Conclusion: Panji and the cap-figure as intermediary characters on the path to Tantric rituals

In my analysis, I have presented suggestions for a new understanding of the narrative reliefs with depictions of cap-figures and of Panji stories, which contribute to a new understanding of the religious practices and the function of the temples in the Majapahit period. To arrive at this understanding, I started from the iconographical analysis of the cap-figures depicted in reliefs at a representative sample of temples. From this I developed an interpretation of the meaning of these cap-figures within the context of the narrative reliefs. This then allowed me to discuss the specific selection and placement of the scenes in the temple, and the cross-references with other narrative depictions. This analysis yields the conclusion that the cap-figures symbolize intermediaries: acting in the mundane sphere, they prepare and guide the pilgrim to an encounter with the sacred sphere in the temple. The cap-figures indicate those aspects in the reliefs, which are essential for conveying the symbolic message of the narrative depictions and the symbolism and function of the temple.

The cap is a new feature which first appeared in the art of the East Javanese Majapahit period. It forms part of a large number of new elements in art, religion, and literature, created and developed during the whole East Javanese period between the tenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century. These new elements, regarded by some scholars in the early twentieth century as representing a degeneration from the Indian original, in fact express the richness of the creative response of East Javanese culture to the Indian influence. The East Javanese culture was more selective in the assimilation of the Indian model than the Central Javanese culture had been: while the latter had a very strong affiliation with Indian culture, the East Javanese culture placed greater emphasis on the integration of specific aspects of the Indian model.
which corresponded to local Javanese concepts. Majapahit, the last Hindu-Buddhist kingdom in Java before the arrival of Islam, occupied a special position in this development. The religious concepts and practices were characterized by a specific blend of Saiwism and Buddhism. The economic wealth and political power of Majapahit in the region induced a high self-esteem, which became manifest in its creativity in religious practices and art in a more diverse way than in the centuries before. The cap-figure, with its symbolism, is an outstanding example of this creativity.

The cap was a contemporary form of headgear which appeared as a new fashion in early Majapahit art. It was initially used for depictions of commoners and servants of royalty or deities, as is evident in the earliest temple under investigation – Candi Jago. The figures with the cap depict personages from daily life, and as such they welcome the visitors to the temple. In the depictions in the successive temples the cap is still used as a headgear for commoners, for servants of the royalty, and for musicians. It is, however, also increasingly used as a headgear in depictions of the nobility, either warriors of noble status or, in a much larger number, young men of the aristocracy and princes. In particular, the nobleman with the cap frequently represents Prince Panji from the popular Panji stories. The status of the cap was gradually upgraded, finally culminating in the statue from Candi Selokelir, which represents a half-human and half-divine character.

The Panji stories, newly created in the East Javanese period, became increasingly popular during the Majapahit period. They relate the story of Prince Panji from Janggala and Princess Candrakirana from Daha, who are betrothed but become separated. Only after a long search for each other and after Panji has been victorious in many wars are they reunited and marry. Many versions of these stories exist in written form; these were widely spread across Java and other parts of Southeast Asia subject to Majapahit’s political influence. Against the background of a strong oral tradition in Indonesia, there probably existed many versions which are no longer known, and even written versions which have been lost. The Panji stories have multiple symbolic meanings. The Panji stories symbolize the ideal of marital sexual union and display a lively erotic character. They may also symbolize fertility by portraying Panji as an incarnation of God Wishnu and Candrakirana as an incarnation of Dewi Sri, the goddess of the rice-plant. On a political level they reflect
the historical division of the Javanese realm in the kingdoms of Janggala and Daha, and the claims and struggles of princes and kings in reuniting these parts.

From the investigation of the case studies in which I analysed the predominant elements in the narrative depictions with noble cap-figures I conclude that, in many cases, it is Panji stories that are depicted: on the Pendopo Terrace at Candi Panataran, at Candi Mirigambar, and at Candi Kendalisodo. These predominant elements are: separation, journey in search of one another, and reunion. It has not been my aim to identify the reliefs as representing particular Panji stories; for my analysis it is sufficient to recognize and analyse the plots of the Panji stories depicted in these reliefs.

