

WRITING JAVA: THE POLITICS OF AUTHORSHIP AND COLONIAL PHILOLOGY IN BABAD TANAH JAWI

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Abstract. This article examines the complex authorship and colonial philological interventions in Babad Tanah Jawi, a foundational Javanese historical text. Spanning over two centuries of revisions, this manuscript reflects dynamic interactions between indigenous court authorship and colonial intellectual appropriation. While Yasadipura I is frequently credited as the primary author of the Major Babad (1788 version), scholarly debates continue regarding the roles of earlier contributors such as Carik Bajra and subsequent editors like Yasadipura II. The rise of Dutch philological interest in the 19th century, particularly through the Javacini figures Meinsma and Winter, further complicated notions of authorship by transforming poetic manuscripts into accessible prose for colonial governance. This study argues that authorship in Babad Tanah Jawi is less about singular attribution than about navigating ideological terrain shaped by court politics and colonial ambition. Employing an intertextual analysis between Babad Tanah Jawi and Babad Giyanti, this article identifies ideological currents embedded within the text and asserts that questions of authorship reveal deeper epistemic negotiations between aesthetic form, political allegiance and colonial epistemology. Ultimately, it offers a critical reflection on how historical texts are produced, revised and appropriated within shifting regimes of power.

Keywords: Politics, authorship, colonial philology, Babad Tanah Jawi.

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1. Introduction

Babad Tanah Jawi is widely regarded as a foundational text in Javanese historiography, chronicling the genealogical and political lineage of Java's rulers from the mythical Adam to the late 18th century. Beyond its literary function, the text served as a vital political instrument - revised repeatedly to assert the legitimacy of ruling dynasties. The long span of its composition and frequent revisions point to the strategic use of literary production in shaping collective memory and state authority. What makes the study of this manuscript especially urgent is its entanglement with both internal Javanese court politics and external colonial philological interventions. In a time when textual production was deeply embedded in structures of power, *Babad Tanah Jawi* became a site where aesthetic form, political ideology and historical memory converged. Its ambiguous authorship and ideological fluidity offer a window into the ways indigenous knowledge systems navigated colonial surveillance and patronage.

Scholarly research on *Babad Tanah Jawi* - notably by Ras (1986, 1987), Ricklefs (1973, 1997), Wieringa (1999) and Pigeaud (1967) - has meticulously traced the textual genealogy of various versions of the manuscript. These studies recognize the multiplicity of contributors, the role of the text in royal legitimation and the textual shifts

across different political regimes. However, the issue of authorship has remained partially unresolved, especially regarding the contributions of Yasadipura I. While some scholars affirm his authorship of the 1788 version, others suggest his role may have been editorial rather than authorial. Moreover, studies have not fully explored the ideological rivalry between Yasadipura I and Carik Bajra, nor have they accounted for the broader implications of colonial translations into prose by Meinsma and Winter. The colonial reconfiguration of Javanese poetic texts into utilitarian prose remains an underexplored yet critical dimension in understanding how indigenous narratives were appropriated within colonial knowledge systems.

This article addresses the following research questions: (1) Who can be identified as the author(s) of *Babad Tanah Jawi* and how is authorship represented or obscured across different versions? (2) In what ways did colonial philologists intervene in and reshape the text to serve their epistemological and administrative goals? (3) What ideological implications emerge from these shifts in authorship and textual form? More broadly, the study aims to reposition the debate on authorship by framing it not merely as a matter of individual attribution, but as a socio-political practice situated within aesthetic negotiations, courtly rivalry and colonial intervention. The research seeks to uncover how textual anonymity, stylistic hybridity and intertextual resonance function as strategic responses to hegemonic structures.

This article contends that the authorship of *Babad Tanah Jawi* cannot be fixed to a singular figure, but rather reflects a multi-layered process of aesthetic negotiation and political positioning. The textual ambiguities - particularly the overlapping roles of Yasadipura I, Carik Bajra and later editors - reveal a deliberate strategy of concealment and adaptation in response to colonial pressures and court politics. Simultaneously, the Dutch Javacini's transformation of poetic manuscripts into standardized prose exposes the epistemological demands of colonial administration and its need to domesticate indigenous knowledge. The ideological nuances identified between *Babad Tanah Jawi* and *Babad Giyanti* underscore the text's potential as a site of resistance as well as complicity. Thus, authorship here is not simply a literary question but an index of cultural negotiation under colonial rule. This insight contributes to broader debates in postcolonial philology, indigenous historiography and the politics of knowledge production.

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative, interdisciplinary methodology grounded in textual criticism, intertextual analysis and socio-historical contextualization. The primary data include the *Major Babad* (1788), its 1836 revision and related texts such as *Babad Giyanti*. This research is supported by comparative examination of the Meinsma and Winter prose adaptations, as well as Dutch archival commentary. Analytical focus is placed on identifying authorship claims, ideological motifs and structural shifts within the text across different iterations. The study employs intertextual analysis to trace thematic continuities and disruptions, particularly in depictions of political power, colonial presence and legitimacy. By positioning the text within the broader framework of colonial philology and aesthetic politics, the study aims to interpret the manuscript as a discursive battleground rather than a stable historical source.

3. Literature Review

Scholarly interest in *Babad Tanah Jawi* has long focused on its function as a dynastic chronicle and its fluid textuality across different periods of Javanese history. Foundational works by Ras (1986, 1987), Ricklefs (1973, 1997), Wieringa (1999) and Pigeaud (1967) have established a critical framework for understanding the babad as both a literary artifact and a political instrument. Ras, for instance, emphasized the layered authorship of the text, identifying multiple contributors across centuries, including Pangeran Panjang Mas, Pangeran Adilangu I and II, Carik Bajra and possibly Yasadipura I. Pigeaud similarly stressed the syncretic elements within the babad - blending Islamic, Hindu-Buddhist and local mythic narratives - to support political legitimacy.

