WRITING BACK THROUGH LOCAL MEMORY: ARYA PENANGSANG, POLITICAL MEMORY, AND HISTORICAL HERITAGE IN JIPANG, BLORA

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Abstract

This article examines the Petilasan of Prince Arya Penangsang in Jipang, Blora, as a site of local political memory and historical heritage associated with the succession conflicts and fragmentation of Islamic power in post-Demak Java. It explores how the tomb complex functions as a medium through which local communities remember, reinterpret, and transmit narratives about Arya Penangsang and the Jipang polity. Using the historical method—heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography—combined with a historical-archaeological approach and the concepts of collective memory and lieux de mémoire, this study analyzes historical sources, material features, and local narratives surrounding the site. The findings indicate that Gedong Ageng Jipang functions not merely as a burial site but as a living heritage through which genealogical legitimacy, heroic narratives, and local cultural identity are reproduced. The site thus represents a form of "writing back" through local memory by preserving and rearticulating historical perspectives rooted in Jipang that complement and negotiate with dominant narratives of post-Demak Javanese history. The study highlights the role of local heritage in recovering historical memories and strengthening community-based understandings of the past.

Keywords: Arya Penangsang, collective memory, historical heritage, historical archaeology, local history

INTRODUCTION

Archaeology, as an auxiliary discipline of history, plays an important role in reconstructing the past through material remains, such as tombs, mosques, Islamic boarding schools, royal palaces, and museums. In the context of Islamic history in the Indonesian archipelago, archaeological remains often serve as important sources for understanding the processes of Islamization, social structures, and the dynamics of local politics. In *Arkeologi Islam Nusantara*, Uka Tjandrasasmita emphasizes that tombs constitute one of the principal sources in Islamic archaeology because they contain data concerning chronology, social status, genealogical networks, and the cultural expressions of religious communities (Tjandrasasmita, 2009).

In Javanese society, distinctions are made among the terms *kuburan*, *makam*, and *petilasan*. *Kuburan* generally refers to a burial place, while *makam* usually denotes the burial place of a figure who held a particular social or religious status. *Petilasan*, meanwhile, refers to a place believed to have a historical or spiritual connection with a particular figure. These distinctions demonstrate that a tomb is understood not merely as a space associated with death, but also as a symbol of status and social memory.

Based on this framework, this study aims to analyze the function of tombs as a medium of collective memory as well as a means of introducing local history to the wider community. Kuntowijoyo, in *Pengantar Ilmu Sejarah*, emphasizes that history serves not only as a reconstruction of the past but also as a means of developing historical awareness within society (Kuntowijoyo, 2013).

Within this context, the Gedong Ageng Jipang Petilasan in Blora Regency represents an important site because of its association with Arya Penangsang, the Duke of Jipang who was involved in the political conflicts that followed the Demak Sultanate in the sixteenth century. The site functions not only as a burial place but also as a symbolic space representing political memory and the local identity of the Blora community. Therefore, this study seeks to situate the Gedong Ageng Petilasan within the dynamics of Islamic political history in Java while simultaneously examining it as a space for the production of collective memory.

Based on a review of previous studies discussed in the literature review section, studies of Arya Penangsang tend to focus on two main strands: narratives of legitimacy and Javanese political mysticism, and the construction of local identity in contemporary contexts. Meanwhile, studies that integratively connect the political conflicts of the sixteenth century, the Gedong Ageng Jipang Petilasan site, and the concept of political memory within a single analytical framework remain relatively limited.

Accordingly, this study seeks to address this gap by positioning the Gedong Ageng Jipang Petilasan as a *lieux de mémoire* that represents the fragmentation of power in the post-Demak period. The site also functions as a medium for the production of the historical identity of the Blora community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies of Arya Penangsang in modern historiography remain relatively limited and are often situated within the context of the succession conflicts that followed the death of Sultan Trenggana. One study that specifically examines this figure is Ahmad Nurhamid's article, "Arya Penangsang Gugur: Antara Hak dan Pulung Kraton Demak Bintara" (2009).

Nurhamid highlights the contestation between genealogical entitlement and the concept of *pulung* within Javanese political traditions. From this perspective, Arya

Penangsang is regarded as having a legitimate claim to the Demak throne based on his lineage but failing to obtain the cosmological legitimacy understood as divine will. The article demonstrates the strong symbolic and mystical dimensions in the construction of Javanese history. However, its analysis focuses more on narrative aspects and cultural conceptions of fate than on examining material spaces or historical sites as mediums of political memory (Nurhamid, 2009).

