To fast or not to fast?

_Pangulu_ Ki Amad Kategan challenges his sultan in the *Sĕrat Nitik Sultan Agung*

**Els Bogaerts**

**Abstract**

The *Sĕrat Nitik Sultan Agung* texts relate how Sultan Agung (r. 1613-1645) in a miraculous way conquers the surrounding world. He subjugates its inhabitants to Mataram and converts them to Islam. The selected fragment is an interesting example of how the sultan – refusing to fast during the month of Shawwāl – impresses the people in his environment with his supernatural power, and in particular Ki Amad Kategan, his *pangulu*, who tries to match his strength with that of the sultan. The two characters engage in a dispute on Islamic matters. Firstly, I discuss the figure of Ki Amad Kategan and the function of this excerpt in the *Nitik Sultan Agung* tales. Secondly, I present variant readings of the story. The comparison of the three versions touches on features of narrative structure, content and style, language use, and target audiences.

**Keywords**

(Pa)Nitik; *pangulu*; Islam; *piwulang*; comparing; Sultan Agung; Ki Amad Kategan.

**Introduction**

The *Sĕrat Nitik Sultan Agung* texts relate tales of Sultan Agung (r. 1613-1645). We learn how, when still a crown prince, he wanders around and acquires secret

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knowledge and supernatural power before he is installed on the throne. He conquers the surrounding world, subjugating its inhabitants to the kingdom of Mataram and converting them to Islam. Gods from the Upperworld and forces from the Underworld, Hindu-Buddhist deities and Islamic saints, endorse the crown prince and prepare him for kingship. Ratu Kidul, the Spirit Queen of the Southern Ocean, and her spirit army assist Sultan Agung wherever he goes. The possession of royal heirlooms contributes to the special qualities a future king should have. Hence, we witness how Sultan Agung creates royal entertainment (lêlangen aji) in the form of sacred dance and music, and how, together with the Spirit Queen, he plants the first rice and coconuts. The narratives emphasize how under Sultan Agung’s rule Mataram is prosperous and peaceful. Representing the sultan as a pious and invincible ruler, they tell the history of Mataram, including the encounters with foreigners, from a much later Javanese perspective.

The texts contained in the nineteenth and early twentieth century Javanese manuscripts were written, copied, read/recited, and listened to in Javanese Islamic aristocratic circles. Most texts are composed in the poetic form of tĕmbang macapat, some in prose. They belong to a storytelling repertoire which is characteristic of Yogyakarta. Simultaneously, they share stories and motifs with other Javanese works (like the Babad Tanah Jawi) and Malay textual traditions (like the Menak/Hikayat Amir Hamzah).

The Sĕrat Nitik Sultan Agung texts are multivocal: they have open structures and accommodate various narratives that all centre around Sultan Agung. Hence, the Nitik Sultan Agung corpus is much variegated and shows overlap, convergence, variation, and diversity among the narratives. Two recensions have circulated in a number of copies; of other recensions, so far only a single copy has been encountered. Most manuscripts are kept in the libraries of the Yogyakarta Kraton, the Sonobudoyo Museum, and Leiden University. The Nitik corpus has never been studied entirely and only few researchers have cast their eyes on some of the narratives.

The stories are not just alluring because of the sultan’s wondrous adventures and the aesthetics of their rendering. Piwulang, didactic moralistic instructions, also have a prominent place in the Nitik tales. One of the recensions of the Sĕrat Babad Nitik mentions this explicitly. The reason given to make a copy of that text was that it was appropriate to set an example; Sultan Agung functions as a role model for the aristocracy, notably for future kings. Islam plays a prominent role in the tales: the sultan spreads Islam among his subjects and his enemies. He frequently flies to Mecca to attend the Friday prayers (the sholat) in the mosque – it only takes him two hours to

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2 When designated a crown prince, Raden Mas Rangsang receives the title Pangeran Adipati Anom Mĕntawis; only later he is called Sultan Agung. For the sake of convenience in this chapter I refer to him as Sultan Agung.

3 For a brief comparison of these two recensions, see Slamet Riyadi (1984).

4 marmanira anĕdhak Srat Babad Nitik / yogya karya darsana (LOR. 6489 a I: 3). In references to the Javanese text, Roman numerals refer to the canto(s), Arabic numbers to the stanza(s). Hence, I: 3 means canto I, stanza 3.
reach Arabia from Java, it is told – and to discuss Islamic doctrine with his chief religious official (pangulu) and some court officials. Further, the sultan’s meetings, confrontations, and battles with foreigners from various origins receive much attention.

