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# Mount Merapi in drawings and paintings

## A dynamic reflection of nature, 1800-1930

GHAMAL SATYA MOHAMMAD

### ABSTRACT

Mount Merapi in Central Java is one of the world's most studied volcanoes. The frequent eruptions of this volcano and the densely populated areas on its slopes make Merapi particularly important to scholars of the natural and social sciences. Considerable attention has been devoted to contemporary aspects of this volcano, including research into forecasting and monitoring possible volcanic activity and eruptions. However, research investigating artistic representations of Merapi in a historical context, particularly local artworks referring to how people responded to a natural hazard such as a volcanic eruption, is still rare. In this paper, I explore how artists in the period 1800-1930 have portrayed the volcanic activities in their drawings and paintings. Various historical data, including newspapers, reports, and records of volcanic eruptions, will be used to help interpret the accuracy of the paintings which depict Merapi at different moments in time. I argue that artists in the period under investigation were acutely aware of Merapi's volcanic activities and depicted these in their drawings and paintings, because of the influence of science, which invokes interest in Merapi, landscape art, and a sense of humanitarianism. Their artworks are dynamic visual historical reflections of Merapi which testify to the power and beauty of nature.

### KEYWORDS

Drawings; paintings; Merapi; volcanic activities; Java; Indonesia; volcano; landscape.

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INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The depiction of mountains in the visual arts is a common practice in Java and in other parts of the Indo-Pacific World. As early as the Old Javanese Period (seventh-eleventh century), artists in Java had already captured and interpreted the image of the sacred mountain in sculptures and temple architecture (Asti Wright 1994: 35-49). This “enchantment with the mountain” is attributed to the spiritual and religious beliefs the people associated with the mountains of Java (Wright 1994; Claire Holt 1967). Another reason underlying this spiritual enchantment is the geological formation of this island. The volcanoes of the World Database of the Smithsonian Institution’s Global Volcanism Program show that thirty-six “Holocene volcanoes” in Java have remained active over the last 10,000 years and have had major impacts on the people and the environment (Global Volcanism Program 2013). On account of their frequent eruptions and distinct morphology, the volcanic mountains in Java “stand out” in the environment. They determine the ecological character of an area, as their presence affects soil fertility, mineral deposits composition as well as assemblages of flora-fauna (Payson D. Sheets and Donald K. Grayson 1979: 2). Braving the inevitable consequences of volcanic hazards, people have also altered the environment in the volcanic plains by developing an intensive agricultural society. In the nineteenth century, visual artworks depicting Merapi produced by foreign travellers and residents of Java began to appear. These historical artworks have the potential to deliver important information about the volcano, its activity and human-environment interactions in the past.

Despite this repository, research which attempts to understand how people responded to and interpreted mountains through visual works of art from a historical perspective is still limited. We are left wondering what they thought about the frequent volcanic activity in Java. Previous research on the history of the visual arts in Java has focused primarily on local expressions of art and the making of colonial and Indonesian identities through the works of art (Susie Protschky 2007, 2011; Helena Spanjaard 2018; Holt 1967; Kusnadi 1990). These studies, albeit very important, employ a general view of the visual arts and what they signify within the broad context of colonial and independent Indonesia. They have not attempted to examine a particular form of visual art, such as drawings or paintings, in a “specific” location of the landscape environment, like volcanoes, rivers, and forests, in Indonesian history. Furthermore, there is also a widely held pessimistic view of colonial landscape paintings as a source of reliable historical information because of the colonial artists’ tendency to convey an idealized natural landscape in their works (Protschky 2011: 73-74).

Before the nineteenth century, the history of the indigenous art of drawing and painting in Java is somewhat unclear. The manuscript of the *Negarakertagama*, which dates from the fourteenth century, mentions the

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank James Francis Warren, Susanna Jenkins, Rosemary Robson-McKillop, Ardhana Riswarie, Raditya Putra, anonymous reviewers, and special editors of the issue for their insightful comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this paper.

position of the *anglukis* or 'court painter' in the kingdom of Majapahit, evidence that this form of art was practised at the time (Wright 1994: 49). Javanese literary traditions of a later date include stories about noble characters who were talented in drawing, for example, in the story of *Sungging Prabangkara*, which contains an indication of a recognition of this talent in Javanese society (M.I. Cohen 2005). However, painting and drawing seem to have disappeared from Javanese court tradition during the period of the Mataram Kingdom (late sixteenth-eighteenth century), only to surface again in batik and *wayang kulit* puppet-making (Cohen 2005: 13). In the seventeenth century, Europeans overseas resorted to their own style of drawing and painting to make records of their explorations and scientific discoveries. In the nineteenth century, Europeans also embraced the use of lithography as a then-modern method of printing artworks, including drawings and paintings of Java. Depicting landscapes in paintings and drawings was introduced by Europeans in the nineteenth century. The fashion gradually became more widespread, especially after the era of Raden Saleh (1811-1880), an early modern Javanese artist (Werner Kraus 2012). People in Java and the Indies in general were generally receptive to the arrival and introduction of European fine art, including the products of realism, impressionism, and expressionism. In the nineteenth and early-twentieth century, landscape art emerged as a popular genre in drawings and paintings. However, when a new movement in the Indies painting began in the 1930s, landscape art was criticized for over-emphasizing the exoticism and the beauty of nature. The term *Hindia Molek* or *Mooi Indië* (Beautiful Indies) was used to refer to the "typical" landscape art created in the colonial period which idealized the Indies landscapes (Protschky 2007: 65; Holt 1967: 165-171).

This paper explores the portrayal of nature in the drawings and paintings of Mount Merapi and its surrounding landscape from 1800 to 1930. The depiction of the volcano and its environs suggests a dynamic reflection of nature among the artists rather than the reproduction of any idealistic image of it they might have nurtured. This depiction seems a fitting choice in the Mount Merapi area in which volcanic eruptions have been such a frequent occurrence they are considered part and parcel of the natural life of the area. The paintings and drawings of Merapi in the period 1800-1930 are reflections of what the artists actually observed and experienced. These paintings and drawings can help us perceive the natural landscape which the artists "saw" or "chose not to see" (Colin M. Coates 2009: 143).

However, relying solely on such artworks without properly framing their historical contexts is problematic because, generally speaking, art is not created in a vacuum nor necessarily is the practice of making realistic records of a given situation. Andrea Gaynor and Ian McLean (2008) note that fine art emphasizes its "artificiality", "ambivalence", "imagination", and "beauty", and therefore produces works which do not constitute reliable sources of empirical data. In spite of this, when studying the ecological history of the Swan River in Western Australia, Gaynor and McLean made a comprehensive analysis of 259 artworks depicting the area created between 1827 and 1950.



With a careful use of content analysis methods, Gaynor and McLean show that landscape drawings and paintings can in fact be effectively used in environmental history research (Gaynor and McLean 2008).

In the case of Merapi, employing the Gaynor and McLean macro-method of mapping and analysing an extensive number of artworks would not work because of the widely scattered locations of the artworks of Merapi created in the stated period. However, the author has found 27 artworks of Merapi in the period under investigation in various book publications, art catalogues, as well as in library, museum, and private collections. Some of these artworks are not precisely dated, so their connection with the historical context cannot be explicitly confirmed. Therefore, given this limitation, this paper focuses only on clearly dated artworks, so that they can be discussed in their proper historical context using primary and secondary sources, including newspapers, journal reports, and archival records of volcanic eruptions as backup. As I show, the precisely dated and documented artworks can inform us about the cultural-ecological history of the volcano and its surroundings at the time these artworks were created. When comparing the historical records of volcanic eruptions, it seems that the artists shared a sense of “environmental consciousness”<sup>2</sup> in the way they made their drawings and paintings of Merapi. These artworks depicting Mount Merapi in the period 1800-1930 cover various themes: archaeological ruins, science, landscapes, volcanic eruptions, and disaster art.

