

# *Mountains and Caves in Art: New Finds of Terracota Miniatures in Kudus, Central Java*

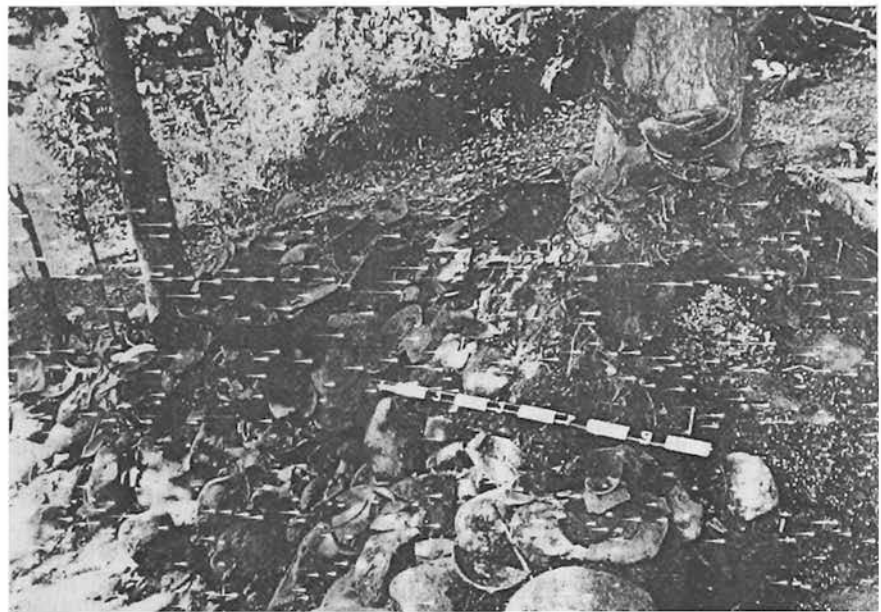
*by Sri Soetjami Satari*

Early in 1978 an archaeological team of the National Research Centre of Archaeology was sent on an expedition to the north coast of Central Java. They came back with a report that they had found many terracotta fragments in the village of Jurang, about 10 km. north of the town of Kudus. As a result, another team was sent to undertake an additional survey and excavation at Jurang, hoping to find the clue to the identity of the finds. Here follows the account of the research undertaken during a period of two weeks.

## **The Site and the Finds**

Kudus, the capital town of the regency, was once the bustling centre of Moslem religious activities. Derived from the word *al-kuds* meaning holy or pure<sup>1</sup>, Kudus is, according to Poerbatjaraka, the only town in Central Java bearing an Arabic name. However, Kudus must already have existed before the Moslem period<sup>2</sup>. Some of its archaeological remains still show traits of Hindu influence, such as the minaret of Kudus with its decoration of pottery dishes and the winged gateway.

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*Site of finds at Jurang Kudus: earthenwares are found half-buried in the ground.*

The 14th century Nagarakartagama mentions names of *simas* belonging to the Majapahit domains, among which is the *sima Suci*<sup>3</sup> which also means pure or clear. Some of the place-names may refer to Central Java. Since none of the names mentioned, including Suci, can yet be identified, even though Kudus and Suci have the same meaning, it would be rash to assume that Suci and Kudus are one.



Other towns in the area still retain their Old Javanese names such as Demak, Lasem, and Juwana. A thorough investigation of the geographical names mentioned in the Nagarakartagama is still to be done.

The terracotta miniatures are found on the slope of a hill which people called the *punden* (holy place) of Pundisari and is still considered to be sacred. On special occasions, such as a wedding celebration or when someone has just recovered from a serious illness, people make offerings in the form of earthenware plates or pots with covers containing coins and flowers. Thus, with the passage of time, a huge pile of earthen plates, half buried in the ground, was formed on the slope beneath a tree, near the place where the miniatures were found.

Despite the promising surrounding, the results of the excavation proved to be very disappointing. Only a very small number of unidentified potsherds were dug out from the five excavation boxes measuring 2 x 2 metres. The team became convinced that the miniatures had actually originated elsewhere. From information gathered from the eldest man in the village, it came to light that they were transported from the surroundings of a nearby mosque which was rebuilt in 1940. The peculiar offering of plates also seemed to be a tradition at the place where a saint called Kyai Sukun was entombed.

