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To fast or not to fast?

Pangulu Ki Amad Kategan challenges his sultan in the Sĕrat Nitik Sultan Agung

ELS BOGAERTS

ABSTRACT

The *Sĕrat Nitik Sultan Agung* texts relate how Sultan Agung (r. 1613-1645) in a miraculous way conquers the surrounding world. He subjugates its inhabitants to Mataram and converts them to Islam. The selected fragment is an interesting example of how the sultan – refusing to fast during the month of Shawwāl – impresses the people in his environment with his supernatural power, and in particular Ki Amad Kategan, his *pangulu*, who tries to match his strength with that of the sultan. The two characters engage in a dispute on Islamic matters. Firstly, I discuss the figure of Ki Amad Kategan and the function of this excerpt in the *Nitik Sultan Agung* tales. Secondly, I present variant readings of the story. The comparison of the three versions touches on features of narrative structure, content and style, language use, and target audiences.

KEYWORDS

(Pa)Nitik; pangulu; Islam; piwulang; comparing; Sultan Agung; Ki Amad Kategan.

INTRODUCTION

The *Sĕrat Nitik Sultan Agung*¹ texts relate tales of Sultan Agung (r. 1613-1645). We learn how, when still a crown prince, he wanders around and acquires secret

¹ Also called *Sĕrat* or *Babad Nitik*, *Babad Nitik Sultan Agung*, or *Panitik Sultan Agungan*.

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knowledge and supernatural power before he is installed on the throne.² He conquers the surrounding world, subjugating its inhabitants to the kingdom of Mataram and converting them to Islam. Gods from the Upperworld and forces from the Underworld, Hindu-Buddhist deities and Islamic saints, endorse the crown prince and prepare him for kingship. Ratu Kidul, the Spirit Queen of the Southern Ocean, and her spirit army assist Sultan Agung wherever he goes. The possession of royal heirlooms contributes to the special qualities a future king should have. Hence, we witness how Sultan Agung creates royal entertainment (*lělangen aji*) in the form of sacred dance and music, and how, together with the Spirit Queen, he plants the first rice and coconuts. The narratives emphasize how under Sultan Agung's rule Mataram is prosperous and peaceful. Representing the sultan as a pious and invincible ruler, they tell the history of Mataram, including the encounters with foreigners, from a much later Javanese perspective.

The texts contained in the nineteenth and early twentieth century Javanese manuscripts were written, copied, read/recited, and listened to in Javanese Islamic aristocratic circles. Most texts are composed in the poetic form of *těmbang macapat*, some in prose. They belong to a storytelling repertoire which is characteristic of Yogyakarta. Simultaneously, they share stories and motifs with other Javanese works (like the *Babad Tanah Jawi*) and Malay textual traditions (like the *Menak/Hikayat Amir Hamzah*).

The *Sěrat Nitik Sultan Agung* texts are multivocal: they have open structures and accommodate various narratives that all centre around Sultan Agung. Hence, the *Nitik Sultan Agung* corpus is much variegated and shows overlap, convergence, variation, and diversity among the narratives. Two recensions have circulated in a number of copies;³ of other recensions, so far only a single copy has been encountered. Most manuscripts are kept in the libraries of the Yogyakarta Kraton, the Sonobudoyo Museum, and Leiden University. The *Nitik* corpus has never been studied entirely and only few researchers have cast their eyes on some of the narratives.

The stories are not just alluring because of the sultan's wondrous adventures and the aesthetics of their rendering. *Piwulang*, didactic moralistic instructions, also have a prominent place in the *Nitik* tales. One of the recensions of the *Sěrat Babad Nitik* mentions this explicitly. The reason given to make a copy of that text was that it was appropriate to set an example;⁴ Sultan Agung functions as a role model for the aristocracy, notably for future kings. Islam plays a prominent role in the tales: the sultan spreads Islam among his subjects and his enemies. He frequently flies to Mecca to attend the Friday prayers (the *sholat*) in the mosque – it only takes him two hours to

² When designated a crown prince, Raden Mas Rangsang receives the title Pangeran Adipati Anom Měntawis; only later he is called Sultan Agung. For the sake of convenience in this chapter I refer to him as Sultan Agung.

³ For a brief comparison of these two recensions, see Slamet Riyadi (1984).

⁴ *marmanira anědhak Srat Babad Nitik / yogya karya darsana* (L.Or. 6489 a I: 3). In references to the Javanese text, Roman numerals refer to the canto(s), Arabic numbers to the stanza(s). Hence, I: 3 means canto I, stanza 3.

reach Arabia from Java, it is told – and to discuss Islamic doctrine with his chief religious official (*pangulu*) and some court officials. Further, the sultan's meetings, confrontations, and battles with foreigners from various origins receive much attention.

The excerpt below (Figure 1) is taken from the Leiden University Library manuscript LOr. 6489a which belongs to the Hazeu Collection of 1931. Entitled *Sĕrat Babad Nitik*, it is written in verse in Javanese script by Pangeran Arya Candra Nagara of Yogyakarta and dated 1838 AJ (1908 AD). It consists of 37 cantos. The text of this manuscript is very closely related to the oldest existing manuscript found so far, the Sonobudoyo MSB/S57, written between 19 July 1873 and 16 July 1876 (see Behrend 1990: 30-31). The first canto (stanzas 4-6) contains a reference to the royal spouse of the late Hamĕngku Buwana VI (r. 1855-1877), named “Kangjĕng Prameswari, Gusti Jĕng Ratu Agĕng”, mother of Sultan Hamengku Buwana VII (r. 1877-1921). The text was written for or commissioned by the Ratu Agĕng, with the intention of telling the story of the young Agung. Hence, in my analysis I will refer to it as the Ratu Agĕng text. The excerpt is part of canto XXX (consisting of 38 stanzas) which is rendered in the macapat metre *Durma*.⁵

In the excerpt it is related that Sultan Agung refuses to fast during the month of Shawwāl, a refusal of which his *pangulu*, Ki Amad Kategan, is aware. In a dispute with the *pangulu*, the sultan explains why. After being admonished by the *pangulu*, he tells him he will abstain from food and drink for one month, beginning the next morning. One hour after the beginning of his fasting, the throne with the sultan seated on it starts levitating, higher and higher. At the urging of the female courtiers who fear the sultan will disappear, the *pangulu* pelts the sultan with rice balls to bring down the throne. As everybody laughs at him, Ki Amad Kategan quickly takes to his heels.

