

Reinterpreting Kuta Bara of East Java: Historiographical, Archaeological and Cultural Deconstruction

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Abstract

This article examines Kuta Bara, one of the vassal kingdoms of Majapahit, with a particular focus on its localization and historical significance during the reign of Hayam Wuruk. The nature of Kuta Bara remains a subject of debate among local historians in Jember, East Java, particularly concerning its location and function. Based on written sources, some scholars have identified Kuta Bara as a Buddhist religious site situated in Cakru village. However, recent archaeological discoveries have prompted a reassessment of these interpretations, necessitating a more comprehensive historical analysis. Employing established historical research methods e.g., heuristics, verification, interpretation, and historiography, this study reevaluates existing perspectives on Kuta Bara. It proposes that rather than a religious site, Kuta Bara functioned as a trading city located in the vicinity of Kraton village. By integrating both textual sources and material evidence, this article offers a revised interpretation of Kuta Bara's role within the broader political and economic networks of Majapahit.

Keywords: Kuta Bara, Buddhist religious site, deconstruct, new interpretation, trading city

Abstrak

Artikel ini mendiskusikan tentang salah satu kerajaan vasal Majapahit. Kuta Bara adalah salah satu kerajaan vasal Majapahit yang menjadi objek penelitian ini. Kuta Bara merupakan sebuah kota kuno pada masa pemerintahan Hayam Wuruk, yang di mana corak kota kuno ini masih menjadi perdebatan sejarawan lokal di Jember. Terutama letak keberadaan dan corak kota kuno ini, yang di mana beberapa sejarawan berupaya mengidentifikasi corak kota kuno ini sebagai areal keagamaan Buddha yang berlokasi di Desa Cakru dengan mendasarkan pada sumber tertulis. Seiring berjalannya waktu kemudian muncul temuan arkeologis, yang menyebabkan adanya upaya interpretasi baru. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mendekonstruksi dan re-interpretasi terkait dengan lokalisasi dan corak Kuta Bara. Artikel ini menggunakan metode penelitian sejarah yang meliputi heuristik, verifikasi, interpretasi, dan historiografi. Artikel ini menghasilkan interpretasi baru mengenai lokalisasi dan corak Kuta Bara, yang di mana kerajaan vasal ini adalah Kota Dagang yang berlokasi di sekitar Desa Kraton.

Kata Kunci: Kuta Bara, areal keagamaan Buddha, dekonstruksi, interpretasi baru, Kota Dagang

Introduction

Kuta Bara was known as one among ancient cities that thrived under the hegemony of the Majapahit Kingdom. Classified as a vassal kingdom, it played a significant role within Majapahit's political and territorial framework. Historical records indicate that in 1359 CE, Hayam Wuruk undertook a sacred journey known as *tirtayatra*, accompanied by the poet Mpu Prapanca (Muljana, 2006). Departing from Wilwatikta, his entourage traversed the eastern regions of Java, carrying a substantial contingent of troops and supplies. Along the way, they halted in several ancient cities, including Kuta Bara.

Despite its historical significance, the precise location of Kuta Bara remains a subject of scholarly debate. Researchers such as Dukut Imam Widodo and Zainollah Ahmad contend that Kuta Bara was situated near Cakru. Their analyses have contributed to the study of

classical history in Jember, East Java, yet existing scholarship has largely examined the region in general terms rather than focusing on its ancient cities. Consequently, further investigation into Kuta Bara's localization is warranted, as it could provide crucial insights into Majapahit's presence in Jember. Theoretically, Hayam Wuruk's journey may have left an archaeological imprint, offering tangible historical records (Laskowski et al., 2021: 135).

The discovery of new archaeological artifacts necessitates a revision of existing historiography. Historical narratives are inherently dynamic, reflecting the *mutatis mutandis* nature of historiographical inquiry. This adaptability mitigates the risk of biased historical writing, which can marginalize certain perspectives and lead to less accurate accounts (Poespoprodjo, 1987). Thus, historiography must account for even the smallest localized components, as they ultimately contribute to the broader framework of national history (Manning et al., 2024; Kartodirdjo, 1993).

This study aims to critically analyze and deconstruct the prevailing narratives surrounding Kuta Bara's localization. Historical critique plays a vital role in the advancement of historiography, particularly from a locality perspective, which addresses gaps in historical representation and reduces subjectivity (Gutiérrez et al., 2023: 2-4; Fileva, 2019: 157). Discussions on Majapahit often remain overly generalized, with little focus on its vassal kingdoms, despite their historical significance. A locality-based approach allows classical history to be reexamined and developed through new findings that substantiate the existence of vassal states like Kuta Bara. This approach also underscores the role of subordinate entities within Majapahit's broader sociopolitical framework—entities that are

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frequently overlooked in historiography despite their crucial contributions (Perreault, 2020: 29-30).

The discovery of new archaeological artifacts can alter existing historiography. Such changes in historical narratives are natural, as they demonstrate the *mutatis mutandis* nature of history, which suggests that history is a dynamic ideographic discipline. This characteristic helps minimize the likelihood of biased historical writing that can lead to the marginalization of certain historical narratives. Such actions represent imposed subjectivity, which indirectly results in less accurate historiographical outcomes (Poespoprodjo, 1987). Therefore, historiographical presentations should not overlook the smallest components, even if they are merely local, as these elements ultimately support the national historiography (Manning et al., 2024; Kartodirdjo, 1993). Thus, the importance of historical critique for the development of historiography is emphasized.

Kuta Bara's localization remains a contested subject among classical historians in Jember. Widodo and Ahmad argue for its placement near Cakru, citing historical toponymy. The name Cakru is thought to be an ancient place-name, possibly dating back to the Kediri Kingdom, and referenced in Bujangga Manik's 16th-century travel accounts (Ahmad, 2015; Widodo, 2014). However, no definitive evidence has been found to support this assertion. Meanwhile, significant discoveries of red brick structures in Desa Kraton suggest the need for a reassessment of Kuta Bara's location. Given these findings, this study seeks to deconstruct existing historiographical assumptions and establish a revised historical account of Kuta Bara's true localization.

This research is aimed to answer the following questions: (1) What was the historical significance of Kuta Bara?, (2) Where was Kuta Bara precisely located?