Historical-archaeological research concerning a tomb associated with Arya Penangsang was also conducted by Rina Wulandari in her undergraduate thesis on the Tomb of Arya Penangsang, titled Raden Kuning (Buyut Laye), in Indralaya Village, Ogan Ilir Regency. The study employs an archaeological approach with an anthropological perspective to describe the history of the burial site and the local community's cultural practices surrounding the tomb.

The study demonstrates that the tomb functions as a center of religious activity and has positive socio-cultural impacts on the local community, particularly through religious practices such as the recitation of *shalawat* and *Yasin* during various customary events. Nevertheless, the study focuses on the local context of South Sumatra and places greater emphasis on the socio-religious functions of the tomb. It therefore does not examine in depth the dimensions of the sixteenth-century political conflicts or their relationship to the dynamics of power between Jipang and Demak (Wulandari, 2018).

A study more closely related to the context of Jipang and Blora was conducted by Sukarjo Waluyo (2021) in his article, "Arya Penangsang: Santri Kesayangan Sunan Kudus sebagai Pembangun Memori Kolektif dalam Revitalisasi Kota Cepu." Using an ethnographic method, the study explains how Arya Penangsang has been reconstructed as a local hero in efforts to revitalize the identity of Cepu.

Waluyo demonstrates that the collective memory of Arya Penangsang among the people of Cepu is manifested through historical sites, public-space symbols, and cultural activities initiated by local communities, including the Yayasan Keraton Jipang. The article is significant because it connects Arya Penangsang with the politics of identity and local historical discourse.

Nevertheless, the study focuses primarily on contemporary processes of identity revitalization and does not specifically position the Gedong Ageng Jipang Petilasan as an

object of historical-archaeological analysis within the context of post-Demak political fragmentation (Waluyo, 2021).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs the historical method as formulated by Dudung Abdurrahman in *Metodologi Penelitian Sejarah Islam*. The method consists of four stages: heuristics, verification (source criticism), interpretation, and historiography (Abdurrahman, 2011).

At the heuristic stage, the researcher collected both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources were obtained through direct observation and a field visit to the Gedong Ageng Jipang Tomb on Saturday, December 13, 2025. The visit involved visual documentation, recording the spatial layout, and observing the structures and surrounding environment of the site. In addition, the researcher examined written sources, including online articles such as *Bloranews*, historical books, journal articles, and relevant scholarly works concerning the political dynamics of the Demak and Pajang Sultanates.

The next stage was verification or source criticism, consisting of external criticism to assess the authenticity and credibility of the sources and internal criticism to examine the content and consistency of the data. This process ensured that the information used in the study was academically accountable.

The interpretation stage involved interpreting historical data and field findings to understand the position of the Gedong Ageng Jipang Petilasan within the context of sixteenth-century political fragmentation. The study employs political history and historical archaeology approaches. The political history approach helps explain the succession conflicts and the legitimacy of power in the post-Demak period (Kartodirdjo, 1992), while historical archaeology is used to examine the structure and spatial layout of the tomb as symbolic representations of social status and political memory (Tjandrasasmita, 2009).

This study is further supported by the theory of collective memory, which emphasizes that physical spaces can function as mediums for transmitting the social memories of a community (Halbwachs, 1992). The final stage is historiography, namely the systematic and chronological presentation of the research findings to construct an argumentative, source-based historical narrative in accordance with academic writing conventions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Post-Demak Political Conflict and the Role of Arya Penangsang

The death of Sultan Trenggana in 1546 during a military expedition to Pasuruan marked a crucial turning point in the political history of Islamic Java. From that point onward, the power structure of the Demak Sultanate experienced serious instability due to the absence of a central figure capable of consolidating the political and religious elites.

In the context of the early Islamic kingdoms in Java, political stability depended heavily on the charisma and personal legitimacy of the ruler. Consequently, the death of a sultan often triggered succession conflicts. This situation demonstrates that the Demak monarchy had not yet become fully institutionalized but still relied heavily on networks of patronage and personal loyalty (Supriyadi & Sumiyati, 2014).

Elite conflict subsequently emerged between Sunan Prawoto as the successor to the throne and Arya Penangsang, the Duke of Jipang, who believed that he possessed a legitimate claim based on the lineage of his father, Raden Kikin. In Javanese political traditions, legitimacy was determined not only by formal appointment but also by genealogical lineage and the support of religious elites.

Arya Penangsang regarded the appointment of Sunan Prawoto as a disregard for the political rights of the Jipang lineage. Therefore, the conflict was not merely a matter of personal ambition but also a struggle over dynastic legitimacy rooted in the longstanding dispute surrounding the killing of Raden Kikin (Graaf & Pigeaue, 1989).

