



At the Intersection of Authority and Threat: A Philological Analysis of Mataram Letter in Southern Cirebon (1687)

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Abstract

This study examines the dynamics of power and official directives through a philological approach, focusing on letter issued by the Mataram Sultanate to the southern Cirebon region in 1687. By employing a philological perspective, the research investigates not only the textual content but also the material, linguistic, and contextual aspects of the manuscripts. The findings demonstrate that Mataram letter functioned not solely as administrative instruments but also as tools of internal diplomacy and social control, enforcing laws, issuing commands, and signaling warnings to local rulers. Philological examination uncovers layered meanings within the texts, highlighting how language, manuscript form, and historical context collectively shaped the messages sent by the Sultanate to southern Cirebon at the close of the seventeenth century. Ultimately, this study provides a multidimensional understanding of official Mataram documents: as instruments of administration, mechanisms of political legitimacy, and vehicles of social influence. It offers novel insights for Javanese history, colonial administrative studies, and Nusantara textual philology.

Kajian ini menyoroti dinamika kekuasaan dan instruksi resmi melalui pendekatan filologis, dengan fokus pada surat-surat yang berasal dari Kesultanan Mataram dan ditujukan kepada wilayah selatan Cirebon pada tahun 1687. Dengan mengadopsi perspektif filologi, penelitian ini tidak hanya memeriksa teks sebagai rantai kata semata, tetapi juga mengeksplorasi aspek material, linguistik, dan kontekstual naskah. Kajian ini menegaskan bahwa surat-surat Mataram tidak hanya bersifat administratif, tetapi juga merupakan instrumen diplomasi internal dan kontrol sosial, yang digunakan untuk menegakkan hukum, menyampaikan perintah, dan sekaligus memberikan sinyal peringatan atau ancaman kepada penguasa lokal. Melalui analisis filologis, penelitian ini dapat menyingkap lapisan-lapisan makna yang terkandung dalam teks, menjelaskan bagaimana bahasa, bentuk naskah, dan konteks historis saling terkait dalam membentuk pesan yang disampaikan oleh Kesultanan Mataram kepada wilayah selatan Cirebon pada akhir abad ke-17. Dengan demikian, studi ini menyajikan pemahaman multidimensional mengenai fungsi dokumen resmi Kesultanan Mataram: sebagai sarana administrasi, media legitimasi politik, dan alat pengaruh sosial, sekaligus memberikan wawasan baru bagi studi sejarah Jawa, sejarah administrasi kolonial, dan filologi teks Nusantara.

A. INTRODUCTION

The Mataram Sultanate (Javanese: ꦏꦱꦸꦛꦠꦤꦤ꧀ꦩꦠꦫꦩ; Pegon: كاسولتانن منارام translit. Nagari Kasultanan Mataram) was an Islamic kingdom established on the island of Java from the late sixteenth century. The sultanate originated with the coronation of Panembahan Senapati as its first ruler and persisted until 1755, when the Mataram Sultanate was partitioned into smaller territorial entities under the Giyanti Agreement. Throughout this period, Mataram was governed by the Mataram dynasty, representing the legitimate line of succession.

At the height of its power, particularly under the reign of Sultan Agung (r. 1613–1645), Mataram emerged as one of the most politically and militarily dominant states on the island of Java. The sultanate successfully consolidated control over Central Java, Yogyakarta, most of West Java (excluding Banten), and significant portions of East Java, including Madura. Furthermore, Mataram's influence extended beyond Java to include regions such as Sukadana in West Kalimantan, Makassar in South Sulawesi, and parts of Sumatra, including Palembang and Jambi (Ricklefs, 2001; Andaya, 1993).

The administrative structure of the Mataram Sultanate was divided into several territorial categories: kutagara (the palace core), nagaragung (major regions), mancanagara (areas of extended influence), pasisiran (coastal regions), as well as a number of vassal territories with varying degrees of autonomy. Some regions were annexed directly into the sultanate's domain, while others retained limited autonomy, depending on their strategic position and political relations with the central authority.