About 90 large and small fragments of terracotta have been excavated and all are shaped in the form of hollow mountains or hillocks and made of bricks carved with caves and small holes. The following pieces are the most interesting finds in Jurang:

1. A fragment 37 cm. long, 33 cm. high and 19 cm. thick depicts a mountainous scenery. The large mountain top has collapsed, but two hill tops still remain, standing side by side. The base of the hills is decorated with a pair of caves, topped by a stylized intricately carved kala head. This kala rests on a bed of rocks indicated by small holes on the surface; behind the rocks, on the



*Above : Terracotta depicting hills with floral decoration.  
Below : Terracotta decorated with stylized kala head.*

body of the mountains, incised lines are carved to denote creepers.

2. A fragment (length 28 cm., height 23 cm., 8.5 cm. thick) represents oblong cave-openings which decorate the base of the mountains, framed by straight stemmed curly floral top. The mountain top has the form of a stylized elephant head, beautifully carved. More than five fragments decorated in this manner have been found.



3. A fragment (23 cm. long, 25 cm. high, 24 cm. thick) represents a scenery of small mountain peaks. A five-pillared hanging structure on a platform seemingly squeezed between the mountains is carved on the slope. It has a square roof with diamond-shaped tiles, but only the frontsides are carved. The four ridges of the roof with their uptilted ends are decorated with rib-formed ornate decorations as we still see in Kudus today.

These five-pillared structures are sometimes depicted on Hindu temple reliefs<sup>4</sup> and sometimes used as decorations on mosques built in the transition period such as Mantingan, Sendangan and Sendangduwur<sup>5</sup>. They represent a sacred building.

4. Another fragment shows traces of a platform with six pillars. Unlike the five-pillared structure, this one denotes a living quarter or a profane building<sup>6</sup>.

5. An interesting fragment forms a part of a side corner where a single mountain is depicted: two sides of the base are hollowed to represent caves. The caves are not carved at the base of the central mountain, but at the base of two hills, having respectively the form of a sitting owl or bull (part of the head is damaged) and an unidentified animal sitting *dos-a-dos* entwining their tails together.

6. Naturally shaped animals also enliven the scenery. A deer is seen sitting on top of a hill and another fragment shows a sporting dog leaping up toward the bushes.

Although thoroughly fired, not all of them are carved on the entire surface. A part of the terracotta which is supposed to be hidden from the public is sometimes deliberately left plain, or is left unfinished except for some incised outlines.

Based on these descriptions, we can conclude that:

1. All miniatures depict mountainous scenery or *gunungan* decorated with stylized floral patterns.
2. Parts of the *gunungan* consisting of hills or hilltops are sometimes shaped into animal forms, such as an elephant's head, a lion and other fauna which usually frame a cave, thus replacing the floral motifs.
3. The reliefs of fauna which are detached from their decorative function and depicted as living creatures in the woods are shaped in their natural forms.
4. The five-pillared structure represents a hermitage, whereas the six-pillared pavilion depicts a resting place.

The questions that these evoke are: when were these terracotta miniatures produced, what influenced their form and style and

what was their purpose? The answers require a deep penetration of the cultural and spiritual life of ancient Indonesia.

### Cosmic Mountains

From the beginning of the first century, Indonesian culture has been exposed to Indian influence. Indian religious systems and values merged and fitted smoothly into the already formed Indonesian community. This influence extended also to other forms of religious expression such as language, architecture and the arts. The adaptation of the Indian culture in each region occurred in different ways. Central Java for instance displayed a mastery in handling and modifying Indic tradition and styles<sup>7</sup>, whereas East Java showed more indigenous traits.

