



A CONTROVERSIAL STUDY ON THE EXISTENCE OF NUSATEMBINI KINGDOM IN CILACAP CITY

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ABSTRACT

The Nusatembini Kingdom on Nusakambangan Island is portrayed as a mythical kingdom because its existence is difficult to prove, but it is believed to exist, even appearing in the Babad Pasir Luhur. PT KAI once planned to launch the Nusa Tembini train route from Cilacap to Yogyakarta, but it was later canceled and renamed the Joglosemarkerto train. The Tourism Office once named a beach destination in the village of Tegalkamulyan as Nusatembini Beach, but it was soon dismantled and renamed Tegalkamulyan Beach. The existence of the Nusatembini Kingdom has raised a number of research issues, particularly regarding the historical accuracy and identity of the kingdom. This study aims to describe the factors that encourage people to believe in the existence of the Nusatembini Kingdom. Controversy has arisen due to the lack of consistent historical evidence, varying perceptions between believers and the general public, and diverse responses in the media. As a result, there are research problems surrounding a lack of understanding of the factors influencing this belief, including cultural, local historical, social dynamics, and collective community perceptions. Data collection was conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation studies. Data analysis was performed using descriptive analysis with reduction, data presentation, interpretation, triangulation, and conclusion drawing. The mythology of the Nusatembini Kingdom is closely related to the history of the Pasirluhur and Pajajaran Kingdoms. Although there is no evidence of its existence, it is recorded in the Babad Pasirluhur. There is controversy among the people of Cilacap regarding the Nusatembini Kingdom. Some believe it to be a mythical kingdom, while others say that the Nusatembini Kingdom is just a fairy tale or legend, but still others believe that the Nusatembini Kingdom did indeed exist. Prabu Pulebah's defeat of the Pasirluhur and Pajajaran kingdoms led them to create a negative image of the Nusatembini Kingdom, spreading the story that Nusatembini was a supernatural kingdom. In fact, the Nusatembini Kingdom really did exist. Prabu Pulebah was known as a courageous man. The negative perception of Nusatembini as a supernatural kingdom led to it being regarded only as a legend. However, the elders' rejection of the naming of Tegalkamulyan Beach as Nusatembini Beach because the location of the Nusatembini Kingdom was not there, but on the southern coast of Cilacap city or on Nusakambangan Island, is strong evidence of the existence of the Nusatembini Kingdom in the past. Thus, the people of Cilacap, especially the older generation, still believe in the existence of the Nusatembini Kingdom.

Keywords: existence, Nusatembini, believe, demon

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, the distinction between history and folklore is often unclear. Many historical accounts are regarded as folklore, and conversely, folklore is often perceived as historical fact. In Java, narratives about haunted locations and ghost stories enable communities to interpret concealed political violence. These supernatural accounts provide a means to articulate historical events that are difficult to discuss openly.¹

Numerous Indonesian fairy tales, including Jaka Tarub, Arya Menak, and Rajapala, exhibit structural similarities across regions. Despite containing supernatural and implausible elements, these narratives are frequently regarded as local history.² Folktales transmitted orally and modified over generations convey moral and cultural messages that are often interpreted as historical facts.³ The use of illustrated history books encourages students to examine the distinction between historical fact and fiction, demonstrating how both historical narratives and fairy tales influence collective understanding.⁴

Cilacap Regency has a history and several legendary tales. The Cilacap Regency Government, through its official website, states that in 1579, the Hindu Kingdom of Pakuan Pajajaran was attacked by the Islamic Kingdoms of Banten and Cirebon. Pakuan Pajajaran's defeat led to the eastern part of its territory being handed over to the Cirebon Kingdom. As a result, the entire eastern part of Cilacap Regency fell under the rule of the Islamic Kingdom of Pajang. The western part remained under the rule of the Cirebon Kingdom. When the Pajang Kingdom became the Islamic Mataram Kingdom, founded by Panembahan Senopati (1587-1755), all its territory, including the eastern part of Cilacap, was handed to the new kingdom. In 1595, the Islamic Mataram Kingdom also expanded into the Galuh region, which then belonged to the Cirebon Kingdom. However, this historical account does not mention Nusatembini, a kingdom thought to have existed in the city of Cilacap. The name Nusatembini appears only in the *Babad Pasir*, noted for its feud with Kamandaka.⁵

According to the *Babad Pasir*, Pulebahas, the King of Nusatembini, whose kingdom was reportedly located on Nusakambangan Island, engaged in conflict with

¹ Kar-Yen Leong, "Invisible Threads Linking Phantasmal Landscapes in Java: Haunted Places and Memory in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia," *Memory Studies*, 16.2 (2023), pp. 296–318, doi:10.1177/1750698021995968.

