CHAPTER II

The horse dance under the Orde Baru

The horse dance in Java

Nothing is known about the origin of the horse dance in Java. The earliest description of a performance by horse dancers as far as I know is to be found in the *Serat Centhini*, a Javanese picaresque romance from the beginning of the nineteenth century (Pigeaud 1967:228-9). Here we read the following, in Canto 291, stanza 37, about a number of mythical beings (gandarwa) and ‘horsemen’ mounted on bamboo horses (képang):

The gandarwa flourish swords
those mounted on képang
snort and kick backward like a horse
neighing and rearing.1

Horse dances, according to this fragment, are performances by dancers ‘mounted’ on small, flat bamboo (and sometimes leather) horses. Performances by dancers on horses like this are found all over Java, among the Sundanese of West Java as well as among the Javanese of Central and East Java (Pigeaud 1938:215-43). Th.G.Th. Pigeaud, who was one of the first to devote a detailed study to this kind of folk entertainment,2 believed that it was originally a Javanese dramatic form that was adopted by the Sundanese via Cirebon (Pigeaud 1938:216). Among the Madurese it was found only among those groups living in East Java, he believed.3 It is difficult to establish at this junc-

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1 Ngikal lamêng gandarwo amolak-malik / kang anumpak képang / pindha kuda (m)bêkos (njondhil / mbêngingêh alunjak-lunjak (Kamajaya 1988, IV:161).
2 Various descriptions of horse dance performances had been published before Pigeaud, who has sometimes quoted extensively from these. Pigeaud was the first author to attempt an explanation of the importance of this kind of performance, however.
3 Pigeaud 1938:242-3. There were performances featuring dancing horses, *jaran nandhak*, *jaran jogèd* or *jaran kencak*, on the island of Madura, but these were real horses. They probably had little or no connection with the horse dances discussed in this book (compare Pigeaud 1938:208-9). Pigeaud supposed that there was possibly some sort of relation, however, between these dancing horse performances and the *monèlan* or *jaranan* horse performances, found likewise among the Madurese, in which the dancers stand in a kind of bamboo framework in the shape of a horse.
ture whether the horse dance is originally Javanese, in fact. What is clear, however, is that it only occurs sporadically in Madura at present.\(^4\)

In Kediri the term for horse dance performances is *jaranan* (derived from *jaran*, low Javanese\(^5\) for ‘horse’) or *réyog*. The latter term is somewhat vaguely defined by Pigeaud as ‘a kind of street performance involving the horse dance, using a kind of hobby-horse’, but also as ‘hand-to-hand fight or procession’\(^6\).

In East Java we find the following genres of horse dance: *jaranan jawa*, *jaranan pégon*, *jaranan sènthéréwé*, *jaranan képang*, *réyog panaraga*,\(^7\) *jaranan brèng*, and *jaranan buta*. With the exception of the latter two, these also occur in Kediri (*Buku inventarisasi* 1981; *Data organisasi kesenian* 1985). These types are mutually distinguishable as regards actors’ costumes, number and kinds of theatrical props, characters and roles, and musical instruments.

The horses after which the performance is named are made of screens of woven bamboo (*képang*) cut into the shape of horses without legs. To stop the wickerwork from fraying, the edges are clamped between two thick bamboo strips. They are sometimes referred to as *jaran képang* or *kuda képang* (*kuda* being the high Javanese word for ‘horse’), after this wickerwork. In some regions in Java we come across the term *kuda lumping*, as the horses there are made of lumping or leather (Kartomi 1973b:20). Clifford Geertz observed that the horses in Pare (a sub-district of Kediri) were made of paper (Geertz 1964:262). This also seems to be the case in Tengger (East Java), where the use of paper instead of bamboo appears to have something to do with a belief in the magical potency of bamboo. This plant, which is subject to certain taboos in Tengger, is allegedly held to be too dangerous as a material for the horses.\(^8\)

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\(^4\) Bouvier 1994:98, 139. Elly Touwen-Bouwsma’s diary entry (from around 1979) describing the performance of a horse dance group in a neighbourhood of the town of Sampang, which she kindly placed at my disposal, suggests that trance dancing on wickerwork horses (*djhatilan képang*) did still occur in Madura at that time.

\(^5\) Javanese is a stratified language, that is to say, word choice, and sometimes also syntax, is differentiated according to the status of the person addressed or spoken about. Low Javanese is used for persons of the same status as the speaker, high Javanese for persons of higher social status.

\(^6\) Pigeaud 1982. The term *réyog* does not always refer to horse dancing, however. In West Java, and elsewhere as well, it is a term for a musical dance-drama which features no horse dancers (Pigeaud 1938:251-2). Originating from Ponorogo, the *réyog* is a popular performance of two or more horse dancers, four to seven musicians, a mask dancer (Prince Bujangganong) and a tiger monster with a huge mask covered with peacock feathers (Singabarong), which is based on the Panji legend (Go Tik Swan 1971; Sugiarso 2003; Ayu Sutarto 1992).

\(^7\) I regard the *réyog panaraga*, like the *jaranan jawa* and *jaranan brèng*, as a specific genre, which is also found outside the *kabupaten* of Ponorogo. I have therefore rendered the term in the Javanese spelling and without initial capitals.

\(^8\) Personal communication by the Swiss anthropologist Barbara Lüem, November 1986.