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Painted Keris

by Bapak R. Notohardjo

Now a little bit of guidance about authentic Javanese court kerises, which use the *sunggingan* style of painting. The application of *sunggingan* itself on a keris scabbard is pretty much like that of a Javanese *wayang kulit* or shadow puppet. It is completely hand painted and depending on the quality, it can be quite pricy. Indeed in the old days, *sunggingan* was commonly applied in court kerises.

HOWEVER!! ... There is something that you might need to know regarding the types of court kerises which has a *sunggingan* motive on them and this will be a guide for you to judge if a keris *sunggingan* you are looking at is indeed a court keris or not. A real court keris cannot be seen only from the *sunggingan* applied on its scabbard. Every part that makes up the keris as a whole has to make sense. A court keris is always matched with a special blade that goes with it. It doesn't make sense for a court keris to have a *sunggingan* on the outside but coupled with a blade, which is made for warriors or commoners. Also with

the same importance are the materials used for decorating the fittings, such as the *selut* (hilt cup) and *mendak* (hilt ring). A court keris is something that is made for honor, so it will have the best decorations. The *selut* and *mendak* will mostly be made out of pure gold and decorated with precious gemstones if not real diamonds. One doesn't just go to see a king and present him a keris that is also used by lower rank officers, much less commoners or warriors as this is regarded as insulting. Another thing is the use of *pendok* or a piece of metal that covers the scabbard of a keris. *Pendoks* are either made of brass, silver, copper or gold. GENUINE old court kerises from the time of Dutch occupation in Indonesia were given *pendoks* and the *pendoks* are all colored with certain traditional coloring material known as "*kemalon*" (or *kemalo*) as it is extracted from sap of *kemalo* tree, NOT REGULAR PAINT (forget about car paint!). Such *pendok* is called "*pendok kemalon*" and the color on the *pendok* determines the owner's rank/status. The keris wearing *sunggingan* is given a *pendok kemalo* in the following order: - Scabbard

painted with special *sunggingan* and given red *pendok kemalo*: for a king - Scabbard painted gold with *sunggingan* and is given a red *pendok kemalon*: for the king's kin - Scabbard painted white with *sunggingan* and is given a green *pendok kemalon*: for regents, ministers - Scabbard painted green with *sunggingan* and not given a *pendok kemalon*: for lower ranks - Scabbard painted blue with *sunggingan* and not given a *pendok kemalon*: for palace servants Now remember that there are still a lot of factors to be considered when it comes to authenticity. However, by knowing this you can get as close as possible to an authentic *keris sungging* from the Keraton Solo.



Keris Dapur Sengkelat

by Bapak R. Notohardjo

Now a little history of *keris dapur sengkelat*. The first *keris sengkelat luk 13* was created by the best *Empu* in Majapahit kingdom, *Empu Supo Mandrangi*, during the rule of King Brawijaya V - Prabu Kertabumi (1466-1478). The *keris* is called *Kyai Sengkelat*.

At that time Islam religion has entered Java and *Empu Supo* was a student of one of the 9 suffies (Wali Songo), i.e. Sunan Ngampel Dento. The blade material in form of a hook to guide camels with (*cis*) was given by Sunan Ngampel Dento to *Empu Supo* to make him just a blade out of it. *Empu Supo* thought that it would be better to make a *keris* blade out of that material, and he did make one with 13 *luks* on it. It was latter called *Kyai Sengkelat*. The word "kyai" was added to honor the Sunan which was Moslem. The Sunan thought that the *keris* blade did not fit him, being a Moslem. It was regarded to have been something that would properly belonged to the Hindu culture. So the Sunan suggested that *Empu Supo* offered the *Keris Kyai Sengkelat* to king Brawijaya. The king was totally amazed by the *keris* and it has then become the mascot for Majapahit kingdom and was honored a title *Kanjeng Kyai Ageng Purworo*. More *keris(es)* with *dapur sengkelat* were made by different *Empu* besides *Empu Supo*, using different materials and different workmanship (*garap*). Somewhat different in style, but still regarded as *dapur sengkelat*.

Keris and Cosmos

By Hilga Prins

Translation by Pendekar Taruna Ger Giesen.

A study in search of the meaning of the Javanese *Keris* within the cultural context. Paper written for the study of cultural anthropology at the Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht (Holland). July 1990.

Preface. (Shortened by the translator)

During my study cultural anthropology at the University of Utrecht I got the opportunity to come in touch with a part of my study which previously escaped my attention: the material study. I could do this at the Rijksmuseum voor volkenkunde in Leiden.

I choose Indonesia and together with the conservator of this department I decided to make the Javanese *keris* the subject of my study and to take special care of the male and female aspects of this artifact.

Part 1

The shape of the *keris*

A *keris* is made up by several different parts that will pass our examination more or less in depth, relevant to the importance of the part in relation to the subject of this paper.

The Blade

The blade of a *keris* can be straight or waved. One thinks that the straight variety is the oldest, because a blade with waves needs more knowledge to make by the smith. The first weapons that look like a *keris* and can be found on reliefs have this straight form. The waved blade is thought to come from India and it came to the Indonesian Islands together with Hindu influences. Gardner for example sees a strong resemblance between the waved blade of a *keris* and the horn of a kind of goat, which lives in India. Views about this differ very much though.

During the making of a *keris* different kind of metals are used. One of these metals should hold a percentage of Nickel. Because Nickel is light colored, at the end of the process the motifs on the blade can be seen. When the blade is ready, it is soaked in lemon juice and arsenic, because of this the dark iron is slightly etched so the motives are often in relief. During the making the metals are torqued, flattened, mixed, hacked to pieces and made whole again, in a way which is carefully planned by the smith or Empu to get a desired motive. At the beginning of the art those motives were probably pure chance, but in later times they learned how to produce certain motives on command. These motives are called "PAMOR", which is also the name for the nickel holding metal, because it really means mixed metal, a blending.