² Prima Gusti Yanti and Fairul Zabadi, "A Comparative Study of Indonesian Fairy Tales Structure," *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 8.3 (2016), pp. 252–61, doi:10.21659/rupkatha.v8n3.26.

³ Mahawitra Jayawardana and Khairil Anwar, "Binary Oposition in Sarantuang Baralieng Kunyait Folktales Siting Laut Kerinci," *Magistra Andalusia: Jurnal Ilmu Sastra*, 2.2 (2020), doi:10.25077/majis.2.2.33.2020.

⁴ Firman Parlindungan and Kathy Short, "Making Meaning from Historical Fiction Picturebooks about Indonesian Heroes," *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 26.3 (2024), pp. 77–99, doi:10.18251/ijme.v26i3.4471.

⁵ Ryolita, W. P., & Nurharyani, O. P. Hegemoni Kekuasaan Kamandaka dalam Menaklukkan Pasir Luhur. *Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Dan Budaya* 12, no. 3 (2022): 43–50.

Banyak Catra from Pajajaran over Dewi Ciptarasa. Kamandaka, also known as Banyak Catra, employed cunning in the form of Lutung Kasarung, resulting in Pulebahas's death. Subsequently, the entire Nusatembini royal army was defeated by the Pajajaran royal forces. Following these events, Pulebahas's youngest sister, Dewi Sri Wulan, assumed leadership of the kingdom under the title Queen Brantarara. The Pajajaran Kingdom later launched a further assault on Nusakambangan, which led to the destruction of the Nusatembini Kingdom.⁶ Physical evidence of the Nusatembini Kingdom in Cilacap has been identified as a defensive fort constructed from tightly packed bamboo, known as Baluwarti Pring Ori Pitung Sap.⁷ In 1970, these artifacts, believed to originate from prehistoric times, were still present at the Pasir Besi Port dock complex, but have since disappeared.

Despite the absence of verifiable evidence for the Nusatembini Kingdom, a significant portion of the Cilacap population continues to believe in its existence. This belief is exemplified by the proposed establishment of a train line between Cilacap and Yogyakarta, designated as KA Nusatembini. The perception of the Nusatembini myth as a sacred ghost kingdom prompted protests from several community leaders, which led to the cancellation of the train line's launch on July 2, 2021.⁸

The reported existence of the Nusatembini Kingdom led the Tourism Office to designate the tourist destination in Tegalkamulyan as Nusatembini Beach. This decision generated protests from several community leaders, who asserted that the Nusatembini Kingdom was situated on the southern coast of Cilacap or on Nusakambangan Island, rather than at Tegalkamulyan Beach. As a result, the Nusatembini Beach signboard was removed and replaced with Kamulyan Beach.

However, various information circulating about the Nusatembini Kingdom shows contradictions that have never been studied in depth. On the one hand, the people of Cilacap still believe in the existence of this kingdom through oral stories, chronicles, and place names, even though there is no archaeological evidence or verifiable historical facts. On the other hand, written sources such as the Babad Pasir or traditional literary texts mostly portray Nusatembini as part of a mythological narrative rather than a factual historical record. The discrepancy between the community's beliefs, traditional literary sources, and the absence of material evidence has created a growing controversy, especially when the narrative of this kingdom enters the realm of public policy, such as the naming of tourist destinations or transportation.

The existence of the Nusatembini Kingdom is challenging to verify due to its association with myths regarding a ghost kingdom. No physical structures or

⁶ Ika Ratnani, Waluyo Setyobudi, and Sri Rahayu, *Jejak Sejarah Kuno Kabupaten Cilacap*, ed. by Sigit Kindarto, 1st edn (Dinas Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Kabupaten Cilacap, 2019).

⁷ Merdeka, "3 Fakta Sejarah Kerajaan Nusa Tembini, Cikal Bakal Kota Cilacap," <https://www.merdeka.com/jateng/3-fakta-sejarah-kerajaan-nusa-tembini-cikal-bakal-kota-cilacap.html?page=4>, 2022.

