Authenticity, Authority, and Sundanese Historical Memory: The Wangsakerta Manuscript Controversy, 1986–1995

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Abstract

This article reconstructs the controversy over the Wangsakerta manuscripts among historians, archaeologists, philologists, and Sundanese cultural intellectuals between 1986 and 1995. Rather than treating the dispute as a binary contest between authenticity and forgery, it examines how standards of historical evidence collided with the cultural demand for a fuller and more affirming account of the Sundanese past. The study employs a historical research method comprising heuristics, external and internal source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Its principal evidence consists of Edi S. Ekadjati's documentary compilation, contemporary editions and transliterations, seminar papers, press articles, museum documentation, and later historiographical assessments. The controversy developed in three phases. The years 1986–1987 were marked by philological publication and an asymmetrical public record dominated by advocates. The years 1988–1989 brought direct confrontation in academic forums, material testing, and national press coverage. The years 1990–1995 witnessed a decline in collective debate without methodological or cultural consensus. The article argues that the dispute was a struggle over historical authority as much as manuscript authenticity. Critics insisted on provenance, material analysis, paleography, anachronism, and independent corroboration. Supporters emphasized the corpus's cultural value, the scarcity of local written sources, and the need for continued investigation. Its novelty lies in reconstructing the chronology of this shift, identifying the asymmetry of the early documentary record, and showing how academic forums and mass media converted a technical problem of source criticism into a public argument about Sundanese historical memory under the New Order.

Keywords: Wangsakerta manuscripts, Sundanese historiography, source criticism, manuscript authenticity, cultural memory, New Order Indonesia

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Introduction

The controversy surrounding the Wangsakerta manuscripts belongs to a wider problem in Indonesian historiography. Regional histories often depend on bodies of evidence that were unevenly preserved, mediated by colonial institutions, or transmitted through texts whose purposes were not identical to those of modern historical scholarship. Sundanese historiography is a particularly revealing case. Inscriptions, early manuscripts, foreign accounts, and colonial records preserve important fragments, yet they do not provide an uninterrupted narrative of political and cultural change. The limited survival and study of local sources encouraged historians and cultural intellectuals to search for materials capable of connecting the pre-Islamic Sunda kingdom, the Islamic polities of Cirebon and Banten, and the later history of West Java.[1]

The Wangsakerta corpus appeared to answer this need with extraordinary abundance. The texts attributed to a committee led by Pangeran Wangsakerta offered detailed dynastic sequences, regional relations, and chronologies covering the archipelago from the early centuries of the Common Era to the seventeenth century. They also presented a narrative of Gotrasawala, an assembly allegedly convened in Cirebon in 1677, after which a learned committee compiled historical knowledge for twenty-one years. The scope and apparent order of this material made it attractive to scholars seeking to fill lacunae in the Sundanese past. The same features made it suspicious to historians, archaeologists, epigraphers, and philologists accustomed to fragmented evidence and careful corroboration.[2]

The debate was not created by a simple opposition between local tradition and academic history. Sundanese intellectuals had long worked critically with babad, carita, silsilah, and other manuscript genres. Such texts could preserve historical information while also legitimating rulers, articulating moral values, or arranging the past according to literary convention.[3] The Wangsakerta case nevertheless raised the stakes because the corpus was used not only as an object of philological study but also as a foundation for large historical reconstructions. The 1987 edition of *Pustaka Rajyarajya i Bhumi Nusantara I.1* made a portion of the corpus available through transliteration and translation.[4] Earlier, the West Java historical project had already drawn on transliterated Wangsakerta materials when producing *Rintisan Penelusuran Masa Silam Sejarah Jawa Barat*.[5]

The New Order context gave the dispute a political and cultural resonance that exceeded codicology. Regional culture was officially accommodated as part of

[1] Edi S. Ekadjati, *Kebudayaan Sunda: Suatu Pendekatan Sejarah*, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 2014), 114.

[2] Nina H. Lubis, "Kontroversi tentang Naskah Wangsakerta," *Humaniora* 14, no. 1 (2002): 20–21, https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.v14i1.741.

[3] Edi S. Ekadjati, Wahyu Wibisana, and Ade Kosmaya Anggawisastra, *Naskah Sunda Lama Kelompok Babad* (Bandung: Pemerintah Daerah Tingkat I Jawa Barat, 1985), 1–2.

[4] Atja and Edi S. Ekadjati, *Pustaka Rajyarajya i Bhumi Nusantara I.1: Suntingan Naskah dan Terjemahan* (Bandung: Bagian Proyek Penelitian dan Pengkajian Kebudayaan Sunda, Direktorat Jenderal Kebudayaan, Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1987), 3–5.

[5] Saleh Danasasmita, Yoseph Iskandar, and Enoch Atmadibrata, *Rintisan Penelusuran Masa Silam Sejarah Jawa Barat* (Bandung: Proyek Penelitian dan Pengkajian Kebudayaan Nusantara, 1984), 15–20.

national culture, while direct political expression of ethnic identity remained constrained. History and cultural production therefore became important arenas in which Sundanese intellectuals could articulate collective dignity.[6] A corpus that seemed to restore a long and sophisticated past acquired significance beyond its evidentiary status. Conversely, criticism of that corpus could be interpreted by some readers as a denial of Sundanese historical agency, even when critics understood themselves to be defending standards applicable to every source.

Previous scholarship has approached the controversy from several directions. Ekadjati's documentary volume assembles seminar papers, press articles, arguments, and responses from the principal participants.[7] Iskandar's *Sejarah Jawa Barat* represents the incorporation of Wangsakerta narratives into a broad reconstruction of regional history.[8] Lubis's 2002 article offers the most explicit historical critique of authenticity, provenance, and corroboration. Mulyanto places the use of manuscripts within the wider imbalance between local texts and colonial archives in Indonesian historiography.[9] Nugraha, Dienaputra, and Mulyadi reconstruct the intellectual and cultural environment that shaped Saleh Danasasmita, one of the important early advocates of the corpus.[10] These works illuminate the documents, the method, or the intellectual biography of individual participants.

