

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

The Laguna Copper-Plate Inscription: Text and Commentary

Antoon Postma

Philippine Studies vol. 40, no. 2 (1992): 183–203

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

The Laguna Copper-Plate Inscription: Text and Commentary

Antoon Postma



Based on the stone tools that have been recovered during archaeological excavations, the history of man in the Philippines can be considered to have started at least 40,000 years ago. Since that early starting point, a variety of human remains, tools and artifacts, still being excavated, testify to a consistent human habitation of the Philippine archipelago, and its social interaction and trade. However, until recently Philippine history is less than 500 years old, if the history of a country is understood to begin with the first established calendar-dated document, originating in, referring to, and/or recovered within the boundaries of that country. General consensus has it that the dividing line between Prehistory (or Protohistory as Dr. Manuel called it) and History in the Philippines, is the year 1521, when Antonio Pigafetta wrote his diary notes for the records of his Captain Ferdinand Magellan on his "discovery"—voyage to the group of islands now known as the Philippines.

The Philippines' southern neighbor, Indonesia, can claim a much earlier history, since the oldest documents, the Kutai Inscriptions, discovered in East-Kalimantan, are estimated to date from the fifth century A.D. These inscriptions, written on stone or thin sheets of copper, have contributed significantly to the history of Indonesia during its first millennium of our era.

The Philippine Copper-Plate Inscription

In January 1990, a crumpled, blackened, thin piece of metal was offered for sale to the National Museum in Manila, after previous efforts to sell it to the world of antiques had met with little interest. The attractive aspect of this plate of copper (as laboratory analysis later established) was the fact that this copper sheet, measuring about

20 x 20 cm., was fully covered on one side with an inscription in ten lines of finely written characters.

When I saw the inscription on the copper-plate I immediately thought that this was from Indonesia, and had nothing to do with the Philippines. Because nothing similar had ever been found in the Philippines before. It could well be another faked "document" like the ones that at first were considered "National Treasures," but afterwards proved to be clever falsifications. Because the copper-plate had been discovered along the Lake of Laguna east of Manila, I decided to call it the Laguna Copper-Plate Inscription or LCI for short.

The script appeared to me rather similar to the standard form of the Early Kawi Script used around the tenth century A.D. (Stutterheim 1940, 3-28) like the OJ Randoesari inscription of Central Java, dated 905 A.D. (Stutterheim 1940, 3-28). According to Dr. de Casparis, an expert in Indonesian paleography, this type of script can be found from Balie (Indonesia) in the East, to Thailand and Champa (Central Vietnam) in the West, since the scripts of these areas were not yet differentiated from each other during that period. With the help of Holle's lists of Indonesian Scripts (Holle 1882) I was able to identify most of the *aksaras* (letters), notwithstanding the poor tracing I had made. But after returning several times to Manila, I made some clear photographs of the inscription that settled any previous doubts as to the correct reading of the LCI.

I continued contacting Dr. de Casparis, and he clarified several characters that were doubtful to me. As of now, the whole LCI has been transcribed, but the interpretation of certain parts of the text still remains difficult, and not all the individual words are properly understood as yet.

Contents

The LCI seems to be a semi-official certificate of acquittal of a debt incurred by a person in high office, together with his whole family, all relatives and descendants. The debt mentioned involved a substantial amount in gold, that apparently was still unpaid. Our "document" of acquittal (the LCI) is confirmed by other leaders and officials, some of whom are mentioned by name, as well as the place (or area) of their jurisdiction.

The tenth or last line of the LCI seems to be a warning¹ to anyone who might question or doubt the truth of the "document." But the complete pronouncement we probably will never know for sure, because this tenth line ends in mid-sentence, inferring that at least one more copper-plate is part of the whole inscription. Unfortunately, the LCI is the only one known to have "survived."

Date and Provenance

It is fortunate that this inscription is supplied with a date so accurate that the exact moment of issuance can still be determined centuries afterwards, thanks to an elaborate system of astronomical calculations, which were usually mentioned at the beginning of an inscription. The LCI bears the Saka date of 822, or 900 A.D.,² which situates it at the beginning of the reign of King Balitung of Central Java, without implying that the LCI necessarily originated from that area.³ In connection with the reign of King Balitung (899-910), a great number of inscriptions on copper-plate have been found, all of them in the OJ language, and most of them charters or official Royal Decrees. The majority have the customary mention of the name of the King. However, in contradistinction to that, the LCI is not written in the OJ language, is not a charter, nor does it mention the name of the King, or any other name in the traditional formula.