#### EARLY DRAWINGS AND PAINTINGS OF MERAPI, 1800-1830

So far, this research has not found any drawings or paintings which specifically depict Mount Merapi in the period before 1800. This situation becomes more readily understandable when we consider access to the Merapi area. Until the early nineteenth century, the regions of the *Vorstenlanden* (Principalities of Yogyakarta and Surakarta), which includes the Merapi area, were difficult to reach. Dutch officials who wanted to visit the *Vorstenlanden* encountered transport problems because of the few access roads connecting Batavia in West Java to the *Vorstenlanden* in the middle of the island. Heavy tropical rains frequently destroyed what roads there were which made travelling very difficult, if not impossible, at certain times of the year (P. Nas and Pratiwo 2002: 709). Herman Willem Daendels (1762-1818), the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies during the Napoleonic occupation of the Netherlands (1807-1811), was the first to try to rectify this situation. During his term of office, he ordered the construction of the *Grote Postweg* (the Great Post Road) which improved existing footpaths and wagon tracks, as well as adding missing connections on the land road across Java (Nas and Pratiwo 2002: 709). The duration of the journey from Batavia to the *Vorstenlanden* was shortened by the completion of this new grand road. It was now easier for European officials and artists to visit the area and explore the surroundings of the Fiery Mountain.

<sup>2</sup> Gaynor and McLean (2008: 192).

Francois van Boekhold (or Van Boeckholtz, in an alternative spelling), a member of the Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen and second Resident of Surakarta of the Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie (VOC) (1783-1789), was the first European to climb Merapi. Between 18 July and 9-10 August 1786, he climbed Merapi from the northern side, at that time considered part of the kingdom of Surakarta (N. van Padang 1983: 10). During his pioneering ascent, Van Boekhold, who possessed some artistic skill, did not sketch or paint Merapi.<sup>3</sup> Instead, he wrote a “personal account” of the still dangerous and unexplored area of the *Brandenden Berg* (Fiery Mountain). Reading his account of his journey gives an idea of how unfamiliar Merapi and its immediate environs were to Van Boekhold.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the unfamiliarity of an “exotic” environment was not a sufficient reason to draw or paint natural surroundings unless the area had a “strategic” value for the VOC (Protschky 2011: 79). In this period, the “painter-traders”<sup>5</sup> of the VOC restricted their artwork to colonial ventures and commissions to draw places and objects deemed essential to colonial policy, including a map of an area and locations of occupied land, a fort or seaport. However, as we can see in the *Lexicon of foreign artists who visualized Indonesia (1600-1950)* by Leo Haks and G. Maris (1995), European artists did not actively engage in such activities in the *Vorstenlanden* before 1800.

In 1807, as European interest in the archaeological ruins in Java grew, Merapi was depicted as a background in drawing of one of these sites. The title of this artwork is *View of the ruins of a Bramin Temple at Brambanang as formd [sic!] in the jaar 1807*.<sup>6</sup> The artist was Hermanus Christiaan Cornelius (1774-1833?), a draughtsman in the service of the Netherlands Indies (see Figure 1). In his drawing, the volcano situated in the right background is unmistakably Merapi. The central subject of this drawing is the archaeological ruins of the present Candi Sewu Temple in Prambanan, southeast of Merapi.

<sup>3</sup> F. van Boekhold’s (or Van Boeckholtz) background and skill in painting are mentioned in Roy Jordaan (2013: 20).

<sup>4</sup> In his account, Van Boekhold expressed his astonishment at the situation around this volcano on several occasions, for instance, “[...] we had not have seen or imagined that the mountain there was active (burning) [...]” ([...] *wij niet hadden kunnen zien of ons voorstellen, dat de berg daar zoude branden*), “the difficulty and the danger during the ascent caused because the scree was all loose and hot [...] was inexpressible” (*De moeite en het gevaar was in het opklimmen onuitsprekelijk, door dat de klippen alle lose en warm waren [...]*), “No man could have seen, let alone give tongue to, the sight of the dreadful sulfurous pool [...]” (*Geen mensch kon zich het gezicht van den vreselijken zulver-poel voorstellen of uitdrukken [...]*). Moreover, he did not use the name Merapi to refer to this volcano, but took the literal meaning of “Merapi” or fiery mountain (*brandenden berg*) (Van Boekhold 1827b: 17-19. On Van Boekhold’s first journey to Merapi, see Van Boekhold 1827a: 14-16).

<sup>5</sup> The painter-traders or the painters and draughtsmen of the VOC who were also involved in its trade. (See Spanjaard 2018: 27).

<sup>6</sup> According to the curator of this object in the British Museum, Colin Mackenzie (1754-1821), a British colonial officer was given a drawing with the same title in English by H.C. Cornelius. See the British Museum curator’s comment on this artwork: [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A\\_1939-0311-0-6-30](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1939-0311-0-6-30).



Figure 1. H.C. Cornelius (1807), *View of the ruins of a Bramin Temple at Brambanang as formed in the jaar 1807*. Watercolours on paper, 36,40x 48,40 cm. Museum number: 1939,0311,0.6.30. (© The Trustees of the British Museum).

The drawing depicts three groups of people working on the clearing and surveying of the temple. The first group, the largest in number, comprises the half-naked Javanese labourers wearing a headcloth (*udheng* or *destar*). The second group is composed of Javanese officials, in their distinctive traditional dress, a *keris* (dagger) inserted at the back and their customary headdress (*blangkong*). The third group is European officials in their gentleman's attire and top-hats. Without a detailed depiction of the local landscape, this drawing would be regarded as no more than an illustration of Candi Sewu, its clearing, and surveying operation. However, Cornelius chose to include the mountainous contours of the location, with Merapi spewing ashes which pour out to the right in the drawing.

This drawing is important for several reasons. Apart from its year of completion, which makes it the oldest depiction of Merapi to date, the drawing portrays Merapi and its vicinity during a small-scale eruption. Interestingly, the volcanic records database shows that there was a period of small-scale explosive activity in Merapi, classified under Volcanic Explosivity Index (VEI) 1 in 1807,<sup>7</sup> the year Cornelius completed this painting (B. Voight et al. 2000: 80). Cornelius had probably experienced a small-scale eruption of Merapi at that time and included this natural event in his drawing. Cornelius also depicts the archaeological party, both the Javanese and the Europeans, as being in no way

<sup>7</sup> The Volcanic Explosivity Index is a tool to estimate the relative scale of an explosive eruption. The VEI scale of 1 to 2 indicates a relatively small eruption. VEI scales of 3, 4, and 5 are used to designate a large and highly explosive eruption. See Christopher G. Newhall and Stephen Self (1982: 1235).

alarmed by the eruption. They are working at the site as if they did not consider the occurrence of the volcanic eruption life-threatening, a clear indication of VEI 1 as seen from the Candi Sewu Temple.

Thematically speaking, this drawing signifies Cornelius' interest in ancient ruins and landscapes, two emerging themes in European visual arts in Java. However, unless human activity was a useful tool to highlight the picturesque landscape of Java, its depiction was generally excluded (Sarah Tiffin 2009: 547-549). Nevertheless, Cornelius did incorporate the human element and activity in this picturesque drawing of the entire archaeological landscape at the Candi Sewu Temple during a small-scale eruption of Merapi in 1807.

In 1817, ten years after Cornelius' drawing of the archaeological ruin of Candi Sewu, another "development" emerged in the depiction of Merapi in artworks. In that year, the crater of Merapi was drawn in detail for the first time. This interest in the crater of the volcano was not surprising. In 1815, King Willem I (1772-1843) of the Netherlands entrusted the task to gather scientific knowledge about the Indies archipelago, especially Java, to Caspar Georg Reinwardt (1773-1854), a renowned professor of science from Amsterdam. For this mission, Reinwardt was assisted by two draughtsmen, Adrianus Johannes Bik (1790-1872) and his brother Jannes Theodorus Bik (1796-1875). They came to Java in April 1816 (Andreas Weber 2012: 1-2, 124). About a year later, in September 1817, it was a Belgian-born artist Antoine Auguste Joseph Payen (1792-1853) who arrived in Java to take part in Reinwardt's scientific expeditions as an official artist (*kunstschilder*) (Weber 2012; Marie-Odette Scalliet 1995; Peter Carey 1988).

The World Cultures Museum in the Netherlands holds a drawing by Payen entitled *Crater du Mara-Api en 1817* (Crater of Mara-Api in 1817) (see Figure 2). The fine detail in this drawing is embellished by Payen's use of colour to emphasize the different elements in the drawing. It is impossible not to notice key features such as the glowing fire and white steam from the fumaroles and the greyish façade of the summit. The uneven volcanic rim and its inner crater wall are visible in this drawing. There are also twelve small vents in the image from which fumaroles emerge. One of the small vents in the centre of the drawing emits a fiery glow. Interestingly, Payen's depiction of Merapi's disruptive activity also matches the volcanic record database which reveals small explosive activity (VEI 1) occurring between 1817-1821, several years before the major Merapi eruption in 1822 (Voight et al. 2000: 80-81).