The excerpt below (Figure 1) is taken from the Leiden University Library manuscript LOr. 6489a which belongs to the Hazeu Collection of 1931. Entitled Sĕrat Babad Nitik, it is written in verse in Javanese script by Pangeran Arya Candra Nagara of Yogyakarta and dated 1838 AJ (1908 AD). It consists of 37 cantos. The text of this manuscript is very closely related to the oldest existing manuscript found so far, the Sonobudoyo MSB/S57, written between 19 July 1873 and 16 July 1876 (see Behrend 1990: 30-31). The first canto (stanzas 4-6) contains a reference to the royal spouse of the late Hamĕngku Buwana VI (r. 1855-1877), named “Kangjĕng Prameswari, Gusti Jĕng Ratu Agĕng”, mother of Sultan Hamengku Buwana VII (r. 1877-1921). The text was written for or commissioned by the Ratu Agĕng, with the intention of telling the story of the young Agung. Hence, in my analysis I will refer to it as the Ratu Agĕng text. The excerpt is part of canto XXX (consisting of 38 stanzas) which is rendered in the macapat metre Durma.5

In the excerpt it is related that Sultan Agung refuses to fast during the month of Shawwāl, a refusal of which his pangulu, Ki Amad Kategan, is aware. In a dispute with the pangulu, the sultan explains why. After being admonished by the pangulu, he tells him he will abstain from food and drink for one month, beginning the next morning. One hour after the beginning of his fasting, the throne with the sultan seated on it starts levitating, higher and higher. At the urging of the female courtiers who fear the sultan will disappear, the pangulu pelts the sultan with rice balls to bring down the throne. As everybody laughs at him, Ki Amad Kategan quickly takes to his heels.

The selected fragment is an interesting example of how Sultan Agung impresses the people in his environment with his supernatural power, and in particular his pangulu who tries to match his strength with that of the sultan. Discussions on Islamic matters form the core part of the encounter between the two strong characters, humour adding zest to the competition.

I will first present the excerpt with an English translation. In the commentary section, I will give some information on Ki Amad Kategan, an interpretation of the fragment and a discussion of two variant readings.

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5 Durma has the following metrical form: 12 a  7 i  / 6 a  7 a  / 8 i  / 5 a  7 i /// (Ras 1994: 316).
Figure 1. Sérat Babad Nitik – LOr. 6489a page 139. (Courtesy of Leiden University Libraries).
13. [...] jĕng sultan / nulya ngandika aris
14. "Hey Pangulu, as you are making troubles because I am not fasting, do you understand fasting and non-fasting days? After all they do not exist, actually, days that fast except for people only
15. who fast, and further there are no sated days and hungry days, only to human beings this applies. Now what is the difference between a sated person and a hungry person, none other than a person who is satiated or hungry.
16. If then indeed a person is actually fasting, without breaking off, every day, according to the rules of the sacred law and wisdom, if you are fasting now, the only thing you are longing for is to break the fast at the setting of the Sun God
17. like the transition from a newborn child to an old person.” When the pangulu heard those words of the king, he felt overpowered. The pangulu blinked his eyes, feeling at a loss about how he was going to answer,
18. Nolah-nolih maring sandhingira
lĕnggah
kĕtibira kĕkalih
duk kala umiyat
gligapireng lulurah
kĕtib tumungkul ngesĕmi
panyakranira
datan wignya mangsuli

18. he kept on turning his head to the ones sitting next to him, the two kĕtib. Upon seeing how startled their master was, the kĕtib bowed low and smiled at him, suspecting he would not be able to give an answer.

19. Kya Pangulu Amad Kategan tan kewran
ing reh parama widi
nĕmbah apyayama

lo inggih kasinggihan
lĕrĕs dhawuh dalĕm gusti

rehnning paduka
ngratoni sanagari

19. Pangulu Amad Kategan was not troubled because of his eminent knowledge. He made his obeisance with a sĕmbah and answered: “Well indeed you are right, true are Your Highness’ words that have come down. Because Your Majesty reigns over the entire realm,

20. Wajibipun panduka dados tuladan
manawi gih manawi
estu botĕn siyam
sagungireng sujalma
yĕkti kathah kang gĕgampil
ngenthengkĕn sarak
yeku pamanggih mami

20. it is your duty to set an example. If, yes, if you truly do not fast, of all your people many indeed will be easy-going and take the religious rules lightly. Such is my point of view.”

21. Eh pangulu apa mĕsthi kehing jalma
kabeh kang sun ratoni
manut marang ingwang
tĕgĕse manut padha
karo ingkang den anuti
lanun tan wignya
padha wran manut lamis

21. “Hey Pangulu, do indeed all the people, all the ones over whom I rule, have to follow me, meaning they act like the one they are following, and if they are not capable, they resemble people who just pretend to do so?”