A gap remains in the reconstruction of the controversy as an historical process. Documentary collections tend to place arguments side by side, which can flatten changes in timing, venue, and public authority. Methodological critiques often return directly to the question of authenticity, while biographical studies explain one participant rather than the changing configuration of the dispute. This study addresses the gap by tracing the controversy from 1986 to 1995 and examining how a technical dispute over a manuscript evolved into a public contest over the authority to define Sundanese history.

The article argues that the controversy developed in three distinct but connected phases. Between 1986 and 1987, publication and cultural dissemination created an affirmative narrative before a named opposing camp became visible in the surviving documentary record. Between 1988 and 1989, direct academic confrontation, material testing, and mass-media coverage converted private doubts into a national controversy. Between 1990 and 1995, collective confrontation diminished, but the arguments did not converge. The controversy declined through exhaustion and relocation rather than resolution.

[6] Nina H. Lubis, *Sejarah Tatar Sunda*, vol. 1 (Bandung: Satya Historika, 2003), 265.

[7] Edi S. Ekadjati, ed., *Polemik Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta*, 2nd ed. (Bandung: Dunia Pustaka Jaya, 2017), 5–9.

[8] Yoseph Iskandar, *Sejarah Jawa Barat* (Bandung: CV Geger Sunten, 1997).

[9] Heru Mulyanto, "Penggunaan Naskah Kuno dan Arsip dalam Historiografi Indonesia: Suatu Tinjauan Kritis," *Jumantara: Jurnal Manuskrip Nusantara* 14, no. 1 (2023): 45–63, https://doi.org/10.37014/jumantara.v14i1.3301.

[10] Muhamad Satria Nugraha, Reiza D. Dienaputra, and Raden Muhammad Mulyadi, "Analisis Historis Ruang Budaya Saleh Danasasmita, 1973–1986," *Fajar Historia: Jurnal Ilmu Sejarah dan Pendidikan* 7, no. 2 (2023): 245–58, https://doi.org/10.29408/fhs.v7i2.21199.

This periodization provides the article's principal novelty. It treats the absence of named critics in the documented 1986–1987 phase as evidence of asymmetrical public formation, not as proof that no doubts existed. It also distinguishes disciplinary judgment from public consensus. Lubis ultimately concluded that the surviving manuscripts were not authentic historical sources and could not be used as such in their present evidentiary condition. The broader controversy, however, remained socially unresolved because supporters and cultural audiences continued to attach value to the corpus. The result was not a neutral middle ground. It was a durable separation between the standards governing historical proof and the meanings attached to the manuscripts in Sundanese cultural memory.

Method

The research adopts a four-stage historical method comprising heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Heuristics involved identifying and collecting editions, transliterations, seminar papers, press articles, museum documentation, and later assessments related to the controversy. This sequence follows the methodological formulations of Sjamsuddin, Gottschalk, and Kuntowijoyo.[11] [12] [13] It does not add interviews, ethnography, discourse analysis, or quantitative procedures that were not part of the original study. The article's temporal boundary is 30 April 2025; events and documentation after that date are excluded from the evidentiary reconstruction.

The principal source is Ekadjati's *Polemik Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta*, treated not merely as a retrospective monograph but as a documentary repository containing texts produced during the dispute. Other primary or near-contemporary materials include the 1986 and 1987 editions of Wangsakerta texts, Saleh Danasasmita's 1986 seminar paper, the proceedings of the 1988 Tarumanagara panel, reports in *Tempo* and *Suara Pembaruan*, and the 1989 Gotrasawala papers. Later works by Lubis, Darsa, Hardani, Mulyanto, and Nugraha and his co-authors are used to evaluate the controversy's historiographical afterlife. The procedure follows Abdurrahman's emphasis on identifying, classifying, and managing historical sources and Sulasman's account of systematic source collection.[14] [15]

External criticism examined provenance, date, edition, authorship, institutional origin, and the material status of the sources. It was especially important because the object of study was itself a controversy about external criticism. The method therefore distinguishes the seventeenth-century authorship claimed within the Wangsakerta texts from the physical age of the manuscripts held by Museum Sri Baduga. It also distinguishes the historical existence of Pangeran Wangsakerta from the uncorroborated claim that he directed the full corpus. These are related propositions, but one does not prove the other. Gottschalk's criteria concerning material,

[11] Helius Sjamsuddin, *Metodologi Sejarah* (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2020), 89, 130–32.

[12] Louis Gottschalk, *Mengerti Sejarah*, trans. Nugroho Notosusanto (Jakarta: UI Press, 1986), 32, 46–50.

[13] Kuntowijoyo, *Metodologi Sejarah*, 2nd ed. (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 2003), 82, 84–85.

[14] Dudung Abdurrahman, *Metodologi Penelitian Sejarah Islam* (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2011).

[15] Sulasman and Beni Ahmad Saebani, *Metodologi Penelitian Sejarah: Teori, Metode, Contoh Aplikasi* (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2014), 90.

handwriting, authorship, and the chain of custody supplied the basic logic of the assessment.[16]

Internal criticism evaluated competence, consistency, interest, and independent corroboration. Statements made by participants are treated as evidence of their positions, not automatically as proof of manuscript authenticity. Claims within the corpus about Gotrasawala are marked as claims unless supported by an independent source. Likewise, press reports are read in relation to their titles, dates, and polemical setting. In cases of inconsistent bibliographic data, only details supported by the source or verifiable scholarly metadata are retained, without conjecturing page numbers or publication details.

