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Tārā and Nyai Lara Kidul

Images of the Divine Feminine in Java

Abstract

Nyai Lara Kidul, still venerated by the Javanese today as the spirit queen of the Southern (Indian) Ocean, is a well-known figure in Javanese mythology. She has been previously studied as an indigenous Austronesian fertility goddess who in Hindu-Buddhist times (c. 600–1500 C.E.) was associated with the Hindu goddesses Durgā and Dewi Śri, goddesses who came to be matched with the malevolent and benevolent sides, respectively, of Nyai Lara Kidul's vacillating character. The present article attempts to connect her with the Buddhist goddess Vaśyā-Tārā, the presiding deity of Candi Kalasan, a Central Javanese temple founded by a ruler of the Śailendra dynasty in 778 C.E. This identification of Candi Kalasan's presiding deity was accomplished by using iconographic data whose interconnections had not been analyzed earlier.

Keywords: Nyai Lara Kidul—Tārā—Candi Kalasan—Hindu-Buddhist iconography—Central Javanese mythology.

IN THE IMMEDIATE ENVIRONS of the provincial capital of Yogyakarta lies the ruin of Candi Kalasan, a Buddhist temple often regarded as one of the most beautiful temples of Central Java. This temple is one of the few Javanese archaeological monuments that can be dated—in an inscription in stone in pre-Nāgari script, dated 700 Śaka (778 C.E.), mention is made of the foundation in the village Kalaśa by a ruler of the Śailendra dynasty of a temple with an associated monastery, devoted to the goddess Tārā (BRANDES 1886). Although no further concrete details are given about the temple or the goddess Tārā, there can be no doubt that it refers to Candi Kalasan: the ruins of the temple and the foundations of what used to be the monastery are located in a village that has been named Kalasan since time immemorial, and moreover, the inscription was found in the immediate neighborhood—“between Prambanan and Kalasan”—before being relocated.

In this article I want to focus especially on the question of exactly *which* Tārā the temple at Kalasan was dedicated to, or, in other words, which image of this Buddhist goddess sat on the main throne of Candi Kalasan. In answering this question I use two approaches: historical and iconographic.¹ Beyond this I want to see if Tārā has left other traces in Javanese society and whether, with the decline of Buddhism in Central Java, her position may not have been (re)taken by another goddess.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Little is known about the origin of the Buddhist goddess Tārā, or about the probable time of the origin of her cult or about possible influences on this cult by Hindu and non-Aryan or tribal elements (BLONAY 1895; SHASTRI 1925; SIRCAR 1967; GHOSH 1980). Concerning the rise of her cult in Northeast India, Ghosh posits that “there is no evidence (whether literary or archaeological) of the existence of Tārā before the Gupta period,” circa the third to fifth centuries C.E. Although a few early expressions of devotion are known from the Indian literature, the Javanese Kalasan inscription of 778

seems to be “the earliest epigraphic reference to her” (GUPTÉ 1980, 117; cf. SIRCAR 1967, 130).

Because the Kalasan inscription is evidently also the earliest dated edict proclaimed by a Śailendra ruler, its interpretation has occupied various scholars in connection with their attempts to reconstruct the role of the Śailendras in the dynastic history of Central Java. The Śailendras are connected with the building of many Buddhist shrines—of which Borobudur is the best known—in Central Java during the late-eighth and the first half of the ninth centuries. Very little is known of this period of nearly a hundred years (known in the literature as the “Śailendra Interregnum”) other than the remains of temples and a few inscriptions. Thus the origin of the Śailendras is still a great mystery, even after the countless pages devoted to this subject by scholars, in which the interpretation of the Kalasan inscription, or more accurately its second strophe, has played a crucial role. In BOSCH’s early translation this reads as follows: “After the gurus of the Śailendra ruler the great king *dyah* Pañcapaṇa had persuaded the *rakryan* Panamkaraṇa, they had a splendid Tārā temple built” (1928, 60).

The controversy here, in brief, concerns whether this passage refers to two rulers or only one—that is, whether there was an unnamed Śailendra ruler who via his guru(s) involved a Javanese king Panamkaraṇa (elsewhere known as Panangkaran) in building the Tārā temple, or whether there was a Śailendra ruler who was himself named Panamkaraṇa.

Champions of the first explanation see Panamkaraṇa as a Javanese vassal-king or as a scion of an original non-Javanese dynasty, but are divided on the question of whether he descended from a royal line that directly or indirectly emigrated from, or was driven out of, India, or whether he originated from the kingdom of Śrīvijaya in South Sumatra or the state of Funan on the Southeast Asian mainland. Proponents of the second interpretation see Panamkaraṇa as the son of a local Hindu ruler who converted to Buddhism and became the ancestor of a separate branch of a bifurcated Javanese Śailendra dynasty, most of whose members were also adherents of Buddhism. About the second half of the ninth century the two branches are thought to have been reunited by the marriage of a Buddhist crown princess to a Hindu prince who, if not himself descended from the second house, was closely allied with it.²

Since it is beyond the scope of this article to go into the origins of the Śailendra dynasty, let it suffice to make a few comments about the Kalasan inscription that are relevant to the study of the goddess Tārā. I want to first of all point out the very real possibility that the guru(s) named in the Kalasan inscription could be identical with the one(s) mentioned in a Kelurak inscription dated four years later as involved in the foundation of

Candi Sewu. It is moreover mentioned in the latter inscription that the guru, named Kumāraghosa, came from Gaudīdvīpa, which has been identified by Bosch as Gauḍa (Gauḍavisaya), one of the names for the state of Bengal (Vangala) ruled by the Pāla kings.³ The involvement of one or more gurus from this area would be a plausible explanation for the long-noted scriptural similarities between the Kalasan inscription and those of the Bengal ruler Devapāla (ca. 810–850) and his predecessor Dharmapāla (BHANDARKAR 1887, cited in BOSCH 1928, 14–15).

It is known of these Pāla rulers that they especially venerated the goddess Tārā, who was attributed the role of “savior.” This was possibly connected with the vital importance to their state of maritime trade—Tārā was to merchants and sailors first of all a goddess of navigation (SIRCAR 1967, 108, 113). The importance of the goddess for Dharmapāla is evident from the fact that he carried her effigy in his banner (DASGUPTA 1967, 123; GHOSH 1980, 14). According to SIRCAR, the “Tārā of Dharmapāla’s standard or banner [was] very probably the dynastic emblem of the Pālas for their standard or banner just as the Dharmacakra was for their seals” (1967, 131–32). The primacy of Tārā is further evident from the temples built in her honor in India, especially in Northeast Indian sites like Candradvīpa, Nālandā, and Somapura, which were ruled by the Pāla kings (SIRCAR 1967, 113, 128; GHOSH 1980, 9, 30). According to Sircar, Khadiravaṇī-Tārā, who because of her green color was also known as Śyāmā-Tārā, was probably the Tārā worshiped in Candradvīpa, and was “one of the most celebrated deities in Bengal during the age of the Pālas.” Sircar not only calls this image of her the “commonest” representation, but notes that “it also appears that Śyāma of the green variety is one of the earliest forms of Tārā, Śyāma as the name of the Mother-goddess being still very popular in Bengal” (SIRCAR 1967, 128–30).