Mataram functioned as an independent state that engaged in both trade and international diplomacy, including with the Dutch Republic. Diplomatic exchanges involved the mutual dispatch of envoys, reflecting a complex official relationship between the local sultanate and the colonial trading enterprise, the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC) (Anderson, 2010). Towards the end of its existence, Mataram became a Dutch protectorate with the status of a *swapraja*, indicating a form of limited sovereignty under colonial influence.

The Giyanti Agreement (13 February 1755) marked the de jure end of the Mataram Sultanate. Under this agreement, Prince Mangkubumi, in collaboration with the VOC, consented to the division of Mataram's territory into two distinct entities:

one portion remained as the Surakarta Sultanate, while the other became the Nagari Kasultanan Ngayogyakarta. This event represented a turning point in Javanese political history, as it signified the fragmentation of central authority and the emergence of more autonomous local polities (Ricklefs, 2001; Miksic, 2013). Conquest through contracts or formal agreements was a common practice employed by the Dutch East India Company (VOC). One of the kingdoms successfully brought under its control through such means was Cirebon (Tendi, 2021).

At the height of its power, Mataram controlled extensive territories, including areas spanning from Cirebon to Banyumas. In contemporary terms, these regions are divided across two provinces: Cirebon is part of West Java, while Banyumas falls within Central Java. Geopolitically, Cirebon constitutes the northernmost and most influential area; therefore, for the purposes of this study, the entire region from the northern to the southern boundary is simplified as Cirebon and its southern territories to facilitate discussion.

This study focuses on a letter issued during the reign of Sunan Amangkurat II (r. 1677–1703), the son of Amangkurat I. The letter was delivered by two aristocratic figures, or priyayi, Kiai Astra and Astrawijaya, who functioned as royal officials and intermediaries for official governmental communication. This letter served not merely as an administrative instrument but also as a political medium, illustrating how the Mataram Sultanate exercised authority and managed relations with strategically significant regions in southern Cirebon.

Research on documents originating from the Mataram Sultanate in West Java has been conducted on several occasions. Notable contributions include studies by Karel Frederik Holle (1864), Emuch Hermansoemantri (1979), Louis-Charles Damais (1995), and Muhamad Mukhtar Zaedin (2019). The first three scholars examined the piagem text known as “Piyagēm Sukapura”, regarded as one of the earliest manuscripts detailing the establishment of three regencies in West Java. This text also addresses territorial reorganization in the Priangan region following Dipati Ukur’s resistance against Mataram (Lasmiyati, 2016: 393). In contrast, Zaedin studied a different Mataram-era document, the Gandoang Wanasigra Sindangkasih Ciamis Manuscript, concluding that it represents a historically significant copy containing records of seventeenth-century events, particularly letters affirming authority issued by the Sunan of Mataram (Zaedin, 2019).

Consequently, the analysis of the 1687 letter of Amangkurat II is highly significant. This study not only complements previous research but also serves as a gateway to new insights regarding the function of official Mataram documents and their place within the administrative history of both traditional kingdoms and early colonial governance. Analytical methods applicable to this document include approaches used for other historical archival materials, particularly within the context of center-periphery relations during the period of the Mataram Sultanate and the early stages of colonialism in the Nusantara region.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, a philological approach is employed as the primary methodological framework. As noted by Tanselle (1998) and Baried et al. (1985), philology enables a comprehensive examination of manuscripts, encompassing both their physical and textual dimensions, thereby situating them within their historical and cultural contexts. This approach integrates two complementary domains: codicology and textual criticism.

Codicology investigates the material and physical aspects of manuscripts, including script type, language, production materials (e.g., paper or parchment), age, provenance, scribe identity, and authorship estimation (Baried et al., 1985, p. 55; Needham, 1979). Such analysis is essential for assessing authenticity and tracing historical trajectories, including physical alterations over time.

