

Nevertheless, this is a timely and important study. It carries forward research into Arab history in Southeast Asia some considerable way and should be required reading for students of Malay world history.

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Soul Catcher: Java's Fiery Prince Mangkunagara I, 1726–95. By M.C. Ricklefs. Singapore: NUS Press, 2018. xx+439 pp.

Prince Mangkunagara I (1726–95) is a fascinating figure from Javanese history who was known as a fierce rebel who established a semi-independent principality in Surakarta that still exists today. His formidable military exploits earned him a lasting reputation in Indonesia as a great general. In fact, his awe-inspiring posthumous name was 'Soul Catcher' (*Sambĕr Nyawa*), as he used to 'snatch up' the souls of his enemies, Javanese and Dutch alike, ruthlessly killing them in battle. However, he was not just a fearsome warrior but also a pious Muslim, an enthusiast of Javanese culture and all-around *bon vivant* with a taste for beautiful women and hard liquor. The prolific historian M.C. Ricklefs, who has already demonstrated his exceptional skills with many publications on eighteenth-century Java, now paints a vivid picture of one of the most prominent characters of that period who put his stamp on the direction of Java's history. It is hard to imagine another biographer equally fit for this task, as Ricklefs' intimate knowledge of the contemporaneous primary sources from both the Dutch colonial archives and Javanese narrative poems

is second to none. Ricklefs began his professional academic studies of Java in 1965, writing his doctoral dissertation “Jogjakarta under Sultan Mangkubumi, 1749–1792”, which was published in 1974. Since then, an uninterrupted flow of insightful articles and monographs from his meticulous research has significantly filled many of the gaps in our knowledge of Java’s past. Once again, his latest book makes use of unique Javanese sources that hitherto lay untouched—often not even properly catalogued—in library collections. In short, this highly detailed biography is a magisterial achievement.

Nevertheless, I have a minor quibble, which I think should be brought up all the same, because it concerns one of the most important primary Javanese sources to which Ricklefs refers as no less than “the jewel among sources here” and which he regards as “Mangkunagara I’s autobiographical account” (p. 4). The issue is that of Mangkunagara I’s alleged authorship of the *Sĕrat Babad Pakunĕgaran*, which, however, seems to hinge solely on the Javanese expression *ingkang murwa carita*, interpreted by Ricklefs as meaning “the author of this story” (p. 209). The manuscript has at its end the lines “ingkang murwa carita, Kangjĕng Pangeran Dipati, ingkang saking lalana andon ayuda” (p. 350), which Ricklefs translates as “[t]he author of this story was Pangeran Dipati [Mangkunagara], back from his travels during his time at war” (p. 350). As Ricklefs suggests, this would imply that the prince “was just back, i.e., that this was soon after he settled down as the most senior prince in Surakarta in 1757” (p. 209), hypothesizing that the text “was composed or finished by him shortly after settling in Surakarta in 1757” (p. 350). However, the manuscript mentions at the beginning that it had begun on 17 August 1779, which is on the prince’s fifty-fifth birthday in the Javanese calendar (p. 350).

Concerning the phrase *ingkang murwa carita*, Ricklefs explains that the verb *murwa* has “a wide range of meanings based on the concept of ‘the first’” and that it “may more specifically mean an author in our modern sense” (p. 207). I agree with the first general part of Ricklefs’ statement, but beg to differ concerning his second supposition. It is not unusual to find the expression *ingkang*

murwa carita in the opening stanza of Javanese texts, for example, “Sĕkar Durma ingkang (a?)murwa carita, caritaning prajurit, ing Pakualaman” (*Bramartani*, 26 March 1874), which simply means, “This story opens in the *Durma* metre, a story about the soldiers from the Pakualaman.” A literal translation of the expression *ingkang murwa carita* would be “the one who began the story” or “the one who initiated the story”, which in my opinion is comparable to such traditional Malay terminology as *yang empunya cerita* or *sahibul hikayat*, that is to say, “the owner of the story”. According to conventions of traditional Malay literature, the actual writer who wielded the pen was not necessarily the original author, but rather could have been someone who retold the story of “the owner of the story” which had been delivered orally. Malay *hikayats* (prose narratives) time and again employ such formula as *demikianlah diceritakan oleh orang yang empunya cerita ini* (“this is the way the story goes, according to the owner of the story” or “this is how it was told by the owner of this story”), which could be regarded as a literary device to increase the credibility of the story by referring to the narrator from whom the narrative originated. As Muhammad Haji Salleh (2004, p. 155) puts it, “interestingly sometimes out of respect, the patron, usually the king, is considered the owner of the story, and the writer/composer is merely his servant”. I suspect that something similar may have been the case with the *Sĕrat Babad Pakunĕgaran*; “This story was begun/initiated by Pangeran Dipati [Mangkunagara] when he was back ... war”. If someone wanted to make one’s authorship unmistakably clear, Javanese literary convention can provide such clear-cut alternatives as *ingkang nganggit* (“the one who writes this is...” or “the writer”) or (*ing sun grumpaka* (“I am composing...”).

I can imagine Mangkunagara I as having been a raconteur, but I have doubts about Ricklefs’ rather bold claim that Mangkunagara I was “an author in our modern sense” (p. 207). It seems much more plausible to me that the versifying work was left to professional litterateurs, whereas the princely patron fulfilled the role of prime mover or instigator. Anyhow, this should not necessarily detract

from Ricklefs' assertion that the text was an 'autobiography', but if so, I am thinking of something more in the style of President Soeharto's 1989 autobiography which was translated into English in 1991, *My Thoughts, Words and Deeds: An Autobiography as Told to G. Dwipayana and Ramadhan K.H.*, except that Mangkunagara I's faithful courtiers who, perhaps, transformed their master's words into poetry will forever remain humble ghostwriters.

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Siam and World War I: An International History. By Stefan Hell. Bangkok: River Books, 2017. 320 pp.

The dispatch of a Siamese Expeditionary Force to France in 1918 was a minor sideshow on the fringes of a global tragedy. The force numbered only 1,295 men, arrived only ten weeks before the armistice, was not involved in any fighting, and suffered ten casualties,