22. Kya pangulu matur punika tan kĕna
mĕsthi kĕdah lumirig
manut mring paduka
gumujĕng sri narendra
eh pangulu sira lali
duk kalanira
sira tak kon dongani

22. The pangulu spoke politely: “That is not allowed, they should follow you and act as Your Majesty does.” The king laughed: “Hey Pangulu, have you forgotten the time when I ordered you to pray

7 The pangulu’s two assistants.
23. Adol gĕndhung apa wran ma[nut] mangkana
ya ingsun benjing enjing
niyat arsa pasa
sunat muakat Sawal
sira ngadhĕpa ing mami
ing reh manuta
pasa lir pasa mami

23. and you were boastful? Should people follow me in this way?
Yes, tomorrow morning I have the intention to fast,
the strongly recommended fast of the month of Shawwāl.
You should appear before me so as to act according to me
and follow me in my fasting.”

24. Mas pangulu lan kĕtib wus kinen bubar
kauman sampun prapti
dalu tan winarna
wuwusën wanci enjang
pangulu kalawan kĕtib
kang arsa sowan
maruput den enjingi

24. The pangulu and the kĕtib had been ordered to leave
and had arrived at the Kauman. The night is not told about.
Let us speak of the morning time when the pangulu and the kĕtib,
wanting to make their appearance, left very early in the morning.

25. Prapteng pura jĕng sinuhun maksih nendra
pangulu lawan kĕtib
ngadhĕp palĕnggahan
samantara jĕng sultan
wungu lĕnggah gyaning wingi
tan mundhut dhahar
yata pangulu kĕtib

25. When they arrived in the palace, His Highness was still asleep.
The pangulu and the kĕtib faced the throne.
Not long after that the sultan woke up, seated himself in yesterday’s place
and did not ask for any food.
The pangulu and the kĕtib then

26. Amancĕrĕng ngawaskĕn mring kangiĕng sultan
awit pukul nĕm enjing
siyamnya jĕng sultan
dupi wanci jan sapta
sukuning dhampar katawis
bĕnggang sakilan
antara saking siti

26. sternly kept a sharp watch over His Majesty the Sultan.
From six in the morning the king had been fasting.
At seven o’clock the legs of his throne appeared to elevate one hand span from
the earth.

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8 The Muslim quarter around the mosque.
27. Sarĕng tabuh astha sukuning amparan muluk sansaya inggil dupi jam sadasa salandheyan inggilnya wauta duvi prameswari lan pra klangĕnan ĭmban kalawan cethi

When it was eight o’clock the legs of the throne of the king had risen even higher. At ten o’clock they were as high as the handle of a spear. And so it was that the two royal consorts and the concubines, the nursemaids and the female servants,

28. Duk umiyat yen jĕng sultan anggĕgana gupuh pra sami mijil ngadhĕp aneng ngandhap osiking tyas mang[140]nawa awor lawan Sang Hyang Rawi warnanĕn sira pangulu lawan kĕtib

28. seeing that the sultan was rising into the air, emerged hastily. Facing him from below, they considered whether he would mingle with the Sun God. Let us tell of the pangulu and the kĕtib

29. Jĕngĕr ngungun datan wignya amangucap wauta sri bupati neng tawang ngandika eh eh padha kariya yen mangke manira apti wor lan bangsengwang kang pasa anglir mami

29. who were amazed and perplexed and could not speak. It so happened that the sovereign up in the air said: “Hey, hey, farewell to all of you, when soon I desire to mingle with my equals, those who fast like me.”

30. Yata wontĕn kucumbi ran Nyi Pidakan mirĕng yen sri bupati ngandika mangkana sira kucumbi nabda mas pangulu kali pundi yen sri narendra murca saking nagari

30. Then, there was a wife, called Nyi Pidakan. When she heard that the king had said this she, the wife, said: “Mas Pangulu, what happens if His Royal Highness vanishes from the kingdom?

31. Pĕsthi dika kinrawus lan cinĕblekan mring kanca pra kucumbi suwawi den enggal udhunna kangjĕng sultan mu[m]lung nka dereng inggil wĕneh parĕkan nabda sarwi nudingi

31. For sure you will be attacked verbally and slapped by the wives. Come on, quickly, let the honourable sultan descend, while now he is not yet high.” Another servant spoke while pointing at him.
32. The pangulu felt troubled as he wanted to bring down the king. Soon he found a solution and hastened to the backyard. He entered the female quarters and aimed for the kitchen, discarding his embarrassment.

33. He approached a nursemaid who was pouring out the rice. The pangulu swiftly and quickly took it without asking her for permission, the nursemaid was very startled. Then the pangulu was pushed over backwards and fell on the floor rolling over with the cooking pot.