Wieringa, however, approached the text from the perspective of colonial philology, arguing that the 1836 version of the *Major Babad* was largely a reproduction of the 1788 edition attributed to Yasadipura I. According to Wieringa, no new episodes were added to the 1836 version, suggesting a lack of political impetus for further revision. This contrasts with Ras's hypothesis that the revisions may have included subtle ideological recalibrations - such as the softened portrayal of Raden Trunajaya's execution - motivated by socio-political concerns, including the royal marriage of Pakubuwana VII to a Madurese princess.

Despite these contributions, gaps remain. First, there has been little focused analysis of the rivalry between Yasadipura I and Carik Bajra as competing aesthetic and political figures in the Surakarta court. Ricklefs (1997) hints at this tension but stops short of exploring its textual ramifications. Second, the role of Dutch colonial scholars - often referred to as *Javacini* - such as Meinsma, Winter and Roorda, has not been fully integrated into discussions of authorship. While their contributions to translation and prose adaptation have been acknowledged (Remmelink, 2022), the ideological implications of their intervention remain under-theorized, particularly in relation to the colonial project of knowledge control and cultural translation.

Moreover, the intertextual relationship between *Babad Tanah Jawi* and other contemporary texts - especially *Babad Giyanti* - has not received adequate critical attention. *Babad Giyanti*, widely attributed to Yasadipura I, contains a more overt critique of Dutch colonialism and appears to diverge ideologically from the comparatively subdued tone in the *Major Babad*. A comparative reading of the two texts could yield insights into the ideological strategies adopted by court poets navigating between multiple centers of power - Pakubuwana, Mangkubumi and the Dutch East Indies administration. Finally, although modern editions and translations - such as those by Balai Pustaka (1939), Olthof (1941) and Amanah Lontar (2004) - have made the text more accessible, few have questioned how the editorial and translational processes themselves reinforce particular narratives of authorship and authority (Fawaid, 2015). This article therefore contributes to existing scholarship by interrogating authorship as a socio-political act, rather than a matter of textual attribution alone. It draws attention to how aesthetic choices, intertextual references and translational decisions become part of a broader negotiation of power, identity and legitimacy in colonial and postcolonial Java.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon interdisciplinary approaches to authorship, intertextuality and colonial philology to examine *Babad Tanah Jawi* as a contested textual and

ideological site. At its core, the research adopts a post-structuralist understanding of authorship, which challenges the notion of a singular, stable author and instead emphasizes the multiplicity of voices and the socio-political structures that shape textual production. Michel Foucault's seminal essay "What Is an Author?" (2003) provides a foundational premise for this study, particularly his argument that the "author-function" is historically contingent and governed by institutional mechanisms of power, discourse and reception. In this context, the debate over whether Yasadipura I, Carik Bajra or others composed *Babad Tanah Jawi* reflects more than historical uncertainty - it points to broader dynamics of cultural authority and textual ownership.

Complementing this is intertextual theory, as articulated by Julia Kristeva and later elaborated by Gérard Genette. Kristeva's notion of intertextuality - that every text is a mosaic of quotations and is in constant dialogue with prior texts - is especially relevant when considering how *Babad Tanah Jawi* interacts with texts like *Babad Giyanti*, *Serat Cabolek* and other babads from the same tradition. These intertextual relationships are not merely literary echoes but are embedded with ideological negotiations, particularly regarding colonial presence, legitimacy and resistance. By comparing textual motifs, narrative voices and ideological framings across versions, the study seeks to map how aesthetic choices encode political positions.

Further, the study is informed by the theoretical lens of colonial philology, particularly as developed in the works of Pollock (2009, 2016). Colonial philology, in this view, refers not just to the technical practice of editing, translating and classifying native texts, but to a broader epistemic strategy used by colonial powers to control knowledge production and representation. The Dutch Javacini's efforts to transcribe, simplify and translate *Babad Tanah Jawi* into prose - spearheaded by Meinsma and Winter - represent a transformation of Javanese literary culture into a colonial archive. This process, while preserving aspects of indigenous knowledge, also imposed new modes of intelligibility, legibility and utility aligned with European administrative and educational frameworks.

This theoretical triad - authorship as function, intertextuality as ideological dialogue and colonial philology as epistemic intervention - enables a nuanced reading of *Babad Tanah Jawi* as a historical narrative that is never ideologically neutral nor textually stable. It allows for the exploration of how power circulates within literary form, how authorship operates as a political gesture and how colonial modernity sought to reframe indigenous cultural production through the language of rationality, order and standardization.

Through this lens, the study argues that *Babad Tanah Jawi* is not only a palimpsest of textual voices but also a document of cultural contestation - written, revised and reinterpreted across centuries by multiple actors negotiating their place within complex hierarchies of Javanese and colonial power.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Origins and Evolution of Babad Tanah Jawi

Although many *babad* texts exist - some concerning specific regions (e.g., *Babad Madura*), time periods (e.g., *Babad Kartasura*) or particular events (e.g., *Babad Pecinan*) - the foundational or archetypal text of the entire tradition is what is now known as the *Major Babad* or *Babad Tanah Jawi*. Its most recent version dates from 1836 and despite the various debates surrounding its composition (to be elaborated later), the events it

narrates conclude around the year 1770. Having been composed over a span of nearly two centuries, this manuscript underwent numerous interpolations and more importantly, involved the participation of multiple Javanese authors and European intellectuals.