⁸ M. C. Anwar, "KA Nusa Tembini Cilacap – Yogyakarta Batal Diluncurkan 2 Juli," *Kompas*, 30 Juni 2021, <https://money.kompas.com/read/2021/06/30/152118026/ka-nusa-tembini-cilacap-yogyakarta-batal-diluncurkan-2-juli>

inscriptions remain. The only artifact claimed as historical evidence is Pring Ori Pitung Sap. Despite this, the Nusatembini Kingdom is referenced in various scholarly articles. A search using Publish or Perish on Google Scholar identified 31 scientific articles published in the past 30 years that use the keyword “Nusatembini,” with a total of 181 citations. These publications demonstrate scholarly recognition of the Nusatembini Kingdom, although they primarily address its role as the predecessor of Cilacap, ruled by Prabu Pulebahas. Earlier works focus on the conflict between the Pajajaran and the Nusatembini, culminating in the kingdom’s fall in the 1500s. The ambiguous historical status of the Nusatembini Kingdom, whether lost or intentionally omitted, has generated controversy among residents of Cilacap Regency and warrants further academic investigation.

METHOD

The research was conducted from May to August 2024 at multiple sites in Cilacap, including SMA Negeri 2 Cilacap, PT KAI Cilacap Kota Station, the Cilacap Regency Office of Tourism, Youth, and Sports, Tegalkamulyan Beach, and Nusakambangan Island. Primary data were collected through observations and interviews with elders, representatives from the Cilacap City Tourism Office, and PT KAI Cilacap Station. Secondary data were gathered through documentation and literature review of journals, articles, and books. Data collection involved interviews with elders using the snowball sampling method to identify factors influencing the community's belief in the existence of the Nusatembini Kingdom. Additional interviews with PT KAI Cilacap Station and the Tourism, Youth, and Sports Office addressed the proposed naming of a train and beach destination after Nusatembini and the rationale for its cancellation in relation to local beliefs. The research process included data reduction to select relevant information, followed by data presentation and interpretation.⁹ In cases of conflicting data, triangulation was applied before drawing conclusions.¹⁰

⁹ Grigorios Kotronoulas and others, “An Overview of the Fundamentals of Data Management, Analysis, and Interpretation in Quantitative Research,” *Seminars in Oncology Nursing*, 39.2 (2023), p. 151398, doi:10.1016/j.soncn.2023.151398; Ryo Yamada and others, “Interpretation of Omics Data Analyses,” *Journal of Human Genetics*, 66.1 (2021), pp. 93–102, doi:10.1038/s10038-020-0763-5.

¹⁰ Debbie A. Lawlor, Kate Tilling, and George Davey Smith, “Triangulation in Aetiological Epidemiology,” *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 45.6 (2017), pp. 1866–86, doi:10.1093/ije/dyw314.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Mythology of the Nusatembini Kingdom

Ratnani et al. state that the Nusatembini Kingdom was situated on Nusakambangan Island in Cilacap Regency, on the southern coast of Java.¹¹ In local mythology, Nusatembini is referred to as the 'ghost palace' due to its concealed location and limited accessibility. The kingdom was governed by Queen Brantarara, who was recognized for her beauty, wisdom, and gentleness. Before her reign, Prabu Pulebahas served as the ruler of the Nusatembini Kingdom.

The Nusatembini Kingdom maintained close relations with the Pajajaran Kingdom. This connection is illustrated by the narrative of the conflict between Prabu Pulebahas and Banyak Catra, also known as Kamandaka, a prince from Pajajaran who sought to marry Dewi Ciptarasa, the daughter of Adipati Kandha Daha from Pasirluhur. The conflict concluded with the defeat of Prabu Pulebahas by Banyak Catra, who employed strategic tactics. Following Prabu Pulebahas's death, his younger sister, Dewi Sri Wulan, assumed the throne as Queen Brantarara. Subsequently, the Nusatembini Kingdom was attacked by the Pajajaran army, resulting in its destruction. Afterward, the surviving inhabitants relocated to the Handaunan area, now called Donan, which became the precursor to the city of Cilacap. The account of Nusatembini's destruction highlights the influence of mythology and legend in Cilacap society, where the kingdom is depicted as possessing supernatural powers.¹²

Ratnani et al. interpretation has been contested by multiple scholars.¹³ *Risalah Menter* clarifies that the term '*siluman kingdom*' denotes a realm that is difficult for adversaries to infiltrate except through strategic deception, rather than a domain populated by mythological beings.¹⁴ King Nusatembini, Prabu Pulebahas, and his brothers Jurangbahas and Parungbahas were collectively recognized for their exceptional power. Banyak Catra employed strategic deception to assassinate Prabu Pulebahas during his intended marriage to Dewi Ciptarasa. Subsequently, Jurangbahas and Parungbahas sought retribution but were confronted by the Pasirluhur army, which was supported by the Pajajaran army. Both were killed in the ensuing conflict.