34. The pangulu rose immediately and hurried off, not leaving the rice behind. Clutching it in his hands, he did not care that it was too hot in turns he clutched it in his left and right fist. Émban Pidakan and all the wives

35. then saw that the pangulu’s robe was blackened by the soot of the cooking pot which had left traces on his turban. The émban and wet nurses roared with laughter raucous and loud. The female court retainers, reckoning

36. all said: “Kyai Mas Pangulu, how dare you all of a sudden break the cooking pot? It shows from the soot that is left behind.” The pangulu did not reply. He was only occupied with the pelting
Who is this pangulu who frequently provokes the sultan? Ki Amad Kategan, also called Kyai Mas Pangulu, is Sultan Agung’s principal Islamic religious official (pangulu) and religious judge (kalining sanga Ngaji, XV: 2). The name Kategan is related to the Old Javanese katyāgan, ‘the abode of ascetics or hermitage’ (from the noun tyāga, meaning ‘world-renouncing ascetic’ [Zoetmulder 1982: 2091]). A Pangulu Amad Kategan is listed in the genealogy of R. Ad. Danurĕja V and R. Ad. Danurĕja VI, chief councillors of the sultans of Yogyakarta (Pigeaud 1932: 40). A man of distinction, the pangulu is well-versed in Islamic law and theology. In the past, Sultan Agung and Ki Amad Kategan obtained instruction from the same teacher, Sunan Bayat III (XVI: 5-7). Hence, they are well matched.

Ki Amad Kategan is a strong personality, stubborn, resolute, and perseverant, and has a sense of humour. Seriously devoted to God, he acquires supernatural power. On Fridays he flies to Mecca to attend the prayers in the mosque, where he meets with Sultan Agung. As the excerpt demonstrates, he likes to challenge the sultan and show off. All the while, the sultan feels affection for him. Following the fasting sequence, the sultan learns that the pangulu gives all the royal presents to the poor. Hence, contrary to what some people claim, he is not rich but lives a modest life (XXXI: 1). His appearance is not described in detail, but we know that he is wearing a robe and a turban, simple Arab-style clothing fitting his position and function (see Pijper 1977: 79). This pangulu plays an important role in several other Javanese narratives. In the Sĕrat Panatagama, for instance, he teaches Sultan Agung the ilmu makrifat, Islamic mysticism. As he makes his appearance in the Sĕrat Cĕnthini, we can conclude that at least since 1815, the date of the Surakarta version of the Cĕnthini known as the “Major Centhini”, Ki Amad Kategan has been part of the storytelling tradition and the collective memories surrounding Sultan Agung. Also, in the Wirit Wedharaning Cipta Sasmitaning Ngilmi he is presented in the environs of Sultan Agung.

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12 Kyai: Islamic master. Mas: term of address or title for a person of equal or somewhat lower rank.
13 R. Ad. Danurĕja V (17-11-1879 - ca. 21-7-1899); R. Ad. Danurĕja VI (July? 1899 – 14-11-1911). I am thankful to Ben Arps who drew my attention to Pigeaud’s article.
15 Kusumadiningrat, c. 1890.
TO FAST OR NOT TO FAST?

The discussion between the sultan and the pangulu revolves around the fasting in the month of Shawwāl (siyam Sawal). Shawwāl is the tenth month of the Islamic calendar, subsequent to the obligatory fasting month (Pasa, Siyam or Ramelan). The theological basis for the dispute is the interpretation of “fasting”, and the difference between what is strongly recommended (sunat muakat) and what is compulsory for every Muslim (sunat ngaen); failure to perform the latter is considered a sin. The pangulu is aware that Sultan Agung does not, in this case, wish to perform whatever is considered sunat muakat, but only whatever is sunat ngaen. To the king, it suffices if only the pangulu performs the fasting during the month of Shawwāl, which is considered to be sunat muakat. If it were the fasting during the month of Ramadan, which is considered the fourth pillar of Islam and sunat ngaen, then every individual member of society must perform it. Although it is unthinkable that the pangulu does not know these prescriptions, it says in the text that he begins the dispute on purpose, using the fasting issue as an excuse to appear before the sultan in the company of two kĕtib, his assistants, to show off his debating skills (XXX: 11). Actually, Sultan Agung’s refusal to fast is a reaction to the pangulu’s efforts to appear superior to him. The sultan outwits him with his reasoning about days and people fasting, employing a literal interpretation of “fasting days”, and the fact that while fasting, people are only looking forward to breaking the fast.

