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Symbolic Animals in the Land between the Waters

Markers of Place and Transition

Abstract

This paper analyzes the use of symbolic animals in Indonesia and Southeast Asia generally as markers of place or state of being, and aids in transition between states of being. It shows that especially *naga* and Garuda, both subsets of a larger category of *naga*, respectively define the categories upperworld and underworld as the male and female extremes of a water continuum. These are linked by the rainbow, which is also a member of the *naga* category. Together these symbolic animals make up the *axis mundi*, as can be seen in both the symbolic mountain of the Javanese shadow theatre and the Balinese cremation tower. Within the arc of water created by these three elements lies the earth, which has emerged from, and can be seen to be part of the underworld. The emergence of the earth as well as states and crops from the underworld is made possible by the movement of buffalo or its equivalents, which also aid in the transition of human beings from the prenatal state, through life and into death.

Keywords: Naga—Garuda—water buffalo—origins—life-cycle rituals—cosmology—Indonesia—Southeast Asia

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One evening in East Java, I heard a *cicak* (small house-lizard; *Hemidactylus frenatus*) chatter quite excitedly.[1] Since *cicak* there are reputed to be consummate gossips, I perked up my ears: was it true what they said about Mrs. A? Did Mr. B's money come from illicit sources? The *cicak* was interrupted by the sound of another lizard, a *tokeh* (*Gekko gecko*), whose seven-count call of its own name is said to predict fair weather for the next day. By the time the *tokeh* was done, the *cicak* was pursuing a mosquito, and I returned to my book. In the event, the *tokeh* only called five times and it rained the next day, which was not surprising, it being the rainy season.

This anecdote illustrates how these two lizards are perceived in East Java. *Tokeh*, while they occasionally enter a building, primarily live outside. They are considered good omens, but are aggressive and will bite[2] and thus are not preferred in the house. The *cicak*, on the other hand, freely moves in and out of the house and, presumably, between houses. Thus, the *tokeh*, an outside animal, speaks of outside matters—rain—while the *cicak*, moving between houses, speaks of what it has seen and heard. Beliefs about the one are indicative of its (preferred) position outside, while those about the other note its movements across human-defined boundaries.

In this article I look at the use in Indonesia of animals as symbolic indicators of positions and transitions of humans and cultural constructs like states and crops. It will be seen that in the past, and diminishingly so in the present, certain animals were consistently symbolically involved in transitions while others served as guardians of boundaries or indicators of place. While my data comes primarily from Indonesia, with a focus on Java, it is part of a wider pattern. The people of Indonesia have long traveled to South, East, and Southeast Asia, influencing and being influenced by those they met along the way (Kumar 2004; Wessing 1997b, 325–27). It is not surprising, therefore, that much of what I discuss here is found, in varying forms, throughout the region.

The people of Southeast Asia have been described as perceiving themselves to be part of a cosmological whole (for example, Heine Geldern 1930; 1942). This does not mean, of course, that every person can explain the structure of

the cosmos, either that of earlier times or the present Islam, Christianity, or modernity-influenced one. Such knowledge is the purview of specialists who often disagree among themselves. The knowledge is mostly practical, embedded in ritual practice rather than in exegeses and written rules. People have customs that they feel to be essential for the well being of the community, and explanations of them often depend on whom one asks and this person's role in the community (Nourse 1999; Wessing 2001). Since symbols can have a range of meanings, such explanations need not be mutually exclusive (Wessing 1978b). Due to the influence of religion, schooling, and the media, much of this knowledge is rapidly disappearing. As Lévi-Strauss (1963, 154) observed, these (symbolic) structures have long "disintegrated" (for example, been undergoing changes), so that what the anthropologist perceives as a once widespread system of thought is necessarily a reconstruction. This should, of course, not be taken to mean that there once was a fully coherent Javanese or Southeast Asian cosmology, as symbolic systems are never either static or fully coherent, especially over large areas. Rather, they are continually under construction and must adapt to local and historical circumstances (compare Wessing 1978b; McVey 1993). Thus, we must expect to find variations on a theme—harmonies, to stay with Lévi-Strauss—over time and space.

People of Indonesia perceive their lives as proceeding through stages, the transition between which is marked by rites of passage in which animals are used symbolically. These movements take place along two dimensions: along a vertical axis from the pre-natal stage through life into death, and on a horizontal plane, earth but more immediately the community, where people participate in social life. Both these dimensions are internally divided while at the same time forming a unity. This is also true of the other elements that make up the cosmos, both living and non-living. All is, or was, intimately interconnected within a whole that was internally divided into a number of categories (compare Pigeaud 1929, 275).[3] The two dimensions are furthermore linked, something indicated by particular animals and their behavior. To clarify this let us first look at the vertical axis.

THE UNDERWORLD AND THE UPPERWORLD

The vertical axis is usually divided into three parts: the underworld, the earth, and the upperworld, which Löffler (1968, 22) characterizes as "the earth between sky and water, represented by the most prominent animal, flanked by fowl and fish." The tripartite vertical axis can be seen in many aspects of life, from dwellings to cosmic monuments (Wessing 1978a, 53–63; 1988a; forthcoming b), the *kayon* (cosmic tree or mountain) of the Javanese shadow puppet presentations (Sri Soejatmi Satari 1986, 236), and the Balinese cremation tower (Brinkgreve

1979). Although the matter is actually more complex, we can use this depiction for the time being. Since the earth, the horizontal plane, will be discussed separately, I will begin by looking at the underworld and the upperworld.

The underworld is commonly said to be a place of waters and origins: in Java the water of life (Bergema 1938, 3) is a parallel with the amniotic fluid in which fetuses mature. Associated with this water are, among others, fish, snakes (*naga*), water buffalos, turtles, and crocodiles. Of course, participation in a category does not imply that the members are identical. Elements can be members of categories while the role they play within these may vary considerably. In fact, some animals, while members of the underworld category, function primarily on the horizontal plane, assisting human transitions as well as those of states and rice.[4] For the vertical axis, only the *naga* and perhaps the turtle are truly important underworld elements. The upperworld, in contrast, is populated by birds and, at first surprisingly, *naga*. Since the birds will be seen to be a sub-set of the category *naga*, I shall first take a look at this larger category.

NAGA

The word *naga* (serpent) comes from Indian mythology.[5] *Naga*s are sometimes depicted as half-human, half-serpent. Sometimes wearing a crown they live under the earth where they are the guardians of wealth and fertility (Stutley and Stutley 1984, 198–99). According to an Indian myth (Zimmer 1955, 52), a tortoise-man had two wives, Vinatā (heaven) and Kadrū (earth), whom he impregnated. Both laid eggs, Kadrū many and Vinatā three. Out of Kadrū's eggs hatched a great number and variety of snakes, while Vinatā failed to brood two of hers to term; from the last one issued the golden-feathered Garuda (mythical eagle). The two mothers, however, had fallen into enmity, a relationship their offspring continue into the present. In the Indian myth, then, the Garuda and the snakes are children of one father. In a Javanese version of the tale (Bergema 1938, 494–95) Wirata (=Vinatā) and Kadru are sisters, making their offspring matrilateral parallel cousins, while in the Malay version (Winstedt 1926, 418, citing Perry) they in addition have the same father, the sun, making them patrilateral siblings as well (see figure 1).

Naga, the offspring of the earth who dwell in the waters of the underworld are closely associated with fertility (Kern 1916, 395; MacCulloch 1955, 399; Zimmer 1955, 49–50). *Naga* are generally considered female and may present a benevolent or threatening face, depending on the circumstances.[6] In Java floods are thought to result from the anger of an offended earth-guardian spirit (Poerwantana 1971),[7] while the Batak consider the *naga padoha* to be the source of creative, preserving healing power as well as of negative aspects (Tichelman 1942, 223–24; see figure 2).[8] In Java nature itself but also agriculture, in the form

Figure 1. Garuda and *naga*. Ubud, Bali (1971). Photograph: Steve Wessing.

figure 2. Toba Batak medicine container with *naga*. Purchased in Berastagi (1981). Photograph: Steve Wessing.

Figure 3. Water buffalos in Aceh (1980). Photograph: Robert Wessing.