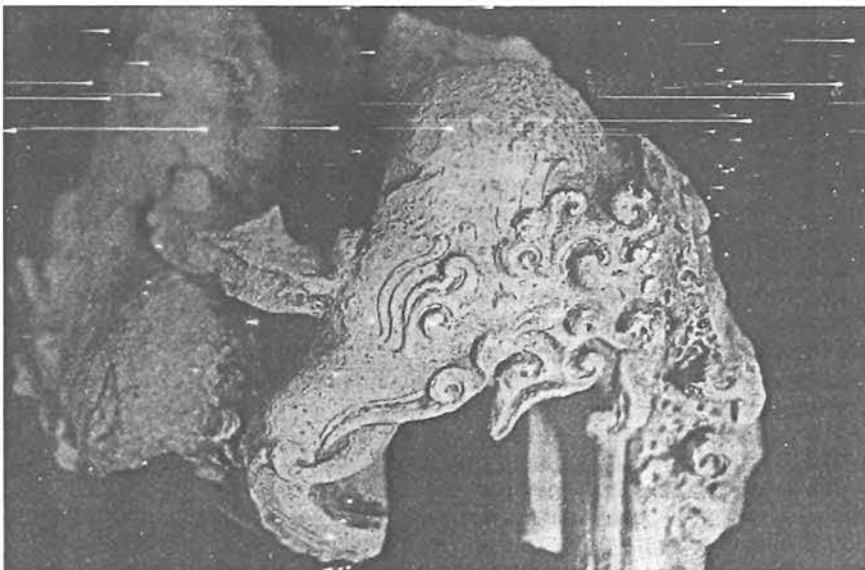
One common feature found throughout Asia was the importance placed on the role of the mountain which symbolized the cosmic mountain. The Hindus believed that the axis of the universe is centered around the cosmic mountain, called the Mahameru, on top of which stood the palace of Brahma. Indra, lord of the heavenly beings, had his grove on Mount Sitanta, on the slope of the Himala-



*Left : A stylized elephant's head and a fragment of a pavilion. Right : A "hanging hermitage" looking over the hills*

ya, whereas different classes of gods had their abode in rocks and cave houses. The caves were also places of worship, retreat and congregation<sup>8</sup>. The ancient Chinese thought the earth to be square and flat, marked by five divine mountains, placed at the four corners of the earth, and one at the centre. The gods were thought to walk on their summits<sup>9</sup>. The Cambodian believed that the mountain was the axis of the universe. It was symbolized by a temple built on top of a natural or a constructed mountain<sup>10</sup>.

The Indian tradition regarding the cosmic mountain underwent some modification in Indonesia. The *candi* became a symbol of the cosmic mountain as well as the seat of the gods. A special form of the Mahameru with either five or nine peaks was much preferred. There even existed the legend on the transportation of the Mahameru to Java, the top of which became the nine-topped Mount Penanggungan<sup>11</sup>. A smaller replica of the





An amrta container with a mountain-top shaped cover from Blambangan, East Java

nine-topped mountain was found at the bathing-place of Jalatunda. It had the form of a central spout surrounded by four medium-sized smaller spouts. Between the small spouts, four other still smaller columns were placed crosswise<sup>12</sup>

Mountain - shaped objects used for religious purposes were also found. In China, there was the typical 'hill' jar, a burial pot from the Han period<sup>13</sup> having a cover representing the magic mountain. Religious significance expressed in arts and crafts can also be perceived, for instance, in the bronze water-jars and bronze ewers dating from the Singhasari period<sup>14</sup>. The water-jars consist of a globular body and a mountain - shaped lid decorated with rocks, whereas the ewer or the water vessel has a lid with many tiers suggesting the replica of Mount Mahameru. A *naga* spout and rock motifs complete the ornamentations.

A similar example is provided by a terracotta amrta container from Blambangan, East Java. The body of the pot is decorated with hillocks and lotus plants shaped into five stylized garuda heads and with the figure of a hermit sitting in front of a cave. A mountain with many peaks tops the whole piece.

Mountain, rock and vegetation motifs were also a much preferred ornamentation of other objects, such as dagger sheaths, batiks, the *gunungan* for wayang performances, etc<sup>15</sup>

The religious value attached to certain kind of art objects seemed gradually to decrease at the onset of the Majapahit period. A terracotta miniature from Trowulan depicts a landscape with a hermit sitting in front of his hermitage and awaiting the arrival of a visitor. The latter is approaching through a path leading up to the hermitage. Round stones and trees adorn the scenery. The square base and the hollow interior is similar to those objects from Kudus. This piece must have graced some nobleman's abode, though. The sacred character of the artifact is obviously less when compared with the amrta vessels.

