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# Kanjeng Ratu Kidul\*

## The Second Divine Spouse of the Sultans of Ngayogyakarta

### **Abstract**

This brief paper discusses Ratu Kidul, the Queen of the Southern Ocean, as ruler over the waters, both fresh and salty, on earth and in the clouds. Through this, she in effect rules also over the earthly domain, the *tanahair* of the Javanese sultan, whose spiritual consort she is; in fact, her being his consort is what enables him to rule the state.

**Keywords:** Ratu Kidul—spirits—Javanese mythology

WHOEVER AS A CHILD heard the sound of the *ķentongan* (slit-drums) along the river Code as the drums accompanied Ratu Kidul on her journeys high above the water to the volcano Merapi<sup>1</sup> learned early on to associate the Ratu with fresh as well as with salt water. This association was reinforced by her visits to the so-called Water Palace, with its freshwater pond, in the Taman Sari (heavenly garden) at the palace of Yogyakarta, where, until the time of Hamengku Buwono IX, the second divine spouse of the sultans met with the ruler.<sup>2</sup>

A contemporary counterpart of that pavilion is a room reserved for the goddess-queen in the four-star Samudra Beach Hotel at Pelabuhan Ratu, dating from the 1960s. This room is, of course, supplied with fresh water in a basin and in the bathroom. Noting the devotional paintings to the goddess by Affandi and Basuki Abdullah and the variety of offerings brought by those who still venerate the goddess, the visitor may be surprised by the adoration that she still enjoys. The main difference with the past is that the royal prerogative of meeting with her has become more democratized, making it possible for ordinary people to do so as well. The room was prepared after a sudden squall from the sea blew away the tableware in the open restaurant during the festive opening of the hotel. As a sudden squall is often seen as an indication of her presence, people realized that they had forgotten to pay the Ratu proper respect, which, as popular lore has it, she demands.

The newspapers reported that when the current sultan, following his installation, rode around the palace in his golden coach a cool breeze sprung up, indicating the godly blessing of the Ratu, as it were. According to the well-known poet and essayist Linus Suryadi A. G., the Sultan was accompanied on this trip by the Ratu herself, too *halus* (delicate, subtle) to be seen by human eyes (LINUS SURYADI 1992, 565). When the door to the private rooms of the ninth Sultan were opened an aromatic breeze is said to have arisen; this too was attributed to the Ratu.

That the Ratu is especially known and venerated in Yogya is of course due to the fact that of the four central Javanese principalities, the Sultanate

of Yogyakarta has the longest coastline and thereby the most extensive boundary with the ocean world ruled by the queen. It is thus most exposed to her influence, which includes the ocean winds. Noting that the goddess is also associated, or even equated, with the Raja Angin-angin (ruler of the winds) (JANZ 1913, 752), one can imagine how the Javanese, from ruler to commoner, must have felt included in a cosmic circuit ruled by her, a circuit of water and wind in which clouds formed over the silty southern ocean, moved inland with the wind to meet the mountains, and released their waters to feed the springs and rivers that nourished the fields and then flowed back to the sea. One also understands why even in areas located high in the mountains and far from the sea, such as the Tengger and the Dieng,<sup>3</sup> the goddess is venerated for the fertility she brings through the rains, just as in the lowlands (JORDAAN 1984, 101, 112). Her protection of fishermen, bird-nest gatherers, and sailors, as well as her relation to the beach rights of the coastal villages, have been discussed elsewhere (RESINK 1990, 13; TER HAAR 1946, 75–78).<sup>4</sup>

At this point we can supplement Anderson's brilliant analysis of Javanese concepts of power with the feminine element, which ANDERSON ignored (1972). Through their two divine spouses, Dewi Sri and Ratu Kidul, the sultans of Yogya and other Javanese rulers assured themselves of authority over the land (*tanah, bumi, siti*) and the water (*banyu, toya, tirta*), and thus over the state (*tanahair*). This connection of authority with the old tutelary deities has continued in popular belief to the present.

I can imagine no greater honor to the water and wind goddess than to end with the question of whether this so mobile and active queen (in conjunction with the more sedentary Dewi Sri) has not influenced the Javanese sense of justice that made married women legally competent and independent of their husbands long before women achieved this in the West (TER HAAR 1946, 138).<sup>5</sup>

#### NOTES

‡ *Asian Folklore Studies* is sorry to announce that G. J. Resink passed away late last summer in Jakarta.

\* The editors of *Archipel* 24 (1982) hit upon the proper tone by avoiding the words "Lara" or "Rara" in front of "Kidul" in their title "Homage a Kanjeng Gusti Ratu Kidul." The issue contained a number of excellent articles on this topic, which have inspired me to write a number of papers of my own.

1. Beating on slit-drums seems to be a means of warning against approaching tidal waves or spring tides in coastal and riverine villages. EPTON gives the following fanciful summary:

Loro Kidul's noisy bodyguard of nymphs beating percussion instruments liked to swim upstream through Jogjakarta [Yogyakarta] and beyond this city to Mount Merapi, with whom the goddess occasionally conversed, but the inhabitants have not heard this army, called 'Lampor,' for a long time. Perhaps that is because they do not listen for it as fear-

fully as they used to. (1974, 188–89)

See also HADIWIDJOJO 1972 and BEHREND 1982, 86–87.

2. The first was the rice goddess, Dewi Sri. The current sultan even had a new dance created to add luster to the latest *garebeg* (royal/religious festivity). In this dance the legendary meeting between the first sultan and the Ratu is depicted.

3. On the volcanic Dieng plateau there is said to be a cave that gives access to a tunnel to the Indian Ocean through which the queen could proceed to the highlands. I am indebted to Jusuf Mochtar of Jakarta for this unexpected information, which he obtained locally.

4. Even today Nyai-gede Segoro Kidul has a national right to the beaches: a Javanese will never undertake anything that will bring him into contact with these areas or the waters of these coasts without having made an offering to the invisible queen and all her followers that reside in the mountains, the forests, and along the waters (HAGEMAN 1853, 69).

5. Another example of an active and influential Javanese queen (besides Ratu Kidul) is Ratu Paku Buwono, the mother of Sunan Paku Buwono II (REMMELINK 1990).

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