The dispute eventually led to a series of political acts of violence that intensified the fragmentation of the Demak elite. Sunan Prawoto was ultimately killed in a conflict involving networks supporting Arya Penangsang. However, the conflict did not end at this stage, as Sultan Hadiwijaya (Jaka Tingkir), who had previously maintained close ties with the center of Demak power, emerged as a challenger to Arya Penangsang. He succeeded in mobilizing military support from the interior regions, transforming the succession dispute into an open war that determined the direction of political transition in Java (Al-Fakir, 2015).

Amid this conflict, the Jipang Duchy occupied a strategic position as a political entity representing the lineage of Raden Kikin. Genealogically, Arya Penangsang was the son of Raden Kikin (Pangeran Sekar Seda Lepen), the brother of Sultan Trenggana, giving

his claim to the Demak throne a strong dynastic basis (Graaf & Pigeaue, 1989). Jipang was not merely an administrative territory but also an alternative center of political power with its own base of loyalty in the eastern part of the northern coast of Java.

The position of Jipang as a duchy also reflects the relatively loose and federative character of Javanese politics in the sixteenth century. Relations between the central and regional authorities were not always strictly hierarchical but were instead constructed through negotiation and personal allegiance.

In the post-Trenggana situation, Jipang functioned as a symbol of resistance to the dominance of the Demak elite, which was perceived as failing to accommodate the lineage of Raden Kikin. Therefore, Arya Penangsang should not be understood merely as a rebel but also as a representative of the political interests of a region that felt marginalized (Ajir, 2016).

Furthermore, the construction of local memory in Jipang subsequently positioned Arya Penangsang as a heroic figure who fought for dynastic rights. This narrative differs from the Pajang historiographical version, which tends to portray him as an antagonist.

These differing perspectives demonstrate that sixteenth-century Javanese political history was characterized by contested narratives, in which legitimacy was determined not only through military victory but also through the production of collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992). Thus, the Jipang Duchy held significance not only as a political space but also as a symbolic space.

The victory of Sultan Hadiwijaya over Arya Penangsang marked the end of Demak's dominance and the emergence of a new center of power under the Pajang Sultanate. This event was not merely a change of ruler but also a transformation in the political structure of Islamic Java, shifting its orientation from the coastal regions toward the interior (Supriyadi & Sumiyati, 2014).

This shift affected economic networks, cultural orientations, and patterns of relations between political elites and religious scholars. The transition to Pajang also reflected a process of power institutionalization that was more centralized than that of Demak. Sultan Hadiwijaya established a new basis of legitimacy by integrating religious symbols and the support of the interior elites. In this context, the defeat of Arya

Penangsang can be regarded as the endpoint of Raden Kikin's dynastic claim within the political structure of Java (Graaf & Pigeaue, 1989).

This transformation also affected the configuration of subordinate territories, including Jipang, which consequently lost its central position in the political landscape. The broader implication of this transition was the emergence of a new pattern in Javanese Islamic politics, in which political legitimacy became increasingly associated with the ability to control both military and symbolic networks. The post-Demak conflict became an important precedent for succession dynamics in subsequent kingdoms, including Mataram. Within this framework, Arya Penangsang acquired a strong symbolic position in the collective memory of the Jipang community because he represented the final phase of the struggle of the coastal Demak lineage before hegemony shifted toward the interior (Ajir, 2016).

Thus, the political conflict following the death of Sultan Trenggana was not merely a personal dispute among elites but a crisis of dynastic legitimacy involving the Jipang Duchy as an alternative political entity. The struggle for power among Arya Penangsang, Sunan Prawoto, and Sultan Hadiwijaya laid the foundation for the transition from Demak to Pajang while also explaining why Arya Penangsang continues to possess strong symbolic significance in the collective memory of the Jipang community today (Abdullah, 2018).

2. The Gedong Ageng Petilasan as a Historical-Archaeological Site

The Gedong Ageng Jipang Tomb is located in Jipang Village, Cepu District, Blora Regency, approximately eight kilometers south of the center of Cepu District. Spatially, the complex is situated in an area that, according to local tradition, is believed to have been the center of the Jipang Duchy. This geographical location demonstrates the connection between the political space of the past and the cultural landscape of the present. From a historical-archaeological perspective, the location of a site cannot be separated from the socio-political context in which it emerged, as physical spaces often represent centers of authority and political memory (Tjandrasasmita, 2009).



Figure 1. The Gate of the Gedong Ageng Jipang Tomb Complex

Source: Author's photo collection, December 13, 2025.