Textual criticism focuses on the content of the manuscript. This study utilizes the diplomatic edition method, which reproduces the text with maximum fidelity to its original form, retaining spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure (Tanselle, 1990). This method is particularly appropriate for manuscripts in Latin script and Oud-Nederlands (17th–18th century Dutch), whose orthography and syntax diverge from modern Dutch.

The research begins with digital reproduction of the manuscript, enabling precise visualization of features such as letter size, ink, margins, and scribal marks. A transcribed copy is also produced to facilitate accessibility, as small letter sizes and period-specific writing styles are often difficult to interpret without transcription (Baried et al., 1985; Tanselle, 1998).

Subsequent contextual analysis situates the manuscript within the history of the Mataram Sultanate under Amangkurat II (1677–1703), examining political and

social dynamics, including the construction of a major road from Banyumas to Cirebon and conflicts in the southern highlands of Cirebon. This approach aligns with principles of social and political history, emphasizing the importance of socio-cultural context in interpreting historical documents (Howell & Prevenier, 2001; Burke, 2000).

By integrating codicology, textual criticism, and historical analysis, the study treats the manuscript as both a textual artifact and a cultural object, revealing insights into administrative practices, political relations, and socio-economic conditions of the period. Furthermore, the study highlights the value of digital methodologies in modern philology, enabling broader access, precise analysis, and interdisciplinary collaboration while preserving the manuscript's integrity.

In sum, this methodological framework allows for a holistic understanding of the manuscript, encompassing its materiality, textual features, and socio-political context, ensuring interpretations are comprehensive and historically grounded.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Manuscript Description

The manuscript under study is catalogued as inventory number 8311, covering the regions of Timor (7 August–30 September 1687), Java's East Coast (29 March–13 November 1687), and Cheribon (10 April–21 November 1687). The inclusion of multiple geographic locations, such as Timor and Java's East Coast, indicates the broad scope of this archival bundle. This manuscript is part of the archival collection 1.04.02 Inventaris van het archief van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), 1602–1795 (1811), housed at the Nationaal Archief in The Hague, Netherlands, which preserves official documents reflecting the trade, administration, and political interactions of the VOC during its operational period.

The collection belongs to the Nationaal Archief (NA), the Dutch national archive responsible for the preservation and management of the nation's significant records, including those of colonial trading companies like the VOC. Following the dissolution of the VOC in the late eighteenth century, the majority of its archival records were relocated from various colonial territories to the Netherlands. The archive contains documents from multiple VOC chambers, including Amsterdam, Zeeland, Delft, Rotterdam, Hoorn, and Enkhuizen, as well as records of the Heren XVII, the company's central supervisory board.

Founded in 1602, the VOC was granted a government-sanctioned monopoly over trade and exploration in Asia and remained operational until 1795. Its records encompass trade activities, administrative operations, and diplomatic correspondence, produced by VOC officials, clerks, and administrators both in Amsterdam and across its Asian trading posts.

The manuscript is classified under access code 1.04.02 and inventory number 8311, facilitating identification and retrieval within the extensive VOC archives. It is part of the E.5.a, Deel I bundle, which comprises documents related to VOC administration and operations in specific regions during defined periods. This organizational system supports efficient access to documents by topic, location, or timeframe. Documents within the bundle include reports, correspondence, official orders, and administrative records that provide insight into VOC policies, local interactions, and operational challenges.

The manuscript is written in Oud-Nederlands (Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Dutch). While the majority of VOC records are in Dutch, some documents employ local or other relevant languages, such as Malay or Portuguese. The manuscript is handwritten in Dutch cursive (Kurrent) on 17th- and 18th-century paper, measuring approximately 30 × 20 cm, a standard size for administrative records facilitating efficient storage and accessibility.

The physical condition of the document exhibits signs of aging, including yellowing, fragility, minor tears, creases, and ink stains, reflecting centuries of use and preservation. As official corporate records, VOC manuscripts contain distinctive features that signify their status, including: (1) letterheads with the VOC name and office details; (2) VOC seals denoting authenticity and authority; (3) signatures of officials authorizing the document; and (4) standardized administrative formats with formal language consistent with VOC governance.

