An unholy brew: alcohol in pre-Islamic Java

Old Javanese literary and epigraphic records suggest that a number of alcoholic beverages were known in Java before 1500, and fermented and distilled drinks were used in secular as well as in ritual contexts. Alcohol influenced social, cultural, religious and political life in pre-Islamic Java in many ways: from the ordinary to the unexpected. Fermented beverages were represented by several types of palm wine, rice beer, sugar cane wine, liana-based intoxicating wines, tuber-based beers and a number of fruit wines. Contrary to an established view, distilled beverages were introduced to Java only by the late 13th century, most probably through the Mongol or Chinese agency.