rather than the cane being mentioned, his name actually means the *sunan* who guards the river (Aisyah 2011: 53).<sup>65</sup> Javanese informants confirm that Kali-

57 Cemara 2. *pohon yg berbatang tinggi lurus spt tiang*. "The [Casuarina] tree has delicate, slender ultimate branches and leaves that are no more than scales, making the tree look more like a wispy conifer" (<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casuarina>>, [19 August 2016]). The Casuarina has "... feathery leaves that hang in fringes from short stems ... [it] whispers and murmurs in the wind, making noises that early settlers compared to a harp" (<<http://griffithreview.com/edition-2-dreams-of-land/the-casuarina-forest>>, [19 August 2016]).

58 Cemara 1. *secekek bulu kuda (lembu, kerbau, dsb) yg dipakai sbg hiasan pd tombak dsb*. Janz (1913: 939) says it is the tail of a wild bull that is attached to the lance, while Pigeaud (1960–63, V: 151) only mentions a tassel or tuft.

59 See, for instance, the tufts, feathers, and tassels attached to the Batak magic staff (Prager and Ter Keurs 1988: 42, 44, 141–146).

60 Mr. Selamat Hariyono of Jember (East Java) writes that these leaves wave and sway (personal communication).

61 A hint in this direction also lies in the syllable *cem* or *cam*, for which Janz gives the longer form *ĕcam*, and which he glosses with "mentally formed depiction or conception" (Janz 1913: 182, 930; cf. Prawiroatmojo 1988: 116).

62 There now is a hill named Gunung (Mount) Kombang in East Java, though it is not clear that this is the place where these mythological events are thought to have taken place. See <<http://www.panoramio.com/photo/52105234>>, [19 August 2016].

63 In Javanese an alternate spelling for *kombang* and in Sundanese the word for bee (Robson and Wibisono 2002: 409; Hardjadibrata 2003: 456).

64 De Graaf (1987: 107) expresses doubts about the meeting between Senapati and Sunan Kalijaga because by that time the Sunan had died.

65 Others, however, say that the name derives from that of the river Jaga near Cirebon (De Graaf and Pigeaud 1974: 52).

jaga can mean *penunggu kali*, the guardian of a river, although a *penunggu* is usually a kind of spirit (*dhemit*) (Wessing 2006b: 42).

Like the Nāga King, then, Sunan Kalijaga, who is called the sacred protector of the people of Mataram (De Graaf 1987: 17), is associated with water and thus with the underworld. Like him, too, he played a role in securing the prince's city. The Nāga King did so by drinking up the water beneath which the land lay submerged, while Sunan Kalijaga poured a line of water along which the wall protecting Panembahan Senapati's capital was to be built.<sup>66</sup> Sunan Kalijaga is furthermore said to have once married a princess of Kediri, who later became the Queen of the Southern Ocean (Rato 1992: 79, n. 3),<sup>67</sup> the *nāgini* from whom Panembahan Senapati learned his statecraft. This would have made Sunan Kalijaga Senapati's (mystical) father-in-law, like the Nāga King was to Preah Thong. Among other things<sup>68</sup> Sunan Kalijaga is said to have invented the forging of the Javanese *keris* (dagger), his own *keris* playing an important role in the 18<sup>th</sup> century division of Java (Ricklefs 1974b: 75). The *keris*, a serpentine object, is reminiscent of the *nāga* and the Nāga King, and the association between *nāgas*, the Javanese courts, and various *sunan* remains strong until today (cf. Jawa Pos 2012: 37).

Another parallel between Prince Preah Thong and Panembahan Senapati is that they stood outside the established order. In the various versions of the Cambodian myth recounted by Gaudes (1993) Prince Preah Thong is most often on exile, expelled from his native land due to misbehavior. Coming to Kouk Thlok, he conquers or usurps power, and becomes ruler. Panembahan Senapati similarly rebelled against his overlord, the ruler of Pajang (Ricklefs 2008: 45) and, thinking them to be too slow to accept Islam, killed off the members of the existing court of Mataram (Reid 1993: 176 f., citing Van Goens 1656). He then established his own court there.