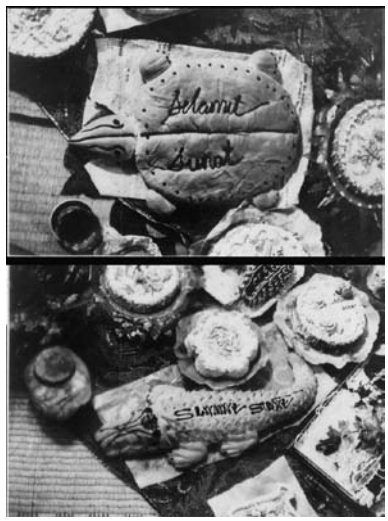

FIGURE 4. Circumcision cakes, West Java (1970). Photograph: Robert Wessing.

FIGURE 5. Javanese *kayon*. Photograph: Steve Wessing.

of a beautiful maiden, originated from a snake. Their proper exploitation, the maiden proclaims, will bring peace, welfare, happiness and prosperity (Pleyte 1894, pt. 1, 99).

Indeed, the land or the state often originates from the waters of the underworld or needs the cooperation of its denizens. Gaudes (1993, 334–53) notes a number of stories from Cambodia in which a prince weds a *nagini*, a female *naga*, in the realm under the waters, after which he founds a state. Sometimes the land itself rose above the water or is enlarged by the king of the *naga* (compare Cœdès 1966, 57). Similarly in Sumatra, Mt. Marapi was a small island inhabited by a dragon (= *naga*). A group coming from Mecca killed this guardian, after which the island enlarged (Kreemer 1956, 211). This is an all-Sumatra motif, known among the Minangkabau, the Kubu, and the Besemah (Barendregt 2005, 51). The Toba Batak tell how an upperworld goddess jumped into the waters of the underworld after which her father gave her some dirt, which grew into the earth.

In Java the clearest example comes from the kingdom of Mataram, whose founder, Panembahan Senopati, forged an alliance with Nyai Roro Kidul, the crowned *naga*-goddess of the Southern Ocean, before founding his state (Wessing 1997b; Schlehe 1998, 144, note 225). Although Java already existed at the time, Senopati reemerged from the waters of the Indian Ocean after a three-night tryst with the Goddess. Since the state is implicit in the existence of a ruler, his reemergence implies the coming into being of the state.[9]

Shifting our perspective to the upperworld, in Indian influenced contexts the *naga*'s opposite is the Garuda, a mythical bird that, according to Tichelman (1942, 220) can take the form of either a kind of falcon (for example, raptorial bird) or a hornbill. The difference is one of context. The Garuda, a raptor, is the vehicle of the God Vishnu, who in Java as elsewhere was mostly relevant in court circles where he often incarnated as the ruler (Kulke 1978, xv). The hornbill, on the other hand, seems to appear in non-court contexts outside Java and Bali.[10] Interestingly, a woodcarving I was given in Ubud (Bali) in 1971 (see figure 1) shows a bird, said to be a Garuda, locked in combat with a serpent. Although the bird's wings are clearly feathered, both are otherwise covered with the same scale markings. Thus, in spite of their opposition a unity exists between them, perhaps reflecting the idea of their parentage. This same idea is expressed by the Lushai of Burma, the Nage of Flores, and the Ngaju Dayak who depict the "unity" of the bird and the *naga* as a feathered snake (Löffler 1968, 22; Forth 1998, 88). The Ngaju Dayak even speak of "the Watersnake who is also the Hornbill" in which the *naga* is depicted with feathers and the hornbill is given scales (Schärer 1963, 18, 19, 33), similar to the Balinese woodcarving.[11] If the underworld was the location of femaleness and origins, the upperworld is associated with maleness and death. The Batak have the hornbill escort the spirit of the deceased to the

afterlife, and their coffins often take the shape of this bird. One of the dancers at funerals was always dressed as a hornbill (Löffler 1968, 24; Tichelman 1942, 220).[12] Ngaju coffins can be decorated with hornbill features (for women) or *naga* ones (for men) (Löffler 1968, 24; Schärer 1963, 93, 95).[13]

The difference, however, is only one of gender because elsewhere spirits of the dead change into snakes: Mandailing ancestors show themselves as such in the sky during storms. Animals we earlier saw as associated with the underworld are also often named as belonging to the upperworld. In Java the turtle is said to be the wind (Pigeaud 1929, 279) and Dayak upperworld and underworld deities live in the sea of clouds (Pleyte 1894, pt. 2, 172) while, according to Pleyte (1894, pt. 1, 98), *naga* originated in the sky (perhaps a reflection of their Sun-father parentage mentioned earlier) but now live in the waters under the earth. Kern (1916, 395–96) writes that *naga* is also a word for cloud and that in Vedic India "the waters" indicated the waters of the sky, the snakes to be venerated being the rain clouds and the lightning flashes.[14] Such snakes are also the source of water for the Javanese (Pleyte 1894, pt. 1, 98).

Thus, there is an essential unity between the *naga* and the hornbill/Garuda, and the opposition between them becomes one of female underworld *naga* versus male upperworld *naga*. Obviously then the *naga*'s place is not exclusively in the underworld. This becomes even clearer when we look at the link between the two, the rainbow, which in Java has the body of a snake (Hooykaas 1956, 304).[15] This rainbow serves as a boat[16] between the earth and the heavenly regions, rowed by an osprey, a kind of hawk (raptor) (Hooykaas 1956, 293, 307). This boat imagery continues among the Ngaju Dayak, where it conveys the spirit of the deceased to the afterlife (Hooykaas 1956, 298), and the Benuaq Dayak whose coffins have the shape of a boat (*perahu*) (Massing 1981, 90). Ngaju shamans also send their spirits to the afterlife by this means (Quaritch Wales 1959, 101), while Toraja shamans' spirits sail into the heavens aboard the rainbow, accompanied by large birds (Alkema and Bezemer 1927, 164–65).

THE LAND BETWEEN THE WATERS

This leaves us with *naga* in the upper and the underworld connected by a *naga*-rainbow boat or, to simplify the idea, an arc of water with the upper and underworlds at its extremes, between which the earth is located.[17] This is reminiscent of the model upon which courts and villages in Java are constructed. As was discussed at length elsewhere (Wessing 2003a and c), the cosmologically ideal location for a village or court is between or at the confluence of two rivers, or minimally in the oxbow of a river. If such a feature is not naturally available, a canal might even be dug or the flow of a river altered to supply it. In the case of the Indic courts, which were likened to Indra's heavenly palace, this concern

with a location between two waters is not surprising. From Indra's heaven originate the sacred rivers Ganges, Jumna and Saraswati, and the earthly court ideally strove to mirror the heavenly one as close as possible. This concern is also apparent from Java's ancient name, Java Dvipa, in which the term *dvipa* refers to a location between waters (Suárez 1999, 16, 25), which we see actualized in the court's location between rivers as well as in the image of the cosmos described above.[18] Furthermore, the *nagini* tutelary spirit of the courts of Java, Nyai Roro Kidul, rules the waters both in the clouds and on earth, and the Javanese visualize the rainbow as a large, sometimes two-headed snake that drinks water from the Java Sea and the Indian Ocean to then spit it out as rain over the land (Hooykaas 1956, 304; Pleyte 1894, pt. 1, 98).[19] Uchrowi et al. (1988, 51–52) have a rainbow change into this tutelary spirit.

THE HORIZONTAL PLANE

Earlier we noted that the land or the state is often perceived as having originated in the underworld. At this point we must briefly look at the relationship between the two, in order to understand the symbolic position of some of the animals involved in the existence of states and local communities. First of all, concomitant with the idea of the land's origin in the underworld is the idea that the world rests on a creature that resides there. Most often this is a snake or *naga* (in India and Sarawak, and among groups such as Batak, Malays, Javanese, Balinese, and Ngaju Dayak). However, it can also be a turtle (Bali), a cow that sometimes stands on an egg lying on a fish (Aceh, Malays of Sumatra, Minangkabau), or a creature that is half snake, half bull, the *ular lembu* (cow-snake; Mandailing, Malays) (Goris n.d.; Hill 1960, 150–51, 199, note 169; Jacobs 1894, 398; Kreemer 1956, 199; Pleyte 1894, pt. 1, 95–96; Schärer 1963, 27–28; Zimmer 1972, 62).

