The Newsletter | No.68 | Summer 2014

Bali at war: a painted story of resistance to colonial rule

The defeat of the royal family in Klungkung by Dutch soldiers on 28 April 1908 marks the point at which the entire island of Bali was incorporated into the colonial administration of the Netherlands East Indies. Both the event and the painting discussed here are known as the *Puputan,* meaning the 'finishing' or 'the end' in Balinese, referring to the slaughter or ritual surrender of the Klungkung royal family. This painting sits within a corpus of oral traditions about the defeat of Klungkung yet it shifts conventional perspectives by describing local developments prior to the clash between the Dutch and members of the royal household at the site of the palace.[1]

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Entertaining the gods

The painting comes from Kamasan, a village of four-thousand people located between the east coast and the mountain ranges of Gunung Agung in the district of Klungkung in Bali. Formerly Klungkung was the seat of royal power, home to the court of the Dewa Agung, the preeminent ruler of Bali. Kamasan village is made up of wards *(banjar)* reflecting the specialised services once provided by artisans to the court, including goldsmiths *(pande mas),* smiths *(pande)* and painters *(sangging).* Kamasan paintings depict stories from epics of Indian and indigenous origin, relating the lives of the deities, the royal courts and sometimes even commoner families. Narratives serve a didactic and devotional function and are intended to gratify and entertain the gods during their visits to the temple, as well as the human participants in ritual activities. Paintings were once found in temples and royal courts all around Bali and these days paintings circulate in many different contexts including private homes, government offices and museums.

Kamasan art is highly conventionalised in that artists work according to certain parameters *(pakem)* and adhere to strict proscriptions in terms of iconography.[2] Their paintings are sometimes called *wayang* paintings with reference to shared roots with the shadow-puppet *(wayang)* theatre. Artists also refer to the figures they paint as wayang, which are depicted in almost the same manner as flat Balinese shadow-puppets except in three-quarter view. While artists interpret the stylistic and narrative boundaries of this tradition in different ways, they maintain that they belong to an unchanging tradition of great antiquity.

Artist Mangku Mura (1920-1999) is one of the most well-known Kamasan artists of the twentieth century. He was posthumously recognised by the Indonesian government in 2011 with an award for the preservation and promotion of traditional art. Unlike most Kamasan artists, who descend from a core line of painting ancestry, Mangku Mura comes from outside the ward of painters, but learnt to paint as a teenager by studying with several older village artists. Of his seven children, Mangku Mura nominated his sixth child, Mangku Nengah Muriati (born 1966), as his successor and both have produced several versions of the *puputan* story. Mangku Mura produced the first version of this painting in 1984 shortly after the initiation of an annual ceremony to commemorate the *puputan*. It was commissioned by the head *(bupati)* of Klungkung district who was also a member of the royal family.

The episodes depicted are based on an oral version of events related to Mangku Mura by his grandfather Kaki Rungking, said to have been an eyewitness to much of the action. In turn, Mangku Mura passed the story on to members of his immediate family, including his daughter Mangku Muriati. Demonstrating how paintings gain additional layers of meaning through elucidation of the story, Mangku Muriati explained that Kaki Rungking had a connection to the royal court which is not mentioned in the painting – his sister was an unofficial wife *(selir)* to the Dewa Agung and lived in the Klungkung palace. This connection was emphasised to explain how Kaki Rungking knew of the broader sequence of events and to establish his credentials as a witness. The artists have also ensured that specific details are communicated without ambiguity by incorporating textual narrative in each scene, written in Balinese script *(aksara)*.

Sacred heirlooms

The painting is divided into ten scenes over four horizontal rows. From the perspective of the viewer, the story moves chronologically from left to right beginning in the bottom left-hand corner and finishing in the top right-hand corner. The text in the first scene relates the movements of the Dutch soldiers, depicted as six uniformed men carrying muskets. Having landed at Kusamba, they passed through Sampalan along the bank of the Unda River. They continued towards the Pejeg burial ground *(setra)* and on to Tangkas. Finding nobody in Tangkas they kept moving towards the home of Ida Bagus Jumpung in Kamasan. He was the guardian of an heirloom dagger or *kris (pajenengan)* belonging to the Klungkung royal family, which the Dutch planned to capture. In the second scene there is a discussion between Ida Bagus Jumpung and his wife. The tree between them is a standard convention when two parties are facing one another in conversation or confrontation. Ida Bagus Jumpung is holding the heirloom and is accompanied by a retainer. Two females accompany his wife. Ida Bagus Jumpung is informing the women that he has been entrusted to safeguard the important regalia.