Babad Tanah Jawi chronicles the history of Java - specifically, the genealogies of its kings - from the figure of Adam up to the year 1770. Although parts of the text appear in several other *babad*, only one complete manuscript is known today, housed in the Leiden University Library (LOr 1786, comprising 18 volumes and 9,094 pages). The function of *Babad Tanah Jawi* is generally considered to be the legitimization of the political authority of the Mataram kings. Initially, this legitimization served the Senapati dynasty (1588-1601), which - despite its relatively modest origins - was traced back in an extended genealogy to the Prophet Adam. The need for legitimization was not limited to Senapati; all subsequent rulers similarly required it. This need explains the continuous updating not only of the text but also of its redactions - since the legitimization of one ruler often implied the delegitimization of his predecessors or rivals (Fawaid *et al.*, 2022).

Given the long historical arc and numerous textual transformations in *Babad Tanah Jawi*, the issue of authorship becomes unavoidable. Numerous court poets and colonial *Javacini* (Dutch scholars of Javanese culture) were involved in studying, modifying and rewriting the manuscript. One point remains clear: the authorship of the *Major Babad* is still largely speculative.

According to the research of Ras (1987), the earliest known author of *Babad Tanah Jawi* was likely Prince Panjang Mas, who composed the genealogy of Sultan Agung (1613-1646), incorporated creation myths and stories of Hindu-Buddhist divine kingdoms and positioned Senapati as a direct descendant of the last king of Majapahit while also integrating his lineage with the Muslim saints (*wali*) who spread Islam in Java. Indeed, the supremacy of Islam is conveyed symbolically by making the Prophet Adam the ancestor of the Hindu god, Bathara Guru.

The next phase of authorship is believed to have involved Prince Adilangu I, who expanded the text during the reign of Amangkurat I (1646-1677), Sultan Agung's successor. Prince Adilangu I is also thought to have undertaken a major redaction of the text to incorporate key historical events: the rebellion of Raden Trunajaya, the ascension of Amangkurat II (1677-1703) amidst conflict with his brother Prince Puger and the 1680 relocation of the royal court from Mataram to Kartasura.

After 1705, the text appears to have been revised again to support Prince Puger, who had usurped the throne from his nephew, Amangkurat III (1703-1705) and subsequently ruled as Pakubuwana I (1705-1719). This revision is attributed to Prince Adilangu II, son of Prince Adilangu I, a descendant of Sunan Kalijaga - one of the most influential Muslim *wali* from the time of Panembahan Senapati to Sultan Agung.

According to tradition, Pakubuwana II (1726-1749) updated the text to include the reign of his father, Amangkurat IV (1719-1726). This version is believed to have been written by Carik Bajra, a palace secretary and scribe who was later known as Tumenggung Tirtawiguna. As will be discussed later, this figure is thought to have had both aesthetic and political rivalries with Yasadipura I.

Pakubuwana III (1749-1788) further revised the text by incorporating his father's reign. Shortly after ascending the throne, Pakubuwana IV (1788-1820) commissioned another revision, which included his father's rule and the history of the division of the Mataram kingdom following the 1755 Treaty of Giyanti. This redaction is widely attributed to the Surakarta court poet Yasadipura I (1729-1803), who had separately composed *Babad Giyanti*, a chronicle of the kingdom's partition.

5.2. Aesthetic Rivalry Between Yasadipura I and Carik Bajra

According to Wieringa (1999), the version composed by Yasadipura I - commonly referred to as the Major Babad or the 1788 version - is the most definitive and authoritative form of Babad Tanah Jawi. However, Ras argues that the 1788 version was not the final one. Rather, it was revised again under the order of Pakubuwana VII (1830-1858), the eldest son of Pakubuwana IV, who required a new legitimizing document following the premature death of Pakubuwana V and the exile of Pakubuwana VI. This revision was redrafted by the court poet Yasadipura II (d. 1842), who reportedly expanded the 1788 version by integrating an extended adaptation of his father's Babad Giyanti, known as Babad Mangkubumi (Ras, 1987). However, Wieringa maintains that the 1836 revision was merely a replication of the 1788 text with a new colophon. Furthermore, there was no evident "crisis" at the time to warrant new legitimation and most importantly, why did the text not include the Java War (1825-1830), the most catastrophic event of that era?

The complexities do not end there. When examining the works attributed to Yasadipura I, numerous issues arise. His oeuvre allegedly spans from translations of ancient kakawin texts to Islamic mystical treatises (serat tasawuf). Although scholars such as Poerbatjaraka (1964), Sasrasumarta et al. (2012) and Winter (1911) differ in listing the works attributed to him, they all agree on one key manuscript: Babad Giyanti. Even this attribution, however, is not without controversy (Ricklefs, 1997). This is not the place to delve into the details of such disputes, but one point remains firm - according to Ricklefs, there exists no manuscript that has been conclusively verified as authored by Yasadipura I, whether from his lifetime or posthumously identified as his work.