It is in fact a matter of perspective whether one sees the world of people (*bumi*) as part of or as separate from the underworld, giving us alternately a dual and a tripartite cosmos. As Tichelman (1942, 224) observes, the conceptions about the world and the underworld seem to continually merge. The Malays contrast Father Water (*Bapa-ku Ayer*), the waters of the male sky, with Mother Earth (*Ibu-ku Bumi*), the female earth—a gender earlier associated with the underworld. The Sundanese of West Java similarly link women and the earth (Rikin 1973, 19).[20] Tripartite or dual, in daily life people's concerns are focused on events on their own plane and the forces of fertility coming from the underworld, which is linked with the upperworld in any case. To the Ngaju Dayak the underworld is located underneath the world of people, and can be accessed from a point near one's village, at the confluence of two rivers (Schärer 1963, 16).[21] As we will see, it is through such linkage points that underworld creatures

like snakes and cows or buffalo enter the world of people.[22] In what follows I shall first look at the human community: its founding and its borders and the way these are crossed by various animal entities. Within this we will then consider a person's life sequence and the animal markers involved in this process.

THE HUMAN COMMUNITY

In considering the human community, we must differentiate between the local village and the state. Although *naga* and buffalo play essential roles in the existence of both they do so at different levels. As we saw earlier, a relationship with a *nagini* was indispensable in founding a state. The same is true of the founding of a local community. In order to successfully start a new community, the founder must enter into an agreement with a local nature spirit, the embodiment of the fertility of that place. This spirit, which subsequently acts as the tutelary spirit (*dhanyang*) to the community, most often appears in the guise of a snake[23] that dwells in a grove at the hamlet's water source (Wessing 1999b; forthcoming a). In Java a well is the first thing constructed when a house is built (Gunawan Tjahjono 1989, 225) while in a Semelai (Malaysia) tale access to the fertility-snake is through a hole at the bottom of the ladder of the house, the place where in a myth the *naga*'s alter ego planted his cane.[24] When the *naga* had been killed and eaten by the community, the alter ego pulled out his cane and water flooded the village (Gianno n.d., 11–15; compare MacCulloch 1955, 407; Pleyte 1894, pt. 1, 98 on Serawak). The tutelary snake is usually given an annual feast and behavioral rules must be observed if it is to continue to favor the community with its blessing of fertility (Wessing 1999a).

THE FOUNDING AND MAINTENANCE OF STATES

One difference between the village-level and the state-level *naga* is the relationship the leader has with her. While on the village level this relationship takes the form of a contract between equals, for example, between the founder and the nature spirit, on the court level it is usually one of a marriage in which on the one hand the ruler places himself in a wife-taking (= inferior) position vis-à-vis the spirit, but on the other hand must control her (sexual) powers if his kingdom is to prosper (Wessing 1997b, 331–33; Poerwantana 1971; Lai 1994, 55).

However, the *naga* is not the only animal involved in the founding of social units. As important, especially in the founding of states, is the buffalo or the cow. Minangkabau and Acehnese myths tell that these animals, which are associated with the underworld, emerged onto the earth from a cave (de Josselin de Jong 1965, 285; Cowan 1973, 268),[25] in the Acehnese tale including both black and albino water buffalos. This notion perhaps reflects the water buffalo's predilection for water and immersing itself in pools to cool off, giving the impression

that it is emerging from the bowels of the earth (see FIGURE 3) (compare KREEMER 1956, 38).

In Aceh the albino water buffalo is taboo as food for various reasons, such as once when this type of buffalo revealed where the dead body of a boy lay (Marjuni),[26] or another time when one saved a group's ancestor from a tiger (Mansur). Albino buffalos are preferred for ritual, sacrificial purposes, such as asking for rain, purifying the land, or alleviating diseases and epidemics (KREEMER 1956, 116; PARKIN 1978, 249).

In Aceh albino water buffalos are called *keubeuë jagat*, which DJAJADININGRAT (1934, 313) glosses with albino. In view of their ritual role as well as their connection with rulers to be discussed below, it should be remembered that in Sanskrit (as well as in Javanese, Sundanese, and Malay) *jagat* means world.[27] M. Masyur Amin (see note 26) notes that an Acehnese prince founded the capital of his new *negeri* (state) at the place where the albino water buffalo he was riding stopped, which is reminiscent of the founding of the kingdom of Blambangan/Macan Putih in East Java, with the exception that there the founder was riding a magical white tiger (OETOMO 1987). An association between rulers or nobles and buffalo is also found in Java. The first king of West Java's Pajajaran to hitch a water buffalo to a plough acquired the title "Mahisa" (Jav. water buffalo) and his descendants bore the title "Munding" (Sund. water buffalo), for example, Munding Kawati and Mundinglaya di Kusuma (KREEMER 1956, 158; ROSIDI 2000, 424). In Central and East Java there is mention of nobles with the appellations "Lembu" (cow, buffalo) and "Kebo" (water buffalo) as part of their names (MULJANA 2005, 258; PRAMUDITO 2006, 153) Given the involvement of Sundanese and Javanese rulers in the promotion of especially wet-rice agriculture (HIDDING 1929), this association is not surprising.

In Minangkabau the future ruler and two companions appeared from under the ocean riding on a silvery white cow (DE JOSSELIN DE JONG 1965, 285). Their presence made the rice growing there turn into gold and silver. BROWN (1970, 14) has them riding on white elephants, animals that belong in the underworld category together with *naga* and water buffalo. In both versions of the tale, a silvery white cow then vomits up some foam from which a man appears who proclaims one of the youths to be king. While *sapi* is usually glossed with "cow" (PIGEAUD n.d., 511), it can also mean the wild buffalo. Thus the female of the wild bovine *Bos sondaicus* (or *B. javanicus*) is known in Javanese as *sapi alas* or *lembu wana* or in Sundanese *sapi leuweung* (all: forest cow) (BEZEMER 1921, 43).[28] The silvery white "cow" could therefore just as easily be an albino water buffalo. Similarly, when HOOYKAAS (1956, 303) writes that the rainbow and the cow were born from the first embrace of Siva and Uma (heaven and earth), it is unclear which species is meant, though I tend to feel it is the water buffalo, given its association with water and the underworld.

We see then that buffalo (or cows), emerging from the underworld, are intimately involved in the founding of states and indirectly with rice and welfare. It is indeed when they move from the waters to the dry land, sometimes bearing the ruler, that the state becomes possible.[29] In Java I have not found this movement, though there too water buffalo are intimately involved with the court of, for example, Surakarta, but this time as sacrifices: a water buffalo was the construction sacrifice at the founding of this court (*kraton*) (Behrend 1982, 23)[30] and on occasion one is sacrificed in a forest grove dedicated to the goddess Durga for the purpose of gaining the Goddess' protection of the kingdom and to assure the people's health and welfare (Headley 2004, 228). Buffalo sacrifice, often in conjunction with human sacrifice, was a common part of the construction of public edifices throughout Southeast Asia in the past, said to give them strength and protection against outside spirit forces (Wessing and Jordaan 1997, 118).

THE FOUNDING AND MAINTENANCE OF VILLAGES

Water buffalo are less involved in the founding of villages, though they play a role in them in the growing of rice and in sacrifices. As was the case with the state, the founder has to deal with the local spirit-owner of the soil, as without this spirit's cooperation the enterprise is thought to be doomed. This spirit usually takes on the appearance of a snake (Sund. *oray sanca*, python; Wessing 2003c; forthcoming a) and stands in the same relationship to the village's founder as does the higher level *naga* to the founder of the state, namely guarantor of its continuance and welfare for as long as the people continue to meet their obligations to the spirit.

Having established the social/political unit, its borders must be maintained. On both the village and the state levels this is done by the founder and later his descendants through his/their relationship with the tutelary *naga*. On the level of the Javanese state this means that each successive ruler renews the founder's relationship with the Goddess of the Indian Ocean as well as bringing her annual offerings.[31] On the level of the village the spirit is annually feasted (Wessing 1999a). This is taken very seriously, and villagers are loath to permit interference from outsiders, especially if this goes counter to the spirit's wishes (Wessing, forthcoming c). Furthermore, whenever the villagers undertake unusual activities, such as going on an extended trip, or circumcising or marrying off one of their children, the tutelary spirit is notified. This is a matter of politeness that must be observed in relations with the tutelary spirit (= *naga*) if fertility and welfare are to be maintained.

