



IN MEMORIAM: SATYAWATI SULEIMAN, 1920–1988

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Dra. Satyawati Suleiman, born in Bogor and the daughter of a Sundanese *bupati*, died in Jakarta on February 26, 1988, a few weeks before the death of her cousin, Mrs. Paramita Rahayu Abdurrachman.¹ She was appointed Director of the National Research Center of Archaeology in 1973 and held the post until 1977. She retired in 1985 as the Center's Senior Research Scholar after completing a long and distinguished career as an art historian that began just before World War Two when she was studying under Professor Dr. Bernet Kempers. She always expressed her affection for her teacher, whose occasional visits to Indonesia were important occasions for her.

In 1953 she took her degree in Archaeology at the University of Indonesia and was the first woman archaeologist to graduate there. During her career she served as Indonesian cultural attaché in New Delhi (1958–1961) and in London (1961–1963), and she became a familiar figure in many international conferences. Her life spanned eventful times in Indonesia, and she enjoyed writing her memoirs for the Jakarta press. Her account of the arrival of the Japanese in 1942 was published in *Indonesia*.² Towards the end of her life she sometimes told her friends that she was looking forward to retirement and leisure to look after her fish pond, but everyone knew that she dreaded the prospect of becoming bored. Fortunately, when she retired in 1985 she was granted the privilege of retaining her office in the Research Center, where she continued to write and help younger scholars to edit their articles for publication.

Others are better qualified than I to review her career and scholarly work. My friendship with her began only when both of us were already aging. We first met in 1978, and the reason was that we shared the conviction that the last word had not yet been written about Sriwijaya's presence at Palembang.³ In July that year she led a group to Palembang that included Dra. Soejatmi Satari, the late Dra. Rumbi Mulia Harahap, and three Cornellians in addition to myself. Under her auspices we made a preliminary survey of Bukit Seguntang and the Musi estuary, and, as a result of what was found on the surface, archaeologists thereafter acknowledged that Bukit Seguntang could no longer be neglected as a focus for Sriwijayan research. For me this occasion was the beginning of series of regular visits to Indonesia and a chapter in my life for which I shall always be grateful to Dra. Suleiman.

¹Writing in the *Indonesian Observer*, Sunday, April 3, 1988, Dr. A. B. Lopian, head of the Center for Social-Cultural Research and Development, LIPI, pays a moving tribute to these scholarly cousins. Mrs. Paramita Rahayu Abdurrachman had been encouraged by Dra. Suleiman to learn Portuguese, and she became the first Indonesian historian to use Portuguese, and also Spanish, documents. Her research interests included the traditions of Indonesian textile weaving. Cornellians will remember her as well as Dra. Suleiman as kind friends in Jakarta.

²Satyawati Suleiman, "The Last Days of Batavia," *Indonesia* 28 (October 1979): 55–64.

³An archaeological expedition to Palembang confidently announced that no remains there could be attributed to Sriwijaya. By 1976, and probably earlier, she was convinced that the expedition's conclusion was ill-founded; letter from E. Edwards McKinnon, dated May 17, 1988. Dr. McKinnon met her in 1976 for the first time.

Her influence on the development of Sriwijayan studies and the study of ancient Sumatra in general was not only substantial; it was indispensable. She, more than anyone else, kept alive the importance of this field of research by bringing to it her professional status, scholarly prestige, and an encyclopaedic knowledge of Sumatran and Javanese artifacts to enable those who worked with her to put miscellaneous discoveries into broader cultural perspectives. She was always generous in supporting those who discovered new archaeological sites and particularly anxious to encourage younger scholars in the National Research Center to interest themselves in Sumatran studies. She was quick to recognize the value of new sources of information and especially ceramic evidence, a subject that was coming into its own in the later years of her life and to which she promptly responded.⁴ In spite of her advancing years she was an indefatigable traveler and collected sackloads of surface ceramics for later examination. Her incessant tours in Sumatra sharpened her awareness of the influence of the physical terrain on the shaping of history. She always saw the island as a whole and was interested in ways in which what happened in one area could affect other areas.⁵ Finally, and crowning her efforts to promote Sriwijayan research, she was able to use her influence on the Governing Board of SPAFA (SEAMEO Project in Archaeology and Fine Arts) to organize four Sriwijayan "workshops" in Indonesia and Thailand during the years 1979–1985. These workshops played an important role in encouraging long neglected comparative studies and inter-regional scholarly collaboration. They were also her opportunity for introducing Southeast Asian scholars and others to Sumatra's cultural heritage. Her familiarity with the island made her a well-informed guide when the workshops traveled up and down Sumatra. The result of the SPAFA Project is that Sriwijayan studies and especially in the neighborhood of Palembang need never again languish. Discoveries there and prospects for further research, unforeseen before 1978, are Dra. Suleiman's permanent legacy.

But she would never have been able to preside over the renaissance in Sriwijayan studies if she had shirked field trips. Nothing seemed to give her more delight than working outside Jakarta. Her characteristic behavior was walking through the fields and mud of Sumatra and observing carefully what she saw on the ground, climbing steep ladders to visit riverine villages along the Musi river, scrambling across log bridges over deep streams at Muara Jambi, or traveling by jeep along dirt tracks to newly found cultural remains reported to her by the inhabitants of remote villages. E. Edwards McKinnon recalls how on one occasion she made her way, shoes in hand, through the rice fields at Kota Cina and laughingly remarked on what had to be done in the quest for "Hindu Sumatra."⁶ Sometimes we would observe her sucking a cucumber, and she would explain that she was keeping her blood pressure under control. Her leadership and enthusiasm were so infectious that, no matter how late in the day the reconnaissance of a new site was proposed, it was undertaken without hesitation. She always took the opportunity of talking to villagers about exciting episodes in Sumatra's ancient past; many outside the academic world will remember her. New evidence, carefully photographed and recorded, is now available for future research. Her physical stamina and spirit of adventure would have done justice to a much younger person. She was always

⁴"A Few Observations on the Use of Ceramics in Indonesia," *Aspek-aspek arkeologi Indonesia* 7 (1980).

⁵In 1954 she published "Peninggalan-peninggalan Purbakala di Padang Lawas," *Amerta* 2 (1954). Dr. McKinnon suggests that her interest in Sumatra was reinforced by her friendship with Dra. Rumbi Mulia, a Mandailing Batak. The two toured Sumatra together.

⁶Letter from E. Edwards McKinnon, dated May 17, 1988. I am grateful to him for sharing memories of our friend.

happiest when she was taking part in what she would refer to as “walking seminars.” Those who accompanied Yati, as she was known to her friends, will affectionately remember her stately but always gentle presence and lively sense of humor.

Dra. Suleiman always hoped to visit Cornell, and she would have done so in the summer of 1987. But in April she became dangerously ill. Her Cornell friends, recipients of her hospitality and kindnesses, will not forget her, and their respectful sympathies are extended to her husband and five children and to her colleagues in the National Research Center of Archaeology.