The Panji stories form part of the kidung poetry, which was, independently from Indian models, created during the East Javanese period, while the kakawin, the older poetic genre in the literary tradition of this period, are based on the Indian epics. Following the terminology developed by Forge (1978), I have used the term ‘mythological stories’ to denote the kakawin, which narrate tales of accomplished kshatriya characters and are usually related to the world of the gods. The term ‘post-mythological stories’ refers to the kidung, which speak of young princes struggling within the hierarchy and are more connected with the mundane world. The term ‘post-mythological stories’ also applies to other folk stories, such as the Tantri stories. In relief depictions these two categories are marked by the more elaborate garment and adornment, meaning they are ‘mythological stories’, and by simple dress for the ‘post-mythological stories’. The cap forms part of the iconography of the latter category. In the Panji stories – such as on the Pendopo Terrace at Candi Panataran, in Candi Kendalisodo, and in Candi Mirigambar – the cap is Panji’s typical headgear, marking him as the hero of the story. Also in the depictions of the kidung Sri Tanjung at Candi Surowono and the Pendopo Terrace, and in the kidung Satyawana on the latter building, the male protagonist – Sidapaksa, or Sang Satyawan – wears the cap as headgear. The cap may, though, also form part of depictions of a kakawin. Here, it is a headgear of servants of the hero and never of the hero itself; an example is found in the Krishnayana reliefs on the Main Temple at Candi Panataran. Still, however, as a servant, the cap-figure belongs to the mundane world rather than the sacred world represented by the heroes of the story. The heroes of the kakawin, such as Arjuna or
Bhima, are never portrayed with a cap; rather, they are depicted with a hairstyle called *supit urang*, another specifically East Javanese creation.

The dichotomy between the two categories of stories corresponds to the placement of the narrative reliefs within the temple. While the ‘post-mythological stories’ are depicted in the entrance or lower part of a temple, the ‘mythological stories’ appear in the rear or upper part. The placement of depictions of cap-figures, and of Panji stories or other stories with cap-wearing noblemen, follows this spatial schema. At Candi Jago the cap-figures only appear on the two lower terraces which display three categories of narratives: folk stories – *Tantri* reliefs; a *kidung* – the *Angling Dharma*; and a *kakawin* based outside of India – the *Kunjurakarna*. However, the upper terraces with depictions of Indian-based *kakawin* – *Parthayajna*, *Arjunawiwaha*, and *Krishnayana* – do not feature caps at all. I recognized in Candi Jago that the cap-figures, commoners and servants of the deity Wairocana, conveys the temple’s essential message: the preparation of a righteous king or a pilgrim on a mundane level to achieve spiritual knowledge on the sacred level. Candi Panataran displays a large number of Panji stories in the entrance part, while the rear part of the temple complex with the ‘mythological stories’ *Ramayana* and *Krishnayana* only contains a few cap-figures as servants and a warrior. In Candi Kendalisodo a Panji story is depicted in the front section of the site, while the hermitage part located in the rear depicts ‘mythological stories’ – the *Arjunawiwaha* and the *Bhimasuci*.