Strengthening the argument that the Javanese myth could be based on the Cambodian one is the fact that in both courts the ruler is said to meet and copulate with the *nāgini* in a tower of the palace. In Cambodia the king had a bedchamber in a golden

tower where a nine-headed serpent (*nāga*) awaited his nightly visits (Gaudes 1993: 334), while in Java this took place in a tower that was part of the *Taman Sari* (Wessing 2003: 227 f.).

A final correspondence between Cambodia and Java can be found in the traditions surrounding Java's *bedhaya* court dance. In Yogyakarta this dance is said to have been created by either Sultan Agung or Panembahan Senapati, or by Ratu Kidul, "as a love dance for the early ruler" expressing the "strong sexual attraction between the two" (Sutton 1993: 128 f., 132). While in Java there are nine dancers, with an invisible tenth one representing the Queen, this dance is remarkably similar to the Cambodian court dance featuring seven dancers described by Cravath (1992: 88), even to the sexual relations between the ruler and one of the dancers (Cravath 1992: 88; Headley 2004: 329, n. 67, 501, 507 f.).<sup>69</sup> It is possible, therefore, that the Javanese court dance was modeled on the Cambodian one, which preceded the Mataram II one in time. This does not exclude the possibility that this tradition may well be far older. Jordaan (2011a: 190) draws our attention to the dancing *apsaras* on the Śiva temple that is part of the 9<sup>th</sup> century Prambanan temple complex in Central Java. These *apsaras*, he writes, are closely connected with water, and appeared at the Churning of the Milky Ocean of Hindu mythology. They may, therefore, equally likely be part of the pool of traditions proposed by Jordaan, which was drawn on by both the Cambodians and the Javanese.

To summarize, in analyzing the correspondences between the traditions surrounding prince Preah Thong's founding of Cambodia and those in the *Babad Tanah Jawi*, we see that rather than necessarily using an archetypal Indian or Central Javanese model, the *pujangga* may in the Cemara Tunggal episode simply have adapted a Cambodian tale, familiar to the courts from Java's long contacts with

66 The idea that land rests on water is a Chinese one (Lai 1994: 36–37). Prior to this Sunan Kalijaga had played an important role in securing the land that was to become Mataram II (Ricklefs 1974b: 75; 2008: 44).

67 About this association of the Goddess with Kediri rather than Pajajaran see Wessing (1997b: 328).

68 The *sunan* is one of the most popular of the nine *wali* (prose-lytizers). The invention of *wayang golek* puppets, dance masks, and *gamelan* (Javanese musical ensemble) are attributed to him (Pigeaud 1938: 41; De Graaf and Pigeaud 1974: 70; Ross 2009: 11–12, 32, 140, 455).

69 Lombard (2008, III: 67) writes that the dancers portray the movement of the planets (cf. Headley 2004: 329, note 67). This number nine and the reference to the planets may be concessions to the Islamic nature of the Javanese court as elsewhere there are said to be seven dancers portraying the seven heavenly nymphs that were created from jewels (Brakel-Papenhuysen 1995: 546). These seven *widadari* correspond to the seven Cambodian *apsaras*-dancers that represented the realm's welfare and were important to the king's potency. Their dances invoked rain, and ended drought and other calamities. They also channeled fertility into the realm, through "sexual union with the king" (Cravath 1992: 88), which corresponds to the sultan's union with Nyai Rara Kidul and/or one of the *bedhaya* dancers mentioned earlier. In a forthcoming publication, Matthew I. Cohen (personal communication) writes that "Courtly female group dancers were more than aesthetic ornaments. Dancers attached to palaces were sometimes concubines of rulers ..."

mainland Southeast Asia. It should be pointed out at this point that the theme of a ruler cohabiting with a *nāginī* is known in South India as well, and it is sometimes assumed that the Cambodian myth is a borrowed and distorted version of an ancient Pallavan legend (Cady 1964: 47; Hall 1964: 26; Rabe 1997: 238). Although Rabe (1997: 238, citing Cœdès) concurs in the Pallavan origin of this tale, Cœdès (1967: 57) writes elsewhere that opinions concerning its origins are divided, and it may equally well have come from “the maritime regions of South East Asia” (cf. Jordaan 2011b: 259).