What is particularly striking is that none of the three aforementioned sources identify Babad Tanah Jawi as a work authored by Yasadipura I. However, if we follow the interpretations of Ras, Wieringa, Ricklefs and Pigeaud, it becomes clear that Babad Tanah Jawi was not written by a single poet, as it spans over two centuries of literary development. According to Pigeaud (1967), the authors of Babad Tanah Jawi before 1800 were Prince Adilangu and Carik Bajra, both active during the Kartasura period in the early 18th century. It is plausible that Yasadipura I adapted their works to produce what is now known as the Major Babad. To date, no comprehensive study has delineated which sections were written by Yasadipura I and which by his predecessors or successors. It is only certain that the version of Babad Tanah Jawi known today (*zoo als wij dien thans bezitten*) was written after 1744, during the reign of Pakubuwana II (1726-1749) (Brumund, 1868). In this version, Pakubuwana II inserted a narrative about his father, Prince Puger, continuing until the latter's death. Subsequently, Pakubuwana III (1749-1788) added an account of Pakubuwana II's reign. If we accept that the Babad

Tanah Jawi LOr. 1788 manuscript - referred to as the Major Babad - is the most definitive version (Brumund, 1868; Wieringa, 1999), then it can be concluded that the manuscript was composed during the reigns of Pakubuwana III and IV.



Figure 1. An illustration depicting Sri Susuhunan Pakubuwono II (1726–1749) seated on his throne wearing a batik cloth, receiving Adipati Natakusuma, Arya Pringgalaya and Tumenggung Tirtawiguna

During this period, two key figures contributed to the authorship of *Babad Tanah Jawi*: Carik Bajra and Yasadipura I. This gives rise to another issue. The absence of any definitive record attributing *Babad Tanah Jawi* to Yasadipura I may be due to the prevailing tendency to credit the earliest contributors - particularly during the Surakarta period - among whom Carik Bajra is most frequently acknowledged. As will be discussed further in subsequent sections, this figure is believed to have engaged in aesthetic and political rivalry with the younger Yasadipura I during the reign of Pakubuwana II. This aligns with Ricklefs' observation that when Yasadipura I is mentioned in the manuscript tradition, it is usually as a marginal note or addendum and typically in texts produced either before or after his lifetime. Ricklefs (1997) himself found no definitive evidence of Yasadipura I's authorship activities.

Further investigation is warranted. However, it may be preliminarily argued that Yasadipura I's authorship can best be traced through texts produced in the Kartasura palace during the reign of Pakubuwana II, a period preceding his formal literary career. These include *Serat Menak*, *Serat Iskandar* and *Serat Cabolek*. Yet even here, authorship issues persist. *Serat Menak*, for instance, is believed to have been authored by the grandmother of Pakubuwana II, known as Ratu Pakubuwana, who also initiated *Serat Iskandar*, while *Serat Cabolek* recounts early events of that period. Therefore, the most likely works authored by Yasadipura I would be those that emerged after 1742, including *Babad Giyanti*, *Babad Prayut* and *Babad Pakepung* - though the latter is frequently attributed to Yasadipura II.

This highlights the unresolved tension surrounding Yasadipura I's literary contributions and his realpolitik involvement in the Kartasura court. The *Tus Pajang* chronicles suggest that Yasadipura I's writings were closely tied to his political activity during the reign of Pakubuwana IV, when he served as *patih* (prime minister). At that time, however, Yasadipura I was already advanced in age, casting doubt on his ability to have produced such prolific literary output during this stage of life.

It is therefore plausible that his authorship began earlier - at the end of Pakubuwana II's reign and the beginning of Pakubuwana III's, around 1749, when Yasadipura I was in his twenties (having been born in 1729). Yet this presents a complication. During that period, another highly influential political figure and palace poet was already active: Carik Bajra (also known as Tumenggung Tirtawiguna or Adipati Sindureja). His literary works are extensive and widely recognized in both Javanese and Dutch sources and his career is more easily traceable, particularly because of his documented support for Dutch colonial policies. This sharply contrasts with Yasadipura I, who, as shown in *Babad Giyanti*, symbolically critiques Dutch power. His authorial identity, however, remains ambiguous and problematic.

5.3. Symbolic Contestation in *Babad Giyanti* and *Babad Tanah Jawi*

If *Tus Pajang* offers testimony regarding Yasadipura I's political activities during this period, then it is likely that he served in the palace during the peak of Carik Bajra's political career. Bajra is considered one of the figures behind the early versions of *Babad Tanah Jawi* during the Kartasura period. He served as *Patih* from 1743 until his death in 1751, two years after Pakubuwana III ascended the throne. This timing suggests that Yasadipura I may have initiated his literary endeavors during Pakubuwana III's reign, a time marked by internal rebellion from Mangkubumi and Mangkunagara. This turbulent context may also explain why *Babad Giyanti* is most plausibly attributed to Yasadipura I, according to Ricklefs. The issue, however, is that the latter half of the *Major Babad Surakarta* version - detailing events after the move from Kartasura to Surakarta - is not widely published and is said to be preserved only at Leiden University. Yet those volumes include narratives on the division of the palace, as described in *Babad Giyanti*.

These facts do not prove definitively that Carik Bajra transferred his "authorial rights" to Yasadipura I, nor do they dismiss the possibility entirely. Politically, Carik Bajra's activities are more visible and verifiable in contemporary sources, unlike Yasadipura I, whose political engagement appears only in later stages of life. As Ricklefs (1997) aptly put it, his case represents "nothing but doubts at this time" - not entirely absent, but persistently uncertain. This is one of the reasons why determining the original authorship of *Babad Tanah Jawi* remains so elusive: the text emerged from a broad historical span stretching from Sultan Agung to at least the reign of Pakubuwana IV.

