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Inscriptions of Sumatra, IV: An Epitaph from Pananggahan (Barus, North Sumatra) and a Poem from Lubuk Layang (Pasaman, West Sumatra)²

The preceding report by Daniel Perret, Heddy Surachman & Repelita Wahyu Oetomo on recent archaeological surveys in the northern half of Sumatra mentions inscriptions in Indic script found respectively near the Makam Ambar in Barus, North Sumatra, and at the village Kubu Sutan in *nagari* Lubuk Layang, *kec.* Rao Selatan, *kab.* Pasaman, West Sumatra. The purpose of this note is to publish my readings of these two inscriptions, both of which are written in Old Malay.³ The first, clearly an epitaph and almost certainly engraved to commemorate the death of a Muslim, according to the authors of the report, bears a date equivalent to 29 June 1350 CE, which makes it the earliest Islamic inscription in Indic script from Sumatra.

1. École française d'Extrême-Orient, Paris; UMR 5189, Histoire et Sources des Mondes Antiques, Lyon. The research for this article has been undertaken as part of the project DHARMA 'The Domestication of "Hindu" Asceticism and the Religious Making of South and Southeast Asia', funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement no 809994). See <https://dharma.hypotheses.org>.

2. For previous installments of my 'Inscriptions of Sumatra', see Griffiths 2011, 2012 and 2014 in the bibliography. I thank Andrea Acri, Dániel Balogh, Henri Chambert-Loir, and especially Daniel Perret for their comments that helped me interpret the two inscriptions presented here.

3. Old Malay is here understood to be "the variant of the Malay language found in documents written in an Indic (i.e., Brāhmī-derived) system of writing" (Griffiths 2018: 275). For representing the Old Malay texts, I use the transliteration system proposed in Balogh & Griffiths 2020.



Fig. 1 – Photograph of the Pananggahan Old Malay inscription. Repelita Wahyu Oetomo, Sept. 2019.

The *raison d'être* of the second inscription, datable to the same period, is less clear; this second inscription, almost certainly from a religious context where Islam had not yet penetrated, casts interesting light on the history of application of Indic verse forms to Nusantara languages.

The Pananggahan Tombstone

The text is deciphered here from photos furnished by Daniel Perret, one of which is shown as fig. 1. I refer to the preceding report for photos showing the shape and decoration of the stone.

Text

- (1) (vars)uri diṃ sākavarṣa 1-
- (2) 272 hi[lam] Ā(śā)ḍha kṛ-
- (3) ṣṇapakṣa caturdvimṣat· (m)aṅgala-
- (4) vāra tatkāletu bhagi(n)da hilaṃ

Commentary

1. (vars)uri: This word is still obscure to me, and the reading therefore uncertain, although all constituents of *vars* seem detectable on the photographs and no clear alternatives present themselves for transliterating the engraved

characters. Unless the text we have is the continuation of a preceding part engraved on another support, we expect here an auspicious word of the type *Om* or *svasti* that is normally found before a dating formula in the Indic inscriptions of Indonesia, including those of Northern Sumatra (see examples in Griffiths 2014: 217, 220, 225, 234). I have considered but rejected the possibilities (a) that we are dealing with a form of the ancient name of Barus⁴ or (b) that we have here a form of the word *suri* in the meaning “queen,”⁵ or in any of the other meanings that this Malay word can have.

1. *diṃ*: understand *diṃ*, i.e. /di-ṃ/. For another epigraphic instance of the preposition *di* with the definite article *ṃ*, in the inscription Tandihat III from Padang Lawas, see Griffiths 2014: 225.

2. *hi[lam]*: I have no satisfactory hypothesis for reading the second syllable and interpreting this word. The reading tentatively chosen here is based on the assumption that we are dealing with scribal sloppiness, due to anticipating of the crucial verb form of this text that comes in its expected place at the end of the text. I have also considered the possibility that the word beginning with *hi* here is some bisyllabic Arabic term suitable to the context, perhaps an allusion to the Hijra era, although this would not be more natural in the context than the word *hilaṃ* is.