¹¹ Ratnani, W. Setyobudi, dan S. Rahayu, *Jejak Sejarah Kuno Kabupaten Cilacap*, ed. S. Kindarto, edisi ke-1 (Cilacap: Dinas Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Kabupaten Cilacap, 2019).

¹² Aprillia Findayani, Nanda Julian Utama, and Khoirul Anwar, "Kearifan Lokal Dan Mitigasi Bencana Masyarakat Pantai Selatan Kabupaten Cilacap," *Journal of Indonesian History*, 9.1 (2020), pp. 28–37, doi:<https://doi.org/10.15294/jih.v9i1.41023>.

¹³ Ratnani, W. Setyobudi, dan S. Rahayu, *Jejak Sejarah Kuno Kabupaten Cilacap*, ed. S. Kindarto, edisi ke-1 (Cilacap: Dinas Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Kabupaten Cilacap, 2019).

¹⁴ *Risalah Misteri*, "Mengenal Kerajaan Siluman di Nusakambangan," *Risalah Misteri*, 2020, <https://www.risalahmisteri.com/detail/32/mengenal-kerajaan-siluman-di-nusakambangan>

Not satisfied with killing Jurangbahas and Parungbahas, the Pajajaran Kingdom attacked Nusatembini under the pretext of searching for the tears of the sembrani horse. At that time, Nusatembini was led by Dewi Sri Wulan, who held the title of Queen Brantarara. Because many Pajajaran troops were killed in the battle, a large reinforcement was sent to break through the pring ori pitung sap fort. Finally, Queen Brantarara fell on her sembrani horse.

According to *Risalah Misteri*, the impact of the defeat and destruction of the Nusatembini kingdom is depicted with negative illustrations.¹⁵ Pulebahas and his relatives are portrayed as cruel and vicious giants.¹⁶ describes Nusatembini as a kingdom or palace of demons stretching from east to west along the southern coast, facing Nusakambangan Island.¹⁷ In the title of her article, Aisyah, links the Nusatembini Kingdom with the legend of the snake demon.¹⁸

According to Handoyo, the Kingdom of Nusatembini was a kingdom of demons ruled by the beautiful Queen Brantarara. Queen Brantarara had a flying horse. At that time, the Kingdom of Balus Pajajaran, west of Nusatembini, was being attacked by a deadly disease. This included the daughter of Prabu Permana Dikusuma. According to a hermit, the disease could only be cured by the tears of a flying horse. Prabu Permana Dikusuma sent Patih Harya Tilandani, Adipati Sendang, and Adipati Gobog to lead the troops to attack the Kingdom of Nusatembini.

The Balus Pajajaran envoys had difficulty penetrating the defenses of the Nusatembini Kingdom. Based on the information they received, they immediately prepared golden bullets to penetrate the defenses of the Nusatembini Kingdom. The golden bullets caused the Nusatembini troops to scramble to pick them up, cutting down the bamboo groves that formed their defenses. Finally, the Balus Pajajaran troops succeeded in breaching the Nusatembini defenses and defeating them. Queen Brantarara turned into a golden golek.

According to some myths, the Kingdom of Nusatembini was located at Tanjung Intan Port on the eastern edge of Bengawan Donan. The eeriness of this place led some people to believe that the center of the Kingdom of Nusatembini was once located there. This place is now known as “Dermaga Buntung.”¹⁹

¹⁵ Risalah Misteri, “Mengenal Kerajaan Siluman di Nusakambangan,” *Risalah Misteri*, 2020, <https://www.risalahmisteri.com/detail/32/mengenal-kerajaan-siluman-di-nusakambang>

¹⁶ Asiyah (2024)

¹⁷ Asiyah, “Legenda Siluman Ular dan Asal Usul Cilacap,” *Warta Priangan*, 2024, <https://wartapriangan.id/legenda-siluman-ular-dan-asal-usul-cilacap/>