There are numerous different kinds of motives to be seen on *keris* blades, but all these came forth out of five main motives. Groneman was the first who named these five ancient types.

They are:

- A. *Beras Wutah* (Strewn rice grains)
- B. *Sekar Pala* (Nutmeg flowers)
- C. *Sekar Ngadeg* (standing up flowers)
- D. *Sekar Temu* (Ginger flowers)
- E. *Blarak Ngirid* (Bound coconut leaves)

The *pamor* motives that are to be seen on the blade all have a special meaning. They should match the personality of the future owner. Not only the decoration of the blade should be in harmony with the owner, other parts of the *keris* have to stand up to certain rules also, if the *keris* is to blend with its wearer. If this is not the case, then the *keris* will bring no luck, but instead will turn against his owner. It is not clear if one of the named *Pamor* is higher in status as the other ones, but it is known that people of certain rank only could bear a *keris* with selected motives. In the Encyclopedia about *keris*, published in 1988, the *Pamor Sekar Pala* is written down as having the power of making the owner known and famous and *Blarak Ngirid* means more authority and leadership. The *Beras Wutah* has a good power and is suitable for everyone. Not all *keris* blades have *Pamor*, but this is thought of as an imperfection of the *keris*.

Beside this *Pamor*, there can be other decorations on the blade. These are different kinds of engravings and cut aways.

Directly under the *Gandja*, the separately made, long a-symmetrical part at the basis of the blade, there can be some of these. At the dull end of the *gandja* they are called *lambe gadjah* and *belalai gadjah* or *kembang kacang*, elephant's lip or snout or sprout of the kacang flower. If the *keris* was worn by a royal person, it could be that the so-called snout touched the lip, in this way a hole was made.

With wearers from the ordinary people there was always an open space between the blade and the point of the snout. According to Hill (1956) this decoration was used for hanging the *keris* near the sleeping place of the owner, so he would have the blade nearby in case of danger. This doesn't sound too probable. In the first place there are a lot of *keris* without this decoration, so for these *keris* it would be impossible to hang them on the wall.

A second practical point is that the round end of the "hook" is toward the grip. If it was used as a hook to hang the *keris*, it should be the other way. To hang the *keris* on a wall, in his sheath, there are wooden boards and even small bags made out of cloth.

Besides these practical arguments we cannot move around the belief system of the Javanese. If their belief in the supernatural powers of the *keris* is as big as literature tells

us, then it is very unlikely that the owner would hang his *keris* in the open next to his bed.

In this way everyone in the room would become vulnerable because of the powers of the weapon, which could be dangerous for someone not knowing about the *keris*. It is also known that a Javanese will not draw his *keris* in public unless in urgent matters. The *keris* is so much surrounded by mysticism, especially the blade, that it is very unlikely indeed that it would be hanged on a wall without its sheath.

According to legend the *keris* will warn his owner of danger by rattling in his sheath or to fight for him in case of an emergency. Although the truth of such stories is hard to believe, they clearly demonstrate how big the faith in the supernatural powers of the *keris* is. The curls at the bottom of the ganja do not have a practical function. The meaning can be found in the symbolical meaning it has for the wearer of the *keris*. The elephant is an animal that played an important role in the mythical world of the Javanese as an animal of great strength and power. It was the riding animal of members of the royal family during their life, but also in death. With this curl, associated with the elephant, the powers of this animal are transferred into the blade.

At the sharp side of the ganja there are small serrations to be seen which sometimes go on in the actual blade. They are told to be snake

teeth. This is very well possible, because the snake has much meaning in Indonesia. The blade of the *keris* is associated with the *Naga*-snake. The straight blade being a resting or meditating snake and a wavy blade is a snake in action.

In the encyclopedia about the *keris* (1988) it is written that according to some *keris* lovers the teeth are to be seen as a signature of the Empu. A third meaning I heard was that the teeth were similar to the letters from the old Javanese alphabet and they could be a spell. This last idea would make an interesting subject for future study. Of course the maker of such a study has to be well versed in Old Javanese. Because this is not the case with me I can only name the possibility.

Wearing the *keris*

“*Wangkingan*” is the original word for *Keris* and means something like ‘wearing something at the back on hip height’ and that is precisely the place where a *keris* is commonly worn. But this is not the only place. In the 15th century Sultan Muhammad Shah made strict rules for wearing the *keris*. The wearing of a *keris* at the back, in the waistband, is to protect the back. The figure on the hilt looks backward and makes sure the wearer isn’t attacked in the back by evil powers and influences. Wearing the *keris* in this way has a protective function.

“The wearing of a keris is so common among the Javanese, that one can assume this weapon as being necessary together with the best clothes if these have to be worn. Even the poorest people wear one, if they go to visit someone or go to a party etc. And if they don’t own a keris themselves, then they will borrow one from a relative or friend, because without a keris they are not properly dressed.” (Mayer 1897)

People of higher status, like working for the government and chiefs, always wear a *keris* while the common man only wears his on official business. Even the wearing of two *keris* at the same time happens.

Among people with high social status this happens during formal occasions, while the common man wears a second *keris* when he goes to travel. But when he is together with someone higher it is considered rude to wear two *keris* and the number will be reduced to one.

The wearing of three *keris* is typical for the warrior. One is his own *keris*, this one is worn on the right front side, the second one is the *keris* he has been given at his wedding by his father in law and this one is worn on his left side; the third *keris* is the so-called *Pusaka*. This *keris* is inherited from his father as an heirloom. It is this weapon that is worn on the back (Hill 1956).

