

# MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER

## Nāgarakrētāgama or Description of the Country (1365 AD) (Indonesia)

2012-51

### 1. Summary

The panegyric poem called Nāgarakrētāgama written in honor of King Hayam Wuruk of Majapahit relates the king's journey through the realm in an attempt and history of his ancestors to know the country and his subjects at close range and to understand their problems firsthand.

The Nāgarakrētāgama gives testimony to the reign of a king in fourteenth century Indonesia in which the modern ideas of social justice, freedom of religion, and personal safety and welfare of the people were held in high regard. It also testifies to the democratic attitude and openness of authority before the people in an era that still adhered to the absolute rights of kingship.

### 2. Details of the Nominator

#### 2.1 Name

The Indonesian National Committee on Memory of the World Program.

#### 2.2 Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated

The National Committee has decided that Nāgarakrētāgama should be nominated to be included to the MOW Register as a cultural heritage of the nation. This manuscript, which is held by the National Library of Indonesia, can be categorized as a rare collection. The Nāgarakrētāgama, along with other invaluable manuscripts, are worth preserving for study, research and dissemination. Some parts contain important materials beneficial for intellectual capacity building, for the present as well as for the future, not only for Indonesia but also for Southeast Asian region and beyond.

#### 2.3 Contact persons

Prof. Dr. Achadiati  
Prof. Dr. Edi Sedyawati  
Dra. Sri Sularsih, M.M.

#### 2.4 Contact details

Prof. Dr. Achadiati

Faculty of Humanities, University of Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia

Email : [achadiati1130@yahoo.com](mailto:achadiati1130@yahoo.com)

Phone (62-21) 70159931

Prof. Dr. Edi Sedyawati  
Faculty of Humanities, University of Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia e-mail :  
edi\_sedyawati@yahoo.com  
phone (62-21) 816790507

Dra. Sri Sularsih, M.M. National  
Library of Indonesia  
Jl. Salemba Raya 28A, Jakarta 10430  
Indonesia  
phone/fax (62-21) 3101472 e-mail  
[pusnas@rad.net.id](mailto:pusnas@rad.net.id) website  
[www.pnri.go.id](http://www.pnri.go.id)

### ***3. Identity and Description of the Documentary Heritage***

#### **3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated**

**Name: Nāgarakrētāgama or Desyawarnana**

Palm leaf manuscript, 48,5 x 3,5 cm in measurement, consisting of 45 lempir (pages), each having 5 line, dated 1365 AD, written in Old Javanese language and Bali character.

**Custodian: National Library of Indonesia**

Jl. Salemba Raya 28A, Jakarta 10430  
Indonesia  
phone (62-21) 3154863, 3154864; fax. (62-21) 3101472 e-mail  
[info@pnri.go.id](mailto:info@pnri.go.id)  
website [www.pnri.go.id](http://www.pnri.go.id)

#### **3.2. Description**

##### **3.2.1 Description and history of the manuscript**

The poem, popularly called *Nāgarakrētāgama*, is actually named *Desyawarnana* or Description of the Country by its author Rakawi Prapañca. At present, three manuscripts of the poem are known to exist, one of these, is now being held at the manuscript collection of the National Library. This manuscript consists of a set of preserved leaves of the Palmyra tree (*Borassus flabellifer*) inscribed in Old Javanese character dated 1365. Presently a part of the collection of the National Library, numbered Br. 493 NB 9, it was formerly known as Codex Orientalis 5023 of the Legatum Warnerianum, Leiden University Library. The manuscript was discovered and saved by the Dutch scholar Dr. J. Brandes at the palace compound of Cakranegara on the island of Lombok before the palace and its entire library collection was burned by the Dutch army during the colonial war in Lombok in 1893. At that time the codex was unique. The manuscript was repatriated to Indonesia from the Netherlands on a G to G agreement in 1974.

In 1979 two Dutch philologists determined two manuscripts of the same title and it turned up that both were exactly the same except for a few scribe's differences (Hinzler and Schoterman, 1979). These two are now in the safe keeping of Jawatan Kebudayaan Karangasem (Karangasem Cultural Institute) in Bali. Prior to being under the custodian of the Institute, they were housed in the Griya (community of Brahmins) Punya in Sidemen, and the Griya Pidada in Amlapura, Bali.

*Nāgarakrētāgama* was written during the era of Majapahit sometime between 1350 to 1389 AD. Majapahit was the last of the major Hindu empires of the Malay archipelago and is considered one of the greatest kingdoms in Indonesian history. Its influence extended to states on Sumatra, the Malay Peninsula, Kalimantan and eastern Indonesia. A large number of manuscripts and edicts on copper plates and stone have been preserved, giving evidence to the stability of the realm and good governance of the country. Corroboration of facts reported in the text have been found in the inscriptions. Judging by these documents, the reign of King Hayam Wuruk supported by the meritorious services of *Patih Amangkubumi* (Chief Minister) named Gajah Mada had successfully transformed Majapahit into a great and prestigious kingdom, flourishing socially, economically as well as politically.

