

# Some Notes on the Epigraphic Heritage of Srivijaya

*By Prof. Dr. J.G. de Casparis*

*Inscriptions associated with the Srivijaya, though only a few, serve as an important source of the empire's history.*

Compared with the considerable numbers of Old Javanese and Old Balinese inscriptions, those found in the island of Sumatra are relatively few. Of those available, the inscriptions of the fourteenth-century king Adityavarman constitute the majority; a relatively small number can be associated with Sriwijaya.

Only seven inscriptions actually mention the name of Sriwijaya, while a few others, mostly fragmentary, can on various grounds be attributed to this great empire. Of these seven inscriptions, three, *viz.* those of Kedukan Bukit, 'Telaga Batu' (in fact from Sabokingking, east of the city of Palembang) and Talang Tuwo belong to the city of Palembang or its immediate vicinity. The inscriptions of Karang Brahi and Palas Pasemah belong to the western part of the province of Jambi and the southernmost part of the province of Lampung respectively. The sixth, the inscription of Kota Kapur, comes from the island of Bangka and the last one, probably from 'Ligor' (Nakhon Si Thammarat) in peninsular Thailand.

The inscriptions dated have been

written towards the end of the seventh century: 683, 684 and 686. The Ligor stone, dated 775 A.D., is considerably later, but they all fall within a narrow period of less than a century. The undated, mostly fragmentary inscriptions can, mainly on paleographical grounds, be assigned to approximately the same period. The language used in these inscriptions, is mostly old Malay; six of the seven were written in that language. The Ligor stone stands somewhat apart for it is drafted in Sanskrit.

It is therefore clear that the epigraphic heritage of Sriwijaya belongs to the first century of the existence of the state and this limits its usefulness. Despite such limitations, the inscriptions are, however, of immense value as they constitute the only authentic source, *i.e.* written source, of the history of this great empire. The Chinese, Arabic and Indian sources are, of course, of immense importance, but they have to be used with great care. The Chinese sources deal only with certain aspects of Sriwijaya and may sometimes misunderstand the actual institutions. On the other hand, the Arabic and Indian accounts usually suffer from gross exaggerations.

The inscriptions supply us with reliable information if — and that is an important limitation — one can read and understand them pro-

perly. If one considers that the Asokan inscriptions, despite intensive study for more than 150 years, still pose problems that are only gradually being solved, it is hardly surprising that the Sriwijayan inscriptions, which have been seriously studied for less than half the above-mentioned period, still present serious problems of reading and interpretation. Only a few points are discussed in this paper.

## **The paleography of the Sriwijayan inscriptions**

The inscriptions dated between A.D. 683 and 775 are written in scripts usually called 'Pallava' due to its similarity with the script of the Pallava charters of about the same period. During this time, a broad similarity between the scripts used in southern India, Sri Lanka and parts of mainland and insular Southeast Asia was observed. There is not yet any clear local differentiation. Hence, in most cases, it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to assign an inscription of unknown origin to a particular area on the basis of paleography alone.

As to the Sriwijayan inscriptions, one can clearly distinguish three different types of script among those issued between 683 and 686.

The inscription of Kota Kapur (island of Bangka) is written in a

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*Map of the sites of the inscriptions*

very regular and elegant type of script. It has relatively long and slender letters with some decorative elements which do not interfere with the basic function of the script, i.e. unambiguous communication. The inscriptions of Karang Brahi, Telaga Batu and some of the fragmentary texts are also drafted

in this calligraphic but functional script. This style of writing differs considerably from that used in the inscriptions of Mulawarman in East Kalimantan, Purnawarman in West Java and Mahendravarman in Cambodia which can be dated back to the beginning of the seventh century.

The main difference rests on what I have elsewhere called the 'equal height' principle. All simple letters, excluding vowel marks, ligatures, viramas etc., have the same height in the Srivijayan inscriptions earlier mentioned. This manner of writing facilitates reading for it immediately separates the basic forms from their accessories.