There is more information about the rules concerning the wearing of the *keris*. If a Javanese enters the house of an unknown, he will have his *keris* at the left side in his waistband, so the hilt is hidden below his left arm. In this way the *keris* is easy accessible to the wearer, in case he feels threatened on unknown territory. If he is together with people he knows then this way of carrying is impolite since it shows suspicion. In such a case the *keris* moves to the back. The above is only for men. There is much less written about the *keris* carried by woman. In the literature is only mentioned that woman from high birth sometimes carried a *keris*. If woman carried a *keris* it usually was a so called *Patrem*, a small *keris* that could be easily concealed under the garment. If woman went out at night or if they traveled far, then they took a *keris* with them but more as a talisman to avert evil than as a real weapon. The carrying of a *djimat*, or amulet, to which a *keris* can be counted, was also common among female amazons and warriors in the army of some Sultans and queens.

With dance performances during *Wayang* theatre the *keris* is worn by male and female alike, if the role needs it.

The carrying of a *keris* is not common among the ordinary people since the beginning. The *Empu* was employed by the court and *keris* were only made for the members of the royal family. The making of these weapons was an expensive enterprise. Griffith-Williams

explains the spreading of the *keris* among the ordinary folk by means of the fall of the *Madjopahit* Empire. In the fifteenth century this empire was overpowered and Hinduism was put back and mixed with Islam.

People with different faiths became enemies. In these unsure times people are supposed to get used to carry a *keris* for their own safety. The Hindu gods protected their believers by putting their powers in the *keris*. So even though the shape of the *keris* had to be altered to fit within the rules of Islam, the Javanese stayed in touch with their old gods through the *keris*.

With the disappearance of the old courts the Empu lost their jobs. They spread and began making *keris* for ordinary people. The *keris* was now for everybody. It is unknown if ordinary woman began to wear a *keris* more often. Nothing about this is mentioned in the literature.

The Empu

As written earlier, the royal courts employed the Empus. They were always male and often a member of the royal family themselves, or completely taken into the household. The fact that these men were not just someone is demonstrated by the name of their profession. The word “Empu” means “master” and was used for the best of *keris* makers, makers of gamelan instruments, court-poets and priests. Members of the highest caste, the Brahmins

were also called Empu. Although in most of the literature the Empu is described as an ordinary man from the common people, who lived sober and often alone, it is obvious that they most have been considerably rich. Their royal clients rewarded them with land, houses, rice fields and even marriage to woman from royal decent. From these enormous rewards for making a royal *keris* one may conclude the value of the *keris* for his possessor and the fact that the Empu had high status.

The common folk regarded the Empu as high as the royal family, because from both families the origin could be traced as descending from the gods. The royal families as well as the Empu stand close to the gods.

The profession of *keris* maker goes from father to son. The last is instructed in the secrets of the art of making these special weapons by his father. Before a *keris* is made several rituals must be done.

Before the Empu starts making a *keris*, he will fast and meditate in the woods or a cave. A suitable day and working order is searched for so that the *keris* will be attuned to the personality of the future owner as well as possible. It happens often that the making process is done only on certain days and hours. In this way it can happen that the making of one single *keris* can take months or even years.

The Empu gives offerings to his ancestors and also to the ancestors of the owner to develop a bonding and to let their protective powers enter the blade of the *keris*.

The Empu charges the *keris*, but the owner has to make these powers go to work so to speak. The charging of a *keris* is done with the use of fire. This is the place where the souls of the deceased become free and the gods find their way to the blade. In this fashion the Empu makes contact between the gods and mankind. The *keris* is carried by people so they can feel the gods and their ancestors close by all the time. The Empu stands between two worlds: the upper-world and the middle-world.

To strongly feel the presence of the gods and ancestors his working-place is in the mountains, the living place of the inhabitants of the upper-world, and the place where he practices his meditations. This ritualistic act confirms their relation and familiarity with the royal families.

If a king has stopped ruling he will draw himself and his wife back to a place well away from the normal hassle of life. For him the time to get in contact with his ancestors and the gods has started. He does this by separating himself from other humans and meditating to get protection and the blessing of the gods for the well being of his former kingdom that is now in the hands of another. As written before the woods and mountains are the dwelling places of the souls of the

deceased. Even stronger than his relation to the other kings is the relation between him and the priests.

The white robe the Empu is wearing while making a *keris* for a man of high status resembles the clothes of a priest, for which the color white is very typical. The priest stands between the world of the gods and the world of men, just like the Empu.

For example, think about the fact that a priest often starts the prayer he does together with his listeners and the explanations he gives about the holy writings. The purpose of this is to bring the people and the invisible world closer together, so they can learn to ask for the help of God or several gods and learn to call upon him/them.

The places where a priest and an Empu perform their (holy) tasks resemble a lot too. The Empu only starts making a *keris* after his working place is transformed into a temple. It is decorated with food and ornaments that are also to be found on a *Kayon*, in the men's-house and in holy rooms.

These rooms in Old Javanese houses are temporarily or permanent furnished to perform rituals like marriages and the circumcision or the honoring of various gods.

During these rituals a priest is always present to lead the way.

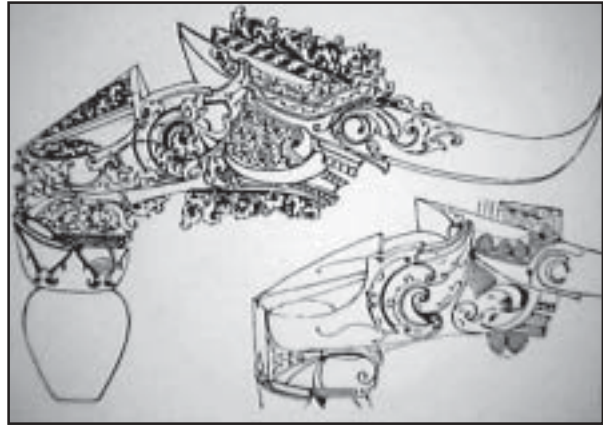
Even though an Empu is not really a priest, the

above proves their relation and the fact that they are closely tied together.