Another significant animal with which rulers have a relationship is the tiger, though this relationship is rather different from that which villagers have

with it. As I discussed in an earlier article (Wessing 1986, 27–34), tigers are symbolic of rulers and occasionally ruling families claim descent from one. Graves of deceased rulers, nobles, but also those of religious figures, may be guarded by white tigers, reminding us of the albino buffalo that helped found states. In Java nobles occasionally bore *macan* (tiger) as part of their titles (van der Kroef 1954, 858).[32] The primary relationship between Javanese rulers and tigers, however, seems to have been one of domination, reflecting the necessity that the rulers encompass the natural forces in their realms (Wessing 1990, 251). There are no reports of Javanese rulers incarnating as tigers after a normal death. Those who died in battle or under abnormal circumstances, however, are said to do so and function as guardians of their realms. The ruler of Pajajaran of West Java is said to continue to do so today (Wessing 1986, 30). As such they take on the role of symbolic ancestors who continue to watch over the welfare of their putative descendants.

While the authority of the ruler, incorporating his power over the natural forces in his realm, is thought to extend from the center all the way to the borders and beyond, the founder or head of a village needs the assistance of variously a guardian tiger or crocodile. The relationship, therefore, is a horizontal cooperative one rather than the hierarchical one between rulers and tigers. Although tigers in Java, as indeed in much of Southeast Asia, are nearly extinct, their symbolic or spiritual presence and influence on the village level continues, at least for now (Wessing 1994a; 1995). Tigers, because of their preferred forest edge and brush habitat and their habit of hunting pigs, deer, and monkeys that feed on a village's gardens, often came to be seen as incarnations of ancestors guarding the community's boundaries and keeping the village safe from the intrusions of pests, natural and spiritual (Wessing 1986). They stand, therefore, between the village and the surrounding forest,[33] which they are occasionally reputed to have helped clear along with the community's founder (Wessing 1995, 197; forthcoming a). Like the tutelary spirit, with whom tigers are sometimes said to cooperate, they are much respected, although, being ancestors, they generally are not feared.[34] As ancestors, they monitor the community's physical and moral well being, making sure that their descendants behave themselves and keep to the pact with the tutelary spirit. A tiger entering a village is taken as a sign that all is not well and that someone has broken the community's ancestral rules (compare Winstedt 1977, 51).

In certain areas the tiger's role is taken over or complemented by the crocodile. This is not surprising as in Indian belief both animals are said to be manifestations of the god Siva, the tiger by land and the crocodile by water (Skeat 1972, 91, 286).[35] Some peoples equate crocodiles with *naga* (Gaudes 1993, 353; Löffler 1968, 26; Tichelman 1942, 224), placing them in the category of underworld animals like the buffalo, which they are reputed never to attack (Kreemer

1956, 40). There is little data about a relationship between crocodiles and nobility, except that in Java a mythological man-eating ruler, having been deposed by Aji Saka, entered the Indian Ocean and turned into a white crocodile. This crocodile was later defeated by Aji Saka's *naga* son, Naga Linglung. In Aceh a large pestle, with which a prince who had rebelled against Sultan Iskandar Muda was executed, reputedly entered the river running by the palace and turned into a white crocodile. If we see this punishment as protective of the realm, it fits in with the crocodile's role of protector of a territory or of the ancestral customs (*adat*) through which the integrity of the community is maintained, something found throughout Indonesia (Bakels 2000, 298, 300–17).[36] Indeed, lizards in general seem to have been regarded as carriers of the spirits of ancestors (van der Hoop 1949, 222; Parkin 1978, 185), perhaps accounting for the gossipy nature of the *cicak* mentioned at the beginning of this article. Several Indonesian peoples, for example, the Osing of East Java, claim to be descended from crocodiles (Tichelman 1942, 224), which may reflect the idea that the spirits of their ancestors now reside in these animals, as we saw them do earlier in tigers (Kalff 1917–1918, 806).[37]

In summary then, tigers and crocodiles, as incarnations of either (founding) ancestors or the nature spirits allied with them, guard the borders of the villages' territory, making sure that ancestral dictums and local rules (*adat*) are observed so that the village or hamlet's welfare (and thus that of their descendants) will continue.

agriculture

One of the factors on which the welfare of these villages depends is agriculture. Earlier we saw that the tiger, because of its forest edge habitat, came to function as a de facto guardian of the village's fields. As a result it came to be symbolically interpreted as an ancestor or ancestrally allied spirit. Tigers, however, are not the only animals involved in agriculture. The mythology about the origin of rice varies between ethnic groups and even between villages, but in both Java and Sunda (West Java) this origin is usually attributed to or associated with a snake. In one Sundanese myth the nymph Pohaci who later becomes the rice, originates from the tears of the *naga* Antaboga (or Dewa Anta) (Hidding 1929, 28), while in Java the same snake deity obtains the jewel Retna Dumilah, which eventually turns into Tishnawati who then becomes assimilated to the Goddess Dewi Sri and rice. Since (wet) rice is seen as the basis for civilization and the state, in both myths this snake is thus, again, also responsible for the state.

In other myths, Sri and her companion Sadana have fled the palace because Sri was about to be forced into an improper marriage with a member of her own underworld category (Wessing 1978a, 38). The gods change Sri into a large

snake (Sund. *ula sawah*), which enters a rice field causing the yield to be abundant (Kats 1916, 180–81). A similar association between rice and *naga* is found among the Toba Batak, where the constellation Orion is considered to be a large snake. This *naga* in the sky is the constellation that farmers use to determine the proper time to plant (Pleyte 1894, pt. 1, 96).

The origin of rice, then, is closely associated with *naga* and the underworld and, as we have already seen, the movement of buffalo plays an important role in relation to it. Buffalo are, indeed, a *leitmotif* in agricultural ritual and, as we shall see, in some of the rituals marking individuals' lives. It was, we remember, the emergence of cows or buffalo from the sea (= the underworld) that heralded the arrival of the king and the welfare of the state through the golden and silver rice in the Minangkabau myth (de Josselin de Jong 1965, 285). In the Javanese rice myth too the cow or buffalo becomes instrumental in the establishment of settled life and rice agriculture after being tamed at the conclusion of the final battle between Dewi Sri's forces and those opposing her (Wessing 1978a, 47). In other words, the Sri myth can also be seen as being about the domestication of the buffalo in the process of which it moves from the opposition to the forces of order, making possible permanent settlements and the associated wet rice agriculture (Wessing 1978a, 42; Hidding 1929, 88).

Whether in wet or in dry rice agriculture, rain is an important factor and predictably we see the water buffalo used throughout Indonesia to either conjure rain or stop it when too much falls (Kreemer 1956, 197). In planting rice, buffalo, or their categorial equivalent, goats, play an important role as sacrifices among the Malay, who ritually mark the center of the ricefield with a ceremony that includes burying a goat (= symbolic buffalo). After this a man walking counterclockwise, the direction into the underworld, plants the rice seeds using a dibble stick (*kuku kambing*; goat's hoof) (de Josselin de Jong 1965, 286–87; Skeat 1972, 231–33). During the entire growing period buffalo continue to be important. The Toba Batak lead a buffalo through the planted fields to drive out malevolent spirits (Kreemer 1956, 233). Similarly in Aceh a buffalo, before being sacrificed, is allowed to roam through the planted fields where the ears of the rice plant are just beginning to fill out, and eat where he likes with the idea that this will bring an abundant harvest (Buchari 1980–1981, 22).[38] Elsewhere, in Toraja, the developing ears are sprinkled with buffalo milk (Kreemer 1956, 126, 166) while in Aceh the "pregnant" rice is welcomed by allowing the blood of an albino buffalo to flow into the confluence of two rivers or into a fishpond (M. Masyur Amin, field notes).[39]

Once the rice is harvested it is integrated into the community in a variety of ways, during which fertility and the rice's relationship with the underworld is marked. The Angkola Batak place the rice-mother, the seed for the next planting, on a mat, covered with an ethnic cloth, and surrounded by eggs and freshwater

fish (Kruyt 1903, 395). Elsewhere, the Mnong Gar of Southern Vietnam sacrifice both actual buffalo and jars of rice beer that are treated as if they were buffalo. The beer is mixed with the blood of sacrificial chickens[40] and then used to anoint the buffalos.