#### Majapahit Art

The period of the Majapahit empire corresponded with the bloom of the second phase of classical art when indigenous characteristics prevailed in architecture, sculpture, literature and other arts. It also witnessed the flourishing of 'miniature' art. Artists created small objects made of stone or terracotta, shaping them into figurines of men, animals, shrines and houses similar to those depicted on the terracotta of Kudus. Sometimes they were modelled in a very lively fashion.

In the Indus valley, where many terracotta figurines have been found, the objects were generally used for worship<sup>16</sup>. Terracotta figurines and miniature shrines and houses were used in China as burial gifts<sup>17</sup>. This seemed also to be the tradition in several places in East Java and Bali. In the surroundings of the stupa of Sumberawa in Malang and the cave of Siti Jedog, Blitar, both in East Java, for instance, were found terracotta figurines which appeared to be used as offerings for deceased persons<sup>18</sup>. In Bali, people still offer figurines made of flour and terracotta during temple festivals. However, this prac-

tice has gradually declined, and the figurines have become mere decorative art objects.

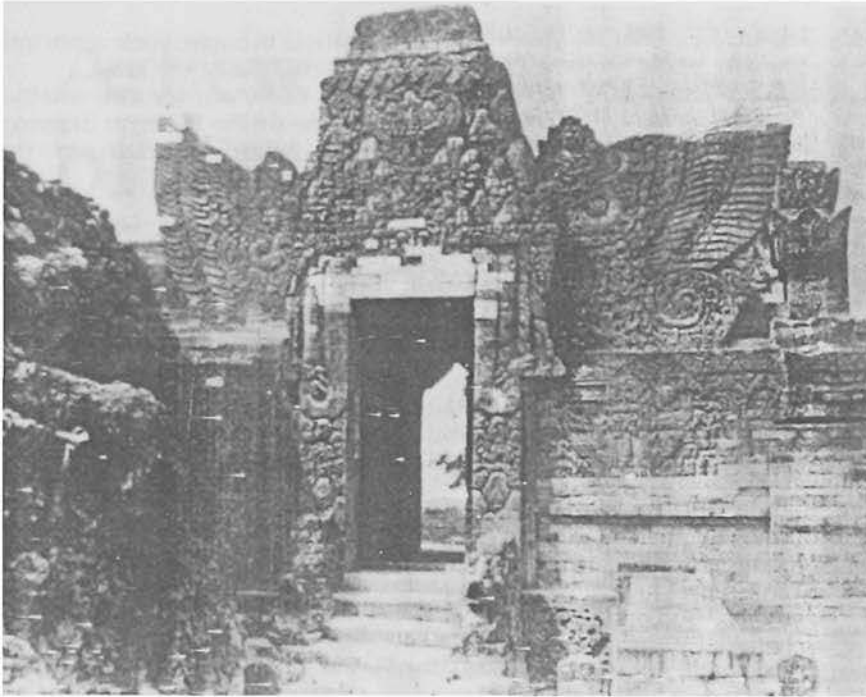
However, no painting of the period survives<sup>20</sup>. It is plausible that the absence of painting is due to the perishable materials that were used. There are, nevertheless, prehistoric paintings still in existence in other areas of Indonesia, such as the cave and rock paintings in South Sulawesi and West Irian<sup>21</sup>. Paintings from the Islamic period known as *wayang beber* or scrolls depicting puppet play stories also exist.

*Kalangwan* is a song in praise of nature<sup>19</sup>. The beauty of nature has always attracted painters and poets not only of ancient Indonesia but of the world. We have ample proof of the existence of poems or *kakawins* from the classical (Hindu-Buddhist) period in which the poets lavishly glorify the beauty of nature in their songs.