The making of a *keris* is done in a room that looks like a temple and is seen as such. Because of this the making of a *keris* is an important ritual, done by the Empu/priest. He makes the marriage between the heavenly meteor and the iron from earth by forging the metals to a *keris* blade. The temples were the rituals of the Empu and the priest are carried out looks like a *kayon*, an element from *Wayang*. The *kayon* is symbolic of the holy men's-house and is also the place where the adventures of *Pandji* take place, often seen in *Wayang* doll performances. The *keris* is made and rituals are carried out within the context of the life of this hero. From this one may conclude that the forging of a *keris* is regarded highly and is almost as important as a wedding or an initiation.

The Empu is a priest in a very special way. This gives him the high regards he gets from the people. He is the one who makes a reunion between ancestors and mankind possible by making an object to confirm and establish the relation between the two.

In the second part of this paper I will delve deeply into this subject. To make it possible to do this it is necessary to know what kind of belief expectations and cosmic ideas are the base of the Javanese culture. With this information it is possible to explain the *keris* in its own world.



The Tajong Keris of the North Peninsular Malays

by Dave Henkel

Introduction - The *Tajong*

The *tajong* is one of the more well known and yet least understood *keris* in the Malay Archipelago. Better known as the *pekaka*, *pekakak* or kingfisher the *tajong* is certainly one of the most flamboyant and dramatic *keris* variants in the family of *keris* forms. Most commonly associated with the ethnic Malay region of Pattani in Southern Thailand, the *tajong* and other variants are also known to have originated in the Northwestern Peninsular Malay states of Kelantan, Yala, Naratiwat and Songkhla. Areas which formed the core of the ancient empire of Langkasuka centered somewhere near the present day city of Pattani. This page is designed as a rough guide for experienced *keris* collectors and researchers and as such assumes some level of familiarity with common *keris* terminology. Less experienced visitors are encouraged to consult a good guide to the *keris*. There are a

number of useful publications in Indonesian, Malay and various Western languages available or you could visit a good online resource such as Paul's *Keris* Page or the Malay Art Gallery's [House of Keris](#).

Other Peninsular and Sumatran hilt forms have occasionally been mistakenly identified as *tajong* or *pekaka* forms. In fact, the *tajong* is quite distinct from those pieces. Features which almost all *tajong* hilts share include a long beak-like nose which typically curves upward to a point, a deep, narrow, tooth-filled mouth with long curving fangs that protrude from both the upper and lower jaw, a large paisly-like *makara* form just behind the head and long talons which cross the front or chest of the hilt just below the neck. Most traditional *tajong* hilts are made from either *kenaung*, a type of ebony, *kemuning* or *ketengga* hardwoods. The hard and sharp beak-like nose of larger, sturdier hilts would probably have served a practical purpose as well, being convenient to place a backhand blow to the face or chest of an opponent in the event that a forward strike were successfully parried. *Tajong* hilts are typically, but not always heavily carved with floral motifs and finer pieces represent perhaps the pinnacle of Malay woodcarving. High status pieces traditionally have been fitted with thin pieces of gold, *suasa* (a low grade gold alloy) or copper work on the nose, the eyes, the crown or at the base of the hilt.

The blades of most *keris tajong* are typical of Northeastern Peninsular blacksmithing. Most commonly blades are made from a high carbon content, indigenous metal known as *besi malela* which takes a good sharp edge and is very sturdy. This metal is pale to dark-grey in color. *Malela* blades are typically pattern welded but more commonly contain no *pamor* and are thus of a uniform color. The pattern weld is most often an upright pattern which resembles the Javanese *pamor adeg*. *Pamor* blades do exist however they are less common. Occasionally one will encounter blades which contain *besi sanak*, a low-carbon indigenous metal which, when clean shows a crystalline pattern. Also, but quite rarely, I have encountered pieces which contain non-indigenous metals more common to other *keris* in the Archipelago. These were generally either imported blades or blades made by local *empu* (smiths) with imported metals. The blades can be either straight (*lurus*) or curved (*luk, kelok*) and may include most of the features (*perabot*) common to *keris* from other areas though *picitan* and *sogokan* are rare. The *kembang kacang*, known locally as *belalai gajah* or elephant's trunk, when present is usually long and thin and typically curves completely around at the tip. The *greneng* of *tajong* blades are also quite unique being most often both very large and deep and also typically very fine and sharp. The *ganja* of many of these blades is also of interest. Towards the rear of the *ganja* they will often angle down at about a 45 to 60 degree angle before reaching the *ri-pandan* or tail of the



ganja. As with most things *keris* however there are always exceptions to the rule and I have seen variations which contain none or only some of the above described features. Northern Malay blades represent some of the sturdiest and most practical in the *keris* world and are a testament to the martial prowess of the people of that region.

The sheath of the *tajong* is unique to the form. Typically *tajong* sheaths are large, quite heavy and very sturdy and would most likely have been used as both a parry and a club in hand-to-hand combat. The *tajong* sheath consists of a long, rounded or off-round *gandar* or *batang* and a boat-like *sampir* or cross-piece with upward curving ends. They generally vary from about a foot and a half to two and a half feet in length. Typically a floral “eye of Shiva” is incised on the cross piece either just behind or both behind and in front of the joint with the *gandar*. The preferred material for the *gandar* is *Angsana*, an indigenous hardwood that typically shows a tight flame across the grain of the wood. The *sampir* is most commonly either *kemuning* or *ketengga*. I

have been told that very rarely *tajong* hilts are fitted to sheaths of the *Semenanjung* form, a *keris* type commonly known as the Malay or Peninsular *keris*. A *keris* such as this would have been worn by a particular clown character in traditional plays or *wayang* and would have been viewed by audience members as being very strange and silly. At any rate these pieces were most likely not kept in this particular configuration.

