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# TEMPORALITIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

The challenge of globalizing historical theory requires that theorization be grounded in material from all parts of the world. Southeast Asia is a world region that is somewhat underrepresented in the theorization of history. The distinctive historical traditions of Southeast Asia present an opportunity to bring new insights to existing theories of history. In this article, I offer a theoretical approach to historical temporality that is grounded in close readings of texts from this region by focusing on how these texts construe temporality through choices of narrative organization. I develop a toolkit for analyzing the temporalities in historical texts from equatorial Southeast Asia (the region covering present-day Indonesia and Malaysia), which includes a precise analytical vocabulary to fully account for their diversity. This approach leads to a theoretical stance that supersedes the conceptual dichotomies of linear/cyclical time and empty/full time, in favor of a more pluralistic understanding of temporalities. The grounded theory presented in this article is not only better suited to working with Southeast Asian materials, but it can also be placed in useful dialogue with existing theories, such as the narrativist approach of Hayden White and recent theorizations of the medieval historiography of Western Europe.

*Keywords:* time, historiography, temporality, Southeast Asia, topology, quality

## INTRODUCTION

The practice of historical writing is one of the central concerns of historical theory. Many insightful theories of historical writing have been developed in recent decades, but the cross-cultural applicability of these theories remains open to question because the vast majority of them are based solely on the study of European historiography. In order for theories of history to encompass the full diversity of the world's historical practices, it is necessary to ground one's theory-building in materials from all parts of the world. Globalizing historical theory requires more than taking pre-existing theory developed in European contexts and applying it to non-European source materials.[1] Instead, the theoretical work itself must be grounded in those materials. Remarkable and unexpected findings have emerged when theories are developed from studies of non-Western historiographies, such as the innovative theory of historicity proposed in *Textures of Time*, based on close readings of early modern South Indian historiography.[2]

1. Ethan Kleinberg and William R. Pinch, "History and Theory in a Global Frame," *History and Theory* 54, no. 4 (2015), 3.

2. Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India 1600–1800* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001). The impact of this monograph was

A promising area in which Southeast Asian historiography can contribute meaningfully to historical theory is the study of historical temporalities. Temporality is a key issue in current historical theory.[3] But recent theorizations of historical temporality have not yet engaged thoroughly with Southeast Asian historiographies. Many existing theories of temporality make use of conceptual dichotomies, such as linear/cyclical time and empty/full time. As will be seen, Southeast Asian historical texts present a richer and more complex set of temporalities than can be captured by such dichotomies. The challenge is this: how to adequately describe the complexity of temporalities in Southeast Asian texts in such a way that can contribute to the broader theoretical conversations about historical temporalities.

To address this challenge, I propose a narrative-centered theory that can thoroughly account for the diversity and complexity of the temporal structures of historical texts, particularly of the topological and qualitative aspects of temporality.[4] My argument proceeds from an empirical treatment of Southeast Asian examples to a general theory, reflecting its evolution during the research process. In the first section of this article, I argue that there is a pressing need to base historical theory on materials from outside European traditions, and especially from Southeast Asian traditions. In the second section, I introduce my two case-study texts: a seventeenth-century Malay dynastic genealogy and an eighteenth-century Javanese chronicle. In the third section, I give a brief glossary of the terms that I employ to describe the temporal devices found in these texts. In the fourth section, I analyze the narrative organization of these texts to show how temporal devices operate within them. In the fifth section, I proceed from this analysis to develop a formalist account of multiple temporalities that focuses on the attributes of topology and quality. In the final section, I argue for the general usefulness of this theory of historical temporalities by highlighting how it can be placed in useful dialogue with existing theoretical frameworks, such as that of Hayden White, and with recent research on medieval historiographies of Western Europe.

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discussed at length in a dedicated forum section of the journal *History and Theory*. "Forum: Textures of Time," ed. Rama Mantena, *History and Theory* 46, no. 3 (2007), 366-427.

3. Margrit Pernau, "Fluid Temporalities: Saiyid Ahmad Khan and the Concept of Modernity," *History and Theory* 58, no. 4 (2019), 107-131; Alexandra Lianeri, "Historia Magistra Vitae, Interrupting: Thucydides, and the Agonistic Temporality of Antiquity and Modernity," *History and Theory* 57, no. 3 (2018), 327-348; William M. Reddy, "The Eurasian Origins of Empty Space and Time: Modernity as Temporality Reconsidered," *History and Theory* 55, no. 3 (2016), 325-356; Harry Jansen, "In Search of New Times: Temporality in the Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment," *History and Theory* 55, no. 1 (2016), 66-90; "Forum: Multiple Temporalities," *History and Theory* 53, no. 4 (2014), 498-591. Much of this work engages with Reinhart Koselleck's ideas about temporality and modernity. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, transl. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

4. I define "temporality" as a constituted effect of organizing principles, especially in the context of narrative. As I discuss below, my understanding of temporality is similar to that of formalist literary theory. I use the term "temporality" instead of "time" to emphasize the plurality and artifactuality of temporal relationships, in contrast to the universalizing theories of time found in physics and in much philosophy.

## I. THE NEED FOR THEORY GROUNDED IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Southeast Asian historiography, in particular, has been underrepresented in historical theory. Recent contributions to historical theory based on non-Western sources have revealed the unexpected diversity of forms that historiography can take.[5] This suggests that expanding the geographical scope of theory will offer productive new avenues of inquiry. It therefore seems high time that Southeast Asia, a world region of great cultural complexity and hybridity, plays a greater role in these scholarly discussions.

The historiography of equatorial Southeast Asia has long posed a theoretical problem for scholars, because it defies modern expectations of how historical writing should look. Temporality plays a crucial role in this problem, because scholars' judgments of the historical validity of Southeast Asian texts are very often based on the sorts of temporality they exhibit. Texts that exhibit the linear and quantitative temporality familiar to Western historians, such as the chronicles of southern Sulawesi, tend to be judged as historically reliable, whereas texts dominated by prophecies, genealogies, and other unusual temporal structures, such as the Islamic Javanese historical tradition, tend to be judged as untrustworthy.[6] A greater appreciation for the diversity of temporal structures that historical texts can possess would help to revise and add nuance to such judgments.

