A. Vickers
The writing of kakawin and kidung on Bali


This PDF-file was downloaded from http://www.kitlv-journals.nl
When Zoetmulder was surveying what he referred to as “minor kaka-wins of later times” in his study of Old Javanese Literature (Zoetmulder 1974, ch. XV), there was little specific information available on the dating of some of that literature. Recent research may help to fill some of the gaps.

In the kakawin Astikayana (Astika’s adventures — a collection of Adiparwa stories) there is mention of “a princess (sic) (naranāthaka-nanyā), whose beauty, nobility and proficiency in the sciences and arts is praised in the manggala. ‘The name by which she is called by the great monks is sang śrī Wiryasakanta’” (Zoetmulder 1974: 396). The text further mentions this royal patron as the centre of great literary activity and the author of poems herself.

In the Babad Dalem, the ancestral genealogy of the rulers of Klungkung (East Bali), there is a record of that kingdom’s having had a queen, called in that genealogy the Dewa Agung Isteri Kanya (Babad Dalem, f. 92b). The first two words are the titles of all the rulers of Klungkung, “Isteri” merely denotes her sex, while “Kanya” means she was not married. From an interview with one of the present-day members of that royal family, Cokorda Gede Mayun, it becomes clear that her rule is now regarded as somewhat of a golden age in the recent history of Klungkung. Cokorda Mayun, himself an enthusiastic student of literature, even tells the apocryphal story that kakawin and kidung were sung every day of her reign, which he estimates to have been thirty-five years. The Dewa Agung Isteri is recorded as ruling with her brother, Dewa Agung Putra, a son of a low-status wife of the former king, Bhatara Kusamba. It seems that there were two rulers, because not all power interests would have found a queen acceptable, while others would not have accepted a ruler born from a low-status mother. The situation may also represent conflicts of factional interests.

The Babad Dalem refers to Dewa Agung Putra in some places as “Maharaja Wirya Putra”, and his sister as “Wirya Kanya” (Babad Dalem, f. 92b). The titles “Naranāthakanya” (Naranātha being the designation of a ruler) and “Wiryasakanta” of the Astikayana would seem to refer to the Dewa Agung Isteri Kanya. The same manggala mentions “Sri Dhaṭṛdewya prabhu” (Zoetmulder 1974: 493; perhaps a reference to Dewa Agung Putra). The Pārthakarma kakawin also mentions “sang Nṛpakanya”, the rājādāyatā (queen). At the beginning of its manggala the term “Dhaṭṛdewya” is used, and at the end of the text “Nṛpatiwiadhu” (another term for queen) occurs in relation to the patron. Considering the rarity of references to patrons in the “minor kakawins”, it seems that this is sufficient evidence to link the patron-age of these two texts. “Dhaṭṛdewi” is another name for Saraswati, goddess of learning and literature, and wife of Brahma, who is referred
to as “Dhatr”. The Sakraprajaya kakawin refers also to Saraswati as a divine patron, and to “Sri Ratañswara nāma rājadāyītā hyang Dhātra-devyāngdādi”, “Ratañswara is the name of the queen who becomes Saraswati”. Although “Ratañswara” is not used as a name for the Dewa Agung Isteri elsewhere, the occurrence of the other elements would seem to be more than just coincidence. Certainly the literary talents of the Dewa Agung Isteri, mentioned in the Āstikāyana, make it likely that she would be equated with the goddess of learning. In 18th and 19th century Bali two other female rulers are known, one in Badung, Gusti Putu Agung, the other in Mengwi, Gusti Agung Ayu Agung Biyang. This complicates any firm identification of the patrons of the above-mentioned kakawin, although no specific evidence exists to link their names with these texts.

The Pratuwijaya (Brahmāndapurāṇa kakawin) mentions in its colophon a “Narendra-dayita”, who is described as “khyāting jagat wīryawān/ sang śrī Pārākṣīwīrya nāmanāra”. The “Wīrya” element in the name may point again to an association with the Dewa Agung Isteri, although its being used at the end of the title and not the beginning could indicate otherwise. The manggala mentions that she is “brahma-nāngsa”. If this is taken to mean “daughter of a Brahman”, then this is not applicable to the Dewa Agung Isteri, whose father was a Kṣatriya and whose mother was a princess of Karangasem, Gusti Ayu Karang, a Wesiya title. If this is interpreted as a “descendant of Brahma”, however, the epithet would accord with the claim of the Klungkung rulers that they are originally descended from Brahma (Babad Dalem 2b).

What of the queen’s brother, Dewa Agung Putra? One of the major works of historical Balinese literature to be studied by Western scholars this century is the kidung Pamancangah, which was assumed to have been written soon after 1700. However, its opening words mention the royal patron “sri Wiryatmaka”, obviously a synonym for Wiryaputra, the Dewa Agung Putra’s other title.

The exact date of the joint reigns of these two is not known. Van Eck says that their father died in 1809, when Dewa Agung Putra was nine years old, and that Dewa Agung Putra ruled until 1849 (van Eck 1878-80 III: 346). According to Cokorda Gede Mayun the “queen-mother”, Gusti Ayu Karang, was the actual ruler after her husband’s death, until the 1820’s, and the Dewa Agung Isteri died in 1868. Until further research is done on the issue, we cannot date the texts mentioned above more accurately within these time spans.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Babad Dalem, Jero Kanginan Sidemen (Hooykaas project XXIV, 25).

Van Eck

Zoetmulder, P. J.