Nonetheless, the ambiguity surrounding Yasadipura I's identity opens a valuable interpretive perspective on his intellectual legacy within the aesthetics of court politics. His authorial obscurity was not merely a matter of anonymity but may have been a deliberate aesthetic strategy. He wrote during a time when the Mataram court was pulled between four centers of power: the Dutch, Pakubuwana II, Mangkubumi and Mangkunagara. These political entanglements likely compelled Yasadipura I to exercise caution in embedding internal commentary within *Babad Tanah Jawi*, so as to avoid censorship or political repercussions. Further research is needed to trace which sections were authored by Yasadipura I and which by Carik Bajra. Such research must go beyond paleographical analysis and incorporate sociopolitical approaches to uncover ideological distinctions between the two Surakarta authors. Hence, the analytical chapter of this study explores the intertextual connections between *Babad Tanah Jawi* and *Babad Giyanti* to assess the authors' shared or divergent attitudes toward Dutch colonial power. Symbolic critique of the Dutch in *Babad Tanah Jawi* - if assumed to have been written by Yasadipura I - is notably less overt than in *Babad Giyanti*.



Figure 2. Babad Giyanti by Yasadipura I

Despite these differences, it may still be said that *Babad Tanah Jawi* reached its golden age of composition at the end of Pakubuwana II's reign. Many of the works attributed to Yasadipura I, including *Babad Tanah Jawi*, had in fact been shaped earlier within the Kartasura literary tradition. Thus, the *Babad Tanah Jawi* often credited to the genius of Yasadipura I may, in truth, reflect the brilliance of an earlier author - Carik Bajra - during the Kartasura era. In this respect and regardless of the testimony found in *Tus Pajang* (which was authored by Yasadipura's own family), the fame of Yasadipura I may not have stemmed solely from his own literary innovation, but rather from his creative inheritance of the Pakubuwana II court's intellectual legacy.

Based on these debates and in light of the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the 1788 *Major Babad* as a revised work by Yasadipura I - along with the absence of conclusive evidence to support the contrary - the author aligns with the majority of scholars (in Islamic tradition referred to as *jumhur ulama*) in asserting that the version of *Babad Tanah Jawi* composed by Yasadipura I during the reigns of Pakubuwana III and IV is the most authoritative among the extant versions. The *Major Babad*, composed in verse (*tembang*), has been one of the strongest bases for attributing the literary authorship of the manuscript to Yasadipura I (Pigeaud, 1967; Ras, 1987; Ricklefs, 1973, 1998). Half of this version - covering events up to the founding of Surakarta in 1745 - was published by the colonial press Balai Pustaka in 31 separate volumes.

5.4. Colonial Adaptations of *Babad Tanah Jawi* in 1833

Once the Carik Bajra version is set aside - albeit with scholarly debate that remains fruitful for further inquiry - another issue worth examining is the post-Yasadipura I version of *Babad Tanah Jawi*, namely the 1833 version by Yasadipura II. As noted earlier, this 1833 version is widely considered a mere replica of the 1788 text. According to

Wieringa (1999), such a revision lacked a political crisis that would warrant a new legitimizing narrative, rendering its production as a royal charter implausible.

However, upon closer examination, the Yasadipura II version cannot be disentangled from the influence of colonial *Javacini*. While Wieringa may be correct in asserting that the 1836 revision of the *Major Babad* did not stem from Pakubuwana VII's own desire to generate a new legitimation document, it is more likely that this effort was initiated by Dutch intellectuals working in Surakarta during that period.

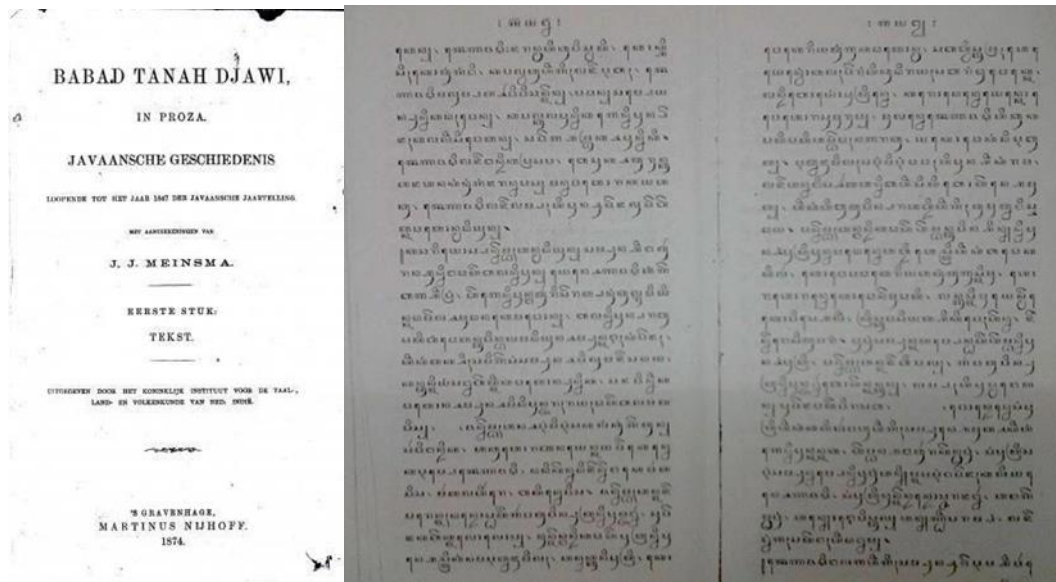


Figure 3. Meinsma version of *Babad Tanah Jawi*

One of the earliest *Javacini* to transcribe the text was J.J. Meinsma (1833-1886), a Javanese language instructor at the Delft Academy, hence the version he worked on is often referred to as the *Meinsma Babad*. This version is not a typical *babad* in poetic form, as it was rendered into prose. Meinsma's version refers to the *Babad Tanah Jawi* attributed to Kertapraja. However, even the authenticity of this version as Meinsma's own work has been questioned. According to information from Professor Taco Roorda (1801-1874) - founder of Javanese studies in the Netherlands, who, much like Arthur Waley, never visited the region he specialized in - the *Meinsma* version contains a handwritten note by Roorda reading "by C.F. Winter, Sr." This note casts doubt on Meinsma's authorship.