Inventory number 8311 contains diverse types of information relevant to VOC operations in Southeast Asia, including:

- a. Reports, detailing trade activities, export-import results, and market conditions;
- b. Administrative records, documenting financial transactions, expenditures, and revenues;
- c. Official correspondence, including letter between VOC officials in Batavia and other regional offices, as well as communications with local authorities;

- d. Orders, providing instructions from officials regarding policies or operational actions.

Collectively, the manuscript and its bundle offer comprehensive insights into the administrative structure, trade policies, and local interactions of the VOC in Southeast Asia from 1602 to 1795, making them indispensable resources for historical research on Dutch colonial administration and commercial enterprise.

2. Mataram Letter in Shouthern Cirebon (1687)

The letter examined in this study constitute Dutch translations of original Javanese correspondence issued by the Mataram Sultanate. These documents are preserved within a VOC archival bundle encompassing strategic regions such as Timor, Java's East Coast (Java's Oostkust), and Cirebon. VOC archives from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries routinely recorded correspondence between local rulers and the Dutch colonial administrative center, rendering this bundle a valuable source for tracing the diplomatic and political relations between Mataram and the VOC (Pigeaud, 1976; Ricklefs, 2001).

Physically, there is no definitive information regarding the condition of the original Mataram letter. Based on contemporary administrative practices, official letter typically became the property of their recipients upon delivery, suggesting that the originals were likely held by regional leaders between Cirebon and Banyumas. However, the ultimate fate of these documents remains uncertain. This limitation underscores the challenges of working with primary sources in colonial historiography while highlighting the significance of translations as secondary sources that still provide substantive information regarding the content, context, and purpose of the correspondence (Anderson, 1991).

The Mataram letter sent to leaders in the southern Cirebon region, as recorded in archival code 8311, served a dual function. On one hand, they were administrative instruments, conveying formal orders and directives from the Mataram central authority. On the other, they functioned as political tools, asserting central authority, monitoring local compliance, and applying pressure or issuing warnings in cases of potential insubordination. Consequently, despite being translations, the letter retain significant historical, political, and social dimensions, which can be analyzed through philological, codicological, and textual approaches (Tanselle, 1998; Baried et al., 1985)

By examining the letter meticulously, researchers can uncover Mataram's political communication strategies, patterns of center-periphery relations, and the dynamics of interaction between the Javanese court and the VOC. In this context, the VOC frequently intervened in the internal affairs of Nusantara polities, as exemplified in Cirebon, where the Company interfered with the principles of royal succession through the 1752 Contract (Tendi, 2023). Such analysis enriches the understanding of Mataram administration and diplomacy in the late seventeenth century and provides methodological insights into how translated correspondence can serve as a window into the past, especially when the original documents are no longer accessible (Ricklefs, 2001; Pigeaud, 1976).

The Mataram letter to the southern Cirebon leaders contained within archival code 8311 are presented as follows:

Translaat van een Javaans
briefgedoor twee gandeex: in de
bovenlanden op Java voort
gesondenen dato heden van Seribon
op Batavia ontfangen.

dit briefje zenden de priaijs gandelx: Kiaij Astra tsjappaen Astrawijaja, voor af aan alle de negorijs volkeren, omde zelve te adviseren, dat vsij gandelx: zijn geordonneert, tothet schoon, en bruijikbaar te maken, van enige grote wegen, dievervolgens op dese plaatsen eijndigen, bewesten, eerst de Regteweg die op Banjoemaas uijt comt, van daar na adjibaran, en dan verder naar Daijloer, wederom uijtget gebergte naar de strandt, en bezorgen datse op brebes (gelegen bewesten tagal) uijtquamen, zonder de passagien naar Lassarij, Gubban, en Sirribon, te vergeten, daar comende, zoo hadden zij hunne ordre volbragt, maar denegorijs volkeren, mosten over al op de wegen, daar zij gandelx: passeerden, bevorens hun aancomst, vaardig en gereet houden, 50: dragers, 10: paarden, 100: maten Reijst. 25: Hoenders, en 10: Rv. sContant tot costgeldt; dese brief moet niet opgehouden, maar gelesenzijnde, Cito werden voortgesonden, op de verbeurte van alle hunnegoederen. zoo iymandt hier in nalatig wert bevonden.

