Dick van der Meij, *Indonesian Manuscripts from the Islands of Java, Madura, Bali and Lombok*. Leiden and Boston: Brill 2017, xlv + 575 pp. [Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section 3 Southeast Asia, 24]. ISBN 9789004347625, price: EUR 153.00 (hardback).

The author of this rather voluminous tome, which appears in the Southeast Asian section of the Brill series Handbook of Oriental Studies, sees his intended audience as consisting of “general readers, specialists, and curators” (p. xl). However, I am not so sure whether the much-coveted general lay reader will gladly pay more than 150 euros out of pocket for this highly specialized book which may be described as a philologist’s personal notebook on Indonesian manuscript arcana. Although lavishly illustrated with no less than 494 color photographs, this is not a decorative coffee table book designed for casual browsing. As the publisher has given free rein to the author’s bibliophile enthusiasm, we are even shown photographs of contemporary library stamps of the University of Leiden and the KITLV (pp. 420–23).

This book intends to dig into the little-studied world of manuscripts from the writing traditions of Central and East Java and the “Javanese-inspired worlds of West Java, Madura, Bali and Lombok” (p. 1). Driven by an encyclopedic zeal, Van der Meij discusses first manuscripts in a general way (chapter 1), after which he successively turns to access to manuscripts (chapter 2); *lontar* and *gĕbang* (*nipah*) manuscripts (chapter 3); verse, verse meters, and their indications (chapter 4); mistakes and corrections in manuscripts (chapter 5); dating and calendars (chapter 6); colophons (chapter 7), and other information on dating and ownership (chapter 8). This is supplemented by eight appendices; glossary; list of manuscripts quoted; bibliography, and index.

To enliven his already rather chatty style, Van der Meij frequently spices his text with anecdotes about personal experiences, but the uninhibited writing style has a strong tendency to wander off in digressions. For example, in a discussion of private collections (pp. 138–42), the topic at hand quickly gives way to a broad sketch of the situation in such other Indonesian regions as South Sulawesi, Minangkabau, Aceh, East Indonesia, and Papua. We learn that the privately owned manuscripts found in Papua—86 in all, as we are also told—“were written in Malay, Buginese, Arabic, and combinations” (p. 142). The baffled reader may ask why all this should be addressed in a book that is supposed to deal with Javanese and Javanese-inspired manuscripts. Another example is the topic of lost manuscripts, which contains a detour to Aceh and includes some “harrowing instances of the fates of manuscript collections in South Sulawesi” (p. 145). Apparently, the Makassarese from South Sulawesi keep

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their manuscripts secret, which makes it impossible for foreigners to have access to their private collections (p. 146). Happily, “[t]he picture would be incomplete if no mention was made that occasionally manuscripts reappear” (p. 147) and hence a Malay example from Malaysia is given. It is noteworthy in this respect that also in several other cases examples pertaining to Malay manuscripts are provided in order to illustrate a certain point. This is most notable in the section on commissioned manuscripts (pp. 99–103), but even more so in the subsequent section on scholarly copies in the original script (pp. 104–7), which mentions four haphazard examples, all Malay (pp. 104–106), concluding with a few lines about a copy of a Balinese manuscript made by H.N. van der Tuuk (p. 107).

Some subjects are treated at length and in detail, whereas other topics are only summarily dealt with in a few lines. The third chapter on palm-leaf manuscripts (pp. 152–242) with its detailed descriptions of the various elements (boards, binding strings and its ornaments, boxes) stands out as a remarkable book within a book. However, the section on lending libraries contains merely four short paragraphs or 31 lines (pp. 107–8), in which the first two paragraphs (13 lines) briefly list the scanty secondary literature on Malay (!) lending libraries. The next two paragraphs consist of off-the-cuff remarks about the situation for Javanese manuscripts: “Behrend talked of a lending library in Semarang” (p. 108) and then “Behrend and Pujiastuti mention another manuscript” (p. 108) from another Semarang lending library, after which a citation of four lines from the beginning of a Javanese manuscript in a private collection constitutes the final example. The section on “blogs, portals, social media, and digital search machines” receives a rather cavalier treatment of no more than ten lines containing little more than some general comments and a few cautionary words on the use of modern technology. This paragraph ends with the platitude that “[o]ne can only wonder what the future has in store in this regard” (p. 149).