Literature Review

History is a discipline that constructs narratives based on assumptions substantiated by evidence. The composition of historical narratives must draw upon diverse sources—not solely written or oral records but also material evidence—which plays a crucial role in reinforcing historiographical claims. Neglecting such sources risks producing what Iskra Fileva terms historically inaccurate narratives (Fileva, 2019). Given that different source types yield varying research outcomes, each anchored in distinct forms of historical evidence, John Roosa describes this phenomenon as truth-claims (Purwanto et al., 2008: 185).

Historians frequently encounter historiographical bias, often shaped by ideological influences, which can compromise objectivity and result in narratives that are not value-free (Vuletich et al., 2024: 855; Abdullah & Surjomihardjo, 1985: 133). Talal Asad characterizes this tendency as excessive charity, wherein historical interpretations are influenced by unwarranted sympathies or nationalistic sentiments (Day & Foulcher, 2008: xi). Such bias may lead to overgeneralized historiography, reconstructed to align with ideological positions, personal interests, or exaggerated historical patriotism. Thus, archaeological evidence becomes essential in reinforcing assumptions regarding the localization of Kuta Bara as remnants of a past civilization (Liu et al., 2024: 51).

Moreover, historians subject to ideological biases often reconstruct narratives using coercive conceptual frameworks, a phenomenon Poespoprodjo identifies as objectivism (Poespoprodjo, 1987: 27). This approach may foster resistance to critique, particularly against new findings that contradict entrenched narratives. Ludwig Wittgenstein underscores the persuasive power of language, cautioning against rhetoric wielded by historians lacking value-neutrality in their reconstructions of the past (Al-Zastrouw, 1999: 134-135; Wittgenstein, 2007: x). Given the inherent dynamism of historical discourse, narratives inevitably evolve with the emergence of new evidence; thus, historians must cultivate historical consciousness (Bleeze, 2024: 5; Heller, 1982: 3). Ethan Kleinberg, therefore, advocates for comparative historiographical approaches that facilitate the deconstruction of established historical narratives (Kleinberg, 2007: 114).

Historical deconstruction dismantles preexisting narratives to reconstruct new interpretations informed by newly uncovered evidence (Rosenqvist, 2020: 133). In this context, research on the localization of Kuta Bara serves as a comparative study, challenging and refining previous scholarship. Despite references to Kuta Bara in historical literature, studies focusing explicitly on its localization remain scarce. Dukut Imam Widodo, in *Djember Tempo Doeloe*, speculates that Kuta Bara was located in Cakru (southern Jember) (Widodo, 2014), an assertion echoed by Zainollah Ahmad in *Topographia Sacra: Menelusuri Jejak Sejarah Jember Kuno* (Ahmad, 2015). However, neither study offers definitive evidence confirming Kuta Bara's precise location, necessitating further investigation.

Some historiographical approaches employed in prior studies exhibit strategic essentialism, yielding provisional conclusions that remain subject to revision. The *mutatis mutandis* nature of historical inquiry ensures that interpretations evolve alongside new discoveries. Therefore, as long as additional findings emerge, historical narratives will continue to shift, including perspectives on Kuta Bara's existence. Reinterpreting Kuta Bara's localization is imperative, requiring historians to adopt an uncharitable stance toward historical subjectivity to mitigate the risks of historical patriotism—where unsupported assertions overshadow empirical evidence. Soedjatmoko (1957) advocates for an evidence-based historiographical approach, stressing the necessity of historical deconstruction to convert ahistorical narratives into historically substantiated accounts. Accordingly, this study seeks to critically reexamine and reconstruct the historical interpretation of Kuta Bara's location.

Method

This research employed established historical methods, including heuristics, verification, interpretation and historiography (Sjamsuddin, 2016: 55-99; Notosusanto, 1968: 145; Gottschalk, 1985: 32). To investigate the localization of Kuta Bara, the researcher synthesizes insights from literature reviews and field observations. The literary sources consulted originate primarily from colonial records, such as those preserved in Delpher, including the works of Brandes and *Oost-Java en Madoera*, which document references to Kuta Bara. Further relevant literature includes *Slamet Muljana's Tafsir Nagarakretagama* and the *Bujangga Manik*

chronicle, both of which have informed the interpretations of Dukut Imam Widodo and Zainollah Ahmad.

In addition to written sources, material evidence plays a critical role in this research. Among the significant finds are red brick remnants scattered across the rice fields of Desa Kraton, as well as several historical maps. Photographic documentation from field observations serves as supplementary evidence for reinterpretation efforts. MacArthur argues that historical photographs function as natural extensions of past realities, providing a visual reference for historical reconstruction (MacArthur, 2022: 69). Moreover, Riccardi et al. assert that photographs not only reinforce arguments but also sharpen analytical depth, contributing to the evidentiary foundation of historical narratives (Riccardi et al., 2024: 2).

To ensure source validity and reliability, this study employed a critical comparative analysis of written records, material findings, and cartographic representations. The analysis evaluated discrepancies and aligned historical descriptions with the localization of existing discoveries. Mapping techniques facilitated the comparative study of Desa Cakru and Desa Kraton, drawing from the references in Tafsir Nagarakretagama by Slamet Muljana. Interpretation was undertaken through the lens of local historical perspectives, which aimed to illuminate narratives of historically significant communities (Wongsrichanali, 2022: 586; Abdullah, 2021: 8-10). These perspectives were further supported by linguistic, empirical, and historical approaches, ensuring a multi-dimensional understanding of Kuta Bara's existence.

Result and Discussion

Kuta Bara in an Etymological Context

There are several definitions of "bara" in the Indonesian language. The meaning of "bara" in the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia is closely associated with "membara" (to glow) and "batu bara" (coal), often interpreted as something that burns or is easily ignited. Following this definition, Kuta Bara could be identified as a conflict zone, as it suggests an area prone to warfare, which aligns logically with the context of Paregreg. Kuta Bara is believed to have been a trading city that emerged from the oppression exerted by Wikramawardhana during the Paregreg conflict from 1404 to 1406 CE. Sociologists agree that a city is a site where various powers converge (Basundoro, 2009: 20). As a symbol of strength and regional advancement, Kuta Bara is likely to have been a battleground during the internal conflicts of Majapahit (Muljana, 2006). This definition indicates that Kuta Bara was a trading city contested during the Majapahit civil war. However, there is another potential meaning for "bara," as the interpretation of the term may vary in different languages.