The pre-Srivijayan, so-called Palava, inscriptions including, e.g. the Mahendravarman inscriptions, show a number of letters such as *a*, *ra*, *la* and *ka* which extend far below or above the frame within which most of the other letters are contained. The *ka*, for example, has a kind of downward extension which in other letters would be interpreted as a subscript *-u*. From this point of view, the type of script used in the Srivijayan inscriptions must be regarded as an improvement as it promotes both legibility and order.

It is difficult to determine whether this innovation was first used in Sriwijaya and subsequently followed by others. One finds other examples of scripts using the equal height principle in mainland Southeast Asia in about the same period, i.e. the last quarter of the seventh century.

A totally different type of script, though also adhering to the equal-height principle, is used in the Kedukan Bukit inscription. The script has no trace of ornamentation. It is purely functional, square and straight. In this respect, it clearly foreshadows later development exemplified by the Ligor inscription and the Javanese script of inscriptions of A.D. 760 and later.

Finally, a third type of script, exemplified by the Talang Tuwo inscription, occupies a sort of intermediate position. Its script is stylized too, but not to the extent the Kota Kapur inscription is. It is slightly decorated and not as slender as the Kota Kapur script. Letters such as the *pa*, *sa*, *ma*, *ga* and a few others are just about as broad as they are high.

#### **No Chronological Significance**

However, it should be stressed that the difference among the

scripts is only stylistic. It has no chronological implications. Hence it is not surprising to see quite a number of different styles of writing used side by side in the short inscriptions at Mahabalipuram, all giving different *birudas* and epithets of King Rājendravarman.

In the case of the Sriwijayan inscriptions, it is striking that the most simple, 'ordinary', type of script is used in the Kedukan Bukit inscription. It provides the author one good reason to reconsider the contents of this important, but difficult, inscription.

### The Kedukan Bukit Inscription

Whereas most other Sriwijayan inscriptions, such as the stone inscriptions of Kota Kapur, Talang Tuwo, Telaga Batu etc., are engraved in carefully cut stones with smooth surfaces, the Kedukan Bukit inscription is cut in an ordinary boulder of the kind used for the numerous *siddhayatra* inscriptions. The simplicity of the stone and of the script used for the text is in agreement with the contents of the inscription.

This is by no means a *prasasti* of the ordinary kind (such as one sees, for instance, in the Ligor inscription of 775), but a rather dry and factual account of the movements of the *dapunta hiyang*, perhaps the king or else, a high official of the empire.

If it is a report, the next question that arises is: by whom and for whom is it written? Coedès was, of course, clearly aware of this problem, for he started the discussion of the inscription with the words: *quelle est au juste l'objet de cette inscription?* His reply is, as the learned scholar himself admits, somewhat unsatisfactory and mainly negative in that he mainly combats Van Ronkel's interpretation without giving a clear alternative.

The most striking aspect of the inscription is its reference to *siddhayatra* both at the beginning and at the end. It started with the Dapunta Hiyang embarking (*naik sāmwa*) in order to seek (literally: take, *manambill*) *siddhayatra*, and end with him making Sriwijaya

*jayasiddhayatra*, prosperous and ... (here the stone is broken off).

In this connection, it should be noted that there is a strange lapse in the otherwise excellent transcription by Coedès. It has apparently crept into the transcriptions of later scholars, *viz.* the omission of *jaya* following *sriwijaya*, presumably by a kind of haplology, not rarely found in manuscripts.

One may wonder whether the meaning of *jayasiddhayatra* is very different from that of *siddhayatra* itself when *jaya*, in its present usage, merely adds a kind of victorious or honorific tinge to some names, for example in Jaya Ancol and Irian Jaya which used to be just Ancol and Irian Barat. On the other hand, one may argue that there must have been a clear dif-

ference between the two. However, two objections were raised against this view. First, why is *siddhayatra*, not *siddhiyatra* used. The second, more serious, objection stems from the Mahayanic doctrine which states that such supernatural powers can be acquired by a person but can hardly be conferred upon an empire.