The diversity of temporalities is one important aspect of what makes Southeast Asian historiography distinctive; it therefore invites further theoretical attention. Recent studies have offered useful insights into how temporalities work in Southeast Asian historiography, but they have tended to focus on individual texts or on particular historical traditions.[7] There is still a need for an abstract

5. Axel Michaels *et al*., "Nepalese History in a European Experience: A Case Study in Transcultural Historiography," *History and Theory* 55, no. 2 (2016), 210-232; Shahzad Bashir, "On Islamic Time: Rethinking Chronology in the Historiography of Muslim Societies," *History and Theory* 53, no. 4 (2014), 519-544; Shonaleeka Kaul, "'Seeing' The Past: Text and Questions of History in the Rājatarańgiṇi," *History and Theory* 53, no. 2 (2014), 194-211; Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Times of History: Universal Topics in Islamic Historiography* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2007); Anne Murphy, "History in the Sikh Past," *History and Theory* 46, no. 3 (2007), 345-365.

6. This logic is found throughout the theoretical literature on Southeast Asian historiography, as can be seen in the major volumes of collected essays in the field: *An Introduction to Indonesian Historiography*, ed. Soedjatmoko *et al*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965); *Southeast Asian History and Historiography: Essays Presented to D. G. E. Hall*, ed. O. W. Wolters and C. D. Cowan (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976); *Perceptions of the Past in Southeast Asia*, vol. 4, ed. Anthony Reid and David Marr, Southeast Asia Publications Series (Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd., 1979).

7. Nancy Florida, "Living in a Time of Madness: Last Days of Java's Last Prophetic Poet," *History and Theory* 58, no. 4 (2019), 86-106; E. P. Wieringa, "A Monument Marking the Dawn of the Muslim Era in Java: Chronicles and Chronograms in the Grand Mosque of Demak," in *Figurations of Time in Asia*, ed. Dietrich Boschung and Corinna Wessels-Mevissen (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2012); Ann Kumar, "Significant Time, Myths and Power in the Javanese Calendar," in *Lost Times and Untold Tales from the Malay World*, ed. Jan van der Putten and Mary Kilcline Cody (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008); William Cummings, "Islam, Empire and Makassarese Historiography in the Reign of Sultan Ala'uddin (1593–1639)," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 38, no. 2 (2007), 197-214; M. C. Ricklefs, "Time and Time Again in Java," *History Today* 49, no. 10 (1998), https://www.historytoday.com/archive/time-and-time-again-java; Nancy K. Florida, *Writing the Past, Inscribing*

theoretical approach to temporalities in historical writing that is grounded in specific texts but can be applied broadly to texts from Southeast Asia and beyond. Such a theory should be built from the bottom up, based on close reading of the historiographical materials, in order to properly account for the full range of temporalities that are found in those materials. In the next three sections, I offer close readings of two Southeast Asian texts that describe how multiple and complex temporalities operate within them, on the basis of which I subsequently develop a general theory of temporalities in historical texts.

## II. TWO SOUTHEAST ASIAN HISTORICAL TEXTS

My two case-study texts originate from equatorial Southeast Asia: the *Sulālāt al-Salāṭīn* from seventeenth-century Malaysia and the *Babad ing Sangkala* from eighteenth-century Java. They are among the oldest and most authoritative texts in their respective historical traditions and contain important information not found in other sources. These factors make them crucial sources for early modern Southeast Asian history. I have chosen them as case studies because they exhibit a wide range of temporalities that cannot be easily explained by conventional theories. As such, they demonstrate the need for a new approach to historical temporalities, as well as providing the basis on which to build such an approach.

### *Sulālāt al-Salāṭīn*

The first text that I examine is known by several titles: *Sulālāt al-Salāṭīn* ("Lineages of Sultans"—Arabic), *Sejarah Melayu* ("Malay Genealogy"—Malay), and *Malay Annals* (English). It is considered the premier work of traditional Malay historiography by historians, scholars of literature, and the general public. This text focuses on the sultanate of Melaka on the Malay Peninsula and includes an extensive account of the background of the Melaka royal dynasty. It was compiled in many stages over a period spanning the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries and exists in over forty manuscripts that are grouped into three recensions.[8]

The *Sulālāt al-Salāṭīn* was esteemed by Malay rulers and courtiers as containing a body of knowledge that would ensure the continuation of royal tradition; the preface to the text states that the court of Johor ordered that the text be written down, "so that it will be heard by our descendants who will come after us, and that they will know everything it says, and moreover, that they may get benefit from it."[9] Later Malay historians looked to the *Sulālāt al-Salāṭīn* as the exemplary

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*the Future: History as Prophecy in Colonial Java* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1995); Henk Schulte Nordholt, "Origin, Descent, and Destruction: Text and Context in Balinese Representations of the Past," *Indonesia* 54 (1992), 27-58; Adrian Vickers, "Balinese Texts and Historiography," *History and Theory* 29, no. 2 (1990), 158-178; Hendrick M. J. Maier, *In the Center of Authority* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1988).

8. Henri Chambert-Loir, "The History of a History: Variant Versions of the Sulalat al-Salatin," *Indonesia* 104 (2017), 169.