A Southeast Asian origin seems to me the more likely possibility because the House of Pallava probably arose late in the third century C.E., and a mid-third century distortion of a Pallavan tale is thus rather unlikely (Gaudes 1993: 348). It is quite possible, therefore, that the myth originated in Southeast Asia. Leclère (1914: 31–34, cited by Gaudes 1993: 336) even suggests a Javanese origin,<sup>70</sup> which Jordaan would agree with, relying on material from the 9<sup>th</sup> century Hindu state of Mataram I (emails 11 October 2013 and 29 November 2013). While early Javanese influence in mainland Southeast Asia is undeniable, and keeping in mind the proposed pool of related tales, I do not consider Java as a proximate source for this specific tale to be very likely: the *Babad Tanah Jawi*, where we find the earliest specific mention of Nyai Rara Kidul, dates from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, while the tale of Prince Preah Thong was known as early as the late 4<sup>th</sup> or early 5<sup>th</sup> century, and possibly even during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (Gaudes 1993: 339, 341). However this may be, the notion of spirit owners of the land, here the *nāga*, is common in Southeast Asia. “Such notions”, Gaudes writes (1993: 348) “surely are indigenous and not imported from India.”

## Sea Spirits

As a focus for the new tale the *pujangga* adopted a sea spirit on the southern coast of Java, following the Cambodian model. It is not certain that this spirit was already known as Nyai Rara Kidul at the time, as both *rara* and *nyai*, as we have seen, re-

fer to special statuses, not normally associated with sea spirits. As greater demands were made on her, however, she was promoted from being a generalized water spirit to her current position of Queen (cf. Henninger 2004: 3 [citing Wellhausen 1927<sup>71</sup>], 38 f.). Sea spirits, usually venerated by sailors and fishermen, indeed abound throughout Southeast Asia and Southern China,<sup>72</sup> and are known elsewhere as well.<sup>73</sup> On the coasts of Java, the local sea spirit bears these days sometimes the name of the Queen,<sup>74</sup> but in most places it is known by a local name or is identified with e.g. the Muslim saint Nabi Khidir (De Graaf and Pigeaud 1984: 136; Kusnadi 1992: 40; Sutarto 2011: 128, 139, 210, 215, 126, 141, 214–217). Singodimayan (2011: 105, 116) even speaks of plural female *jinn* (genies, spirits) who are called *nyai*,<sup>75</sup> two of which are named Nyai Rara Kidul and Nyai Sebrang Lor.<sup>76</sup> In some places no one is named, and thanks is given to “the sea and its creator” (Sutarto 2011: 217), leaving the question of who is thanked or venerated rather open. Elsewhere also, e.g., in Kelantan (Malaysia), the spirit-owners of the sea are venerated and propitiated, but are not necessarily named (cf. Glaskin 1961: 294–297; Rashid and Karim 1988; Laderman 1991).

These local spirits do not have to be *nāginī*,<sup>77</sup> of course, and this aspect may well have been attached

71 *Reste arabischen Heidentums* (1927).

72 Well known is the veneration of a sea spirit in Kelantan and Trengganu (Kasimin 1991: 201–206; Rashid and Karim 1988: 65–67), brought to popular attention by Glaskin’s (1961) novel. The phenomenon is known throughout the area, however. See among others Raats (1970: 32), Matthes (1885: 432), Platenkamp (2008), Beyer (1913: 89, 94), and Schafer (1967: 104). These water spirits may well be the model for the *apsaras* mentioned earlier, which would account for their appearing in the tale of the building of the causeway. This activity was, after all, disturbing their domains. The *apsara*’s name Tuan Putri Ikan (Fish Maiden) would seem to point in this direction.

73 Cf. Henninger (2004: 23, n. 115).

74 E.g., at Pantai Popoh, in Muncar, and in Puger (Sutarto 2011: 131, 135; Aekanu Hariyono 2011: 9). In Muncar the emphasis now is tending to switch to God (Baraas 1992: 8).

75 “*Para jin perempuan yang bernama nyai*”.

76 *Sebrang lor* can be interpreted “the other side, north”, e.g., the north coast of Java. Note, however, that *nyai* indicates a female entity, which contradicts De Graaf and Pigeaud’s (1984: 136) observation that the master(s) of the Java Sea was/were a “more benevolent male god or male spirits”.