The interpretation proposed by B. Ch. Chhabra, who discussed the term in connection with the inscription on the stone slab of an engraved stupa from Bukit Meriam, is more acceptable to the author. In this inscription by the captain of a ship named Buddhagupta, he wished that 'they all' (presumably all the inmates of the ship) may be *siddhayatra* in all their enterprise'. Chhabra is right that there can hardly be any question of magical

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### The Kedukan Bukit Inscription is a factual account of the movements of Dapunta Hiyang.

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ference between the two.

It is, however, difficult to come to any conclusion without first getting a clear idea of the meaning of *siddhayatra*. This term has given rise to much discussion. Van Ronkel took it as a synonym of the later term *berkat*, derived from Arabic *barakat*, a blessing that a holy or merely older person can give to someone on the point of making an important decision, such as a marriage, a voyage or perilous enterprise. This meaning fits well the context of the Kedukan Bukit inscription. The 'seeking' of *siddhayatra* clearly preceded an important enterprise by the Dapunta Hiyang who, some four weeks later, would leave (the capital?) with a considerable number of troops. After his return, he would have conferred this newly acquired blessing on his country, i.e. Sriwijaya.

Coedès prefers a different interpretation and compares *siddhayatra* with the well known word *siddhi* which is usually an indication of supernatural powers of the Buddha or of Bodhisattvas of the highest state (such as flying through the

powers in this case. The meaning 'success' or 'successful' seems to be required by the context.

Such an interpretation would also fit the context of the Kedukan Bukit inscription. The Dapunta Hiyang would, at the first mentioned date, have left (the capital) to seek, by prayers and meritorious deeds, success in the enterprise, probably a military campaign, which he was to undertake four weeks later. It has been suggested first by Mr. Boechari that the date of his departure, the 11th of Vaisakha, was chosen in order that the meritorious acts (perhaps of the kind mentioned in detail in the Talang Tuwo inscription of 684) would be proclaimed on the 'Thrice Blessed Day' of all Buddhists: the Full Moon of Vaisakha. This would imply a two- or three-days' journey, assuming that the Dapunta Hiyang would have made sure to be at his destination well in advance of the scheduled date of his pious acts. After the, presumably successful, completion of the enterprise or campaign, the Dapunta Hiyang would have decided to share the



success of his victory with his subjects, probably in the form of booty and captives.

The site of the siddhayatra ceremony, no doubt, should be identified as 'Telaga Batu', the Stone Pond at or near Sabokingking, where a considerable number of stones with the inscription siddhayatra or jayasiddhayatra have been found. Where Dapunta Hiyang came from is, however, more difficult to determine. One might suggest a place near Kedukan Bukit, the presumed site where the inscription was found, but the journey from there to 'Telaga Batu' would only take a few hours.

The author doubts, however, that Kedukan Bukit is really the place of origin of the stone inscription of 685. The stone was dis-

which the campaign was directed. Coedès' reading *mata jap* is qualified as uncertain and does not make sense. Krom suggested correcting it to *malayu*, which does make sense but does not correspond with the still visible parts of the aksara. In particular, the second letter does not appear to have been *la*, but seems to have been either *ka* or *to*. The third letter, of which only the upper part remains, could well have been a *ya*, but the vowel mark for subscript *-u* is conjectural as the lower part of the letter is broken off.

In his paper submitted for the SPAFA Workshop, Mr. Boechari made an ingenious conjecture concerning the reading of this passage. He noticed traces of the beginning of a subscript *-u* below the *ma*, which is clearly visible. He there

to belong to separate *aksaras*. They most probably have to be taken together to form a *ya* with or without *-u*. Boechari's reading of *mu* instead of *ma* is, a definite improvement. However, too many possibilities exist, so the best decision is to wait for further discoveries.