Interpretation proceeds through historical reasoning and a limited use of Hayden White. White helps explain how advocates and critics selected, arranged, and endowed evidence with different narrative force.[17] The framework is not used to dissolve the distinction between valid and invalid evidence. Narrative construction does not make every historical claim equally reliable. Kartodirdjo's insistence on contextual explanation complements this approach by locating intellectual arguments within institutional and cultural conditions.[18] Historiography then organizes the verified record chronologically and analyses causality, agency, continuity, and change across the three phases.

Results

The Manuscript Object, Its Claims, and the Conditions of Reception

The modern history of the corpus begins with acquisition rather than with the seventeenth-century assembly narrated in the texts. Lubis records that in 1977 the head of Museum Sri Baduga purchased manuscripts through Mohammad Asikin, an intermediary from Cirebon. Asikin claimed that the materials had come from several regions and had been moved to protect them from colonial seizure. The chain of custody before the sale remained undisclosed. Atja and other researchers worked on the texts, but the identity of the earlier owners was not made available to independent scholars.[19] The lack of a verifiable provenance later became one of the strongest external criticisms.

Pangeran Wangsakerta himself was not simply invented by the disputed corpus. Lubis identifies him as a son of Panembahan Girilaya and notes that his political existence is supported by colonial sources. The Cirebon–VOC agreement dated 7 January 1681 also lists his name among the representatives of Cirebon.

[16] Louis Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 95–98, 117–18.

[17] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 7, 10, 213.

[18] Sartono Kartodirdjo, *Pendekatan Ilmu Sosial dalam Metodologi Sejarah* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1992), 15.

[19] Edi S. Ekadjati, ed., *Polemik Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta*, 2nd ed. (Bandung: Dunia Pustaka Jaya, 2017), 5–8.

. This independent evidence establishes a seventeenth-century political actor. It does not establish that the surviving manuscripts were written under his direction, that Gotrasawala occurred as described, or that the complete corpus descends from an authentic seventeenth-century archetype.[20]

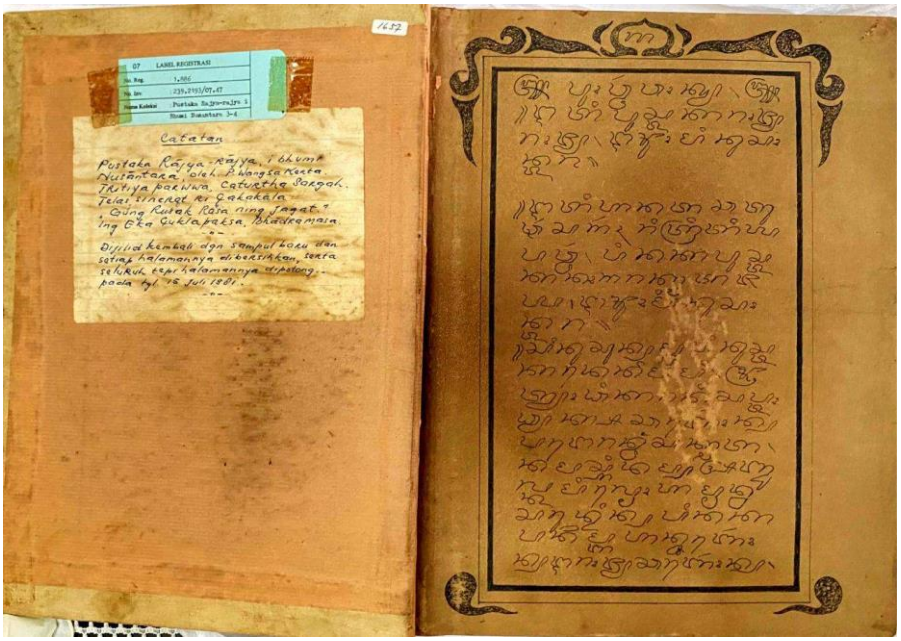


Figure 1. Opening leaf and registration label of *Pustaka Rajya-Rajya i Bhumi Nusantara*, volumes 3–4, registration no. 1.886. Source: Chatarina Bahira Ababyl, personal documentation, Museum Sri Baduga, Bandung, November 28, 2024.[21]

According to the texts, a Gotrasawala was convened at Cirebon in 1599 Saka, corresponding to 1677 CE. Seventy representatives and learned visitors allegedly contributed knowledge from across the archipelago and beyond. A committee chaired by Pangeran Wangsakerta then organized the material over twenty-one years, completing the work in 1698. The resulting corpus was said to contain several series devoted to the archipelago, Java, and Tatar Sunda, with carefully ordered parwa and sargah.[22] Ayatrohaedi and Darsa reproduced these claims in their editions and transliterations.[23] [24]

The physical evidence introduced a different chronology. The Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia tested the manuscript material in 1988 and estimated it at approximately one hundred years old at the time of testing. Lubis inferred that the museum manuscripts could be late nineteenth-century copies rather than

[20] Nina H. Lubis, "Kontroversi tentang Naskah Wangsakerta," *Humaniora* 14, no. 1 (2002): 20, https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.v14i1.741.

[21] Chatarina Bahira Ababyl, field observation and photographic documentation at Museum Sri Baduga, Bandung, November 28, 2024.

[22] Nina H. Lubis, "Kontroversi tentang Naskah Wangsakerta," *Humaniora* 14, no. 1 (2002): 20–21, https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.v14i1.741.

[23] Ayatrohaedi, *Sundakala: Cuplikan Sejarah Sunda Berdasarkan Naskah-Naskah 'Panitia Wangsakerta' Cirebon* (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 2005), 13–14, 72–75.