¹⁸ Asiyah, “Legenda Siluman Ular dan Asal Usul Cilacap,” *Warta Priangan*, 2024, <https://wartapriangan.id/legenda-siluman-ular-dan-asal-usul-cilacap/>

¹⁹ Suryo Handono, “Kerajaan Nusatembini,” in *Cerita Rakyat Jawa Tengah: Kabupaten Cilacap*, ed. by Agus Sudono, Enita Istriwati, and Rini Esti Utami, 1st edn (Balai Bahasa Jawa Tengah, 2017), pp. 21–27; Jørgen Møller, “When Is Old Too Old? The Problem of Leaning on Outdated Historical Work and a Simple Distinction between Two Kinds of Evidence to Address This,” *International Studies Perspectives*, 26.1 (2025), pp. 110–24, doi:10.1093/isp/ekae003.



Figure 1. Interview with Muslim Gunawisesa
Souce: Author Documentation

The Controversy of the Nusatembini Kingdom

The absence of historical evidence often causes controversy regarding historical content, so that an event or figure can be considered a fairy tale or unreal. In historical studies, the difference between factual evidence, such as artifacts or written documents and inferential evidence, such as historical interpretations or interpretations is very important. Factual evidence tends to be more durable and reliable, while inferential evidence is more debatable and can become obsolete over time.²⁰ When material evidence or documents are unavailable, communities or researchers often rely on oral traditions, legends, or indirect cultural remnants, making the historical truth more open to debate.²¹

Controversy also arises because each type of evidence, whether archaeological, written documents, or oral traditions, has its own strengths and limitations, so prioritizing one type of evidence does not always result in a complete

²⁰ Møller, "When Is Old Too Old? The Problem of Leaning on Outdated Historical Work and a Simple Distinction between Two Kinds of Evidence to Address This."

²¹ Lisa Regazzoni, "Unintentional Monuments, or The Materializing of An Open Past," *History and Theory*, 61.2 (2022), pp. 242–68, doi:10.1111/hith.12259; Lisa Regazzoni, "The Uncertain Stuff of History: Outline of A Theory of Intentionality-Thing By Thing," *History and Theory*, 63.2 (2024), pp. 186–218, doi:10.1111/hith.12341.

understanding of history.²² In addition, people's understanding of history is also influenced by their level of knowledge and familiarity with the topic, so that historical claims that are not supported by strong evidence are more easily considered fairy tales or myths.²³ Thus, the absence of strong historical evidence opens up room for debate and the perception that a story is a fairy tale, not a historical fact.

The Nusatembini Kingdom is one of the kingdoms whose history has been obscured by the lack of archaeological evidence and documents. The location of the Nusatembini Kingdom is disputed by researchers.²⁴ argue that the Nusatembini Kingdom was located on Nusakambangan Island, precisely in the northeast near Majeti Island. Handono argues that the Nusatembini Kingdom was located on the southern coast of the city of Cilacap, precisely in the southwest of the city known as Dermaga Buntung.²⁵ This controversy has left the public unsure of the exact location of the Nusatembini Kingdom. Meanwhile, Sukarni mentions that the people of Nusakambangan believe that the Nusatembini Kingdom was located in Karanganyar Village, Permisan, Nusakambangan.²⁶ The confusion surrounding this history is due to the lack of any relics that indicate its existence, so information is highly dependent on word of mouth, legends, and fairy tales.²⁷ Therefore, the Tourism Office once built a tourist destination marker on the beach at the intersection of the South Ring Road and Kalimantan Road with the name Nusatembini Beach. Many elders protested the naming, and it was eventually dismantled and replaced with the name Tegalkamulyan Beach. The reason was that the Nusatembini Kingdom was not located on the coast facing Penyus Bay, but on the southern coast or in Nusakambangan.²⁸

The history of the Nusatembini Kingdom is also controversial. Many articles mention that Nusatembini was a ghost kingdom or a giant kingdom. This belief is ingrained in many people, including Muslim Gunawisesa, Secretary of the Majelis

²² Jan Kolář and Péter Szabó, "On Interdisciplinarity in the Humanities: A Comment on Fanta et Al. (2020) on the Bias in Dating Obtained from Historical Sources," *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 132 (2021), p. 105392, doi:10.1016/j.jas.2021.105392.

