This book was published on the occasion of Uka Tjandrasasminta’s 80th birthday in October 2009. It contains 23 papers written during his long career. He is perhaps the most prolific author of any Indonesian archaeologist. He writes about a wide range of subjects; his main topic, the archaeology of Indonesia during the period since the inception of Islam, enables him to utilize a wide range of types of sources.

I first met Pak Uka in 1976, soon after the Lembaga Purbakala had been divided into two institutions, one the body in charge of monument preservation which he headed, the other the National Research Center for Archaeology, under R.P. Soejono. It was due to Pak Uka’s assistance that I received permission from LIPI (Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia, The Indonesian Institute of Sciences) to undertake my first research project in Indonesia. I have always felt a debt of gratitude for his willingness to assist a foreigner who wanted to participate in interpreting the past of his country.

Despite the fact that Pak Uka’s responsibilities lay in the area of conservation, he devoted a significant amount of his free time to research using data from literature and architecture in addition to traditional archaeological artifacts. As Professor Azyumardi Azra wrote in his Foreword, Pak Uka’s approach resembles that of the Annales School of Historians. Professor Edi Sedyawati in her introduction writes with her usual perspicacity that although Pak Uka’s book does not go into details concerning his reasons for choosing certain lines of reasoning, this is the price exacted by his choice to write a popular book. She also notes that whereas his book devotes coverage to Banten, Sumedang, Jakarta, and Cirebon, he does not pay similar attention to Mataram, Banjarmasin, and Riau.

Pak Uka’s book is divided into four sections. Each relates Islamic archaeology to a specific theme: the “cosmopolitan dynamic”, and three themes focused on archipelagic Southeast Asia: the local dynamic, manuscripts, and the formation and heritage of culture. His choice for the subject of his own introduction is the relationship of archaeology and history, to which he returns again in his third section; one of the chapters in that section deals specifically with the Annales School of History. He also refers to the Annales approach in other chapters, for example on page 133, and pages 186-188.

The first section is devoted to the various streams of communication which led to the Islamization of Indonesia. Unfortunately there is little artifactual evidence on this subject. The most important relics of the early period of conversion are tombstones and mosques. Interesting recent discoveries from
underwater archaeology such as the Belitung and Cirebon shipwrecks, with cargoes including Changsha ceramics of the ninth century decorated with pseudo-Arabic script, and tenth-century beads from the Near East, suggest that more artifactual evidence may still be discovered. For the present, however, scholars are still compelled to rely upon textual sources, most of them from the period after Islam was already implanted, and mosque architecture, also from period subsequent to Islam’s adoption, to reconstruct the earliest phases of the conversion. This section contains a full synthesis of the data on this topic.

There are also some studies of specific sites. For example Chapter 8 discusses the formation of the settlement of Kampung Lengkong Sumedang or Lengkong Ulama, near Tangerang, West Java, in the seventeenth century. Chapter 12 is concerned with Pulau Berhala, off the coast of Jambi. One of my favorite publications by Pak Uka which was not included in this volume, presumably because of its length, is his 1975 study of Sendang Duwur. Like him I have been fascinated by the use of the winged motifs on the kori agung gateways there. Another instance of this motif are the carved wooden wings on the entrance corridor leading to Sunan Gunung Jati’s tomb. The motif seems to derive partly from the stylization of the pre-Islamic scrolls on the kala motif usually found on temple lintels; the hypothesis that the selection of the specific emblem of the wing to replace them is connected with the notion of immortality in connection with the Garudeya myth makes sense (pp. 243-246).

Another useful chapter is Chapter 19 “History and dynamics of cultural institutions in Indonesia”. This is conventional history of a documentary sort, but it does a useful service by compiling much information from scattered sources (pp. 251-277).

This volume does not indulge in the problematization of theoretical approaches to Islamic archaeology. This is in large part connected with his obvious personal fascination with literature rather than artifacts. Its main contribution is that it summarizes comprehensively all the important data which is ever likely to be gleaned from the main sources collected so far: architecture, tombstones, and textual sources. These formed the main battlements of Pak Uka’s bailiwick during his long tenure in charge of protecting Indonesia’s monuments. He also refers to other sources which remain to be fully exploited. These include urban archaeology, including the use of space in early Islamic ports and palaces (on this subject, a recent useful publication is Arkeologi perkotaan Mataram Islam, written by Inajati Abrisijanti in 2000), and the study of ceramics, the main remnant of the trade routes along which Islam spread. A database is needed, as Pak Uka suggests (p. 119), not just for Banten, but for Islamic archaeology in general.

Question: was Banten a city-state as Uka states (p. 166)? There is historical evidence to suggest that its administrative authority spread beyond the city’s boundaries. Archaeological research in Bengkulu at the site of Fort York, built in 1685 after the English were ejected from Banten, demonstrates that ornate Banten pottery was used there earlier; probably the British took over a site which had earlier been used by Banten’s representatives. Various piagem or
proclamations from Banten demonstrate its authority in Lampung.

Another topic of interest to which this book alludes is Islamic tourism (Chapter 22 “Kontribusi purbakala Islam Aceh bagi pengetahuan dan pariwisata”). This is an important subject for future research and discussion. How does one market Islamic monuments? What are some of the dangers of doing so? Is it possible to promote Islamic sites for tourists without turning them into commodities, or subjecting them to degradation? The subject of cultural tourism in general is an increasingly critical topic, due to the incredible increase in the number of tourists, and the impact they are having on heritage sites. It is to be hoped that this volume will form a source of insight into the need to balance development with sustainability, which means allocating a sufficient proportion of the profits gained from heritage tourism to the maintenance of the heritage resources. It also requires that tourism authorities target their marketing at quality tourists rather than the mass market.

A theme which runs through most of the chapters in this book is the need for conservation. This was Pak Uka’s main professional mission. Because of his example, many younger people have taken up the cause of historic preservation, not only archaeologists, but many members of the general public. Fighting against time is always a losing battle, but if losses can be minimized, Pak Uka’s legacy will be secure.

In conclusion, it is worthy of mention that the book contains numerous illustrations, many of which have never been published before, or have only appeared in sources which are difficult to find. They add considerably to the interest of this book.


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Edwin Jurriëns’ new book is an excellent case study about the impact of Indonesian political reform on radio journalism in Indonesia. Although various scholars have focused their research on specific aspects of the historical and contemporary use of radio in Indonesia, Jurriëns, a lecturer in Indonesian Language and Culture at the University of New South Wales in Canberra, Australia, is the first to present an extensive study of the effects of Indonesian political reform on the medium of radio.

This book studies the changes that have occurred in radio journalism