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[Book Review:] Herald van der Linde, *Majapahit: Intrigue, betrayal and war in Indonesia's greatest empire*. Burrough on the Hill: Monsoon Books, 2024. xxx, 368 pp. ISBN 9781915310286 (pbk), 9781915310293 (ebook)

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Abstract. Herald van der Linde's monograph focuses on the long-forgotten Majapahit Empire which thrived in East Java and subdued other parts of the island and many regions in the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago in the fourteenth century. The book review reveals the main aspects of the non-fiction monograph which helps to restore the Majapahit glory to modern readers. The review shows dramatic intrigues in the history of the Majapahit state as well as the sources used for its reconstruction. The review focuses on several unverified hypotheses which play essential role in Van der Linde's narrative, its factual inaccuracies, inconsistent transliterations of Chinese and various misspellings. The review stresses the importance of the monograph for deeper interest to Majapahit and its legacy because the book gives a brilliant and amusing story of one of the most influential empires in the world history.

Keywords: Majapahit, empire, history, kings, queens, wars, intrigues, Prapanca, Java.

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[Рец. на:] Herald van der Linde, *Majapahit: Intrigue, betrayal and war in Indonesia's greatest empire*.

Burrough on the Hill: Monsoon Books, 2024. xxx, 368 pp. ISBN 9781915310286 (pbk), 9781915310293 (ebook)

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Аннотация. Монография Херальда Ван дер Линде посвящена малоизученной империи Маджапахит, достигшей расцвета в Восточной Яве в XIV в. и подчинившей себе другие области острова, а также обширные территории Малайского архипелага. В рецензии раскрываются ключевые аспекты научно-популярного издания, способствующего возвращению истории Маджапахита в поле современного читательского внимания. Анализируются драматические перипетии в истории государства, а также источники, использованные для её реконструкции. Особое внимание уделяется ряду неподтверждённых гипотез, занимающих важное место в повествовании Ван дер Линде, фактическим неточностям, использованию различных систем транслитерации китайских иероглифов. Вместе с тем в рецензии подчеркивается значимость монографии для пробуждения глубокого интереса к Маджапахиту и его наследию, поскольку книга представляет собой яркое и увлекательное повествование об одной из наиболее влиятельных империй в мировой истории.

Ключевые слова: Маджапахит, империя, история, цари, царицы, войны, интриги, Прапанча, Ява

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History turns story, and stories turn histories. The great medieval Javanese empire Majapahit comes now to the reader in a fascinating narrative of Walter Scott's style. Herald Van der Linde offers a non-fiction book which seems a must-have reading for all interested in Javanese history be they Indonesians, Americans, Russians, Chinese or other nations.

The monograph opens with Family Tree of the Majapahit rulers who belonged to the Rajasa Dynasty founded by Ken Angrok/Arok. Ken Angrok was the founder



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of the Singhasari/Singasari Kingdom in 1222 CE. Family Tree of the Rajasa Dynasty helps to understand relations of the Singhasari and Majapahit kings and queens. Women played a great role in those old times and remote lands. List of Characters helps introducing the main actors of Van der Linde's narrative. Like Shakespeare, he gives a brief note on any hero and heroine of his play. The list of main dates and Timeline show the chronology of Javanese history for the reader who has little, if any, knowledge of it. There are maps showing the scene of the Majapahit history. They are followed by Acknowledgements and Preface. Preface juxtaposes Kublai Khan of the Yuan Dynasty and his rival Kertanagara, the last king of Singhasari who managed to subdue many parts of the Malay/Indonesian Archipelago and mutilated Kublai Khan's envoy refusing to pay tribute to the Yuan Empire. Preface also stresses that Majapahit which emerged on the ruins of Singhasari became the most powerful maritime empire of its date and its legacy was in use in the modern Republic of Indonesia to unite its many islands and peoples. But as Majapahit was forgotten many centuries ago, it is a time to tell its story again, on the basis of archaeological, epigraphic and narrative discoveries of the last two centuries.