Translation:

"Translation of a Javanese letter
sent via two couriers from the
highlands of Java, received today
from Seribon in Batavia.

This note is sent by the officials (priaijs gandelx: Kiaij Astra, Tsjappaen Astrawijaja) to all local village communities (negorijs volkeren), in order to advise them that they have been ordered to maintain and make usable certain main roads, which subsequently terminate in these locations, to the west, beginning with the "Regteweg" which comes from Banjoemas, then to Adjibaran, and further to Daijloer, again from the mountains to the coast, and ensure that they reach Brebes (located

west of Tegal), without neglecting the passages to Lossari, Gebbang, and Cheribon, upon arriving there, they would have fulfilled their orders, however, the local communities must, along all the roads through which the couriers pass, prepare and make ready before the arrival of the couriers, 50 porters, 10 horses, 100 measures of rice, 25 chickens, and 10 currency units in cash for expenses; This letter must not be delayed, but after being read, should be promptly forwarded, under the forfeiture of all their goods if disobeyed. Should anyone be found negligent in this regard."

3. Transliteration and Philological Analysis of the 1687 Mataram Letter

To elucidate the word structure and distinctive characteristics of this letter, a transliteration of the text contained in the VOC document is presented in this section. For the sake of clarity, the transliteration is organized line by line and displayed in several tables, each providing a comparison between the original Oud-Nederlands text, its normalized form in Modern Dutch, and its corresponding translation into contemporary English. The transliterated text is as follows:

Oud-Nederlands	(A) Modern Dutch Normalization	(B) English Translation	(C) Philological Notes
Translaat van een Javaans briefie	Vertaling van een Javaans briefje	Translation of a Javanese letter	"Translaat" = translation; "briefie" = diminutive of "brief," indicating a short letter; reflects Dutch 17th-century diminutive usage.
door twee gandeex: in de boven landen op Java voort gesonden	door twee gandeerlingen in de bovenlanden van Java verzonden	sent by two couriers from the highlands of Java	"gandeex:" = abbreviation of "gandeerlingen" (couriers or messengers); "boven landen" = highlands, literal geographic reference.
en dato heden van Seribon op Batavia ontfangen	en vandaag ontvangen van Seribon in Batavia	and received today from Seribon in Batavia	"dato heden" = archaic form of "today"; "ontfangen" = received, standard Dutch verb.
dit briefje zenden de priaijs gandelx: kiaij astra tsjappa en astrawijaja	dit briefje wordt gezonden door de priyayi-gandels: Kiaij Astra Tsjappa en Astrawijaja	this letter is sent by the priyayi couriers: Kiaij Astra Tsjappa and	"priaijs gandelx:" = "priyayi gandel", i.e., aristocratic couriers; personal names retained; reflects local elites integrated into