It is unfortunate that the LCI was not found in the context of a scientifically controlled archaeological excavation, but discovered during dredging activities with a mechanical conveyor in the Lumbang River, a job done by local sand-and-gravel companies at various locations along Laguna de Bay in the Province of Laguna. My subsequent investigations along the Lumbang River indicate that the LCI was indeed retrieved from that river around 1987. Moreover, certain persons, after viewing a photopicture of the LCI, alleged, without being asked, that they had seen a similar piece of copper-plate with inscriptions around the same time (1987). Its importance, however, was not realized then, and the possible second page of the LCI might have ended up in a local junk yard and been irretrievably lost to posterity. The surviving page of the copper-plate, however, provides sufficient evidence for scholarly investigation and study. The text and analysis of the Laguna Copper-Plate Inscription follow:

Transcription of LCI

- 1) swasti śaka warṣātīta 822 waisākha masa ding jyotiṣa caturthi kṛṣṇa-paksa so-
- 2) mawāra¹ sāna tatkāla dayang aṅkatan lawan dñanña sānak barnāran si bukaḥ
- 3) anakda dang² hwan³ namwran dibari waradāna wi śuddhapātra ulih sang⁴ pamgat senāpati di tuṅḍu-
- 4) n barjā⁵ dang hwan nāyaka tuhān⁶ pailah jayadewa.dikrama dang hwan namwran dñan dang kāya-
- 5) stha śuddhā nu diparlappas⁷ hutangda walānda kā l su⁸ 8 dihadapan dang hwan nāyaka tuhān pu-
- 6) liran kasumuran dang hwan nāyaka tuhān pailaḥ barjādi gaṇaśakti. dang hwan nāyaka tu-
- 7) hān binwāñan barjādi biśruta tathāpi sādānya sanak kaparāwis ulih sang pamgat de-
- 8) wata bar jādi sang pamgat mḍang⁹ dari bhaktinda diparhulon sang pamgat.ya makāña sādāña anak
- 9) cucu dang hwan namwran śuddha ya kaparāwis dihutangda dang hwan namwran di sang pamgat dewata.ini grang
- 10) syāt syāpantāha paścāt ding āri kamudyan āda grang urang baruvara wlung lappas hutangda dang hwa . . .¹⁰

1. The second day of the seven-day week. Old-Javanese (OJ) inscriptions usually mention the days of the five- and six-day weeks as well. Old-Malay (OM) ones do not.
2. *dang* is a honorific particle occurring in OJ and OM texts.
3. *hwan* seems to be an honorific particle, but it is not known in any OJ or OM inscription. Could it be Old-Tagalog (OT)?
4. *sang* is a typical OJ honorific particle, used frequently in OJ inscriptions and usually combined with *hyang*. It occurs in combination with *pam(a)lat* as well.
5. *barjā*, as suggested by de Casparis, should be read as *barjādi* (to become, represent, delegate), as in lines 6, 7 & 8, and is probably an error of the engraver.
6. *tuhān* is related to *tuha* (old, the Elder), and to *tua* of Malay and Kapampangan in the same meaning. Here it means: a Leader, an Alderman, etc.
7. *lappas* in OT has the same meaning as OM in the expression found in the "Vocabulario . . ." of San Buenaventura: "*lappas na ang utang ko sa iyo*" (my debt to you has now been dissolved, or acquitted).
8. *kā* is an abbreviation of *kati*, and *su* of *suwarna*. Both words signify a certain weight of gold. See below.
9. *Mḍang* occurs as an old place name in Indonesia. The *Mḍang* of the LCI might have been introduced to the Philippines by Indonesian migrants in memory of their original homebase in Java.
10. From here the text continues on a second plate, which probably was recovered, but not preserved.