Based on the title of this drawing, Payen depicted a situation at the Mount Merapi summit in 1817. However, it is difficult to approximate the circumstance at which he made this drawing, apart from knowing that it was made after a drawing of someone else.<sup>8</sup> Between 1817 and 1818, Payen stayed at the Governor General's palace in Buitenzorg (Bogor). His first excursion only took place in March 1818 when he visited Ciampea, Sadang, and Dramaga in the vicinity of Buitenzorg (Scalliet 1995, 1993: 131).

<sup>8</sup> Payen gave a small note below the title that this drawing is "*d'après un dessin de Mr [Monsieur]*" (after a drawing of Mr [the initials are not clear]). Therefore, Payen did not create this drawing based on his observation of Mount Merapi in 1817 but through a drawing of someone else.



Figure 2. A.A.J. Payen (1817), *Crater du Mara-Api en 1817* (Crater of Mara-Api in 1817). Pencil and pigment on paper, 23 x 22,7 cm. Inventory number: RV-60-79c35. (Collection of the World Cultures Museum: [collectie.wereldculturen.nl](http://collectie.wereldculturen.nl)).

The World Cultures Museum in the Netherlands also holds a drawing entitled *De Berg Marapi in het gebied van Jogjakarta* (Marapi Mountain in the territory of Jogjakarta). There is no information about the creator of this drawing and its year of origin on both the artwork and the World Cultures Museum website page.<sup>9</sup> This drawing is in striking resemblance to Payen's *Crater du Mara-Api en 1817*.<sup>10</sup> The remarkable difference is that this drawing does not use colour. There is a note on the bottom left side of the drawing that is difficult to read. From this drawing, we get a piece of information that both artworks depicted the summit of Mount Merapi from the territory of Yogyakarta.<sup>11</sup>

Another drawing by Payen which involves Merapi is his *Bedoio, bij den Berg Merapi, Eiland Java* (Bedoyo, near Mount Merapi, the Island of Java), completed in 1825. The central subject of this drawing is the country retreat or villa of Nahuys van Burgst, the Resident of Yogyakarta (1816-1822) and a planter in Bedoyo (now part of Cangkringan District, Sleman Regency) located on the southern slope of Mount Merapi.<sup>12</sup> This rare drawing depicts early plantation society on the slopes of Java's most active volcano. The building looks grand, built in

<sup>9</sup> *De Berg Marapi in het gebied van Jogjakarta*, inventory number: RV-2942-39. Collection of the World Cultures Museum ([collectie.wereldculturen.nl](http://collectie.wereldculturen.nl)).

<sup>10</sup> If we use 1817 as a point of entry to the two drawings, the artist who created *De Berg Marapi in het gebied van Jogjakarta* was probably Jannes Theodorus Bik. It is possible that this drawing was the basic sketch of the *Crater du Mara-Api en 1817* by Payen. In July 1817, J.Th. Bik accompanied Reinwardt on an inspection tour of the Governor-General Godert Alexander Gerard Philip Baron van der Capellen (1778-1848) to Java's North Coast and the *Vorstenlanden* for about four months. See Weber (2012: 145).

<sup>11</sup> However, the territory of Yogyakarta and the rest of the Principalities in Central Java were highly dispersed before 1830. See Carey (2007: 10-11).

<sup>12</sup> During his trip to the *Vorstenlanden* in 1824-1825, Payen also created two basic sketches that depicted Mount Merapi. See inventory number: RV-60-79a43 and RV-60-79-d34. Collection of the World Cultures Museum ([collectie.wereldculturen.nl](http://collectie.wereldculturen.nl)).

European-style with a frontage consisting of ten large pillars, tall doors, and windows. In the bottom left corner of the drawing, Payen noted that the walls of the house and the doors were painted dark green. The Dutch flag has been hoisted in the backyard of the building. The front garden is also attractive. At what appears to be the main entrance, there is a small pond encircled by various plants. In the background, Merapi can be seen releasing bursts of volcanic gas or “degassing” approximately 400-600 metres in height.<sup>13</sup> The crater rim of Merapi in 1825 is presented as a dark shadow looming in the background. The three hills surrounding Merapi are also drawn in the background of this painting: the Turgo and Plawangan Hills in the central background and Klamongon Hill in the right background.



Figure 3. A. A. J. Payen (1825), *Bedoio, bij den Berg Merapi, Eiland Java* (*Bedoyo, near Mount Merapi, the Island of Java*). Pencil on paper. BPL 616, No. 22 (12 c.1). (Collection of KITLV, Leiden University Libraries).

The drawing *Bedoio, bij den Berg Merapi, Eiland Java* was created by Payen after an “absence” from Java of about six years (see Figure 3). He left Java between 1818 and 1823 to conduct scientific explorations in the “outer islands” in the east of the Archipelago. Consequently, he was not in Java when Merapi erupted on 28-30 December 1822 (VEI 3) and destroyed over eight villages, killing at least fifty people residing on the west and southwestern slopes of the volcano (Voight et al. 2000: 81-82; Carey 2007: 512-517). Shortly after he returned to Java in 1824, he was tasked with redesigning the Residency House in Yogyakarta which had been damaged in a large earthquake in 1823. In 1825, while in Yogyakarta to oversee the construction of the new Residency House, Payen spent a night

<sup>13</sup> There is no report of a Merapi volcanic eruption in 1825. Therefore, this was not a minor eruption with an ash-column, but rather a volcanic degassing during which volcanic gas is expelled into the Earth’s atmosphere.

(between 1-2 July) in this villa, or in his words, in the “casino” of Bedoyo, and made a drawing of the entire building. He noted in his diary:

Bedoyo, which I visited for the first time, is a pleasant casino or country retreat on the slopes of Marah-Api [Merapi]. It is well designed. There is a panoramic view of the surroundings of Djocja which extends to the sea and the mountains to the south (Gounoung Kidoel [Gunung Kidul]), even though its immediate surroundings are insignificant; the terrain is composed of dry ash in which stagnate the miserable coffee plantations that are scattered around this countryside [...]. In the morning, I looked for some point from which I could make a sketch of this place. The temperature is very mild there and one of the greatest advantages of this situation.<sup>14</sup> [My English translation.]

Payen undoubtedly did not realize that his drawing would one day become a source of significant historical evidence, providing a glimpse of early plantation society on the slopes of Merapi. At that time, few Europeans had ventured to establish plantations in the wilderness of the Principalities. Nahuys, the owner of the villa Payen depicted on his visit to Bedoyo, was considered a pioneer (Carey 2007: 454-478). We know very little about the character and lifestyle of European plantation society on the slopes of Merapi, especially during the early days before the Java War (1825-1830). The *Bedoio, bij den Berg Merapi, Eiland Java* provides us with an illustration of what plantation life might have been like on the frontier in 1825. Later, during the course of the Java War, this villa was attacked several times by local “bandits” and eventually burned to the ground.<sup>15</sup> We do not hear anything more about this beautiful villa in Bedoyo after 1830. However, the plantation there was still in existence a century later (*Handboek voor cultuur* 1935).

#### DEPICTING A “VOLCANORIUM”: DRAWING MERAPI FOR SCIENCE AND EXPLORATION, 1830-1850

After the Java War, the slopes of Merapi were gradually developed for agriculture and human settlement. One reason for this expansion was the increasing number of patrols dispatched by Dutch and Javanese authorities to suppress the remaining rebels and bandits in the area. Another reason for it was the progress booked by plantations founded by private planters in the “highlands” of Merapi

<sup>14</sup> “Bedoyo, que j’ ai visité pour la première fois, est un joli casino sur la pente du Marah-Api [Gunung Merapi]. Le plan en est bien distribué. On y jouit d’une vue très vaste sur les environs de Djogja et qui s’étend jusqu’ à la mer et les montagnes du Sud, (Gounoung Kidoel [Gunung Kidul]), Pour ses environs ils sont insignifiants; le terrain est une cendre aride dans laquelle végètent les misérables plantations de café qui entourent cette campagne [...] Le matin j’ai cherché quelque point d’où j’eus pu prendre une esquisse de ce lieu, mais inutilement. La température y est très douce et un des plus grands mérites de cette situation” (Carey 1988: 46); Payen’s account of Bedoyo in 1825 is also mentioned in Scalliet (1995: 446).

<sup>15</sup> Carey (2007) cites several sources which state that Nahuys’s villa in Bedoyo was attacked several times during the Java War. According to J.B.J. van Doren, a Dutch army officer who had fond memories of visiting Bedoyo in 1822, this villa was eventually burned to the ground during the Java War (Carey 2007: 535-536; Van Doren 1851: 352).