3. *caturdvimṣat*: since it is incomprehensible if it means “four two six,” this sequence probably has to be understood as corrupt form of the Sanskrit numeral *caturvīmśati* “twenty-four.” In the spelling *caturvīmśati*, this last word would look very close to *caturdvimṣat* in the original script. See below p. 58.

4. *tatkāletu*: understand *tatkāla itu*, joined in vowel sandhi. On vowel sandhi in Old Malay texts, see my review in *BKI* 166 (2010): 137 (mentioning *parāhūram* = *parahu orang* in the Tanjung Tanah manuscript); there are also instances among the Old Malay inscriptions of West Sumatra (e.g., Bukit Gombak I, lines 13 and 15, *sāsanenan* = *sāsana inan* and *dharmmenan* = *dharmma inan*; Padang Roco, *punyaeni* = *puṇya ini*). For discussion of the Old Malay expressions *tatkāla itu* = *sana tatkāla*, see Griffiths 2014: 225 and 227 and 2018: 279.

4. Because a toponym would hardly fit the context and one would expect to find in Indic script a spelling close to that given in a contemporary Indic text from Indonesia, the *Deśavarṇana*, where one reads *barus* in stanza 13.2 *hi lvas lāvan samudra mvaṃ i lamuri batan lāmpuṃ mvaṃ i barus, yekādinyaṃ vatāk bhūmi malayu* “Lwas and Samudra, as well as Lamuri, Batan, Lampung and Barus – Those are the main ones among the Malay lands” (tr. Robson 1995).

5. Because in an inscription in Indic script, one would expect a form of the word closer to the Sanskrit *parameśvarī*.

Translation

barsuri (?) In Śaka year 1272, demise, (month?) of Āṣāḍha, waning fortnight, the twenty-fourth (day of the month), a Tuesday: that was the time of his/her highness' demise.

The date

The date is expressed in the Indian *pañcāṅga* (“five-element”) calendar system, in a manner quite comparable to what we see in the aforementioned inscription Tandihat III from Padang Lawas, which is 171 years older (Griffiths 2014: 224–226). Our dating formula involves the following variables:

Era	Śaka
Year	1272
Month	Āṣāḍha
Fortnight	<i>kṛṣṇa</i> , i.e. waning
Number	<i>caturdvimśat</i>
Weekday	Maṅgala, i.e. Tuesday

In my interpretation above, p. 57, *caturdvimśat* is a localized form, if not to say an error, for *caturvimśati* and meant to indicate the 24th civil day of a full month starting at new moon, i.e. the 9th *tithi* of the waning fortnight.⁶ If one fills in the above parameters, while using the value 9 for the *tithi*, in the online date conversion software Pancanga,⁷ the result is June 29, 1350 CE, which date fell on the Tuesday required by the text. The result is confirmed by the software HIC, which I have used to create the diagram shown here as fig. 2. None of the other interpretations of *caturdvimśat* that have occurred to me, namely the values 14 (*caturdaśa* in Sanskrit) or 12 (*catur* 4 + *dvi* 2 + *śat* 6), yield a result as satisfactory as the one I propose here. Why this date is expressed using civil day rather than *tithi* remains an open question.⁸

6. “Occasionally the day of the full month, undivided into fortnights, is given, either in place of or in addition to the *tithi* of the fortnight” (Salomon 1998: 174 n. 39). See Pingree 1982 for further details. Unfortunately, all of the examples of counting days of the full month given by Salomon and Pingree date to the first half of the first millennium CE.

7. <https://www.cc.kyoto-su.ac.jp/~yanom/pancanga/>

8. The only allusion to this counting system that I have so far been able to find in the seminal publications of Louis-Charles Damais about Indonesian dates is Damais 1952: 21 (about the 8th-century Hampran inscription from Central Java): “le nombre « 21 » fait penser à un comput solaire, par ailleurs inconnu à Java (il semble avoir existé — au moins à une date beaucoup [plus (AG)] récente — à Sélèbès en pays bugi)”; see also Damais 1955: 248 (about the same inscription): “nous ne croyons pas que les nombres au-dessus de 15 aient — au moins à Java — été employés dans un comput luni-solaire”.