²³ Sarit Barzilai, Eva Thomm, and Talia Shlomi-Elooz, "Dealing with Disagreement: The Roles of Topic Familiarity and Disagreement Explanation in Evaluation of Conflicting Expert Claims and Sources," *Learning and Instruction*, 69 (2020), p. 101367, doi:10.1016/j.learninstruc.2020.101367.

²⁴ Ratnani et al. (2019)

²⁵ S. Handono, "Kerajaan Nusatembini," dalam *Cerita Rakyat Jawa Tengah: Kabupaten Cilacap*, ed. A. Sudono, E. Istriwati, dan R. E. Utami, edisi 1 (Semarang: Balai Bahasa Jawa Tengah, 2017), 21–27.

²⁶ S. Sukarni, "Pulebahas: Legenda Raja Nusakambangan," dalam *Pulebahas: Legenda Raja Nusakambangan (Dan Cerita-Cerita Lainnya)*, ed. A. Sultoni, edisi 1 (Cilacap: Dinas Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Kabupaten Cilacap, 2018), 155–183.

²⁷ Adrian Currie, "Of Records and Ruins: Metaphors about the Deep Past," *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 17.1 (2023), pp. 154–75, doi:10.1163/18722636-12341493; Regazzoni, "Unintentional Monuments, or The Materializing of An Open Past."

²⁸ Yadi Kusmayadi, "Eksistensi Masyarakat Etnik Sunda Di Desa Cimrutu Kecamatan Patimuan Kabupaten Cilacap," *Jurnal Artefak*, 3.2 (2015), pp. 161–72, doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.25157/ja.v3i2.1098.

Luhur Kepercayaan Indonesia (MLKI) in Cilacap Regency. According to him, the Nusatembini Kingdom is a gentle kingdom that can only be seen by people who have a sixth sense. It is located in Nusakambangan, but the entrance is in Pring Ori Pitung Sap, which is now located in the Pertamina Oil Refinery Area 70. Through Pring Ori Pitung Sap, people who have supernatural powers can enter the Nusatembini Kingdom. A similar account was shared by Sukarsono, the caretaker of the tomb of Adipati Gobog.²⁹



Figure 2. Interview



Figure 2. Tomb of Adipati Sendang

Source: Author Documentation

According to Sukarni, portraying Nusatembini as a ghost kingdom or a kingdom of giants is a big mistake.³⁰ This portrayal was created by the Duchies of Pasirluhur and Pajajaran, which succeeded in defeating Nusatembini. History is indeed subjective, depending on who is the winner or ruler.³¹ The fictional story to bring down the Nusatembini Kingdom became even stronger and more believable because many elders, such as the Caretaker of the Tomb of Adipati Sendang, knew nothing about the Nusatembini Kingdom. Even Dana Miharja, the Caretaker of the Tomb of Daun Lumbung, only knew about the Nusatembini Kingdom from kethoprak stories.

²⁹ Imam Mubarak dan Sigit Pambudi, "Sinkretisme Islam dan Budaya Nusantara Dalam Sedekah Laut Cilacap," *An-Nuha* 9, no. 1 (2022): 186–196.

³⁰ Suwito Sukarni, "Pulebahas: Legenda Raja Nusakambangan," dalam *Pulebahas: Legenda Raja Nusakambangan (Dan Cerita-Cerita Lainnya)*, ed. Abdul Sultoni, edisi 1 (Cilacap: Dinas Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Kabupaten Cilacap, 2018), 155–183.

³¹ A. A. Kadir et al., "Philosophical Reflection on The Interconnection of Life, Religion, and History," *Kanz Philosophia* 9, no. 2 (2023): 421–438.



Figure 4. Interview



Figure 5. Tomb of Adipati Gobog

Source: Author Documentation

According to Sukarni, in Babad Pasir, Pulebahas is referred to as Raja Sindhula or Butawireng, who is described as a giant who is rude, cruel, and ruthless. In fact, Prabu Pulebahas had a tall and mighty physique.³² The negative portrayal in the Babad Pasir made the people of Cilacap feel ashamed of the Nusatembini Kingdom. As a result, PT KAI canceled the launch of the Nusatembini train service from Cilacap to Yogyakarta.