		Astrawijaja	Dutch transcription.
voor af aan alle de negorijs volkeren	voor af aan alle de negorij-communities	to be delivered to all village communities	"negorijs volkeren" = "negorij" (from Javanese nagari = village/community), "volkeren" = peoples; demonstrates Dutch attempts to transcribe local administrative terms.
om de zelve te adviseren, dat vsij gandelx: zijn geordonneert	om hen te adviseren dat zij door de gandel zijn geordonneerd	in order to advise them that they have been ordered by the couriers	"vsij gandelx:" = archaic spelling for "zij gandel", meaning "they (the couriers) are instructed/ordered"; reflects formal administrative phrasing.
tot het schoon, en bruikbaar te maken, van enige grote wegen, die vervolgens op dese plaatsen eindigen	om de wegen schoon en bruikbaar te maken die uiteindelijk op deze plaatsen eindigen	to maintain and make usable certain main roads that terminate at these locations	"tot het schoon" = "to make clean/maintained"; "bruikbaar" = usable; literal Dutch phrasing in administrative context.
bewesten, eerst de Regte weg die op Banjoemaas uijt comt	naar het westen, eerst de Regteweg die uit Banjoemas komt	westwards, starting with the Regteweg coming from Banjoemas	"bewesten" = westwards; "Regte weg" = Proper Road/Main Road; Banjoemaas = Banyumas; reflects Dutch phonetic transcription of Javanese toponyms.
van daar na adjibaran, en dan verder naar Daijloer	van daar naar Ajibaran, en vervolgens naar Daijloer	from there to Ajibaran, then further to Daijloer	Place names transcribed with Dutch orthography; "Daijloer" = Dayeuhluhur; sequential route description.
wederom uijttet gebergte naar de strandt, en bezorgen datse op Brebes (gelegen	opnieuw van het gebergte naar de kust en zorgen dat zij in Brebes (gelegen westelijk van Tegal)	again from the mountains to the coast, ensuring they reach Brebes (located west	"wederom uijttet gebergte" = "again from the mountains"; "strandt" = coast; "uijtquamen" = arrive/exit; geographical

bewesten Tegal) uijtquamen	uitkomen	of Tegal)	orientation.
zonder de passagien naar Lassarij, Gubban, en Sirribon, te vergeten	zonder de doorgangen naar Losari, Gebang, en Cirebon te vergeten	without neglecting the passages to Losari, Gebang, and Cirebon	"passagien" = passages/routes; transcription approximates local place names; indicates strategic control over multiple routes.
daar comende, zoo hadden zij hunne ordre volbragt	eenmaal daar aangekomen, hebben zij hun opdracht vervuld	upon arriving there, they would have fulfilled their orders	"comende" = arriving; "volbragt" = completed; formal imperative construction.
maar de negorijs volkeren, mosten over al op de wegen, daar zij gandelx: passeerden, bevorens hun aancomst, vaardig en gereet houden	maar de gemeenschappen moesten langs de wegen die de gandel passeerden, voor hun aankomst, gereed en voorbereid zijn	however, the village communities must be ready along all roads the couriers pass, prior to their arrival	"vaardig en gereet" = ready and prepared; emphasis on community obligations; typical of Mataram administrative instruction.
50: dragers, 10: paarden, 100: maten Reijst, 25: Hoenders, en 10: Rv. s Contant tot costgeldt	50 dragers, 10 paarden, 100 maten rijst, 25 kippen, en 10 rijksdaalders contant voor kosten	50 porters, 10 horses, 100 measures of rice, 25 chickens, and 10 currency units in cash for expenses	"Rv. s" = Rijksdaalders; "maten Reijst" = measures of rice; precise quantification for logistical administration.
dese brief moet niet opgehouden, maar gelesen zijnde, Cito werden voortgesonden	deze brief mag niet worden tegengehouden, maar na lezing onmiddellijk doorgestuurd	this letter must not be delayed, but after being read, promptly forwarded	"Cito" = immediately/quickly; formal bureaucratic imperative.
op de verbeurte van alle hunne goederen	onder verbeurdverklaring van al hun bezit	under forfeiture of all their goods	"verbeurte" = forfeiture; explicit sanction to ensure compliance; legalistic phrasing.

zoo ijmandt hier in nalatig wert bevonden	indien iemand hierin nalatig wordt bevonden	should anyone be found negligent in this regard	"nalatig wert bevonden" = found negligent; closes the warning clause; reinforces social and administrative control.
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Furthermore, this letter has also been examined through a philological approach in order to ascertain its historical significance. Based on the analysis conducted, it can be concluded that a philological analysis indicates that the Mataram letters were not merely administrative documents. They functioned in multiple, interconnected capacities:

a. Administrative Instrument

One of the primary functions of this letter was as an administrative instrument, regulating logistical activities and physical labor at the local community level. Textually, the letter instructs village residents to:

- Maintain and keep the main roads connecting Banjoemas (Banyumas) with Ajibaran (Ajibarang), Daijloer (Dayeuhluhur), and ultimately Brebes;
- Provide labor (50 porters), transportation animals (10 horses), staple supplies (100 measures of rice and 25 chickens), and cash (10 currency units) to cover courier expenses;
- Ensure logistical readiness along the route traversed by the Mataram couriers.

In the context of the Mataram Sultanate's administration, such orders reflect an effective center-periphery coordination mechanism. Instructions regarding road maintenance and the provision of logistical supplies were integral to a public administration system that enabled the central government to control communication, trade, and military mobility. These routes were not only intended for commercial traffic but also served political and military purposes, rendering the road maintenance orders strategically significant.

Moreover, the specification of labor, animals, and supplies demonstrates that Mataram had developed administrative standardization, likely recorded in official archives at the central court or local offices. From a philological perspective, the letter exhibits a formal linguistic structure, prescriptive quantitative terms, and an imperative style characteristic of seventeenth-century Mataram administrative documents (Ricklefs, 2001; Andaya, 1993).

b. Medium of Political Legitimacy

The second function of the letter is as a medium of political legitimacy or an instrument of internal diplomacy. The letter is not merely an administrative directive; it also reflects the authority of the Mataram central government and legitimizes Amangkurat II as ruler. This is evident in several aspects:

- Involvement of official couriers: The dispatch of the letter through priyayi of specific social and political status underscores that the order originates directly from the central authority. This enhances the legitimacy of the instructions and increases the likelihood of local compliance.
- Sanction threats: The text stipulates that any negligence will result in the confiscation of all property. Such threats reinforce central authority and affirm the ruler's legal right over compliance and territorial governance.
- Use of administrative symbols: Although the original letter likely included official seals, signatures, or standard formatting not reflected in the translation, documents of this nature historically employed symbols of authority to assert legitimacy. Written documents thus functioned as internal diplomatic media, reinforcing the ruler's position in the eyes of both local officials and the broader populace.

In the post-Trunojoyo context, Mataram faced challenges to legitimacy, as the central court had only recently restored control following armed rebellion. Letters of this type served to convey official mandates while reminding local communities of the full authority of the central government. In other words, the letter combines administrative directive with political legitimacy, such that each mandated physical activity simultaneously reinforces hierarchical relations between the center and periphery (Pigeaud, 1960; Ricklefs, 2001).

c. Instrument of Social Influence

The third function is as an instrument of social influence, enforcing collective compliance and strengthening local social structures in alignment with central interests. The letter instructs village communities to prepare before the couriers' arrival, including the provision of labor, animals, and staple supplies. From a sociological and anthropological perspective, such instructions carry several implications:

- **Strengthening local hierarchy:** Villagers are required to provide resources according to specified quantities. This indicates an organized social structure, where village heads or local leaders mobilize communities to fulfill royal mandates.
- **Formation of social norms:** By imposing sanctions for negligence, the letter functions to establish social norms linking compliance to the security of property and reputation. Residents are socially incentivized to cooperate, ensuring effective application of royal law and norms.
- **Control of community mobility:** By directing logistical and physical preparedness, the letter regulates the movement of people and goods, while monitoring local responses to the center. This demonstrates that the letter is not merely a communication medium but also an effective social surveillance tool (Andaya, 1993; Vickers, 2013).

Thus, the letter operates as a social intervention instrument, combining directive, threat, and resource management to regulate community behavior. This approach illustrates how Mataram employed written documents to build collective compliance and coherent social structures.