However important Candradvīpa may have been as a Bengal pilgrimage site, in places such as Nepal, Tibet, China, Sumatra, and Java it is Nālandā that is remembered. It was here, for instance, that a Śailendra prince, Bālaputra, after having been driven out of Java and enthroned in Śrīvijaya in Sumatra (Suvarnadvīpa), had a monastery built with the aid of king Dēvapālādēva. In the accompanying edict his father is mentioned as king of Java as well as an “ornament of the Śailendra dynasty.” Also interesting is the information about his mother, the queen of that king; named Tārā, she was the daughter of the great ruler Dharmasētu (Varmasētu) of the lunar race and was said to resemble the goddess Tārā herself (SHASTRI 1925, 32).⁴ Moreover, Śrīvijaya itself was also an important center of learning in the Buddhist world, not only for many Chinese pilgrims who called there on their way to and from India, but also for Indian monks and scholars. One of

these was Atiśa, who came from Northeast India and who for twelve years (1013–25) lived at the court of Śrīvijaya. Later he went to Tibet to “renew” Buddhism there and gave a fresh impulse to the veneration of Tārā, so that she would develop more or less into “the national goddess of Tibet” (SCHOTERMAN 1986, 23; cf. DAS 1893, 53–83; BOSCH 1925, 559).

Although Atiśa must have been a devotee of Tārā long before his sojourn in Sumatra, in Śrīvijaya he found a kindred soul in his Sumatran teacher, who was no less devoted to the goddess. A Tibetan source puts it as follows:

Here in Tibet, five traditions have come down to us.... Among these, the most distinguished is the school of Atiśa: both he and his own teacher Dharmakirti of the Golden Isles continually saw the face of the Holy Lady, and upon them was bestowed the tradition. (BEYER 1978, 417–18; cf. SCHOTERMAN 1986, 23).

According to BEYER, in Tibet Atiśa becomes another famed teacher of Mahāyāna Buddhism (either directly or via Nāgārjuna), associated with the so-called Twenty-one Tārās and with the green Khadirāvaṇī-Tārā (1978, 320).

TĀRĀ IDENTIFIED

Undeterred by the absence of concrete indications in the Kalasan inscription, KROM wrote, “There are no further indications which Tārā is meant and thus it is undoubtedly Śyāma Tārā, the Tārā par excellence” (1923, 1: 257). As far as I know, Krom’s thesis has never been explored in the archaeological literature, although BERNET KEMPERS did once suggest that “a large image of the Buddha in bronze seems to have sat enthroned [in the central cella] in former times” (1959, 50), without, however, providing a single argument in support of this proposition. As will be shown, it is likely that Bernet Kemper’s suggestion was based primarily on the shape and size of the main throne, from which it can be deduced that it was meant to seat an exceptional figure, which certainly could have been Buddha if this were not contradicted by the Kalasan inscription.

The data about Tārā’s throne come primarily from BRANDES’s comparative research into the main thrones in three Buddhist temples in Central Java, namely Candi Sewu, Candi Mendut, and Candi Kalasan (1904). Only the thrones of Candi Mendut and Candi Kalasan are relevant here because these are nearly identical in form and decoration, as is clear from the drawings in Brandes’s article.

In brief, Brandes maintained that the main throne of Candi Kalasan must have been occupied by a seated statue with its legs hanging down, as is the case with the statue of the Buddha in Candi Mendut (figure 1).

FIGURE 1. Buddha in Candi Mendut (photo courtesy of Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, Leiden, Nr. 33,838)



However, the statue was much larger: “Where the Mendut statue is ‘only’ 3 meters in height from the soles of its feet to the top of its head, that of Kalasan must have measured 6 meters. Both...are thrones for statues of gods sitting in the European manner” (BRANDES 1904, 162). Later Brandes notes another important difference that became apparent to him not only because of the colossal size of the missing statue but also because of traces of a join in the cushion of the throne, indicating that the Candi Kalasan statue was probably not made of stone but of metal, probably bronze.

It seems probable that Bernet Kempers’s suggestion regarding a bronze Buddha on the Candi Kalasan throne is based on the combination of the above-mentioned data. The European manner of sitting was possibly the deciding factor, because according to iconographic handbooks this sitting posture, known as *pralambāpadāsana* or *bhadrāsana*, is relatively unique, and seems to be especially characteristic of Maitreya, the future, human Buddha (AUBOYER 1937, 90; GORDON 1939, 24; LIEBERT 1976, 216). As was pointed out, the only thing that contradicts this identification is the information in the Kalasan inscription, which speaks explicitly of both a temple and a statue of Tārā, information that in my opinion cannot be ignored.

Rereading the literature on Buddhist iconography with this assumption,

I recalled that there is indeed a Tārā characterized by the *bhadrāsana* posture: Vaśyā-Tārā (figure 2), also known as Vaśyādhiḱārā-Tārā (BHATTACHARYYA 1925-28, 1:178; KIRFEL 1959, 99; LIEBERT 1976, 36; GUPTA 1980, 140; GHOSH 1980, 36). DE MALLMANN too notes that *bhadrāsana* was the seated posture most frequently attributed to Vaśyādhiḱārā-Tārā, but adds that her admittedly tentative description does not correspond to what would be understood as a European sitting posture (1975, 10). This latter she calls



FIGURE 2. Nepalese drawing of Vaśyā Tārā

paryāṅka, which, relying on a secondary Hindu source, she attributes to the form Mahattāra Tārā. Most authors, however, consider *paryāṅka* to be a cross-legged position.

That Vaśyā-Tārā is the only Tārā explicitly connected with this sitting position is very important, as it gives our identification a degree of certainty. With the other sitting positions this is not the case: not only can other forms of Tārā sometimes take these positions, but it also happens that one and the same Tārā can take a different position depending on the context.

The only Tārā whose seated posture is not strictly prescribed is the earlier-mentioned Khadiravaṇī-Tārā, which for this reason, if only theoretically, could also be depicted in *bhadrāsana*. As the *āsana* (seating posture) alone is thus not decisive, it becomes useful to look at the iconographic characteristics of Vaśyā-Tārā and Khadiravaṇī-Tārā in order to determine their mutual differences and similarities. It then becomes immediately apparent that the two goddesses have much in common. Both have only one head and two hands and both are emanations of the Dhyāni Buddha Amoghasiddhi, whose image they bear in their crowns. Their color is green, just like that of their “spiritual sire.” They further have in common the “boon-giving” mudrā (*varadamudrā*) of their right hands and the blue lotus in their left. According to Ghosh, who studied the development of the Buddhist iconography in which Tārā takes a central position, both Vaśyā(dhikārā)-Tārā and Khadiravaṇī-Tārā belong to the eleven Tārā for whom the sacred Tārā-mantra (*om Tarē tuttāra ture svāhā*) is prescribed and who all bear the *utpala* as an attribute. All in all the correspondences are so numerous that it should not be wondered that some authors tend to consider the goddesses as identical (e.g., KIRFEL 1959, 99; LIEBERT 1976, 333).