After the advent of Islam in Java, Old Javanese literature continued to thrive in Bali, where a large number of manuscripts from the Hindu Javanese period has been preserved and handed down to the succeeding generations. Among others were the manuscript of *Nāgarakrētāgama* in the *puri* (palace) of Cakranegara and the *griya* (house) where the manuscripts were originally kept.

The exact date of the writing is mentioned accurately in the poem, after the custom of Old Javanese literature of this genre. It was completed in the Çaka (Javanese) year 1287, which corresponds with the 30<sup>th</sup> of the 11<sup>th</sup> month of 1365 of the Julian calendar.

### 3.2.2 Contents of the text

*Nāgarakrētāgama* gives a description of King Hayam Wuruk's journey through the realm of Majapahit, as its original name Desyawarnana testifies. The royal progress which took place in 1359, 1360, 1361 (twice) is described in detail, illuminating various aspects of the people's life: social structure, main religions and organization of their institutions, economy of the people, local and international trade, material culture, art, language and literature, games and pastimes of the people, government and political structure of the kingdom, and status of the king and his extended family.

Also recorded were the discussions with the rural community about their rights, giving an idea of how the democratic process was run in an Indonesian kingdom of the fourteenth century. The organization and administration of different religious institutions demonstrated the freedom of religion and the equal rights of its adherents.

Prapanca, who held an official of rank in the Majapahit government, also gave an accurate description of the land and its countryside. It is interesting to note that the route of the king's journeys can be traced geographically in present-day Java. A number of monuments have also been discovered by following indications found in this text. Through the poem, the modern reader perceives a complete and close picture of a community in the fourteenth century Indonesia with the political background of the state and its government.

International relations with friendly countries (*Mitreka Satata*) has also been established at the time, for example:

- Ayodhyapura
- Dharmānagāri
- Marutma
- Rājapura

- Singhanagari
- Campa
- Kamboja
- Yawana
- Nusa Madura
- Dwipāntara

#### **4. Justification for Inclusion/Assessment against Criteria**

##### **4.1 Authenticity**

Nāgarakrētāgama's authenticity has been verified by the philologists of Old Javanese, i.e. N.J.Krom (1919), H.Kern (1903-1914), Poerbatjaraka (1924) and Th. Pigeaud (1960.), and later by H.A.R.Hinzler and J.A.Schoterman.(1979).

##### **4.2 World significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability**

The record of the journeys made by a king for the sake of the welfare of his subjects was something unique in its days. Nāgarakrētāgama documented the following aspects of the government.

The panegyric poem called Nāgarakrētāgama written in honor of King Hayam Wuruk of Majapahit relates the king's journey through the realm in an attempt and history of his ancestors to know the country and his subjects at close range and to understand their problems firsthand

##### ***Personal safety***

The rule of law guaranteed peace in the kingdom.

##### ***Freedom and peace among religions***

People of different religion, faith or belief were guaranteed freedom to practice their specific rituals.

##### ***Social justice***

The relation between the people and their superiors were arranged in such a way ensuring a balance of interest. They were also given the opportunity to appeal directly to their ruler.

Nāgarakrētāgama is unique because it is a record written in 1365 AD of a progressive guiding principle which brought in practice **the basic ideas of good governance that are still valid in the today's modern world.** As such the record in itself is unique as a witness of the **personal thoughts of a high dignitary-cum-poet in fourteenth century Asia.**

##### **4.3 Criteria of (a) time, (b) place, (c) people (d) subject and theme (e) form and style**

###### **a. time**

Fourteenth century during which Nāgarakrētāgama was written saw a time of cultural prosperity when literary activity was at its height, producing a large number of *kakawin* (poetic literature) which have come down to the present generation, of which Nāgarakrētāgama was one. Many archaeological remains in other parts of Indonesia testify to the intercultural relations between the different regions and the role of Majapahit in it.

###### **b. place**

The regions and places mentioned along the routes of the king's journey have been traced in a study by Gomperts (IIAS 58, 2011) and Hadi Sidomulyo (2007), covering a large area in Java, although a few place names were already

forgotten. (check more detail by Hadi Sidomulyo)

**c. people**

At that time, much as today, the people of that part of Java subsisted on the agriculture of the land. This offered a stability to the government enabling the people to practice and develop the arts, as it is described in the text.

**d. subject and theme**

The *kakawin*, a formal kind of poetry which is essentially a Sanskrit poetic form, usually does not deal with realistic subjects like the ones in Prapañca's work. Thus, it can be said that it is an innovation of an old form already known from ninth century Old Javanese literature.

**e. form and style**

As previously mentioned, the *kakawin* form of prosody of Sanskrit origin has been adapted and developed to the Old Javanese language and continued to be popular into the fourteenth century. The poem consists of 98 cantos including 8 cantos using the jagaddhita metres which is old javanese creation. Although formally Nāgarakrētāgama follows the kārya metre in content and style it is something new and during the times to follow it remained unique in its subject matter.