Differences in words and languages can imply varying meanings. These differing meanings can provide distinct descriptions and connotations, leading to diverse interpretations (Soriente, 2024: 167). This statement reflects the views of Ludwig Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein, 2007: 2-3). The same principle applies to the definition of Kuta Bara. It is important to emphasize that the establishment of a city serves as a reflection of achievements that signify the glory of a kingdom, within which a system of social stratification is developed. Furthermore, based on the travel

accounts of Hayam Wuruk (Tirtayatra), Kuta Bara is indicated to be located to the south of Jember, specifically in Desa Kraton (Kencong), close to the southern coastal port. Therefore, the definition of Kuta Bara as a city that was once a conflict zone remains tentative.

Definitively, "bara" refers to a monastery that serves as a place of worship for Buddhists. This toponym relates to the initial word "Borobudur," specifically the element "Boro." According to the inscriptions of Tri Tepusan dated 842 CE, it mentions a grand and sacred structure for Buddhist worship located around Bhumisegoro, referred to as Bhumisambhara. There has been a phonemic change from "bhara" to "Boro," reflecting an adaptation of pronunciation within the current Javanese community. The definition of "bhara" in Old Javanese carries adjectival meanings such as great, high, and heavy (Wirjosuparto, 1952: 39). Soekmono defines "bhara" as a sacred monument left by Buddhism in the past (Soekmono, 2017: 115; Soekmono, 1976: 13). Meanwhile, Poerbatjaraka interprets "bhara" as "The Monastery of Budur," which can be understood as a monastery for Buddhist monks of that time. This interpretation aligns with the findings from the inscriptions of Sri Kahulunan, which announce the management of a plot of land for the construction of a Buddhist place of worship, in celebration of the marriage of Sri Kahulunan's child from the Sailendra dynasty with the Sanjaya dynasty. Thus, the concept of "bhara" in this context refers to a place of worship known as a monastery.

Referring to the above definition, "bara" signifies a monastery. Consequently, this indirectly positions Kuta Bara as a sacred city for Buddhists, which in the Nagarakretagama is referred to as the region

of Kasogatan Bajraka (Zainollah, 2015; Widodo, 2014). Several findings indicate that Kuta Bara could be regarded as a sacred area, such as the discovery of a cowbell and various other spiritual objects. However, this evidence has not yet sufficiently reinforced the definition of Kuta Bara as a sacred territory, as cowbells can also be found in markets, similar to prayer beads sold in contemporary traditional markets.

Meanwhile, Zoetmulder offers a different definition from the aforementioned interpretations. Etymologically, "Kuta Bara" consists of two words: "kuta" and "bara." Both terms belong to the vocabulary of Old Javanese, where "kuta" means region, center, or city, and can literally be equated with a city in contemporary terms. In contrast, "bara" signifies exchange, transaction, and trade. Thus, "Kuta Bara" literally refers to a place where producers and consumers meet to conduct trade transactions, or the activity of exchanging goods and services with one another (Robson and Zoetmulder, 2004: 109). This phenomenon is described by Homans as social exchange (Homans, 1961). This phenomenon is described by Homans as social exchange (Enayat et al., 2022; Homans, 1961). This etymology suggests that Kuta Bara is a trading city that once hosted consumers and producers in their efforts to meet their needs. The motivation behind these transactions is referred to by Abraham Maslow as homeostasis (Fu, 2024: 2; Maslow, 1970). The toponym "Kuta Bara" is recorded in the travel accounts of Hayam Wuruk in the present-day Jember area, and it is one of the place names mentioned in the Decawarnana manuscript (now popularly known as Nagarakretagama).

The mention of this toponym is not without reason. Hayam Wuruk's visit indicates that Kuta Bara was one of the vassal regions of Majapahit, once situated in what is now Jember. This area was likely a significant part of the economy of Majapahit at that time, as, from an economic perspective, a king would only visit regions that offered benefits and were crucial for advancing his kingdom. In spatial planning theory, there is a concept of environmental survey, wherein visits are conducted to vassal territories to explore opportunistic possibilities for the central kingdom (in this case, Wilwatikta) (Sutaryono, 2007: 4). It has been generally acknowledged that one of the sources of income for Majapahit came from maritime trade, taxes, and fines enforced under the Kutaramanawadharmasastra. Therefore, the toponym Kuta Bara represents new evidence of a local kingdom that was taken into account by Majapahit due to its trading quality.

Kuta Bara etymologically refers to a vassal kingdom of Majapahit that functioned as a trading city near the coast. Aligning this with the status of Majapahit as a major maritime kingdom at the time, particularly evidenced by the *Yingyaishenglan*, which reported the spread of major ports including Surabaya, Tuban, and Gresik (Tanudirjo, 2011: 243; Notosusanto and Poesponegoro, 2010: 463). This information is further supported by the discovery of the Canggal Inscription dated 1358 CE, which states that Majapahit had approximately 77 ports and 60 important crossing dock locations, most of which were active in trade, including one named the Canggal port. Thus, it is highly plausible that Kuta Bara was also located near coastal areas. Given its proximity to the docking points for trading ships, it is likely that there would be trading spaces nearby.

This trade serves as a significant symbol associated with the toponym Kuta Bara. It is closely linked to the influence of Majapahit's hegemony, which successfully expanded its territory to the eastern tip of Java, particularly due to the policy of "mitra satata," which emphasized the importance of having ports and docks along both the northern and southern coasts of Java (Munandar, 2018: 77). Consequently, ports and docks can be found along every coastline within Majapahit's domain. This phenomenon reflects a political tendency that triggers what Shefter refers to as political opportunism (Fukuyama, 2005: 31). This practice of political opportunism triggered the emergence of affinity politics which was influential in the establishment of international relations (Wang et al., 2025: 2). *Mitra satata* policy as the essence of affinity politics during the Majapahit period, which was an effort of developmentalism for Majapahit at that time, triggered the emergence of Kuta Bara as a vassal kingdom that developed into a trading city in southern Jember. The "mitra satata" policy thus became a form of developmentalism for Majapahit at that time, leading to the emergence of Kuta Bara as a vassal kingdom that developed into a trading city in southern Jember.

Kuta Bara in Empirical Context

HOOFDSTUK IX.

122'
— 92' —

AANTEEKENING.

als iets ondoordachts of onvoorzichtigs zal worden beschouwd, daarbij ook rekening houdt met bijzonderheden door de Pararaton verteld, dan kan dit zelfs tusschen vrij enge grenzen geschieden.