In the third scene the Dutch troops have reached the gateway of the priestly compound. They kill Ida Bagus Jumpung. As they seize the heirloom his corpse mysteriously disappears, so Ida Bagus Jumpung is not depicted in this scene. There are only two Dutch officers; they aim their muskets at the closed doors of the compound gateway *(paduraksa),* guarded by a pair of dogs. The latter two scenes emphasise the connections between the royal regalia and the ruling dynasty; the loss of sacred heirlooms also foretold the defeat of earlier Balinese dynasties.[3] Here the capture of the kris is a sign that defeat was imminent. The fourth scene begins on the next row as the Dutch troops arrive at the Gelgel palace. This palace was re-established as a branch line of the Klungkung royal family during the reign of Dewa Agung Madia (1722-1736). There is a lone guard, a resident of Pasinggahan, standing on duty outside the palace. He is shot dead. The other guards are eating rice cakes *(tipat)* in the courtyard, a detail related only in the text. They are all shot down as the troops enter the palace.





Above: Mangku Muriati applying black ink to the eyes of the Dutch troops, Kamasan 2011.

Right: The site of the former royal palace in Klungkung today.

Below: Mangku Muriati reciting the story from a version made by Mangku Mura in 1995, Kamasan 2011.



Protecting the Gelgel palace

The plump figure of Kaki Rungking (grandfather of Mangku Mura) appears for the first time in the next scene. He witnessed the slaughter of the guards and covertly assembled his own weapon. It is mounted on a waist-high stand but is otherwise of similar appearance to the muskets held by the Dutch officers. Firing one shot, his bullet kills a lieutenant. His left hand rests on his hip and the thumb and index finger of his raised right hand are held together in the same gesture of defiance adopted by the Balinese figures in other scenes. Despite the show of bravado in his visual depiction, the text relates that Kaki Rungking was terrified to find himself all alone. He ran for cover as the Gelgel palace was destroyed around him. The people of Jero Kapal, where the palace is located, also ran away to avoid being shot. This is the only scene in which Kaki Rungking is depicted visually. His position in the centre of the composition highlights his role as protagonist. Iconographically, little distinguishes him from the commoner figures in other scenes. All have thickset bodies, hairy torsos, dark skin, wavy hair and short loincloths with less ornate head-dresses and clothing than the nobles.

Kaki Rungking's gallantry is reinforced by a detail in the text. It states that the target of his fatal shot was an officer of rank. By appearance alone the lieutenant is no different from his fellow officers, except that a chain binds his dead body. In fact, the only apparent difference between all of the colonial officers is their eyes. Most have the type of rounded *(bulat)* eyes associated with demons though a few officers have the same wavy *(sipit)* eyes as the commoners. This might refer to the composition of the colonial forces, which comprised both Dutch and indigenous officers. In relation to the veracity of Kaki Rungking's role, it is worth noting that the death of a Dutch lieutenant and his officers did occur in the fortnight prior to the massacre during a routine inspection of the opium monopoly at Gelgel. The incident resulted in raised hostilities between Klungkung and the Dutch.



Above: Mangku Muriati, *Puputan Klungkung*, 2011, acrylic and natural pigment on cotton cloth.

Treachery

The third row, scene six, begins with the Dutch troops moving towards Tojan. They spent the night in a village called Carikdesa, the present-day site of Galiran market. While the troops were resting a commoner from Lekok appeared with a kris but was killed before he could attack. In scene seven, the text explains that key figures from the Gelgel palace went to Klungkung to discuss the critical situation with the king Dewa Agung Jambe. The lords of Gelgel were obstinately opposed to the Dutch. The father of the Dewa Agung is shown standing on the right with two servants seated in front of him.[4] He advised the Dewa Agung that Klungkung must not surrender and that as nobles *(satria)* they must prepare to die. The Dewa Agung, on the left, is in the company of three women of the royal household whose different ranks are marked by their head-dresses. Traitors to the palace are depicted in the eighth scene, including the figure of a brahmana, a commoner *(kaula)* and a Muslim. The text explains that a lord *(cokorda)* was also secretly cooperating with the Dutch because he hoped to take over the role of the Dewa Agung. Mangku Muriati advised that when her father was initially commissioned to produce the painting he was instructed not to write the actual names of these traitors on the painting, even though they were known.

