

The following is a synopsis of the historical information found in this source:

Sumarsam. 1995. *Gamelan: Cultural Interaction and Musical Development in Central Java*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Javanese Political History and the Development of Gamelan and Wayang

The outside influences of the Dutch and the Chinese directly and indirectly led to a renaissance of Javanese arts. In the early 18th century, court intrigues among members of the royal family of the Mataram kingdom created an atmosphere of uncertainty and strife. The division of the Mataram kingdom not only ended the wars, but also created another outlet for family rivalries – the performing arts.

In 1742 Paku Buwana II's court of Kartasura was sacked by Javanese and Chinese rebels. Subsequently, the Dutch defeated the rebels and re-installed Paku Buwana II to the throne. However, the court of Kartasura was all but destroyed so Buwanawas forced to move his palace to Surakarta. Unfortunately, a number of princes, nephew of the king (Mas Said) and the king's brother, Pangeran Singarsari, continued their insurgency, teaming up with the Chinese. Eventually the king's own brother, Mangkubumi, also defected to the rebels.

After the death of Buwana II in 1749, the war continued into the reign of Paku Buwana III. Being a weaker ruler than his father, Buwana III lost many of his officials, including the crown prince, who all defected to the rebels. It is important to remember that the Dutch were always on Buwana's side of the conflict.

Mataram divided into two major courts: Kasunanan in Surakarta and Kasultanan in Yogyakarta

By 1752, both sides were tired of the war and decided to try negotiating. Mas Said and Mangkumbi negotiated with the Dutch on separate occasions. First, Mas Said attempted to negotiate with the Dutch, but could not come to an agreement. Second, Mas Said and Mangkumbi parted ways and Mangkumbi approached the Dutch on his own terms. "These negotiations resulted in a division of territorial control between Paku Buwana and Mangkumbi, and in Mangkumbi's agreement to help the Dutch defeat Mas Said" (Sumarsam 1995: 49). In 1755 a treaty was signed. "The Mataram kingdom was permanently divided between two major courts, the Susuhunan (Kasunanan) of Surakarta and the Kasultanan of Yogyakarta. Mangkumbi became the first sultan of Yogyakarta, taking the name Hamengku Buwana I" (ibid.).

Surakarta divided into a major and a minor court

Mas Said was the only rebel left, but his armed forces were not strong enough to take over the whole kingdom of Mataram – which was his ultimate goal. "In 1757, under the supervision of the Dutch, Paku Buwana III and Mas Said reached an agreement for the establishment of Mas Said's territory and his Mangkunegaran court, although Hamengku Buwana I did not agree with the settlement" (ibid.). At this point, the Dutch provided support to all three rulers (Mas Said, Paku Buwana III, and Hamengku Buwana I) in order to prevent any one of them from having victory over the others.

Yogyakarta divided into a major and a minor court

The war in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century, forced the Dutch to temporarily give up control of Java. The Dutch turned Java over to British control from 1811 until 1816. Due to a conflict between Hamengku Buwana II and the British government, the Yogyakarta court became divided into a major and minor court. In 1813 the British besieged the Kasultanan and exiled Hamengku Buwana II to Penang. Due to the fact that the British were assisted by Natakusuma (an uncle of the sultan), the British government rewarded him by allowing him to establish the Paku Alaman Court in Yogyakarta, [complete] with its own territory taken from that of the Kasultanan. Hamengku Buwana II's son was then installed as the sultan of the main Yogyakarta court.

Peace and court rivalries lead to a renaissance in Javanese performing arts

After the division of the Mataram kingdom there came a period of relative peace and prosperity. This, along with the growth in population, inspired what Sumarsam and other scholars have called, "the renaissance of classical Javanese literature . . . the remarkable development of cultural and artistic life in Central Javanese courts" (Sumarsam 1995: 51-56). This was also a period of rebuilding. The Chinese rebellion and the Mangkumbi war had resulted in "the destruction of many books and other cultural treasures" (ibid.). These items were not only replaced, but many new works were also created. The new literature was drawn from Hindu-Javanese culture and Islamic culture. Sometimes it was even a mixture of the two cultures.