Stanzas 22-23 offer a clue to the origin of the dispute. When the pangulu points out to the sultan that he needs to set an example for his subjects and that everybody has to follow him in all he does, the sultan reacts laughingly: “Hey Pangulu, have you forgotten the time when I ordered you to pray, and you were boastful?” Referring to the recent past, when the pangulu refused to pray for the royal slamĕtan, he undermines Ki Amad Kategan’s argument and wishes to teach him a lesson.16

This past event, which takes place before the fasting sequence, goes as follows: Ki Amad Kategan intends to prove his supernatural power. He ceases to make his appearance before the sultan (sowan). On the sultan’s birthday (tingalan tumbuk, which is every windu or eight-year cycle), he pretends to be ill. Sultan Agung sends envoys to his house, but the pangulu has left for the palace already. There, Ki Amad Kategan refuses to pray at the ritual feast and sends his assistant, Mas Kĕtib Anom, as a representative. Sultan Agung is furious and forces the pangulu to say the prayers over the royal slamĕtan and the food dishes (XXIX). As soon as he starts praying, the prepared meat and fish turn back into living animals and the boiled rice turns back into husked rice grains. The meal (kendhuri) is postponed, with the guests invited to return the same afternoon. The news of the pangulu’s power spreads and everybody is astonished by it (XXX: 5). The pangulu receives presents from

16 In his notes to a similar passage in another manuscript, Kraemer suggests that Sultan Agung wants to revenge himself upon the pangulu (LOr. 11.655).
the king as a token of affection, but even so he still wishes to go on making
fun of the sultan (XXX: 1-8).\footnote{Dadya mĕne dahat sihira jĕng sultan / pangulu winudheng sih / pinaring pradana / pradana warna-warna / ananging pangulu mĕksih / kĕdah derarsa / guywan mring sri bupati // (XXX: 8).}

To interpret the function of the narrative in this excerpt, a glance at
the beginning of the manuscript may offer some insight. In the stanzas referring to
the circumstances of the coming into being of this manuscript – the beginning
of the writing and its patronage – the aim of the copying is mentioned, namely
it is appropriate to set an example.\footnote{See footnote 3.} Possibly this is one of the instances used
to inspire the readers of and listeners to the text and to instruct them by means
of a \textit{piwulang}.

Another explanation may be found in the meaning of the word \textit{nitik},
used in the title of the manuscript. The \textit{Sĕrat Babad Nitik} presents us with a
meticulous account of the life of Sultan Agung. \textit{Nitik} means to observe carefully,
to understand the characteristics of someone or something (Poerwadarminta
1939: 346), to explore or investigate (Gerick and Roorda 1901, I: 651). Theodore
Th.G. Pigeaud (1967: 161) translates \textit{panitik} with “Scrutiny, a name intimating
knowledge of esoteric secrets pertaining to the great man’s life and exploits,
not mentioned in common babads”. Suradi Hp (1991: 226) applies the act of
exploring not to the text’s readers/listeners, but to the crown prince himself as
he wanders around and visits the neighbouring countries to investigate (\textit{nitik})
the local conditions and powers. The episode in the excerpt indeed scrutinizes
an instance of how the sultan masters secret knowledge (\textit{ngelmu}).\footnote{On \textit{Nitik} as a genre, see Bogaerts (1990: 41-47). On a very different \textit{Nitik Sultan Agung} text
(also called \textit{Sĕrat Cariyosipun Dewi Ambararini}), see Wieringa (1993); on other \textit{Nitik} texts, such
as the \textit{Babad Nitik Sambĕrnyawa} and the \textit{Babad Nitik Mangkunagaran}, see Ricklefs (2018).}

\textbf{Variant readings}

Stories about the sultan and his \textit{pangulu}, including the one presented here, recur
in the \textit{Nitik Sultan Agung} texts. However, not all the tales appear in every text,
and their position within the narrative may differ. It is an interesting exercise to
uncover how the variant readings relate to each other. The narrative structure
and the context of the stories usually show similarities while the plots develop
along well-established lines; the argumentative discourse within the episodes
however varies. Using the term “variant readings” I do not want to suggest
that the Ratu Agĕng text – which I presented first and which is closely related
to a much older \textit{Sĕrat Nitik} – is the main source on which the other texts offer
variations.

A brief comparison of the selected fragment with a similar fragment found
in two other manuscripts, LOr. 6476 and LOr. 8990 no.1, yields the following.
The LOr. 6476 manuscript contains a \textit{Sĕrat Buk Panitik} in verse in Javanese script.
It consists of sixty-four cantos. It was written in Yogyakarta by Raden Wadana
Sasra Winata in 1876 and owned by Raden Mas Nukadar.\footnote{Hereafter I will use the name of the owner, RM Nukadar, to refer to this manuscript and text.} Like the Ratu Agĕng
manuscript, the Nukadar manuscript belongs to the Hazeu Collection,
dated
1931. LOr. 8990 no.1 contains a copy of a Sĕrat Nitik (also called Nitik Sultan Agungan) in verse. It consists of twelve cantos and was written by Ngabehi Wirya Rumĕksa on 8 January 1923 AD (AJ 1853). This is one of the very few Surakarta court manuscripts containing the Sĕrat Nitik Sultan Agung. Interesting is also its explicit mention that this versified text is based on a prose version (gancar sinĕkarken, XII: 23). The manuscript is part of the Rinkes Collection, dated 1954.