(Roel de Neve and Vincent Houben 1997: 51-64). Apart from a drawing<sup>16</sup> by F.V.A. de Stuers (1833) detailing the situation on the west side of the Merapi and Merbabu plains during the Java War, there are no more extant drawings of Merapi until 1845 when Franz Wilhelm Junghuhn's (1809-1864) account of his explorations of Java was published under the title *Topographischer und Naturwissenschaftlicher Atlas zur Reise durch Java* (Topographical and scientific atlas of a journey through Java). Junghuhn, the "Humboldt of Java", was a German-born scientist who was specialized in botany and volcanology. On the occasion of his first journey from Europe to the Indies in 1835, Junghuhn was employed as a medical officer in the Dutch army. With the assistance of Ernst Albert Fritze (1791-1839), the chief medical officer in the Netherlands Indies who shared a similar scientific interest, Junghuhn began his scientific explorations in Java shortly after his arrival there (Ulbe Bosma 2016: 185). As early as 1836, Junghuhn undertook a journey to the *Vorstenlanden* and then visited Merapi. This volcano was the first among the forty-three volcanoes in Java which he ascended, explored, and sketched (Bosma 2016: 185). The most likely reason he chose Merapi for his first "conquest" was because of the volcanic activities (VEI 2)<sup>17</sup> taking place in the mountain that year.

We have to acknowledge that the wealth of data Junghuhn presents in his artistic works are based mainly on his scientific descriptions which provide substantial notes on the morphology of the volcano and a record of its eruptions. However, simply ignoring the drawings and labelling them merely "supportive material" would be to "kill the goose which laid the golden egg". In the words of Adrienne Joergensen, the drawings by Junghuhn were an attempt to create "a representation of a very large figure" on a piece of paper and transform it into a "drawing of a volcanorium" (Joergensen 2016: 96-101). Junghuhn's notes which accompany his drawings of Merapi should be regarded as authoritative representations of the situation of Merapi in 1836, particularly so in the two scientific subject areas of volcanology and botany. Following Junghuhn's other publication, entitled *Java, zijne gedaante, zijn plantentooi en inwendige bouw* (Java, its form, its flora, and internal construction) in 1853-1854, it appears he and his publisher made some adjustments to way in which his drawings were displayed.<sup>18</sup>

In all there are seven drawings of Merapi by Junghuhn in the two publications mentioned above. The drawings can be divided into three groups: the drawings of the summit or the "ejection cone" (*Auswurfskegel*) depicted from different sides on Merapi (see Figures 4, 5, 6, 7), a drawing of the crater of Merapi (Figure 8) and the drawings of the slopes of Merapi (see Figures 9 and 10). In Figures 4, 5, 6, 7, the summit is a lava dome composed of millions of pieces of rubble (*puinbrokken*) and lava-slag (lava-slacken) piled on top of each

<sup>16</sup> Shelfmark: KITLV 47B8. Collection of KITLV-Leiden University Library (<https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl>).

<sup>17</sup> Voight et al. (2000: 82).

<sup>18</sup> In his 1845 publication, Junghuhn's original drawings were plated and lithographed by E. Baensch. In his 1853-1854 publication, his drawings were lithographed by C.W. Mieling.



other (Junghuhn 1853: 440). The cone at the summit is also depicted as emitting significant amounts of volcanic gasses with intense degassing. The vents where fumarole appeared were located in the southeastern side of the crater wall (Figure 7). In his depiction of the crater of Merapi, Junghuhn illustrates an active, albeit loose, crater structure in the centre and inner walls (Figure 8). The fumarole was also present in the crater.



Figure 4. F.W. Junghuhn (1836), *Nordseite des Merapi: Aus Einer Höhe von 7500 fuss vom sudl. Abhange des Merbabu Gesehen* (North side of Merapi, seen from an altitude of 7500 feet from the south slope of Merbabu). Lithographed by E. Baensch. (Source: Junghuhn 1845: Plate X).



Figure 5. F.W. Junghuhn (November 1836), *Der Eruptionskegel des Merapi mit dem östlichen Ende der Kratermauer* (The eruption cone of Merapi with the eastern end of the crater wall). Lithographed by E. Baensch. (Source: Junghuhn 1845: Table VI).



Figure 6. F.W. Junghuhn (1836), *Goenoeng Merapi*. Lithographed by C.W. Mieling. (Junghuhn 1853-1854, shelfmark: KITLV 50H8; collection of KITLV, Leiden University Libraries).



Figure 7. F.W. Junghuhn (1836), *Die Süd Ost-Seite des Auswurfskegels des Merapi* (The southeast side of the ejection cone of Merapi). Lithographed by E. Baensch. (Source: Junghuhn 1845: Plate III).



Figure 8. F.W. Junghuhn (1836), *Auswurfkegel und innere Wand der Kratermauer des Merapi* (Ejection cone and inner wall of Merapi crater wall). Lithographed by E. Baensch. (Source: Junghuhn 1845: Plate V).



Figure 9. F.W. Junghuhn (November 1836), *Der Merapi von der Nordseite* (The Merapi from the north side). Lithographed by E. Baensch. (Source: Junghuhn 1845: Plate VIII).



Figure 10. F.W. Junghuhn (September 1836), *Der Merapi von der Südseite* (The Merapi from the south side). Lithographed by E. Baensch. (Source: Junghuhn 1845: Plate VII).

Junghuhn also paid attention to the situation on the slopes of Merapi. He gives us a view of the northern slope (from the Selo area – Surakarta) and the southern slope (Yogyakarta) of the volcano. The northern slope (Figure 9) is depicted as barren, without a single tree, between an altitude of 4,868 feet (1,428 metres) above sea level and the summit (Junghuhn 1845: Plate VIII), whereas the southern slope (Figure 10) appears lush with vegetation to an altitude of 5,231 feet (1,594 metres). Junghuhn’s description of conditions on the southern slope is worth quoting here:

To view the southern side of the summit of Merapi at a height above 5,231 feet, one stands between the roots of the *Celtis Montana* (Angring), whose forests end here, and looks up towards the barren summit. A monotonous grey, it lies there; only in its centre is a narrow stretch of vegetation of *Gaultheria* and *Thibaudia* up through the Angring forests. Some of these high points are illuminated by the first rays of the sun, while others are still shrouded shadow. Long and whiteish hang together the grey branches and trunks of the *Celtis* trees. Many of these trees in the frontline have been denuded and burnt. The ground is covered with small stone debris, between which the *Polypodium vulcanicum* Bl. sprouts up everywhere. Other grass-like species are also spreading around. Sept. 1836. (S. 127).<sup>19</sup> [My translation.]

<sup>19</sup> Ist die Südseite des Gipfels vom Merapi, von einer Höhe von bereits 5231 Fuß aus gesehen. Man steht zwischen den Stämmen der *Celtis montana* (Angring), deren Wälder sich hier endigen [endingen?], und blickt hinauf nach dem öden Gipfel. In einfarbigem Grau liegt er da; nur in der Mitte zieht sich eine kleine Strauchvegetation von *Gaultherien* und *Thibaudien* noch über die Angringwälder hinauf. Einige der hohen Punkte sind vom ersten Sonnenstrahl beleuchtet, während das andere noch im Schatten liegt. Lange weitzliche uzneen [sic!] hängen von den grauen Zweigen und Stämmen der *Celtis*-Bäume herab. Viele dieser Bäume im Vordergrund sind kahl und verbrannt. Der Boden ist mit kleinen Steingeröllen bedeckt,

In this passage, Junghuhn provides some botanical information about the vegetation found at the southern slopes of Merapi in 1836. The forest there consisted of *Celtis montana* or *antring*, an old growth forest tree species in the mountains of Java.<sup>20</sup> There were other plants, such as *Gaultheria*, *Thibaudia*, and *Polypodium vulcanicum* Bl., a kind of tree-fern which he noticed on the southern slope. With the exception of *Gaultheria* (or *gondopuro*, in Javanese), the other plants are no longer found on the list<sup>21</sup> of contemporary plants growing on the southern slope of Merapi. The volcanic activity of Merapi has created a volatile environment which frequently changes the biodiversity around the volcano (Wisnu Febry Afrianto, Agus Hikmat, and Didik Widiatmoko 2016: 270). What we see in his drawing is an illustration of the vegetation Junghuhn encountered when he ascended Merapi in the 1830s.