These doubts were later addressed by research conducted by Rimmelinck, who suggested that the manuscript was sent to Roorda in the Netherlands by the colonial government in the name of Winter. This conclusion is supported by the fact that C.F. Winter Sr. had indeed created a revised version (the *Verbeterde Babad*) of Meinsma's prose manuscript (Rimmelinck, 2022; Ricklefs, 1973).

It must be acknowledged that after Meinsma's prose version was published, C.F. Winter Sr. (1799-1859) - founder of the Javanese Institute in Surakarta and official translator for the Dutch colonial government - was reportedly dissatisfied with the *Meinsma Babad*. This dissatisfaction stemmed from the fact that the Kertapraja text was written in a mixture of *krama* and *ngoko* Javanese, failing to meet Winter's preference for a standard, easily comprehensible form of Javanese prose for Dutch readers.

Another reason for Winter's dissatisfaction was his preference for working with the *Major Babad* version, which he believed offered the most complete account of the Mataram kingdom. This manuscript is now housed in the library of Leiden University. It is commonly assumed to be a copy of an original, nearly "sacred" manuscript supposedly kept in the Surakarta court, although the existence of such an original has never been confirmed (Remmelink, 2022).

Beyond the authorship debates concerning the *Meinsma* and *Winter* versions of *Babad Tanah Jawi*, a further compelling question arises: Why were these colonial *Javacini* so deeply invested in transcribing and summarizing a 9,000-page manuscript into prose? The answer is straightforward: they were involved in the Dutch colonial government's broader effort to study Javanese society and transmit that knowledge to their peers. This was only feasible by translating the content into a language and form intelligible to their colonial colleagues - hence the shift from verse to prose.

Winter, for instance, served as an official translator in the Surakarta court, as had his father before him - who had worked for the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Unfortunately, the VOC had historically underinvested in training such cultural intermediaries. One notable exception was Nicolaas Hartingh, who, as a youth, was sent from Tegal to Kartasura in 1734 to study Javanese customs. This training proved invaluable when, as Governor of the Northeast Coast of Java, he successfully mediated the Third Javanese Succession War in 1755 through the Giyanti Agreement. Hartingh, however, was the exception: many VOC officials had little to no knowledge of Javanese and were often considered fortunate if they could communicate in basic Malay.

Following the Java War (1825-1830), the issue of competent cultural mediators became even more pressing. The colonial government found itself in control of large swaths of Java yet lacking skilled administrators - let alone those proficient in the Javanese language. Understanding agrarian systems alone required much deeper engagement with Javanese society than had previously been the case.

To address this gap, the Dutch colonial administration partnered with the Dutch Bible Society (*Nederlandsch Bijbelgenootschap*) and established the *Instituut voor de Javaansche Taal* (Institute for the Javanese Language) in Surakarta in 1832. Winter was appointed as a lecturer there in 1834.

The obstacles were considerable: there were no teaching materials, no grammars and no qualified instructors. From the outset, Winter had to produce his own learning resources. He proved to be highly capable. His book *Javaansche Zamenspraken* (Javanese Conversations) was first published in full in 1848, continually expanded and remained a pedagogical success, reaching its fifth edition by 1911. In Conversation No. 35, between a Dutchman and a Javanese figure identified as Raden Ngabéhi (likely Ranggawarsita), the latter suggests that *babad* texts could be suitable reading materials for students due to their factual, straightforward content and minimal poetic ornamentation (Remmelink, 2022). Whether or not this conversation was prompted by Ranggawarsita, it reflects Winter's vision for classroom texts with notable accuracy.

Based on this rationale, Winter went on to write a prose version of the *Major Babad*. While he may not have been the first to produce a prose adaptation - preceded by Meinsma's work on the Kertapraja text - Winter can nonetheless be regarded as the intellectual force behind the prose version of the *Major Babad*. Several factors explain why Meinsma's version has remained more prominent than Winter's, one being the intellectual rivalry between the Javanese Institute in Surakarta (Winter) and the Delft Academy (Meinsma). The academic circle around Taco Roorda, founder of the Delft

Academy and uncle to Meinsma, ensured the latter's broader visibility and publication success.

These two prose versions, however, derive from different *babad* sources. The Kertapraja text belongs to the Delft collection, while Winter's version came from Roorda's private collection. Notably, Meinsma was aware of Winter's version. In annotations to his own edition, he noted that he had borrowed the manuscript from the Roorda family to correct several *chronograms* and to clarify obscure expressions in the Kertapraja text. Despite this, he remained committed to publishing the Kertapraja version, even though Winter's manuscript was more complete and derived from what he called the "source text" (Rommelink, 2022).

This rivalry among colonial *Javacini* scholars continued, manifesting in bureaucratic conflicts within the VOC, accusations of racism against Winter and eventually culminating in the closure of the Javanese Institute on the eve of World War

Unfortunately, this is not the place to delve into those complex institutional histories. Interestingly, the greater prominence of Meinsma's version over Winter's also extends to the Indonesian translation of *Babad Tanah Jawi*. In 1941, W. L. Olthof published the Meinsma text in Dutch and five years later, A. Teeuw added a new register to it. In 2007, Narasi Publishing released Olthof's translation in Indonesian. In contrast to Olthof's version, which has gained wider recognition among Indonesian readers, the *Major Babad* composed in verse by Yasadipura I was published by Balai Pustaka in 31 volumes in 1939 and translated into prose by Amanah Lontar Publishing in six volumes in 2004. Today, however, it remains one of the lesser-known literary works.