9. This is my translation of part of the Malay preface to the text. R. O. Winstedt, "The Malay Annals, or Sejarah Melayu," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 16 (1938), 42.

historical text,[10] and sometimes summarized its content in their own works to bolster their authority.[11] The *Sulālāt al-Salāṭīn* became a key reference point for the development of Malaysian national historiography to such an extent that an eminent Malaysian historian argued that the "general history of Malaysia is always begun with the history of the Malay-Muslim Sultanate of Melaka."[12] The text has proven to be an indispensable source for fifteenth-century Malay history because it offers unique information about historical events in the Melaka sultanate and insights into the ideological environment of Malay courtly life in the early modern period.[13]

The *Sulālāt al-Salāṭīn* is a prose description of a great family of kings and queens, beginning with Iskandar Zulkarnain, a Quranic figuration of Alexander the Great. It describes various significant dynasties in South and Southeast Asia before devoting the bulk of its narrative to a dynastic history of the Melaka kingdom. The genealogy is elaborated by narrative episodes that emphasize certain themes: rulers' conversions to Islam, cunning as a character trait of Malays, and the mutual obligations of rulers and ministers to one another. My study uses the earliest extant recension of the *Sulālāt al-Salāṭīn*.[14] This version, labeled Recension I, exists in two manuscripts: the well-known Raffles Malay 18 manuscript belonging to the Royal Asiatic Society, and the partial copy Or. 1704 held in the Leiden University Library.[15]

The text is organized as a genealogy in which events are ordered by the lifetimes of members of a kinship network. There are very few explicit dates in the text, apart from the colophon date indicating when the manuscript was copied, and a series of reign lengths attributed to the kings of Singapore and Melaka. Since the genealogy integrates many separate lineages, it does not produce a unitary and linear timeline, but a complex and nonlinear temporal network. As the genealogy grows in the pre-Melaka part of the text (chapters I to VI in Winstedt's

10. A. Teeuw, "Some Remarks on the Study of the So-Called Historical Texts in Indonesian Languages," in *Profiles of Malay Culture: Historiography, Religion and Politics*, ed. Sartono Kartodirdjo (Jakarta: Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, 1976), 17.

11. Examples of such texts include *Bustān al-Salāṭīn* (compiled in Aceh in the late 1630s), *Silsilah Raja-Raja Perak* (Perak, mid-1820s), and *Tuḥfat al-Nafīs* (Riau, 1866).

12. Cheah Boon Kheng, "Writing Indigenous History in Malaysia: A Survey of Approaches and Problems," *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 10, no. 2 (1996), 37.

13. O. W. Wolters, *The Fall of Śrīvijaya in Malay History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970); Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya, *A History of Malaysia* (Basingstoke, UK, and London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1982); C. H. Wake, "Melaka in the Fifteenth Century: Malay Historical Traditions and the Politics of Islamization," in *Melaka: The Transformation of a Malay Capital, c. 1400–1978*, ed. K. S. Sandhu, Paul Wheatley, and A. A. bin Mat Ton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Henri Chambert-Loir, "The Sulalat al-Salatin as a Political Myth," *Indonesia* 79 (April 2005), 131-160; John N. Miksic, *Singapore and the Silk Road of the Sea, 1300–1800* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2013).

14. Winstedt, "The Malay Annals." Other whole and partial editions of this recension include: C. O. Blagden, "Sejarah Melayu: An Unpublished Variant Version of the Malay Annals," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3, no. 1 (1925); Muhammad Haji Salleh, *Sulalat al-Salatin, ya'ni Perteturun Segala Raja-Raja Karangan Tun Seri Lanang* (Kuala Lumpur: Yayasan Karyawan dan Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1997); Cheah Boon Kheng, "Edition of the Sulalat al-Salatin, manuscript Raffles Malay 18," in *Sejarah Melayu: The Malay Annals*, ed. Cheah Boon Kheng (Kuala Lumpur: MBRAS, 1998). An influential English translation of this recension is C. C. Brown, *Sejarah Melayu, or, The Malay Annals* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1970).

15. Chambert-Loir, "Variant Versions of the Sulalat al-Salatin," 124-126.

edition), the geographical setting shifts from India, to Sumatra, to Singapore, and to Melaka. The middle part of the text (chapters VII to XXII) describes the heyday of Melaka as a regional power, up to its capture by the Portuguese under Alfonso d'Albuquerque. The final part of the text (chapters XXIII to XXXI) describes how the last sultan of Melaka and his descendants attempted to set up various successor courts on the Malay peninsula.

*Babad ing Sangkala*

The second source I examine is the *Babad ing Sangkala* ("History in Chronograms") an early eighteenth-century Javanese verse chronicle. This text belongs to a distinct genre of Javanese chronicle, which is characterized by the fact that each year entry is marked by a chronogram.[16] It is one of the earliest extant works in the modern Javanese historical tradition, whose historical value is magnified by the extreme scarcity of Javanese sources from the first half of the eighteenth century. The account given in the *Babad ing Sangkala* is remarkably consistent with the available primary sources, especially in its coverage of the seventeenth century.[17] The chronicle was probably composed in the vicinity of the royal court of Kartasura in central Java,[18] although its author's identity is unknown. It was completed on November 17, 1738 but appears to draw on earlier drafts written in the late seventeenth century.[19] I use M. C. Ricklefs's edition and historical commentary on this text, which exists in a single manuscript belonging to the British Library: MS IOL 36(B) as part of the India Office Library sub-collection.[20]

The *Babad ing Sangkala* is the product of a refined literary culture that was highly valued by the Kartasura royal court. The preface spans the first two stanzas of the text, and its author claims to have written several other chronicles, as well as works in the pre-Islamic *kakawin* genre of Javanese poetry.[21] The text exhibits an accomplished use of metrical, poetic, and calendrical techniques that underscores its literary significance, quite apart from its usefulness for modern historians. This significance seems to have afforded the manuscript a privileged status in royal libraries; it was "among the few Kartasura heirlooms still preserved in court circles after the chaos of the 1740s and 1750s" and was kept safe in Yogyakarta until being seized by British forces in 1812.[22]

The *Babad ing Sangkala* commences its annalistic account of important events in Java with the fall of the Hindu-Buddhist kingdom of Majapahit in 1478, and ends abruptly in the middle of a description of a Kartasura courtier in 1721. All the events are recounted as concise statements of fact in strict chronological

16. A chronogram is a textual device for encoding the digits of a year numeral in meaningful symbols. Later in this article I provide a detailed discussion of chronograms and their uses in constructing historical temporalities.

17. M. C. Ricklefs, *Modern Javanese Historical Tradition: A Study of an Original Kartasura Chronicle and Related Materials* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1978), 203.

18. *Ibid*., 150.

19. *Ibid*., 187.

20. The previously standalone India Office Library collection has since been merged into the British Library's holdings. *Ibid*., 24-25.