The spatial layout of the complex displays a relatively orderly structure, consisting of a *pendopo* or semi-open structure at the front, a gate marking the boundary of the sacred area, the main tomb area, and brick walls surrounding the complex. These elements are not merely architectural components but also symbolize the division between profane and sacred spaces.

The gate functions as a symbolic transition from the outside world into a space of veneration, while the brick walls emphasize the boundaries of protected historical authority. This arrangement demonstrates that the tomb complex was designed with a strong symbolic awareness (Ajir, 2016).

The *pendopo* within the complex functions as a reception area for pilgrims as well as a space for socio-religious activities. The presence of the *pendopo* indicates that the site has not functioned solely as a burial place but also as a communal space. From a historical-archaeological perspective, such spatial arrangements can be interpreted as an effort to preserve memory through spatial organization that enables continued social interaction (Halbwachs, 1992).

Within the complex are the principal tombs associated with Arya Penangsang, along with several tombs of relatives of the Jipang Duchy, including Raden Bagus Sosrokusumo, Raden Bagus Sumantri, Raden Sekar Winangkrong, and Tumenggung Ronggo Atmojo. The presence of these family tombs demonstrates a pattern of elite burials concentrated within a single complex (Ajir, 2016).

In the Javanese-Islamic tradition, the grouping of aristocratic family tombs reflects the continuity of lineage and symbolic legitimacy. Furthermore, the arrangement of these tombs indicates the existence of a symbolic hierarchy, reflected in the size of the gravestones, their relative positions in relation to the main tomb, and other distinctive markers.

This spatial hierarchy reinforces the internal social structure of the Jipang Duchy as represented through the burial space. From the perspective of collective memory, family tombs serve not only as final resting places but also as means of strengthening the genealogical identity of the local community (Nora, 1989).

The presence of relatives' tombs also expands the meaning of the site as a center of memory for the broader Jipang lineage rather than merely for a single historical figure. Thus, the complex functions as a spatial archive preserving traces of past power relations and kinship networks. Historical archaeology regards tomb artifacts and structures as sources of data capable of explaining the socio-political configuration of a community (Tjandrasasmita, 2009).

Over time, the function of the complex has undergone transformation. Whereas the site initially functioned as a burial ground for political elites, it has now developed into a religious space that attracts numerous pilgrims. Collective prayers, *haul* commemorations, and visits by students have transformed the site into a living space within contemporary social practices. This transformation demonstrates that historical sites are dynamic and undergo reinterpretation according to the needs of society (Kuntowijoyo, 2013).

In addition to its religious function, the Gedong Ageng Jipang Tomb complex also has an educational dimension. The site is frequently used as a reference for local history education by schools and cultural communities in Blora and its surrounding areas. This transformation of function demonstrates a shift from a private-dynastic space to a public-cultural space. In this context, the tomb is no longer merely a symbol of mourning or veneration but also a medium for transmitting historical knowledge (Handinoto, 2010).

An archaeological approach enables this transformation to be understood as an ongoing process of meaning-making. The same physical space may accommodate different functions according to the historical context while retaining its historical

authority. Thus, the Gedong Ageng Jipang Tomb can be understood as a political artifact representing the political memory of the Jipang Duchy while simultaneously serving as a space for negotiating contemporary community identities.

This demonstrates that the Gedong Ageng Jipang Tomb is not merely a religious site but also a historical-archaeological space containing representations of political authority, genealogical structures, and transformations in social function. The spatial layout of the complex, the presence of family tombs, and the transformation from an elite burial ground into a religious-educational space demonstrate how physical space continuously represents historical memory and legitimacy.

3. The Tomb as a Symbol of Community Identity and Memory

The Gedong Ageng Jipang Tomb is understood not only as a historical site but also as a space for producing heroic narratives. In the collective memory of the Jipang community, Arya Penangsang is often positioned as a figure who defended the genealogical rights and political dignity of the Jipang Duchy. This narrative constructs a form of heroism that differs from mainstream historiography, which tends to emphasize the perspective of political victors. The production of such narratives demonstrates that collective memory operates through the selection and emphasis of particular aspects of the past according to the identity needs of a community.

The production of genealogical legitimacy is also evident in the emphasis placed on Arya Penangsang's lineage as the heir of Raden Kikin. In Javanese society, bloodline carries strong symbolic significance in establishing moral and historical claims. Through oral narratives, religious gatherings, and local traditions, this legitimacy continues to be reproduced, shaping a shared awareness that Jipang occupied a historical position comparable to other centers of power in sixteenth-century Java (Ajir, 2016). Thus, the tomb serves as a point of reference for strengthening this genealogical identity.



