

Beds and Bed Pavilions in Java before 1500 CE

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Abstract

This article focuses on furniture, and more specifically beds and bed pavilions in pre-Islamic Java, hence before 1500 CE. In this way, it intends to contribute to the knowledge of an aspect of Javanese material culture that is still in need of comprehensive studies. Old Javanese and Malay texts read against the iconographic evidence on temple stone reliefs and metalware identify four types of “sleeping apparatus” in pre-Islamic Java: a mat unrolled on the floor; a wooden or bamboo bed-platform, standing on four or more legs, which were supported on stone or terracotta bases (umpaks); a movable bed consisting of a bedstead standing on wooden legs (what one might be tempted to call a “true” bed); and a canopy bed, which probably developed from the curtained bedchamber. The article also considers the elements that complete the beds’ functional equipment, such as mattress padding and curtains that ensure privacy for their users. Even in their terse form, the different sources can be used to develop hypotheses on the association of some of these beds with groups of people identified by social rank or gender, and on the influence of foreign furniture on the design of beds in Java. Finally, this study also seeks to determine the precise meaning of various Javanese terms used to designate items of furniture intended for rest or pleasure, as tilām/tilam, palañka, and jinəm.

Keywords: bed; canopy bed; bed pavilion; mattress; pre-Islamic Java.