The selected fragment is an interesting example of how Sultan Agung impresses the people in his environment with his supernatural power, and in particular his *pangulu* who tries to match his strength with that of the sultan. Discussions on Islamic matters form the core part of the encounter between the two strong characters, humour adding zest to the competition.

I will first present the excerpt with an English translation. In the commentary section, I will give some information on Ki Amad Kategan, an interpretation of the fragment and a discussion of two variant readings.

⁵ *Durma* has the following metrical form: 12 a 7 i / 6 a 7 a / 8 i / 5 a 7 i // (Ras 1994: 316).

EXCERPT AND TRANSLATION

LOr. 6489a XXX *Durma*Translation⁶

13. [...] *jěng sultan / nulya ngandika aris* 13. [...]. Thereafter the king spoke softly:
14. *Eh pangulu wuruk sudi gawe sira* 14. "Hey Pangulu, as you are making troubles
gon sun tan pasa iki because I am not fasting,
apa sira wikan do you understand
dina pasa lan ora fasting and non-fasting days?
rak nora nana sayěkti After all they do not exist, actually,
dina puwasa days that fast
anjaba amung jalmi except for people only
15. *Ingkang pasa lan manehe datan ana* 15. who fast, and further there are no
dina warěg lan ngělih sated days and hungry days,
jaba manungsanya only to human beings this applies.
iku bedane apa Now what is the difference
wong warěg lawan wong ngělih between a sated person and a hungry
tan liyan sujalma person,
kang warěg miwah ngělih none other than a person
who is satiated or hungry.
16. *Yen ta uwis dhasar wran yěkti puwasa* 16. If then indeed a person is actually
fasting,
tan pěgat saběn ari without breaking off, every day,
reh ing sarak widya according to the rules of the sacred law
and wisdom,
saiki sira pasa if you are fasting now,
tan liyan kang den arsi-arsi the only thing you are longing for
gonira buka is to break the fast
surupa Sang Hyang Rawi at the setting of the Sun God
17. *Anglir jabang mari dadi ngran wong* 17. like the transition from a newborn child
tuwa to an old person."
pangulu duk miyarsi When the *pangulu* heard
sabda kang mangkana those words of the king,
rumangsa kalu[138]huran he felt overpowered.
kya pangulu kěthip-kěthip The *pangulu* blinked his eyes,
kawěken driya feeling at a loss
genirarsa mangsuli about how he was going to answer,

⁶ I would like to thank Yosephin Apriastuti Rahayu with whom I discussed some issues of translation and style, and Nancy K. Florida, Tony Day, and Edwin Wieringa for their critical comments.

18. *Nolah-nolih maring sandhingira
lěnggah
kětibira kěkalih
duk kala umiyat
gligapireng lulurah
kětib tumungkul ngesěmi
panyakranira
datan wignya mangsuli* 18. he kept on turning his head to the ones
sitting next to him,
the two *kětib*.⁷
Upon seeing
how startled their master was,
the *kětib* bowed low and smiled at him,
suspecting
he would not be able to give an answer.
19. *Kya Pangulu Amad Kategan tan
kewran
ing reh parama widi
němbah apyayama

lo inggih kasinggihan
lěrs dhawuh dalěm gusti

rehning paduka
ngratoni sanagari* 19. *Pangulu* Amad Kategan was not
troubled
because of his eminent knowledge.
He made his obeisance with a *sěmbah* and
answered:
“Well indeed you are right,
true are Your Highness’ words that have
come down.
Because Your Majesty
reigns over the entire realm,
20. *Wajibipun panduka dados tuladan
manawi gih manawi
estu botěn siyam
sagungireng sujalma
yěkti kathah kang gěgampil
ngenthengkěn sarak
yeku pamanggih mami* 20. it is your duty to set an example.
If, yes, if
you truly do not fast,
of all your people
many indeed will be easy-going
and take the religious rules lightly.
Such is my point of view.”
21. *Eh pangulu apa městhi kehing jalma
kabeh kang sun ratoni
manut marang ingwang
těgěse manut padha
karo ingkang den anuti
lamun tan wignya
padha wran manut lamis* 21. “Hey *Pangulu*, do indeed all the people,
all the ones over whom I rule,
have to follow me,
meaning they act like
the one they are following,
and if they are not capable,
they resemble people who just pretend to
do so?”
22. *Kya pangulu matur punika tan kěna

městhi kědah lumirig
manut mring paduka
gumujěng sri narendra
eh pangulu sira lali
duk kalanira
sira tak kon dongani* 22. The *pangulu* spoke politely: “That is not
allowed,
they should follow you
and act as Your Majesty does.”
The king laughed:
“Hey *Pangulu*, have you forgotten
the time when
I ordered you to pray

⁷ The *pangulu*’s two assistants.