In East Java the harvest[41] is a time of the renewal of fertility during which the village's tutelary spirit is feasted and its powers of fertility are channeled into the community (Wessing 1999a). Among the Osing ethnic group in the area, an essential part of these celebrations is the acting out of the role of buffalo by males of the community. As part of the *seblang* ritual conducted in two communities, men or boys are hitched to "ploughs" and pull a furrow (Wessing 1999a). Elsewhere in the Osing area men become possessed by spirits and act as buffalo, butting each other and ploughing an area of wet-rice field (riy 2004; de Stoppelaar 1927, 31–32). The Madurese of East Java furthermore have the *aduan sapi* (bull fight) (Atmosoedirdjo 1952, 79; de Jonge 1990), which is now forbidden because of the associated gambling and alleged sexual immorality. This bullfight usually involves a butting-fight between two bulls, but during the harvest festival in the village Arjasa, for example, men replace the bulls. Otherwise, the attributes remain the same.[42]

We see then that on the village as well as the state level the symbolic movement of buffalos is crucial. The emphases are different, of course, though the animal remains the same. On the state level the prospective ruler rides on the buffalo, clearly in charge, while on the village level it needs to be tamed before it can be put to use. On both levels the buffalo crosses a boundary—from the underworld to the earth in the one and from the wild into the order of the village in the other, and it is this movement that makes possible the further development of the state and the agriculture that sustains it.

THE INDIVIDUAL

After this brief look at communities, we must now turn to the lives of the individuals that inhabit them, as these, like their communities, are part of the cosmic totality. In doing so we note that there are four transitions to these lives, the first and last of which relate to the vertical axis while the middle two take place on the horizontal plane.

Care for the person begins long before birth, during the third month of pregnancy. At this point the fetus resides in the amniotic fluid, which is part of the mother like the waters of the underworld are part of the earth. According to the Madurese the third month is the time when the child's spirit enters its body. A ritual meal is held (*nyebe*) during which fish, fowl, and red meat may be served, but in which freshwater fish is considered indispensable (Handayani 1990, 3).[43]

Elsewhere, for example in West Java, red and white porridge, symbolizing the parents' gender, suffices (Prawirasuganda 1964: 12; Moestapa 1946, 20).

At the seventh month of pregnancy the Sundanese of West Java hold a ritual meal featuring a salad of various fruits (*rujak*), eggs, and various kinds of fish, expressly forbidding meat and fowl (Moestapa 1946, 20). In some areas of West Java salted fish is required, which is placed inside a *tumpeng* (rice cone, symbolic *axis mundi*) instead of the usual chicken (Wessing 1978a, 126). Interesting here is the fact that the forbidden meats, chicken, goat, beef and buffalo all come from land animals, even though the buffalo is classified with the underworld. At this time in West Java, the mother-to-be is also bathed seven times, perhaps associating her with the waters of the underworld in this way, and an eel (= snake-like) is dropped between her clothing and her skin to induce an easy birth later on (Wessing 1978a, 126). In Java proper the *rujak* salad suffices (Hardjowirogo n. d., 133). Finally, Garo (Assam) women attending the mother-to-be chant the names of various kinds of fish, "intended as symbols for the child which is about to enter the world" (Löffler 1968, 33, note 21, citing Playfair). Van der Kroef (1954, 848) considers fish to be symbolic of fertility, also in regard to agriculture, but it would perhaps be more accurate to see it as referring to pregnancy, both of the expectant mother and of the land after it has been sown.

In Indonesia as well as elsewhere in Southeast Asia (Löffler 1968, 23), then, fish, an integral part of the underworld,[44] are an essential symbolic marker, if not an anchor point, while the fetus remains in the amniotic waters of the underworld. The buffalo is notably absent. As will be seen, the buffalo is often a ritual equivalent to or substitute for the person (Kreemer 1956, 161, 166),[45] but obviously cannot stand in for this person at birth: emerging from the amniotic fluid (= waters of the underworld) is something one has to do oneself.

After birth, the child goes through a forty-day transitional period (Wessing 1978a, 130–132; Niehof 1985, 241), at the end of which in West Java the midwife who attended the birth takes her leave (Moestapa 1946, 41), or the child is given a name and its first haircut (*syukuran*) (Wessing 1978a: 132–33). Fish and meat (probably goat) are part of the ritual meal that accompanies the departure of the midwife, thus continuing the connection with the underworld while commencing that with the earth plane, reflecting the child's transition between the two (compare Jordaan 1985, 155). Moestapa (1946, 41) notes that one essential part of this ceremony is a live young chicken called *hurip* (alive) that is cared for by the newborn's mother. The welfare of the chicken and the baby are seen as somehow connected. Once again, the buffalo is absent from the event, but this time only seemingly so since, as was seen in the agricultural ritual, the goat (and probably the *hurip* chicken), is a substitute for it. The reason for this is probably a matter of practicality, since a buffalo is an expensive animal and, especially at forty days, it remains to be seen whether the child will live.

MEMBERSHIP IN THE COMMUNITY

After this transitional period, the child hopefully grows into adulthood. During his or her life, the person enters into adult society through two prominent events: circumcision and marriage, the middle two transitions mentioned earlier. For a circumcision the Sundanese place offerings to the tutelary nature spirits at the four corners of the yard, containing uncooked bits of all the meats served at the circumcision feast (Prawirasuganda 1964, 60),[46] while prior to the operation the head of a black chicken is buried to avert malevolent influences (Moestapa 1946, 57, 61). Appel (2001, 19) mentions fish as part of the offerings in rituals generally, but this is not confirmed elsewhere for circumcisions. In both Sunda and Java another part of the offering consists of a live chicken and a young coconut plant, both called *panghurip* (life giving, see above) and symbolic of life, fertility and welfare (Rikin 1973, 50–51; Agoesdjam 1921, 473). The live chicken is given to the man who performs the operation, and another, black, chicken or sometimes a goat, called *bela* (one who shares in the experience) is slaughtered at the moment the boy is circumcised (Rikin 1973, 53). This *bela* substitutes as an offering for the boy undergoing the transition and who thus only undergoes a symbolic death by sacrificing part of his body (Appel 2001, 32).[47] Once again, then, goat and chicken substitute for the buffalo, although in West Toraja, when it involves a case of serious illness, a buffalo may be used as a *bela* for a person (Kreemer 1956, 216).

Underworld symbols are furthermore brought into play in the circumambulation of the village (= cosmos) during which the boy sits on a *naga*-shaped vehicle (see Appel 2001, plates 19–21), which is, according to Rikin (1973, 49), reminiscent of Dewa Anta, the origin of the rice goddess. We can also see this, however, as the *naga* of fertility mentioned earlier. Elsewhere in West Java the *naga*'s alter egos appear in the form of turtle and crocodile-shaped cakes (see figure 4).

To be considered fully adult by the community, one must be married, a transition in which, again, animals play a symbolic role. Rikin (1973, 56–57) observes that the circumcision and wedding rituals have much in common, including the physical arrangements and the fertility symbols. Included in the list of things the groom contributes to the wedding is water buffalo meat (Bratawidjaja 1990, 18). Notably absent from this list is fish. Appel (2001, 29) on the other hand mentions two fishes as gifts from the groom to the bride's parents.[48] After the wedding in Sunda the bride and groom sometimes pull apart a cooked chicken (*bakakak*), the one obtaining the larger piece being the one to bring the greatest amount of luck to the family (Bratawidjaja 1990, 55). Moestapa (1946, 97) writes that this chicken is consumed after the wedding-night and celebrates the bride's virginity and the groom's manliness. One could

also associate it with life (*hurip*), especially that resulting from the new couple's fertility.