Van der Linde tells a true story inside of many stories. *Introduction: Hidden Temples, Forgotten Empires* starts from the discovery of Majapahit's ruins by British lieutenant-governor of Java, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles in 1815. The latter's *History of Java* serves as the main source. The reader travels East Java, following the British and their arch-rivals Dutch, and discovering temples and statues hidden in the jungles.

There are fifteen chapters in the monograph. Van der Linde introduces Prapañca who wrote an Old Javanese book *Deśawarnana*—*Description of the Country/Districts*, or *Nāgarakṛtāgama*—*The Complete Doctrine of the State/The Advanced City* in 1365. The following narrative is a story of Majapahit as it could be heard and/or participated in by Prapañca and/or other Old Javanese and Chinese actors. For the sake of English speaking readers all diacritics is omitted. In the first chapter *Prapanca makes a discovery* he learned the history of Singhasari from an old abbot during a trip to a remote mountain cloister near a volcano when Prapañca's patron, King Hayam Wuruk, made a journey throughout East Java in 1359 CE. The abbot told a story of Majapahit and former kingdoms as it is told in another Old Javanese text—*Paparaton*, or *The Kings* composed in the sixteenth century. Any discrepancy between the *Deśawarnana* and *Paparaton* is carefully mentioned in endnotes. But the main text keeps legendary stories and old myths like a divine origin of Ken Angrok, the founder of the Singhasari Kingdom in 1222. The second chapter *From Robber to Royal* deals with Ken Angrok's rise to power. The third chapter *Game of Thrones* shows an Old Javanese version of the famous movie focusing on Ken Angrok's sons and their intense and brutal rivalry after his death and before 1250 CE as evidenced by *Deśawarnana* and few inscriptions. The chapter also includes a glimpse on Javanese affairs made by a Chinese official and geographer Zhao Rugua 趙汝适 who composed *Zhu Fan Zhi/Description of Barbarous Peoples* 諸蕃志 in 1225. The treatise reveals trade connections between Singhasari and the Song China.

The chapter four *Three Kings* tells about King Wishnuwardhana and his rule over Singhasari since 1250. The chapter title reveals the fact that Wishnuwardhana



had two co-rulers, his maternal cousin Narasinhmurti as a deputy king and his son Kertanagara. The latter was proclaimed king along with his father in 1254. The chapter five *Kertanagara* brings to light his conquests of various islands, such as Bali or southern regions of Sumatra, and his spiritual affairs and international diplomacy. Kertanagara proclaimed himself a deity and treated himself equal to Kublai Khan. The Java ruler rejected the great khan's claim to become his vassal. In turn Kublai Khan ordered a punitive expedition against Singhasari. But everything changed when the Chinese sailed to Java. The chapter six *Singasari Falls, Majapahit Rises* is a bloody story of many intrigues resulted in the killing of old Kertanagara, a short rule of his killer, Prince Jayakatwang of Kediri, and the accession to the throne of Wijaya/Widjaya who founded Majapahit both a city and a realm. The Chinese were driven out of Java by the Wijaya's forces whom they previously helped to destroy Jayakatwang. These events are described in the chapter seven *Brawls and Betrayals*.

The chapter eight *Friends Turn Foes* shows revolts against the King Wijaya who took the name Kertarajasa Jayawardhana, by his old friends and companions who were with him during his exile when Jayakatwang searched for his head. After the death of Wijaya in 1309 his son Jayanegara ascended the throne but he faced many intrigues in his court. The widow of Wijaya and last daughter of Kertanagara, Queen Gayatri Rajapatni helped a man of low origin named Gajah Mada 'Enraged/Rutting Elephant', to become *patih* or the first minister of first Singhasari (as part of the kingdom) and then of Majapahit. Van der Linde claims Gajah Mada killed its second king Jayanegara in 1328 (p. 176–177) while there is but an option.