In Junghuhn's drawings, the colours enrich our understanding of the depiction of Merapi which he presents in each drawing, from the morphology of the crater to changes in the vegetations on Merapi across the years. Interestingly, besides drawing the volcano in great detail, Junghuhn also included people in the landscape which might be a representation of himself and his party during their explorations of the environs of the volcano. For example, Figure 4 depicts a European man (perhaps Junghuhn himself) with a walking stick, telescope, and a helmet observing Merapi from a distance, while Figure 5 depicts five people, with equipment on their backs and walking-sticks ascending the left-hand side of Merapi. We have a more precise version of this drawing in Figure 6, which appears in Junghuhn's 1853-1854 publication. In this depiction, three people in the centre of the drawing are attempting to climb Merapi. These details are an unequivocal indication that Junghuhn created a set of drawings which record Merapi and his own journey there. By so doing, he helped to spread scientific knowledge about Merapi to the wider public in Java and the rest of the world.

Between 1830-1850, apart from Junghuhn's drawings, there were several other drawings made of Merapi by Europeans who travelled to the *Vorstenlanden*. J.H.W. Le Clercq (1809-1885) was a major-general in the Dutch Army who investigated the defence system of the Netherlands Indies between 1844 and 1846 (J.H. Maronier 1967: 3). On his inspection tour of the Principalities in 1845, he visited Selo on the northern slopes of Merapi, where

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*zwischen denen überall das Polypodium vulcanicum Bl. hervorwuchert. Auch grasarten verbreiten sich umher. Sept. 1836. (S. 127). (Junghuhn 1845: Plate 7).*

<sup>20</sup> Clason (1935), mentioned by C.G.G.J. van Steenis, observed two plant species called *anggrung* (*Trema orientalis*) and *anggris* (*Parasponia parviflora*), two dominant old-growth species in the secondary forest on Mount Kelud after a volcanic eruption in 1919 (Van Steenis 2006: 54). On the other hand, the Kew Royal Botanical Garden database recognizes *Trema parviflorum* (Miq.) Byng & Cristenh., a synonym of *anggris* (*Parasponia parviflora* Miq.) and *antring* (*Celtis montana*, Jungh. Ex Planch) (<http://www.plantsoftheworldonline.org/taxon/urn:lsid:ipni.org:names:77185679-1>, accessed on 16-8-2021). Therefore, we can safely conclude that Junghuhn's *antring* (*Celtis montana*) is the same plant mentioned as *anggris* (*Parasponia parviflora*) which was observed by Clason on Mount Kelud. The two species are therefore synonymous with *Trema parviflorum* (Miq.) Byng & Cristenh.

<sup>21</sup> Afrianto, Hikmat, and Widiatmoko (2016: 274-276).



Junghuhn had made drawings of the volcano (Figure 9). Here, Le Clercq drew an image of Merapi entitled *Top van de Merapi (Gezien van Sello)* (The summit of Merapi, as seen from Sello) (see Figure 11). This drawing resembles the view depicted in Junghuhn's drawing (Figure 8), except that in Le Clercq's drawing the northern slope is covered with vegetation. Le Clercq's depiction of a cloud enveloping the top of Merapi in Figure 11 probably shows volcanic degassing, indicating a low level of volcanic activity. There is no reported instance of a Merapi eruption in 1845 (Voight et al. 2000: 82).

Other works of art featuring Merapi in this period were created by Anton Baron Sloet van Oldruitenborgh (1823-1894), a Dutch businessman from East Java. In 1847, he made some sketches of Merapi entitled *Gezicht op de Merapi en Merbaboe van de vlakte van Djoeroek bij Solo* (View of Merapi and Merbaboe from the plain of Djoeroek near Solo) and *Gezicht op de Merapi van Toempak op de Helling der Maraboe Gelegen* (View of Merapi from Toempak located on the slope of Maraboe [Merbaboe]) (Maronier 1967: 69). The former is a landscape made during his journey, while the latter is a contour sketch of the northern slopes of Merapi.<sup>22</sup> Oldruitenborgh depicted volcanic ash in both his drawings. This sign of volcanic activity in his drawings is confirmed in the eruption record. In 1846-1848, Merapi was active (VEI 3) (Voight et al. 2000: 82) and these drawings document the painter's journey to the site of the active volcano. One can readily imagine how an active volcano was a major attraction to the intrepid travellers who visited the *Vorstenlanden*.



Figure 11. J.H.W. Le Clercq (22 June 1845), *Top van de Merapi (gezien van Sello)* (The summit of Merapi, as seen from Sello). Watercolours on paper 11,5 x 19,5 cm. (Shelfmark: KITLV 36A68, collection of KITLV, Leiden University Libraries).

<sup>22</sup> Shelfmark: KITLV 37A125, KITLV 37A126. Collection of KITLV, Leiden University libraries (<https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl>).

## RADEN SALEH'S PAINTINGS OF MERAPI ERUPTION IN 1865

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the *Vorstenlanden*, which had undergone rapid agricultural development since 1830, continued to lead the way in further expansion. In this period, the slopes of Merapi were rapidly opened up for European plantations, reaching 32,505.35 hectares of land set aside for plantations by 1873 (*Koloniaal Verslag* 1870-1873). While this increasing land use was taking place on the slopes of Merapi, its disruptive character, which was occasionally destructive, remained unchanged. After a dormant period in the 1850s, Merapi became active once again. In 1863, Merapi entered a major eruption phase (VEI 2). The description of the Merapi eruption at this time, quoted by B.G. Escher, describes "masses of glowing rocks rolling down the mountain on all sides" (Escher 1933: 52). Violent eruptions of Merapi were still occurring on the morning of 1 January 1864, causing extensive ashfalls in the surrounding area as far away as Purworejo, 70 km west of Mount Merapi (*Java-Bode* 16 January 1864). Afterwards, the eruptive activity of Merapi waned for the rest of the year (Escher 1933: 52). Up until then, no one had ever captured the 'wrathful nature of Merapi' by drawing or painting an actual volcanic eruption. The artists and painter - scientists whom we have discussed so far still just recorded the usual "active state" of this volcanic mountain in general terms. One year after the eruption of January 1864, Merapi entered another eruptive phase. On this occasion, the image of a Merapi eruption was captured by Raden Saleh Syarif Bustaman (1811-1880), a Javanese painter of remarkable talent.

During the eruption of Merapi in 1863-1864, Raden Saleh, the "king's painter" (*schilder des konings*), was still residing in Batavia. He had visited the *Vorstenlanden* at least once upon returning from Europe in 1852 (Kraus 2012: 89). However, painting the landscape of the Fiery Mountain at the "peak of his fame" as a painter was a new challenge and not an easy one at that. He needed to obtain permission from the Dutch government to enter the *Vorstenlanden*, as well as to bear the burden of the expenses of travelling "decently" between Batavia and the *Vorstenlanden* (Kraus 2012: 98). The opportunity to travel emerged in 1865 when he was granted a permit to visit the *Vorstenlanden* on a "mission" to gather historical objects and Javanese manuscripts for the collection of the Bataviaasch Genootschap voor Kunsten en Wetenschappen. Saleh did not hesitate to seize the opportunity. His arrival in Yogyakarta in August was quickly followed by a visit to Merapi in November 1865. At that time, people who lived near the volcano, including those who resided in the Magelang Regency on the western side of Merapi, were worried about a possible catastrophic eruption. During October and November, H.J.C. Hoogeveen, Resident of Magelang (Kedu), had received numerous reports about the daily activity of Merapi (Hoogeveen 1865: 3). Therefore, with the scientist, Dr Hillebrand, the Regent (*Bupati*) of Magelang, and the Regent of Temanggung, Hoogeveen formed a small party to observe this activity. For some unknown reason, Raden Saleh joined this trip which took place on 9-11 November 1865.

This trip to Merapi was meant to observe its eruption phase in whose throes it was at that moment. Raden Saleh, a skilled painter with an interest in the volcanoes of Java, responded to the occasion, capturing various moments of Merapi's eruption in sketches before translating them into paintings. His point of position for drawing Merapi was the party's observation place at Jengger Lor, a hill about 1,371 metres above sea level in the middle of the Blongkeng and Lamat ravines on the western side of Merapi.<sup>23</sup> Hoogeveen states that Jengger Lor was 10 km farther away from the village of Gemer Sabrang (now Gemer and Sabrang Hamlets, Ngargomulyo Village, Dukun District, Magelang Province), at that time the highest human settlement on the western slopes of Merapi. Jengger Lor was also a "favourite hiding place" of the Javanese tiger (Hoogeveen 1865: 11). From here, the party could observe Merapi very clearly. As stressed by Hoogeveen,

[...] The view from there was striking. Between the two ravines in which we found ourselves, in a clear sky, we saw the colossal mountain in all its fury and starkness, free and unobstructed before us. The site chosen by us was ideally suited to watch the eruption.<sup>24</sup> [My translation.]