Hoewel het uit de Pararaton niet blijkt, wanneer de opvolger van deze vorstin, die zelf in 1250 Çaka aan het bewind kwam, in hare plaats de regering aanvaardde, is het toch uit het volgende hoofdstuk duidelijk, dat hij in 1279 Çaka reeds koning was. Ook schijnt men te mogen besluiten dat Bali, dat in het opschrift genoemd wordt als een onderhoorigheid van Java, in 1256 Çaka, zie bl. 28, reg. 16, zulks nog niet was. Eerst na de vermelding van het in dat jaar plaats hebbende feit spreekt de Pararaton van de door Gajah mada afgelegde gelofte Gurun, Seran, Tañjungpura, Haru, Pahang, Dampo, Bali, Suṇḍa, Palembang en Tumasik te zullen onderwerpen. Hiervoor moet toch weer eenige tijd verlopen zijn, ook al zou het Bali alleen betreffen, en zoo blijkt het dat ook dit opschrift, afkomstig van dezelfde vorstin, als op het Mañjuçri- beeld, doch daar niet met name vermeld, ook uit ongeveer denzelfden tijd, Çaka 1265, moet dagteekenen¹⁾.

Waar het Saḍeng, waarvan de tekst spreekt, gezocht moet worden, blijkt niet. Mogelijk is het, dat de plaats thans zelfs niet meer bestaat. Daar alles in de Pararaton op oost-Java schijnt te spelen, zou men er het Saḍeng in de residentie Pasuruhan, district Rejasa, of wellicht nog liever de Saḍeng, in de residentie Bésuki, district Pugèr, voor in aanmerking kunnen brengen. Er dient daarbij gewezen te worden op het feit, dat in de omgeving van dien berg restanten van bouwwerken zijn gevonden, men denke slechts aan Tjandji Kédaton, Kuṭa Bara, Kuṭa Kéḍawung, Kuṭa Krajingan, Cora manis, Poṅṅang, en Kuṭa Blaṭer, zie Verbeek Oudheden van Java, n^o. 647, 648, 649, 653, 654, 652 en 651 (bl. 321 en 322), op twee waarvan de jaarcijfers 1260 en 1292 Çaka (Poṅṅang en Tjandji Kédaton) zijn aange troffen, die van het jaar der Pasadeng, 1253 Çaka, niet zoo heel veel verschillen. Deze jaarcijfers wijzen het uit, dat althans eenige dier bouwwerken, welken gedeeltelijk van jongere dagteekening kunnen zijn, uit de tweede helft der 13^e Çaka-eeuw dagteekenen, en dat in het zuidwestelijk en zuidelijk gedeelte van de residentie Bésuki in dien tijd iets meer te doen moet zijn geweest, dan bijv. in vroegere dagen daar het geval was. Het kleinste dezer jaartallen valt in de regering van Jayawisnuwardhan, en, hoewel men zich daarmede waagt op het gebied van zuiver gissen, want hier weet men, met de toegankelijke gegevens, goed gezien, toch eigenlijk niets positief, onwillekeurig is men geneigd om tusschen het genoemde eenig verband te ontdekken, zelfs waar de Pararaton leert, dat de Pasadeng gunstig voor Majapahit adliep, doordat de *sinuhun* (vermoedelijk de gemaff van de vorstin, Cakradhara) Saḍeng ten onder bracht, bl. 28, reg. 14 2).

1) Dat Suṇḍa, Dampo en Palembang in den tijd, dat de belofte van Gajah mada door hem volgens de Pararaton geuit werd, inderdaad nog niet veroverd waren, zal beneden nader blijken, zie de aantekening bij Hoofdstuk X.

2) Voor Kuṭa Kéḍawung in verband met het latere rijk van Balambangan, zie men het Verhaal over



Photo 1. Archive Data About Kuta Bara

(Source: Brandes. *Paraton (Ken Arok) of Het Boek Der Koningen van Tumapel en van Majapahit.* (Batavia: Albrecht and Rusche, 1896), 124 pages)

naar Soember-Waroe, 10 paal van Kapoengan aan den N. W. voet Boeloerangebergte gelegen. Verder voert de weg Zuid Oostwaarts over de poststations Sading en Djati-ketjil naar Badjoel-mati (16 paal) en wijders over Bengkalingan, Soemoer (tegenover Poeloe Teboean), Watoe-dodol en Kalipoera naar de stad Banjoewanggi.

Een zijtak van den grooten postweg loopt van Sitoebondo Zuidwaarts langs den linkeroever van de Kali Sampejan naar Pradjekan, (18 paal), waar men de oudheden van Karang anjar en Taroem (Botak)vindt, en verder over Klabang naar Tapen, (8 paal) ten Oosten waarvan een oude begraafplaats ligt en van waar een pad naar Kediri en Petoeng, aan de helling van het Idjen-plateau gelegen, leidt en waar de oudheden van Soember tjanteng en Renang gevonden worden. Hooger den berg op liggen de dessas Pantjoer en Rendah. Van Tapan voert de weg over de districts hoofdplaats Wonosari naar *Bondowoso* (8 paal). Verder Zuidwaarts voert de weg over Maesan (ten Westen liggen de oudheden van Patirana en Soetja) naar *Djember* (22 p. v. Bondowoso). Vijf palen Oostwaarts van Djember ligt bij Kertasari de ruïne Koeta Kradjingan en tien palen verder Oostwaarts de ruïne van Tjora-Manis. Van Djember loopt de weg verder in Z. W. richting over Mangli naar Rambi poedji, waar de weg zich splitst. De Zuidelijke tak loopt langs den rechter oever van de Kali Bedawang over Baloeng naar Poeger (25 paal) aan de Zuidzuid gelegen. Dicht bij die plaats liggen de oudheden van Poeger Wetan, meer Oostwaarts de ruïne Koeta Blater en de oudheden van Goenoeng Poentang. Van Poeger leidt een karreweg N. W. naar Loemadjang (30 paal). Ongeveer half weg vindt men bij Kentjang de ruïne Koeta Bara (30 paal). De Westelijke tak van den weg loopt van het kruispunt Rambi Poedji, over Bangsal-Sari, waar ten Z. van den weg de ruïne Koeta Kedoewang ligt, Tanggoel (distr. hoofdpl.) naar Djatirata (over de grens van Probolinggo) en verder naar Loemadjang.