Most references to the *tajong* refer to the form as a *keris pekaka* (or *pekakak*) which translates as “kingfisher” in English. My experience has found though that most people in the region who possess a local knowledge of the *keris* continue to use the traditional term *tajong* when referring to the form. The nose of the *tajong* hilt does resemble somewhat the beak of the kingfisher bird. However other features in the *tajong* hilt clearly differentiate it from a bird-like creature. Older existing pieces clearly show the outlines of arms, legs and feet, which indicate that the *tajong* hilt represents some type of deity or spirit. Islamic strictures against the creation of false deities and a strict prohibition against the making of objects which, if given the gift of life, could “function” as living beings have gradually effaced these human-like features. This “morphing” of traditional hilt forms into less human-like creations is common in Islamicised areas of the Archipelago. It can be clearly observed in the comparison of hilts from Islamic and non-Islamic areas. Hindu-Buddhist Balinese hilts are clearly more human or animal-like than Islamic Bugis,

Malay or Javanese forms. The fact that the remnants of anthropomorphic features can still be observed in various *Jawa demam* type hilts, Bugis/Malayan *ayam sejuk* and *anak ayam teleng* hilt types and even Javanese planar hilts certainly confirms their more human or animal-like ancestry.

Having spent the better part of twenty-odd years studying the *tajong* Nik Rashidin Nik Hussein has concluded that the *tajong* hilt is a representation the Hindu deity Shiva. He makes a good case for this assertion by comparing motifs in the *tajong* hilt with other known local traditional representations of Shiva in carvings and *wayang kulit* or shadow puppets. Nik Rashidin makes this assertion in a paper, *Keris Sebagai Senjata Silam*, presented to the 1999 *keris* seminar *Keris: Darjat dan Kudrat* sponsored by Kraftangan Malaysia. The popular use of the term *pekaka* when referring to the *tajong* probably has a great deal to do with efforts on the part of modern dogmatic Islam to deliberately obscure the origins of the hilt form. Origins which are clearly rooted in the Malay world's pre-Islamic past. Additional confusion has been created by the fact that there is a Northeastern Peninsular variant of the *Jawa demam* form which bears the name *pekaka*.

The Coteng

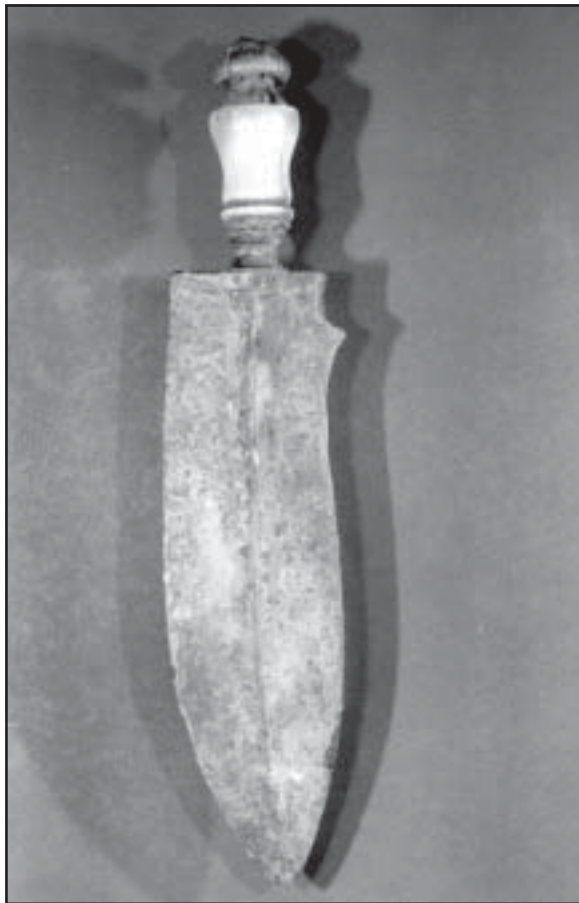
Another less common variant of the *tajong* type is the *keris coteng* (pronounced *choteng*), which originates from the ethnic Malay region

of Songkhla, the northern-most ethnic Malay state of the Peninsula. The handful of *coteng* I have seen have many of the same features as the *tajong* but are still quite distinct. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the *coteng* is the lack of a beard. I have heard it suggested that the *coteng* may in fact represent the female form of this hilt type however I suspect that this may in fact be a more recent belief to explain the lack of a beard. The *coteng* that I have come across tend to be much smaller overall than the *tajong* and more commonly have metal fittings on the sheath and smaller, thin straight blades. I have also seen a couple of *coteng* sheaths which lacked metal oversheaths and were held together with woven rattan bands. Given their rarity however it is difficult to make truly representative comments about the *coteng* form.

Construction of the Tajong Hilt

The making of traditionally correct *tajong* hilts is a dying art form although tourist trade copies of generally poor quality are not terribly hard to come by. One of the few master *keris* hilt carvers who specializes in the *tajong* hilt is Nik Rashidin Nik Hussein, a Malaysian who resides in the Northeastern state of Kelantan. Nik Din, as he is commonly known, has put an exceptional amount of effort and research into his craft and produces masterpiece hilts of the highest quality. He has collected and studied literally hundreds of *keris tajong*, which he describes as his

“textbooks.” He uses this knowledge to produce *tajong* hilts that reflect correct traditional forms. This is not to say that he copies old pieces. Rather, like the carvers of old, Nik Rashidin expresses his craftsmanship while remaining within the bounds of traditional methods, forms and motifs. For Nik Rashidin the creation of a *tajong* hilt is not simply an exercise in woodcarving. Rather it is a mystical experience, which requires that he make a personal connection with the piece being carved.



