

Marieke Bloembergen and Martijn Eickhoff, *The Politics of Heritage in Indonesia: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, 324 pp., ISBN 9781108614757).

The *Politics of Heritage in Indonesia* is a comprehensive, detailed and informative book on heritage formation in colonial and post-colonial Indonesia.<sup>1</sup> It builds on recent work relating to Indonesian heritage, such as the *Sites, Bodies, Stories* program led by Susan Legêne (of which the authors Marieke Bloembergen and Martijn Eickhoff were participants), but also makes a valuable contribution to a growing body of literature on the relationship between archaeology, the state, and how we make meaning from the material remains of the past.

Bloembergen and Eickhoff are at the forefront of this turn towards a mobile approach to understanding heritage formation, in which the traces of objects and sites, and of course the people who engage with them, are exhaustively and meticulously mapped across time and place. These encounters can be hugely influential, changing not only the sites themselves – such as with the removal of key objects from Javanese temples in the late nineteenth century – but also how we understand, value and manage them. This book captures the value of such an approach, and makes a convincing argument that context matters.

Bloembergen and Eickhoff explain their mobile methodology in a substantive introduction. This is followed by seven discrete yet connected chapters that each centre around specific case studies and are organised by rough chronology.

Chapter One examines two site interventions on Java in the first half of the nineteenth century, at Borobudur and at the great mosque of Demak. This was a period marked by regime change and shifting loyalties, which stimulated a new focus on the past, in particular a Hindu-Buddhist past. This conundrum – the evocation of a Hindu-Buddhist past in a country inhabited by the world's largest Muslim population – is one to which the authors return repeatedly throughout the book. Borobudur has become ubiquitous in any discussion of Indonesian heritage formation, but deservedly so. It is a site that continues to shed light on the politics of heritage and the way sites are used by different people for different purposes.

The second chapter continues the focus on Borobudur, situating it within global knowledge networks and paying particularly close attention to King Chulalongkorn's visit to the site in 1896. This chapter is distinguished by a remarkable source unearthed by the authors: a guest book associated with Borobudur for the period 1888 to 1898. Their analysis of the guestbook

reveals Borobudur as a site where people came together to visit (and to be seen to be visiting), to recreate, to judge each other, and to observe – and sometimes remove – objects. The guestbook also reveals mechanisms of exclusion, dominated as it is by European visitors and marked by a complete absence of non-elite Javanese visitors.

The following two chapters are dedicated to Majapahit and the material remains of the Javanese state that flourished in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries around Trowulan. These chapters focus on nineteenth and twentieth century interpretations of Majapahit by a diverse range of interested parties: colonial administrators such as Thomas Stamford Raffles, Javanese aristocrats like the regent Kromodjojo Adinegoro IV, academic scholars like Jan Brandes, Frederik Bosch, Poerbatjaraka, Slametmuljana and Cornelis Christiaan Berg, late nineteenth century Javanese modernists like the authors of the *Serat Dermagandhul* and contributors to the journal *Bramartani*, early twentieth century Javanese revivalist groups like the Budi Utomo and the Majapahit Society, and Indonesian nationalists Sanusi Pané and Muhammad Yamin (both of Sumatran origin) in the mid-twentieth century. Their focus was philological evidence, primarily the *Deśavarṇana* (a royal chronicle written in 1365 by a cleric in the Majapahit court), the *Pararaton* (a sixteenth century compilation of historical materials pertaining to Majapahit), and a corpus of inscriptions. Temple and wall structures, statues and other portable artefacts were also important, but this archaeological evidence was interpreted through the textual lens of the *Deśavarṇana*.

These Majapahit chapters are essential reading for historians. They explain why Majapahit is key to understanding Javanese antiquity (142), and why it has been seen by nationalists as the proto-site of the new Indonesian nation. But more than that: these chapters demonstrate how heritage sites and objects are interpreted anew by each generation. In the case of Majapahit, these diverse interpretations took place since at least the early nineteenth century within the context of the major political and cultural debates at that time. In the Raffles era these debates related to religion, while in the 1870s the focus was on the clash within Javanese society between Western and Islamic modernism. The 1920s saw ‘professional’ academics seeking to assert their authority over amateurs, and by the 1950s the focus had shifted to internal political ambitions that sought to project Indonesia’s power to an international stage. By showcasing the diversity of these interpretations and how they have shifted over time, these chapters play a valuable role in untangling how and why Majapahit has been such a potent source for reimagining the nation.