However, there is a difference between them: while Vaśyā-Tārā is always presented as standing alone, Khadiravaṇī-Tārā is said to be attended by two companions, namely Aśokakāntā Mārīcī on her left and Ekajāṭā on her right (KIRFEL 1959, 99). BHATTACHARYYA seems to give the unattended status the character of a differentiating criterium when he writes that Vaśyā-Tārā “is described as single and as such is not accompanied by any god or goddess” (1968, 230). Although GHOSH leaves some room for errors in identification, she proposes that “within the limitations of the present state of our knowledge, we may, for practical purposes, ascribe to Khadiravaṇī those images which are not in the *paryāṅka* or *vajrā-paryāṅka* attitude and which are attended by Aśokakāntā-Mārīcī and Ekajāṭā” (1980, 64).

If greater importance is given to the independence of Vaśyā-Tārā than to the indeterminate seated posture of Khadiravaṇī-Tārā, this is additional reason for us to think that Vaśyā-Tārā must have been the goddess whose statue was seated on the main throne of Candi Kalasan. That is, in contrast to

the other temple-chambers, there was room here for only one statue. BRANDES notes that

there is not only room in this temple for a main statue, but in the secondary chapels one always finds 3 altars of which the most important ones, still to the sides of the main seat, show grooves that indicate that two smaller ones stood next to that statue, so that for each of the chapels one is concerned with 5 statues; that 6 niches can be found in the antechamber, which gave access to the main chamber, each of which was in turn also intended for a statue." (1904, 166; cf. IJZERMAN 1891, 25, plates 1-4).

However, there is insufficient room for attendants on or next to the main throne of *Vaśyā-Tārā*, while the walls of this temple-chamber also do not contain the niches that were found in the other chambers (see figure 3).

Unfortunately it is impossible at this point to use the data about *Vaśyā-*

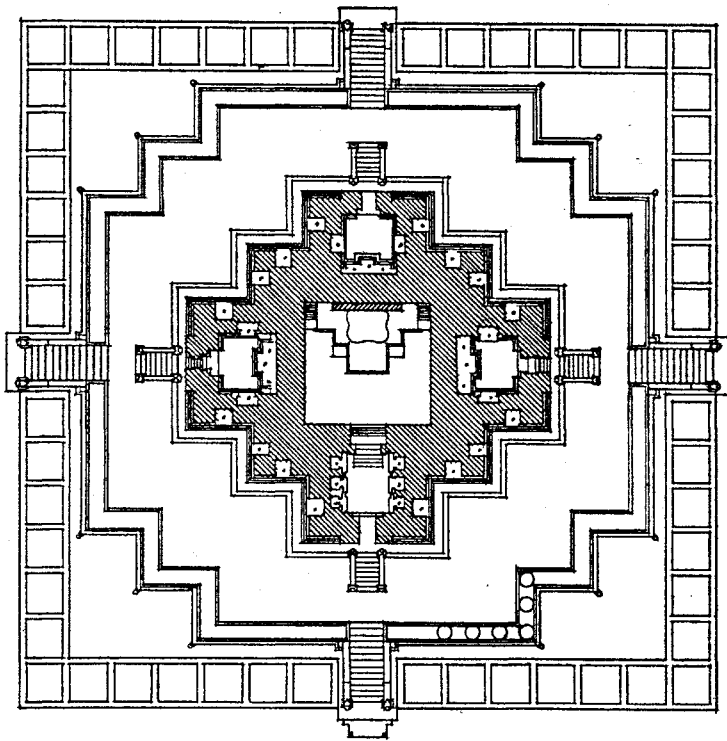


FIGURE 3. Floor plan of Candi Kalasan

Tārā as a point of departure for a hypothetical reconstruction of the maṇḍala (divine cosmic plan) of Kalasan, that is, the specification of the other goddesses and gods in the pantheon and their distribution on the remaining thrones and in the inner and outer niches.⁵ The only thing that can be said is that, aside from the main throne, the total number of spaces is twenty-one, the same number that came up in connection with Atiśa's propagation of the twenty-one Tārās in Tibet. On the basis of the available data it is impossible to determine whether these twenty-one Tārās were also present at Kalasan, but it does not seem very probable, given what is written about them. According to BEYER, the twenty-one were "ordinary" Tārās all seated in the same way ("with their right feet extended and their left drawn up"), and distinguishable from each other only on the basis of the colors of the bottles in their hands or the attributes on the lotuses (1978, 333–35, 470). This cannot have been the case with Candi Kalasan—there seated statues were located on the thrones and standing ones in the niches. Moreover, not all of the niches were of the same size and decoration, as can be determined from the ones preserved in the antechamber to the main room.

SYMBOLISM

Earlier we mentioned Tārā's role as both "savior" and as "goddess of navigation." It is not completely clear how the latter role arose, but it may relate to the etymology of the name Tārā. LIEBERT writes that

this word [Tārā] should properly, regarding its etymology, be interpreted as "star, constellation" and may therefore, as the name of a deity, be connected with the Babylonian Istar. But since the word may also be associated with the verb *tar-* (caus. *Tārayati* "cause to arrive at, lead over or across, rescue, save"), it is generally understood and translated as "saviouress"; thus especially in Buddhism. (1976, 294–95; cf. DE MALLMANN 1975, 368)

After examining the evolution of this Buddhist goddess and identifying many notable correspondences between her and the Brahman Devī (Durgā), GHOSH concluded that Tārā "is conceived essentially as a saviouress liberating people from various perils" (1980, 8). For example, one of her well-known forms is Āryāṣtamahābhayā-Tārā, who protects against the eight dangers of the lion, elephant, fire, snake, thief, fetter, water, and demon (GHOSH 1980, 40). It is easy to see why sea-fearing merchants and navigators should emphasize especially her protection on water, and why she became a goddess of navigation for them. Among the Tibetans the idea of deliverance is primary, as is evident from, among other things, the transla-

tion of the name as “Unloosener (of difficulties)” (GHOSH 1980, 8). In a similar way, the geographical and climatological differences between Bangladesh, Java, and Sumatra on the one hand and Nepal and Tibet on the other appear to be the most plausible explanation for the fact noted by BEYER that “the various minor goddesses, occasionally assimilated to forms of Tārā, who may be grouped together as one or another type of snake goddess (e.g., Jāngulī, Parnaśabari), evoked almost no response in the hearts of any but the most scrupulously studious Tibetans” (1978, xiii).