Beyond this bipartite allocation of ‘post-mythological stories’ and ‘mythological stories’ in the entrance and the rear, and in the lower and upper part of a temple, respectively, my analysis yields that corner positions within a temple layout may have a similar function. In most case studies the corners display scenes which function to introduce or indicate to the pilgrim the important message incorporated in the whole series of reliefs on a building. This arrangement is found on the Pendopo Terrace, where the major elements of the stories – separation and reunion of the two lovers – are dominant at the corners. At Candi Surowono all scenes of the ‘post-mythological stories’ *Sri Tanjung* and *Bubukshah*, placed at the corners, present an introduction and comment on the neighbouring panels of the ‘mythological story’ *Arjunawiwaha*. The function of corners

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1 The cap-figures, presumably representing Panji, in the Small Bathing Place in the rearmost part of the temple complex have an exceptional role, which lies beyond the typical placement of post-mythological and mythological narratives in the layout of a temple.
appears also to have been utilized at Candi Mirigambar, with Panji and the kadeyan appearing next to the entrance: they introduce the visitor to the Panji story depicted along the temple walls. In the same temple the two scenes of the separation and reunion of the two lovers are placed at corners, repeating the model of the Pendopo Terrace. The indicatory and introductory function of the corner depictions reaches its zenith at Candi Yudha, where two Panji figures and two kadeyan figures, outside of a narrative context, point at the ‘mythological stories’ and their essential symbolic message.

Besides the placement of the narrative depictions, the selection of specific scenes is another important means to express a specific symbolism. Particular episodes of a story may be depicted while others are omitted. The visual medium allows for an emphasis and focus on certain aspects of a story other than those prioritized in the literary medium. In the depictions of Panji stories and other related kidung stories many scenes illustrate erotic situations, while episodes featuring battle and warfare, though major elements in the story plots, are hardly ever illustrated. Also, Panji’s engagement in love affairs with other women is not thematized in the depictions, even though these are typically featured in the literary versions. Erotic episodes comprise the sexual union of the two lovers, and also their longing for one another. These two categories of episodes correspond to the erotic moods of ‘love-in-enjoyment’ and ‘love-in-separation’. These moods are known from Old Javanese poetic literature where they are given a Tantric connotation. The depictions of Panji stories on the Pendopo Terrace at Candi Panataran display two further dominant themes: the crossing of water and meetings with hermits. These themes, however, are not of comparable importance in the literary versions. Thus, the visual depictions convey a message that is different from that of the written medium. These two themes symbolize the approach to Higher Knowledge and the teaching by a guru. Considering the predominance of scenes featuring erotic moods and the teaching of Higher Knowledge, I conclude that the underlying function of these depictions is to provide an introduction to the Tantric doctrine and through this differs from or even surpasses the literary form of the Panji stories or more generally of kidung poetry. This doctrine has as its final goal the union of the individual with the Divine, which is achieved in the experience of the unification of Siwa and Sakti. This union of the god and the goddess on the macrocosmic level corresponds to the
sexual union of a man and a woman. Thus, the practice of this sexual union is a means to achieve the final goal of the Tantric doctrine. In Old Javanese literature erotic practices are frequently described in connection with ascetic practices, both being a means to achieve the Tantric goal. In the same way, the Tantric path is symbolized in the visual medium with the reliefs depicting the two erotic moods in combination with scenes of religious teaching. This is all the more valid as Tantric knowledge requires the teaching of a guru – symbolized in the depictions of the hermit – which is usually characterized by secrecy and is only accessible to an initiated adept.

The Panji stories introduce the pilgrim on a mundane level to the Tantric doctrine, which is continuously symbolized in the sacred sphere of the temple with depictions of relevant scenes from the Indian epics. In Candi Panataran these are, at the Main Temple, the final scenes of the *Krishnayana* depicting the union of Krishna and Rukmini, which symbolizes the goal of the union of Siwa and Sakti. In the layout of Candi Panataran and in the symbolism of the relief depictions, I recognize the schema of the Tantric Kundalini path. In the practice of this path Sakti, in the form of the serpent Kundalini, rises through the *cakra* of the body and unifies with Siwa above the head of the adept, before finally descending to the *Anandakanda-padma* below the heart-*cakra*, which is symbolized by water. This path corresponds to the ascent along the three courtyards up to the Main Temple and the final descent to the Bathing Place.