### Another Passage Needing Interpretation

This is not the only uncertain passage in the Kedukan Bukit inscription. In lines 9 and 10, a small lacuna is present between *marwuat wanua* at the end of line 9, and *sriwijaya jayasiddhayatra* at the beginning of line 10. Coedès translates this as: '*vint et fit le pays ..... Srivijaya, doué de puissance magique*', but his interpretation seems to have ignored the lacuna. Nobody knows what the Dapunta Hiyang made or did (*marwuat*) in order that Sriwijaya would become successful and prosperous. The parallel version discussed in *Pras. Indon.* II, I *e* is of no help in this case, as the gap is even larger at this spot.

The account of the mysterious movements of the Dapunta Hiyang in the spring of A.D. 683 is still a problem as it was when Coedès studied it half a century ago. An analysis of the problems of reading and interpreting the inscription may pave the way to their ultimate solution. However, no progress can be made until new materials are discovered.

### Other Sriwijayan Inscriptions.

The other inscriptions are much more straightforward. They relate the various activities of one or more of its earliest rulers. As one may have expected in such a far-flung maritime empire, these activities centred around punitive expeditions (Kota Kapur); curses against all possible evildoers, especially potential traitors (Kota Kapur, Karang Berahi and Palas Pasemah); and also pious foundations (Talang Tuwo).

It is perhaps no coincidence that the most carefully engraved inscription is that on the hexagonal column of Kota Kapur; those of

## Dapunta Hiyang's embarkation point and destination are still an object of research.

covered in 1920 in the words of Coedès '*chez une famille malaise de Kedukan Bukit, au bord du Sungei Tatang, affluent du Musi, au pied de la colline de Bukit Seguntang*'. Coedès adds in a footnote that a 'resident' of Palembang at that time, L.C. Westenek, explained that the stone had, for a long time, been in the possession of the family which used it as a mascot during boat races. As the story of how the family came to possess this inscribed stone is unknown, it is difficult to ascertain its true site of origin. It could be 'Telaga Batu' as a stone fragment with part of the same text, now in the Jakarta museum, originates from that site. In that case, one has to look for the residence of the Dapunta Hiyang, no doubt also the capital of the kingdom, at some place a few days' travel by *prau* away from 'Telaga Batu'.

### Where Did Dapunta Hiyang Go?

Different suggestions have been made regarding the place against

fore, read the first two syllables as *muka* or *mukha*. He also pointed out that the left part of the letter read as *ja* or *ya* (or *jap* by Coedis and *yu* by Krom) could well be the upper part of an initial *u*. He agreed with Coedès that what followed may be the upper part of a *pa*, but he saw no *virama* above it though he recognized an *anusvara*. This would read *upang* in front of which (di muka) the Dapunta Hiyang would have arrived. Indeed, an important village called Upang does exist at some 30 km. distance downstreams of Palembang. Its main part consists of a nearly four km. long 'boulevard' entirely built on poles and planks above the coast. Was this indeed the place against which the efforts of the Dapunta Hiyang were directed?

Having examined the passage on the original at the Musium Pusat in Jakarta, the author believes that the reading, though by no means impossible, is hardly likely. The two vertical strokes which were identified as the upper part of an initial *u*= and the left downward stroke of a *pa* seem to be too close together

Karang Berahi and Palas Pasemah seem no less carefully engraved, but they are badly worn. One would expect that imprecations were an important element of Sriwijayan policy, corresponding to the threats and blackmail of modern states. Whether such curses were real deterrents is, of course, impossible to determine. Even if they were not, they could, however, be used as a *casus belli* to justify Sriwijayan intervention. These curses, the most elaborate version of which is found on the stone of 'Telaga Batu', are of particular interest as they throw some light on the major preoccupations of the rulers. All sort of rebellious activities are mentioned with precise definitions as in a code of criminal law (chapter: 'Crimes against the State'). Although it may seem that some of these definitions are of a somewhat theoretical nature in general, they are based on actual experience and practice.