If my interpretation is correct and if it may be assumed, with Daniel Perret, Heddy Surachman & Repelita Wahyu Oetomo in their report on the discovery of this tombstone, that we are dealing with a specifically Islamic epitaph, then we must note the total absence of explicit indicators of the knowledge of Arabic language/script and of Islam in the Old Malay text, which would contrast with the other early Islamic inscriptions in Old Malay known so far, the ones from Minye Tujuh (Aceh) and Pengkalan Kempas (Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia).⁹ And, still assuming that the Islamic affiliation of this tombstone is a valid hypothesis, we may draw the conclusion that this tombstone, just a few decades more recent than the oldest dated Islamic tombstones that have so far been found on Sumatra,¹⁰ is indeed the oldest Islamic tombstone known so far from the Barus area. The Arabic epitaph previously claiming that honor was found at the exact same cemetery in Barus and bears a date also falling in 1350 CE,¹¹ but some months after June in that year. It is very regrettable that the Arabic inscription is damaged while the preserved part does not contain the name of the deceased person, which is apparently unmentioned in the Old Malay epitaph. Nevertheless, the correspondence of the shapes of the two tombstones has led the archaeologists to propose that the two might have marked a single grave. If that was the case, then we must find an explanation for the fact that the conversion of the Hijra date contained in the Arabic epitaph and that of the Śaka date contained in the Old Malay epitaph does not lead to the exact same date in the common era, a situation somewhat different from the disagreement between dates observed in the case of the Minye Tujuh epitaphs,¹² or the disagreement of dates between the texts written in Jawi and in Indic scripts on the Pengkalan Kempas tombstone.¹³ I must leave open the questions (1) whether there is any issue with the reliability of the conversion mechanisms applied to the Śaka or Hijra dates on the two Pananggahan tombstones, (2) whether there are problems with the decipherment of the

9. See van der Molen 2008 and De Casparis 1980.

10. See Guillot & Kalus 2008: 177–179, for stones dated 1297 (Malik al-Sālih) and 1326 CE.

11. See Perret, Heddy Surachman & Repelita Wahyu Oetomo in this volume, fig. 3.

12. “One problem is that the Arabic inscription, although referring to the same event, displays a different date: not 781 AH but 791 AH (1389 AD). As other details of the date are the same, it is generally assumed that a mistake was made in the second digit of the year in one of the two inscriptions” (van der Molen 2008: 356).

13. “[...] one of the riddles surrounding the Pěngkalan Kěmpas inscriptions: the approximately four years’ difference between the dates given in the Kawi and Jawi inscriptions. [...] I can see only two possible solutions of the discrepancy between the two dates. The explanation which first comes to one’s mind is that of a mistake in either or both of the dates. [...] In the light of these considerations it has to be concluded that both dates are correct, implying that the Kawi and the Jawi inscriptions are not contemporary” (De Casparis 1980: 6–7).