The chapter nine *Pomp and Splendour* shows Gajah Mada and his efforts to become the *patih* of all kingdom and to build an empire conquering different lands. Another topic is the birth and early years of Hayam Wuruk who became King of Majapahit in 1350 when his mother Tribhuwanatunggadewi died. She was the ruler after the assassination of her brother Jayanegara.

The chapter ten *The Wedding Disaster* tells a terrific story of unsuccessful wedding between Hayam Wuruk and a Sundanese Princess. It was an intrigue by Gajah Mada who wanted the Sunda Kingdom a vassal of Majapahit. But the Sunda king could give his daughter to Hayam Wuruk as the equal partner and independent ruler. He decided to fight to death, and the Battle of Bubat in 1359 ended in massacre. The Sundanese were crushed, their king was killed, their princess made a suicide. There was a root of hostility between the Javanese and the Sundanese which is still alive...

The chapter eleven *Royal Progress* focuses on Hayam Wuruk's journey throughout East Java. It was the journey when Prapañca learned the story of Ken Angrok from the old abbot and collected data for his own *Deśawarnana*. The chapter also offers a story of the śraddha ceremony for the late Queen Gayatri Rajapatni in 1362 CE when she joined gods, according to the Old Javanese beliefs. She passed away in 1350 but the ceremony was held twelve years after. In 1364, the old *patih* Gajah Mada also left this world. Hayam Wuruk was now in the full powers. But there were seeds of future decline. A Majapahit vassal in Sumatra, Adityawarman proclaimed himself king and sent a mission to China. He was punished but Majapahit began to lose control over its remote possessions. Chapter twelve *Death*



and Distrust reveals the story of Hayam Wuruk's descendants who had no abilities to keep the empire from the falling apart in the first third of the fifteenth century.

Chapter thirteen *A Stroll Around Town (1415)* is based on an account left by a Chinese. Ma Huan 馬歡 left a description of his journey to Majapahit during the fourth naval campaign led by Chinese Admiral Zheng He 鄭和 in 1413. The description is included in Ma Huan's *Yíngyá Shènglǎn/The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores* 瀛涯勝覽 (1451). It is a glimpse on everyday life of the Majapahit capital, its country and Javanese ports and roads.

Chapter fourteen *Suhita (1430–1450 CE)* focuses on the reign of another strong and attractive woman who ordered the construction of temples with erotic scenes—to the horror of the Hindu priests. Candi Sukuh and Candi Ceto are the most unusual temples of East and Central Java. They were built by the order of the Queen Suhita and they are monuments to her outstanding personality.

The last chapter fifteen *The Final Blow (1450–1527 CE)* sketches an inevitable decline of the Majapahit Kingdom which was the result of internal weakness and the coming of Islam and the Portuguese in Java. The Muslim polity of Demak destroyed Majapahit in around 1527 CE. Few survivors managed to escape to Bali which turned the outpost of Hindu culture in the Indonesian Archipelago till nowadays. They kept many poems and other texts, including Prapañca's *Deśawarṇana*. It forms the basis of our knowledge of Majapahit and its predecessors since its discovery in Lombok in the late nineteenth century up to day.

The Epilogue *Majapahit's Legacy* traces its longstanding influence on Indonesian politics and its motto and on Southeast Asian cultures through Old Javanese stories about the adventures of Prince Panji. They gave birth to Javanese shadow theater too.

The last parts of the monograph are Endnotes and Bibliography. Endnotes show discrepancies between stories of Majapahit and its history as it can be traced through narrative texts, inscriptions, archaeological monuments and sites and sculptures. Bibliography mentions many scholarly works on Majapahit and may be useful for future research.