At the level of the overall narrative structure, in the Nukadar text the story presents itself in an earlier position, in canto VIII. It is put in the Dhandhanggula metre, here called Sarkara, and has thirty-nine stanzas. The Wirya Rumĕksa text presents the story in the cantos IX (twenty-five stanzas in the Dhandhanggula metre) and X (Sinom, here called Srinata, stanzas 1-4). In the following, I will focus on the contents of the three examples. I will neither discuss the mood each specific metrical form – in the present case Durma and Sarkara or Dhandhanggula – is said to convey (see Ras 1994: 311-315; Suripan Sadi Hutomo et al. 1984: 69), nor join the scholarly discussion about the relation between content and form, the written text and its oral delivery (see Arps 1992: 27-29).

Notwithstanding the differences, the narrative structure of the three tales runs fairly parallel and there is quite some overlap on the level of the stanzas, verse lines, and wording. The plot develops along the following lines.

The pangulu wants to show off, matching his power to the sultan’s:

Ratu Agĕng (LOr. 6489a)  
Canto XXX Durma (38)

RM Nukadar (LOr. 6476)  
Canto VIII Sarkara (39)

Ng Wirya Rumĕksa (LOr. 8990 no.1)  
Canto IX Dhandhanggula (25)

8. [...]/ ananging pangulu mĕksih / kĕdah derarsa / guywan mring sri bupati //
9. Amantyakkĕn nĕnggih ing pangwasanira / [...]
The sultan refuses to fast and – deliberately – offers the pangulu the perfect alibi to test him:

9. [...] / samana amaręngi / węktu siyam Sawal / pangulu wus uninga / yen sang nata datan apti / sunat muakat / mung sunat ngaen yěkti //

3. [...] / lan gustinya kanggéng sultani / saręng ing sahari Ramlam²⁶ / kang sinuwun / Prabu Anyakrusuma / datan arsa siyam saha mangaběkti / sěmbahyang mring munara //

2. [...] / marma Sang Sri Mulku / dupi nuju wulan Ramlan / wanci enjing animbali para cethi / kěkalih cacahira //

26. The usual Ramlan is spelled Ramlam in this text.

This leads to an argument between the two protagonists, after which the sultan decides to fast. The pivotal point in the plot is indicated by the night which is not told about and the early morning which will be told about as time markers:

24. [...] / dalu tan winarna / wuwusěn wanci enjang

19. [...] / ing dalu tan winarna / enjing umun-umun / [...] //

19. [...] / tan kacrita duk ing dalunira / kuněng wau ri enjinge / [...] //

The fasting scene relates how the sultan and his throne ascend. The plot and the structure of this scene are similar in each version. The account of the event and the determining time markers in the Ratu Agĕng and the Nukadar versions are very close to each other, although the latter is much more elaborate; the Wirya Rumĕksa version presents its proper time markers and measurement values:
26. [...] awit pukul nèm enjing / siyamnya jèng sultan / dupi wanci jam sapta / sukuning dhampar katawis / běnggang sakilan / antara saking siti //

27. Sarĕng tabuh astha sukuning amparan / muluk sansaya inggil / dupi jam sadasa / salandheyan inggilinya / [...]  

Up in the sky, the sultan addresses the pangulu, threatening that he will disappear from the realm to unify with his likes:

26. [...] sarta ngawaskèn jèng sultan / ing nalika pukul nèm denira wiwit / siyamnya kangjièng sultan //

27. Sarĕng wanci pukul pitu enjing / plĕnglągahan dalèm wijoan rukma / katingal běnggang sukune / wantawis běnggangipun / mung sakilan kalawan siti / ki pangulu duk mulat / yen dhampar sang muluk / lan siti běnggang sakilan / gedhég-gedhég mas pangulu datan angling / kètib dyè jèngèr mulat //

28. Sarĕng dumugi jam walu enjing / denya siyan kangièng sultaningrat / kang dhampar wuno wénggang / sadèdèg mulukipun / sangking kisna sarĕng dumugi / ing wanci jam sadasa / dhampar saya mumbul / salandheyan i[ng]gilira / [...]  