77 Though snake veneration is widespread throughout India, Southeast Asia, China, and into Melanesia. For an overview see MacCullough (1955). For locally specific information see, among many others, Adams (1979: 96), Barnes (1974: 105), Croke (1955: 415 f.); DeBernardi (2006: 17); Doolittle (1876, I: 292, II: 117, 265), Kamma (1978: 122–140), Laubscher (1976: 202, 206, 209, 212–213), Poignant (1967: 85, 91–94), Riesenfeld (1950: 294, 296), and Warneck (1909: 30). According to MacCullough (1955: 400 f.), traditions about snakes are rare in New Zealand and Polynesia,

70 Questions have been raised whether the “Java” (with various spellings) mentioned in Southeast Asian histories is indeed the place we now know as the island Java (cf. Griffiths 2013). In the current case, however, there can be little doubt that there was indeed a connection between present-day Java and Cambodia/Cham, given the extensive references to a Putri Cina/Putri Champa from Java itself, as well as data from Cambodia that confirms a connection as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century C.E. (Griffiths 2013: 64, 67).

to Nyai Rara Kidul after her promotion to guardian spirit of Mataram II. Having been lifted out of local obscurity and made into a guardian of state, it became possible to apply all manner of elaborations to her, including ones deriving from the *Hikayat Sri Rāma* that were noted by Jordaan (2011a; 2011b). Quite often local expressions of this veneration concern the shaping or forming of the land,<sup>78</sup> founding communities (Barnes 1974: 46), water or rain, and agriculture or horticulture.

### A Southern Chinese Connection?

As I suggested earlier, there are also Chinese influences that can be detected in the make-up of the Queen, which would most probably have come through the Cambodian connection. These influences are especially visible in her identity as a *nāginī*, though the question to what degree the origin of these local versions of *nāga* veneration must be sought in India or China cannot be fully answered here. It occurs in areas that were not touched by Indian influence<sup>79</sup> (Jordaan 1987: 125), though these may well have received Chinese inputs (Abalihin 2011: 664). Locally it is most likely often a mixture of various influences (cf. Hall 1985: 83). While Eberhard (1968: 238 f.) considers India to have been an important source of inspiration for China, Kern (1916: 397) notes that the veneration of *nāga* was something that entered India from the north (cf. Hopkins 1895: 539), opening the possibility of a Chinese origin, perhaps via Tibet.<sup>80</sup> In any case, while there can be no doubt that the Indian version

of the *nāga* has played an important role in Southeast Asia, there are indications that especially the southern Chinese<sup>81</sup> version of the belief has at times been quite influential.

One of these pointers is the persistent association of Chinese *nāga* with the sky. In Vedic India, to be sure, serpents were associated with the sky and black clouds, rather than solely with the earth (Pleyte 1894, pt. 1: 98; Crooke 1955: 414).<sup>82</sup> *Nāga* in fact is also a word for cloud, and in Vedic times “the waters” referred to the waters of the sky, and the snakes that were to be venerated were the rain clouds and lightning flashes (cf. Kern 1916: 395–397). Since Vedic times, however, *nāga* live in and under the earth and its waters (Kern 1916: 396; Zimmer 1962: 63).<sup>83</sup>

In China, on the other hand, the *nāga*-in-the-sky persists. The true dragon, Doolittle (1876, II: 265) writes, “... is always accompanied by, or partially enshrouded in, clouds” on which it can walk (Hackin 1963: 276). It is associated with rain and the rainbow<sup>84</sup> (Doolittle 1876, I: 292; II: 117; Eberhard 1968: 384 f.), something that seems to be no longer true of Indian *nāga*. Depending on the season, Chinese *nāga* either fly into the sky or dive into the earthly waters (Eberhard 1968: 238 f., 257; Hackin 1963: 276 f.). While in India *nāga* are generally thought to be female, in Chinese lore there is mention of four dragon kings, each linked with one of the Four Seas (Hackin 1963: 277)<sup>85</sup> of which the southern one is associated with the Javanese Queen.