21. *Ibid*., 16-17.

22. *Ibid*., 151.

order. The text is a selective rather than a comprehensive survey of historical events, and tends to focus on battles, natural disasters, and political leaders at the expense of other topics. This thematic focus means that the *Babad ing Sangkala* is a particularly useful source for the political history of Java. The text summarizes the military expansion of the major states of Demak (early sixteenth century) and of Mataram (early seventeenth century), as well as the interminable dynastic conflicts in Java during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This Javanese text offers a multitude of fruitful contributions and correctives to the historical information provided by contemporary Dutch sources.

The historical value of both my case-study texts has been recognized by scholars, but the complexity of their temporal structures poses a theoretical challenge. In order to get to grips with this complexity, it is necessary to have a precise technical vocabulary to describe the temporalities exhibited in narrative texts. The next section presents such a vocabulary.

## III. GLOSSARY OF TEMPORAL DEVICES

I define a temporal device as a narrative tool for labeling references to events and people in such a way that establishes temporal relationships between those references. The temporal devices that most prominently appear in my case-study texts are: *genealogy*, *era*, *calendar*, *chronogram*, *lepsis*, and *ellipsis*.

A *genealogy* is a device for expressing kinship relations that serve to mark the passage of time. The two basic relationships that constitute a genealogy are parenthood, which indicates the temporal separation between two people, and marriage, which indicates the contemporaneity of two people. From the perspective of temporal organization, all other genealogical relationships can be seen as variants or combinations of these two basic relationships. Historical events are temporally marked by the lives of people within a genealogy.

An *era* is a device by which a target year is assigned a number by counting the years between it and some fixed reference year, which is called the epoch of that era. Relevant examples are the common era of solar years (denoted CE in this article), whose epoch is the purported year of the birth of Jesus Christ, the Śaka era of lunisolar years (S), whose epoch is the purported year of accession of the satrap Caṣṭana in western India, and the Islamic Hijri era of lunar years (H), whose epoch is the year of the flight of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca.

A *calendar* is a device for indicating the position of an interval within a containing interval, such as a day of the week or a month of the year. It is distinguished from an era by having no unique reference point; instead, the beginning of the containing interval is a relative reference for the intervals within it. A full date in modern European chronology consists of combination of calendar and era: the calendar part refers to an interval that recurs (for example, the eleventh of November, which happens every year), whereas the era part refers to a unique interval (for example, 1918 CE, which happened only once).[23]

23. The independence of calendar time and era time is further illustrated by the fact that the date on which the new year begins is arbitrary and can vary even during the use of a single calendar system. An example of this was the concurrent use in early modern England of the Historical Year (beginning on

A *chronogram* is a device for representing a numeral as a string of symbols. Traditions of chronogram composition are known in various parts of Eurasia, and chronograms are used in languages such as Sanskrit, Hebrew, Arabic, and Latin. In Javanese and Balinese texts, chronograms are used to express the year numerals of an era. In early modern Javanese chronograms, each digit of the year from zero to nine is mapped to one of several symbols, so that each year numeral can be expressed by one of many different chronograms. For example, in the *Babad ing Sangkala*, the words *bumi* ("earth") and *tunggal* ("same") symbolize the digit one, *paksa* ("force") and *kalih* ("pair") symbolize two, *ayoga* ("having a child") and *awarna* ("described") symbolize four, and *obah* ("to move") and *retu* ("uproar") symbolize six. The text puts these symbols in series to create two chronograms: *paksa ayoga obah ing bumi* ("the force of the child moved the world") and *kalih awarna retu tunggal* ("the pair described the same uproar"), both of which represent the same year numeral 1642 J (1717–18 CE).[24]

*Lepsis* is a device for indicating that a portion of narrative pertains to a time interval outside the sequence of the narrative surrounding it. There are two types of this device: prolepsis and analepsis. Prolepsis is a device to embed descriptions of later intervals of time within earlier intervals, and conversely, analepsis is a device to embed descriptions of earlier intervals within later ones. The effect of lepsis is to connect specific events and people that are otherwise separated in time, thereby to "short-circuit" the temporal distance established by other kinds of devices such as calendar or genealogy. Lepsis may be diegetic, where the leptical passages are marked as the direct speech of a particular character, or nondiegetic, where the leptical statement is simply interpolated within the main narrative. I define "prophecy" here as a term for diegetic prolepsis, "commemoration" for diegetic analepsis, "flashforward" for nondiegetic prolepsis, and "flashback" for nondiegetic analepsis.

*Ellipsis* is a device to establish temporal distance between adjoining parts of the narrative. Generally expressed as a break or scene change, ellipsis marks the boundaries between episodes that are separated in time. Ellipsis may be marked explicitly, often using standard formulas such as "after some time had passed," "and now for the story of," "no more is told of this matter," or implicitly, creating a discontinuity of time and place that can be discerned only from context.

## IV. THE USE OF TEMPORAL DEVICES IN MALAY AND JAVANESE TEXTS

How do these temporal devices operate to organize the historical narratives of my case-study texts? My analysis shows how a variety of temporal devices play crucial roles in the narrative organization of these texts. My interpretation puts the devices on an equal footing in order to give due attention to the nonlinear and

January 1) and the Civil Year (beginning March 25). See *A Handbook of Dates for Students of British History*, ed. C. R. Cheney and Michael Jones (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Byron Ellsworth Hamann, "How to Chronologize with a Hammer, or, the Myth of Homogeneous, Empty Time," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6, no. 1 (2016), 271.

24. J here refers to the Javanese era, adopted by the central Javanese court of Mataram in 1555 J (1633–34 CE). Ricklefs, *Modern Javanese Historical Tradition*, 130-135 and 232-233.

qualitative aspects of the temporalities present in these sources. These aspects play an important role in my subsequent theoretical arguments.