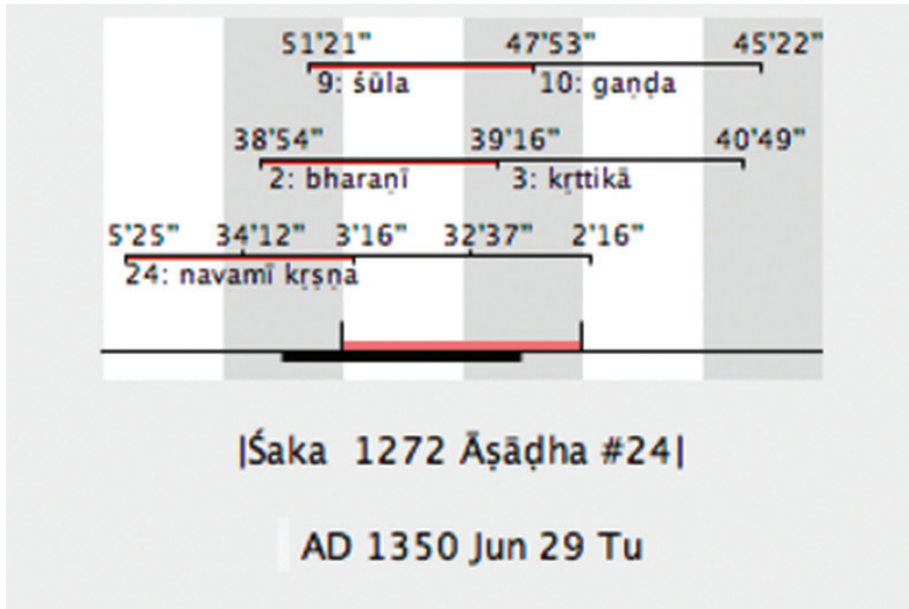


Fig. 2 – Diagram showing the dating parameters of the Pananggahan tombstone inscribed in Old Malay.

Arabic text — in which two cases it may be possible to bridge the narrow gap between the two Barus epitaphs — or (3) whether the disagreement between the dates actually means that the two epitaphs do not belong to a single grave.

The Lubuk Layang Stela

This inscription, engraved in a form of script practically indistinguishable from the script that is typical of Ādityavarman’s inscriptions, was discovered in the 1970s¹⁴ and briefly mentioned by Satyawati Suleiman (1977: 2)¹⁵ and Machi Suhadi (1990: 227, 1995–96: 21) before it was finally published by

14. The sources at my disposal mention various dates: April 1975 (Satyawati Suleiman 1977: 2), “sekitar tahun 1970” (Machi Suhadi 1990: 227), or 22 April 1976 (Hunter 2015: 324) — the latter date is the one indicated on the typescript that I consider to have been produced by Boechari, on which see n. 17.

15. Satyawati Suleiman 1977: 2, with reproduction of an estampage of face B in plate 3. Her information is partly misleading: “The characters are Old Sumatran script, which look slightly different from the characters in Adityawarman’s inscriptions, yet there are still enough similarities. The characters are very much unlike those used by the kings of Sriwijaya and also unlike Javanese characters. They have more similarities with the characters used in Cambodia. (according to Boechari)”.

Budi Istiawan (1994).¹⁶ Apparently unaware of this publication, Hunter (2015) reproduces an unpublished reading that he found among the papers of J.G. de Casparis kept at Leiden University.¹⁷ None of the existing publications is accompanied by reproductions allowing to verify the readings, and it does not appear to have been observed so far that the inscription is metrical — in other words, that we are dealing with a poem —, while awareness of the metrical structure makes it possible to achieve a more reliable reading and interpretation. For these reasons, it may be useful to include my decipherment here, even though the text remains very challenging.

My reading is based on the estampages bearing the numbers n. 2005 and n. 2006 held at the EFEO in Paris, which were made during my 2011 campaign of documenting inscriptions in West Sumatra. In my edition, in lost parts whose metrical structure is known, I use ~ to indicate a lost short syllable, and – to indicate a lost long syllable. The breve sign ˘ on top of a vowel means that it is short but needs to be read as long to suit the meter.¹⁸ The several instances of a closing symbol are here represented by the pilcrow sign (¶).

16. This article is based on an unpublished report by Budi Istiawan (1992).

17. Hunter (2015: 375 n. 60) attributes the typescript to De Casparis, but I suspect it is by Boechari, because various Indonesian publications refer to a reading by Boechari and it is likely that Boechari would have shared it also with De Casparis. The text printed by Hunter does not agree precisely with any of the readings I have myself copied in the De Casparis archives, but I suspect this may be due to typing errors on Hunter's part, and so I do not believe that he has seen a different document than the one I have, which exactly resembles the Boechari typescripts that I have collected in preparing the edition of Boechari's selected writings.