While these days Nyai Rara Kidul is portrayed as a beautiful woman, sometimes driving a *nāga*-carriage through the waves, she is also shown as a kind of mermaid or as a snake with a human torso.<sup>86</sup>

although in Tonga a water-snake-god is venerated; there are said to be no poisonous land snakes in Tonga (<<http://www.virtualoceania.net/tonga/photos/fauna/>>, [19 August 2016], and no poisonous snakes are reported to exist in French Polynesia (<[http://gohawaii.about.com/cs/frenchpolynesia/tahtiti\\_facts.htm](http://gohawaii.about.com/cs/frenchpolynesia/tahtiti_facts.htm)>, [19 August 2016]. Melanesia north and northwest of Australia, New Guinea and the Salomon Islands and Fiji do have poisonous snakes, however (<[https://books.google.co.id/books?id=\\_bBz1-v1WUwC&pg=PA133&lpg=PA133&dq=snakes+in+melanesia&source=bl&ots=nWKV7U2HE&hl=de#v=onepage&q=snakes%20in%20melanesia&f=false](https://books.google.co.id/books?id=_bBz1-v1WUwC&pg=PA133&lpg=PA133&dq=snakes+in+melanesia&source=bl&ots=nWKV7U2HE&hl=de#v=onepage&q=snakes%20in%20melanesia&f=false)>, [17 August 2016]. To what extent this presence or absence of poisonous snakes has any influence on the occurrence of beliefs about snakes remains to be explored.

78 As in Cambodia (Gaudes 1993). Compare Adams (1979: 95).

79 Or so we have assumed. But see Pugach et al. (2013), who write that human genetic mixing between India and Australia may have occurred as early as 4,200 years ago. They correlated this with other genetic and archaeological changes, though whether it also introduced the concept of the *nāga* cannot be said, of course.

80 <[http://viewonbuddhism.org/symbols\\_tibet\\_buddhism.htm](http://viewonbuddhism.org/symbols_tibet_buddhism.htm)>, [19 August 2016]. Compare Hopkins (1895: 536).

81 Eberhard (1968: 242, 384 f.).

82 *Nāga* came into being when the earth (Kadru) was impregnated by the sun (Bergema 1938: 394–395; Zimmer 1955: 52).

83 Crooke (1955) only mentions one instance from India in which the *nāga* is associated with the sky, and this is in a report by a Chinese pilgrim. Crooke does not mention the source of this information.

84 This is also the case in some areas of Indonesia and Melanesia (cf., e.g., Barnes 1974: 62, 105, 107; <<http://www.lowchensaustralia.com/names/polynesiangods.htm>>, [19 August 2016]).

85 Different parts of the seas were designated as eastern, western, northern and southern, the last encompassing much of Southeast Asia (Reid 1993: 19; 1988: 6).

86 The aspect of a skin disease, which led to the exile of the princess who was to become the Queen, is also associated with some versions of the southern Chinese *nāga* in which snakes, sometimes heaven-snakes are associated with leprosy (Eberhard 1968: 384). In southern China, snakes symbolize wealth, and are said to be the spirit of money, reminiscent of the Javanese money goddess, Nyi Blorong, who is also portrayed as a serpent (Wessing 2007).

In both India and China *nāga* are also often depicted with human heads or wearing crowns (Stutley and Stutley 1977: 198; Eberhard 1968: 445; Schafer 1967: 13, 255 f.; Stevens 1997: 55). In China this is especially the goddess Nü Kua,<sup>87</sup> who created the visible world (Schafer 1967: 116) and was the origin of the human race (Stevens 1997: 55 f.).<sup>88</sup> She also controlled the waters (Granet 1958: 74 f.; Schafer 1967: 256; Watson 1972: 12). Nü Kua went out of official fashion (Schafer 1967: 116), but such traditions tend to survive in folk beliefs (cf. Abalihin 2011: 663). In the case of Nü Kua this is especially true in Southern China, where she may have originated (Eberhard 1968: 242, 445; Schafer 1967: 13). Nü Kua probably was not a direct prototype for the Javanese Queen, however, as she is nowhere said to be a goddess or queen of the sea or ocean.