*Sulālāt al-Salāṭīn*

The most prominent temporal devices in this text are genealogy, ellipsis, and diegetic lepsis. The narrative of the *Sulālāt al-Salāṭīn* is organized by integrating hundreds of kinship references into a genealogical network centered on the ruling dynasty of Melaka. Since no era numerals are used in the text besides in the colophon, the order of events[25] is determined by reference to the lifetimes of individual people and the genealogical relationships between them. Ellipsis is used to indicate gaps of time between brief episodes within a particular genealogical period, and prophecy and commemoration interact with genealogical time to connect specific ancestors to their descendants.

The genealogical time of *Sulālāt al-Salāṭīn* has a complex network structure, in which the Melaka royal line occupies a central place. Other families are continually added to the network, both as ancestors and as separate lines connected to the Melaka dynasty through marriage. The presence of many contemporaneous lines, which are usually tied to specific places, means that any event can be indexed by one of several living figures. Since the *Sulālāt al-Salāṭīn* covers a large temporal and geographical scale, the device of ellipsis serves to provide more fine-grained temporal separation than genealogical time can. In other words, episodes that occur within the same generation are demarcated by the use of ellipsis. Ellipsis is indicated by standard terms like *kemudian* ("subsequently") *tatkala pada zaman* ("when at the time") and *setelah berapa lamanya* ("after a while").

The origin points of genealogical time, such as the careers of apex ancestors and court founders, are accorded special significance in the *Sulālāt al-Salāṭīn*. For example, the life of the Macedonian conqueror Iskandar Zulkarnain is particularly important in the text, as this story was used in seventeenth-century Malay literature as a means for historians to "provide their chronicles with greater affinity with the Muslim genealogies."[26] The parallelism between this ancestor and the first ruler of Melaka, who was also called Iskandar, serves to highlight their analogous roles as dynasty founders, as well as to emphasize the pre-existing genealogical connection between them.[27] By virtue of their privileged position within the genealogical network, the lifetimes of these apex ancestors take on greater significance.

Genealogical connections are also supported by the use of diegetic lepsis, both prolepsis (prophecy) and analepsis (commemoration). Lepsis reinforces the genealogical continuity between the history of the Malay kingdoms and that of its precursors in other parts of Eurasia (regions that are referred to as *atas angin*

25. That is, the order in which events occur, rather than the order in which they are narrated.

26. Vladimir Braginsky, *The Heritage of Traditional Malay Literature* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004), 130.

27. This use of the genealogy device to emphasize temporal links between ancestors and descendants finds an interesting resonance in the "chronophagous" use of chains of transmission (*isnad*) in the early modern Middle East. Dana Sajdi, "Reclaiming Damascus: Rescripting Islamic Time and Space in the Sixteenth Century," *History and Theory* 58, no. 4 (2019), 68-85.

"above the winds"). For example, the connection between the Tamil king Raja Chulan and the Malay dynasty at Palembang is established by a commemorative inscription coupled with a prophecy:

> Raja Chulan commanded to the scribes and stoneworkers, "Let all of you make for me a commemoration as proof that I went down into the sea. It is my desire that my deeds shall endure to the Day of Judgment, and that you write down my whole story, so that it is known and heard by all my descendants to come." After all the scribes and stoneworkers heard Raja Chulan's command, a stone was split in half and written upon by all of them, in the Hindustani language. After it was completed, they were ordered by Raja Chulan to insert various treasures of gold and silver, diamonds, jewels and gems, and all kinds of wonderful objects. So Raja Chulan said, "In the future there will be a king among my descendants who will obtain this treasure, and that king will conquer all those countries below the winds."[28]

The role of diegetic lepsis in this Malay text can be usefully compared to its function in the nineteenth-century Javanese texts studied by Nancy Florida. For the author of the *Babad Jaka Tingkir (*"History of Jaka Tingkir" [1826]), commemoration and prophecy are one and the same, expressed by the polysemous verb *mèngeti* ("to remember," "to be aware of," "to prophesy," "to forewarn"). Florida argued that lepsis is the key to how the *Babad Jaka Tingkir* operates: "It is a prescient present's writing about a past which opens to a desired future."[29] The prophetic effect of lepsis is also illustrated by the creative adaptation of prophetic passages from the *Serat Centhini* ("Book of Centhini" [1815]) in Ronggawarsita's *Serat Kala Tidha* ("Book of the Time of Darkness" [1873]), resulting in "a productive intimacy with both pasts and futures . . . realized in the relay across time."[30] It is precisely such an intimacy between pasts and futures, realized by the textual device of lepsis, that can also be seen at play in Raja Chulan's stone inscription, reinforcing the coherence of the temporal structure of the *Sulālāt al-Salāṭīn*.

*Babad ing Sangkala*

The devices of chronogram and ellipsis play a major role in the temporal organization of the *Babad ing Sangkala*. As indicated by the text's title, the chronogram device (*sangkala*) dominates its temporal organization, and other technologies such as calendar play a supplementary role. A single list of chronograms acts as a skeleton for the whole text, starting with a chronogram for 1400 J (1478–79 CE) and ending with a chronogram for 1645 J (1720–21 CE). The chronograms are listed in ascending order, though not every year numeral is included, and sometimes a single year numeral is represented by multiple chronograms. The digits of the year are expressed in reverse order, so that a chronogram such as *tanpa – warna – obah – ing jalmi*, encoding the digits 0 – 4 – 6 – 1, indicates 1640 J (1715–16 CE). The chronograms divide up the narrative into short sections; in the early parts of the text, each section is only one sentence

28. My translation of Winstedt's Malay text. Winstedt, "The Malay Annals," 54.
29. Florida, *Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future*, 397.
30. Florida, "Living in a Time of Madness," 103.

long, whereas in the later parts of the text, each dated section can run to several stanzas of verse.

The chronogram time in this text is linear, because it consists of a single ascending sequence of chronograms. The symbolic connotations of the *Babad ing Sangkala*'s chronograms exhibit semantic resonances with the events being narrated. Chronograms can be used to elaborate on the event mentioned, such as in the example *duk palindhu gedhe´ obah sirna marga iku* "when there was a great earthquake, the roads were destroyed in the commotion,"[31] where chronogram part *obah – sirna – marga – iku* ("the roads were destroyed in the commotion") encodes the digits 6 – 0 – 5 – 1, thus indicating that the earthquake occurred in 1506 J (1584–85 CE). Similarly, a conspiracy by two younger brothers of the heir apparent to seize the throne by force is dated by the chronogram *kalih – adhi – rasa – tunggal* ("the two younger brothers had the same feeling"), corresponding to 1642 J (1717–18 CE).