Translation of LCI¹

(1) Hail! In the Saka-year 822; the month of March-April; according to the astronomer: the fourth day of the dark half of the moon; on (2) Monday. At that time, Lady Angkatan together with her relative, Bukah by name, (3) the child of His Honor Namwran, was given, as a special favor, a document of full acquittal, by the Chief and Commander² of Tundun (4) representing the Leader of Pailah, Jayadewa.³ This means that His Honor Namwran, through the Honorable Scribe⁴ (5) was totally cleared of a salary-related⁵ debt of 1 *kati* and 8 *suwarna* (weight of gold),⁶ in the presence of His Honor the Leader of Puliran, (6) Kasumuran; His Honor the Leader of Pailah, representing Ganasakti; (and) His Honor the Leader (7) of Binwangan, representing Bisruta. And, with his whole family, on orders of the Chief of Dewata (8), representing the Chief of Mdang, because of his loyalty as a subject (slave?)⁷ of the Chief, therefore all the descendants (9) of his Honor Namwran have been cleared of the whole debt that His Honor owed the Chief of Dewata. This (document) is (issued) in case (10) there is someone, whosoever, some time in the future, who will state that the debt is not yet acquitted of His Honor . . .⁸

1. To be considered as preliminary, pending further research.

2. The Chief of Tundun seems to have occupied a higher position than the others, because he additionally was a *Senāpati* (Commander).

3. Although the name is Sanskrit, meaning "Divine (or Royal) Victory," it does not necessarily mean that this person was a foreigner. Preferring foreign names to indigenous ones, was as much a fashion in former times as it is today. See further: line 6, Ganaśakti ("Host of Power"), and line 7, Biśruta ("Famous").

4. Official clerks were usually employed for important documentary transactions.

5. The word is obscure in this context. However, if *walānda* could be read as *welānda*, it could be translated as: (a debt) "to the amount of" . . .

6. One *kati* is about 617.6 grams, and one *suwarna* (the 16th part of a *kati*) is about 38.6 grams. The total weight of gold that had to be paid was 1.5 *kati*, or approximately 926.4 grams.

7. Oj *hulun* means slave, but also covers: "being subordinate subservient." It might be that Sir Namwran had technically become a slave, because of his debt, including his family and descendants, as was usually the case. (See Bibliography: Placencia)

8. The name that follows is probably Namwran. This last line might be part of a curse formula, whereby transgressors are threatened with punishment, here or in the hereafter.

ပွဲလွန်စံမါတိတ် ၁၃၁၃ (ဝါးကောလိယ) ပြောတိမ ဖတု ပိကံဗပကံ) ဝါ
ပဝါၤ ဝါးကောလိယံ မနုဏ် ခါပဝံ ခါ ဝါးကောလိယံ ကာမာကောလိယံ ဝါးကော
မာကောလိယံ မနုဏ် ဝါးကောလိယံ ဝါးကောလိယံ မနုဏ် ဝါးကောလိယံ
ခါပဝံ ဝါးကောလိယံ မနုဏ် ဝါးကောလိယံ မနုဏ် ဝါးကောလိယံ
ပုဂံ ဝါးကောလိယံ မနုဏ် ဝါးကောလိယံ မနုဏ် ဝါးကောလိယံ
မနုဏ် ဝါးကောလိယံ မနုဏ် ဝါးကောလိယံ မနုဏ် ဝါးကောလိယံ
မနုဏ် ဝါးကောလိယံ မနုဏ် ဝါးကောလိယံ မနုဏ် ဝါးကောလိယံ
မနုဏ် ဝါးကောလိယံ မနုဏ် ဝါးကောလိယံ မနုဏ် ဝါးကောလိယံ
မနုဏ် ဝါးကောလိယံ မနုဏ် ဝါးကောလိယံ မနုဏ် ဝါးကောလိယံ

Tracing of the Laguna Copper-Plate Inscription, by Antoon Postma, at Panaytayan, 16 April 1990.

Authenticity and Script

An important aspect of the LCI, that had to be established without a shadow of a doubt, was its authenticity, especially bearing in mind the various fake "historical documents" that in the past have been presented in a Philippine context. Fortunately, some of the foremost experts in the fields of Paleography and Old Malayan⁴ languages were readily available with their professional opinions. They assured me that the LCI is genuine and authentic, based on the identical script-type known to have existed during the tenth century, and the correctness of the language(s) employed, substantial elements that would be hard to imitate or falsify at the present time without being noticed by the experts.

