



Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future: History as Prophecy in Colonial Java

Nancy K. Florida

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Located at the juncture of literature, history, and anthropology, *Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future* charts a strategy of how one might read a traditional text of non-Western historical literature in order to generate, with it, an opening for the future. This book does so by taking seriously a haunting work of historical prophecy inscribed in the nineteenth century by a royal Javanese exile—working through this writing of a colonized past to suggest the reconfiguration of the postcolonial future that this history itself apparently intends. After introducing the colonial and postcolonial orientalist projects that would fix the meaning of traditional writing in Java, Nancy K. Florida provides a nuanced translation of this particular traditional history, a history composed in poetry as the dream of a mysterious exile. She then undertakes a richly textured reading of the poem that discloses how it manages to escape the fixing of "tradition." Adopting a dialogic strategy of reading, Florida writes to extend—as the work's Javanese author demands—this history's prophetic potential into a more global register.

Babad Jaka Tingkir, the historical prophecy that *Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future* translates and reads, is uniquely suited for such a study. Composing an engaging history of the emergence of Islamic power in central Java around the turn of the sixteenth century, *Babad Jaka Tingkir* was written from the vantage of colonial exile to contest the more dominant dynastic historical traditions of nineteenth-century court literature. Florida reveals how this history's episodic form and focus on characters at the margins of the social order work to disrupt the genealogical claims of conventional royal historiography—thus prophetically to open the possibility of an alternative future.

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