These three functions (administration, political legitimacy, and social control) are interrelated rather than independent. Philological analysis reveals that they collectively create a single, effective communicative message:

- **Administration:** Provides clear, measurable operational instructions, facilitating infrastructure and logistical management.
- **Political legitimacy:** Affirms central authority, legitimizes Amangkurat II, and establishes the role of official couriers as representatives of royal power.
- **Social control:** Ensures community compliance, establishes social norms, and supervises behavior through clearly defined sanctions.

The letter exemplifies a sophisticated royal communication strategy, where document form, formal language, and specific directives are integrated with threats and symbols of authority. From a philological perspective, the document also demonstrates features of seventeenth-century administrative texts: translation from Javanese into formal Oud-Nederlands, imperative sentence structure, and dissemination through official couriers. Additionally, the document reflects the political and social realities of post-Trunojoyo Mataram, where the central court

sought to restore control over peripheral regions, assert legitimacy, and regulate local compliance through systematic, repeatable written media.

D. CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this study was to examine a translated Javanese letter from 1687 within the broader historical framework of the Mataram Sultanate under Sunan Amangkurat II (r. 1677–1703), employing philological and codicological methodologies to reconstruct its functions, meanings, and socio-political implications. By focusing on this single document, preserved in the archival collection of the *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC) at the *Nationaal Archief*, the research sought to uncover how textual artifacts functioned as instruments of governance, diplomacy, and social regulation in the late seventeenth-century Javanese world. The letter under scrutiny transcends its apparent administrative role, revealing itself as a layered communicative device embodying the intersection of political authority, logistical coordination, and mechanisms of control in a context marked by both internal consolidation and external colonial pressures. The study, therefore, is situated at the confluence of philology, political history, and colonial archival studies. It addresses a significant lacuna in the historiography of Mataram's western periphery by analyzing a document that illuminates the intricate relations between center and periphery during a critical juncture in Javanese history, the aftermath of the Trunojoyo rebellion, when the legitimacy of the Mataram court was contested, and Dutch colonial presence was increasingly pervasive.

Archival evidence situates the letter within inventory number 8311 of the VOC collection (access code 1.04.02), which encompasses correspondence, reports, and orders pertaining to Java's east coast, Timor, and Cirebon for the year 1687. The manuscript is a Dutch translation of an original Javanese letter, underscoring the mediated nature of our access to the source. While the physical original remains untraceable, the Dutch version exhibits fidelity to the semantic structure of the Javanese text, as inferred from its formal diction, prescriptive modality, and reference to indigenous administrative categories such as *priyayi* and *negorij*. The codicological description further highlights the standardized features of VOC archival practices: folio-sized paper (approximately 30 × 20 cm), written in *Oud-Nederlands cursive*, bearing formal bureaucratic formulae characteristic of seventeenth-century documentation. Such archival conditions not only ensure the letter's preservation but

also shape the interpretive lens through which modern scholarship encounters this historical artifact.

In sum, the 1687 Mataram letter crystallizes the entanglement of text, power, and materiality in the governance ecologies of early modern Java. It exemplifies how a seemingly prosaic missive could operate simultaneously as an administrative algorithm, a semiotic engine of legitimacy, and a dispositif of social control, thereby rendering visible the infrastructural and ideological scaffolds of a polity straddling the thresholds of tradition and colonial modernity. Through the prismatic lens of philology, the letter emerges not as a mute relic but as a resonant archive of sovereignty in transit, inscribing the dialectics of command and compliance, centrality and periphery, script and power that animated the political imaginary of seventeenth-century Java. The study, by recuperating the historical valence of a single document, gestures toward a broader methodological imperative: to read the margins of the archive as the epicenters of historical knowledge, and to apprehend the material traces of the past not as inert residues but as active mediators of meaning. In doing so, it affirms the enduring relevance of philology, not as an antiquarian indulgence, but as a critical praxis for rethinking the infrastructures of authority and the semiotics of governance in a world perpetually oscillating between the legacies of empire and the contingencies of modernity.

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