Altogether, it was the opinion of these experts of Indonesia and the Netherlands, that in a final analysis of the LCI, the Philippines would play an important role. In connection with this, they gave credence to my theories regarding the location of the toponyms or placenames mentioned in the LCI, that I thought to be situated in the Philippines.

The type of script used in the LCI belongs to the so-called Early Kawi Script that was also employed in the inscriptions that were found in Indonesia during a period of almost two hundred years (about 750–925 A.D.).⁵ It is ultimately derived from the script-types used on the Indian mainland, that gradually spread into Southeast Asia and further into the Malayan Archipelago. The Pllava Script, used in the sixth century by the kings of that Dynasty in South India for their decrees, lies at the root of the Kawi Script and its subsequent development in Southeast Asia, including the Philippines.

The LCI bears the date of 900 A.D., and the script of that period (850–925) is considered to be the standard form of Early Kawi, used for a great number of inscriptions in stone or on copper-plate, not only in Java, but on the Southeast Asian mainland as well, with few or no variations in style or outward appearance. Therefore, the LCI, as far as the script is concerned, could have originated from Central Java of the tenth century as well.

The script of the LCI is well executed, in a regular style, and does not present great difficulties in reading. The *aksaras* (letters) *ba* and *wa* are usually well distinguished, except in line 7, where *bisruta* is written instead of the usual Sanskrit *wisruta* and in line 8, where it reads *warjadi* instead of *barjadi*.

A curious writing-error-cum-correction can be found in line 3, where the last part of a compound Sanskrit-derived OJ word was accidentally omitted by the engraver of the copper-plate. When he afterwards noticed his mistake, he deftly inserted *tra* (of *patra* = Sanskrit *pattra*) under its intended position, and gave dotted indicators of his amended correction. Another error of omission, but without correction, is probably at *barjā* in line 4, where *barjādi* should have been written, a word that occurs three more times.

The Language

Regarding the language of the LCI, there are a number of technical Sanskrit words, common to this type of inscription, and some OJ words expressing ceremonious forms of address, but the main language of the LCI is clearly Old-Malay (henceforth OM), containing several words that are identical or closely related to the Old-Tagalog language (henceforth OT) of the Philippines. Clear cognates to Tagalog (Old and/or Modern) of certain words found in the LCI are: *anak* (child), *dayang* (noblewoman), *hadapan* (in front), *hutang* (debt), *lap(p)as* (acquitted of debt), *ngaran*⁶ (name), *pam(a)gat* (Chief), *tuhan* (honorable person), and other etymologically related words. As a clarification, however, it should be said that several of these words are shared by the OJ and OM languages as well, as members of the same linguistic family.

It should further be noted that the OM language had its linguistic development in the course of the centuries, and therefore, the famous Sriwijaya Inscriptions of the end of the seventh century, and the several OM inscriptions of the ninth century⁷ found in Central Java, are not identical with the OM of the LCI, but certainly related.

The inscriptions in the Early Kawi Script found in Indonesia thus far, are either in a local language like Old-Balinese of Bali Island, Old-Javanese of the big Island of Java, or Old-Malay that was spoken in the Kingdom of Sriwijaya in Sumatra, and the Malayan Peninsula, and their dialectical variations. "Overlapping" into neighboring language-areas did happen.

These Malayan languages acquired, in the course of their exposure to Indian culture, -commerce and religion, a great number of Sanskrit words, and adapted these to their own linguistic needs and rules, equipping them with their own affixes, and simplifying the spelling of these (formerly) "foreign" words.

However, certain standard, legal and astronomical formulas or expressions, among others, were presented unchanged, and regularly occur in their inscriptions. The LCI is no exception, and contains a liberal amount of words derived from Sanskrit, starting as it does with a line in traditional Sanskrit astronomical terms that indicates the date of the inscription in detail.