A possible candidate for the role is the goddess Mazu,<sup>89</sup> a human shaman turned Goddess of the Sea (Ter Haar 1990: 356; Eberhard 1968: 402). She is the protector of local sailors and, like Manimekhalā, is reputed to have saved people in danger of drowning (Eberhard 1968: 402 f.; Ter Haar 1990: 156, 374). Similar to Nyai Rara Kidul she protects coastal communities from attacks by enemies (Stevens 1997: 137). Owing to her human origin, she cannot fly or swim like the *nāgas*, and instead uses a raft when coming to the rescue (Ter Haar 1990: 357). The focus of Mazu's cult is in Fujian (Hackin et al., 1963: 329; DeBernardi 2006: 17, 171). From there it spread to the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, among others carried by sailors from Fujian aboard Zheng He's<sup>90</sup> fleet when it sailed to the Southern Ocean between the years 1405 and 1533 C.E. (Tan Ta Sen 2009: 204; Ter Haar 1990: 375; Widodo 2007: 67).<sup>91</sup>

87 Not solely, however, as the god Ho Po is also said to have "the face of a human and the body of a fish" (Lai 1990: 345).

88 For a depiction see <[http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/sumer\\_anunnaki/reptiles/reptiles15.htm](http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/sumer_anunnaki/reptiles/reptiles15.htm)>, [19 August 2016], under "naga figures in other traditions." In Java, as in India, village tutelary spirits are often portrayed as *nāga* with human heads (cf. Pangeran 2001: 35; Stutley and Stutley 1977: 198). *Nāgas* with a human head are also found in Melanesia (Riesenfeld 1950: 294, 296). In Sumba and Borneo, like in China, snakes are credited with creating and giving form to the landscape (Adams 1979: 95; Evans 1913: 469 f.), which is reminiscent of the role of the Nāga King in the Cambodian tales.

89 Also Ma-tsu. Her official name is T'ien-hou, the Empress of Heaven (Hackin et al. 1963: 129). She is linked to the goddess Guanyin (Tan Ta Sen 2009: 67; Eberhard 1968: 403).

90 Also Cheng Ho or Sam Po.

91 These communities pre-existed Zhen He's voyages, however, and may have come into being as the result of the Ming Dynasty prohibition on individual overseas trade in 1368 (Reid 1992: 184, 1993: 38 f.).

## The Southern Ocean

One aspect of the Javanese Queen that has not yet been touched upon is her title, Ratu Laut Kidul (Queen of the Southern Ocean). As was seen earlier, sea spirits are not necessarily named, although those that are venerated as goddesses are: e.g., the Indian Manimekhalā and the Chinese Mazu. Both of these, however, are only names, and neither emphasizes a location. The question is, therefore, why in the Javanese Queen's case the southernness of her location is emphasized, both in her name, Nyai Rara Kidul, and in her title.

It is possible that the answer to this question lies in the Chinese view of Java, the location of which was said to be in the Southern Ocean (Nan-hai) (Groeneveldt 1887: 135, 138). Beyond this Southern Ocean, filled with dangers and strange tides and beings, the waters extended into infinity and outside men's knowledge (Schafer 1967: 104, 138 f., 220). Although the Chinese thought the southern sea to be ruled by a god (Schafer 1967: 30, 36), this was not exclusively so, as we have seen with Mazu, who was the queen of the sea, at least to sailors from Fujian (DeBernardi 2006: 17; Ter Haar 1990: 374).

In summary, there are some obvious parallels between Nyai Rara Kidul and Mazu. Both used to be a human female who dealt with esoteric forces: Mazu as a shaman and the Queen as an *ajar*. Like Nyai Rara Kidul and Cemara Tunggal, Mazu was a virgin (Eberhard 1968: 402; Stevens 1997: 137), although unlike the Javanese Queen, no sexual exploits are attributed to her, perhaps owing to Confucian and other moral niceties (Lai 1994: 38). Both, furthermore, are said to be the Queen of the Sea and, as I pointed out earlier, the Javanese do not usually refer to Nyai Rara Kidul as a goddess (*dewi*) but use the title queen (*ratu*) instead.