In regard to the symbolic meanings of the above-mentioned attributes of Tārā, Ghosh notes that green represents “youthful vigour, freshness, activity, and divine energy,” while *bhadrāsana* signifies “sovereignty.” The latter seems to correspond with the indication “Vaśyādhikārā,” which means “having authority over the subject ones,” as is also the case with Vaśyādhikārā-Lokeśvara (see LIEBERT 1976, 333), but does not fit as well with Liebert’s translation of Vaśyā-Tārā as “the tamed, subjected Tārā.” This translation, however, seems to contradict Liebert’s own observation that the *pralambapadāsana*, taken to mean the European way of sitting, symbolizes “authority.”⁶ “Sovereignty” or “authority” (terms whose meanings overlap considerably) must be taken as the most probable meaning, as is also evident from the fact that sovereignty is precisely the meaning attributed to the ornamentation of the main throne, consisting of a *maḥara*, a standing lion or elephant (AUBOYER 1937; SAUNDERS 1960, 129). Perhaps the image’s unattended status should also be understood in terms of independence and sovereignty. It seems probable in any case that the Vaśyā-Tārā of Kalasan was given the status of a supreme goddess.

Finally, I would like to indicate the meaning of one of Vaśyā-Tārā’s attributes: the flower *utpala* (synonymous with *nilotpala*). The *utpala* is a water lily or blue lotus that Bhattacharyya calls a “night lotus” and Margaret STUTLEY rather cryptically says is “sacred to the moon” (1985, 102). GHOSH elaborates as follows:

The blooming time of *utpala*s which open at the sunset and close at the sunrise is night and, accordingly, these flowers are associated with the moon, just as the lotus, which opens in the morning and closes by night, is connected with the sun. Both these flowers with their prolonged life symbolize rejuvenation of life. The promise of a prolonged life together with the idea of Tārā delivering devotees from the dark elements may be the reason for the preference for this particular flower. (1980, 26)

JAVANESE MYTHOLOGY AS A SOURCE OF "MEMORY"

Before we turn to more recent data from the mythology of Java in this examination of the Tārā of Kalasan, it must first be asked whether such an approach is valid. Some support is provided by the fact that many historical names still remain from that era, albeit in somewhat corrupted form, despite the passage of over a thousand years and the occurrence of various drastic cultural and historical changes in Javanese society. Kalasan, for example, can only have been derived from the old Kalaśa. Other examples include the name of the old state of Mataram, the Hindu-Javanese names of rivers like the Sanjaya, the Serayu, and the Progo, and temple names such as Borubudur, Prambanan, and Ratu Boko.

It goes without saying that one has to be far more careful with data relating to former religious ideas and practices than with data relating to old names. Even so, useful points of departure can be found, especially in the mythology surrounding the Central Javanese goddess Ratu Kidul, alias Nyai Lara Kidul. Elsewhere (JORDAAN 1984) I have suggested that this mythological figure, which is still venerated as both the spirit queen of the Southern Ocean and the spouse of successive rulers of Central Java, should be understood in relation to the original pan-Indonesian ancestral figures (often with the titles Nyai, Nyi, and Ni) who were connected with natural fertility and the welfare of the land. Their ability to continually rejuvenate themselves, plus their close association with underworld beings, especially the snake, led me to suspect that Nyai Lara Kidul could herself have been a snake goddess (*nāginī*). This made it possible to compare her with similar mythological figures in the area, such as Po Nagar, a goddess who is prominent among the Cham of mainland Southeast Asia and who is likewise closely connected with agricultural fertility.

In order to explain the current weakened and veiled connection between Nyai Lara Kidul and agricultural fertility, I proposed, following STUTLEY and STUTLEY's lead (1977, 88, 222), that in the Hindu-Javanese period she must have been subjected to a process of association and identification with Hindu goddesses such as Umā, Durgā, and Pārvatī, which are often considered mother-goddesses. Drawing on the work of SCHRIEKE (1925) and PIGEAUD (1962, 211), I concluded that a connection with Durgā and Śridevī (who came to be called Dewi Śri in Java) seemed most likely, because together these two more or less encompassed the original Nyai Lara Kidul's ambiguous, vacillating nature. While Durgā primarily represented Nyai Lara Kidul's demonic side, Śridevī, the goddess of welfare, was associated with her benevolent aspect. However, these associations did not everywhere develop in exactly the same way or to the same degree. In large areas of Java, for instance, Śridevī, as Dewi Śri, gained influence at the expense of

Lara Kidul and ultimately took over the latter's position as goddess of agriculture, especially in the case of wet rice cultivation.

However, for both of these goddesses the dissociation resulted in a mutilation of their original characters. Although Dewi Śri, as rice goddess, never became as ambivalent and capricious as the ancient Indonesian rice-spirit (cf VAN DER WEIJDEN 1981, 225), she did acquire a number of traits that were foreign to her, or at least unusual in the Indian context. These included the ability to change herself into a snake and to have food crops grown from her dead body. The damage to Lara Kidul was greater, however.

Presumably, because of the weakening of her connection with fertility, the bond with the vast majority of the agricultural people became increasingly meaningless and loose; in the process her identity finally dissolved into a mysterious demonic power, which was connected with the Southern Ocean. (JORDAAN 1984, 112)

In a later article I explored Nyai Lara Kidul's mythological relations with the female ancestral figures of a number of peoples in Eastern Indonesia and beyond (JORDAAN 1987). Here too there existed an associative complex in which recurrent folkloristic elements (such as ever-rejuvenating old women, skin disease, snakes, the underworld, and agricultural fertility) were combined in various ways, supporting the notion of the pre-Hindu origin of Ratu Kidul.

Retrospectively, my 1984 article is especially lacking in references to Buddhism and Buddhist goddesses. My current thinking is that mutual relations, both between Hinduism and Buddhism and between these and indigenous beliefs, were probably less exclusive and not as antagonistic as certain influential studies on old Central Java would have us believe. There were cases, for example, in which rulers cooperated in building temples, such as Candi Kalasan, Candi Plaosan, and Candi Prambanan. This could only have taken place on a basis of a mutual understanding of each other's religious conceptions and practices. There may even have existed a drawing together of religions in a process of syncretism, such as the Śivā-Buddha cult, where the lines of differentiation were formal rather than real.

Although the origin of the Śivā-Buddha cult is usually considered an East Javanese development during the period from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries, an earlier dating to the Central Javanese period would provide the most satisfactory explanation for some long-known discoveries that are often disposed of as "stray finds." These include images in various temples from both pantheons, images such as a silver statue of Śiva in the temple area of the Buddhist Candi Sewu (ANOM 1992, 68) and a bronze image of the

Bodhisattva Vajrapani and (I suspect) the goddess Tārā⁷ in the “Hindu” temple Candi Sambisari (SUAKA PENINGGALAN n.d.; see also FONTEIN 1990, 223). The most striking example is probably a silver statue of Durgā with the Buddhist creed “*ye dharmma hetupabhaw...*” inscribed on its backpiece in the Nāgarī script, which was closely related with the Buddhist Śailendra dynasty (BRANDES 1887, 24).

The above-mentioned data seem to fit well with studies on the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism and Tantrism oriented more to the Indian subcontinent—WAYMAN’s article, with its telling title “The twenty-one praises of Tārā, a syncretism of Śaivism and Buddhism,” comes to mind here (1959). Ghosh, however, in contrast to Wayman and many other authors, does not believe that Tārā as supreme goddess began with the Buddhists and was subsequently admitted to the Hindu pantheon; rather, she holds that “the chief inspiration for the Buddhist goddess Tārā was derived from the Brahmanical concept of Devī (or Durgā)” (GHOSH 1980, 20). As one of the most important factors in this she cites the rise of Brahmanical Hinduism under the Guptas, which, as it were, forced the Buddhists to compromise by expanding their elementary pantheon into a host of gods and goddesses in order to assure the continued existence of their religion.