The emotional reactions of the court women force the pangulu to find a solution. Pelting the throne with rice, he brings the sultan down:

29. [...] wauta sri bupati / neng tawang ngandika / eh eh padha kariya / yen mangke manira apti / wor lan bangsengwang / kang pasa anglir mami //

30. Ciptaningsun arsa amor maring / bangsaningsun ingkang padha bisa / bisa pasa kaya kene / [...]  

The emotional reactions of the court women force the pangulu to find a solution. Pelting the throne with rice, he brings the sultan down:

22. Sabab ingsun tinitah Hyang Widi / wus bineda lan puwasanira.” / [...]  

27 dwi.
The pangulu is defeated. The Ratu Agĕng version relates that he returns home. In the two other readings he begs the sultan for forgiveness:

39. [...] / nuwun ngapura / mring jĕng Sultan Agung / ki pangulu sasolahnya / estu kena siku mring kangjĕng sultani / a[54]tas karsaning Allah //

24. [...] ki Pangulu sujud ing siti / saraw matur ngrĕrĕpa: / “Dhuuh pĕpundhen ulun / seu-seu lĕpat amba / mung ngunjukkĕn pĕjah gĕsangnya pun patik / ing mangke Srinata //

25. Sampun boten sisah siyam Gusti / kang supadha janna tani desa / kawĕdalan tanĕmane / satĕmah dimenipun / ayĕm tĕntrĕm kawula alit.” /

In some readings, the sultan honours and rewards the pangulu as a token of respect.

In terms of content, both the Nukadar and the Wirya Rumĕksa texts offer readings that in their details vary much from the reading in the Ratu Agĕng text. Most importantly, the circumstances of the fasting are different as is the dispute between the pangulu and the sultan. In the Nukadar text, the sultan is not willing to fast and pray during the month of Ramadan, a fasting which is compulsory. Hence, there is no argument about the character of that fasting in terms of sunat muakat (strongly recommended) or sunat ngaen (compulsory), as was the case in the Ratu Agĕng text. Further, the setting of the sultan’s breakfast is drawn up more elaborately, in particular paying attention to the presence of the beautiful wives and concubines and the rows of court servants presenting the fabulously looking dishes to the king. Eight additional stanzas describe the pangulu’s early arrival at the palace the next morning, while the sultan is still asleep. We are told how the pangulu seats himself in a corner of the compound, is close to being urinated on by the female servants, his turban
almost besmirched with stinking beans (pete)\textsuperscript{29} and smelly jengkol\textsuperscript{30} urine. Next, he escapes from being swept up and shovelled onto the dunghill together with old leaves, by jumping up and screaming (VIII: 21-22).

In the next scene, the sultan overpowers the pangulu with a similar play on the meaning of the term "fasting day" as is found in the Ratu Agĕng text: a “fasting day” as such does not exist according to the sultan, since only human beings can fast or not fast, and only they can be hungry or not, not the days. The continuous longing to break the fast demonstrates the weakness of humanity. The sultan’s words make the pangulu feel ill at ease and the bystanders smile. The discussion continues and touches upon the duty of the sultan to set an example for his subjects so that they will not take the religious prescriptions lightly, and upon the role of the individual will.\textsuperscript{31} Also here, the sultan refers to the past, when the pangulu himself refused to follow his order when asked to pray for the royal slamĕtan. The sultan, winning the debate, perceives how the outsmarted pangulu is impressed and frightened. He promises to begin fasting the next morning, complying with the pangulu’s humble request, and to continue for the entire month of Ramadan, in the presence of the pangulu.

The end of the story, following the fasting scene, expands on the pangulu’s defeat, a scene lacking in the corresponding sequence in the Ratu Agĕng text. After the throne has come down as a result of the rice pelting, the pangulu feels overpowered by the sultan and humiliated by the female bystanders. Back home, he discovers the soot on his face, his clothes torn, his turban unwound. The distress continues in a slapstick scene that has a high tempo due to a dense and rhythmic succession of events in just a few verse lines: bathing in the pond, a gurame fish bites him; running away, he slips over the tiles and falls backwards. He gets dressed and goes to bed, but barely asleep, a cat pounces on him. Jumping up to chase the cat, he hits a post, and while prodding the animal with a bamboo pole, he is stung by a wasp, a centipede biting his foot at the same time. He begins to scream. Finally, he realizes his mistake and begs the sultan for forgiveness.\textsuperscript{32}