Keris Buda Voglsinnger

by Kerner Martin

translator Chris Martin

Introduction

The Keris is in the possession of M. Voglsinger and it was acquired in the summer of 1999 in Zurich. It was sold to the author by a private person who acquired the Keris in Malang (Ostjava) according to his own statements.

The preservation condition of this copy is unusually good. The front side is covered by a dark, thin lining with smaller, thickened drop-shaped deposits, without thereby outlines were covered or the roughness of the surface were affected. The back is in a similar condition, exhibits however additional deposit zones of a black, fine-grained sand, which sintered itself with the surface. Within these zones reflecting surfaces of small crystals are to be recognized with suitable beam of light. Likewise the Metuk and the lower part of the grasp of these sandigen deposits are partially covered. This sand is with large probability of volcanic origin. Since only one side exhibits such traces, it is obvious to accept a burying of the Keris due to a volcanic eruption whereby one can presuppose that he was not in a sheath. Probably was so hot and opposite the iron aggressive these volcanic ashtray gene, in order to cause a lasting rust protection and on the other hand not hot enough, in order to burn the organic material of the grasp. At the same time the ash precipitation over grasp, Metuk, Ganja and blade seals the original state of the grasp. Temperature and steams of ash contributed probably to conserve the organic materials so well.

The form of the blade is:

Length (without Ganja)	20.6 cm
Center width	6.2 cm
Slimness S	1.66
SxL	34,22 cm

The blade form is short and broad and is appropriate thereby in S-SxL diagram of the Buda Kerise at the lowest end of the involution straight lines, in direct neighbourhood of the bronze dagger of the Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen (KITS), Amsterdam and the Chinese Bishou from the Dong Son culture. This proves the transition from the bronze dagger to the iron Keris. The blade is very thinly out-forged with a central burr up to the point, as well as two approx. 8 cm are enough for Sogokan slots and accurately forged cutting edges. The training of the Gandik is without model. The blade is out-forged to a managing nose, whose momentum is resumed in the following short (approx. 1 cm) Gandik and jointless turns into. On the opposite side the asymmetrical transition is missing to the blade root to the Ganja completely. The Ganja is trained with broad head and center section, which adapt to the diameter of the Metuk, while the tail is missing.

The blade shows an excellent forging work with all characteristic details of a Keris, with exception of the Pamors. Also to the Ganja are no signs of a Pamorierung to be seen. The surface of the blade was probably smooth before burying and shows no traces of a corrosive treatment.

The Metuk is hour glass shaped with a double groove in the waist and a cover plate at the side of the grasp. The Peksi has a square profile.

The Grip

From two organic materials the grasp is compound. A cylindrical tap from ebony, which locks with a large button and a bulgy tube bone and/or antlers, which pushes themselves over the cylinder of the tap and exhibits at the front end a double groove. All parts of the grasp are manufactured on a turning lathe. Turning lathes are in China since the second pre-Christian millenium well-known and to the Jadebearbeitung were already used. Therefore this statement may not be surprising.

Both turned parts of the grasp are relatively complex manufactured in their form. In particular the mushroom-shaped button with a foot implemented as Kugelkalotte is turned and the hat is from down hinterstochen, the bulge is set off and in the highest place is again put on a small lense-shaped conclusion. The whole arouses the impression, as if one would have copied the construction of the Bronze dagger grips with all its individual parts in wood. At the lower end of the grasp the diameter of the tube bone agrees with that of the Metuk. For this adjustment one accepted even the partial break-through of the bone wall. However it is at the upper end 6 mm more largely and projects therefore. The grasp was put on with a bonding agent on the Peksi. The bonding agent is mineralized and accepted a grey color hard. Probably it concerns (third) an organic material here likewise. That fell trees-hurry shows age and drying tears. The tube bone probably shattered

after the acquisition by the owner due to change of climate into two parts.

Summary

The excavation of a Buda Keris with original grasp from organic materials in good preservation and nearly without corrosion damages means an unusually lucky coincidence. Blade form and grasp point on a direct relationship with the bronzedolchen, how it admits from the temple reliefs and from the museums is. The organic material of the grasp leaves the possibility open of making an age determination with the C14 method. Thus a first step would be possible for the dating of the Buda Keris.



Culture Corner

by Chris Martin

The national emblem of the Republic of Indonesia, *GARUDA PANCASILA*, is emblazoned with the words *BHINNEKA TUNGGAL IKA*. Translated, they mean “Unity in Diversity” or, “We are of many kinds, but we are one.” This motto is a founding principle of the modern Indonesian nation, which declares the essential unity of its members despite ethnic, regional, social or religious differences.

The concept of *BHINNEKA TUNGGAL IKA* is not new to Indonesian history. It can be traced back to the time of the construction of Borobudur, when the Sailendra dynasty ruled on the plains of Central Java in the eighth and ninth centuries. Two hundred years later, in the Brantas Valley in East Java, King Airlangga built a united kingdom based on this same principle.

It was, however, the 14th century poet sage of Majapahit, Mpu Tantular, who is said to have committed the phrase to writing for the first time. In his religious poem *Sutasoma*, composed during the reign of King Rajasanagara (Hayam Wuruk), Mpu Tantular expounded a doctrine of reconciliation between the Hindu and Buddhist faiths. Such a spirit of religious tolerance was an essential element in the foundation and security of the newly emerging State of Majapahit, which reached the height of its power and influence

under the guiding hand of the prime minister Gajah Mada.

In more recent years, the words of Mpu Tantular were an inspiration to the founders of the first Independent Government of the Republic of Indonesia, and today they are found immortalized on the national emblem.