The old Javanese poets used to roam the country-side with their writing instruments, consisting of the *tanah* (a kind of writing slate) and the *karas* (a board or tablet). In praising the beauty of the landscape, they frequently alluded to it as being in human or animal forms. Sometimes, they used the reverse allusion: the animals appeared as vegetation. In the *Arjuna Wiwaha*,

A terracotta incense burner from Camara, Ceribon





*The winged gateway at Sendangduwur, Lamongan, East Java*

for instance, the mountain was described as an ascetic wearing a robe of clouds and a large cap resembling a breadfruit tree<sup>22</sup>. The charms of nature were not only sung by the poets, they were also carved on temple reliefs and sculptures such as at Prambanan, Panataran and other temples.

The tradition persisted in the ensuing period, when Islam religion and culture became integrated into the existing societies. Islam did not bring about much change in the cultural life of the people. Although mosques started to be built in the coastal area in the sixteenth century, the builders of these religious edifices still employed sculptors who used to do the carving of the temples. It was, therefore, not surprising to find several parts of a mosque or a tomb decorated with motifs which were popular in the previous period.

The stone medallions on the walls of the old mosque and cemetery of Mantingan, about 12 km. south of Japara, Semarang, are decorated with reliefs depicting mountainous scenery with fauna, flora and pavilions which remind

us of Trowulan. Since orthodox Islam forbids the representation of living beings, only the plants retain their natural form. The animals are depicted in a stylized form and seem to mingle with the foliage surrounding them<sup>23</sup>

Similar decorations are found at the cemetery of Sendangduwur, Tuban, East Java, where they are carved on wood. Reminiscent of classical art are the winged gateways, which symbolize a flying garuda and at the same time a mountain and a tree of life<sup>24</sup>

The art of Majapahit expanded along the north coast of Java, where it is called the art of *pasisir* (coastal area)<sup>25</sup>, and so similar artistic traits are found in Trowulan, Sendangduwur, Tuban, Kudus, Japara, Ceribon, and Banten. In the palace of Kasepuhan in Cirebon, for instance, we find a sculpture of a mountain of rocks as decoration. Sunyaragi has a rock garden where the rocks in some places are shaped like an elephant.

The elephant-rock which slightly resembles the elephant-shaped hills

on the relief of Kudus is also found on a terracotta incense-burner from Ceribon. The space between its legs are filled with reliefs of plants on hillocks. The legs look more like lotus tubers from which the elephant has pulled out a blooming lotus stalk.

#### **Date and Function of Terracotta Miniatures**

Before considering further the functional significance of the terracottas, we will place them in the sequence of art history in accordance with their physical features. On account of the landscapes depicted, adorned with pavilions, mountains and caves which are shaped into an animal or other creature form, the terracottas could be considered a continuation of the Majapahit art. The tradition must date from the high tide of the Old Javanese literary life, when the deer was inseparable from the hermitage's life and the dog from the hunting scenes in the woods.

For comparison, we will refer to some lines mentioned in Old Javanese kakawins, which range in date from the tenth to the eighteenth centuries. The relief of the 'hanging hermitage' which seems to be squeezed between the mountains will fit nicely into the following canto (sorandaka: 1939:1:5):

*Liwat ing margasengkamanggih  
pajajaran/lilangungang kaaksi/ri  
wijil ing arka/ri agra ning parwata...*

Its English translation follows:

Leaving the steep path behind, upon a recluse they came/how beautiful he looked, like peeping down on his surroundings it seemed/at sunrise/(when the sun) emerged (behind) the mountain-top...

The Arjuna Wiwaha (1926:11:2) also mentioned the existence of a resting pavilion: *alas katemu sang-graheng tamuy an amalaku jawuh tanggaling kapat*<sup>27</sup> translated as: In the woods they found a resting pavilion provided for the guests who might be caught in the rain while travelling in the rainy season.

Elephant-shaped rocks were common features in the kakawins, as shown in canto XV:9 of the same

poem: ... *ring mapasir mapandan akarangsliman asemu leyep tininghalan*.<sup>28</sup> The translation follows ... the beach, the pandanus shrubs, and the rocks resembling elephants were nearly too hazy to behold.

Artificial mountains and caves were also known by poets as described in the Smaradahana, canto IV: 16: *Kulwan-kidulnya gainaga linurah hawanya. Endah gunungna, ginawe minaha guhanya*<sup>29</sup>

It is translated as follows: in the southwest part was laid out a dry ricefield with a cleaned-up path. The (artificial) mountains and caves being beautifully shaped.