This is ironic considering that the Balai Pustaka version covers a broader historical period - extending to the founding of Surakarta in 1746 - while the Meinsma/Olthof version concludes in 1722. The difference lies in the format: Narasi published Olthof's already prose-form translation, while Amanah Lontar transformed the poetic Balai Pustaka version of the *Major Babad* into prose. When comparing Amanah Lontar's translation and Winter's prose version (Rommelink, 2022), both texts demonstrate strikingly similar narrative structures. This is unsurprising, as both are believed to derive from the same "source text", the *Major Babad*. This connection leads us to reconsider the notion of "completeness" in these versions. Winter is said to have translated directly from the source text. But what was this source? Was it the *Major Babad* of 1788 or the 1836 version? That remains uncertain.

How, then, should we interpret Wieringa's claim that the 1836 version was merely a replica of the 1788 edition?

If we accept Wieringa's view, there is no problem. However, Ras notes a specific episode that differentiates the *Major Babad*, *Meinsma Babad* and *Winter Babad*. Wieringa did not address this episode, which details the brutal execution and death of the Madurese rebel Raden Trunajaya in 1680. In the *Major Babad*, this execution is described less violently, leading Ras (1986) to suggest that the *Meinsma* and *Winter* versions may be the only accounts preserving this missing episode.

The reason for the softened depiction in the 1836 version may be political. In 1834, Pakubuwana VII married a princess from Madura, where Trunajaya remained revered as a hero. To avoid offending his new bride - especially since women were known to be avid readers of *babad* - he may have instructed Yasadipura II to tone down the description of Trunajaya's killing. Though Pakubuwana VII was not a direct descendant of Amangkurat II, he likely wished to avoid tension within his court.

This raises a critical question: if Yasadipura II rewrote that section of the *Major Babad*, what else might he have altered? Such a revision weakens Wieringa's argument that the 1836 version was a mere reproduction of the 1788 text and revives Ras's theory that Yasadipura II reworked the existing *babad*, incorporating his father's revised *Babad Giyanti*.

Why Yasadipura II did not extend the text to cover the accession of Pakubuwana VII remains unclear, but it is not unusual, considering that much of the authorship of existing *babad* texts continues to be debated to this day.

5.5. Philological Interventions and Colonial Canonization

Returning to the original question of authorship and colonial philology, the intellectual and bureaucratic rivalry between Winter and Meinsma reveals deeper motivations behind the *Javacini* scholars' interest in *Babad Tanah Jawi* and their insistence on rendering it into prose. In the first half of the 19th century, literary writing - especially in Java - was largely confined to verse. Prose existed but was considered unsuitable for refined expression and reserved for official announcements, decrees, letters and similar utilitarian texts.

One illustrative passage in *Babad Tanah Jawi* recounts how the Regent of Magetan was deceived by a scribe who read aloud a forged letter from Pakubuwana II commanding the regent to vacate his post. Upon realizing the deception, he lamented his illiteracy and interpreted the incident as divine punishment (Yasadipura I, 1937). This event can be interpreted as a veiled critique of colonial rule.

For the colonial government, poetic language posed significant challenges. Their goal was to dominate and exploit Java, an endeavor rendered difficult if key texts and traditions remained enshrined in verse. They required a modern, standardized prose capable of translating Javanese laws, customs and worldviews into a format aligned with European linguistic conventions. Thus, institutions such as the Javanese Institute, the VOC and the Dutch Bible Society - with their associated intellectuals - shared a common objective: to engage Java on its own cultural terms while also reframing that knowledge in a language that suited colonial imperatives.

This was the impetus behind the experimentation of Winter, Roorda and Meinsma with prose adaptations of Javanese literature. To accomplish this, they collaborated with palace scribes such as Kertapraja and Ranggawarsita, who shared their expertise in Javanese language and tradition.

In essence, the colonial philological project underlying the authorship of *Babad Tanah Jawi* was about disseminating knowledge of Java to colonial peers by studying and rearticulating its traditions, worldview and language within the bounds of modern Dutch linguistic standards - namely, prose. Fortunately, not all palace poets complied with this Dutch agenda. Nor were they oblivious to the interests, agendas and limitations of their colonial interlocutors. As discussed in previous sections, many court poets employed subversive strategies to critique Dutch authority in their texts - often in ways that went unnoticed by their patrons and rulers.

It is quite plausible, therefore, that the unresolved debate over whether Yasadipura I or II is the rightful author of *Babad Tanah Jawi* served a colonial purpose: to frame the Dutch-produced prose versions as definitive, endowing Dutch scholars with authorship status while excluding Javanese court poets from such recognition. This unresolved authorship also raises another unanswered question: why is Carik Bajra (Tumenggung

Tirtawiguna or Adipati Sindureja) more clearly identified as the author of *Babad Tanah Jawi* than Yasadipura I? Was it because Tirtawiguna, as a *tumenggung* of Surakarta, was more supportive of Dutch policies than Yasadipura I? Or did a political rivalry exist between the two men as contemporaries in service to the Surakarta court? These questions demand further scholarly investigation.