From here we venture beyond Java, to the prehistoric cultures and historic sites of South Sumatra. In the fifth chapter Bloembergen and Eickhoff

1 Disclosure: Marieke Bloembergen examined the author’s PhD thesis.

reveal the extent of colonial violence behind the presence of objects in museum collections, and the ways in which archaeological interventions were connected to the violent expansion of the colonial state beyond Java. Long before they were appropriated within colonial archaeological infrastructure, archaeological heritage sites and objects had a clear function in local and regional society, including in Sumatra. Unlike in Java, however, local elites in Sumatra tended to play only a secondary role in colonial archaeological hierarchies.

In Chapter Six the authors look at both Javanese and non-Javanese sites during the early twentieth century, a period characterised by war, regime change and a national awakening. Discussion focuses on the temple of Siva at Prambanan, and also moves outside of Java to examine the relationship between heritage formation and violence in Bali, specifically the mass ritual suicide (*puputan*) in the early twentieth century by Balinese seeking to avoid Dutch subjugation. But the authors also make use of a well-travelled fifteenth century porcelain vase, using it to examine the development of archaeology and the Chinese past in the Netherlands Indies. By looking at the social history of this vase, and the context within which it travelled from China to Halmahera and later to the Netherlands, the authors provide a valuable demonstration of the mobile approach to heritage formation in action.

The final substantive chapter returns us to Borobudur, and addresses Japanese interest in the site – which, contrary to expectation, pre-dated the Japanese occupation of Indonesia – as well as the post-war policies of UNESCO. The authors propose that anxiety over heritage loss has profoundly influenced cultural heritage dynamics in post-colonial Indonesia. As they demonstrate, examining the ongoing heritage interventions on Borobudur has the power to reveal how national and international parties reckon with difficult, violent and colonial pasts.

This mobile approach to heritage formation in colonial and post-colonial Indonesia concludes with a brief epilogue, in which the authors return to many of the sites in the book. In doing so, their aim is to address two key problems with how people, ‘within and outside Indonesia, have been engaging with Indonesia’s seen or unseen pasts’ (268). The first of these problems, as they articulate, is that heritage sites can either conceal or shed light on difficult pasts. The second problem relates to the conundrum raised at the beginning of the book: that of Indonesian Islam as heritage. The authors’ puzzlement over the exclusion of Indonesian Islam within global heritage discussions is a recurring theme, and one they address directly in its final pages. Contrary to the tendency to characterise Borobudur, Majapahit, and other major Hindu-Buddhist sites as ‘dead’, and therefore ripe for the projection of personal and national ambitions, the authors argue the age of such sites renders them more meaningful, and imbues them with power, in the eyes of many Indonesians. They matter to the people who have used and continue to use them – perhaps not in the way experts, archaeologists

and historians had anticipated or envisaged, but in a way that continues to animate them in complex and sustaining ways.

It is accurate to state that the book is Java-centric. However, this Java-centrism must be understood in terms of the availability of source material, itself connected to the activities and focus of the Dutch archaeological services during the colonial period. This in fact is one of the book's great strengths, namely its deep engagement with a huge corpus of Dutch archival material. As Edmund Edwards McKinnon has observed in his 2020 review of this book, there are occasional 'wrinkles' relating to dates and names, such as a statement (106) that Surabaya surrendered to British forces in August 1813 (when other evidence points to the correct date being August 1811) and the occasional reference (3) to Raffles as a Lieutenant-General rather than a Lieutenant-Governor.<sup>2</sup> These occasional inaccuracies notwithstanding, this book makes a valuable contribution to the Indonesian Studies literature. Equally important, however, is the contribution it makes to the growing literature on the politics of heritage. Through their mobile, case study approach, Bloembergen and Eickhoff have advanced the field and demonstrated not only the value but the necessity of including Indonesia within global heritage discussions about the use of the past in the present.

Natali Pearson, The University of Sydney

2 Edmund Edwards McKinnon, 'The Politics of Heritage in Indonesia: a cultural history (Asian Connections)' by M. Bloembergen and M. Eickhoff, Cambridge, Cambridge University

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