This complex concept, which I discovered for Candi Panataran as if I were a detective in a novel, also holds true for other temples, although not in the same elaborate fashion. I understand Candi Kendalisoro to symbolize the same path in a more concise way. The Panji story in the front part of the site, with its erotic and beautiful scenes and a dominance of the subject of water, introduces the pilgrim to the Tantric ideas. These ideas are continued in the rear part on the hermitage, which features the subjects of asceticism and descent into water to achieve Higher Knowledge, as illustrated in scenes of the *Arjunawiwaha* and the *Bhimasuci*. By selecting only a few characteristic scenes, the essential message is conveyed in a most concise form.

At Candi Surowono, both the placement and the selection of scenes are unusual. My analysis confirmed and further developed earlier explanations of this temple and of its unusual arrangement of the narrative
reliefs on the temple walls; this arrangement seems to be ‘out of order’, but was in fact done deliberately. That some scenes from the Sri T anjung and the Bubukshah at Candi Surowono deviate from known written versions may be due to the use of other, unknown versions, or to the deliberate creation of particular scenes. In any case the selection of the depicted scenes conveys a specific, intended message. The Sri T anjung reliefs, featuring the protagonist Sidapaksa as a noble cap-figure, have a similar function as the Panji stories on the Pendopo Terrace at Candi Panataran. On the mundane level they introduce the visitor to the symbolism of the Arjunawiwaha reliefs which, on the sacred level, display the theme of kshatriya-thood, which is to be achieved through asceticism and Tantric practice.

While in most temple reliefs the Panji stories are part of a larger set of narratives, in Candi Mirigambar only a single Panji story is depicted and no cross-reference to other narratives is made. Through a specific selection of scenes – particularly those incorporating the two major elements of separation and reunion of the two lovers – and through their placement on the temple walls Tantric ideas are symbolized. In addition, another focus is the theme of Panji as the ideal warrior, a theme which is very rarely depicted in temple reliefs. The selection of scenes related to fighting convey the political meaning of the Panji story.

At Candi Yudha, Panji and his kadeyan are depicted as single figures outside a narrative context, pointing to the Arjunawiwaha and Ramayana. Candi Mirigambar and Candi Yudha, both from the late phase of Majapahit, illustrate that by now Panji had developed into a well-known character with a specific symbolism which, even when depicted in a very concise form, was comprehensible to the visitors. Panji had become well established in his function as introductory guide to the sacred and, particularly, to the Tantric sphere, so that with this quality he could stand on his own. Although the Tantric concept in these temples is presented in a less conspicuous way than in the other case studies, Tantrism still seems to have been embedded in the temple’s symbolism, albeit in a more secret way.

The climax of this development is embodied in the Panji statue from Candi Selokelir, which portrays Panji, on a lotus cushion, with features of a deity. Panji had developed into a local cult figure and was upgraded to his highest level yet. He had proceeded to become an object of worship for Javanese people on their path to reach the union with the Divine.
The lotus flower held in front of the Anandakanda-padma, the seat of the union of the individual with the personal god, the ishtadewata, may be considered to be a particularly demonstrative expression of Panji’s function. This statue represents Panji as the intermediary *par excellence* between the mundane and the sacred sphere, even more so because the image incorporates ‘all in one’, namely, both features of a local popular personage wearing the cap and of a deity. Panji’s symbolic meaning as intermediary was sufficient to be expressed in a single statue, without the cross-reference to other depictions. Panji’s worship must also be considered in the context of the worship of other mythological heroes who were raised to the status of cult figures, such as Bhima and Hanuman. We may even speak of a ‘Panji cult’, parallel to a ‘Bhima cult’ and a ‘Hanuman cult’. These transformations are indications of creative developments in the religious practices in the Majapahit period.