The action continues around the Klungkung palace in the ninth scene on the top row. The confrontation took place in the palace forecourt *(bencingah)* as the Dutch arrived from the south. Cokorda Bima attacked the Dutch; his loyalty to the Dewa Agung so great that when he lost his right hand he picked it up, tucked the limb into his waist-cloth and continued to fight with his left. The illustration shows him standing in the centre of his fallen comrades before he too is killed. Only a small child was left alive, buried under the dead, Dewa Agung Oka Geg (1896-1965), the eldest son of Dewa Agung Smarabawa, a half-brother of the Dewa Agung and the second-king *(iwaraja)*. Despite being shot in the foot, he survived because a Dutch soldier, visible amongst the Balinese corpses, took pity on him. This detail tallies with other official versions, however, some Balinese accounts relate that the child was stabbed by other Balinese. The text of the tenth and final scene describes four treacherous lords from Akah, Manuang, Aan and Klungkung. They had hoped to benefit from a Dutch victory; instead they were exiled to Lombok and ordered to raise the surviving child. An adult Dewa Agung is depicted sitting on a pedestal on the right-hand side, separated from the three lords by a tree.

Reversing conventional representation

The Dewa Agung Oka Geg did return to Klungkung as an adult. He served various administrative functions within the colonial bureaucracy, including as clerk, inspector of roads *(mantri jalan)* and roaming official *(punggawa keliling)* to the Dutch administrator. In 1929 the Dutch Resident of Bali and Lombok swore him in as Dewa Agung of Klungkung at the state temple in Gelgel. In 1938 all eight of Bali's regents were given the title 'autonomous ruler' *(zelfbestuurder)* in a ceremony at Besakih. Formally, this placed the Dewa Agung of Klungkung on the same footing as the rulers of other kingdoms. However, by the 1940s the Dewa Agung was "probably the largest landowner of all the kings, and certainly the most powerful."[5] Mangku Muriati commented that Dewa Agung Oka Geg was so powerful *(sakti)* that even the Dutch spared his life when they could have destroyed the royal family for good.

Although the visual presence of Kaki Rungking attests to the immediacy and integrity of the story, the story gains further elaboration with each retelling. Like some Balinese literary accounts of the puputan by the ruling families of Badung in 1906, the painting combines historical details, personal memory and conjecture.[6] The most remarkable aspect of the painting is the way Mangku Mura embedded his ancestor in the centre of this historical moment. It is unusual for a commoner to take the leading role in a story commonly associated with the Balinese courts. Though Kaki Rungking is protagonist and story narrator, in the painting he appears alongside various commoners *(jaba)*. Some loyally served and defended their social superiors, while others conspired against the royal family. Not only did Mangku Mura reverse conventional representation by giving the leading role to a commoner, he emphasised the disunity amongst the Balinese themselves in their opposition to colonial rule. Given the role that the puputan plays in Indonesian national histories as a symbol of resistance this was probably the most subaltern position of all, disrupting conventionally conceived histories of the conflict between colonial and indigenous subjects.

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References

1 These are the subject of an extensive study by Wiener, M.J. 1995. *Visible and Invisible Realms: Power, Magic, and Colonial Conquest in Bali,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Wiener was doing research in Klungkung when Mangku Mura initially produced this narrative; after seeing his painting displayed in the office of the district head of Klungkung she commissioned a version of the painting, which became the cover illustration for her book.

2 Refer to Vickers, A. 2012. *Balinese Art: Paintings and Drawings of Bali 1800-2012,* Singapore: Tuttle.

3 For instance when Anglurah Agung ousted Dalem di Made from his palace in Gelgel many of his retinue returned to their own homes taking their powerful and sacred heirlooms with them. See Creese, H. 1991. 'Balinese Babad as Historical Sources: A Reinterpretation of the Fall of Gelgel', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 147(2/3): 236-260, Leiden: BRILL, KITLV (http://tinyurl.com/balinese-babad)

4 The birth father of Dewa Agung Jambe was Dewa Agung Putra III who died in 1903. On this point the text of the painting is not necessarily incorrect as the reference to father might be taken to imply the close relationship between Dewa Agung Jambe and the Gelgel palace.

5 See Vickers, A. 1989. *Bali, a Paradise Created.* Rowville, Ringwood: Penguin, p.139.

6 See Creese, H. 2006. 'A Puputan Tale: "The Story of a Pregnant Woman",' *Indonesia* vol.82, Oct 2006, p.82. (http://tinyurl.com/puputan-tale)