[24] Undang Ahmad Darsa, *Transliterasi Naskah Kuno: Pustaka Rajya-Rajya i Bhumi Nusantara, Parwa 1 Sargah 2, Karya Tim Pangeran Wangsakerta* (Bandung: Balai Pengelolaan Museum Negeri Sri Baduga, 2013), 40–48.

seventeenth-century originals.[25] This finding did not settle the debate. Supporters argued that the tested objects might be copies of older exemplars. Critics responded that a hypothetical lost archetype could not be used to authenticate the surviving text without a demonstrable lineage or independent corroboration. The difference between the age of the writing support and the age of the textual tradition became a central fault line.

Reception was shaped by the cultural productivity of the material. Research on old Sundanese manuscripts had emphasized how much remained uncatalogued or unedited.[26] Wangsakerta materials seemed to supply names, reigns, genealogies, and connections on a scale rarely available in local sources. The 1987 *Pustaka Rajyarajya i Bhumi Nusantara I.1* and the 1986 *Nagarakretabhumi I.5* gave the corpus academic form through transliteration and translation.[27] [28] Its narratives also moved into popular culture through magazine writing, serialized fiction, and stage productions. The public diffusion of the material therefore preceded a comprehensive source-critical consensus.

1986–1987: Publication before Confrontation

The Seminar Kebudayaan Sunda, held at the Grand Hotel Lembang on 9–11 March 1986, marks the most prominent starting point in the chronology of the controversy. It was not organized solely as an authenticity trial. Saleh Danasasmita presented "Pangeran Wangsakerta sebagai Sejarawan Abad ke-17," framing Wangsakerta as an intellectual figure within a broader discussion of Sundanese culture.[29] This distinction matters. The later controversy can make the seminar appear as though two settled camps had already confronted one another. The surviving documents instead show a forum in which the affirmative historical potential of the corpus received structured presentation.

Two concrete publications followed. Atja and Ayatrohaedi issued *Nagarakretabhumi I.5* in 1986. Atja and Ekadjati issued *Pustaka Rajyarajya i Bhumi Nusantara I.1* in 1987. These editions stabilized titles, transliterations, and translations through institutional publication. Their importance was not limited to access. Publication converted an object with obscure provenance into a source that could be cited, excerpted, and inserted into regional historical narratives.[30] The authority of

[25] Nina H. Lubis, "Kontroversi tentang Naskah Wangsakerta," *Humaniora* 14, no. 1 (2002): 21, 24, https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.v14i1.741.

[26] Edi S. Ekadjati, *Naskah Sunda: Inventarisasi dan Pencatatan* (Bandung: Lembaga Penelitian Universitas Padjadjaran and The Toyota Foundation, 1988), 19–21.

[27] Atja and Edi S. Ekadjati, *Pustaka Rajyarajya i Bhumi Nusantara I.1: Suntingan Naskah dan Terjemahan* (Bandung: Bagian Proyek Penelitian dan Pengkajian Kebudayaan Sunda, Direktorat Jenderal Kebudayaan, Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1987), 18–20.

[28] Atja and Ayatrohaedi, *Nagarakretabhumi I.5: Karya Kelompok Kerja di Bawah Tanggung Jawab Pangeran Wangsakerta Panembahan Cirebon* (Bandung: Proyek Penelitian dan Pengkajian Kebudayaan Sunda, 1986).

[29] Saleh Danasasmita, "Pangeran Wangsakerta sebagai Sejarawan Abad ke-17," paper presented at the Seminar Kebudayaan Sunda, Grand Hotel Lembang, Bandung, March 9–11, 1986, 4, 9.

[30] Edi S. Ekadjati, ed., *Polemik Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta*, 2nd ed. (Bandung: Dunia Pustaka Jaya, 2017), 186, 218.

editors and sponsoring institutions consequently became part of the corpus's public credibility.

No specific opposing participant is documented for 1986–1987, an absence that requires cautious interpretation. It does not prove universal agreement, and Lubis later reported that Atja's plan to use the manuscript for a dissertation had met resistance because of controversy.[31] It does indicate that the public documentary field was asymmetrical. Advocates had publications, seminar papers, media channels, and a regional historical project. Doubts had not yet crystallized into an equally visible coalition with named spokesmen and a formal resolution. The controversy therefore began as a challenge to an already circulating affirmative narrative, not as a balanced debate launched from a common starting point.

1988–1989: Academic Confrontation and Media Escalation

The decisive confrontation occurred at Universitas Tarumanagara in Jakarta on 16 September 1988. The panel was titled *Pengungkapan Informasi Kesejarahan melalui Pengkajian Keabsahan Naskah Sumber*. Atja addressed physical aspects of the manuscripts and Ayatrohaedi addressed historical content. The discussants included Boechari, R. P. Soejono, R. Soekmono, J. Noorduyn, and Uka Tjandrasasmita, with Bambang Sumadio as moderator.[32] The selection placed the editors before senior archaeologists, an epigrapher, and philologists whose expertise directly engaged script, material, chronology, and corroboration.

The panel focused on Wangsakerta texts containing information about Tarumanagara. Its formulation concluded that the manuscripts could not yet be used as primary sources for reconstructing that kingdom. The decision was narrower than the popular slogan that the entire corpus had been conclusively proven fraudulent, but it was still a major institutional defeat for the advocates. It established that cultural promise and editorial labour did not substitute for authentication.[33] It also shifted the burden of proof. Supporters now had to answer specific doubts concerning material, script, anachronism, and the relation between the text and modern scholarship.

Two further forums broadened the dispute. The Seminar Metode Penelitian Filologi at the Faculty of Letters, Universitas Padjadjaran, on 5 December 1988 moved discussion toward philological procedure.[34] On 23 January 1989, Universitas Pasundan hosted the Gotrasawala Pengkajian Naskah-Naskah Kuna Jawa Barat. Historians, archaeologists, philologists, and cultural intellectuals could now argue in

[31] Nina H. Lubis, "Kontroversi tentang Naskah Wangsakerta," *Humaniora* 14, no. 1 (2002): 21, https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.v14i1.741.