To make their religion attractive and also acceptable to the maximum number of people of various ethnic groups including aboriginal and tribal... the Mahāyānists and afterwards the Vajrayānists introduced the Buddhist counterparts of the Brahmanical gods and goddesses and folk-divinities.... [T]he Buddhists did not hesitate, even at the cost of their original precepts, to take over the concepts and even iconography of many of the Brahmanical gods and goddesses and regional ideas and beliefs. (GHOSH 1980, 15)⁸

The background Ghosh provides, particularly that relating to the conceptual relationship between Tārā and Devī, would have benefited my earlier article. Even so, it would have remained an open question whether Tārā was connected directly with Nyai Lara Kidul or indirectly through separate incarnations, to better account for Nyai Lara Kidul’s ambiguous character. Just as the epithet “Devī,” “the Great Goddess,” is applied to a number of Hindu mother-goddesses (like Durgā, Pārvatī, and Umā), so too the deity Tārā takes on a variety of forms, such as Parnaśabari and Vasudhara, which appear to have rather opposite characters. While Parnaśabari shows a striking demonic similarity to Durgā (BHATTACHARYYA 1978, 14–18), Vasudhara is in many ways reminiscent of Dewi Śri (CHATTERJI 1960, 91–92); the goddesses could, therefore, be readily connected with the destructive and

beneficial aspects of Nyai Lara Kidul. In the meantime interest in Ratu Kidul has increased, not only among ordinary and educated Javanese but also in scholarly circles, which has led to a broadening and, in some areas, a deepening of the research on the subject (e.g., WESSING 1988; BRAKEL-PAPENHUYZEN 1988; BRAKEL 1995; BOGAERTS 1990; SCHLEHE 1991, 1992; FLORIDA 1992; SUTTON 1993; CHANDRA 1995). It might therefore be useful to review some of this recent and ongoing research and compare it with the new data on Tārā.

TELL ME YOUR NAME AND I WILL SAY WHO YOU ARE

One recurring point of discussion in the literature concerns the rather confusing number of names that appear in connection with the goddess. These include Nyai Lara Kidul, Kanjeng Ratu Kidul, Nyaigedhe Segarākidul, Ratu Lara Kidul, Mbok Rara Kidul, Raja Angin-angin, and Retna Dewati (BOGAERTS 1990, 9). These days Ratu Kidul, literally “Queen of the South,” is probably the most common. The name derives from the belief that the goddess, ruler of a host of spirits, nymphs, and other beings from the underworld, has her palace on the bottom of the ocean directly off the south coast of Central Java.⁹ Her excursions ashore are said to be accompanied by the occurrence of unusual natural phenomena, such as spring tides. I do not know of any mention of the existence of queens or kings of other oceans or the other cardinal directions, except for Behrend’s reference to Kanjeng Sunan Lawu, the ruler of the spirits on Mt Lawu, to the east of Solo (Surakarta). BEHREND writes that

Sunan Lawu (east) and Ratu Kidul (south), together with K. Ratu Sekarkedaton, tutelary spirit of Gunung Merapi, the active volcano west of the capital, and Sang Hyang Pramoni (=Durgā), resident in the forest Krendawahana north of the city, guard the cardinal directions and receive special veneration in Surakarta. (1982, 88)

There is no doubt that Ratu Kidul has the most prominent position in this configuration.

In view of the royal features on the main throne of Candi Kalasan, it is obvious that Tārā too was venerated as a ruling deity. The fact that she occupied the main temple chamber as an unattended deity indicates that she was a supreme goddess who tolerated no one in her presence. This interpretation is supported by a Tibetan hymn, translated by WAYMAN, that suggests she is capable of making her influence felt everywhere (as when it calls her the “Lady who fills the quarters, intermediate directions and space with the sounds of Tuttārā and Hum”) (1959). Tārā’s power is formidable, as may be

inferred from expressions like “Lady [who is] able to summon the multitudes of all local genii,” “[who is] placed above all by the elementary spirits, vampires, songster spirits, attendants of Śiva, and secret folk,” “who shatters the seven underworlds with the Hum made by her contracted brows.” Tārā even appears stronger than death: “So as to defeat Death (Māra [*mṛtyu-māra*]), she gives life force (*prāna*) to the living beings.”

Such a superiority over death can also be detected in Nyai Lara Kidul. She is an ever-rejuvenating woman who, as a virgin, marries successive Javanese rulers. In Javanese court circles it is even claimed that the rejuvenation occurs much faster—the late Sultan of Yogyakarta, Hamengku Buwono IX, declared in an interview that her change of form runs more or less parallel with the waxing and waning of the moon (ROEM et al. 1982, 103). Ricklefs cites the Serat Surya Radja to the effect that “she is the queen of the spirits, thousands of years old, but can be either young or old depending on whether the moon is new or old.” According to the sultan, who was personally consulted about this passage, the name for Kanjeng Ratu Kidul is Retna Dewati when she is young, that is, during the first half of the lunar month (RICKLEFS 1974, 200). It is relevant here to note that Tārā must also have been able to rejuvenate when she developed into an omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient goddess of Buddhism. One of her characteristics is *viśā-rūpa*, “having all forms,” and in one case at least she seems to have taken the form of an old woman who helped a believer in trouble (GHOSH 1980, 10, 33–34). And, as we noted earlier, connections have been made between Tārā and the moon, as in the case of the night-lotus. We will return to this below.

The difference between the terms *nyai* and *ratu*, both part of the Queen of the South’s official titles, has also been a point of discussion in the literature, though the matter has not yet been fully dealt with. KOENTJARANINGRAT suggests that the use of *nyai* indicates that this deity’s place in the category of Javanese Hindu-Buddhist supernatural beings is with the Javanese ones rather than those deriving from Islam:

The relationship of man to the Hindu-Buddhist gods, the heroes of the *wayang* [shadow puppet] epics, the nature deities, the ancestral spirits, and the spirits of local saints is conceived by the Javanese as a relationship to senior but intimate kin, whereas the relationship to the Allah of Islam, to Muhammed, Allah’s prophet, and to the other prophets, the *walis* [proselytizers], and the Muslim saints is considered as one to powerful but distant beings. Consequently the Javanese consistently use the kinship terms *hyang* [ancestor], *eyang* [refined term for grandfather or grandmother], *kiyai* [old man], *nyai* [old woman], or *mbah* [ordinary term for

grandfather or grandmother] to refer to or address the deities or spirits, and the titles for kings or high officials, such as *gusti* [Your Highness], *kanjeng* [My Lord or My Lady], or *sunan* [Your Grace] to refer to or address Allah, the prophets, and the *walis*. The supreme eternal spirit of the universe, for instance, is called Sang Hyang Guru; the latter's destructive aspects is called Sang Hyang Batara Kala; the spirit of the ocean is called Eyang Lara Kidul, or Nyai Lara Kidul; the local spirit of a particular area is called Mbah Untung and so on. Allah, on the other hand, is called Gusti Allah, His prophet is called, or addressed as, Kanjeng Nabi Muhammad; the individual *walis* are called Sunan Kali Jaga, Sunan Bonang, Sunan Giri, Sunan Ngampel, etc. (1980, 132–33)