Chronograms can emphasize the catastrophic atmosphere of centennial years by drawing attention to the two trailing zeroes using symbols of destruction and disappearance. The qualitative link between centennial years and political downfall is well documented in the modern Javanese historical tradition.[32] As an example of this link, the text offers a chronogram corresponding to 1500 J (1578–79 CE): *tan pantara windu agung prapta sirna ilang tata raje* ("not long after, the century arrived; the order of the state was destroyed and gone"), where the chronogram symbols for the two zeroes are *sirna – ilang* ("destroyed and gone").[33] In this quotation, the presence of the digit zero in the year numeral is explicitly alluded to, since the term *windu* is etymologically derived from the Sanskrit word *bindu* ("zero"). The gloss of the Javanese term *windu agung* as "century" (literally "great zero") therefore results from the presence of trailing zeroes in the year numeral.

Within the narrative sections marked off by chronograms, the *Babad ing Sangkala* uses a standard vocabulary of ellipsis to break up the flow of events. This vocabulary falls into categories of simultaneity (*duk* ["when"], *kala* ["at the time"], *sa* ["as"], *yata* ["now"]), succession (*anuli* ["following that"], *alagi* ["and then"], *purwa* ["it began"], *samana* ["then"], *wau* ["only then") and duration (*antara* ["a while later"], *lawase´* ["as long as"], *lami* ["a long time"]). On rare occasions, a calendar element will be included to give precision to a period of ellipsis: *pira ing laminipun gangsal wulan anéng Matawis* ("They were in Mataram for a period of five months")[34]

The effect of the chronogram and ellipsis devices in the *Babad ing Sangkala* is to produce a strictly discretized and chronologized narrative, in contrast to the dense genealogical and leptical networks of the *Sulālāt al-Salāṭīn*, which lacks chronological markers almost entirely. Nevertheless, the chronogram device, through its rich symbolic system, is able to connote meaningful links between

31. Here and below I quote from Ricklefs's Javanese text, accompanied by my own English translation. Ricklefs, *Modern Javanese Historical Tradition*, 26-27.

32. Ricklefs, "Time and Time Again in Java," 36.

33. Ricklefs, *Modern Javanese Historical Tradition*, 24-25.

34. *Ibid*., 140-141.

particular events and moments. As will be explored further below, the dual quantitative/qualitative character of chronogram temporality has direct relevance to recent scholarship on the theoretical distinction between "empty" and "full" time.[35]

## V. A FORMAL THEORY OF HISTORICAL TEMPORALITIES

In this section, I outline a general theory of temporalities that is grounded in the preceding analysis of the two Southeast Asian texts. My theory is a formalist account of how temporal devices generate diverse temporal structures in historical narratives. I emphasize two attributes of temporality in order to reframe major debates about temporality in historical writing: topology and quality. These two attributes are often theorized in terms of conceptual dichotomies; time is said to have either "linear" or "cyclical" topology and to be either "empty" or "full" of quality. My theorization challenges these dichotomies and offers a way to analyze temporal topology and quality in a more detailed way.

The manner in which I have employed temporal devices to read historical texts treats temporality as a constituted effect of textual organization. My approach resembles certain kinds of formalist literary criticism, particularly Gérard Genette's study of temporalities in narrative.[36] According to this understanding of temporality, narrative devices generate temporal relationships between the events and the entities that belong to the narrated world. In other words, these temporal devices "evoke" a particular "story-time" that constitutes the represented world.[37] The benefit of a narratological approach is that it offers a precise vocabulary to analyze the topological and qualitative complexities of temporality in historical texts. The temporal devices discussed in previous sections generate temporal relationships, which in turn can be theorized through a narratological model. The discussion below focuses on those attributes of temporality that feature prominently in the preceding analysis of the *Sulālāt al-Salāṭīn* and the *Babad ing Sangkala*; namely, topology and quality.

### *Topology*

I postulate that, on a basic narrative level, temporal relationships obtain between entities called "moment" (a specified point of time), "interval" (a relation of separation between a prior and a posterior moment), and "coincidence" (a relation of simultaneity between two moments). I define the attribute of "topology" as the set of structural relations between the moments in a narrative. This definition of topology in terms of relations between moments necessarily includes all the intervals and coincidences between those moments as well. The topology of temporal relationships in narrative can be visualized using graphs of vertices and edges, as

35. Lucien Hölscher, "Time Gardens: Historical Concepts in Modern Historiography," *History and Theory* 53, no. 4 (2014), 577-591.

36. Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, transl. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980).

37. *Ibid*., 33. See also the entry "Time" in *The Living Handbook of Narratology* (2014). Michael Scheffel, Antonius Weixler, and Lukas Werner, "Time," Hamburg University, http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/time.

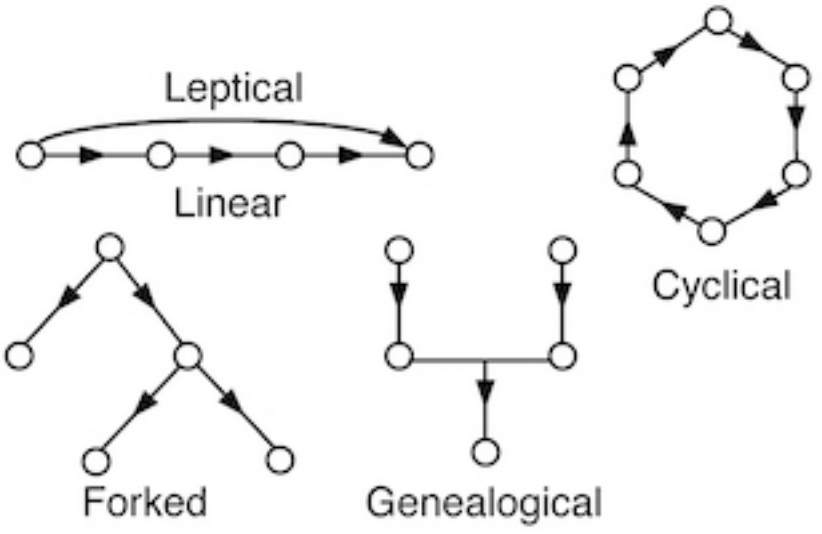


Figure 1: Graphical representations of various topologies. In this figure, the temporalities consist of moments (vertices), intervals (directed edges), and coincidences (nondirected edges).

is done in mathematics. The figure above shows how different topologies of time can be visualized graphically (see Figure 1).