We note then that, with some minor exceptions, fish, being anchor points in the underworld, play no significant role in either of the two major transitions during life. Since the forty-day post-natal ritual, this position has been taken over by the chicken (= buffalo equivalent), which is the form often taken by the human spirit throughout Indonesia (Wilken 1912, 23–25). Indeed, when a person suffers from "spirit loss," a dangerous condition that is thought to sometimes lead to death, throughout much of Indonesia the spirit is called back to the person using the same call one does for chickens, namely *kurr! kurr*! (compare Wilken 1912, 23; Forth 1994).

DEATH

During the final transition, death, the person leaves the horizontal plane to continue along the path of the vertical axis on which he or she began at conception. As Jessup (1990, 226) observes, death rituals are more sober in Islamic Java than they were before the introduction of Islam. Even today, however, traces of this previous ritual can be found. As we will see for the area generally, buffalos and birds take central place in this transition. Throughout Indonesia and mainland Southeast Asia we find that buffalo are seen as equivalent to or as substitutes for people. Thus in Flores both the Nage and the Ngada believe in the mutual identity of the spirits of persons on earth and buffalo in the upperworld: if a person dies on earth, a buffalo has been slaughtered in the upperworld and vice versa (Kreemer 1956, 161, 246; Forth 1998; de Josselin de Jong 1965, 288).[49] Similar ideas are found in Sulawesi where the ancestors own spirit buffalo and are the protectors of earthly ones. In Central Sulawesi an enclosure is made for the spirits of the dead, located behind the buffalos' pen (Kreemer 1956, 166, 181, 198).

Upon the death of a prominent person buffalos would be sacrificed to accompany them into the afterlife (Kreemer 1956, 194). Similarly, in West Java a prominent person was only said to have departed (as opposed to just died) after a buffalo had been slaughtered in his honor (Moestapa 1946, 161; compare Holm 2003, 2). Throughout the area, indeed, the primary purpose of buffalos used to be to serve as sacrificial animals (Simoons and Simoons 1968; Holm 2003, 208), especially for funerals and in connection with the veneration of ancestors. These sacrifices may in the past have been people, but now buffalo are used (Kreemer 1956, 50, 222–23; Massing 1981, 95; Holm 2003, 207).

In Java the stones covering the grave were addressed as buffalos, and buffalo horns used to decorate some graves (Bergema 1938, 539, 401). The Javanese word for gravestone is *maésan*, which is nearly identical to the High Javanese word for buffalo (*maésa*). Today, *maésan* means the stone placed at the head of the grave

(Headley 2004, 285; Pigeaud n.d., 251), which Headley relates to the sacrificial pillar at which buffalo used to be sacrificed. The Benuaq Dayak shape this pillar like a human being (Massing 1981, 95). Bergema (1938, 539) connects the equivalence of gravestones and buffalos with the idea that buffalos accompany or guide the deceased to the afterlife, which is indeed found among some peoples, for example, the Toraja and, perhaps, the Besemah of Southern Sumatra (Kreemer 1956, 105, 239; Tichelman 1942, 262; Schefold 1990, 104).[50] In Bali the bodies of deceased high nobility are placed in coffins shaped like bulls while ordinary people are cremated in coffins in the form of a mythical fish elephant or elephant *naga* (*gajah-minah*) (Goris n.d.; Brinkgreve 1979, 54; Schefold 1990, 75).

Among the (probably Ngaju) Dayak, finally, death boards are the place where the spirit of the deceased takes up temporary residence until all the funerary rituals are completed (Löffler 1968, 24). These boards are decorated with soul boats, sometimes shaped like the hornbill. Other Dayak also use the boat as a vehicle for the spirit of the departed (Massing 1981, 90, 97, 99), which is not surprising given the watery continuity we saw earlier between the underworld and the upperworld. Elsewhere the hornbill or some other bird acts as the spirit's guide or vehicle into the afterlife, for example, in Bali, among the Batak and the Ngaju Dayak, and among the Anggami Naga and other groups in mainland Southeast Asia (Covarrubias 1942, last plate; Löffler 1968, 24; Schärer 1963, 92; Tichelman 1942, 220; Wilken 1912, 23, note 53), although the Ngaju also have water-snake coffins, which are used for men.[51] Schärer (1963, 92, 146–47), basing himself on the hornbill and water snake symbolism of these Ngaju coffins posits a previous existence of two "villages of the dead," one in the upperworld and the other in the underworld, although, as he observes, only one such village is recognized today. This is probably a misunderstanding since, as we have seen, the upper- and underworlds form a unity, at most showing a male and female aspect. This would necessitate only a single village of the dead, which is what the Ngaju recognize, while the two coffins reflect the male and female aspects that together form the unity.

To summarize, symbolic animals accompany the person from the pre-natal state into death. These animals do not define the person as a moral, social being per se,[52] but rather are indicative of social states the person passes through. Indeed, they make these transitions possible: beginning with fish, reflecting residence in the waters of the underworld/amniotic fluid, via the *ayam hurip*, the chickens of life that are closely tied to the person's spirit, to end up being accompanied into death by buffalos or snakes and various birds, especially the hornbill. This theme we find reprised in the decorations on the gates to Katu (Central Vietnam) villages in which from the inside to the outside a fish metamorphoses into a buffalo-shaped human ancestor: as one enters the village one is "born"

into its community while leaving one enters the realm of death (Löffler 1968, 23, 27). Grave markers of the Ngaju Dayak whose ends are clearly marked with under- and upperworld symbols are similar, while the Loven of southern Laos decorate their graves with images of fish, fowls, and buffalos (Schärer 1963, 24; Löffler 1968, 22).

AXIS MUNDI

Thus, the vertical axis and the horizontal plane form a unity whose elements cannot be considered apart. In fact, as we have seen, the horizontal plane, the earth or state, emerged from the underworld and can in some sense be seen to be part of that aspect of the vertical axis. The essential factor here seems to be the movement of the buffalo or its substitutes: its emergence brings about the horizontal plane and agriculture, and its sacrifice is instrumental in escorting deceased humans into the after life as well as in maintaining the integrity of the state.

This centrality of the buffalo is emphasized by the pole to which it is tied during its sacrifice. Among the Ngada and the Nage of Flores as well as in Assam and Burma this is a Y-shaped pole (compare Forth 1998, 10), the upper branches of which are called horns (Kreemer 1956, 244), which is reminiscent of the buffalo. According to Forth (1998, 7, 13), the Nage erect this definitely masculine post as an *axis mundi* in the center of the village. The Batak sacrificial pole (*borotan*), which Parkin (1978, 249) likens to the Indian *yupa*,[53] is decorated with leaves to resemble a living tree. Elsewhere the Katu of Central Vietnam decorate the pole with a fowl and a fish (= the upper- and underworlds), while the Guangnan bronze drum of southeastern Yunnan shows the sacrificers wearing feathered headdresses (Holm 2003, 162–64).

The sacrificial post thus functions as an *axis mundi* at which the immolation of the buffalo makes possible the transfer of the human spirit to the afterworld. This becomes even clearer when we look at the Balinese cremation tower in which the buffalo coffin is placed.[54] This tower incorporates the three levels of the vertical axis discussed earlier: the earth-bearing turtle surrounded by a *naga*, the earth, and the Garuda (Goris n.d.; Brinkgreve 1979, 54). Furthermore, it is physically connected to the officiating priests by a *Naga Banda*, a crowned *naga* (Brinkgreve 1979, 55; Pleyte 1894, pt. 1, 99), which we saw earlier as representing Nyai Roro Kidul, the Goddess of the Southern Ocean and guarantor of the Sultanate of Mataram. Like the sacrificial post, the structure is an *axis mundi*.

This tower of death is, in fact, the counterpart of the tree of life (Jav. *kayon*), which also incorporates the principal animals discussed thus far. The Javanese *kayon* typically depicts a winged gate[55] that, like the Katu village gate mentioned

earlier, leads to the world of the ancestors, gods and spirits. Associated with this gate, sometimes though not always below it, is a pair of snakes representing the underworld. In the one depicted in FIGURE 5 we furthermore see a snake with a bird on its head—the feathered snake we encountered earlier. Just above the gate a tiger and a buffalo commonly face each other (compare BERGEMA 1938, plate 5), representing the horizontal earth plane.[56] These latter two, often deadly enemies (WESSING 1992), we met earlier as two animals that both crossed the boundary between the village and the wild, one as the guardian of both the community's fields and its morality and the other as an enemy turned into a helper in the cultivation of rice.[57] Like the Garuda/Hornbill and the *naga* they are opposites, yet have the same origin, the forest edge beyond the village. The four of them together help make possible the social whole of the community.