[32] *Kumpulan Makalah Panel Diskusi Naskah Sumber Sejarah Kerajaan Tarumanagara*, Universitas Tarumanagara, Jakarta, September 16, 1988, as reproduced and discussed in Edi S. Ekadjati, ed., *Polemik Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta*, 2nd ed. (Bandung: Dunia Pustaka Jaya, 2017), 83–107.

[33] Edi S. Ekadjati, ed., *Polemik Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta*, 2nd ed. (Bandung: Dunia Pustaka Jaya, 2017), 83–107.

[34] Seminar Metode Penelitian Filologi, Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung, December 5, 1988, as documented in Edi S. Ekadjati, ed., *Polemik Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta*, 2nd ed. (Bandung: Dunia Pustaka Jaya, 2017), 191.

an explicitly interdisciplinary setting.[35] The movement from Tarumanagara to philological method and then to the wider manuscript heritage of West Java altered the scale of the dispute. What began as a question about one corpus became a test of how local textual traditions should enter historical knowledge.

Table 1. Source-critical chronology of the Wangsakerta manuscript controversy, 1986–1995

Date	Arena	Development	Historical significance
1986	Seminar Kebudayaan Sunda, Lembang	Saleh Danasasmita presents Wangsakerta as a seventeenth-century historian. Nagarakretabhumi I.5 is published.	Affirmative framing and editorial stabilization precede direct public confrontation.
1987	Sundanology publication project	Atja and Edi S. Ekadjati publish Pustaka Rajyarajya i Bhumi Nusantara I.1 with transliteration and translation.	The corpus becomes more accessible and citable within regional historiography.
16 Sep 1988	Universitas Tarumanagara panel	Editors and supporters confront archaeologists, epigraphers, and philologists. The formulation withholds primary-source status for Tarumanagara history.	First documented institutional confrontation and explicit source-critical restriction.
22 Oct–9 Dec 1988	Tempo and Suara Pembaruan	Headlines and responses debate authenticity, scandal, archaeological criticism, and defence.	A technical dispute becomes a national public controversy.
1988	ANRI material test	The manuscript support is estimated at about one hundred years old at the time of testing.	Supports a late nineteenth-century copy date for the museum object, but does not by itself prove or disprove a lost archetype.
5 Dec 1988	Universitas Padjadjaran	Seminar on philological research method considers problems exposed by the controversy.	Moves debate from verdicts toward disciplinary procedure.
23 Jan 1989	Universitas Pasundan Gotrasawala	Historians, archaeologists, philologists, and cultural intellectuals debate old West Javanese manuscripts.	Broadens the controversy across disciplines and cultural constituencies.
1990	National history meeting and journal publication	Ekadjati reframes Pustaka Rajya-Rajya i Bhumi Nusantara as traditional or national historiography.	Shifts defence from direct physical authenticity toward intellectual and historiographical value.

[35] *Kumpulan Makalah Gotrasawala Pengkajian Naskah-Naskah Kuna Jawa Barat*, Universitas Pasundan, Bandung, January 23, 1989, as discussed in Nina H. Lubis, "Kontroversi tentang Naskah Wangsakerta," *Humaniora* 14, no. 1 (2002): 21, 25, https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.v14i1.741.

1990–1995	Dispersed publication	The available record identifies no comparable national forum on authenticity, with differing positions continuing to appear in separate publications.	Decline reflects loss of collective momentum, not consensus.

Mass media converted this academic sequence into a public controversy. *Tempo* published "Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta Ternyata Palsu" on 22 October 1988.[36] Etti R. S. responded with "Naskah Wangsakerta: Skandal yang Tak Perlu Dimaki" on 12 November.[37] *Suara Pembaruan* reported archaeological challenges on 20 November.[38] Boechari contributed "Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta Bukan Palsu" on 9 December, even as his comparison of the text with modern epigraphic reconstruction supplied one of the reasons for suspicion.[39] The titles compressed complex judgments into memorable positions. They also turned academic disagreement into a question of collective honour and scandal.

The material test undertaken by ANRI intensified the argument because it appeared to supply empirical evidence independent of interpretive preference. Yet its meaning remained contested. Critics treated the estimated age of the material as inconsistent with the asserted seventeenth-century object. Advocates treated it as compatible with a later copy. Both interpretations were logically possible at a general level. Only the critics, however, could point to the actual surviving object. The supporters' older archetype remained hypothetical. This asymmetry explains why material testing weakened the claim of direct authenticity without exhausting every possible claim about textual descent.[40]

The affirmative camp was internally varied. Ekadjati expressed admiration and concern rather than unqualified belief. He argued that the corpus should not be rejected before sustained research and noted the long history of indigenous historical writing.[41] Ayatrohaedi distinguished several levels of historical truth within the texts, ranging from names and places already known elsewhere to statements that remained

[36] Putut Tri Husodo, Ahmadie Thaha, Hasan Syukur, and Riza Sofyat, "Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta Ternyata Palsu," *Tempo*, October 22, 1988, reproduced in Edi S. Ekadjati, ed., *Polemik Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta* (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 2005), 104–7.

[37] Etti R. S., "Naskah Wangsakerta: Skandal yang Tak Perlu Dimaki," *Tempo*, no. 37, year XVIII, November 12, 1988, reproduced in Edi S. Ekadjati, ed., *Polemik Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta* (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 2005), 115.

[38] "Keaslian Kitab Wangsakerta Digugat Para Ahli Purbakala," *Suara Pembaruan*, November 20, 1988, reproduced in Edi S. Ekadjati, ed., *Polemik Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta* (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 2005), 116.