The main language of the LCI is OM, and as the "lingua franca" or trade language of the whole Malayan area during those times, it was the medium of communication with outlying regions like the Philippines that used their own indigenous languages. Problems in understanding this trade language were slight, because the Philippine languages were closely related to the Malayan vernaculars of their southern neighbors.

One of the reasons, therefore, that the LCI was written in OM (and not in OJ or any other Malayan language), might be its intended purpose, namely for communication with a "foreign" country (*in casu* the Philippines) outside the immediate language (OJ?) domain, where the local (Javanese) language was no longer well understood. If that is indeed the case, the LCI might have been issued by recognised authorities *outside* the Philippines (e.g. in Java), who had personal or national interests there. It might then be possible that important person(s) in the Philippines, with a substantial debt in gold, had appealed to these foreign authorities for help in his/their quandary, to arrange for a debt-acquittal, officially sanctioned, under certain conditions not mentioned in the LCI.

Another reason for the LCI to have been written in OM, might also be because it was issued by Sriwijayan authorities in Sumatera Selatan, where OM was the vernacular and current language of communication, serving also as the trade language farther afield. In that case, however, certain OJ words and influences, clearly noticeable in the LCI, would have to be explained to make that supposition acceptable.

In the LCI, aside from the expected Sanskrit words, and the OJ cognates with OM, there occur also a number of pure OJ words, like *ngaran* (name) and *pam(a)gat* (leader or Chief), that have no cognates in OM, and, moreover, have not occurred in any OM inscription thus far. These words are accepted as OJ words, but could be OT as well, because they exist in both of these languages.

With the help of the Tagalog language more insight could be brought to bear to solve this perplexity, especially since *ngaran* (OJ) is used with the prefix *bar-* (OM).⁸ In an OM inscription, one would

have expected *barnama*, instead of *barngaran* (to name), because *nama* is the (Sanskrit-derived) word for "name" in Old & Modern Indonesian/Malay.⁹

Pamgat (or *pamagat*) is another OJ word that frequently occurs in OJ inscriptions (not in OM ones), often preceded by the honorific OJ *sang* as in the LCI. On the other hand, those acquainted with the Tagalog language will recognize *pamagat* immediately as a Tagalog word as well, in rather common use, though at present mainly with the meaning of "title of a book," or "heading of a chapter." The oldest Tagalog dictionaries,¹⁰ presenting the linguistic picture of the sixteenth century (and probably earlier, since words are slow to change!), mention *pamagat* as a title or "special name" for persons. It seems, moreover, that even at the beginning of the twentieth Century, *pamagat* was still used as a title for important persons, as evidenced in the book "Capitan Bensio" by G.B. Francisco (Maynila, 1907), where he mentions a ". . . *pamagat na maginoo*" (p. 3), and ". . . *isang Pangulong punong cawal, na may pamagat na Gobernador general*" (p. 20)¹¹

The abbreviated forms *magat* and *gat* were used as well, and were still fashionable in the Philippines at the arrival of the Spaniards in the sixteenth century. Moreover, until now there are the surnames of persons like *Gatdula*, *Gatmaitan*, *Gatbonton*, etc., as reminiscences of once existing titles for Chiefs [(*pama*)*gat*] in charge of certain, limited territories in pre-Spanish Philippines. Likewise, there was the title of a noblewoman, or the wife or a Chief, who was addressed in Tagalog as *dayang* (San Antonio 1738), a word occurring in the LCI as well (line 2).

Therefore, the word *pam(a)gat*, repeatedly (five times!) mentioned in the LCI, might well be the common honorific reference to Chiefs, or important persons, in the Philippines of the 10th Century A.D., "borrowed" from the OJ *pam(a)gat*, a common word also in that language of those early times, though not used anymore in Modern Javanese.¹²

Personal and Place Names

A number of names, or possible names, of persons and/or places are mentioned in the LCI, and close attention should be paid to them, because they furnish vital clues regarding the political and topographic background of the LCI.

One of the personal names, *Bukah*, cannot be doubted, because it is introduced by the OJ personal marker *si* (line 2).¹³ Other names

without the *si* preceding them, seem to be more in conformity with its use in OM inscriptions. Other possible personal names are: Angkatan (line 2); Namwran (*passim*); Jayadewa (line 4) and Kasumuran (line 6). Maybe also: Ganaśakti (line 6) and Biśruta (line 7). The toponyms or placenames are: Pailah¹⁴ (lines 4 and 6); Tundun (line 3); Puliran (line 6) and Binwangan (line 7). Dewata (line 8) and Mdang (line 8) could be either personal names or toponyms.

