



Rocks washed by the sea as Hayam Wuruk probably saw them at the cape of Tanjung Papuma.  
courtesy of author

# In the footsteps of Hayam Wuruk

In the Old Javanese text *Nagarakertagama* or *Desawarnana* (1365), the Buddhist poet Prapanca describes King Hayam Wuruk's journey through East Java in 1359. We followed the royal tracks in a 900-kilometer jeep expedition in June 2005 and discovered that many of the places can still be identified.

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The expedition departed from the court of Majapahit, during the day of the full moon on 8 September 1359. The royal caravan drove in ox-carts, with dozens or possibly hundreds of followers on foot; together they covered over 900 kilometres in two months.

R.A. Kern's overlooked but nearly complete map of Hayam Wuruk's journey (Kern 1927) provided the basic data for our venture. Consultation of 500 Dutch and Indonesian small-scale topographic sheets of the area verified and appended Kern's work. Sixty per cent of the two hundred place names and topographical descriptions mentioned by Prapanca could be identified from maps only.

We determined a geodetical datum for Java and converted geographical coordinates from Dutch topographical maps (1915-1942) into the current standard. Finally, we entered all the geographical coordinates into a GPS satellite navigation system. A few highlights of our findings are sketched on the map below with references to Prapanca's text *Desawarnana* (DW; Brandes 1902).

## Places not found on the maps

A number of Prapanca's toponyms could only be traced in the field. A place called Daleman identified by Kern does not appear on any of the detailed maps (DW 31.1). With the help of local farmers we found Daleman – a small running spring amidst rice fields – along the road between Besuki and Binor. We also were told that an ancient stone statue of a goddess, said to include an inscription, had disappeared from the spot in 2004, suggesting that the place may be of archaeological importance.

The village of Balerah, which was passed by the royal party to the east of the town of Pasuruan, also does not appear on our topographic sheets (DW 21.1). Neighbouring villagers, however, recognized the name and directed us to a tiny five-house settlement on one hectare amidst irrigated rice fields. After 650 years, the inhabitants still refer to the hamlet as Blerah.

Prapanca describes topographical features visible in the Javanese landscape to this day, referring to them by still familiar Javanese terms. For example, after leaving the still-existing village of

Renes, the caravan passed through a forest referred to as Jati Gumelar or 'spread out teak trees' (DW 23.1). The Dutch topographic maps show details of vegetation that locate the forest near the village of Tasnan which my Javanese travel companions recognized as *jati* 'teak'. Prapanca also distinguishes irrigated rice-fields (*sawah*) and non-irrigated fields (*tegal*) which are also marked on maps. We were able to identify the road that Hayam Wuruk took to the city of Singhasari from the poet's reference to *tegal* (DW 38.2).

Prapanca's terminology may include both toponyms and geographical descriptions, and some distinctions can only be verified in the field. For example, Pakalyan is the name of a river, but the Old Javanese word *pakalyan* also denotes a 'river-bed'. As the riverbed itself is jumbled with rocks, the royal party must have travelled along the road following the river of Pekalen (Robson 1995:115).

A second example: the Javanese understanding of the word *jurang* is more elaborate than just 'ravine'. My Javanese companions showed me that it may also refer to a river running through a ravine but crossed by a bridge. Following Kern's map, we passed over modern bridges spanning impressive ravines. The royal party must have traversed the four *jurang dalem* or 'deep ravines' of the river of Sampean (Robson 1995:112). Such crossings would have required bridges spanning 50 meters strong enough to carry ox-carts. Another such ravine is *Bobo Runting* which literally means 'mouldered and in tatters' (DW 21.2). We identified it as the bridge crossing the river of Sawaran near the village of Juranglor, literally 'North of the Ravine'. Today, piles support the concrete bridge. There is no other road that the caravan could have taken, and

descending the steep ravine is impossible. Thus, in 1359, the wooden or bamboo bridge may have been in a mouldering state but it could not have been entirely in tatters. Such bridges challenge our archaeological imagination. Close to this location, Prapanca's topographical reference *pasawahan* or 'area of irrigated rice fields' suddenly appeared before us (DW 21.2). On both sides of the descending road that leads from the ravine of Bobo Runting, *sawah* extended into the plains as far as the eye could see.

## Medieval tourists

The poet continues with the description of a pleasure trip of Hayam Wuruk to the shore of the Indian Ocean. This is the only part of the journey not included on Kern's map (Bullough 2004:19). Prapanca did not attend the trip (DW 22.4-5), but he versified the words of someone else, expressed in Robson's translation as follows (1995:41):

*Departing from there the King came directly to Kuta Bacok where he disported himself on the shore, Absorbed in looking at the rocks engulfed by waves with showers of spray resembling rain.*

The unusual term *bacok*, literally meaning 'chopped-off', appears on one of our Dutch topographic maps as the name of the village Gunung Bacok. We found it near a stone quarry to which several families of the village have long held the male hereditary right of exploration. The excavated boulders are sold as house fundamentals, offering an obvious explanation for the etymology of the village name. In the 14th century, there was a hill with a *kuta bacok* 'chopped-off peak'. Today, after 650 years of excavating, it has been reduced into a *gunung gacok* 'chopped-off hill'. From here, it is eight kilometres to the white beaches at the

cape of Tanjung Papuma, nowadays a small tourist resort. The rocks jutting up close to the beach remain as Hayam Wuruk may have seen them (see photograph).