CONCLUSION

These *axis mundi*, then, return us to the vertical axis we started with. The serpent of the underworld reaches into the sky in various guises: the rainbow (HOOYKAAS 1956, 311), the tree of life, the sacrificial post, and the cremation tower.[58] In each, however, and across a wide geographical range the same animals appear in the same places. Of these, fish tended to generally remain stationary, defining the lower end of the *axis mundi*. The *naga*, as either a serpent or a bird, constitutes both the *axis mundi* and the non-human realm of the upper and underworld. Joined by the buffalo, in its manifestation as serpent it is involved in the founding of territorial units, while as a bird it and the buffalo are instrumental in safely conveying the human spirit along the *naga*-path of the rainbow into the afterlife.

On the earth plane, the tiger, the buffalo and the crocodile cross human-defined boundaries and in so doing become "symbolically elaborated" (SPERBER 1974, 129),[59] each into its own sphere of competence: the tiger and crocodile as guardians, the buffalo (or its equivalents, the chicken and the goat) as ritual conveyances of the human spirit in the rituals surrounding birth, circumcision, and marriage: at each stage a bloody sacrifice was made and a boundary crossed, culminating in the sacrifices at death.[60]

The picture I have drawn shows the movement of certain entities through the cosmos. Some, mostly material ones like states and communities, come into ideally permanent being while others, impermanent spiritual ones, only tarry in the physical realm before moving on to the next dimension which, as we have seen, is in essence the dimension in which they originated. These transitions are mediated, indeed made possible, by the sacrificial transitions undergone by the symbolic animals discussed here. Though specific details vary between local communities, the image of a land between the waters, guarded, defined

and supported by tigers, buffalos, *naga*, and birds is one that was once common throughout Southeast Asia. That traces of it still remain is something for our *cicak* to chatter about.

NOTES

1. I would like to thank Matthew I. Cohen and Jerry Sullivan for their insightful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

2. While this is not true, some think its bite poisonous. For information on *tokeh* and *cicak* see among others http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/information/Gekko_gecko.html and http://www.reptilerooms.com/Sections+index-req-viewarticle-artid-78-page-1.html. Both accessed 12 October 2006.

3. This should not be seen as endorsing the idea that "the gap separating people and animals is not perceived as clearly [as in the West] and may in some cases even be absent" (Joustra 1921–1922, 317). Indonesians today, in any case, are fully aware of the difference and we should not reify their metaphors.

4. The number of these "cosmically active" animals, furthermore, is limited. Although many animals are perceived to play a role in daily life, this is primarily as omens (compare Freeman 1961; Habbema 1901; Joustra 1921–1922, 332; Moestapa 1946, 49; Pleyte 1894, pt. 2, 170).

5. However, the assumption that the belief in snake deities found in Southeast Asia and the Pacific thus all derive from India is not necessarily correct. As Pleyte (1894, pt. 1, 96–99) observes, admittedly based on a weak proof, it is possible that these beliefs existed in the area before the arrival of Indian ideas and mythology. Gaudes (1993, 348, citing Przluski) considers it possible that the idea spread to India and China rather than from there. The term *naga*, then, came to cover beliefs that were common to what Mus (1975, 8-10) calls "Monsoon Asia," which included South, Southeast, and East Asia and extended into the Pacific.

6. They can be seductive and misleading, especially to the unwary. As *ipri* in West Java or Nyi Blorong in East Java they can be appealed to for wealth, usually with dire consequences. As the Goddess of the Southern Ocean the serpent deity brings bountiful catches of fish but mercilessly punishes infringements of her rules (Wessing 1988b; 1997a; 2005).

7. Poerwantana uses the term *dhanyang* here where I would use *dhemit*. Both are earth-guardian spirits, but *dhemit* function at a higher political level than *dhanyang* (Wessing, forthcoming a).

8. These days, probably under Christian (elsewhere Muslim) influence, these vengeful aspects are said to be indicators of evil. They mostly come about, however, due to human error (compare Wessing, forthcoming a).

9. Compare the emergence from the sea of the three youths that founded Minangkabau (de Josselin de Jong 1965).

10. In Java, where it occurs naturally, it is a sign of good luck. It does not seem to occur naturally in Bali. Compare http://www.montereybay.com/creagrus/hornbills.html. Accessed 12 October 2006.

11. Matthew I. Cohen (personal communication) writes that in *prang* (battle) scenes in Javanese shadow puppet presentations (*wayang*), when one opponent transforms into a *naga* the other quickly becomes a *garuda*.

12. Neither Tichelman nor Löffler specifies which Batak are meant here.

13. Similarly, hornbill feathers or coffin-boats with hornbill designs featured in the burials of the Kuki, Lhota Naga, and Konyak peoples of India (Löffler 1968, 24).

14. The fireworks lit during the Thai-Lao agricultural festival Bun Bang Fai are called *naak* (serpent) (Lefferts 2004, 132). See also http://www.circleofasia.com/features/index.asp?Id=153. Accessed 12 October 2006.

15. In Malay *pelangi* (rainbow) also means snake (Hooykaas 1956, 311, note 67a).

16. Hooykaas (1956, 293) raises the question whether the rainbow is to be seen as a boat or a bridge. While there are some linguistic indicators of a bridge (Hooykaas 1956, 293, 311), the majority of references are to a boat.

17. In Niur, heaven and earth were separated by a snake (Pleyte 1894, pt. 1, 95, 98; compare Kreemer 1956, 211).

18. In Java *dvipa* apparently meant island (Kulke 1991, 20) but it is unclear whether this island referred to all of Java or to the court embraced by the rivers. Since the court represented the whole, there may not have been a conceptual difference.

19. The earth is thought to rest on the mythical snake Antaboga, who is so large that his body encircles the earth (Pleyte 1894, pt. 1, 96). Though living under the earth Antaboga can also fly (Hooykaas 1956, 312).

20. This reduces the cosmos to a duality, coordinate with the two sexes. This also shows in Sundanese houses in which the floor is equivalent to the earth (*bumi*) and the space underneath the floor (*kolong*), especially the one under the kitchen, is symbolically one with the kitchen floor (Wessing forthcoming b). In Javanese houses, lacking a space underneath the floor, the earth-mother floor is joined to the sky-father by the house posts (Gunawan Tjahjono 1989, 213, 229). See also the illustration of a Balinese house in Nieuwenkamp (1936, 47).

21. Plate IV of Schärer's book clearly shows the underworld as a mirror image of the one inhabited by people, attached to its underside.

22. This same close linkage is found in the Gunongan, the cosmic mountain associated with the old Sultanate of Aceh. Coming from inside this structure, one emerges onto the earth level through a hole. Access to the sky level is by steps on the side of the upper part of the structure (Wessing 1988a).

23. This snake, *oray naga* in Sundanese, may be covered in dragon-scales or have a head like a manila-duck with a bunch of hair on top (Habbema 1901, pt. 2, 615–23), reminiscent of the feathered *naga* discussed earlier.

24. In the myth the snake encircles the earth like the Javanese one, and causes earthquakes when it detects incest.

25. De Josselin de Jong only mentions cattle without specifying the kind.

26. Unpublished field notes of Mr. Abd. Gani Hado Marjuni and Mr. M. Yahya Mansur, participants in the research training program of the Pusat Latihan Penelitian Ilmu-ilmu Sosial in Banda Aceh, 1980-1981. Another participant in this program whose field notes will be mentioned below is Mr. M. Masyur Amin.