The party stayed in Jengger for two days, from 10 to 11 November 1865. The scene was perfect for Saleh as he could witness the "eruption spectacle" of Merapi unhindered during this two-day visit.

During the observation trip to Jengger Lor, Saleh made sketches of Merapi which became the basis for his two paintings of the volcano, entitled *Merapi, eruption by day* and *Merapi, eruption by night*, both completed in 1865 (see Figures 12 and 13).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Kemmerling, quoted by Escher, remarked that the location Raden Saleh chose to create his paintings on Merapi was Mount Plawangan (1,275 m. above sea level) situated on the southern slopes of Merapi (Escher 1933: 51). Following Escher, Voight et al. also state that Raden Saleh's paintings of Merapi were made from Plawangan (Voight et al. 2000: 83). On the other hand, the Indonesian language version of Raden Saleh's book by Kraus and Vogelsang states that the location was Jengger Lor (north) (Kraus and Vogelsang 2018: 157). In the travel report compiled by Hoogeveen, however, he uses only the name Jengger to refer to this location. I agree with Kraus and Vogelsang that the place which Hoogeveen mentions in his report is also the place from which Saleh made his sketches of Merapi, namely: Jengger Lor on the western slopes of Merapi. At present, the villagers in Babadan, Dukun District, Magelang Province, still know about this hill. Jengger Lor is higher than Jengger Kidul (south) and matches the description given by Hoogeveen.

<sup>24</sup> *Treffend was het uitzigt van dáár. Tusschen de twee diepten waar we ons bevonden, zagen we bij een helderen hemel den kolossalen berg, in al zijn woestheid en naaktheid, vrij en onbelemmerd voor ons. De plaats door ons gekozen, was bij uitnemendheid geschikt om de eruptie gade te slaan* (Hoogeveen 1865: 7).

<sup>25</sup> Raden Saleh made several versions of these paintings in different sizes but they are currently difficult to trace (Kraus 2012: 194). The National Museum of Natural History in Leiden, the Netherlands, holds one of the smallest versions, only 20x30 cm in size. Another version of the two paintings belongs to the Tan Family of art collectors based in Singapore. I show the latter version of the two paintings here with the written permission from the owner.





Figure 12. Raden Saleh (1865), *Merapi, eruption by day*. Oil on canvas, 59,5 x 92 cm. (Collection of the Tan Family).



Figure 13. Raden Saleh (1865), *Merapi, eruption by night*. Oil on canvas, 58,6 x 91 cm. (Collection of the Tan Family).

Saleh's paintings depict stunning versions of the Merapi eruption which still intrigue many people to this day. In *Merapi, eruption by day*, he presents

a pyroclastic flow followed by the glowing clouds of Merapi, while a crowd of spectators beside Blongkeng Ravine on the western side of Merapi watch near falling rocks. Details such as a wooden hut and a Dutch flag flying from a long bamboo pole on Jengger Kidul on the left-hand side of the painting are visible, presenting an accurate portrayal of the event taking place.<sup>26</sup> In *Merapi, eruption by night*, Saleh captures the image of the fiery avalanches of glowing lava which were ejected from the crater on multiple sides and turning into volcanic ballistics (see Figure 13).<sup>27</sup> Commenting on the two paintings, Escher felt that both images of the active volcano are “fundamentally correct” and display the characteristics of a 1865 Merapi eruption. However, he questioned whether the lava streams did occur simultaneously in all directions, as the painting suggests (Escher 1933: 52-53).

However, when we consult Hooegeveen (1865) on this matter, we find that he witnessed an event similar to that depicted by Saleh in his paintings. Describing the rock avalanches during the day, Hooegeveen said,

The falling of the multitude of stones and slags attracted our special attention. From the crater rim, 8,940 feet [2,724 m] high, they came, smoking heavily, down the slopes of the erupting cone, in tremendous, oft-repeated leaps and bounds, flying thousands of feet downwards, as if they wanted to flee the unholy mouth of the craters with unbridled speed.<sup>28</sup> [My translation.]

Describing the glowing streams of lava at night, he states,

Merapi seemed transformed into a true Pandemonium. Awful, fearful, terrifying, horrific was that sight, but nonetheless beautiful, glorious, brilliant, alluring, insanely beautiful. Out of the crater, whose rim was glowing, now rose a fiery column of smoke, while the lava was ejected glowing white and, like fantastic racehorses, rushing wildly, tracing fiery arcs, made devilish leaps into the nocturnal abyss, and rapidly exploded into myriads of fiery sparks. So swiftly did the eruptions follow upon each other, they produced continuous surprises and the straining eye had difficulty in watching them. The one stream of fire was repeatedly followed or surpassed in shape and appearance by the other; often, too, some of them collapsed as they spread and the mountain seemed marbled with fire. On all sides and in all directions, we saw it pouring out and undulating, radiant and flickering, sometimes rushing down like fiery waterfalls and, at times, the whole volcano stood before us, lit up in one fiery glow. It was if the Phlegethon, the fiery river of the underworld, had forced its way upwards by force.<sup>29</sup> [My translation.]

<sup>26</sup> I refer to the explanation by Hooegeveen in which he states that a few flimsy wooden huts were constructed on the hilltops of both Jengger [Jengger Lor and Kidul] as encampment for the party. A Dutch flag on a long bamboo pole was prepared by the District Chief of Probolinggo, who accompanied the trip (Hooegeveen 1865: 11).

<sup>27</sup> For the impacts and risks of volcanic ballistics to people who live near an active volcano, see R.H. Fitzgerald et al. (2018).

<sup>28</sup> *Het nedervallen der steenen en slakken bij menigte trok bijzonder onze aandacht. Van af den kraterrand, hoog 8940 voet, kwamen ze sterk rookend, langs de hellingen van den eruptiekegel, in geweldige, dikwijls herhaalde sprongen, duizende voeten vliegend naar beneden hollen, als wilden ze met toemeloze vaart den onzaligen mond des kraters ontolieden* (Hooegeveen 1865: 10).

<sup>29</sup> *De Merapi scheen herschapen in een waar Pandaemonium. Vreeselijk, huiverend, ijzingwekkend,*

According to Hoogeveen, the eruptions were so rapid and frequent they caused the glowing avalanches of lava to fall simultaneously on every side of the volcano. Therefore, what we see in the two paintings of the Merapi eruption by Saleh are actual depictions of a major volcanic eruption – a singular moment in geological time unique to 1865 – from the standpoint of a painter who witnessed and recorded the event. The two paintings signify a combination of the raw power and majesty of nature, arousing human curiosity, frightening but also alluring at the same time. The depiction of volcanic eruptions in paintings had begun earlier in Europe where prominent painters such as J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851) had produced painting of *the eruption of the Soufrière Mountains, 30 April 1812* (1815) and Johan Christian Claussen Dahl (1788-1857) with *An eruption of Vesuvius* (1824).<sup>30</sup> Saleh continued this trend in Java, the natural home of dozens of active volcanoes, when he painted the true character of a large Merapi eruption in 1865.

THE INFLUENCE OF LANDSCAPE ART AND THE HUMANITIES ON PAINTINGS OF MERAPI  
 The two paintings of the 1865 Merapi eruption by Raden Saleh were the only major artworks depicting the volcano in the second half of the nineteenth century. After Saleh, with the exception of four drawings of the volcano and its surrounding landscape by O.G.H. Heldring, a Dutch officer in the Koninklijk Nederlandsch Indisch Leger (KNIL) dated 1880-1884, we do not find any other depictions of Merapi.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, there were no “Grand Tours” to Merapi as was the case with Vesuvius in the eighteenth-century European painting tradition. Travelling to Merapi remained largely a colonial administrative venture and much less an artistic endeavour until the end of the nineteenth century. The “winds of change” in the painting of Merapi began to blow at the beginning of the twentieth century. In tandem with the trend of landscape art in the Indies or the *Mooi Indië* (Beautiful Indies), a new generation of professional painters, both European and Indonesian, arrived on the scene and began to paint the landscape of Merapi more frequently.