Although this dichotomy is seductive in its simplicity, it must be rejected because it does not conform to the facts. As BOGAERTS rightly points out, the use of Nyai Lara Kidul is not universal, and many Javanese commonly use Ratu Kidul or even Kanjeng Ratu Kidul Sri Kencana (1990, 10).¹⁰

Yet I suspect there is more going on here: that the names Nyai Lara Kidul and Ratu Kidul apply to different matters, with Nyai Lara Kidul referring to the Old Javanese fertility goddess and Ratu Kidul to the indigenous goddess who under Hindu-Buddhist influences was promoted and given a role as the *śakti* of deified Javanese rulers. While the latter identity is now generally known,¹¹ the notion of an Old Javanese fertility goddess is apparently too daring for some scholars. SCHLEHE, for instance, is convinced (*ganz eindeutig*) that Ratu Kidul, simply because she is rarely mentioned as having children, is neither a mother nor a fertility goddess (1991, 199). This conception of a fertility goddess is clearly rather limited, as is further shown by the absence of any reference to the connections earlier researchers have identified between Nyai Lara Kidul and Dewi Śri (e.g., PIGEAUD 1962, 211; SCHRIEKE 1925; JORDAAN 1984).

The results of BOGAERTS' recent study considerably strengthen the association between the two goddesses (1990). Where I concluded, on the basis of the information in the *Babad Tanah Jawi*, that the earlier relationship of Lara Kidul and agriculture had disappeared and could only be recovered indirectly (for example, via the mythological relationship to her "sister" Tisnawati [the goddess of dry rice cultivation] and the religious conceptions of isolated peoples like the Tenggerese), Bogaerts demonstrates that Nyai Lara Kidul's position as fertility goddess—whether or not as an incarnation of Dewi Śri—is clearly evident in the stories of the *Panitik Sultan Agungan*. She also confirms my suspicion that Nyai Lara Kidul was closely associated with snakes and should maybe even be identified as a snake goddess (BOGAERTS 1990, 113).

The only important point upon which Bogaerts and I differ is in what, precisely, constitutes a snake goddess. Bogaerts maintains with SCHLEHE (1991, 198) that there is no indication of Nyai Lara Kidul's having had a "snake-like appearance"; moreover, such an appearance seems to Bogaerts difficult to reconcile with the beauty for which Nyai Lara Kidul is famed. For this reason she thinks it better to speak of a snake queen. This rejection, however, may be somewhat premature, as it ignores the information provided by my Javanese informants,¹² who remembered that in their youth Nyai Lara Kidul was spoken of as a *nāga*, a mythical snake. Nor does her position take cognizance of my 1987 article, which focuses on the close relationship between Nyai Lara Kidul and snakes. Further evidence is provided by Behrend, who discusses Pangung Sanggā-Buwana, the twenty-eight-meter-tall palace-tower, in a top-floor room of which the amorous meetings between the ruler of Surakarta and Ratu Kidul are said to take place. Especially important here is the painting that used to hang in this room. The painting, which depicted a man riding on a flying snake, was recognized by Behrend as a *sengkala memet*, a Javanese pictographic representation of the founding date of the tower (1782 C.E.). In a note he adds the following:

The picture may also be a symbolic depiction of the relationship between the king and Ratu Kidul. "Riding" is a metaphor for sexual intercourse, and the snake may represent the chthonic nature of the Queen, though I am not familiar with any other such likening of the two. (BEHREND 1982, 87, n. 205).¹³

Finally, it should be remembered that the Sultan of Yogyakarta would meet with Ratu Kidul in a room in the tower of the so-called Water Palace (Taman Sari), which led me to examine parallel examples on the Southeast Asian mainland, such as the nightly unions in the Phimeanakas, a tower-like structure in the Angkor Thom complex, of Khmer kings with a "serpent goddess" who appeared in the guise of a beautiful woman. The fertility goddess of the Cham could also appear in the form of a *nāga* (JORDAAN 1984, 113 n. 8).

More difficult is the discussion about the precise meaning of the term *Lara*, which is usually translated as "girl" or "maiden," but which, according to some researchers (myself included), ambiguously refers to illness (or which, more precisely, might include a connection with illness in spite of its derivation from *rara* [girl]). The latter notion, however, is firmly denied by some, despite the claim in some myths that Nyai Lara Kidul suffered of a skin disease before taking up residence in the Southern Ocean. BOGAERTS (1990, 10) argues that there is a tendency in Modern Javanese for two "r"

sounds to go ill together when occurring in one word. Through regressive dissimilation in the course of time the Old Javanese *rara/rara* changed into the New Javanese *lara*, in which the meaning of “maiden” was retained. The Old Javanese *rara* developed historically out of the honorific prefix *da+ *DaRa, “maiden.” *Lara* as “unmarried woman” or maiden and *lara* as “illness” are simply homonyms, she suggests.

This argument does not adequately deal with the situation. By concentrating on laws of phonetics,¹⁴ Bogaerts ignores the well-known tendency of the Javanese to use puns and veiled language, especially when mysterious and politically sensitive subjects are concerned. By speaking of “only” homonyms, she not only does violence to the mythological reality but also ignores the fact that mythologies are often purposely vague and ambiguous, which is the source of their power and the reason for their continued existence.¹⁵

It is Nyai Lara Kidul’s association with snakes that shows the capacity of the Javanese to connect the various meanings of *lara* with each other in an ambiguous way. This can be seen with Nyai Lara Kidul’s double, Nyi Pohaci Sangyang Sri, the West Javanese rice goddess: Nyi Pohaci, like Dewi Śri, is able to incarnate as a snake, and for this reason the Sundanese use the names of snakes to indicate the various stages in the growth of the rice crop (KERN 1948). Nyi Pohaci herself is addressed as “Nāgini” in some rice mantras, while mention is repeatedly made of her skin (SUKANDĀ-TESSIER 1977, 43; ATJA and DANASASMITA 1981, 29). It is obvious that the skin disease mentioned in the myths refers to the shedding of a snake’s skin. Comparison with variant myths from elsewhere in the archipelago shows that the skin disease of certain ancestral figures and the shedding of the snake’s skin are both related to the ability to rejuvenate (JORDAAN 1987).

This information is important for the interpretation of the Javanese mythological material about Nyai Lara Kidul collected by Bogaerts and others.¹⁶ For example, a popular motif in connection with the beauty of Javanese princesses is their ability to change shape several times a day. With normal princesses one might tend to imagine a change of makeup or clothing, but Nyai Lara Kidul, with nine changes daily, surpasses all ordinary mortals. While the *Panitik Agungan* makes some rather contradictory comparisons with a white water lily that continually changes color, I was reminded instead of the snake’s skin-shedding, the goddess’s skin diseases, and the latter’s “snake-like appearance.” Regrettably it is not yet possible to test this hypothesis, since the other Javanese and Sundanese texts that speak of this change in shape or beauty are known only from Dutch summaries, in which there is no explanation of the terms used in the originals (DJAJADININGRAT 1913, 253).