Mazu's cult, as we have seen, was spread throughout Southeast Asia via the port cities (DeBernardi 2006: 17). In these, Chinese, especially from Fujian and their descendants occupied influential positions (De Graaf and Pigeaud 1984: 171). We should be careful about this ethnic attribution, however, because, as Reid points out, Southeast Asian port cities were meeting points for people from all over the maritime region,<sup>92</sup> and ethnic labels were not as clear cut as they seem to be at first glance (Reid 1992: 178, 184, 191–199; 1993: 66,

92 The 14<sup>th</sup> century Javanese court poem *Deśavarnama* (*Nāgarakṛtāgama*) lists Cambodia, China, Dai Viêt, Champa among others as "always being friends" and visiting Javanese ports "in countless numbers" (Griffiths 2013: 68 f.; Robson 1997: 431, 434).



187). Champa was but one stop in a trade network that linked Africa, the Middle East, China, and Java, in which trade between Java (Gresik) and Champa was an important factor (Manguin 2001: 289f.). This may also account for the fact that the Putri Cina who is said to have married king Brawijaya of Majapahit, is also referred to as Putri Champa, the Princess from Champa (Olthof 1987: 18; Tan Ta Sen 2009: 174): the boundary between East and Southeast Asia is not as clear cut as such labels may suggest, and it may be best to look at the area as a unity (Abalihin 2011).

With this caveat in mind, it is nevertheless true that “Chinese” cultural influence in Java extended to all levels of society, and included the arts, traders, courtiers, and spiritual leaders, including very influential Muslim proselytizers (De Graaf and Pigeaud 1984; Reid 1992: 196–199, 185; 1993: 39, 133; Ross 2009: 6). Social status often rested on business acumen, and noble lines could spring “from humble or commercial origins” (Reid 1993: 122). Given this cosmopolitan make-up of the port cities, and the mixing of beliefs and traditions that often occurs in such a melting pot, it is not surprising that, in addition to the echoes of India and the Middle East, we also find Chinese elements in Nyai Rara Kidul’s make-up. These include, among others, the idea of a Queen of the (southern) Seas, an involvement with shamanic arts, a preference for the color green, the ability to appear as a *nāga* in both the sky and the earth, sometimes having a human head wearing a crown, and, of course, the link between her and the ruling house.

## Conclusion

As was pointed out earlier, narratives, as part of a cumulative tradition, are historical constructs that are subject to revision as and where necessary in order to make the narrative conform to current needs. Things may be added or subtracted, as long as the community that uses the narrative continues to be generally able to define itself in terms of the story that they tell themselves about themselves (cf. Geertz 1973: 448). Over time, such narratives may come to include a variety of elements, not all of which are necessarily of local origin, but all of which have been recast in such a way as to satisfy local needs.

In Mataram II one such need was the confirmation of the legitimacy of its rebel-ruler Panembahan Senapati. This was done by claiming continuity with the previous major kingdom of Majapahit through a prequel in the *Babad Tanah Jawi*. As suggested, the vehicle used by the court poet was prob-

ably an adaptation of the Cambodian foundation myth, creating a symbolic continuity between Majapahit and Mataram II through the promotion of a local water spirit to Queen of the Southern Ocean. This, however, only resulted in a bare-bones story, onto which a variety of elements could be grafted. Some of these, like those from the Hikayat Sri Rāma indeed derive from India. Other aspects, like the references to Nabi Khidir and Sunan Kalijaga, come from the Islamic tradition.

Other than Indian and Muslim elements attached to our adaptation of the Cambodian myth, we noted a number of Chinese influences in the make-up of the Queen, which is not surprising given the important economic and cultural position of the Chinese, both at court and generally. This is not to say, of course, that e.g. Nū Kua or Mazu must be seen as immediate prototypes for Nyai Rara Kidul. While there are similarities between them, they are not identical, and the influence is noticeable in details rather than in broad outlines. In all this we should keep in mind that such interpretations are hazardous, and that we may tend to find what we are looking for, which also applies to the possible links suggested in this article. In any case, the combination of elements and traditions that are grafted onto our Queen make her uniquely Javanese. This is an ongoing process, which these days takes place especially in popular media such as films, television, and the Internet (Wessing 2006a, 2007), as well as in current Indonesian writing (Yongki Y. 2003; Sholikhin 2009), keeping both the Queen and her tradition alive and current.

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