The Panji stories also have a specific symbolism in the context of fertility, a major theme in the mythology of ancient and traditional Java which has been present in a variety of fertility rites up to the present day. In this context, Panji and Candrakirana, locally known as Sadono and Sri, are understood to be incarnations of Wishnu and Sri. These Hindu deities, like other aspects of Indian culture, had been integrated into local Javanese concepts. Sri was worshipped as the goddess of the rice plant, whose union with Wishnu was considered as a guarantee for agricultural fertility. This symbolism may also have been a concept underpinning the depictions of the Panji stories. The union of Wishnu and Sri, parallel to the union of Siwa and Sakti, is simultaneously embedded in the Tantric symbolism.

In a political context, the Panji stories carry still another symbolism. Prince Panji, as well as the protagonists of other *kidung* stories, undergoes the struggle to become an adult by finding a wife to marry to be an accomplished *kshatriya*. This accomplished status was the aim of young royals in the competitive political climate of the Majapahit period, particularly in the time following the heyday of Majapahit, which was marked by increasing civil wars between rivalling parts of the branches of the royal family. The union of Panji and Candrakirana, who originated from the historical kingdoms Janggala and Daha, respectively, reflects Majapahit’s political claim to unify the realm. The popularity of Panji stories during the Majapahit period, in particular during its final phase, must be seen against this background. The importance of the union
of the realm in Majapahit politics is demonstrated by Hayam Wuruk’s travels through the realm and his visits to many temples. Most notably, it is indicated by the lavish sraddha ritual held for his grandmother, which served as an enactment of the unification of the two parts Janggala and Daha. The erection of temples and the rituals held in them were a means to legitimize the king. The Panji stories played an important role in this process of legitimization.

In the upheaval of the fifteenth century, Panji stories and their depictions gained an even greater importance. The mountain sanctuaries, increasingly built during this time and concentrated upon Mount Penanggungan, were places for members of the aristocracy to retire to from the chaotic situation of the world and to seek advice from respected hermits. The religious teaching, comprising instructions in the secret Tantric doctrine, was also directed towards the achievement of spiritual power, sakti, which would prepare these aristocrats for an encounter with the challenges of the time. The Panji stories depicted here incorporate all symbolic aspects: the religious symbolism of the Tantric doctrine, the political symbolism of kshatriya-hood, and the unification of the separated parts of the realm. It is particularly this combination of religious and political symbolism which led to an increase in the popularity of Panji stories. In both the religious and the political context, the Panji stories served to guide the pilgrims along the way to their final goal. The character of these stories and the style of their depictions as ‘post-mythological stories’ helped the pilgrim to identify with the protagonists and to prepare for their encounter with the spiritual, esoteric sphere.

Panji’s function as a guide may indeed have been enacted through real guides, such as priests or performers who explained the reliefs to the visitors. In the same way we still need interpreters to understand these beautiful images today. The relief depictions with cap-figures are understood in different ways by the various visitors. They can merely have an entertaining function or they may symbolize the intermediary function between the mundane and the sacred sphere; for those who are initiated, they symbolize the introduction to the Tantric path.

The fact that the cap-figure, which in most cases represents Panji or another nobleman, can be found on a large number of temple reliefs of the Majapahit period as documented in the table in Chapter V, enhances its importance. The cap, initially a local fashion in headgear, had developed into a symbol of the introduction into spiritual knowledge. For my
Fig. 11.1. Cap-figure in panel 3 at the Pendopo Terrace of Candi Panataran
third research question (‘Why was the cap-figure depicted frequently and exclusively in the Majapahit temples?’), raised in the introduction to this book, I found multiple answers. The emergence of Panji and other cap-figures became a kind of icon for the local Javanese culture of the Majapahit period.

The continuation of the Panji theme in Balinese paintings and dance, in Javanese wayang forms, and in what in present-day Java is called ‘Budaya Panji’ (Panji culture), affirms its importance and ongoing popularity. The beauty of the Panji tradition in the various forms of art can perhaps still serve to create langö – rapture.

*Budaya Panji* represents a revitalization of the Panji theme and is embedded in the broader context of retraditionalization of Javanese culture.