27. Zoetmulder (1982, 715); Pigeaud (n.d., 70); Coolsma (n.d., 123); Iskandar (1984, 429).

28. The species, the male of which is known as *banteng*, is found in Java, Kalimantan, Malaysia and throughout mainland Southeast Asia into Burma and the Chittagong Hills, with tamed examples found in Madura and Bali and Lombok (http://www.ultimateungulate.com/Artiodactyla/Bos_javanicus.html, accessed 12 October 2006; Gonggryp 1934, 102; Simoons and Simoons 1968, 16–17). Although *B. sondaicus* is partially a forest-edge creature like the water buffalo, it does not seem to wallow or bathe in mud-pools (compare

Löffler 1968, 25). It also does not feature as an underworld creature in folklore or mythology.

29. Even the well-known story of how a buffalo calf saved the Minangkabau from Javanese domination can be seen as fitting into this pattern.

30. On such construction sacrifices see Wessing and Jordaan (1997). Compare also the ritual burial of water buffalo heads at the tips of Indonesia when then president Suharto went abroad in September 1970, "to ensure that the nation held together during his absence" (May 1978, 158). In 1918 an albino water buffalo was sacrificed in Yogyakarta to alleviate a drought (Kreemer 1956, 198).

31. This is true of fishermen's relations with her as well (compare Wessing 1997a). A similar custom in Kelantan (Malaysia) is described in G. M. Glaskin's novel, *The Beach of Passionate Love* (1961) and may also reflect the *nadran* rituals of coastal Java (Matthew I. Cohen, personal communication).

32. Though they bore titles such as *kuda* (horse = underworld) and *dangdang* (raven = raptor) as well.

33. They can, of course, also be seen as village-edge animals. Although this forest has now largely disappeared from Java and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, it continues to exist in the people's minds (Wessing 1994b). In the past these forests were a formidable reality, separating hamlets and forming both a physical as well as a spiritual obstacle to be reckoned with. See for instance Blume's (1845) description of his journey to the village Kanekes in West Java. Clearing space for a hamlet, therefore, was not undertaken lightly or by just anyone.

34. Boomgaard (2001) to the contrary notwithstanding. See Wessing (2003b). Spirit tigers also function as familiars to shamans, helping them effect cures. Only a few instances of were-tigers are the result of malevolent magic (compare Wessing 1986).

35. In East Java I heard an Islamic version of this tale, in which both originated from the sperm of a Muslim saint. However, when in May 1989 I related this tale to a university audience in Malang (East Java) an uproar ensued in which my lecture was likened to Salman Rushdi's *Satanic Verses*.

36. Bakels gives examples here from the Minangkabau, Mentawai, and Nias. See also Wilken (1912: 80).

37. Elsewhere people claim to be descended from a dog or another animal (compare Kleiweg de Zwaan 1915), but it would take us too far afield to discuss these beliefs here.

38. This is reminiscent of the Batak horse-sacrifice in which a cow was often substituted for the horse (Parkin 1978, 75–78).

39. The Toraja of Central Sulawesi mark themselves and a newly built house with the blood of a sacrificial buffalo to strengthen the life-spirit of both (Kreemer 1956, 230).

40. These are intimately related to both the human spirit and to buffalo, as will be shown below.

41. These days the harvest festivals are coordinated with the Islamic calendar and are held after the fasting month of Ramadan, or after Idul Adha, the feast of sacrifice.

42. The *aduan sapi*, which, among other things, is concerned with fertility and rain, is described by de Jonge (1990) and involves a great deal of sexual symbolism, not all of it analyzed by the author. As the bulls enter the fight, their male owners lose their manhood, which flows into the bulls, while the men "become" women called *seler* (concubines). After a bull wins the fight, its owners regain their manhood (and perhaps that of their opponents as well), turning them into "super" males, which they act out in a somewhat obscene manner with their whips in relation to a female dancer. In Madura itself, but also in Bali, West Sumba and Kangean (Covarrubias 1942, 74–75; Kreemer 1956, 88–89) there are the

bull races (*kerapan*, *berapan*), which involve animals that have not been used in the fields. Neither *aduan sapi* nor *kerapan* involve water buffalo, although the Madurese *kerapan* sled may feature a *naga*, relating it to fertility and the underworld (VAN DER HOOP 1949, 216).

43. HANDAYANI (1990, 3) writes of *ikan kali, ikan udara, dan ikan darat* (freshwater fish, "fish" of the air, and "fish" of the land), which is not uncommon in Indonesia where fowl and meat are often referred to as fish (KREEMER 1956, 23). A person fishing in West Java will ask the spirit of the river for *anak ayam* (chicks) in the hope of catching many fish. Similarly, in what used to be Indochina, fish are seen as fowls of the water (LÖFFLER 1968, 27–28).

44. In Java fish may be depicted as a rainbow (HOOYKAAS 1956, 319).

45. This is also very clear from the fact that the buffalo now replaces slaves that used to be sacrificed at funerals (KREEMER 1956, 222–23).

46. This as well as the context of the use of meat indicates its sacrificial character. Meat is still (as at 2006) not a regular part of the daily diet of especially villagers, proteins being supplied by fish and soybean based foods like tofu and *tempe*. The use of meat, therefore, is indicative of the sacred nature of the occasion (compare LEACH 1964, 56).

47. SMITH and DONIGER (1989, 190–91) observe that anything sacrificed is a substitute for the person who is sacrificed.

48. LÖFFLER (1968, 23) writes that when a Talaing (Burma) girl goes to join her husband, the couple drags a fish three times around the girl's parental home, which is reminiscent of the circumambulation of a *naga* vehicle in the Sundanese circumcision. Among the Talaing, he writes, the fish can replace a buffalo and is called the head of a *naga*, giving us the equivalent of fish, *naga*, and buffalo.

49. In Sunda, a dream about slaughtering a water buffalo is an omen that predicts the death of a close family member.

50. More rarely, for example, among the Katu of Central Vietnam, we find that ancestors are fully equivalent to buffalo and that buffalo blood is the only proper substitute for human sacrifice (LÖFFLER 1968, 23). WESSING and JORDAAN (1997, 119–20) argue that, among other items, both human beings and buffalo used to be part of construction sacrifices, depending on the social importance of the building project. In the face of modernity and world religions humans are now said to be only symbolic entries in the list, which is now headed by buffalo as the most prestigious item.

51. The human spirit itself may also be associated with birds or butterflies, though other representations, especially snakes, also occur (FISCHER 1952, 187; FORTH 1998, 50; KRUYT 1903, 374).

52. For definitions of the Javanese as social persons see WESSING (forthcoming a).

53. The *yupa* symbolizes the phallus and represents the cosmic tree (STUTLEY and STUTLEY 1984, 351). Among the Chin of Burma these sacrificial posts have a carved phallic head (LEHMAN 1963, 179).

54. For other people a lion (or tiger) coffin may be used (DE JONG n.d., 71–72; BRINKGREVE 1979, 54). Although the Balinese *singa* literally means lion, this animal does not exist in Indonesia. In East Java, next to Bali, *singa* is also used for tiger. See the opposition/cooperation of the tiger and the buffalo on the tree of life below.

55. Balinese *kayon* I have seen miss this feature. Compare BERGEMA (1938, plate 5).

56. This varies. BERGEMA (1938, plates 1, 2, and 3) shows respectively two tigers, two unidentified animals and two fish facing each other (compare VAN DER HOOP 1949, 281).

57. Interestingly, the tiger, the buffalo and the *banteng* are all forest-edge animals (Wessing 1986; http://www.csew.com/cattletag/Cattle%20Website/Fact_Sheets/Banteng/banteng.htm & http://www.csew.com/cattletag/Cattle%20Website/Fact_Sheets/Asian_

Buffalo/Asian_Buffalo.htm, both accessed 12 October 2006). Their symbolic use reflects the fact that Java and Southeast Asia generally were far more densely forested in the past than they are now.

58. In the Javanese myth Kuñjarakarna the kettle in which a human spirit was to be purified suddenly changes into a banyan tree (= *axis mundi*) standing at the edge of a pool of clear water (Kern 1922, 40).

59. The same is, of course, true of the gossipy *cicak* we started with.

60. Note that neither the tiger nor the crocodile, both guardians—or, indeed, snakes (= *naga*)—are considered edible. The three conveyance animals, on the other hand, are especially eaten on ritual occasions. Fish, finally, are part of the normal diet even though they, like the *naga*, figure as part of the cosmic structure (compare Leach 1964, 31).

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