It is evident that Tirtawiguna held a privileged position with the Dutch East India Company (*Kompeni*) at the time. *Babad Tanah Jawi* provides testimony to his strategic political role. After the Company succeeded in suppressing various rebellions in Kartasura, Pakubuwana II summoned his nobles and officials and declared that Pringgalaya and Tirtawiguna would serve as prime ministers, henceforth titled Adipati Pringgalaya and Adipati Sindureja (Yasadipura I, 1939). Later, in *Babad Giyanti*, it is recorded that Sindureja's proposal to lease coastal lands to the Dutch for only 20,000 reals was adopted by Pakubuwana II, rather than Mangkubumi's alternative offer of 100,000 reals. These two *adipati* were also reported to have informed the Dutch of "injustices" among royal relatives - particularly that Mangkubumi had been granted 3,000 *cacah* of land in Sukowati, the largest allotment - prompting the Dutch to pressure the king to reduce the territory promised to Mangkubumi. As a result, Mangkubumi ultimately withdrew from the palace (BG, 1[5], *Dhandhanggula*, Verses 21–36).

This was unsurprising, given that both *adipati* were close confidants of Pakubuwana II and had accompanied Dutch commanders in Semarang when Kartasura was still occupied by Raden Mas Garembi. On multiple occasions, they were also depicted dining with Dutch officers at the palace (Yasadipura I, 1939). Moreover, *Babad Tanah Jawi* recounts that following the successful retaking of Kartasura by Pakubuwana II, the Kedu-Bagelen region - where Yasadipura I had once studied as a *santri* in the Honggamaya pesantren - remained in rebellion. This uprising, too, was ultimately suppressed by Tirtawiguna in cooperation with the Company (Yasadipura I, 1939).

While this narrative does not constitute definitive proof of direct political rivalry between Tirtawiguna and Yasadipura I, it is nonetheless telling that *Babad Giyanti* - written personally by Yasadipura I - offers implicit symbolic support for Mangkubumi, who was anti-Dutch, rather than for Pakubuwana II, who maintained strong ties with the colonial administration. Thus, it may reasonably be inferred that Yasadipura I was engaged in an aesthetic and political rivalry with Tirtawiguna.

5.6. Authorship Claims and Literary Attribution to Yasadipura I

Returning to the question of the authorship of *Babad Tanah Jawi* and particularly for the purposes of this study, in light of the fact that the Mataram episodes in Carik Bajra's version remain incomplete and the sections revised by Yasadipura II are still under scholarly scrutiny, the author of this research concludes - without dismissing existing academic debates - that the authorship of the *Major Babad* should be attributed to Yasadipura I. This attribution is consistent with both direct and indirect acknowledgments by later scholars (Pigeaud, 1967; Ras, 1987; Ricklefs, 1973).

The 'final' version of *Babad Tanah Jawi* is the *Major Babad* edition published by Balai Pustaka, composed by Yasadipura I under the commission of Pakubuwana IV and possibly transcribed again during the reign of Pakubuwana VII by Yasadipura II. This is substantiated by the *manggala* (introductory passage) found at the beginning of the manuscript:

pustaka-pinustaka | ing karsa Sang Prabu | Pakubuwana kaping pat | pinrih aja parbatan wit carita di | aywa nanggung rêkasa || santosaa ri wardaya dening | muktamate carita punika | winangun lawan kususe | tinurut urutipun | malar dadya têpa palupi | ri kang karsa amarna | nênggih Jêng Sinuhun | Pakubuwana ping sapta | anglêluri anggit ing rama narpati | pinrih sapangatira || tumêraha trus ing wuri-wuri | warananing murwêng kawiryawan | wahyaning wahyu wiyose

(This book was compiled by the will of His Majesty Pakubuwana IV to prevent the story from becoming too extensive and to avoid burdening the reader. With clarity and careful construction, the narrative was arranged in sequence as a model for those who wish to tell it - namely, His Majesty Pakubuwana VII - in order to preserve the composition of his royal father, with the hope that his blessings would be passed down into the future; the ending serves as the beginning of nobility and the emergence of divine revelation) (Yasadipura I, 1939).

Thus, although Yasadipura II may have contributed to the transcription of the 1836 version, scholars widely agree that his work was merely a replica of the 1788 version authored by his father. Furthermore, much of what Yasadipura II produced drew directly from his father's *Babad Giyanti*. On this basis, this study asserts that Yasadipura I played the most significant role in the authorship of the final version of the *Major Babad*.

6. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that *Babad Tanah Jawi* is not a monolithic historical narrative, but a layered cultural text shaped by aesthetic politics, ideological rivalry and colonial intervention. Through an analysis of the 1788 *Major Babad* attributed to Yasadipura I, intertextual comparison with *Babad Giyanti* and critical evaluation of colonial prose adaptations by Meinsma and Winter, the research underscores that authorship in Javanese historiography is not merely a textual attribution but a function of power relations, courtly patronage and strategic ambiguity. While acknowledging contributions from earlier figures like Carik Bajra, this study affirms Yasadipura I's central role in shaping the authoritative version of the *Major Babad*, supported both by scholarly consensus and internal textual evidence. In doing so, the research contributes to postcolonial literary historiography by repositioning Javanese authorship as a coded and negotiated practice under shifting regimes of legitimacy.

Despite its findings, the study is limited by the scarcity of verifiable manuscript evidence directly linking specific passages to individual authors. Future research should engage in deeper philological and discourse analysis of other Javanese texts produced in politically transitional periods to uncover parallel strategies of symbolic resistance. Comparative investigations with literary traditions in other colonized regions could also provide broader insight into how indigenous writers navigated empire through textual innovation. *Babad Tanah Jawi*, as shown here, remains not only a site of historical narration but a dynamic testament to cultural resilience and authorial ingenuity.

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