Malayan (including Philippine) names are: Angkatan, Binwangan, Bukah, Kasumuran, Pailah and Puliran. Maybe Namwran as well. names of *Sanskrit* origin are: Biśruta, Dewata, Ganaśakti, Jayadewa (G. & J. are both compound words), Mdang and Tundun. The last two names, because of their lingual consonants (n and d) that are of Sanskrit origin might originally be toponyms existing on the Island of Java.¹⁵ Javanese settlers in a foreign country (i.e. the Philippines), might have brought these names along, and applied them to the places of their occupation as a remembrance of their home country.

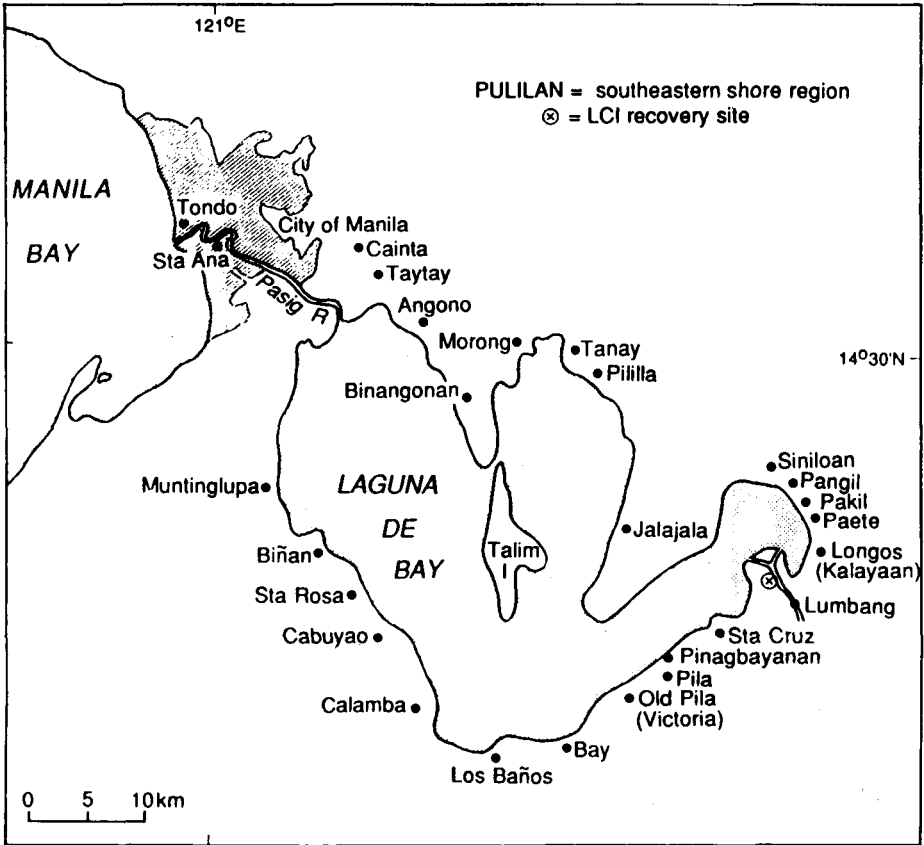
Regarding the names mentioned in the LCI, it is interesting to note that in the *Catalogo Alfabetico de Apellidos*, appended to a Decree promulgated in 1849 by the Spanish government in the Philippines,¹⁶ the names Angcatan, Buca, Diwata, Pacla, Puriran, Somuran and Tundo, are mentioned as possible surnames.

In August 1990, during my stay in Yogyakarta, Indonesia when I attended the 14th Congress of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association (IPPA), and presented a preliminary paper on the LCI, I availed myself of the opportunity to consult research data on the Indonesian presence of placenames mentioned in early inscriptions recovered there. The key works in this field are undoubtedly Damais and Darmosoetopo (see: Bibliography) that contain a complete listing of all the toponyms occurring in the Indonesian inscriptions from the earliest periods till the reign of king Airlangga (1049 A.D.) inclusively. Aside from Mdang I didn't find any of the placenames mentioned in the LCI. Moreover, it was confirmed by experts in Indonesia that to their knowledge the toponyms of the LCI (Mdang excepted) had not been encountered thus far.