Prapanca's (DW 32-33) lyrical description of the Siwaite forest hermitage of Sagara is aptly expressed in the following excerpts from Robson's translation (1995:46-47). My additional interpretations are in brackets [...]:

*When the King departed to go on, it was the forest hermitage of Sagara that he headed for....*

*It was splendid and extraordinary, in the midst of the wooded mountains, its layout bewilderingly beautiful....*

*The bwat ranten pavilion bore several paintings of stories and had a base of stone, polished and high; Flowers of the nagakusuma tree lay thick in the yard, the [shore-]side[s] (tira) of which was [were] lined with a wall. ...*

*And all the hermits and especially the nuns, young and old, were virtuous and clever....*

*The young and pretty hermit-girls remained behind pining every one.*

The toponym Sagara is geographically associated with the area around Ranu Segaran – literally 'lake of Segaran'. The region comprises a total of five crater lakes with a diameter of 750 meters in a remote and wooded area that retains its poetic beauty. The yard's wall possibly stood on the shore (*tira*) of a lake. Zoetmulder (1982:1504) has suggested that *ranten* might be the Old Javanese high speech form of the word *ranu* 'lake'. Therefore, in combination with the current toponym 'lake of Segaran' and the reference to shore (*tira*), the Old Javanese *bwat ranten* probably denotes a 'lake-pavilion'. Furthermore, the female hermits must have had access to water for drinking and sanitation purposes. Of the five lakes, we found out from villagers that only the water of the lake of Ranu Segaran is potable. Therefore, the geographical location of the hermitage may be narrowed down to the lake shore of Ranu Segaran itself. As we should interpret Prapanca's language within the context and dimensions of traditional Javanese and Balinese architecture, the *bwat ranten* pavilion was likely an open verandah consisting of bamboo and wood on a base of stones with a palm-fibred roof. The hypothesis is finally supported by the existence of several big black stones worked by

human hands on the southern shore of Ranu Segaran, in front of a terraced garden; this site may well indicate the location of the *bwat ranten*.

At the end of the journey, the royal caravan headed for the court of Majapahit. Prapanca, however, turned off for Rabut Tugu to where his own family lived in *pahyangan*, 'the area of worship' (DW 59.1). Kern's identification of Rabut Tugu with the village of Sumbertugu appears well founded. A farmer of the settlement of Sumbertugu showed us a stone pillar on a venerated spot amidst the maize fields. Locals refer to the location as Pepunden Tugu or 'sacred land with pillar', which is synonymous with Rabut Tugu. We left the pillar untouched for the archaeologists.

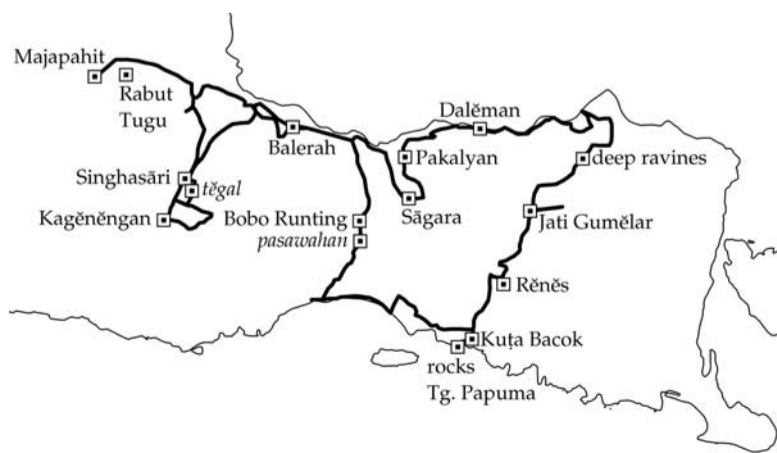
Much remains to be done on the geographical and archaeological aspects of Hayam Wuruk's journey. With all Dutch cartographic material of Java now freely available on the website of the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam ([www.kit.nl](http://www.kit.nl)), and because GPS technology is increasingly affordable, further fieldwork is within easy reach. Finally, archaeological research – and funding – is urgent to prevent the reduction of the subject to historical geography. ◀

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**Acknowledgement:** The author would like to express words of gratitude to the Bupati of Sragen, Mr. H. Untung Wiyono, who kindly sponsored our expedition: matur sembah nuwun!

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The reconstructed tracks of Hayam Wuruk's journey through East Java in AD 1359.

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