Conventional models of historical temporality presume a timeline that has unidirectional, linear topology, which means that every distinct moment is either prior or posterior to every other moment, and therefore that simultaneous moments are self-identical. But it is possible to have topologies other than the timeline. A set of moments or intervals may have a cyclical relationship, such as the days of the week: the interval Monday has a prior relationship to the interval Tuesday, the interval Tuesday has a prior relationship to the interval Wednesday, and so on, but the interval Sunday has a prior relationship to the initial interval Monday. It is not possible to determine any day of the week as absolutely prior to another without recourse to another calendar element (such as the day of the month) and to an era. The week is thus an example of a temporal device with cyclical topology.

It is also possible to have forked topologies: the moment of a parent's birth (A) must occur prior to the moments of his or her children's births (B and C), but this does not imply anything about the relation between the moments B and C: one may be prior to the other or they may be simultaneous, but the relations A–B and A–C do not determine the relation B–C. In a linear topology, a relation of simultaneity necessarily implies self-identity, but in more complex topologies, nonidentical moments may occur simultaneously.

Thinking in terms of topology enables us to transcend frameworks based on group-held concepts of time, which are often expressed in terms of a dichotomy between "linear" and "cyclical" concepts of time. For much of the twentieth century, historians and social scientists argued that different societies or classes

within a society possess different time-concepts,[38] but the limitations of this approach have now been recognized, including its unsavory Eurocentric connotations.[39] The treatment of topology presented in this article rejects the time-concept approach, and offers in its place an explicit and precise formal vocabulary for describing a broad range of topologies of time found in historical texts.

My approach offers graphical tools to help scholars probe deeper into the temporal structure of texts, rather than being limited to broad-stroke labels like "linear," "cyclic," "genealogical," or "prophetic" time. The usefulness of these fine-grained analytical tools becomes clear when considering a case such as the *Sulālāt al-Salāṭīn*, which has multiple topologies operating within it: the network topology generated by the genealogy device, the nested topology generated by the leptical devices of prophecy and commemoration, and the linear topology generated by enumeration of regnal periods in terms of years. Rather than merely identifying the multiple temporalities in a text, a topological description can map out in detail how those temporalities interact.

*Quality*

The attribute of "quality" refers to the significance of certain moments and intervals in contrast to others. This significance inheres in the time itself, rather than to the events that occur within it. Quality is usually expressed in terms of the propriety of a particular moment or interval in relation to some value system. The qualitative aspect of time is not limited to historical writing. For example, systems of divination and astrology are widely used to differentiate certain intervals as appropriate for particular activities, thereby producing time that is qualitatively associated with a broad range of social practices and cultural attitudes.

Temporal quality is generated by specific devices, such as chronograms or calendars, that have a built-in system for differentiating the quality of moments and intervals. The quality of temporalities in the *Babad ing Sangkala*, for example, emerges from the conventional associations between symbol and digit that constitute the Javanese chronogram system.[40] The same is true of the temporal quality produced by divination calendars. By understanding quality as a generated effect of particular symbolic systems, which are instantiated in temporal devices such

38. The scholarship that exhibits these attitudes is extensive; the most influential examples include: Jacques Le Goff, "Au Moyen Age: Temps de L'Eglise et temps du marchand," *Annales, E.S.C.* 15, no. 3 (1960), 417-433; Henri Lefebvre, *Critique de la vie quotidienne*, vol. II (Paris: L'Arche, 1961); Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, transl. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1967); E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present* 38 (December 1967), 56-97; Clifford Geertz, "Person, Time, and Conduct in Bali," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). These arguments have been given more nuance by technology-focused approaches such as that of Gerhard Dohrn-Van Rossum, *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders*, transl. Thomas Dunlap (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

39. The classic critique of the anthropological use of time-concepts as an othering strategy is found in Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

40. The philologist J. Noorduyn published a useful study of the evolution of the Javanese chronogram system from its Sanskrit beginnings to a thoroughly Javanized symbolic system. J. Noorduyn, "Some Remarks on Javanese Chronogram Words: A Case of Localization," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 149, no. 2 (1993), 298-317.

as chronograms and calendars, we can gain a more detailed understanding of its operation in historical texts.

As with topology, scholarly discussions on the quality of temporality have tended to foreground a conceptual dichotomy. In this case, the dichotomy is between the quantitative and qualitative attributes of time, sometimes expressed in terms of "empty" versus "embodied" time.[41] This distinction assumes that it is possible to have a conception of time devoid of qualitative aspects, which is often associated with the onset of modernity. Such a nonqualitative temporality has been labeled "homogeneous," "empty," "Newtonian," or "mathematical" time. Although the dichotomy itself has come under some critique,[42] distinguishing quantitative and qualitative aspects of time has proven useful for many theorists. Walter Benjamin's attack on the "empty, homogeneous time"[43] of conventional historicism inspired a large body of work, which examines the qualitative complexity of time in various cultural and historical contexts.[44]

I argue that, since the qualitative significance of time is generated by particular symbolic systems, it follows that a careful investigation of those systems offers a thorough understanding of the quality of time. By examining the temporal devices that generate quality, we can go beyond the limitations of the empty/full dichotomy. For example, the chronograms in the *Babad ing Sangkala* highlight the qualitative resonances between historical events and the moments at which they occur, while locating those moments in a quantitative chronological order. The chronogram device produces a temporality with linear topology but highly heterogeneous quality, because each year interval can be made significant in a range of contexts via the symbolism of the particular choice of chronogram employed. In this way, the chronogram device seems to play both sides of the fence between quantitative and qualitative time, suggesting that the dichotomy is not especially useful in this case. In place of this dichotomy, this article offers a narratological method for analyzing how temporal devices like chronograms generate specific qualitative patterns in historical texts.