18. For general information on how Indic meters work, in a Nusantara context, see Zoetmulder 1974: appendix III ("Kakawin metres"), pp. 451–472.



n. 2005 / N. Lubuk Layang A

Fig. 3 – Lubuk Layang stela, face A. Estampage EFEO n. 2005.
Photo courtesy of the EFEO.

Edition

A (East face, fig. 3)

- (1) {2 akṣ.} I[n̄dra] ...
 (2) {1 akṣ.} (pu)r̄ṇ(n)endra(bh)u ...
 (3) ra ma {1 akṣ.} surimadaṇa ...
 (4) dha(r)i[n̄i]¹⁹ // 0 // ¶ // 0 // ¶ // ...

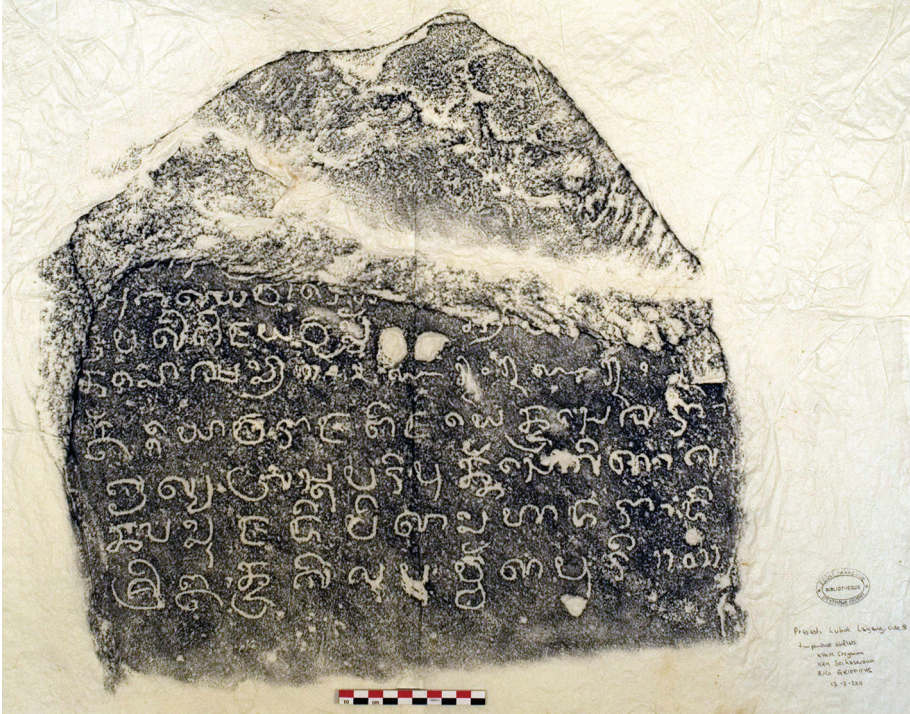
(5) Om̄

Amarabijaya yauvāsūk(ṣm)a jāy(6)endravarmman·,
 satatavibhava p(ū)jāpa(7)ñcadānāsila(ta)tvā,
 sadavaca(ṇa) bi(8)seṣābhakti dī mātapītā,
 sakala(9)[ja](nas)utr̄ptisvasthaśanto(ṣabandh)[u]²⁰

(10) *about 7 akṣaras illegible* ¶ 0 //

19. It seems likely that what precedes formed part of at least one stanza, but the damage is too severe to be able to reconstruct what the meter was.

20. The meter is Mālinī, containing four *pādas*, each of which has the pattern ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ — — ∪ — — ∪ — ∪ — ∪. The second *pāda* seems to have one syllable too many, but I suspect that the unclear *ta* in *pañcadānasila(ta)tvā* was intended to be crossed out. In any case, the meter supports reading *pañcadānāsilatvā*, and if this is understood as equivalent to *pañcadānāsīlatva*, we can obtain a more or less plausible sense.



n. 2006 / N. Lubuk Layang B

Fig. 4 – Lubuk Layang stela, face B. Estimage EFEO n. 2006.
Photo courtesy of the EFEO.