23. *Adol gëndhung apa wran ma[139]nut mangkana
ya ingsun benjing enjing
niyat arsa pasa
sunat muakat Sawal*
23. and you were boastful? Should people follow me in this way?
Yes, tomorrow morning I have the intention to fast, the strongly recommended fast of the month of Shawwāl.
You should appear before me so as to act according to me and follow me in my fasting.”
24. *Mas pangulu lan kětib wus kinen bubar
kauman sampun prapti dalu tan winarna
wuwusēn wanci enjang pangulu kalawan kětib kang arsa sowan maruput den enjingi*
24. The *pangulu* and the *kětib* had been ordered to leave and had arrived at the Kauman.⁸
The night is not told about.
Let us speak of the morning time when the *pangulu* and the *kětib*, wanting to make their appearance, left very early in the morning.
25. *Pripteng pura jěng sinuhun maksih nendra
pangulu lawan kětib ngadhěp palěnggahan samantara jěng sultan wungu lěnggah gyaning wingi*
25. When they arrived in the palace, His Highness was still asleep.
The *pangulu* and the *kětib* faced the throne.
Not long after that the sultan woke up, seated himself in yesterday’s place and did not ask for any food.
The *pangulu* and the *kětib* then
26. *Amancěřeng ngawaskēn mring kangjěng sultan awit pukul nēm enjing siyamnya jěng sultan đupi wanci jam sapta sukuning dhampar katawis běnggang sakilan antara saking siti*
26. sternly kept a sharp watch over His Majesty the Sultan.
From six in the morning the king had been fasting.
At seven o’clock the legs of his throne appeared to elevate one hand span from the earth.

⁸ The Muslim quarter around the mosque.

27. *Sarěng tabuh astha sukuning amparan* 27. When it was eight o'clock the legs of
the throne
muluk sansaya inggil of the king had risen even higher.
dupi jam sadasa At ten o'clock
salandheyan inggilnya they were as high as the handle of a spear.
wauta dwi prameswari And so it was that the two royal consorts
lan pra klangěnan and the concubines,
ěmban kalawan cethi the nursemaids and the female servants,
28. *Duk umiyat yen jěng sultan* 28. seeing that the sultan was rising into
anggěgana the air,
gupuh pra sami mijil emerged hastily.
ngadhěp aneng ngandhap Facing him from below,
osiking tyas mang[140]nawa they considered whether
awor lawan Sang Hyang Rawi he would mingle with the Sun God.
warnaněn sira Let us tell of
pangulu lawan kětib the *pangulu* and the *kětib*
29. *Jěngěr ngungun datan wignya* 29. who were amazed and perplexed and
amangucap could not speak.
wauta sri bupati It so happened that the sovereign
neng tawang ngandika up in the air said:
eh eh padha kariya "Hey, hey, farewell to all of you,
yen mangke manira apti when soon I desire to
wor lan bangsengwang mingle with my equals,
kang pasa anglir mami those who fast like me."
30. *Yata wontěn kucumbi ran Nyi Pidakan* 30. Then, there was a wife, called Nyi
Pidakan.
mirěng yen sri bupati When she heard that the king
ngandika mangkana had said this
sira kucumbi nabda she, the wife, said:
mas pangulu kadi pundi "Mas Pangulu, what happens
yen sri narendra if His Royal Highness
murca saking nagari vanishes from the kingdom?"
31. *Pěsthi dika kinrawus lan ciněblekan* 31. For sure you will be attacked verbally
and slapped
mring kanca pra kucumbi by the wives.
suwawi den enggal Come on, quickly,
udhunna kangjěng sultan let the honourable sultan descend,
mu[m]pung nika dereng inggil while now he is not yet high."
wěneh parěkan Another servant
nabda sarwi nudingi spoke while pointing at him.

32. *Kya pangulu kewēdan denira arsa
ngudhunkĕn sri bupati
gya amanggih akal
gupuh dhatĕng pungkuran
malĕbeng ring gen pawestri
pawon sinĕdya
tan etang wirang isin* 32. The *pangulu* felt troubled as he wanted
to bring down the king.
Soon he found a solution
and hastened to the backyard.⁹
He entered the female quarters
and aimed for the kitchen,
discarding his embarrassment.
33. *Amĕrpĕki ĕmban nuju numplak sĕga

pangulu katgada glis
amet tan pĕpoyan
ĕmban sru kagyatira
pangulu jinĕngkang nuli

tiba ing kisma
gulung awor ku[141]wali* 33. He approached a nursemaid who was
pouring out the rice.
The *pangulu* swiftly and quickly
took it without asking her for permission,
the nursemaid was very startled.
Then the *pangulu* was pushed over
backwards
and fell on the floor
rolling over with the cooking pot.
34. *Kya pangulu garegah mĕnyat
lumajar
sĕgane datan kari
ginĕgĕm neng asta
tan etang kĕpanasan
ngiwa nĕngĕn denya musthi

ĕmban Pidakan
sĕdene pra kucumbi* 34. The *pangulu* rose immediately and
hurried off,
not leaving the rice behind.¹⁰
Clutching it in his hands,
he did not care that it was too hot
in turns he clutched it in his left and right
fist.
Ĕmban Pidakan
and all the wives
35. *Dyan umiyat yen pangulu jubahira
kenging angus kuwali

nglabĕti mring srĕban
ĕmban inya sadaya
sanya gumuyu abĕlik
ambata rĕbah¹¹
panyakraning pra cethi* 35. then saw that the *pangulu's* robe
was blackened by the soot of the cooking
pot
which had left traces on his turban.
The *ĕmban* and wet nurses
roared with laughter
raucous and loud.
The female court retainers, reckoning
36. *Sanya nabda kyai mas pangulu tĕka

dadak mĕcahkĕn kwali
dene kawistara
nglabĕti angusira
pangulu tan nyauloni
muhung genira
bikut denya nyawati* 36. all said: "Kyai Mas Pangulu, how dare
you
all of a sudden break the cooking pot?
It shows
from the soot that is left behind."
The *pangulu* did not reply.
He was only
occupied with the pelting

⁹ That is, he went to the privy.