The conflicting stories about the Nusatembini Kingdom have led many people to draw their own conclusions based on their individual understanding. Tolkah, a librarian in the city of Cilacap, claims to know about the Nusatembini Kingdom from various books he has read. However, he concludes that the Nusatembini Kingdom is only a fairy tale or legend. This opinion is supported by Thomas Sutarman from the Tjilatjap History community.

³² Suwito Sukarni, "Pulebahas: Legenda Raja Nusakambangan," dalam *Pulebahas: Legenda Raja Nusakambangan (Dan Cerita-Cerita Lainnya)*, ed. Abdul Sultoni, edisi 1 (Cilacap: Dinas Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Kabupaten Cilacap, 2018), 155–183.



Figure 6. Interview with Tolkah, librarian in Cilacap
Source: Author Documentation

The Influence of the Nusatembini Kingdom Controversy on Toponymy

The story of the Nusatembini Kingdom has sparked controversy among various parties. For those who believe that the Nusatembini Kingdom is only a legend, its name is recorded in the Babad Pasirluhur book. Therefore, its existence is not just a fairy tale or legend, but it really did exist.³³

On the other hand, the version of the story in Babad Pasirluhur is also controversial. If the Nusatembini Kingdom was indeed a supernatural kingdom, why did it have to wage war like humans? Moreover, why did it have to marry the daughter of the Duke of Pasirluhur, Dewi Ciptarasa? The story of the war that took place was not a war between supernatural beings and humans, but rather a war between human forces and human forces. This aligns with Inwood who state that history often sparks controversy because much of it is written from the subjective perspective of the victors in a conflict.³⁴

Based on thematic triangulation, Sukarni opinion is closer to the truth³⁵. The Nusatembini Kingdom did exist, but its story was distorted by the Pasirluhur Kingdom and the Pajajaran Kingdom. Therefore, the renaming of Tegalkamulyan Beach to

³³ Achmad Sultoni and others, "Representation of Ecological Wisdom in Banyumas Folklore: An Ecocritical Study," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 13.12 (2023), pp. 3141–48, doi:10.17507/tpis.1312.11.

³⁴ Kris Inwood and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, "Selection Bias and Social Science History," *Social Science History*, 44.3 (2020), pp. 411–16 (pp. 411–16), doi:10.1017/ssh.2020.18; Kalypso Iordanou, Panayiota Kendeou, and Michalinos Zembylas, "Examining My-Side Bias during and after Reading Controversial Historical Accounts," *Metacognition and Learning*, 15.3 (2020), pp. 319–42 (pp. 319–42), doi:10.1007/s11409-020-09240-w.

³⁵ Suwito Sukarni, "Pulebahas: Legenda Raja Nusakambangan," dalam *Pulebahas: Legenda Raja Nusakambangan (Dan Cerita-Cerita Lainnya)*, ed. Abdul Sultoni, edisi 1 (Cilacap: Dinas Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Kabupaten Cilacap, 2018), 155–183.

Nusatembini Beach sparked strong protests from the elders. The reason is that the Nusatembini Kingdom was not located at Tegalkamulyan Beach, but on the southern coast of Cilacap city or on Nusakambangan Island. This controversy led to the annulment of the toponym Nusatembini for the Tegalkamulyan beach destination.

Many tourist destinations in various regions do indeed adapt their names and concepts to local legends or folklore. The use of legends as the basis for naming and developing tourist destinations is believed to strengthen local identity, create uniqueness, and increase appeal for tourists because they feel emotionally connected to the stories behind these places.³⁶ Legends that are incorporated into destinations, such as in festivals, place names, or tourist attractions, also help deepen the cultural experience and immersion of tourists, making their visits more meaningful and memorable.³⁷ However, destination managers need to maintain authenticity and not distort the cultural meaning of these legends, so as not to cause a deviation in values or a loss of original meaning in the eyes of the local community.³⁸ Therefore, the rejection by the traditional elders in Cilacap of the naming of Tegalkamulyan Beach can be understood as an effort to prevent the distortion of the cultural meaning of legends or history.