The kingdom of Majapahit, with its capital in East Java, flourished at the end of what is known as Indonesia’s “classical age”. This was a period in which the religions of Hinduism and Buddhism were predominant cultural influences. Beginning with the first appearance of Hinduized kingdoms in the archipelago in the 5th century A.D., this classical age was to last for more than a millennium, until the final collapse of Majapahit in the early 16th century and the establishing of Java’s first Islamic sultanate at Demak.

Legend has it that Hindu civilization and culture were introduced to Java in A.D. 78 by the sage Aji Saka. This figure is often associated with Agastya, the patron saint of southern India, whose image is a common sight on the southern walls of Central Javanese Hindu temples. Not unlike the god Neptune in appearance, Agastya is also recognized as Shiwa in his form of divine teacher. When he first brought the message of Hinduism to southern India, it is said that he stood in the north and faced south.

The way in which Hindu/Buddhist culture was transmitted to Indonesia is still not yet fully understood. Older theories suggesting immigration and colonization by Indian merchants and settlers have tended to lose favor in the light of recent advances made in the fields of history and archaeology. The case seems rather to have been one in which the native Indonesians themselves played an active role in the selection and adaptation of foreign cultural forms, through which they were inspired.

The great flowering of Hindu-Javanese civilization which sprang up in Central Java during the 8th and 9th centuries may be seen as the product of a dialogue between, on the one hand, the established forms of classical Hinduism and Buddhism, and on the other, the innovative qualities of a society whose traditional beliefs and customs were already firmly entrenched.

The oldest datable evidence of a Hindu civilization in Indonesia comes from Kutei in eastern Kalimantan (Borneo). Stone inscriptions, written in Sanskrit and dating from around A.D. 400, record the reign of a King Mulawarman. At about the same time, in West Java, there existed a kingdom named Tarumanagara, yet more than this little is known, on account of the scarcity of archaeological remains.

It is not until the 7th and 8th centuries that the picture becomes clearer. This period, which

saw the rise of the maritime empire of Sriwijaya in south eastern Sumatra, as well as the emergence of the Central Javanese kingdom of Mataram, marked the beginning of a golden age in Indonesian history.

“In the whole course of my life I have never met with such stupendous and finished specimens of human labor, and of the science and taste of ages long since forgot, crowded together in so small a compass as in this little spot”

Thus exclaimed Captain George Baker when first confronted by the ruins of Candi Sewu, or the “ Temple of a Thousand Buddhas” , at Prambanan, near Yogyakarta, early in the 19th century. Baker, who had been given the task of surveying the antiquities of Java by Thomas Stamford Raffles, then governor of the island, was no stranger to India, nor to other parts of south east Asia.

Yet, the extensive ruins to be found in the mountains and on the plains of Central Java were beyond anything, which he had yet seen. The remains of Borobudur, Prambanan, Sewu, the temple sites of Dieng and Gedong Songo, are just a few of the archaeological treasures which to this day continue to arouse similar expressions of wonder and astonishment.

Through the study of temple remains and the deciphering of ancient inscriptions on stone and metal, historians have been able to establish a quite coherent chronology for the

period. Tracing an outline, the ruling power in 8th and 9th century Central Java appears to have been shared by two dynasties, whose exact relationship is not fully clear. According to the earliest known inscription, dating from A.D.732, there was a Hindu king named Sanjaya, who united the kingdom of Java and whose descendants are recorded in inscriptions for the following two centuries.

Not long after the appearance of Sanjaya, a dynasty bearing the title Sailendra emerged as the supreme authority on the southern plains. The Sailendra were adherents of Mahayana Buddhism, the religion, which inspired them to embark on one of the most ambitious building programs known to history. In the space of just one century they commissioned the construction of a vast number of religious monuments, some very large, built from hand cut blocks of volcanic stone. The remains of many of these buildings are still visible, some of the, more well known including the temples of Kalasan, Sari, Sewu, Sojiwan, Mendut, Ngawen, Pawon, as well as the massive “ temple mountain” of Borobudur, one of the architectural wonders of the world.

Sometime during the early to mid 9th century, a marriage alliance between a Sailendra princess and a king from the dynasty of Sanjaya seems to have resulted in the end of Sailendra rule in Java. At about the same time, the great Shiwa temple at Prambanan was constructed, perhaps as a monument to the return to power of the Sanjaya dynasty.

Yet, the Prambanan temple complex was barely completed when, for reasons, which are still not fully comprehended, Central Java all but vanished from the records of history for about five centuries. One reason for this sudden silence, which began after the palace was moved to East Java by Mpu Sindok in A.D. 929, may well have been a violent eruption of Mt Merapi, which overlooks the plains of both Borobudur and Prambanan. In recent years, more and more archaeological sites have been discovered buried under metres of lava and volcanic dust, indicating the occurrence of a serious calamity, which could well have taken place about a thousand years ago.

Following the shift of political power from central to eastern Java at the beginning of the 10th century, the first kingdom to emerge was called Isana, established by Mpu Sindok in A.D. 929. The capital, at Watugaluh, is thought to have been located on the banks of the Brantas River, in the region of Jombang. Sindok is reported to have had two wives, one of whom Sri Parameswari Dyah Kbi, may have been the daughter of Dyah Wawa, the last known ruler of ancient Mataram in Central Java. Since it is known that Sindok had formerly held a high ministerial position in the Mataram government, it seems likely that he was recognized as the successor to Dyah Wawa on the strength of this marriage. Despite the discovery of quite a number of stone inscriptions dating from Sindok’s reign, the information which they reveal has not

helped to shed very much light on this historical period.