Van Besoeki loopt de postweg Z.O. over de Djeties, Kesombirampok, Wringen (9 paal) en Poeler naar Bon-

Photo 2. Dutch Archive Data on the Existence of Kuta Bara
(Source: Kapitein Fedor Schulze. *Oost-Java en Madoera*. (Batavia: G Kolff & Co, 1896), 56 pages)

Brandes noted the existence of several ancient kuta (cities) around Jember, including Candi Kedaton, Kuta Kedawung, Kuta Kranjangan, Kuta Blater, Cora Manis, and Pontang (see Photo 1). Brandes's observations, which serve as a reference for findings in the Jember area, are further supported by the *Nagarakretagama*. This kakawin indicates that Kuta Bara was located to the south of present-day Jember (Muljana, 2006: 353). Dutch records also specifically mention that Kuta Bara is situated to the south of Jember, around Kencong (currently the Kencong District) (see Photo 2). These data reinforce the research of Dukut Imam Widodo and Zainollah Ahmad, confirming that the localization of Kuta Bara indeed lies south of Jember. However, the identification of Desa Cakru as Kuta Bara still requires further critique.

Several historians such as Dukut Imam Widodo and Zainollah Ahmad, have sought to interpret the location of Kuta Bara. The *Nagarakretagama* describes Kuta Bara as one of the regions traversed by Hayam Wuruk during his tirtayatra journey to East Java. According to the *Nagarakretagama*, Kuta Bara is situated in the southern part of Jember, as its description indicates that the location is near the coast (Muljana, 2006). Dukut Imam Widodo localizes Kuta Bara at Cakru, considering Cakru as a toponym that signifies a very ancient entity recorded in the journey of Bujangga Manik in the 16th century CE. Cakru is associated with "Cakru" which means a comfortable resting place, aligning with the *Nagarakretagama*'s account that states Hayam Wuruk briefly stopped near Kasogatan Bajraka (the epithet for Kuta Bara). Thus, Kuta Bara is believed to be located in Cakru (Widodo, 2014: 32). Zainollah also supports the localization of Kuta Bara at Cakru.

Javanese, meaning sacred. This adjective is linked to the toponym "Herucakra" interpreted as a holy leader. The similarity in diction between "cakra" and the singular phoneme "a" transitions to "cakru" with the phoneme "u" which then identifies it as a sacred place. The second reason for interpreting Kuta Bara as located in Cakru is its connection to Kasogatan Taladhwaja, identified around Kediri. This toponym is mentioned in the kakawin Smaradahana, which contains praises for King Kameswara of the Kadhiri Kingdom (Ahmad, 2015: 183). Zainollah argues that Cakru is regarded as Kasogatan Bajraka due to its close association with Kasogatan Taladhwaja. His perspective is supported by the findings from the Ranu Kumbala inscription, which provides information about King Kameswara's journey to the eastern Java region. Therefore, there is a hypothesis that Kuta Bara is located near Cakru (one of the villages in Kencong District).

The hypothesis localizing Kuta Bara in Cakru still needs to be reconsidered due to certain weaknesses in the argument. Widodo's opinion, which relies on the records of Bujangga Manik, an ethnic Sundanese figure from the 16th century, contrasts with the events of Hayam Wuruk's journey (tirtayatra) that took place in the 14th century (1365 AD). This significant gap of two centuries can inadvertently lead to historical anachronism, suggesting that the tirtayatra might be viewed as an ahistorical event. It is important to consider this opinion because there is a law called value relativity (Aspernäs et al., 2023: 9-10; Morgenthau, 1991: 126). Furthermore, Antonio Pigafetta recorded that the last known existence of Majapahit was in 1522 AD, where Majapahit was merely one of several major cities in Java (Tanudirjo, 2011: 246). This indicates that there had been a transformation in the status of Majapahit,

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particularly following the invasion by the Sultanate of Demak in the early 16th century, which successfully exerted hegemony over Majapahit (Muljana, 2009). Based on the Jiyu inscription, which bears the manggalacarana of Girindrawardhana Dyah Ranawijaya and was issued in 1408 Saka (1486 AD), it is evident that the territory of Majapahit during Ranawijaya's reign extended only to Batu (present-day Malang) and did not encompass the Jember region. Therefore, the hypothesis that locates Kuta Bara in Cakru based on Bujangga Manik's records carries tentative credibility.



Photo 3. Map of Jember Region During the Dutch Colonial Period
(Source: Carnbée and Versteeg. *Algemeene atlas van Nederlansch Indië*. (Leiden: Gualth Kolff, 1872), p. 119)

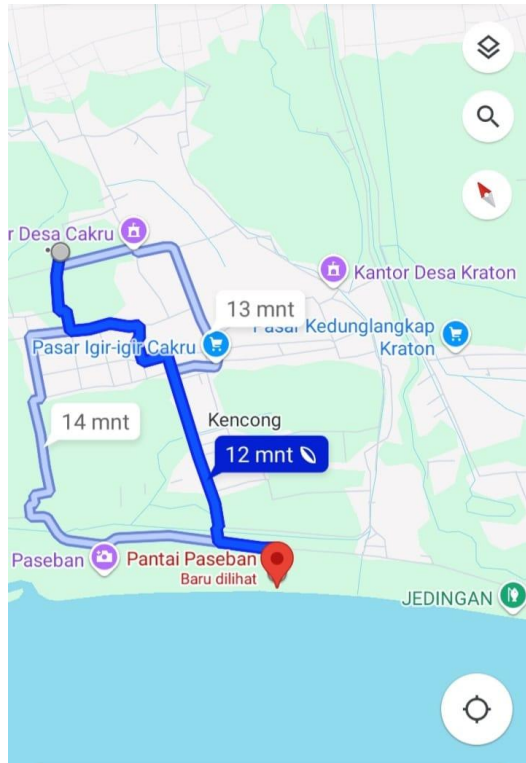


Photo 4. Distance Comparison Map from Paseban Beach to Cakru Village and Kraton Village
(Source: Google maps)

Nagarakretagama, particularly in pupuh 22 bait 2, indeed provides information about the location of Kasogatan Bajraka. However, it is important to note that the location of Kasogatan Bajraka, according to Nagarakretagama, is situated not far from the lake and the coastal area where Hayam Wuruk enjoyed the scenery (see photo 3). In contrast, Cakru is somewhat farther away compared to Desa Kraton, which is much closer to the sea (see photo 4). Furthermore, Nagarakretagama pupuh 22 bait 3 indicates that Hayam Wuruk traveled east from the coastline through dense forest to reach Kasogatan Bajraka (Muljana, 2006: 353). The location of Desa Kraton is closer to Paseban beach than Cakru, which is still situated

to the west of Paseban (see photo 4). If we follow the information in Nagarakretagama regarding the location of Kasogatan Bajraka, it implies that Hayam Wuruk's party moved eastward through the wilderness, not westward. Therefore, the position of Cakru to the west of Paseban contradicts this narrative, while Desa Kraton, located to the east of Paseban beach, aligns geographically with the information from Nagarakretagama. Additionally, etymologically, "cakra" and "cakru" hold significantly different meanings despite their only differing vowel sounds (a and u). A difference of just one phoneme can lead to distinct meanings, much like the words "embezzlement" and "theft", which may seem similar but have different legal implications. Similarly, the meanings of "cakra" and "cakru" would carry different consequences.