¹⁰ Taking the rice with him.

¹¹ Literally: like falling bricks (Robson and Wibisono 2002: 77).

<p>37. <i>Kang kěpělan sěga dhatěng sri narendra amparanira kěni wangwang kang dhědhampar tumurun lon-alonan wangsul mring gyanira lami yata pra garwa samya arsayeng galih</i></p>	<p>37. of rice balls at the king hitting his throne. Promptly the throne descended slowly, returning to its original position. It made the royal spouses happy.</p>
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COMMENTARY

KI AMAD KATEGAN

Who is this *pangulu* who frequently provokes the sultan? Ki Amad Kategan, also called Kyai Mas Pangulu,¹² is Sultan Agung's principal Islamic religious official (*pangulu*) and religious judge (*kalining sanga Ngaji*, XV: 2). The name Kategan is related to the Old Javanese *katyāgan*, 'the abode of ascetics or hermitage' (from the noun *tyāga*, meaning 'world-renouncing ascetic' [Zoetmulder 1982: 2091]). A Pangulu Amad Kategan is listed in the genealogy of R. Ad. Danurēja V and R. Ad. Danurēja VI, chief councillors of the sultans of Yogyakarta (Pigeaud 1932: 40).¹³ A man of distinction, the *pangulu* is well-versed in Islamic law and theology. In the past, Sultan Agung and Ki Amad Kategan obtained instruction from the same teacher, Sunan Bayat III (XVI: 5-7). Hence, they are well matched.

Ki Amad Kategan is a strong personality, stubborn, resolute, and perseverant, and has a sense of humour. Seriously devoted to God, he acquires supernatural power. On Fridays he flies to Mecca to attend the prayers in the mosque, where he meets with Sultan Agung. As the excerpt demonstrates, he likes to challenge the sultan and show off. All the while, the sultan feels affection for him. Following the fasting sequence, the sultan learns that the *pangulu* gives all the royal presents to the poor. Hence, contrary to what some people claim, he is not rich but lives a modest life (XXXI: 1). His appearance is not described in detail, but we know that he is wearing a robe and a turban, simple Arab-style clothing fitting his position and function (see Pijper 1977: 79). This *pangulu* plays an important role in several other Javanese narratives. In the *Sěrat Panatagama*,¹⁴ for instance, he teaches Sultan Agung the *ilmu makrifat*, Islamic mysticism. As he makes his appearance in the *Sěrat Cěnthini*, we can conclude that at least since 1815, the date of the Surakarta version of the *Cěnthini* known as the "Major Cěnthini", Ki Amad Kategan has been part of the storytelling tradition and the collective memories surrounding Sultan Agung. Also, in the *Wirit Wedharaning Cipta Sasmitaning Ngilmi* he is presented in the environs of Sultan Agung.¹⁵

¹² *Kyai*: Islamic master. *Mas*: term of address or title for a person of equal or somewhat lower rank.

¹³ R.Ad. Danurēja V (17-11-1879 - ca. 21-7-1899); R.Ad. Danurēja VI (July? 1899 - 14-11-1911). I am thankful to Ben Arps who drew my attention to Pigeaud's article.

¹⁴ A late nineteenth century prose treatise on Islamic theology (Florida 1993, I: 293-294).

¹⁵ Kusumadiningrat, c. 1890.

TO FAST OR NOT TO FAST?

The discussion between the sultan and the *pangulu* revolves around the fasting in the month of Shawwāl (*siyam Sawal*). Shawwāl is the tenth month of the Islamic calendar, subsequent to the obligatory fasting month (*Pasa, Siyam* or *Ramelan*). The theological basis for the dispute is the interpretation of “fasting”, and the difference between what is strongly recommended (*sunat muakat*) and what is compulsory for every Muslim (*sunat ngaen*); failure to perform the latter is considered a sin. The *pangulu* is aware that Sultan Agung does not, in this case, wish to perform whatever is considered *sunat muakat*, but only whatever is *sunat ngaen*. To the king, it suffices if only the *pangulu* performs the fasting during the month of Shawwāl, which is considered to be *sunat muakat*. If it were the fasting during the month of Ramadan, which is considered the fourth pillar of Islam and *sunat ngaen*, then every individual member of society must perform it. Although it is unthinkable that the *pangulu* does not know these prescriptions, it says in the text that he begins the dispute on purpose, using the fasting issue as an excuse to appear before the sultan in the company of two *kětib*, his assistants, to show off his debating skills (XXX: 11). Actually, Sultan Agung’s refusal to fast is a reaction to the *pangulu*’s efforts to appear superior to him. The sultan outwits him with his reasoning about days and people fasting, employing a literal interpretation of “fasting days”, and the fact that while fasting, people are only looking forward to breaking the fast.

Stanzas 22-23 offer a clue to the origin of the dispute. When the *pangulu* points out to the sultan that he needs to set an example for his subjects and that everybody has to follow him in all he does, the sultan reacts laughingly: “Hey Pangulu, have you forgotten the time when I ordered you to pray, and you were boastful?” Referring to the recent past, when the *pangulu* refused to pray for the royal *slamětan*, he undermines Ki Amad Kategan’s argument and wishes to teach him a lesson.¹⁶

This past event, which takes place before the fasting sequence, goes as follows: Ki Amad Kategan intends to prove his supernatural power. He ceases to make his appearance before the sultan (*sowan*). On the sultan’s birthday (*tingalan tumbuk*, which is every *windu* or eight-year cycle), he pretends to be ill. Sultan Agung sends envoys to his house, but the *pangulu* has left for the palace already. There, Ki Amad Kategan refuses to pray at the ritual feast and sends his assistant, Mas Kětib Anom, as a representative. Sultan Agung is furious and forces the *pangulu* to say the prayers over the royal *slamětan* and the food dishes (XXIX). As soon as he starts praying, the prepared meat and fish turn back into living animals and the boiled rice turns back into husked rice grains. The meal (*kendhuri*) is postponed, with the guests invited to return the same afternoon. The news of the *pangulu*’s power spreads and everybody is astonished by it (XXX: 5). The *pangulu* receives presents from