"The permanent division of the Mataram Kingdom into two major and two minor courts led each of these courts to search for a special identity in court customs, rituals, and artistic expression" (Sumarsam 1995: 49-50). The two main courts, the Kasunanan of Surakarta and the Kasultanan of Yogyakarta, were the most intense rivals. They both put forth a great deal of energy to create a unique court culture, ranging from the particular styles of official dress to notable distinctions in the performing arts. To this day we have a clear distinction between the Surakarta and the Yogyakarta playing styles in gamelan. R. Anderson Sutton notes that "Musicians generally believe that the Yogyanesse gamelan [style] represents a continuation of the style from before the division of the kingdom, while the Solonese style was developed after the division of Mataram" (Sutton 1984: 225).

In the early nineteenth century, the two minor courts, Mangkunegaran and Paku Alaman formed an alliance in their attempt to stand out from the major courts. Mangkunegaran sought to distinguish itself from Kasunanan and Paku Alaman desired to set itself apart from Kasultanan. These minor courts assisted each other by exchanging musicians, music, and dance styles (Lindsay 1980).

"In short, it was the politics, the increased accessibility to writing tools, and the intellectual climate of this period that influenced Javanese authors to write *serat*, *babad*, new *wayang* stories, *wayang pakem*, and treatises on Javanese music" (ibid.: 54). The dynamic interaction between the Javanese and various other population groups on the island also contributed to the increasing creative output of both written and performance based arts.

The performing arts as symbols of power in the Javanese court

The most intimate and influential relationship was between the Javanese courtiers and the Dutch elite. This relationship was based upon mutual respect between the Dutch bureaucrats, managers of the Company, and the Javanese rulers who saw them as their social equals. This relationship led to an inclusion of European music (military marching music and social dance music) in court ceremonies

and celebrations. By the middle of the nineteenth century, after a revolt against European colonial rule 1825-1830, this relatively cordial relationship changed. This “new era of colonialism” brought with it a growing number of educated immigrants from the Netherlands. These new immigrants were less interested in Javanese culture as they tried to maintain their connection with European bourgeois society.

Even before the “new era of colonialism” there was a gradual but significant shift of power from Javanese aristocrats to the Dutch. Lacking any real political or economic power, Javanese royalty chose to express their power through performances at court. The gamelan had always been an “emblematic sign of the king’s authority” in a Javanese court (ibid. 62). It was, and still is, quite common for a king to have several different gamelans at court, each meant for different types of occasions and each with a different number and arrangement of gongs and other instruments. As Pemberton notes,

Numerous gamelan from the king’s storehouse, drum and fife corps, chanting, Islamic officials, brass bands, mantra-ing palace diviners, waltz orchestras, and twenty-one cannon salutes all served as signals of royal occasions; the greater the occasion, the more of these were sounded, often simultaneously. (Pemberton 1987: 23)

The competition between Javanese and European sounds in court ritual provided the basis for a new aesthetic of the loudest sound. This resulted in a marked increase in the size and number of instruments that make up the gamelan. This is the same size of gamelan that is used today.

Although European and Javanese customs coexisted in the nineteenth century Javanese court, “syncretism between European music and Javanese gamelan did not really occur” (ibid.: 75). This separation was as much the result of incompatible musical systems as it was a political statement of animosity from the colonized Javanese to their Dutch colonizer. Sumarsam observed that the two performing arts traditions “coincided” and “competed” but did not compliment each other (ibid. 76). European bands and Javanese gamelans often played at the same time, creating a real battle of the bands. Sumarsam states that, “the mixture of sounds of various kinds of ensembles and other such grandiose artistic displays demonstrated to the populace the power of the court in the face of the Dutch colonial government in Java” (ibid.: 63).

One exception to this avoidance of syncretism was the integration of European instruments into the gamelan by musicians at the Yogyakarta court. This style of composition was called *gendhing mares* (march) and was inspired by the European marching band. These *gendhing mars* were played to accompany one of the most refined and sacred female dances, the *Bedhaya*. Another addition to this dance was the integration of pistols. Sumarsam theorizes that one of the possible reasons for this strange mixing of elements could be to further enhance the expression of power by Javanese aristocrats. Due to its refined nature, the performance of *Bedhaya* dance is an expression of a Javanese king’s *alus* (refined) character and thus his power. Similarly, military marches and pistols are symbols of power for a European monarch. The integration of these elements “could be thought of as a way for an [Javanese] aristocrat to adopt foreign elements in order to enhance royal power” (ibid.: 78).