Zainollah Ahmad tends to linguistically identify Kasogatan Bajraka with Cakru, equating it with "cakra," although the two have different meanings. Widodo interprets Cakru as "cakru'," which means a resting place, correlating this interpretation with Hayam Wuruk's stopover near Kasogatan Bajraka in 1365 AD (Widodo, 2014). In Old Javanese, there is also the term "cakruk," which refers to a group or companion, indicating a small kingdom subordinate to Majapahit. This implies that during his journey, Hayam Wuruk might have been inspecting Kuta Bara. On the other hand, "cakra" refers to a wheel that spins, symbolizing the flow of energy during meditation, often visualized with colors to position the chakras during the process (Robson and Zoetmulder, 2004: 152). For instance, the sexual chakra practices aim to awaken kundalini through the Kamasutra, where the process involves meditating to release the body's energy centers, starting from the root chakra at the base of the spine, moving through seven chakras to emerge at the crown chakra above the

head. Additionally, another term that bears similar meaning to "herucakra" mentioned by Zainollah is "cakrawarti," which also embodies the concept of a ruler or sovereign in the context of power and dominion.

Cakrawarti is a term found in Hindu and Buddhist theology, meaning the supreme ruler, leader, king, or controller (Robson and Zoetmulder, 2004: 153). In Hindu theology, a cakrawarti is understood as the perfect sovereign of the universe, while in Buddhist belief, a cakrawarti is considered a compassionate leader who is wise in decision-making regarding all living beings. Consequently, the term is associated with dharmacakramudra, which serves as the controller of the cycles of life and the universe (Soekmono, 1997: 95-96; Tjandrasmita et al., 1980: 62-63). Thus, if "cakra" is identified with the controller or supreme ruler of the universe, and Kasogatan Bajraka is acknowledged as a vassal kingdom of Majapahit, then equating Cakru with "herucakra" seems hyperbolic. This exaggeration may misrepresent the actual significance and power dynamics of the region, implying a level of authority that may not accurately reflect Cakru's status within the broader context of Majapahit's political and spiritual landscape.

Information about ancient regions such as Kasogatan Bajraka is derived from the kakawin Nagarakretagama. However, it is important to note that Nagarakretagama is a copy made using Balinese script in Kancana by Arthapamasah on October 20, 1740 CE (Muljana, 2006: 285). This results in a significant temporal gap between the creation of the Decawarnana, composed in 1365 CE by Mpu Prapanca, and its transcription into Nagarakretagama by Arthapamasah in 1740 CE. This long interval raises the possibility

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of transcription errors, particularly due to the deterioration of the original text over the three centuries prior to the copying process in 1740 CE. Thus, there is a chance of errors in the transcription concerning the term "bajraka".

There are several terms in Old Javanese that sound similar to "bajraka." Among them are "bajrakāya" and "bajran(g)kara" (with the anusvara symbolizing the nasal sound "ng"). "Bajrakāya" means diamond, while "bajran(g)kara" refers to the ruler of heaven and earth in Buddhism (Robson and Zoetmulder, 2004: 97). "Bajrakāya" literally connotes prosperity, as gemstones symbolize glory, indicating that this region is a place of abundance. Diamonds also serve as symbols of the grandeur of a kingdom's territory, akin to Majapahit, which inspected the southern Jember region referred to in Nagarakretagama as Kasogatan Bajraka. On the other hand, "bajran(g)kara" signifies the highest adjective, implying that Kasogatan Bajraka is a kingdom of the highest standing. However, Nagarakretagama states that Kasogatan Bajraka is one of the vassal regions of Majapahit. Brandes refers to the Pararaton record, indicating that Kuta Bara is part of Majapahit's vassal regions located in East Java, based on numerous findings of ornaments and fragments associated with Majapahit (Brandes, 1896). Therefore, it is unlikely that Kuta Bara, which Zainollah Ahmad and Dukut Imam Widodo identify as Kasogatan Bajraka, is a region of the highest entity. Instead, it could be a significant vassal kingdom for Majapahit, either as a diamond producer or a trading city.

It is highly likely that Kuta Bara refers to "bajrakāya" rather than "bajraka." This is because its geographical proximity to the coast suggests the presence of trading activities. If we insist that Kuta Bara

is a sacred site for Buddhist worship, it raises a new question regarding the rationale for placing a monastery near the coast. Generally, places of worship require solitude and tranquility as prerequisites for spiritual needs (Muljana, 1981: 140-142; Maslow, 1970: 269). This is similar to the Dadi Temple found in Tulungagung, which is situated on a mountain, and the Pawitra site located atop Mount Penanggungan.

This phenomenon is closely related to the classification known as "triwicara." This classification divides spaces into three categories: lively, quiet, and silent. The quiet and silent categories are suitable for sages to meditate. If we maintain the localization of Kuta Bara in Cakru and regard it as a sacred area, then archaeological evidence such as monasteries and mandalas is necessary to support the presence of religious leaders like *dewaguru* (the highest religious expert), *manguyu* (priest), *tapaswi* (male ascetic), and *tapi* (female ascetic) (Munandar, 2018: 18). However, there are no findings to prove that Kuta Bara is a Buddhist religious site in Cakru. Thus, Kuta Bara is likely a trading city located along the southern coast of Jember, with its presence most probably around Desa Kraton.

Kraton is a Javanese transliteration for the word "keraton" in Indonesian. "Keraton" is an adaptation of the Javanese term that refers to the palace of a king (Poerwadarminta, 1976: 489). The position of the letter "r" in this context serves as a vowel with a dot below it, resulting in a subtle pronunciation of "e taling" in Javanese, which causes the pronunciation to shift from "keraton" to "kraton" (Poedjawijatna and Zoetmulder, 1992: 2). Poerwadarminta defines kraton as "daleming ratoe" (the dwelling place of the leader) (Poerwadarminta, 1939: 249). Thus, kraton is synonymous with the

entity of a kingdom, similar to Majapahit. The toponym "kraton" indicates that Kuta Bara was a kingdom that existed in the past as a vassal of Majapahit. Several findings provide evidence of a civilization that once thrived around Desa Kraton, which is suspected to have been Kuta Bara in ancient times.