¹⁶ In his notes to a similar passage in another manuscript, Kraemer suggests that Sultan Agung wants to revenge himself upon the *pangulu* (L.Or. 11.655).

the king as a token of affection, but even so he still wishes to go on making fun of the sultan (XXX: 1-8).¹⁷

To interpret the function of the narrative in this excerpt, a glance at the beginning of the manuscript may offer some insight. In the stanzas referring to the circumstances of the coming into being of this manuscript – the beginning of the writing and its patronage – the aim of the copying is mentioned, namely it is appropriate to set an example.¹⁸ Possibly this is one of the instances used to inspire the readers of and listeners to the text and to instruct them by means of a *piwulang*.

Another explanation may be found in the meaning of the word *nitik*, used in the title of the manuscript. The *Sĕrat Babad Nitik* presents us with a meticulous account of the life of Sultan Agung. *Nitik* means to observe carefully, to understand the characteristics of someone or something (Poerwadarminta 1939: 346), to explore or investigate (Gericke and Roorda 1901, I: 651). Theodore Th.G. Pigeaud (1967: 161) translates *panitik* with “Scrutiny, a name intimating knowledge of esoteric secrets pertaining to the great man’s life and exploits, not mentioned in common babads”. Suradi Hp (1991: 226) applies the act of exploring not to the text’s readers/listeners, but to the crown prince himself as he wanders around and visits the neighbouring countries to investigate (*nitik*) the local conditions and powers. The episode in the excerpt indeed scrutinizes an instance of how the sultan masters secret knowledge (*ngelmu*).¹⁹

VARIANT READINGS

Stories about the sultan and his *pangulu*, including the one presented here, recur in the *Nitik Sultan Agung* texts. However, not all the tales appear in every text, and their position within the narrative may differ. It is an interesting exercise to uncover how the variant readings relate to each other. The narrative structure and the context of the stories usually show similarities while the plots develop along well-established lines; the argumentative discourse within the episodes however varies. Using the term “variant readings” I do not want to suggest that the Ratu Agĕng text – which I presented first and which is closely related to a much older *Sĕrat Nitik* – is the main source on which the other texts offer variations.

A brief comparison of the selected fragment with a similar fragment found in two other manuscripts, LOr. 6476 and LOr. 8990 no.1, yields the following. The LOr. 6476 manuscript contains a *Sĕrat Buk Panitik* in verse in Javanese script. It consists of sixty-four cantos. It was written in Yogyakarta by Raden Wadana Sasra Winata in 1876 and owned by Raden Mas Nukadar.²⁰ Like the Ratu Agĕng manuscript, the Nukadar manuscript belongs to the Hazeu Collection, dated

¹⁷ *Dadya mĕne dahat sihira jĕng sultan / pangulu winudheng sih / pinaring pradana / pradana warna-warna / ananging pangulu mĕksih / kĕdah derarsa / guywan mring sri bupati //* (XXX: 8).

¹⁸ See footnote 3.

¹⁹ On *Nitik* as a genre, see Bogaerts (1990: 41-47). On a very different *Nitik Sultan Agung* text (also called *Sĕrat Cariyosipun Dewi Ambararini*), see Wieringa (1993); on other *Nitik* texts, such as the *Babad Nitik Sambĕrnyawa* and the *Babad Nitik Mangkunagaran*, see Ricklefs (2018).

²⁰ Hereafter I will use the name of the owner, RM Nukadar, to refer to this manuscript and text.

1931. LOr. 8990 no.1 contains a copy of a *Sĕrat Nitik* (also called *Nitik Sultan Agung*) in verse. It consists of twelve cantos and was written by Ngabehi Wirya Rumĕksa²¹ on 8 January 1923 AD (AJ 1853)²². This is one of the very few Surakarta court manuscripts containing the *Sĕrat Nitik Sultan Agung*. Interesting is also its explicit mention that this versified text is based on a prose version (*gancar sinĕkarken*, XII: 23). The manuscript is part of the Rinkes Collection, dated 1954.

At the level of the overall narrative structure, in the Nukadar text the story presents itself in an earlier position, in canto VIII. It is put in the *Dhandhanggula* metre, here called *Sarkara*, and has thirty-nine stanzas.²³ The Wirya Rumĕksa text presents the story in the cantos IX (twenty-five stanzas in the *Dhandhanggula* metre) and X (*Sinom*, here called *Srinata*, stanzas 1-4). In the following, I will focus on the contents of the three examples. I will neither discuss the mood each specific metrical form – in the present case *Durma* and *Sarkara* or *Dhandhanggula*²⁴ – is said to convey (see Ras 1994: 311-315; Suripan Sadi Hutomo et al. 1984: 69), nor join the scholarly discussion about the relation between content and form, the written text and its oral delivery (see Arps 1992: 27-29).

Notwithstanding the differences, the narrative structure of the three tales runs fairly parallel and there is quite some overlap on the level of the stanzas, verse lines, and wording. The plot develops along the following lines.