Our most informative source, in fact, dates from the following century when East Java was ruled by King Airlangga. An inscription known as the “Calcutta Stone”, so named because it is preserved in the Indian Museum of Calcutta, traces the genealogy of Airlangga back to King Sindok. Thus we are informed that, following Sindok’s death in A.D.947/8, the throne was taken over by his daughter, Sri Isana Tunggawijaya, who was married to a Sri Lokapala. Their son and successor, Sri Makutawangawardhana, was known as the “Sun of the Isana Dynasty”. It was from the union of his daughter, Mahendradatta, with the Balinese ruler Udayana, that Airlangga was born.

Airlangga

The famous “Calcutta Stone”, dating from A.D. 1041, describes a terrible calamity which befell the East Javanese kingdom of Isana in the early years of the 11th century. A rebellion incited by a jealous vassal king resulted in the destruction of the capital of Watugaluh. The reigning king, Dharmawangsa, successor to Sri akutawangawardhana, was murdered along with his entire family. Only the young Airlangga, who was aged about 16 at the time, managed to escape unharmed.

After spending three or four years in the safety of a forest retreat, Airlangga, as the closest

surviving relative to Dharmawangsa, emerged to take over the throne in about 1020. The early part of his reign was spent putting down rebellions and securing the borders of his kingdom. Among his successful military campaigns were those against King Wishnuprabhawa of Wuratan, King Wijaya of Wengker, as well as the subjugation of a powerful queen in the south. In 1032 Airlangga attacked and defeated the ruler of Wurawari, who is believed to have been responsible for the earlier destruction of the old capital of Isana. By the end of Airlangga’s reign, in the mid 11th century, the kingdom which he had established is believed to have stretched from Pasuruan in the east, to present day Madiun in the west. Although there are few surviving archaeological remains dating from his time, Airlangga is known to have been a keen patron of the arts, notably literature. In around 1035, the court poet Mpu Kanwa produced the Arjuna Wiwaha, which has to this day remained one of Java’s most popular classical stories. Adapted from the Indian Mahabharata epic, the poem recounts episodes in the life of the hero sage Arjuna, who was an incarnation of the Hindu god Wishnu. There are reasons to believe that the poem was a portrait of the life of Candi Belahan, on the eastern slope of Mt Penanggungan, is traditionally believed to be a memorial to King Airlangga. Seen above, statues of the goddesses Sri and Lakshmi are still at the site. Originally they flanked the central image of Wisnu on Garuda, now on display at the Trowulan Museum.

Airlangga himself. He, like Arjuna, was seen as a divine incarnation, apparently laid to rest at Candi Belahan, where he was portrayed in stone as Wishnu on Garuda. Towards the end of his life, Airlangga was faced with the problem of succession. The rightful heir, the princess Sanggramawijaya, refused the throne, preferring to live her life as a hermit. She is traditionally associated with the legend of Dewi Kilisuci and the cave of Selomangleng at Kediri. Airlangga's realm was, as a result, eventually divided between two of his sons, giving rise to the separate kingdoms of Janggala and Kediri. It was Kediri, however, which was to become the dominant power until the rise of Singosari in the early 13th century.

The Origins of Rajasa Dynasty

The rulers of Singosari and Majapahit trace their origins back to the mysterious figure of Ken Angrok, who founded the Rajasa dynasty early in the 13th century. According to the Pararaton, our main source of literary information about this period, Ken Angrok was born in the Malang region, apparently from the union of his mother, Ken Endok, with the god Brahma. Abandoned in a cemetery shortly after his birth, the infant was subsequently adopted by a thief named Lembong, whose questionable talents the child was later to inherit.

As a young man, Ken Angrok became a notorious gambler, running up debts to the

point where both his mother and stepfather were forced into slavery. Such reckless behavior earned him a great deal of unpopularity in the community, and on more than one occasion Brahma himself had to intervene when he feared for his son's life. Yet, Ken Angrok was destined to become a great king. Signs which indicated him as an incarnation of the god Wishnu were revealed to the Brahmin priest Dang Hyang Lohgawe, who travelled from India in search of the youth. He found him at a gambling table in the village of Taloka. Following the advice of the priest, Ken Angrok accompanied him to Tumapel, where he was placed in the employment of the local ruler, Tunggal Ametung.

Tunggal Ametung had a beautiful young wife named Ken Dedes, the daughter of Mpu Purwa, a renowned Buddhist priest. She had been abducted by the Tumapel ruler while her father was away practicing asceticism in the forest. Returning to find his daughter gone, Mpu Purwa had laid a curse on Tunggal Ametung, swearing that he would meet his end by being stabbed to death by a keris (Javanese double edged dagger). Ken Dedes, on the other hand, was promised a life of happiness and fulfillment.

As the gods had willed, Ken Angrok happened to be in the park of Baboji on the day when the ruler of Tumapel and his wife, who was three months pregnant, were passing by. The carriage came to a halt, and as Ken Dedes

descended a gentle breeze caused her skirts to part momentarily, allowing the youth a glimpse of the light radiating from between her thighs. Reporting his experience to the priest Lohgawe, Ken Angrok was advised that a woman who displayed such signs possessed enormous power, and whoever took her to wife, regardless of his character or position, would inevitably become a king of kings. On hearing the words of the priest, Ken Angrok resolved to win the hand of Ken Dedes, even if it meant having to kill her husband. In the village of Lulumbang there lived a renowned metal smith named Mpu Gandring who, it was said, could forge a kens capable of overcoming the strongest magical protection. Since it was known that Tunggul Ametung was a man of great power, a special weapon had to be created in order to destroy him. On hearing Ken Angrok's request, therefore, Mpu Gandring said that he would need a full year in which to perfect the blade. Knowing that Ken Dedes was pregnant, and determined to murder Tunggul Ametung before his wife gave birth to a possible son and heir, Ken Angrok found these conditions unacceptable. Impatiently, he demanded that Mpu Gandring complete the job in five months, and then went on his way.

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Final Comments

If you have comments, student questions, a possible article that you would like to submit or an article that you would like to see written please send them to:

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