In the Wirya Rumĕksa text, both the preamble to the sultan’s decision to

\textsuperscript{29} Parkia speciosa.
\textsuperscript{30} Archidendron pauciflorum.
\textsuperscript{31} LOr. 6476 VIII: 12. Sayidinku amirul mukmini / kas[ŋ]giyan sĕbda kang dhumawah / direng kang abdi wiyose / nanging panduka ratu / angratoni jálma sanagni / ngatas angin myang Jawa / pra samya tumeliung / mangestu pada jëngira / ratu wa{j}ib dadya panutaning dasih / manawi boṭen siyan //
fast and the description of the final part of the story introduce some quite new perspectives. In the month of Ramadan Sultan Agung is aware that his pangulu wants to test him. Therefore, he delegates two female court retainers to the house of the pangulu where they spread the rumour that His Royal Highness every morning asks to be served rice with kĕmangi (lemon basil), cabbage, and tĕmupoh root as raw side dishes. Beyond that, he eats at least five times a day, while he is expected to fast. The pangulu, having obtained a reason to provoke the sultan, puts pressure on him by calling him a true Apostle, Lawgiver of religion, splendid Representative of God on Earth and right leader. Astonished by the sultan’s stance, the pangulu engages in a dispute with him. In this text, the argument centres around the Sufi philosophical question of the Manunggaling Kawula Gusti, the Javanese perception of the unity between God, or the sultan as His representative, and the people. The other point of discussion is the sultan’s responsibility towards his subjects. When the sultan claims, he is not obliged to fast, the pangulu emphasizes his exemplary function. The sultan then poses a rhetorical question: “But, insofar as I am God’s Caliph, am I not different from my subjects?” The pangulu agrees with him, stating that as a representative of God he holds the authority over the law and therefore differs much from the subjects. On the bodily level, on the contrary, he is similar to every other human being as he is vulnerable to physical pleasure, sleep, illness, fear, death, and so on. Hence, like any other man still a kawula of God, the sultan should be willing to fast, urges the pangulu.

When the sultan thereupon asks him how his subjects observe the fast, the pangulu instructs him in detail and in a very down-to-earth manner: from the sahur, the meal eaten at three o’clock at night, followed by the abstention from food and drink throughout the entire day to the buka, the time at sunset when the birds and bats are flying up and people are allowed to eat and drink.

The fasting scene follows. A sweet fragrance fills the palace while the sultan levitates and threatens to merge with his equals who have prophetic lustre like him. Because, he says, “I am destined by God Who Ordains All, that my fasting is different from yours”. After pelting the throne with rice, a leftover from the previous evening (sekul wadhang), by the will of Allah the throne quickly descends. Prostrating himself before the sultan, the pangulu humbly asks for forgiveness. In the future, the sultan does not need to fast anymore, so that the crops of the farmers in the village will be bountiful, and so that, as a result, the common people will be peaceful and quiet. Back home, he gathers his children and grandchildren, teaches them how the common people should serve the king and instructs them in Islamic matters.

The comparison of the three fragments demonstrates how interesting and relevant it is to study manuscript corpuses as a whole and in detail. At first glance the three excerpts seem similar to each other and only more detailed research reveals significant variations, as I have demonstrated in this essay.

33 Curcuma mangga, a plant of the Zingiberaceae family.
34 waliullah tuhu / panĕtĕp panata gama (LOr. 8990 no.1 IX: 8).
35 kalipah di panuntun sajati (LOr 8990 no.1 IX: 9).
The examples also reveal how the scribe and the context of the writing have their impact on stylistic features. Not only is the Nukadar narrative more elaborate than the Ratu Agĕng narrative, it also uses more religious terms and references to Islamic law. The language used in the Ratu Agĕng text is more archaic. Most possibly this is a copy of an older manuscript, going back to 1873-1876. In terms of content and in the phrasing, the Wirya Rumĕksa text is very close to a prose version originating from the Surakarta court and on which it possibly has been based. This is reflected in the style and language use and in the “physicality” of the wording and descriptions. The piwulang in this text is very explicit, the teachings basic in character. Further study may give us glimpses of how and why these different variants of the Sĕrat Nitik were composed. Lastly, comparative research may offer insights on the audiences targeted and on the aims of the storytelling. The Wirya Rumĕksa text is possibly meant to inform or educate rural audiences and point them to their proper social positions from a court angle, while the Ratu Agĕng text targets aristocratic circles. All three texts, however, give vivid, theatrical depictions of the scene and use humour as a device to attract the attention of the audiences and prepare them to receive the instruction.

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LOr. 8990 no.1. Sĕrat Nitik (also called Nitik Sultan Agungan). Leiden University Libraries.
LOr. 11.655. Notes by Hendrik Kraemer on the Babad Nitik. Leiden University Libraries.

SECONDARY SOURCES

36 I compared the tĕmbang version with a copy of a Sĕrat Nitik Sultan Agungan in prose, written in Javanese script and Romanized at the Radyapustaka library (copy in my collection). This copy does not give any further details which would enable me to identify the author and the date and place of writing. However, it possibly is a copy of the Babad Nitik Sultan Agungan of 1918, of which the scribe is Sastrasayana (see RP 22, in Florida 2012: 56).
37 As suggested by Yosephin Apriastuti Rahayu (oral communication 5-8-2020).