While non-fiction books may include some hypotheses, they need to be properly examined. There are two kinds of hypotheses. The first kind is necessary ones. For example, while we do not know who were the parents of Gajah Mada, he obviously had his mother and father. The second kind of hypotheses is unnecessary ones. We know that Prapañca liked drinking but we almost never know on what occasion and how many cups of palm wine he drank. So we may think he did it in some occasions but it cannot be told for sure. But there is yet other kind of supposition—pure speculation of how it would be when there is no data and no sufficient reason to suppose something.

There are some problems in the monograph under review. First, there are few factual inaccuracies.

Van der Linde calls the strait between Sumatra and Borneo 'narrow' (p. 109, 313, n. 193) but it covers up to one thousand kilometers or about 550–620 miles. He states the ninth century Borobudur reliefs depict 'millet, not rice' which 'was probably introduced to Java in the later Hindu-Buddhist period. Irrigated rice came in the medieval times' (p. 302, n. 45). But it seems unlikely because there are Old



Javanese words *bras/bāras* and *vās* ‘rice’ known from inscriptions of the late ninth and early tenth centuries [Zakharov, 2023]. The word *savah* ‘irrigated rice field’ also appears in epigraphy. Rice probably was domesticated in Southeast Asia. Millet seems much more problematic in Old Javanese context as this cereal usually grows in non-tropical zones. There is no exact date for the beginning of the Borobudur construction, contrary to the statement that it took place in 778 CE (p. XV).

Second, there are few ungrounded hypotheses which may create new myths.

For example, Ken Dedes, a wife of Ken Angrok, disappeared from all authentic historical documents after her husband was assassinated and buried but Van der Linde attributes to her a sacrificial suicide of a *hara-kiri* style joined with the Hindu *sati*, or self-burning ritual in the fire of the dead husband (p. 62). A good phantasy but not a successful hypothesis: there is no actual data which would show such a habit among the royal families of Singhasari and Majapahit times.

Another case concerns the last ruler of the Singhasari Kingdom Kertanagara who is shown as participating in ritualistic Tantric sexual intercourse (p. 98) while there is no clear evidence of his such actions. Van der Linde admits it in an endnote (p. 311, n. 160) but a good tale wins the game.

The Chapter 5 attributed a statue to ‘Young Kertanagara’. The statue is kept in the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg, Inv. No. BD-543 (p. 97, 311, n. 158). But there is a hermaphrodite divinity as it has the female left breast and male right breast. The divinity also has four arms. Van der Linde writes in the endnote (p. 311, n. 158) that there is Harihara Ardhanari [Deshpande, 2016, p. 389] and it just ‘resembles’ Kertanagara but it has no grounds.

Third, there are misspellings and multiple systems of transliteration of Chinese and Old Javanese.

There is a constant mixture of different systems of Chinese transliteration throughout the book. The one can find an outdated Wade–Giles along with the pinyin: Peking and I Ching/I Tsing on p. 86, *passim*, and 46 and Zhao Rugua on p. 67 and even more strange *Ta-tu* on p. 85 and *Dadu* on the pp. 139, *passim*, for 大都 *Dàdū* (modern Beijing).

There is an omission of the last letter ‘i’ in the name of Zhou Qufei 周去非 who was an author of *Lingwai waida* 嶺外代答 / *Representative Answers from the Region beyond the Mountains* (1178) and a subject of the Song Empire (p. 45). Another misspelling is the Old Javanese loanword from Sanskrit for a divine door-keeper, guardian of the gate *dwārapāla* which is spelt as *darwapala* (p. 69, *passim*) or *dharwapala* (p. 315) but it appears in the correct simplified form on p. 89. A misspelling is *Ma Huen* (p. XI) instead of correct *Ma Huan* 馬歡.

Anyway, *Majapahit: Intrigue, betrayal and war in Indonesia's greatest empire* is a beautiful story of the long-forgotten Old Javanese kingdom. It reads easily and naturally, and takes you to a long-vanished land of Hindu and Buddhist priests, strong rulers and cunning ministers, palm wine and bloody intrigues. *Majapahit* comes to life again...

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