The *pangulu* wants to show off, matching his power to the sultan's:

Ratu Agĕng (L.Or. 6489a)
Canto XXX *Durma* (38)

8. [...] / *ananging pangulu
mĕksih / kĕdah derarsa / guywan
mring sri bupati //*

9. *Amantyakĕn nĕnggih ing
pangwasanira / [...]*

RM Nukadar (L.Or. 6476)
Canto VIII *Sarkara* (39)

3. *Nanging mangke ki pangulu
taksih / kĕdah arsa nyuwun
pagujĕngan / dhumatĕng
jĕng sri pamangse / ngabĕn
pangwasanipun /*

Ng Wirya Rumĕksa (L.Or.
8990 no.1)
Canto IX *Dhandhanggula*
(25)²⁵

1. [...] *marma ki pangulu /
darbe pamanggih
sumĕdya / pados margi
nggenirarsa amiwiti /
ngatingalakĕn kramat //*

2. *Pinanggihing pamikir
mung kardi / nyobi marang
Panjĕnĕngan Nata / puwara
jĕng Sripamase / mriksa
saderengipun / lamun
arsa cinobi dening / abdi
pangulunira / [...]*

²¹ Having the function of Abdidalem Panewu Garap Karaton Surakarta. Hereafter I use the name of the writer/copyist Wirya Rumĕksa to refer to this manuscript and text.

²² On *Senen 19 Jumadilawal taun Jimawal*, according to the Javanese calendar.

²³ *Dhandhanggula* has the following metrical form: 10i 10a 8e or o / 7u 9i / 7a 6u / 8a / 12i 7a // or 10i 10a 8e or o / 7u 9i / 7a 6u / 8a 12i 7a // (Ras 1994: 316).

²⁴ And four stanzas in *Sinom*, which I do not analyse any further here.

²⁵ I have adapted the spelling of the original in Latin script to the official modern Javanese spelling (see Sudaryanto 1991: 199-232). Further, I have kept the punctuation marks of the original, but marked the end of each verse line with / and the end of each stanza with // .

The sultan refuses to fast and – deliberately – offers the *pangulu* the perfect alibi to test him:

9. [...] / *samana amarēngi /
wēktu siyam Sawal / pangulu
wus uninga / yen sang nata datan
apti / sunat muakat / mung sunat
ngaen yēkti //*

3. [...] / *lan gustinya
kangjēng sultani / sarēng ing
sahri Ramlam²⁶ / kangjēng
kang sinuwun / Prabu
Anyakrakusuma / datan arsa
siyam saha mangabēkti /
sēmbahyang mring munara //*

2. [...] / *marma Sang Sri
Mulku / dupi nuju wulan
Ramlan / wanci enjing
animbali para cethi / kēkalih
cacahira //*

3. *Pan ingutus amēmireng
maring / ki Pangulu lamun
Srinarendra / tan karsa siyam
parēnge / [...]*

This leads to an argument between the two protagonists, after which the sultan decides to fast. The pivotal point in the plot is indicated by the night which is not told about and the early morning which will be told about as time markers:

24. [...] / *dalu tan winarna /
wuwusēn wanci enjang*

19. [...] / *ing dalu tan winarna /
enjing umun-umun / [...]*

19. [...] / *tan kacrita duk ing
dalunira / kunēng wau ri
enjinge / [...]*

The fasting scene relates how the sultan and his throne ascend. The plot and the structure of this scene are similar in each version. The account of the event and the determining time markers in the Ratu Agēng and the Nukadar versions are very close to each other, although the latter is much more elaborate; the Wirya Rumēksa version presents its proper time markers and measurement values:

²⁶ The usual *Ramlan* is spelled *Ramlam* in this text.

26. [...] / *awit pukul nēm enjing / siyamnya jěng sultan / dupi wanci jam sapta / sukuning dhampar katawis / bėnggang sakilan / antara saking siti //*

27. *Sarėng tabuh astha sukuning amparan / muluk sansaya inggil / dupi jam sadasa / salandheyan inggilnya / [...]*

25. [...] / *sarta ngawaskėn jěng sultan / ing nalika pukul nēm denira wiwit / siyamnya kangjěng sultan //*

26. *Sarėng wanci pukul pitu enjing / plė[ng]gahan dalėm wijoan rukma / katingal bėnggang sukune / wantawis bė[ng]gangipun / mung sakilan kalawan siti / ki pangulu duk mulat / yen dhampar sang mulku / lan siti bėnggang sakilan / gedheg-gedheg mas pangulu datan angling / kėtib dyi²⁷ jěngėr mulat //*

27. *Sarėng dumugi jam walu enjing / denya siyam kangjěng sultaningrat / kang dhampar wuwuh bė[ng]gange / sadėdėg mulukipun / sangking kisma sarėng dumugi / ing wanci jam sadasa / dhampar saya mumbul / saklandheyan i[ng]gilira / [...]*

19. [...] / *wanci jam tabuh wolu / sampun lėnggah Srinarapati / mungging palangka rėtna / ingayap para rum / manggung kėtanggung palara / ampil-ampil upacareng jěng Sang Aji / aglar cethi parėkan //*

20. *Ki Pangulu wus sowan jro puri / jěng Sri wiwit lėnggah tanpa nabda / datan dangu antarane / dhampar lėnggahan Prabu / gonggang siti mumbul manginggil / prapteng wanci jam sanga / inggilipun sampun / kintėn wontėn tigang dhėpa / jam satėngah sadasa sangsaya inggil / watawis gangsal dhėpa //*

Up in the sky, the sultan addresses the *pangulu*, threatening that he will disappear from the realm to unify with his likes:

29. [...] / *wauta sri bupati / neng tawang ngandika / eh eh padha kariya / yen mangke manira apti / wor lan bangsengwang / kang pasa anglir mami //*

29. [...] / *mardana sang mulku / manuara gupitanya / eh ta kabeh padha kariya neng puri / dene ta jėnėngingwang //*

30. *Ciptaningsun arsa amor maring / bangsaningsun ingkang padha bisa / bisa pasa kaya kene / [...]*

21. [...] / *katungka prapta gandane / rum ngambar jro kadhatun / Srinarendra ngandika aris: / "Heh Pangulu si kakang / keria sireku / angrėksa prajeng Mataram / rehning ingsun siyam iya bakal nunggil / bangsaningsun nurbuwah //*

22. *Sabab ingsun tinitah Hyang Widi / wus bineda lan puwasanira." / [...]*

The emotional reactions of the court women force the *pangulu* to find a solution. Pelting the throne with rice, he brings the sultan down:

²⁷ *dwi*.