[39] Boechari, "Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta Bukan Palsu," *Suara Pembaruan*, December 9, 1988, reproduced in Edi S. Ekadjati, ed., *Polemik Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta* (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 2005), 119.

[40] Nina H. Lubis, "Kontroversi tentang Naskah Wangsakerta," *Humaniora* 14, no. 1 (2002): 21, 24, https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.v14i1.741.

[41] Edi S. Ekadjati, ed., *Polemik Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta*, 2nd ed. (Bandung: Dunia Pustaka Jaya, 2017), 123, 126–29.

interpretive or uncorroborated.[42] Yoseph Iskandar emphasized the corpus's connection to the growth of Sundanese culture.[43] Saleh Danasasmita presented its scale and organization as evidence worthy of serious investigation.[44] Their shared position was continued study, but their reasons ranged from philological possibility to cultural urgency.[45]

The opposing camp was equally diverse. Noorduyn stressed the unclear origin and ownership history of the collection.[46] Uka Tjandrasasmita examined script and material anomalies.[47] Soekmono regarded the texts as a modern-looking compilation of historical knowledge and narrative. R. P. Soejono considered some prehistoric concepts implausibly advanced for the claimed date. Taufik Abdullah asked whether the corpus represented history discovered or history invented. Edi Sedyawati proposed treating it as a genre of historical folklore until its purpose and reliability could be established.[48] The critics did not reject Sundanese history. They rejected exceptional evidentiary treatment for a source because it promised a desirable past.

Several internal criticisms converged. The narrative was unusually comprehensive and chronologically neat. Some passages appeared to reproduce the structure or even the errors of modern historical scholarship, particularly J. G. de Casparis's reconstruction of ancient Mataram and Srivijaya. The alleged assembly of seventy delegates in 1677 was not found in VOC *Dagregisters*, despite the political sensitivity of Cirebon and the scale of the gathering. The scripts, papers, and handwriting were judged inconsistent across manuscripts or too recent by several specialists. The corpus also supplied detailed rulers for polities that could not be corroborated through independent inscriptions or archaeological evidence.[49] Hardani's later comparison with the Wanua Tengah III inscription illustrates the continuing need to test individual claims against independent primary evidence rather than accept or reject the entire corpus by reputation.[50]

[42] Ayatrohaedi, *Sundakala: Cuplikan Sejarah Sunda Berdasarkan Naskah-Naskah 'Panitia Wangsakerta' Cirebon* (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 2005), 164.

[43] Yoseph Iskandar, "Keterikatan Naskah-Naskah Kuna Jawa Barat dengan Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan Kebudayaan Sunda," paper, Lembaga Penelitian Universitas Pasundan, Bandung, January 19, 1989, 3.

[44] Saleh Danasasmita, "Pangeran Wangsakerta sebagai Sejarawan Abad ke-17," in Edi S. Ekadjati, ed., *Polemik Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta* (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 2005), 29, 43.

[45] Edi S. Ekadjati, ed., *Polemik Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta*, 2nd ed. (Bandung: Dunia Pustaka Jaya, 2017), 67–69, 153, 192–97.

[46] J. Noorduyn, "Beberapa Catatan tentang Naskah Sumber Sejarah," in Edi S. Ekadjati, ed., *Polemik Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta*, 2nd ed. (Bandung: Dunia Pustaka Jaya, 2017), 89–92.

[47] Uka Tjandrasasmita, "Naskah-Naskah Kuno Jawa Barat bagi Kajian Sejarah," paper presented at Pengkajian Naskah-Naskah Kuno Jawa Barat, Universitas Pasundan, Bandung, January 23, 1989, 1.

[48] Edi S. Ekadjati, ed., *Polemik Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta*, 2nd ed. (Bandung: Dunia Pustaka Jaya, 2017), 83–107.

[49] Nina H. Lubis, "Kontroversi tentang Naskah Wangsakerta," *Humaniora* 14, no. 1 (2002): 22–25, https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.v14i1.741.

[50] Kayato Hardani, "Rajya Rajya Ing Jawa Madhya, Raja-Raja Mataram Kuna Abad 9–10 Masehi: Perbandingan antara Naskah Pustaka Rajya-Rajya i Bhumi Nusantara dengan Prasasti Wanua Tengah III," *Berkala Arkeologi* 30, no. 1 (2010): 39–60, https://doi.org/10.30883/jba.v30i1.388.

1990–1995: Decline without Resolution

Following the intense debate of 1988 and early 1989, the documentary record reveals no comparable national forum devoted to authenticity between 1990 and 1995. Debate shifted from collective confrontation to publication. In March 1990, Ekadjati presented *Pustaka Rajya-Rajya i Bhumi Nusantara* as a form of national historiography at a national history meeting in Bandung. The resulting article argued that the text should be considered a systematically organized work of traditional historiography and that seventeenth-century Cirebon possessed an intellectual environment in which such a work was conceivable.[51] This represented a strategic change. The case for value no longer depended only on proving the physical object to be a seventeenth-century original.

The period from 1990 to 1995 is characterized by a decline in debate rather than a resolution of the controversy, as the main arguments had already been articulated. No new material discovery or independent manuscript lineage transformed the evidentiary balance. Participants continued to publish, but the controversy lost the concentrated institutional setting that had forced direct replies.[52] Silence therefore cannot be equated with consensus. It records a change in the arena and intensity of debate. The technical question of authenticity remained open to further evidence, while the practical status of the surviving manuscripts divided scholars.

