



2008 SOCIETY FOR ASIAN MUSIC KEYNOTE LECTURE

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2008
12:30-1:30PM

This keynote lecture will be delivered at the Society for Asian Music's annual membership meeting, held in conjunction with the Society for Ethnomusicology annual conference at Wesleyan University (October 25-28, 2008). Please refer to the conference program for the location of this lecture.

ISLAM, COLONIALISM, AND JAVANESE PERFORMING ARTS: THE LOST GAMELAN OF GRESIK

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Ethnomusicologists interested in historical inquiry into non-western musics are usually hampered by a lack of written sources. The study of gamelan history is no exception. Although some European and Javanese sources give us glimpses of early Javanese musical life, their factual accuracy must be scrutinized. The present study is an attempt to address issues of historiography through the case study of a disappearing gamelan culture in Gresik, a town on the eastern north coast of Java.

According to tradition and scholarly speculation, the growth of elite Islamic commercialism in the north-coastal area of Java during the early period of Islamization (circa 16th century) fueled intensive cultural development in the area. While written and oral sources (European and Javanese) from later centuries often refer to this development, contemporaneous sources cannot be found to support the argument. Some sources describe an era of vigorous performance of gamelan and its related arts in Gresik up to the mid 19th century.

The situation in Gresik today, however, presents a different picture. Several gamelan types, large musical repertoires, lively dances and dance-dramas, and the center of gamelan making mentioned in our early sources cannot be found, and appear to have been forgotten by Gresikians. How do we explain this loss of gamelan culture in Gresik? I will address this question by looking at the changing perspective of Islam, the effect of colonialism, and the encroachment of the Central Javanese Mataram kingdom on East Javanese states. What emerges from this study is the conclusion that, ultimately, a formerly resilient gamelan culture has been extinguished by wars and changes in religious attitudes.