37. Kang *kěpėlan sęga dhatęng sri narendra / amparanira kęni / wangwang kang dhędhampar / tumurun lon-alonan / wangsul mring gyanira lami / [...]*

36. Sarikutan *denira nyawati / kępėlan sękul dhatęng jęng sultan / kang dhampar tumurun age / ganjręt-ganjręt gya wangsul / palę[ng]gahanira duk enjing / [...]*

23. [...] / *puwaranya antuk sękul wadhang nuli / sinawatkęn ing dhampar //*

24. *Kalęresan panyawatnya titis / sękul sagęd dhumawah ing dhampar / dillallah Allah karsane / dhampar laju tumurun / [...]*

The *pangulu* is defeated. The Ratu Agęng version relates that he returns home. In the two other readings he begs the sultan for forgiveness:

39. [...] / *nuwun ngapura / mring Jęng Sultan Agung / ki pangulu sasolahnya / estu kęna siku mring kangjęng sultani / a[54]tas karsaning Allah //*

24. [...] *ki Pangulu sujud ing siti / sarwi matur ngręrępa: / "Dhuh pępundhen ulun / sewu-sewu lępat amba / mung ngunjukkęn pęjah gęsangnya pun patik / ing mangke Srinata //*

25. *Sampun boten sisah siyam Gusti / kang supadya janma tani desa / kawędalan tanęmane / satęmah dimenipun / ayęm tęntręm kawula alit." /*

In some readings, the sultan honours and rewards the *pangulu* as a token of respect.

In terms of content, both the Nukadar and the Wiryā Rumęksa texts offer readings that in their details vary much from the reading in the Ratu Agęng text. Most importantly, the circumstances of the fasting are different as is the dispute between the *pangulu* and the sultan. In the Nukadar text, the sultan is not willing to fast and pray during the month of Ramadan, a fasting which is compulsory. Hence, there is no argument about the character of that fasting in terms of *sunat muakat* (strongly recommended) or *sunat ngaen* (compulsory), as was the case in the Ratu Agęng text.²⁸ Further, the setting of the sultan's breakfast is drawn up more elaborately, in particular paying attention to the presence of the beautiful wives and concubines and the rows of court servants presenting the fabulously looking dishes to the king. Eight additional stanzas describe the *pangulu*'s early arrival at the palace the next morning, while the sultan is still asleep. We are told how the *pangulu* seats himself in a corner of the compound, is close to being urinated on by the female servants, his turban

²⁸ LOr. 6476 VIII: 3. *Nanging mangke ki pangulu taksih / kędah arsa nyuwun pagujęngan / dhumatęng jęng sri pamangse / ngabęn pangwasanipun / lan gustinya kangjęng sultani / saręng ing sahri Ramlam / kangjęng kang sinuwun / Prabu Anyakrakusuma / datan arsa siyam saha mangabękti / sęmbahyang mring munara //*. *Sahri* is Arabic for *sasi*, 'month' (throughout this canto).

almost besmirched with stinking beans (*pete*)²⁹ and smelly *jengkol*³⁰ urine. Next, he escapes from being swept up and shovelled onto the dunghill together with old leaves, by jumping up and screaming (VIII: 21-22).

In the next scene, the sultan overpowers the *pangulu* with a similar play on the meaning of the term “fasting day” as is found in the Ratu Agëng text: a “fasting day” as such does not exist according to the sultan, since only human beings can fast or not fast, and only they can be hungry or not, not the days. The continuous longing to break the fast demonstrates the weakness of humanity. The sultan’s words make the *pangulu* feel ill at ease and the bystanders smile. The discussion continues and touches upon the duty of the sultan to set an example for his subjects so that they will not take the religious prescriptions lightly, and upon the role of the individual will.³¹ Also here, the sultan refers to the past, when the *pangulu* himself refused to follow his order when asked to pray for the royal *slamëtan*. The sultan, winning the debate, perceives how the outsmarted *pangulu* is impressed and frightened. He promises to begin fasting the next morning, complying with the *pangulu*’s humble request, and to continue for the entire month of Ramadan, in the presence of the *pangulu*.

The end of the story, following the fasting scene, expands on the *pangulu*’s defeat, a scene lacking in the corresponding sequence in the Ratu Agëng text. After the throne has come down as a result of the rice pelting, the *pangulu* feels overpowered by the sultan and humiliated by the female bystanders. Back home, he discovers the soot on his face, his clothes torn, his turban unwound. The distress continues in a slapstick scene that has a high tempo due to a dense and rhythmic succession of events in just a few verse lines: bathing in the pond, a *gurame* fish bites him; running away, he slips over the tiles and falls backwards. He gets dressed and goes to bed, but barely asleep, a cat pounces on him. Jumping up to chase the cat, he hits a post, and while prodding the animal with a bamboo pole, he is stung by a wasp, a centipede biting his foot at the same time. He begins to scream. Finally, he realizes his mistake and begs the sultan for forgiveness.³²

In the Wirya Rumëksa text, both the preamble to the sultan’s decision to

²⁹ *Parkia speciosa*.

³⁰ *Archidendron pauciflorum*.