Lubis's later assessment helps clarify the difference. External criticism led her to classify the museum manuscripts as non-contemporary and therefore non-authentic for the history they narrated. Internal criticism found weak corroboration for detailed claims such as the rulers of Salakanagara and Tarumanagara. She concluded that the corpus could not be used as a historical source in its existing evidentiary condition, although it remained a legitimate object of philological study and could be reconsidered if an archetype or earlier copy were found.[53] This was a disciplinary conclusion. It did not erase the continuing cultural reception of the corpus or produce agreement among former advocates.

Discussion

From Authenticity to Historical Authority

The results show that the controversy cannot be reduced to a disagreement about the age of paper. It concerned the relationship among object, text, and narrative authority. The physical manuscripts could be late copies, while a text might theoretically preserve older information. Yet that possibility has historical value only when a lineage or independent corroboration can be demonstrated. The supporters emphasized possibility and cultural significance. The critics emphasized the distance

[51] Edi S. Ekadjati, "Pustaka Rajya-Rajya i Bhumi Nusantara: Sebuah Historiografi Nasional," *Pemerintahan* 1, no. 1 (July 8, 1990): 5–13, described in Edi S. Ekadjati, ed., *Polemik Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta*, 2nd ed. (Bandung: Dunia Pustaka Jaya, 2017), 206.

[52] Edi S. Ekadjati, ed., *Polemik Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta*, 2nd ed. (Bandung: Dunia Pustaka Jaya, 2017), 18, 190.

[53] Nina H. Lubis, "Kontroversi tentang Naskah Wangsakerta," *Humaniora* 14, no. 1 (2002): 23–26, https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.v14i1.741.

between possibility and proof. Their dispute arose because the corpus was already being used to write regional history before that distance had been resolved.

This sequence explains the intensity of the 1988 confrontation. Publication created an asymmetry of consequences. If the manuscripts were used and later proved unreliable, they could restructure public knowledge through unsupported names, dates, and genealogies. If they were rejected too quickly and later proved valuable, a rare local record could be lost to academic prejudice. Both risks were real, but they were not methodologically identical. Source criticism does not require a historian to prove forgery before withholding factual assent. The burden rests on the claim that a source reliably reports the past.

The distinction between primary, secondary, and philological value is therefore essential. A manuscript may be an authentic nineteenth-century artefact even if it falsely presents itself as a seventeenth-century document. It may reveal the historical imagination, cultural politics, linguistic practice, or intellectual anxieties of the period in which it was copied or composed. Such value does not authorize its unsupported claims about the first millennium. The most defensible position is not a vague compromise between authenticity and forgery. It is a claim-by-claim evaluation that states precisely what the object can evidence.

Ekadjati's position evolved in a direction compatible with this differentiation. By describing *Pustaka Rajya-Rajya i Bhumi Nusantara* as traditional historiography, he shifted attention from the immediate verification of every fact to the form and ambition of the work.[54] This move preserved an object of study even when primary-source status was contested. It also created a potential ambiguity. If traditional historiography is treated as evidence of historical consciousness, the category is productive. If it is used to reintroduce uncorroborated factual claims, it evades rather than answers the critics.

Narrative Construction and the Limits of Relativism

White's concept of historical emplotment helps explain why the same corpus generated incompatible stories. Advocates narrated discovery, recovery, and cultural restoration. The manuscripts filled an absence and demonstrated an indigenous capacity to produce an archipelagic history. Critics narrated methodological danger. The texts were too complete, too modern, and too conveniently aligned with twentieth-century scholarship. In one narrative, abundance remedied colonial and archival loss. In the other, abundance was itself a symptom of fabrication.

The value of White's approach lies in exposing these narrative investments. Its limit lies in the temptation to treat competing constructions as evidentially equivalent. The external and internal criticisms remain decisive. A narrative of cultural recovery cannot establish provenance. A narrative of suspicion cannot prove a specific forger. Historical interpretation begins after sources have been criticized, not instead of criticism. The article therefore uses White to analyse how arguments acquired meaning, not to suspend judgment about what the surviving evidence can support.

[54] Edi S. Ekadjati, ed., *Polemik Naskah Pangeran Wangsakerta*, 2nd ed. (Bandung: Dunia Pustaka Jaya, 2017), 62–82.

This distinction also reframes the supporters' appeal to indigenous historical tradition. The existence of *Negarakertagama*, *Carita Parahyangan*, *Sanghyang Siksakandang Karesian*, *Amanat Galunggung*, and *Sejarah Banten* demonstrates that precolonial and early modern Indonesians produced sophisticated texts. It makes a seventeenth-century historical project conceivable. Conceivability, however, is not authentication. Every manuscript must still be examined in its own material and textual history. Ekadjati's inventories themselves emphasize careful identification and description.[55]

New Order Cultural Politics and the Moral Weight of the Past

The New Order context explains why methodological criticism acquired moral weight. Regional identity could be cultivated through language, literature, heritage, and history so long as it remained compatible with the national framework. A manuscript that organized Sundanese and archipelagic antiquity offered a resource for cultural dignity. It also addressed a common frustration with colonial archives, whose survival and institutional accessibility often gave European perspectives disproportionate authority. Mulyanto's wider historiographical critique makes this imbalance clear.[56]

The desire to correct archival asymmetry was intellectually legitimate. It did not justify lowering the standard of proof for a local manuscript. Indeed, treating local sources indulgently would reproduce another hierarchy by assuming that they could not withstand the same scrutiny as European records. The critics' strongest contribution was therefore procedural equality. A Sundanese manuscript should not be dismissed because it is local, but neither should it be accepted because it serves a needed identity. Provenance, paleography, language, material, authorial competence, and corroboration apply to all sources.

The advocates nevertheless identified a problem that the critics could not solve by rejection alone. Historical communities live with gaps, and those gaps are not emotionally neutral. Nugraha and his co-authors show how Saleh Danasasmita's scholarship grew from a cultural environment committed to the preservation and explanation of Sundanese values.[57] For such intellectuals, the corpus was not only data. It represented an opportunity to reconnect fragments of the past. The controversy became painful because methodological restraint could sound like renewed deprivation, while cultural enthusiasm could sound like indifference to truth.