Figure 2. The Tomb of Arya Penangsang and His Relatives at the Gedong Ageng Jipang Complex

Source: Author's photo collection, December 13, 2025.

The concept of *lieux de mémoire*, or "sites of memory," explains how particular places can become focal points for the concentration of a community's collective memory (Nora, 1989). In this context, the Gedong Ageng Jipang Tomb functions as a symbolic space that preserves and reactivates heroic narratives. This physical space enables the community to connect with the past through symbols, rituals, and visual representations. The tomb therefore serves not merely as a historical object but also as an arena for identity construction.

The regular pilgrimage practices conducted at the tomb complex demonstrate how historical memory is reproduced through collective action. Pilgrimage is not merely a spiritual activity but also a medium for transmitting narratives concerning past struggles and conflicts. During each visit, stories about Arya Penangsang are retold, reinterpreted, and adapted to contemporary contexts. This process demonstrates that collective memory is dynamic and continuously renewed through social practices (Halbwachs, 1992).

In addition to its religious function, pilgrimage serves as a form of informal historical education. Younger generations who participate in this tradition gain an understanding of the origins of their region, including the former territory of the Jipang Duchy, which now encompasses Blora, Cepu, Lasem (Rembang), and Bojonegoro. Thus, pilgrimage practices create a cross-regional network of memory that strengthens regional identity. The tomb space becomes a symbolic point of orientation for communities across the region (Haryadi & Safinah, 2020).

The reproduction of memory through pilgrimage also demonstrates the relationship between religious experience and historical consciousness. When prayers are offered at the tomb, there is a dimension of respect for a historical figure regarded as having made significant contributions or possessing spiritual charisma. This practice demonstrates how the boundaries between history and spirituality often intersect within Javanese-Islamic culture (Lombard, 2005).

Within the context of Blora's cultural identity, Arya Penangsang has become a local symbol that distinguishes the region from other areas of Central Java. The figure is frequently invoked in cultural discourse, artistic performances, and local historical narratives as a representation of courage and steadfastness (Nora, 1989).

This identity demonstrates how a historical figure can become a cultural icon that extends beyond the factual events of his historical life. Arya Penangsang is not merely a sixteenth-century figure but also a symbol of regional pride (Putri & Hudaidah, 2021).

This construction of identity is further reinforced by local historical narratives disseminated through regional mass media, education, and oral traditions. In this context, collective memory is not spontaneous but is shaped through lengthy social and cultural processes. Local history serves as an important instrument for developing a sense of belonging to a particular region and its past. Therefore, Arya Penangsang occupies a central position in the cultural imagination of the people of Blora and its surrounding areas.

The relationship between history, myth, and the politics of memory is clearly evident in the ways in which the community interprets this figure. Some narratives have developed in the form of legends that enrich their symbolic dimensions, although not all of them can be historically verified. Nevertheless, the existence of myths does not necessarily contradict history; rather, myths function as a means of internalizing values and identity. The politics of memory operates when a community selects particular versions of a narrative to preserve as part of its collective identity.

Thus, the tomb becomes an arena where historical facts and mythological constructions intersect. The politics of memory shapes how Arya Penangsang is positioned within both local and national historical narratives. This process demonstrates

that history is not merely a reconstruction of the past but also a field in which meanings are contested in the present (Halbwachs, 1992).

Through the production of heroic narratives, pilgrimage practices, the construction of Blora's cultural identity, and the relationship between history and myth, the tomb becomes a medium through which the fragmentation of past political power is reproduced in contemporary social consciousness. In other words, the tomb is not merely a space of death but a living space that continues to shape and reinforce the historical identity of the community (Haryadi & Safinah, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that the political conflict following the death of Sultan Trenggana constituted a crisis of dynastic legitimacy involving genealogical, symbolic, and territorial contestations, in which Arya Penangsang emerged as a representative of the Raden Kikin lineage through the Jipang Duchy. The shift of power from Demak to Pajang was not merely a governmental transition but a transformation of the political structure of Islamic Java that shifted the orientation of power from the coastal regions toward the interior.

Within this context, the Gedong Ageng Jipang Tomb cannot be understood merely as a burial site but as a political artifact preserving traces of the fragmentation of power in the sixteenth century. Through its spatial layout, the presence of elite family tombs, and continuing pilgrimage practices, the tomb functions as a symbolic space that reproduces genealogical legitimacy and heroic narratives surrounding Arya Penangsang. From the perspectives of collective memory and *lieux de mémoire*, this study demonstrates that the tomb serves as a medium through which history, Blora's cultural identity, and the politics of memory intersect. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations, particularly concerning the limited use of oral sources and the contemporary social dynamics surrounding the site.

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