The cancellation of the Nusatembini train name by PT KAI was not explained in detail. When contacted for an interview, PT KAI Cilacap did not provide any explanation regarding the reason for the cancellation of the Nusatembini name. However, it is suspected to be due to the story of Pulebahas' defeat in the war against Kamandaka or Banyak Catra. Therefore, the name Kamandaka remains in existence, while the name Nusatembini has been revoked. This is in line with Sukarni statement that the people of Cilacap feel ashamed of the history of Nusatembini due to Pulebahas' defeat when he was cheated by Kamandaka, so that the naming of Nusatembini was not responded to positively.³⁹ This is in line with Fuentes, who explain that sometimes history that is considered embarrassing will be erased by the parties concerned so as not to create a negative image.⁴⁰

³⁶ Gianna Moscardo, "Stories and Design in Tourism," *Annals of Tourism Research*, 83 (2020), p. 102950, doi:10.1016/j.annals.2020.102950; Licia Calvi and Moniek Hover, "Storytelling for Mythmaking in Tourist Destinations," *Leisure Sciences*, 43.6 (2021), pp. 630–43, doi:10.1080/01490400.2021.1908193; Hailin Zhang, Jinbo Jiang, and Jinsheng Zhu, "Myths, Imagination and Reality: Constructing Tourist Attractions with Local Knowledge," *Current Issues in Tourism*, 28.13 (2025), pp. 2102–18, doi:10.1080/13683500.2024.2355555.

³⁷ Mohamed Khater and others, "Weaving Tales: The Impact of Storytelling in Tourism Guides on Cultural Immersion," *Tourism Recreation Research*, 2025, pp. 1–16, doi:10.1080/02508281.2024.2448887.

³⁸ Zhang, Jiang, and Zhu, "Myths, Imagination and Reality: Constructing Tourist Attractions with Local Knowledge."

³⁹ Suwito Sukarni, "Pulebahas: Legenda Raja Nusakambangan," dalam *Pulebahas: Legenda Raja Nusakambangan (Dan Cerita-Cerita Lainnya)*, ed. Abdul Sultoni, edisi 1 (Cilacap: Dinas Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Kabupaten Cilacap, 2018), 155–183.

⁴⁰ Juan Luis Fuentes, "'A Forgetting for Everyone, by Everyone'? Spain's Memory Laws and the Rise of the European Community of Memory, 1977–2007," *The Journal of Modern History* 94, no. 1 (2022): 127–162.

A scientific approach to historical controversies arising from the absence of archaeological evidence and documents emphasizes the importance of openness to various hypotheses and constructive management of differences of opinion. The scientific pluralism approach encourages researchers to accept the existence of several competing explanations, as weak evidence often makes it difficult to defend a single conclusion. In such situations, researchers should not impose consensus, but rather focus on managing differences and maintaining productive interactions between various approaches and expertise.⁴¹

In addition, the validation of historical interpretations must consider various criteria such as data coverage, comparability, and transparency in the use of theories or frameworks.⁴² Researchers also need to acknowledge data limitations and critically assess existing sources, as well as be open to revising hypotheses as new evidence is found. Thus, a scientific attitude requires humility, openness, and a commitment to critical evaluation in the face of historical controversies with minimal evidence.

CONCLUSION

The mythology of the Nusatembini Kingdom is closely related to the history of the Pasirluhur and Pajajaran Kingdoms. Although there is no evidence of its existence, it is recorded in the Babad Pasirluhur. There is controversy among the people of Cilacap regarding the Nusatembini Kingdom. Some believe it to be a mythical kingdom, while others say that the Nusatembini Kingdom is only a fairy tale or legend. While others believe that the Nusatembini Kingdom did indeed exist, but the defeat of Prabu Pulebahas caused the Pasirluhur and Pajajaran Kingdoms to create a bad image for the Nusatembini Kingdom, spreading the story that Nusatembini was a supernatural kingdom. In fact, the Nusatembini Kingdom did exist, and Prabu Pulebahas was known as a courageous man. By being portrayed as a mythical kingdom, it was ultimately considered only a legend. However, the naming of Tegalkamulyan Beach as Nusatembini Beach, which was rejected by the elders on the grounds that the location of the Nusatembini Kingdom was not there but on the southern coast of the city of Cilacap or on Nusakambangan Island, is strong evidence of the existence of the Nusatembini Kingdom. Thus, the people of Cilacap actually still believe in the existence of the Nusatembini Kingdom.

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⁴¹ Tanguy Bonnin, "Monist and Pluralist Approaches on Underdetermination," *Journal for General Philosophy of Science* 52, no. 1 (2021): 135–155.

⁴² Lawrence Rosen, "Validating Historical Interpretations: An Approach from Cultural Anthropology," *History and Theory*, 63.3 (2024), pp. 384–402, doi:10.1111/hith.12354.

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