B (West face, fig. 4)

(1) *only traces of two akṣaras*

˘ ˘ (2) sugatayavā(so) – ˘ – – ˘ – ˘ – ॐ

(3) (nṛ)patibijayavarmma – – (n·) – ˘ – – (4) na mokṣam.²¹
 || 0 || ¶ // 0 // ¶ // 0 //

(5) Om̐

yauvarājabijayendrasekharā,

(6) kṛtya Astu²² paripurṇna sobhitā,

ka(7)n pamūja di pitā mahādarā,

di (8) śrī Indrakila(pa)rvvatāpuri || 0 ||²³

Translation

Face A:

Indra ..., ... earth.

Om. Jayendravarman is victorious over the immortals, youthful, subtle; is always mighty (due to?) being one who has the customary practice of the five gifts of worship (*pūjā*); he speaks the truth (? *sadavacaṇa*); is specially devoted to his parents; is a friend for the contentment, health and satisfaction of all people.

Face B:

... abode of the Buddha ... king Vijayavarman, ... death.

Om. May the deeds of the crest-jewel of victorious heirs apparent be perfect [and] beautiful with (*kan*) zealous (*mahādara*) offerings (*pamūja*) to parent(s) in the town of Śrī Indrakīlaparvata.

21. This is the remainder of another Mālinī stanza. See n. 20. Since we lack 2×15+2 syllables before *sugatayavā(so)*, we may infer that at least one more line has been lost above the one here numbered 1.

22. *kṛtya Astu*: the apparent dot between the two words is probably accidental damage to the stone.

23. The meter is Rathoddhatā, containing four *pādas*, each of which has the pattern – ˘ – ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ – ˘ – ˘ ˘ .

Commentary

Although it does not contain a date, this inscription can confidently be dated to the 14th century, based on the similarity of its script to that found in the preceding inscription, in the inscriptions of Ādityavarman, and in the Tanjung Tanah manuscript (Kozok 2015).

Previous scholars have mainly commented on the names figuring in this inscription and proposed various scenarios in which the person or persons whom it celebrates may have been related — politically, chronologically, and in terms of family relationship — with Ādityavarman. I do not have anything to add on those issues, except to warn that any hypothesis is bound to be fragile as long as a comprehensive study of the Ādityavarman corpus has not been undertaken, and as long as the linguistic features of that corpus, to which this inscription seems comparable, are not given due account. In this case, I especially caution against the assumption, which underlies previous discussions of this inscription, that the diversity of names encountered in this text means that we are dealing with more than one protagonist.

Although it is found in a damaged context, the presence of the word *sugata* indicates that the religious context is (still) Buddhist. The theme of respect for parents and grandparents that we find expressed in two stanzas of the present inscription is also a red thread in the Ādityavarman corpus.²⁴

Previous scholars do not seem to have stated explicitly that this inscription is formulated in a kind of mixed language, containing a conjugated Sanskrit verb form (*astu*) side by side with Malay prepositions (*di*, *kan*) and derived forms (*pamūja*). Such a mixture is not found in the Ādityavarman corpus, where a clearer distinction can be made between texts that are wholly or partly in Old Malay (Bukit Gombak I, Gudam II) and all other texts which are in a language that is admittedly very eccentric as Sanskrit, but nevertheless clearly not intended to be Malay. Furthermore, as stated above, the fact that this text is formulated largely, or perhaps entirely, in verse form has also escaped scholarly attention. Since versification is the hallmark of literary aspirations in the Indic cultural world (what Sheldon Pollock has called the “Sanskrit Cosmopolis”),²⁵ the fact that the text is at least in some sense linguistically Old Malay combined with the fact that it is composed in verse means that this text constitutes a precious new piece in the puzzle that is the history of Malay literature.²⁶

24. Cf. the inscriptions Saruaso II and Paninggahan and the inscription on the Mañjuśrī statue from Candi Jago.

25. See Pollock 1996.

26. On this topic, see Griffiths 2018: 279 and Griffiths 2020.

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