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*afschuwelijk was dat gezig, maar ook tevens prachtig, glansrijk, schitterend, aanlokkelijk, overzinnelijk schoon. Uit den krater, wiens rand in hellen gloed stond, steeg nu een vurige rookzuil op, terwijl de slakken wit gloeiend werden uitgeworpen en fantastische renboden gelijk, wild voortijlende, onder het beschrijven van vlamme bogen, duivelssprongen in de nachtelijke afgronden deden, of in haar onzinnige en tuimelende vaart in myriaden vuurspranken uit elkander ploften. Zóó snel volgden de eruptiën elkander op, dat zij een aanhoudende verrassing opleverden en het ingespannen oog moeite had ze immer te bespieden. De eene vuurstroom werd door den anderen, in gedaante en voorkomen telkens verscheiden, nagejaagd of voorbij gestreefd; dikwijls ook vloeiden eenige bij hun uitspreiding ineen en scheen de berg dan door vuur gemarmerd. Van alle zijden en in alle rigtingen zagen wij ze stortend en golvend, stralend en flikkerend, soms als vurige watervallen afwaarts snellen en bij wijlen stond de gansche vulkaan in één robijnen gloed voor ons. Het was de Phlegethon der onderwereld die zich met geweld een uit togt naar boven baande (Hoogeveen 1865: 12-13).*

<sup>30</sup> J.C.C. Dahl was Saleh’s teacher in Dresden, Germany, during the painter’s period in Europe. Saleh might have known Dahl’s two paintings of Vesuvius, including his *An eruption of Vesuvius* (1824) painting. See Kraus (2012: 99).

<sup>31</sup> Shelfmark: KITLV 36D497, KITLV 37B479, KITLV 37B487\_2, KITLV 37B498. Collection of KITLV, Leiden University Libraries (<https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl>).

In the early twentieth century, painters depicted Merapi as they painted the beauty of the surrounding landscape in their work. In such paintings, it appears Merapi was “remembered” and “re-presented” in its dormant state rather than its “fiery wrath” during its frequent past eruptions. Of course, the preference for viewing nature in this fashion did not appear of its own accord. First and foremost, between 1915-1920, 1925-1929, and 1935-1939 Merapi experienced dormant periods (Voight et al. 2000: 91-98). Therefore, the people who lived on its slopes enjoyed a comparatively long period without any volcanic eruptions. Secondly, by the early twentieth century, a market for colonial art had been established in the Indies. As members of the elite of colonial society in the Indies, painters followed contemporary colonial (European) tastes and conventions. They were motivated by the newly emerging market for this art (Protschky 2007; Jim Supangkat and Gunawan Mohammad 1976). Therefore, it was a matter of course that the landscape art left its mark on the painting of Merapi in the early twentieth century.



Figure 14. Abdullah Suriosubroto (c. 1900-1930), *Pemandangan di sekitar Gunung Merapi* (View of the environs of Mount Merapi). Oil on canvas, 59 x 95 cm. (Source: Lee Man-Fong 1964 No. 9; collection of the Presidential Palace of Indonesia).

Two painters who depicted Merapi in their artwork in this period were celebrated painters of Java. Abdullah Suriosubroto (1878-1941) was an artist who had followed his formal training in the Academy of Fine Arts in the Netherlands (Supangkat and Mohammad 1976: 5). Between roughly 1900 and 1930, Abdullah produced paintings of the exceptional beauty of the southern slopes of Merapi. We do not have any specific information about the circumstances concerning his depiction of Merapi at this time. His *Pemandangan di sekitar Gunung Merapi* (View of the environs of Mount Merapi) (Figure 14) depicts a terraced wet rice-field in the middle of a forest close to a flowing

river, while the Turgo and Plawangan Hills, two landmarks on the southern slopes, stand farther in the background and in which Merapi itself is also majestically framed. In Figure 14, even from a distance we can still recognize the morphological features of Merapi and its immediate surroundings, including the crater rim, Pasarbubar and Ijo Hill on the north-eastern side of the volcano. Unfortunately, the exact date of this painting is unknown so we cannot correlate the painting with the historical record of volcanic activity occurring in this period.

Mas Pirngadie (1865-1936) was a Javanese painter who rose to prominence at the beginning of the twentieth century. His exceptional talent was recognized by Johan Ernst Jasper (1874-1945), then a government official (later Resident of Tapanuli and Governor of Yogyakarta) responsible for indigenous arts and crafts. This recognition led to Pirngadie being employed as a draughtsman by the Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen (Koswara Sumaamidjaja 1981: 64). Between approximately 1920 and 1935, while working at the Batavia Society, he made a small sketch entitled *Merapi*, now held in a collection of the World Cultures Museum, the Netherlands. This attractive drawing depicts an idyllic landscape setting. In it, Mount Merapi is portrayed emitting smoke, while the surrounding landscape, including those villagers who lived nearby, remain unperturbed. Unfortunately, like the painting of Merapi by Abdullah, Pirngadie's sketch of Merapi is undated.

In September 1930, during the Great Depression, Merapi entered a new eruption phase. A huge explosion occurred between 18-19 December 1930, when the western side of the crater suddenly collapsed, spewing lava and gas and pyroclastic flows down the western slopes of Merapi into the town of Muntilan. The vast arable lands along the Senowo, Blongkeng, and Lamat Rivers were destroyed, 1,369 people died, 2,100 cattle perished and 1,100 houses in eleven villages were completely obliterated in this catastrophe (Voight et al. 2000: 99). To help the victims of the 1930-1931 eruption, people from across the Indies and the Netherlands, and elsewhere, rallied to offer financial support. A Merapi donation fund was set up for the victims. The amount of attention devoted to the Merapi disaster was so great that one newspaper satirically commented that even the unemployed Dutch in the Indies envied the support provided for the Merapi victims (*Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië* 17-01-1931). At this time, Frederik Kasenda (1891-1942), a Manadonese painter, came up with his own way to raise funds for the victims of Merapi. He created several Merapi disaster paintings and sold them at solo exhibitions in various cities in Java, between January and July 1931.

Frederik Kasenda was born in Remboken, Minahasa, North Sulawesi. In his youth, he displayed exceptional talent as a "self-made man" in the art of painting. Kasenda received support from Johan Ernst Jasper which enabled him to continue his study of painting in Java. He quickly completed his studies and subsequently rose to fame as one of the important landscape painters of the Indies (*De Indische Courant* 05-01-1942). In the late 1920s, he maintained a permanent exhibition at his art gallery in the Bojong District of Semarang and

advertised his collections and portrait-painting service in Semarang-based newspapers, including *De Locomotief* and *Algemeen Handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië*. Shortly after the eruption of Merapi, Frederik Kasenda organized a solo exhibition (31 January-2 February 1931) in Tunjungan Lodge, Surabaya. *De Indische Courant* advertised the event:

On Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday, the painter Frederik Kasenda will hold an exhibition of his work in the hall of the Lodge on Toendjoengan. The collection will be on display from 8 a.m. until 9 p.m. the entrance fee for Europeans is set at f 0.50 and for Natives and children at f 0.25. Twenty percent of the net proceeds of the entrance fee is intended for the Merapi Fund. The painter is exhibiting forty paintings, especially relating to Merapi and the destruction caused by the volcano. In addition, fifty other canvases and water-colours, depicting nature in Java, are also on display. Kasenda, who has a sterling reputation, is worthy of attention. We shall return to this exhibition.<sup>32</sup> [My translation.]

From this initial four-day exhibition, twelve paintings were sold to the public, including four paintings of the Merapi disaster (*De Indische Courant* 02-02-1931).

After this event in Surabaya, Kasenda held a series of solo exhibitions presenting his work on the Merapi disaster. On 16-24 May 1931, another exhibition was held in the pavilion of Hotel des Indes in Batavia. At this event, some of the prices of his Merapi paintings were reported in the press. For example, his paintings which depicted Merapi prior to the disaster were offered for f. 60 while those of Merapi after the disaster were offered at f. 55 (*Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië* 16-05-1931). After this event, he held another exhibition in Societeit Concordia in Malang, East Java on 4-5 July 1931 (*De Indische Courant* 04-07-1931), while yet another exhibition was held in the Tunjungan Lodge in Surabaya, East Java, on 11-12 July 1931. By this time, we learn that Kasenda had only sixteen paintings of Merapi left to display of the initial forty he had made earlier in the year (*Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië* 09-07-1931). The public's positive response to his exhibitions, as reported in the press, indicates the strong sense of charity and mutual sympathy for the victims of the Merapi disaster prevailing in Indies society. His pragmatic approach to fundraising, using his paintings which depicted the disaster, was a unique gesture during the colonial period.