Since the LCI was allegedly found in the Laguna de Bay area, Pulilan, the old name for the Southeastern Lake area, according to some old Tagalog dictionaries (San Buenaventura 1613; Noceda-Sanlucar 1860; Laktaw, 1914 are among them), might be considered as one of the equivalents of the LCI Puliran.¹⁷ In fact, I personally was convinced at first, that in Pulilan (=SE Laguna de Bay area) I had located the place *Puliran* mentioned in the LCI (line 6), and also

Pailah (lines 4 and 6), which easily could have been the earlier name of Pila, Laguna. Moreover, scientific archaeological excavations near Pila had indicated this area to be "one of the most important centers of trade, as well as of culture during the early part of the present millennium . . ." (Tenaza 1968, 13).

However, one of the problems was that Pulilan along Laguna de Bay, according to the dictionaries, was a *region*, comprising several villages, Pila being one of them, situated *within* the area of Pulilan. On the other hand, the LCI clearly indicates that they were two *separate* localities, each with its own leader. For that reason it is very probable that the town Pila, in Laguna Province, was not the *Pailah* I wanted to locate as the LCI toponym.

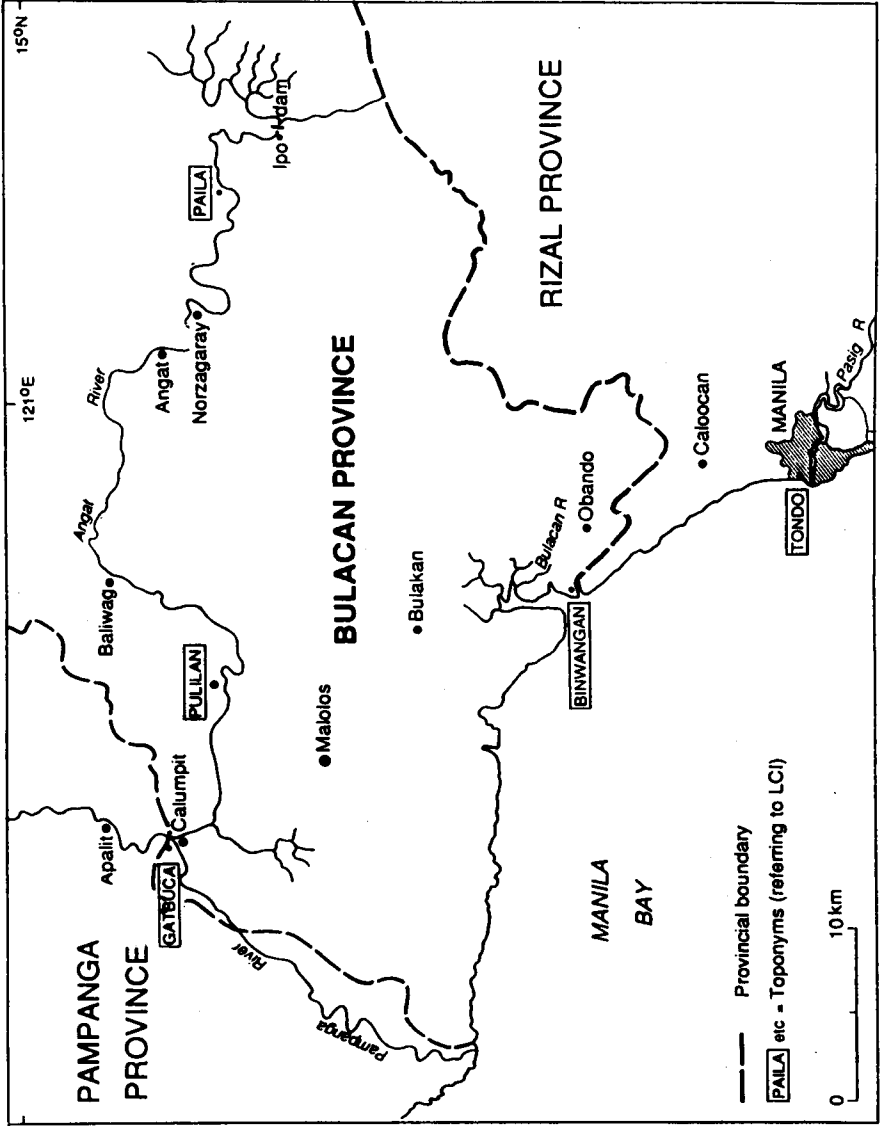


Moreover, it seems that Pulilan was a popular town name in the early Philippines, because there was another one in Bulacan Province. Therefore, I thought Pulilan, along the Angat (pronounced: Anggat) River, in the province of Bulacan, north of Manila, (coordinates: 14-54.2 & 120-50.8)¹⁸ to be a better candidate. All the more so because, after carefully studying the map of Bulacan province, I found at the headwaters of the same river, the village of Paila,¹⁹ in the Barangay of San Lorenzo at the eastern part of the municipality of Norzagaray, with coordinates: 14-54.5 & 121-06.9.

Furthermore, along Manila Bay, north of Manila (and Tondo!), is located the village of Binwangan, belonging to the municipality of Obando, situated at the mouth of the Bulacan River, with coordinates: 14-43.2 & 120-54.3. One can further find, as an unexpected bonus, to the North of the town of Calumpit, along the large Pampanga River, the village of Gatbuca (coordinates: 14-55.5 & 120-45.9), that seems to refer to the name Bukah in line 2 of the LCI.²⁰ All this encouraged me to consider the northern Manila district of Tondo (coordinates: 14-36.9 & 120-58.3), a separate town in earlier times, situated at the mouth of the Pasig River, as the synonym of the name Tundun in line 3 of the LCI.