The media amplified this moral polarization. Headlines translated conditional scholarly assessments into declarations of falsehood, scandal, defence, and accusation.

[55] Edi S. Ekadjati, *Naskah Sunda: Ikhtisar Kandungan dan Cara Penelitiannya* (Bandung: Girimukti Pasaka, 1988), 30.

[56] Heru Mulyanto, "Penggunaan Naskah Kuno dan Arsip dalam Historiografi Indonesia: Suatu Tinjauan Kritis," *Jumantara: Jurnal Manuskrip Nusantara* 14, no. 1 (2023): 45–63, https://doi.org/10.37014/jumantara.v14i1.3301.

[57] Muhamad Satria Nugraha, Reiza D. Dienaputra, and Raden Muhammad Mulyadi, "Analisis Historis Ruang Budaya Saleh Danasasmita, 1973–1986," *Fajar Historia: Jurnal Ilmu Sejarah dan Pendidikan* 7, no. 2 (2023): 245–58, https://doi.org/10.29408/fhs.v7i2.21199.

They widened access to the debate, but they also compressed distinctions between a recent copy, a fabricated text, an unreliable historical source, and a culturally valuable narrative. Those categories are not interchangeable. The public controversy hardened because participants were often answering different questions under the same vocabulary of asli and palsu.

Continuity, Change, and Historiographical Consequences

The long-term consequence was not the elimination of Wangsakerta materials. The corpus continued to appear in regional history, cultural writing, and debates over early polities such as Salakanagara. Its persistence confirms that a disciplinary verdict does not automatically govern public memory. Rosidi's *Ensiklopedi Sunda* reflects the wider cultural field in which the manuscripts remained recognizable.[58] Later philological and manuscript studies also continued to emphasize the need to preserve, catalogue, edit, and interpret local texts, including those from Cirebon and Indramayu.[59]

The controversy did, however, change the terms of use. Scholars increasingly had to identify whether Wangsakerta information was being cited as an authenticated historical fact, a later copy, traditional historiography, literary evidence, or the subject of a controversy. That requirement is a methodological achievement. It prevents the binary choice between erasure and credulity. The corpus can remain visible in historiography while its claims are graded according to independent support.

The periodization also refines the interpretation of the decline phase. The absence of national forums after 1990 did not mark the end of the controversy. It marked the movement of the problem from direct debate into citation practice. Every later work that included or excluded Wangsakerta claims made a small historiographical decision about authority. The controversy became less spectacular but more dispersed. Its afterlife was embedded in footnotes, textbooks, local histories, heritage claims, and arguments about the earliest kingdoms of western Java.

The asymmetry of the initial phase is equally significant. Because advocates established the first public narrative through editions and cultural dissemination, critics entered the debate in a reactive posture. This helps explain their unusually categorical language. They were not evaluating a source confined to an archive. They were attempting to interrupt a narrative already moving through government-supported history and popular media. The timing of criticism shaped its tone, just as the tone shaped the public sense that academic method threatened cultural possession.

A balanced historiography must preserve both the source-critical hierarchy and the history of attachment. The present museum objects do not provide authenticated seventeenth-century testimony simply because they bear Wangsakerta's name. At the same time, the controversy itself is a rich historical source for late twentieth-century Sundanese intellectual life. It reveals how scarcity, institutional authority, media

[58] Ajip Rosidi, *Ensiklopedi Sunda: Alam, Manusia, dan Budaya* (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 2000), 156.

[59] Nurhata, *Kajian Pernaskahan Cirebon dan Indramayu* (Jakarta: BRIN Publishing, 2023), https://doi.org/10.55981/brin.558.

circulation, regional pride, and disciplinary standards interacted under the New Order. In White's terms, the controversy generated rival narratives. In the historian's terms, those narratives remain answerable to unequal bodies of evidence.[60]

Conclusion

The Wangsakerta manuscript controversy emerged from the intersection of evidentiary scarcity and cultural expectation. The corpus promised an unusually complete Sundanese and archipelagic past at a moment when regional historical consciousness was cultivated largely through cultural channels. Its editions, transliterations, and use in West Java historical writing gave it authority before provenance, material age, and internal claims had been independently resolved.

Between 1986 and 1987, advocates dominated the documented public field through seminar presentation and publication. Between 1988 and 1989, the Tarumanagara panel, the Padjadjaran philology seminar, the Pasundan Gotrasawala, ANRI material testing, and national media transformed private doubts into a public controversy. Between 1990 and 1995, direct confrontation declined, but no shared conclusion replaced it. Supporters continued to defend the corpus's value and research potential. Critics insisted that the surviving manuscripts lacked the provenance, material consistency, and corroboration required for use as historical sources.

The article's contribution is to distinguish this unresolved social controversy from the more specific conclusions of historical criticism. Lubis rejected the museum manuscripts as authentic sources for the remote past, while leaving open reconsideration if an earlier exemplar or independent corroboration emerged.[61] The public dispute remained unresolved because cultural value and historical reliability answered different questions. Confusing them produced both premature acceptance and overly simple dismissal.

The novelty of the study lies in its chronological reconstruction and its analysis of historical authority. The controversy was not born as a balanced exchange. It developed when critics challenged an affirmative narrative already supported by editions, institutions, and popular circulation. Academic forums and mass media then redefined a technical question of source criticism as a struggle over Sundanese historical memory. The enduring lesson is not that local manuscripts should be distrusted. It is that their cultural importance increases, rather than diminishes, the obligation to state exactly what the evidence can and cannot prove.

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