Since some animals are depicted in a natural manner, which Islam would never allow, the miniatures must have originated from the classical period. Some of their characteristics, such as the floral elements, are closest to the art of the sixteenth century Mantingan. Hence, it can be concluded that they were made in the late classical or the transitional period, the approximate date being the late fifteenth century.

This corresponds with the fact that the site of Jurang lies only about 12 km. south of Kudus, where the Islamic culture flourished in the sixteenth century, and only a few kilometres north-east of Demak, the first Moslem kingdom to succeed the Hindu kingdom of Majapahit.

Just as the Majapahit period miniatures depicting a mountain became a more decorative element for homes and other structures afterwards, the terracottas of Kudus must have also served a similar function. They were put inside a niche or against a wall to show only the ornamented part. The gunungan or miniature mountain, at first a symbol of the holy cosmic mountain, became a mere ornamentation, the dream of a poet made concrete by the hand of an artist.

#### Notes

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2. Jasper, J.E. "Het stadje Kudus en zijn oude kunst" *Nederlandsch Indie — Oud en Nieuw. 7e jaargang afl 1, 1922, pp 3 ff.*
3. Pigeud, Th. *Java in the fourteenth century. Vol. I* canto 78: 4:3, 1960. p.60. Here Suci is mentioned together with the simas Nadi, Abhaya, Tiyah, Pakuwukan, and Kiyal.
4. Galetin, Th.P. *Houtbouw op OostJavaansche tempelreliëfs*. 1936. Hoofdstuk IV pp.
5. Ibid. The diamond-shaped rooftiles resembling those depicted at Sendangduwur, pp 120 ff.
6. Ibid. op. cit. pp. 121 ffpl VI.
7. Bernet Kempers, A.J. *Ancient Indonesian Art*. 1959. p12.
8. Kramrisch, Stella. *The Hindu Temple*. 1956. pp. 169-170.
9. Schafer, Edward H. *Ancient China*. 1974. pp.102-103.
10. Lee Sherman, E. *A History of Far Eastern Art*. pp.229-230.
11. Bernet Kempers, A.J. op.cit, p.20-21.
12. Bosch, F.D.K., *Selected Studies in Indonesian Archaeology*. 1961. pp 51-52.
13. Lee Sherman, E. op.cit. p.67 p.170.
14. Fontein, J; Soekmono, R; Sulaiman, S. *Seserian Indonesia Purba* 1971. pp.156-157. plts. 70 and 73.
15. Hoop, A.N.J. Th. a Th. van der, *Indonesische Siermotieven*. 1949, pp.232-289;
16. Lee Sherman, E. op.cit. pp. 18 ff.
17. Ibid op.cit. pp. 18ff.
18. Satari, Soetjani "Some notes on terracotta objects in Indonesia" . Paper presented at the VIth IAHA conference in Jog-yakarta, 1974. Unpublished.
19. An elaborate treatise on this subject-matter has been dealt with by Zoetmulder, P.J. *Kalangwan: A survey of Old Javanese Literature*, 1974.
20. We only know from the *Kidung Sunda* (Berg, C.C. 1927b) how King Hayam Wuruk of Majapahit fell in love with the Sundanese princess after one of his court artists brought back a portrait he painted of the later.
21. We know not for sure whether some of the Balinese drawings on lontar dated from this period.
22. *Arjuna Wiwaha*, canto II : 1.
23. See plates 17,18 and 20 of the *Oudheidkundig Verslag* 1930.
24. Tjandrasmita, Uka, *Sepintas mengenai peninggalan kepurbakalaan Islam di Pesisir Utara Jawa* 1976.p.6.
25. Ibid. "Art de Majapahit et Art du Pasisir". *Archipel* 9 1975. pp.93 ff.
26. Berg, Dr.E.J. van den, *De val van Sora*. Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor de taal-land-en volkenkunde van Nederlandsch Indie.
27. Purbatjaraka (Lesya). Dr.R.Ng, *Arjuna Wiwaha*. Tekst en Vertaling 1926.
28. Ibid. op. cit.
29. Ibid. *Smaradahana*. Bibliotheca Javanica, 1931.

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