Photo 5. The Batabang (Red Brick) findings, featuring distinctive motifs, were discovered in Desa Kraton, Kecamatan Kencong, Kabupaten Jember.
(Source: Private Document 11 Desember 2021)

The photo above shows findings near Desa Kraton (Kencong), located in southern Jember. The two batabangs are not in situ, as they were relocated by residents to behind their houses, specifically inside a duck coop. This action was taken because the community spiritually believes that these remnants are ruins of a kingdom that are foundational to Desa Kraton, warranting their preservation and protection from cultural heritage theft. The batabangs measure 25 cm in length and 20 cm in width, with a smooth surface and hard texture, and a thickness of approximately 7-9 cm. Their size significantly differs from contemporary batabangs, which tend to be smaller, fragile, and easily broken. The craft of making batabangs was an important livelihood for the people of Kraton and its surroundings. Therefore, it is highly likely that Desa Kraton was historically a production site for batabangs, which were

subsequently sold and used as building materials for the Majapahit kingdom. The size of these batabangs is comparable to those previously discovered in Tembokrejo.



Photo 6. Discovery of Batabang Structures in a Family Cemetery Area in Tembokrejo Village, Gumukmas District, Jember Regency (Source: Private Document 2021)



Photo 7. Discovery of Batabang Structures in a Family Cemetery Area in Tembokrejo Village, Gumukmas District, Jember Regency (Source: Private Document 2021)

Photo 6 shows the discovery of batabang structures that were also found in Tembokrejo, located in southern Jember. These structures are situated in a family burial area, where some batabangs have been used as tombstones, leading to a change in their in situ position due to local residents' lack of awareness. According to local lore, this site

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once contained remnants of a Hindu kingdom's fort, which was destroyed by certain organizations between 1965-1968, as it was deemed outside the Islamic entity (Ahmad, 2015: 239). This phenomenon is a continuation of the events surrounding G30S in 1965, followed by acts of vandalism committed by KAPPI (Kesatuan Aksi Pemuda Pelajar Indonesia) and KAMI (Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Indonesia) against cultural heritage artifacts in Jember. These actions were justified by the belief that these artifacts were not Islamic entities and posed a risk of leading to practices considered *syirik* (idolatry) by the local community. Observing the local population, it is evident that they have a livelihood based on *batabang* production, similar to the community around Desa Kraton (Kencong), which is suspected to be the location of Kuta Bara. This suggests that the cultural heritage artifacts may serve as evidence of the predecessors of the local people. The similarity in *batabang* sizes further strengthens the assumption that these two areas shared an emotional connection as part of a single kingdom in the past (see Photo 7). The discovery of *batabangs* extends widely into Desa Sukoreno.



Photo 8. Fragmentary *Batabang* resembling a Pedestal Found in Sukoreno Village, Umbulsari District, Jember Regency
(Source: Private Document 20 November 2021)

Fragments of batabang have been found around Desa Sukoreno, located just 8 km north of Desa Kraton. This fragment measures 30 cm in length, 23 cm in width, and approximately 7 cm in thickness (see Photo 8). This discovery indicates that a kingdom once inhabited Desa Sukoreno. The structure of the batabang resembles flooring, similar to batabang artifacts found in Trowulan, Mojokerto. The geographic proximity between Desa Kraton, where the batabang and several fragments were discovered, and Desa Sukoreno, which has yielded temple flooring (or a base), suggests that these two locations were part of a unified entity in the past.

Nagarakretagama, specifically in pupuh 22 bait 3, provides a brief description of the geographical features of Kasogatan Bajraka, identified as Kuta Bara. This area is situated close to the coast and extends eastward, where a forest is encountered along the route (Muljana, 2006: 353). Desa Sukoreno is positioned directly north of Desa Kraton, aligning with Nagarakretagama's account of the forests traversed by Hayam Wuruk's entourage. Given that Sukoreno was once a forested area near Kraton, especially with the discovery of batabang fragments resembling flooring, it is likely that Kuta Bara also encompassed the area that includes Desa Sukoreno today.



Photo 9. Batabang Fragments in Agricultural Land in Desa Kraton, Kencong District, Jember Regency
(Source: Private Document 11 Desember 2021)

The fragments of batabang found in Desa Kraton exhibit motifs and thicknesses similar to those discovered in Trowulan (see photo 9). This finding suggests that Desa Kraton was one of the vassal regions of the Majapahit kingdom in the past, specifically Kuta Bara, but not as a religious site. Geographically, its proximity to the coast indicates its role as a trading center (see photos 3 and 4). Coastal areas are typically associated with ports, as previously discussed, which would naturally lead to the establishment of marketplaces. This hypothesis is further supported by the absence of remnants of monasteries in the area; it is unlikely that a monastery would be situated amid a bustling market, as ascetics typically require tranquil spaces for their spiritual practices. Thus, it is crucial to reconsider the localization of Kuta Bara from Desa Cakru to Desa Kraton.

The deconstruction of Kuta Bara is based on several considerations, as previously explained. Linguistic, geographical, and archaeological evidence supports the localization of Kuta Bara in Desa Kraton, indicating it was not a site for Buddhist religious practices but rather a trading city. If Kuta Bara is indeed recognized as a trading entity, it raises questions about the validity of Nagarakretagama, often cited as a primary reference by researchers studying Majapahit, suggesting the possibility of transcription errors. However, this deconstruction aligns with information from the Canggal inscription, which states that Majapahit had over 60 ports scattered along the Javanese coast. This implies that it is plausible one of those ports was located near Kuta Bara, which served as its trading space.

Kuta Bara in Historical Context

Historically, the existence of Kuta Bara is located in the southern part of Jember. This localization is based on etymological and empirical studies, confirming its position as a trading city in southern Jember. This region is known for its coastline, filled with harbor ships, both during the colonial era and the time of the kingdoms. Southern Jember is particularly notable for Nusa Barong Island (see photo 3), where colonial communities competed for territory due to the production of bird's nest commodities sought after in Europe, located near the coasts of Puger and Paseban (Margana, 2012: 243). Additionally, southern Jember serves as evidence of harbor existence during the Majapahit era, as indicated in the Canggal inscription. Thus, southern Jember has been a trading area since the Majapahit kingdom, with Kuta Bara being one of its significant vassal states.