At the outset, Van der Meij makes it clear that some topics had to be left out because they were even too specialist for him. This includes paper because “[d]iscussions with the staff of the Dutch National Library years ago made it abundantly clear to me that paper is a fascinating but also highly specialized topic and that it is almost impossible for a non-expert (like me) to say anything meaningful about it” (p. 15). However, elsewhere, when he criticizes the comments on paper made by non-specialists, Van der Meij accuses Drewes and Brakel (1986: 251) of the fallacy of appealing to an authority, asserting that they merely accepted Voorhoeve’s pronouncement on the early age of the paper used in Leiden Cod. Or. 5716 on account of this scholar’s “status” (p. 39). Voorhoeve dated the manuscript back to the seventeenth century,

whereas Pigeaud assigned it to the nineteenth century, which Van der Meij finds a much more plausible idea. However, Van der Meij misrepresents the reason as to why Drewes (who was the actual author of this part) favored Voorhoeve's hypothesis: as Drewes writes, "I am inclined to side with Voorhoeve, for besides the damaged condition of the MS. one more argument can be adduced in favour of an earlier date than the nineteenth century" (Drewes and Brakel 1986: 251), after which Drewes argues at some length that the text of this particular manuscript was already known in the early seventeenth century in Banten. Although Drewes may perhaps have been wrong in this assumption, he certainly did not simply base his hypothesis on a greater belief in the scholarly authority of Voorhoeve over Pigeaud.

Deciphering *candra sangkala* or chronograms can be highly difficult. Van der Meij writes that he has collected more than a thousand chronograms in his database and the first appendix contains a handy list of *candra sangkala* in manuscripts (pp. 443–46). As Van der Meij also duly notes, chronogram words may sometimes indicate different numerals (p. 355). For example, the word *badan* ("body") rather surprisingly appears here under the value "eight", whereas Bratakesawa's standard work lists the same word under the value "one". However, it is missing in Van der Meij's list under the value "one" although he mentions the semantic field of "body" (p. 443). It seems that Van der Meij does not always follow his own rules: for example, the sign "[?]" should have been added behind the word *wiku* as it appears under more than one numeral: its value "seven" is usual, whereas its value "five" is uncommon. This should also have been done in the case of *rana* which is here categorized under the value "five", but this is contested as it appears under the value "three" in Bratakesawa's standard list. The word *wisika* with the value "five" is probably a clerical error for *wisikan*, which is explained in the Leiden manuscript Cod. Or. 2177 (2) as "soft wind" (cf. Gericke and Roorda 1901, volume II: 42 under *wisik* with a different explanation but the same value "five"). Although Van der Meij lists *marutani* (which is unknown to me; is it perhaps *marutaning*?) under the value "five", the word *maruta* is missing (explained in Leiden Cod. Or. 2177 (2) as "wind which spreads odors"; cf. Gericke and Roorda 1901, volume II: 483 which explain it as *angin* or "wind"; derived from Sanskrit *māruta* or "wind").

The list of alternative names for *macapat* meters in Java and Madura (p. 447) is, of course, useful, but it is far from exhaustive. The common alternative *rarasati* for *mijil* is missing in the list. Readers of Javanese manuscript may easily encounter other appellations for the meters: for example, three texts in Leiden Cod. Or. 7375, i.e. *Suluk Jalma Lēwi(h)*, *Suluk Yen Kapanggi(h)*, and *Suluk Paesan Wajib*, are all said to be cast in the meter *giwang* with which *maskumambang* is meant. Rather surprisingly, such names as *sarkara* for

dandanggula (discussed in the main text on p. 401) and *brongta* (or *brangta*) *kingkin* for *asmarandana* (discussed in the main text on p. 289) are omitted in the list. I am not sure whether *aja mundur ing yuda* (“don’t retreat from the battle”) constitutes an alternative name for the meter *durma*. It rather seems to be a sentence signalling the name of the meter, in which *mundur* (“retreat”) contains the syllable *dur* that points to *durma*. Although Van der Meij states that he could not find the meaning of *durma* as tiger “in the dictionaries” (p. 253), it is in fact included as such (*macan* in Javanese script) in Gericke and Roorda (1901, volume 1: 574).

As Van der Meij correctly notes for almost any topic that he touches upon in this *vade mecum* of Indonesian manuscript scholarship, academic attention hitherto has been limited or even lacking. My few criticisms notwithstanding, it is important to note in conclusion that Van der Meij bravely tackles a great many issues belonging to an immense field of study, more often than not breaking completely new ground. The fact cannot be lauded enough that in doing so, Van der Meij concretely discusses all kinds of aspects pertaining to the manuscripts of “the Javanese-inspired world” with the help of photographs. This is a tremendous premium, because hitherto studies of Indonesian philology rarely contain images of the manuscripts under discussion. The show-and-tell character of Van der Meij’s book turns it into a veritable mine of detailed information. Van der Meij’s observations and reflections make a great contribution to Indonesian philology which will hopefully stimulate further debate.

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