## VI. DIALOGUE WITH EXISTING THEORIES

In this final section of the article, I relate my proposal to existing theories of history that are grounded in European materials in order to show the benefits of expanding the range of historiographical materials on which theory is based. I show how the theory of historical temporalities proposed here, built on readings of Southeast Asian texts, can complement Hayden White's formalist theory of

41. Hölscher, "Time Gardens."

42. Hamann, "How to Chronologize with a Hammer."

43. Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003), IV, 375.

44. Besides Benjamin and those influenced by him, many modern philosophers have challenged what they perceived to be a mainstream notion of time without quality, including Friedrich Nietzsche, Gilles Deleuze, Giorgio Agamben, and Reinhart Koselleck. Helge Jordheim, "Against Periodization: Koselleck's Theory of Multiple Temporalities," *History and Theory* 51, no. 2 (2012), 151-171; Rhiannon Firth and Andrew Robinson, "From the Past Yet to Come: Utopian Conceptions of Time and Becoming," *Time and Society* 23, no. 3 (2014), 380-401.

the historical text at the basic levels of narrative structure. I also relate my theory to the study of the medieval historiography of Western Europe to show fruitful avenues for future comparative research.

This article's theorization of historical temporalities can be productively compared with White's narrativist theory of historical writing. In *Metahistory*, White proposed a fivefold hierarchy of "levels of conceptualization." This hierarchy started at the most basic level of chronicle, which was defined as "the arrangement of the events to be dealt with in the temporal order of their occurrence," and went to the most elaborate level of the "mode of ideological implication."[45] White focused only on the three higher levels in this hierarchy, setting aside the two lower levels of chronicle and story as "primitive elements" that did not require his special attention. This decision made sense because *Metahistory* was concerned primarily with the differences among various nineteenth-century European works, and those differences existed only at the higher levels of conceptualization. In a later article,[46] White reframed the hierarchy in three levels ("the chronicle of events," "the explanation of them," and their "narrativization") in order to justify his tropological model of the transition from the low-level "chronicle" and "explanation" to the high-level "narrative."

The diverse temporalities examined in this article reside at the basic levels of elaboration that White called "chronicle" and "explanation." Although the temporal devices operating in these texts do have implications at the higher levels of emplotment and ideology, my analysis is focused on the temporal diversity at the lower levels of narrative structure. The contrast between the linear topology of the *Babad ing Sangkala* and the network topology of the *Sulālāt al-Salāṭīn* illustrates the need for further study of the "primitive elements" of historical narrative. The approach presented in this article therefore complements White's theory of the historical text by offering a set of analytical tools for understanding the diversity and multiplicity of historical temporalities.

The theorization of historical temporality presented in this article also finds resonances with research on the medieval historiography of Western Europe. Gabrielle Spiegel has shown how multiple temporalities operate in medieval chronicles, by looking at paratactic, cyclical, figural, and genealogical patterns. Through readings of historical texts by Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Galbert of Bruges, Spiegel showed the diversity of their temporal structures, which generates a "complex melding of temporalities" similar to what is seen in the Southeast Asian texts discussed above.[47] Building on these readings, she argued that medieval historiography can contribute meaningfully to current theoretical discourse of multiple temporalities and the presence of the past. The relevance of these same issues to the study of Southeast Asian historiography suggests the value of comparative approaches at both the empirical and theoretical levels.

45. Hayden White, *The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973, 5.

46. Hayden White, "The Question of Narrativity in Contemporary Historical Theory," *History and Theory* 23, no. 1 (1984), 23.

47. Gabrielle Spiegel, "Structures of Time in Medieval Historiography," *Medieval History Journal* 19, no. 1 (2016), 29.

Genealogy is a particularly useful point of comparison between Spiegel's work on European chronicles and my analysis of Southeast Asian texts in this article. Spiegel argued that genealogy serves as both a "narrative frame" and a "perceptual grid" in thirteenth-century French chronicles. The emergence of genealogies as an organizing principle for chronicles "restored the linear consciousness of history, which . . . was destroyed by the adoption of figuration as the basic strategy of historical interpretation in the early Middle Ages."[48] The employment of genealogy in these French texts contrasts usefully with how it is used in the *Sulālāt al-Salāṭīn*. Rather than structuring the passage of history in terms of a linear progression of a single lineage, the Malay text integrates numerous lineages into a complex network that has directionality (from ancestors to descendants) but not unilinearity. By studying Spiegel's and my case studies together, we can gain a sense of the topological flexibility of the genealogy device in a variety of contexts. In both cases, genealogy was used to "provid[e] an image of connected historical relationships fundamentally grounded in social reality."[49] Their differing topologies of genealogical time-generation can thus be interpreted through the lens of the different social transformations taking place in thirteenth-century France and seventeenth-century Malaysia.

## CONCLUSION

In this article I have developed a theory of temporalities based on readings of two Southeast Asian historical texts. I have studied the distinctive features of Southeast Asian historical traditions in order to propose a set of theoretical tools for understanding and analyzing how narrative devices generate historical temporalities. I have built my argument inductively, moving from an analysis of temporal structure in two particular texts toward a general theory of the topology and quality of time. By treating temporality as a generated effect of narrative devices, I provide an analysis of these Southeast Asian texts that goes beyond such conceptual dichotomies as linear/cyclical topology or empty/full quality. The theory of temporalities developed here, although it is grounded in Southeast Asian materials, can be placed in useful dialogue with theoretical literature that focuses on European and other sources. In this way, this article attempts to point the way toward a globally inclusive form of theorizing that can illuminate the full range of the world's historical traditions.

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48. Gabrielle M. Spiegel, "Genealogy: Form and Function in Medieval Historical Narrative," *History and Theory* 22, no. 1 (1983), 51.

49. *Ibid*., 52.