Elsewhere it has been pointed out that a sick princess not only served as the king-maker of the House of Mataram but also contributed to the decline of this dynasty (her capture by the Dutch promoted the ascension of the V. O. C., the Dutch East Indies Company) (JORDAAN and DE JOSSELIN DE JONG 1985, 273, n. 7). A number of Serat Kanda stories concern a princess of Pajajaran who suffered from leprosy.¹⁷ Her marriage to the king of Holland is said to have resulted in the occupation of West Java by the Dutch during the reign of Sultan Agung. The most plausible interpretation of this mythological explanation seems to me to be that in indigenous thought the sick princess in reality represented the goddess of the earth and fertility, just like Nyai Lara Kidul, and that the one who married her—in other words, who became her ally—as a matter of course came into possession of the land and the people.¹⁸

It is not clear from the literature whether the goddess Tārā was ever associated with skin disease in any special way. Although there is a Tārā who is known as a serpent deity, this being is not an “embodiment of the principle of creation and preservation,” but the deity Jāngulī, a variety of Tārā who cures or prevents snakebites (BHATTACHARYA 1967).¹⁹ For the time being I will keep to my previous thesis that skin disease is an attribute of Austronesian chthonic beings. A curious fact in this connection is MACKENZIE’s eye-witness report of a leper colony in the neighborhood of Candi Kalasan (1814, 29). Regrettably it can no longer be determined whether this location was chosen accidentally or whether it had something to do with the Tārā temple.

ATTRIBUTES: ORIGINAL OR DERIVED?

Now that Nyai Lara Kidul’s skin disease has been linked to the attributes of Austronesian chthonic beings, the question arises as to which, if any, of her other aspects are derived from Hindu-Buddhism. One possibility is the color green, which Nyai Lara Kidul and Tārā have in common. I hesitate to draw this conclusion, however, because of the fact that Tārā’s green color is usually attributed to her relationship with Amoghasiddi, her spiritual sire who is the guardian of the north; Nyai Lara Kidul is connected only with the south. It may be that the link between Nyai Lara Kidul and Tārā was made in another way—for example, via Tārā’s statue in the southern chapel of Candi Kalasan, or, somewhat less far-fetched, via the two goddesses’ association with the sea (other Indonesian spirits associated with the sea, such as Putri Hijau and Nabi Chidir, are also said to be green). Evidently the notion of a “savioress” was so flexible that Tārā was able not only to develop into a guardian of navigators and seafarers, as was the case among the Pāla kings, but also take on the identity of a sea goddess in Hindu literature (GUPTA 1980, 117).²⁰

The last point of correspondence between Tārā and Ratu Kidul concerns their use of the night flowers the *utpala* and the *wijayaḥusuma*,²¹ respectively. This similarity is difficult to explain, because it is not clear how and why Tārā obtained the *utpala*. According to local belief, Ratu Kidul came into possession of the *wijayaḥusuma* by purloining it from Arjuna (VAN HIEN 1994, 7–12). The flower gave her immortality, but did not release her from her god-cursed life.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have demonstrated that Vaśyā-Tārā was the Buddhist deity venerated as the supreme goddess in Candi Kalasan. Just as with the Hindu goddesses Durgā and Dewi Śrī, she was probably associated to the old Javanese fertility goddess, Nyai Lara Kidul. However, because of a lack of information it is not possible to see how this association between Tārā and the ambiguous Nyai Lara Kidul developed, whether directly or via a division into polar personalities like Parnaśabari and Vasudhara. That Nyai Lara Kidul's dual relationship with the Hindu goddesses Durgā and Dewi Śrī is still evident is probably due to the decline of Buddhism on Java owing to the disappearance of the Śailendra dynasty and the further development of Hinduism. With the coming of Islam, Durgā and Dewi Śrī receded somewhat into the background, while Nyai Lara Kidul remained to claim her rights to the Javanese throne. Thus her title Ratu Kidul.

NOTES

* I would like to dedicate the present article to the memory of the late G. J. Resink, particularly since it was in connection with our research on the Javanese goddess Nyai Lara Kidul that I first came to know him.

1. The contents of this study derive in part from a forthcoming archaeological article about the Tārā temple at Kalasan, to be published in the *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*.

2. For the purpose of this article, the discussion of this long and complex topic has been kept to a minimum. For the interested reader, SARKAR 1985 and CHANDRA 1994 are the most recent publications on the subject.

3. DASGUPTA also discusses this issue (1967). Although I agree with his argument, Dasgupta incorrectly posits that the involvement of the guru of Gauḍa in the building of the Tārā temple is mentioned in the Kalasan inscription rather than in the dedication of a Mañjuśrī image, as noted in the Kelurak inscription. He writes, "The information regarding Dharmapāla's banner bearing the effigy of Tārā when judged in the context of the information regarding the construction of a temple of Tārā in Java by the Śailendra guru who hailed from Gauḍa would show that the cult of Tārā migrated from Gauḍa to the Far Eastern islands" (DASGUPTA 1967, 127; repeated by GHOSH 1980, 14).

4. For the time being I do not want to draw conclusions based on the name Tārā, since I agree with the chronological and other objections raised by BOSCH (1929, 141) against con-

necting this queen with the Kalasan Tārā, as Stutterheim has done. MOENS, moreover, suggests that this ambiguity could be intentional, since the name of the queen was not so much a reference to the Buddhist goddess as to the Tārā who was married simultaneously to both Bali and Sugriva (1937, 411). Moens's unorthodox interpretations, however, drew sharp criticism from NILAKANTA SASTRI (1938).

5. Much iconographic research remains to be done on the maṇḍalas in which Tārā figures (BHATTACHARYYA 1978, 63, 65, n. 108–14; GHOSH 1980). All kinds of inconsistencies in the literature, some of which are mentioned in the text, could be analyzed and solved in that way.

6. According to LIEBERT, the symbolic meaning of the manner of sitting is that it brings “material wealth” (1976, 36). After checking her references I suspect that she based this opinion on WALKER (1968, 74), without having given sufficient consideration to the fact that Walker's description of this posture does not correspond with the European manner of sitting (see also DE MALLMANN 1975, 10, n. 3).

7. The small bronze statue is vaguely described as an *arca wanita* (statue of a woman) but might well represent the Buddhist goddess Tārā, since it displays the *varadamudra* in its right hand and holds an *utpala* (?) flower in its left; both are emblems of Tārā par excellence.

8. Similarly, BHATTACHARYYA writes: “The Vajrāyana Buddhists extracted all possible iconic concepts from any explorable source, and incorporated them into their own pantheon so that it looked attractive, and therefore, was accepted by a maximum of people” (1978, 16).