Kuta Bara, located near the southern coast of Jember, indirectly indicates that the area served as a trading hub during the Majapahit period due to its proximity to the shoreline where many ships docked and its etymological meaning as a trading city. Historically, every kingdom that established a civilization in southern Jember had commercial entities, such as the Pontang kingdom that existed in the past. Evidence of trade activities has been found in the Pontang kingdom, as researched by Adi Wildan Alamsyah, which was also situated near the coast (Alamsyah, 2023: 631). Zainollah Ahmad also discusses Sadeng, located in southern Jember, as a kingdom with a commercial character (Ahmad, 2020). These studies indicate that there were several kingdoms engaged in trade in southern Jember, including Kuta Bara.

Kuta Bara is one of the outcomes of the political policies implemented by Majapahit. Hayam Wuruk adopted a policy known as *mitra satata*, which aimed to establish trade relations with allied kingdoms (Munandar, 2018). The Nagarakretagama pupuh 15, bait 1, informs about various kingdoms outside Java that had diplomatic relations with Majapahit, including Siam, Ayudhapura, Darmanagari, Marutma, Rajapura, Singanagari, Champa, Cambodia, and Yawana (Muljana, 2006: 346). Consequently, Anderson notes a traditional Javanese worldview that divides the world into Java and *sabrang* (translated as overseas), reflecting a Java-centric perspective that tends to centralize attention on Java (Anderson, 2000: 90). In addition to *mitra satata*, there were also vassal kingdoms of Majapahit, both within and beyond Java.

The vassal kingdoms were required to pay tribute to Majapahit. Nagarakretagama pupuh 15, bait 3, states that vassal kingdoms were obliged to present tribute each season, with the hope of receiving prosperity and protection from the central kingdom (in this case, Wilwatikta). Some of these vassal kingdoms are located throughout the archipelago, from the easternmost to the westernmost parts of present-day Indonesia. The journey to reach Wilwatikta (the center of the Majapahit kingdom) to deliver tribute would certainly involve passing through ports for vassal kingdoms located outside Java. Vassal kingdoms to the west, such as Malay, Pahang, Kelantan, and Tumasik, would travel through ports from the west after the Sunda kingdom, which had not yet been subdued (Vlekke, 2017: 67; Tanudirjo, 2011: 243-244; Yamin, 1986: 72). Meanwhile, vassal kingdoms to the east, such as Bali and its surroundings, would pass through eastern Majapahit territory, which would include Kuta Bara as a trading hub, facilitating commercial activities. Thus, this

phenomenon indirectly contributes to what Chris Rumford refers to as globalization (Rumford, 2008).

Kuta Bara was one of the vassal kingdoms of Majapahit that experienced the impacts of past globalization, serving as a trading hub among producers, consumers, and distributors from various other kingdoms. Records by Rouffer and Ijzerman indicate that all of Java became a bustling trade sector frequented by merchants from throughout the archipelago in the 16th century, with communities from Sulawesi frequently sailing to Bali for transit before continuing their journey to Java (Lapian, 2008: 54). This phenomenon of exploration is closely tied to what Hayden White refers to as an unfinished story (White, 1980: 9). The globalization that occurred had already been present during the peak of Majapahit, where travelers would stop in Bali to rest and also seek slaves as a primary commodity (Vlekke, 2017: 9; Cribb and Kahin, 2012: 53-54). Diplomatic relations between the communities of Sulawesi, Bali, and Majapahit had existed since the 14th century, primarily related to trade (Vickers, 1987: 32-33). Consequently, a Mandar settlement was established in southern Jember in the 18th century (Brandes, 1930: XXIX; *Tijdschrift voor Nijverheid en Landbouw*, 1862: 52). Thus, Kuta Bara acted as a catalyst for the migration of communities from outside Java.

The phenomenon of migration in southern Jember serves as evidence that Kuta Bara had significant appeal as a trading city. Kuta Bara indirectly motivated communities from outside Java to enhance their quality of life, aligning with what Abraham Maslow describes as "actual needs and lacks in the body" (Maslow, 1970: 35). Research by Meilink and Roelofs indicates that large quantities of

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traded commodities were imported to various locations, highlighting better economic opportunities that attracted numerous trading communities to those areas (Lapian, 2008: 80). This was also true during the Majapahit era, where globalization flourished due to the *mitra satata* policy and a Java-centric political framework involving tribute payments. Thus, Kuta Bara played a crucial role as a port and trading hub for Majapahit in the region of East Java, specifically in what is now southern Jember.

Kuta Bara represents a significant historical area located near the southern coast of Jember. This strategic location influenced the motivations of various communities to stop at Kuta Bara—some merely passing through to pay tribute to Wilwatika (the central Majapahit kingdom, as mentioned in *pupuh 10 of Nagarakretagama*) (Muljana, 2006: 343), while others came to trade or eventually settled, forming communities such as the Madurese, Mandar, and Javanese. Thus, it is plausible that the southern region of Jember served as the initial entry point for Islamic culture in the area during the early 16th century. Indications suggest that Kuta Bara functioned as what Sutan Sjahrir referred to as an area of internationalism in southern Jember (Sjahrir, 1968: 19). Therefore, Kuta Bara is historically recognized as a significant trading hub that once existed in southern Jember, playing a vital role as part of the Majapahit vassal kingdom.

CONCLUSION

This research underscores the interconnected relationship between history, archaeology, and cultural heritage on the Kutabara site. Archaeologically, Kuta Bara represents an enduring testimony to classical civilization during the Majapahit era in southern Jember.

As a strategic vassal kingdom, Kuta Bara played a pivotal role in facilitating trade networks and international relations during Majapahit's reign. Consequently, safeguarding and preserving the Kuta Bara site is essential to ensuring its historical significance remains accessible for future study and appreciation.

Despite its contributions, this study acknowledges limitations in both analytical depth and available evidence regarding Kuta Bara's precise localization. Constructive criticism and scholarly dialogue are necessary to refine and expand upon these findings. Ideally, such critiques and insights should be disseminated through academic publications, ensuring adherence to ethical research standards while fostering respectful discourse. The researcher hopes that future studies will broaden investigations into Indonesian classical history, particularly through localized perspectives, to prevent the marginalization or stagnation of historical inquiry—a phenomenon that could lead to the "death of history."

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