### Curses Against Kins

The 'Telaga Batu' inscription has the most elaborate of the imprecations. Whereas the shorter curses of the Kota Kapur, Karang Berahi and, presumably, Palang Pasemah inscriptions are mainly directed against possible disloyalty by local representatives of central authority, viz. the *datus* appointed by the king, the Telaga Batu inscription includes the very highest authorities below the king — the *yuvuraja*, *pratiyuvuraja* (the prince immediately following the crown prince in rank) and the *rajakumaras* (the other princes) — among the possible rebels.

In publishing the inscription in 1956, the author added that the king might have most to fear from his own relatives eager to take his place. Mr Boechari strongly disagreed and thought of such a situation as 'unthinkable' in an Indonesian *keraton*. Yet, the unthinkable does happen. The violent quarrel between Amangkurat I and his eldest son, the Pangeran Adipati Anom (The later Amangkurat II), contributed to the destruction of the keraton at Plered in 1677 and the flight and death of Amangku-

rat I.

In the same period, an even worse quarrel arose between the Sultan of Banten and his Crown Prince, who did not hesitate to conclude an alliance with the Netherlands East India Company and had his father imprisoned — the old Sultan died a few years later in prison. The Buddhist chronicles of Ceylon, a pious Buddhist country, abound in intrigues of this kind. Wars between brothers and cousins are almost common-place. One gets the impression that many princes felt few scruples if they saw a chance to rise to the throne.

One thing seems certain: the stone containing the most elaborate version of imprecations, which was to be 'drunk' by the appointed governors (*datu*) before leaving for

Since the Kota Kapur, Karang Berahi and, presumably, Palas Pasemah inscriptions are abbreviated replicas of the Telaga Batu stone inscription, the latter should be slightly earlier than the rest. This gives a strong additional argument in favour of the location of the capital of Sriwijaya at or near Palembang, at least in its early phase. The ancient harbour of the empire could have been on the northern bank of the river near Sabokingking, the place where the officials took off after the oath ritual.

### Kind of Scripts Used

To return to the scrip, two styles have been noted: the ordinary,

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### *Imprecations defining rebellious activities are contained in some inscriptions.*

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their respective provinces, must have stood at not too far a distance from the capital. If subsequently they committed any of the crimes mentioned in the inscription, they would automatically be killed by the effect of the imprecation (with some help from the king's spies?). This would imply that the site of the stone, Sabokingking on the eastern fringe of the present city of Palembang, would not be too far from the royal compound in or near the capital. It also implies that the royal compound could not have been too far away from Sabokingking. Thus this inscription strongly indicates that the capital was in the Palembang area during the period when the stone was in use for the oath ceremony. This time limitation is of course essential for no proof that this oath was in use throughout the existence of the empire is available. Its script is of the early type, virtually similar with that used in the Kota Kapur stone of A.D. 686, suggesting that the 'Telaga Batu' stone is roughly contemporary with the former.

functional script of Kedukan Bukit on the one hand and the elegant and decorative script of the imprecations on the other. The script of the Talang Tuwo inscription of 684 stands about midway between these two. It is quite regular and square, obviously engraved with great care but without the elegant shapes of the oath inscriptions. Its contents are also quite different. They speak of a grant by the Dapunta Hiyang of a park for the benefit of all creatures, in particular travellers who would find there lodging and food. This pious gift is part of a *pranidhana* by the Dapunta Hiyang who vowed that all his future acts would be directed towards seeking ultimate enlightenment.

The above analysis shows a kind of correlation between the external form, especially the script, and the contents of the Sriwijayan inscriptions.