9. The usual English rendition of Ratu Kidul—“Queen of the Southern Ocean” or “Queen of the South Seas”—does not seem problematic to me despite the fact that there is no mention of the ocean or sea in her name, since the underworld over which she rules is identified by the Javans as on the floor of the sea. The underworld is situated in the sea among other Indonesian peoples as well. Notions concerning the location of the underworld have not remained unchanged, however, but have in the course of time been influenced by imported ideas, including those of Islam. This has sometimes led to its being situated in the west.

10. Confusion and disagreement surround the use and meaning of Nyai Lara Kidul both among some Javanese today and among a number of researchers who base their theories on the current data. Some, e.g., GRONEMAN (1895, 56), SUTTON (1993, 128), and FISCHER (1994, 100), consider Nyai Lara Kidul to be Ratu Kidul's *patih* or regent, and thus a being separate from her. BIGEON (1982, 121) and SCILEIIE (1991, 198–99) even differentiate a third figure, Mbok Rara Kidul, who assists the queen in the form of an old court servant (*abdi dalem*). The question is whether this configuration, interpreted by Schlehe as a division of power (*Gewaltenteilung*), is original, or when and why it arose. I suspect that this conceptual differentiation is a fairly recent one, dating to the nineteenth century—for example, in the *Babad Tanah Jawi* the name Nyai Lara (Rara) Kidul is consistently used, despite the fact that she is presented as the ruler of countless spirits (BOGAERTS 1990, 11). Moreover, I do not think the different names relate to a division of powers, but rather to the fragmentation of the deity's mythological character resulting from an increasing unfamiliarity with her original identity as the goddess of fertility. This fragmentation is best illustrated by the problem of how the different, apparently contradictory forms of address should be understood. While *nyai* and *mbok* can both be used as polite forms of address for an older woman, *rara* means unmarried girl or virgin. That this problem is only apparent is evident from the mythology itself.

11. Some “Hindu” affinities have also been noted by a number of current authors, such as LIND (1974), HOSTETLER (1982), and BRAKEL (1995). In this connection it should be pointed out that Tārā, just like Nyai Lara Kidul, is a goddess who is open to all. DASGUPTA reports that “the Tibetans, who also look upon her as the great mother, aver that she can be approached without the help of any intermediary, which is not the case with other divinities of the first rank. This may account for her popularity” (1967, 116; cf. KINSLEY 1986, 167).

12. My informants were Pram Sutikno, a social anthropologist and former librarian of the Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology (KITLV) in Leiden (Netherlands), and the late R. M. T. S. Poerbodipoero, a scion of the Pakualaman dynasty of Yogyakarta.

13. FISCHER also noted the association of Nyai Lara Kidul with *nāga* in Javanese folk art, but was unable to give a satisfactory explanation for the harmonic relationship as he was unaware of the chthonic nature of the goddess. The relevant part of his description of a *batik* painting is that “there is an awesome naga (mythical snake) entwined around the throne and she holds a portion of this awesome creature [but all is seemingly in harmony in this depiction of Ratu Kidul’s realm]” (1994, 105).

14. I wonder why *rara* developed out of *dara* if indeed the process of regressive dissimilation is as strong as Bogaerts proposes. In view of what happened to Lara Jonggrang, the old name of the statue of Durgā at Candi Prambanan, a reverse development of *rara* from *lara* also seems possible, as it is only since the Second World War that the temple complex has come to be known as Candi Rara Jonggrang.

15. In LIND’s dissertation, with which Bogaerts is in agreement, illness is mentioned next to hotness, impurity, disorderliness, wildness, and ugliness as one of the symbolic elements in the paradigmatic set that are connected with Kāla-Durgā and thus also with Ratu Kidul (1974, 133). See also JORDAAN and DE JOSSELYN DE JONG 1985, about Indonesian political myths, in which skin disease is discussed as a polyvalent metaphor.

16. One of these researchers is FISCHER, who studied likenesses of Ratu Kidul in the folk arts of Java. In one of his descriptions of a batik painting he points out the goddess’s speckled skin, which led him to guess about a possible dotting with sea life, but which is “more likely a reference to skin disease” (1994, 101). He also noted that “her skin may or may not show traces of a previous disorder” (1994, 105).

17. In other Javanese tales, such as the *Serat Baron Sakèndèr*, there is a certain princess Tanuraga who suffers from a skin disease but also has a flaming womb (PIGEAUD 1927, 325). Other princesses who were said to have flaming wombs, such as Ken Dedes, appear to act as kingmakers, because every man who has a sexual relationship with them is crowned king. A flaming womb evidently has a symbolic meaning similar to skin disease: where skin disease is connected with the snake as a chthonic being par excellence, the flaming womb could refer to volcanic, earthly powers. (This last suggestion was made to me by Robert Wessing.)

18. This may be the reason why the sacred court dance, the Bedaya Ketawang, is only performed at coronations and their annual commemorations. Judging from the prescribed bridal clothing worn by the dancers, one could interpret the annual commemoration as a periodic ritual confirmation of the marriage of the ruling king with Nyai Lara Kidul, who in reality represents the people of Java.

19. BRANDES notes the interesting fact that Amoghasiddhi, the spiritual sire of Vaśyā-Tārā, has a nimbus that is sometimes crowned and intertwined with snakes, which other Dhyānibuddhas do not show (1886, 253, n. 1). Whether Vaśyā-Tārā herself can be connected with snakes in this way is unclear.

20. This development also depends on the notion of the savioress, which, as can be seen in the following citations, can be considered more or less figuratively: “As I help men in crossing the great ocean of peril, people call me Tārā” (BHATTACHARYYA 1978, 35), as opposed to, “Tārā, the mother who can control the rush of waters, is the chief of those saktis who navigate or guide the boats and have dark complexion [sic]” (GUPTA 1980, 117).

21. The identification of this flower is controversial. In spite of its mythological character, which is reminiscent of the Holy Grail, the flower is still of current interest. According to some the flower is the relatively rare *Pisonia sylvestis*, Teysm. et Binnend (Nyctaginaceae), while others indicate the *Epiphyllum oxypetalum*. The legendary *wijayakusuma* seems to have

a great attraction, especially to Javanese rulers. At the coronation of a new ruler in the Javanese principalities (especially in Surakarta), a deputation solemnly collects these flowers, said to bloom on a tree that grows on a couple of rocky islands in the Segara-anakan-(sea). It is believed that this promotes the prosperity of his reign, and that the number of prosperous years is directly related to the number of flowers obtained (OCHSE 1931, 540). It is not known whether this expedition actually results in the finding of any flowers. According to the folklorist van Hien, the *wijayakusuma* is the flower of a mythical tree on the island Nusa Kambangan off the south coast of Java, and Nyai Lara Kidul herself sees to it that this tree never blooms. This would fit the mysterious nature of the search of the Javanese court servants. It is said that they obtain the flower while meditating underneath the tree at midnight, and that the flower is caught in a special, closable bowl that may only be opened by the ruler of Surakarta and is kept by him in the innermost part of his palace (RAHARDI et al. 1991, 150).

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