Kasenda's paintings of the Merapi disaster belong to the genre of disaster art. They depict the horror which erupts at a time of calamity but they also capture a message about humanity. In his painting entitled *Refugees on the road*

<sup>32</sup> *Vrijdag, zaterdag, zondag en maandag a.s. zal de kunstschilder Frederik Kasenda een tentoonstelling van zijn werk houden in de zaal van de Loge op Toendjoengan alhier. De collectie zal zijn te bezichtigen van 8 uur v.m. tot 9 uur n.m. tegen entree, voor Europeanen gesteld op f 0.50 en voor Inlanders en kinderen op f 0.25. 20 procent van de netto-opbrengst dezer entree's is bestemd voor het Merapifonds. De schilder heeft veertig schilderijen geëxposeerd, speciaal betrekking hebbend op den Merapi en de verwoestingen, welke de vulkaan heeft te weeggebracht. Bovendien worden tentoongesteld 50 andere doeken en aquarellen, naar de natuur op Java geschilderd. Kasenda, die een goede pers heeft, verdient belangstelling. Wij komen nog op deze expositie terug* (*De Indische Courant* 30-01-1931).

during the eruption of Merapi dated 1920 (1930?),<sup>33</sup> Kasenda depicts men, women, children, and the elderly fleeing from the violent eruption and seeking refuge in the foreground of the painting, facing in the viewer's direction, as if asking for help (see Figure 15).



Figure 15. Frederik Kasenda (1920/1930?), *Refugees on the road during the eruption of Merapi*. Oil on canvas, 61 x 104 cm. (Source: *Pictures of Indonesia* 2005: 10; image: courtesy of Larasati Auctioneers).

Among the many figures in this painting are three buffalo-drawn wagons crammed many people moving rapidly between other refugees on foot. All this is happening as the entire area around them has been devastated by the eruption. This painting stands in stark contrast to the landscape painting of Merapi in the early twentieth century or the other drawings of Merapi from the nineteenth century. The only similar portrayal of a disaster is the painting of the Merapi eruption by Raden Saleh in 1865. However, Kasenda's paintings of the Merapi disaster are about human suffering. According to one newspaper, Kasenda's paintings were the first artworks to depict the various phases of the Merapi disaster which had been exhibited up until that time (*Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië* 16-05-1931). Unfortunately, we do not have any information about the whereabouts of the remaining thirty-nine paintings of the Merapi disaster by Kasenda.

Following Kasenda's paintings of the Merapi disaster, landscape painting returned to being "dominated" by the stereotypical image of Merapi. Gifted artists from various backgrounds produced important paintings of Merapi in

<sup>33</sup> The catalogue lists the completion date of this painting as "1920", but this might be a typographical error. The catalogue also states that it was exhibited in Bandung, April 1931 (No. 42). However, I could not confirm the date of this exhibition. See *Pictures of Indonesia* (2005: 10).



this period. Basuki Abdullah (1915-1993), the son of Abdullah Suriosubroto, was one of the painters who created a new series of paintings of Merapi. In his *Mount Merapi and the Opak River*, which was completed between roughly 1930 and 1965, he depicts Mount Merapi belching clouds of ash and lava ([www.archive.iva-a-online.org/](http://www.archive.iva-a-online.org/), accessed on 21-05-2021). The Opak River, a tributary of the Gendol River, which flows along the southern slopes of Merapi, looks tranquil in this painting. Basuki also depicts Merapi in his 1935 religious painting entitled *Maria Assumpta*, now part of the collection of the Jesuit Order in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. This painting portrays the Virgin Mary in traditional Javanese dress, blessing the land and the people beneath her, including an area on the slopes of Mount Merapi and Mount Merbabu. The Jesuit Father Jan Betvelzen has said that Abdullah painted this work as a gift to the Jesuit Order, as it had supported his education in the Academie van Beeldende Kunsten, The Hague, The Netherlands ([www.kemlu.go.id/](http://www.kemlu.go.id/) accessed on 21-05-2021). Unfortunately, we do not have any data to explain the basis for the images depicted in these paintings.

#### CONCLUSION

From 1800 to 1930, Mount Merapi emerged as an important subject in paintings and drawings of the natural world in Java. This volcano was drawn and painted by a range of artists, including H.C. Cornelius, A.A.J. Payen, F.V.A. de Stuers, F.W. Junghuhn, J.H.W. Le Clercq, A.B.S. van Oldruitenborgh, R. Saleh, O.G.H. Heldring, A. Suriosubroto, M. Pirngadie, B. Abdullah, and F. Kasenda. Mount Merapi first appeared as part of the natural background in the drawings of the ruins of the Candi Sewu Temple, a major object of interest in Java in the early nineteenth century. Shortly afterwards Merapi became an intrinsic object of interest in the wake of the scientific explorations conducted in Java and the rise of geology and volcanology as important scientific fields in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Merapi became a popular subject in artworks in the early twentieth century because of the developing trend in landscape art in the Indies society. The artists of this period depicted Merapi in a variety of themes, including ruins and antiquities, science, volcanic eruptions, landscapes, and natural disasters. This paper shows that most of these drawings and paintings which depicted Merapi were among the first of their kind in Java thematically speaking.

Interestingly, all the nineteenth-century paintings discussed in this paper were realistic, suggesting the strong influence of science in the artworks of this period. In the twentieth century, we see more variation in the depiction of Merapi, primarily through the disaster art of Kasenda which resembles contemporary expressionist style painting. Although there is no indication that each drawing and painting of Merapi between 1800 and 1930 corresponds to earlier ones, they are part of a “cumulative history of visual production” (Gennifer Weisenfeld 2012: 29) in which the representations of culture, nature, and trends in modern art intertwined in the visual images of Merapi and its surrounding.



Examining volcanological aspects, the author has found a strong correlation between depiction of volcanic activities in the artworks of Merapi created during 1800-1930 and actual eruption events. The depiction of volcanic activities in drawings and paintings of Merapi, except when not dated, corresponded to a scientifically validated eruption. Some exceptions are probably attributable to the low level of volcanic activity at the time the artwork was completed. The depiction of volcanic degassing, as presented in the drawing of Merapi by Payen (1825) in Figure 3 and, most likely, in the drawing by Le Clercq (1845) in Figure 11, were not included in the eruption record of their respective years. Kasenda's painting of the Merapi disaster is an unusual case because he specifically drew the Merapi eruption in 1930 through the expressionist lens of disaster art. In the depiction of natural hazards and disasters in the artworks of Merapi, the author has discovered the significance of beauty and harmony in the portrayal of volcanic activities. This ties in with what David E. Alexander (2016) has said about the portrayal of disaster in the fine arts in the West. He concludes that artists tend to portray the full spectrum from beauty and harmony to chaos and destruction (Alexander 2016: 10). In the case of Merapi, the depiction of volcanic activities was frequently combined with the idyllic nature of the Merapi landscape. These artworks testify to the power and beauty of nature which was frequently on display in the vicinity of Merapi between 1800 and 1930.

When confronting the power of nature as manifested in Merapi, this paper stresses that the artists of this period were "sensitive" to outbursts of volcanic activities. These artists had an environmental awareness of the need to depict what they actually saw in nature and "record" it on paper or canvas. Three basic factors contributed to this situation, namely: the influence of science, landscape art, and a sense of humanitarianism. The emergence of western science in Java encouraged an "empirical approach" to drawing and painting in this period. This development influenced artists to work on-site and then draw or paint in a style which reflected a "precise" depiction of nature (Gaynor and McLean 2008: 192). In the nineteenth- and twentieth-century paintings of Merapi, the influence of landscape art motivated painters such as Saleh to take this inspiration forward to create his own unique paintings of Merapi eruptions. A sense of humanitarianism was also a contributing factor behind the environmental concern of the artists who took Merapi as their subject. The catastrophic Merapi eruption of 1930 prompted Kasenda to use his painting skills as an expression of humanitarianism in Java by creating his own works of disaster art. Immediately following the Merapi disaster of 1930, Kasenda made a singular artistic attempt to support the victims of Merapi by organizing a series of solo exhibitions.

Lastly, the historical-geophysical context of each artwork played a role in the way the artist depicted Merapi. The artworks and historical-scientific data of this period complement each other in confirming the significance of the artworks in depicting the actual real-time situation of Merapi and its surrounding areas. The artworks of Merapi between 1800 and 1930 discussed in this paper provide past dynamic glimpses of Merapi. They inform us that

Merapi has been a “site” of many past severe eruptions as a consequence of its historical location on the Pacific Ring of Fire.

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