³¹ LOr. 6476 VIII: 12. *Sayidinku amirul mukmini / kasi[ng]giyan sèbda kang dhumawah / direng kang abdi wiyose / nanging panduka ratu / angratoni jalma sanagri / ngatas angin myang Jawa / pra samya tumëlung / mangestu pada jëngira / ratu wajib dadya panutaning dasih / manawi botën siyam //* LOr. 6476 VIII: 13. *Abdi dalëm kathah kang gëgampil / dhatëng sarakipun Rasullulah / jëng Nabi musthikengrate / raliyallah nganhu / kang sinuwun ngandika malih / eh pangulu wruhanta / pasthi wong sadarum / kang ingsun ratoni padha / manut marang jënëng sun ing reh sèkalir / pangulu kawruhana //*

³² LOr. 6476 VIII: 38. *Garwa putra gumun samya isin / ki pangulu gya andewasraya / mring blumbang ginigit grameh / sinëdhul kutuk bënguk / mlayu mëntas kapleset jobin / kre[ng]kangan tangi dandan / mantuk nuli turu / mujung këmül aneng wisma / lagi ngliyëp nuli den ëjlogi kucing / kaget kajëgluk cagak //* LOr. 6476 VIII: 39. *Nëpsu ngoyak kucingira dhëlik / neng langitan disogoki gantar / pangulu den antup tawon / warnanya bithu-bithu / gya cinakot klambang kang sikil / bëngok nuwun ngapura / mring jëng Sultan Agung / ki pangulu sasolahnya / estu këna siku mring kangjëng sultani / atas karsaning Allah //*

fast and the description of the final part of the story introduce some quite new perspectives. In the month of Ramadan Sultan Agung is aware that his *pangulu* wants to test him. Therefore, he delegates two female court retainers to the house of the *pangulu* where they spread the rumour that His Royal Highness every morning asks to be served rice with *kēmangi* (lemon basil), cabbage, and *tēmupoh* root³³ as raw side dishes. Beyond that, he eats at least five times a day, while he is expected to fast. The *pangulu*, having obtained a reason to provoke the sultan, puts pressure on him by calling him a true Apostle, Lawgiver of religion,³⁴ splendid Representative of God on Earth and right leader.³⁵ Astonished by the sultan's stance, the *pangulu* engages in a dispute with him. In this text, the argument centres around the Sufi philosophical question of the *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*, the Javanese perception of the unity between God, or the sultan as His representative, and the people. The other point of discussion is the sultan's responsibility towards his subjects. When the sultan claims, he is not obliged to fast, the *pangulu* emphasizes his exemplary function. The sultan then poses a rhetorical question: "But, insofar as I am God's Caliph, am I not different from my subjects?" The *pangulu* agrees with him, stating that as a representative of God he holds the authority over the law and therefore differs much from the subjects. On the bodily level, on the contrary, he is similar to every other human being as he is vulnerable to physical pleasure, sleep, illness, fear, death, and so on. Hence, like any other man still a *kawula* of God, the sultan should be willing to fast, urges the *pangulu*. When the sultan thereupon asks him how his subjects observe the fast, the *pangulu* instructs him in detail and in a very down-to-earth manner: from the *sahur*, the meal eaten at three o'clock at night, followed by the abstention from food and drink throughout the entire day to the *buka*, the time at sunset when the birds and bats are flying up and people are allowed to eat and drink.

The fasting scene follows. A sweet fragrance fills the palace while the sultan levitates and threatens to merge with his equals who have prophetic lustre like him. Because, he says, "I am destined by God Who Ordains All, that my fasting is different from yours". After pelting the throne with rice, a leftover from the previous evening (*sekul wadhang*), by the will of Allah the throne quickly descends. Prostrating himself before the sultan, the *pangulu* humbly asks for forgiveness. In the future, the sultan does not need to fast anymore, so that the crops of the farmers in the village will be bountiful, and so that, as a result, the common people will be peaceful and quiet. Back home, he gathers his children and grandchildren, teaches them how the common people should serve the king and instructs them in Islamic matters.

The comparison of the three fragments demonstrates how interesting and relevant it is to study manuscript corpuses as a whole and in detail. At first glance the three excerpts seem similar to each other and only more detailed research reveals significant variations, as I have demonstrated in this essay.

³³ *Curcuma mangga*, a plant of the Zingiberaceae family.

³⁴ *waliollah tuhu / panētēp panata gama* (LOR. 8990 no.1 IX: 8).

³⁵ *kalipah di panuntun sajati* (LOR 8990 no.1 IX: 9).

The examples also reveal how the scribe and the context of the writing have their impact on stylistic features. Not only is the Nukadar narrative more elaborate than the Ratu Agëng narrative, it also uses more religious terms and references to Islamic law. The language used in the Ratu Agëng text is more archaic. Most possibly this is a copy of an older manuscript, going back to 1873-1876. In terms of content and in the phrasing, the Wirya Rumëksa text is very close to a prose version originating from the Surakarta court and on which it possibly has been based.³⁶ This is reflected in the style and language use and in the “physicality”³⁷ of the wording and descriptions. The *piwulang* in this text is very explicit, the teachings basic in character. Further study may give us glimpses of how and why these different variants of the *Sěrat Nitik* were composed. Lastly, comparative research may offer insights on the audiences targeted and on the aims of the storytelling. The Wirya Rumëksa text is possibly meant to inform or educate rural audiences and point them to their proper social positions from a court angle, while the Ratu Agëng text targets aristocratic circles. All three texts, however, give vivid, theatrical depictions of the scene and use humour as a device to attract the attention of the audiences and prepare them to receive the instruction.

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³⁶ I compared the *těmbang* version with a copy of a *Sěrat Nitik Sultan Agungan* in prose, written in Javanese script and Romanized at the Radyapustaka library (copy in my collection). This copy does not give any further details which would enable me to identify the author and the date and place of writing. However, it possibly is a copy of the *Babad Nitik Sultan Agungan* of 1918, of which the scribe is Sastrasayana (see RP 22, in Florida 2012: 56).

³⁷ As suggested by Yosephin Apriastuti Rahayu (oral communication 5-8-2020).

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