### The Old Malay Language of the Inscriptions

The language of the majority of

the inscriptions — the main exceptions are the great 'Ligor' inscription(s) of 775 and a few fragments — has been called Old Malay which is clearly the ancestor of classical and modern Malay and Indonesian. It shows, however, a few particularities — the prefixes *mar* (Malay *ber-*) *ni-* (Malay *di-*) and *makā* with a causative meaning (*maka gila* = Malay *menggilakan*), as well as words such as *inan*, 'this'. These are all clearly Sumatranese features preserved in languages such as Minangkabau and Batak. Old Malay is clearly a bureaucratic language. Though structurally and in its basic vocabulary Austronesian, it contains not only a large percentage of Sanskrit words, especially technical terms of Buddhism and administration, but also

stone of Candi Sewu. Despite some minor difference in language, such as the use of *war* instead of *mar*, there is little doubt that the use of Old Malay in Java reflects direct or indirect influence from Sriwijaya.

Such influence also appears in a few Malay words found in Old Javanese inscriptions. Owing to the close relationship between the two languages, such influence is often impossible to prove. For example, is *tiga* in Old Javanese and *krama* in modern Javanese a synonym of *telu* or *tlu* due to Malay influence or does it belong to the common Austronesian heritage?

However, a few examples seem beyond doubt.

The so-called import inscription of the Kedu, an edict of King Bali-

are also among the divine powers involved in the oath. One gets the impression that all kinds of deities, including those supposed to be powerful in different regions, were included in those imprecations.

It is therefore not surprising that, from the tenth century, the puzzling name of Waprakeswara (or Baprakaeswara) is found at the beginning of the imprecations. Before this, the name is only attested in the fourth- or fifth-century inscriptions of king Mulavarman in East Kalimantan. It seems unknown in India or Cambodia. Therefore, a strong proof indicates that the use of this name in Java must be attributed to a close relationship between East Kalimantan and East Java in the tenth century. The Javanese, hearing about (or experiencing?) the great power of Waprakeswara in East Kalimantan, must have decided to incorporate this god, no doubt regarded as a manifestation of Siwa, into their pantheon.

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*Old Malay, the language used in most inscriptions, is the foundation of classical and modern Malay and Indonesian.*

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### Unity Among Indonesians

some functional elements such as *tathapi*, 'however' (modern *tetapi*).

The commercial power of Sriwijaya may have spread the use of this language to other parts of the archipelago and may thus have contributed to the later growth of the Indonesian language.

### Linguistic Influence

The first phase of this development is probably already noticeable in the 8th-9th century, when a small number (seven are at present known) of inscriptions in Old Malay were found. All but one have been recovered from northern central Java (Sojomerto south of Pekalongan, Dieng, Gondosuli in the kabupaten of Temanggung). One was uncovered in southern central Java, viz. the foundation

tung dated A.D. 907, shows the use of the well known Malay numeral *satu* (spelt *satū*) in a context where the meaning 'one' is clearly required. Is it a mere coincidence that the king's personal name Balitung is identical with that of the 'tin island', commonly spelt Billiton? Since reasons to suppose that this king married into the Mataram royal family exist, relations with the Malay world can by no means be excluded.

Another example from the same inscription concerns the gods and spirits invoked as protectors of the new foundation. In connection with Nagas and other semi-divine creatures, Tandung Luah, a name that is nearly identical with Tandrum Luah, is the spirit twice invoked at the beginning of the oath inscriptions of Srivijaya. He serves as the principal protector of the kingdom.

A curious enumeration of higher and lower gods of the Hindu pantheon and Old Austronesian deities

The subject of inter-Indonesian relations in ancient times is fascinating but little is known except such obvious topics as Javanese influence in Bali or in Banjarmasin. However, Java also was influenced by the other parts of the archipelago. Such exchanges were of great interest in the later shaping of the Indonesian nation. The well-known lists of foreigners in the inscriptions at the time of Airlangga and later show that traders from the remote parts of the archipelago were never included in such lists. In other words, there was a clear distinction between Indonesians and non-Indonesians. Despite continuous rivalry, perhaps, a kind of solidarity existed between Indonesians of many different islands. Although Java no doubt played a great part in these inter-Indonesian relations, it is quite likely that the role of Srivijaya in these developments has been an important, if not a decisive, one.