At this point, I am confident that five of the (place) names mentioned in the LCI, find their equivalents within the limited area of what is now known as Bulacan Province in the Philippines, the text of this same LCI can be considered to refer indeed to these places, already existing already under identical names in the tenth century.

It is important to note that all five places mentioned,²¹ separated from each other by varying distances, are situated along a river, or rivers, that enabled the tenth century Filipinos to make use of them as an effective (and often *only*) means of transportation and communication between the different settlements. Moreover, these "water-highways" emptied (and still do) into the open sea (China Sea), by way of Manila Bay, offering the seafaring traders of China and South-east Asia of early times an easy access to interior trading centers via these riverine communication-lines. It can further be presumed that during those times, these rivers must have been much deeper and certainly were more navigable than they are today, considering the deteriorating ecology of the area and the Ipo and Angat flood-control dams that have been constructed in the huge water-shed area of the Angat River.



Gold, Debt, Slavery and Class

A dictionary usually gives the equivalent word from one language to the other. However, in the "Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala" of Fr. Pedro de Buenaventura, (henceforth SB), printed in "la noble Villa" of Pila in 1613, you will get much more. SB will give you an adequate definition and description of each word, its origin and use, and will illustrate this with a number of related sentences in both Tagalog and Spanish. In the "Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala" of Fr. Francisco Blancas de San Joseph, (henceforth SJ), a forerunner of the above, but only available in manuscript form, similar definitions can be found, though not as comprehensive as in SB.

As concepts like gold, debt, slavery and class-distinctions occur in the LCI, I tried to familiarize myself with these words in the SJ & SB dictionaries, and early Spanish writings.

Scott, in his essay on Tagalog Technology culled from SB, wrote: "One of the richest vocabularies in the whole dictionary is that pertaining to metallurgy and metal-working, including special subdivisions for goldsmithy and jewelry" (Scott 1982, 531). The quality of gold was subdivided in accordance with its karat contents, and the weighing scales were always available (there was a special bag for carrying them around!) to determine the differences from twenty-four Karat, the *dalisay* gold, to the poorest kind (below ten Karats), the *hotoc* gold, that was mixed with so much silver and copper, that it could hardly be called "gold" at all.

As to the practical use of gold, Scott further writes:

Goldsmithing almost doubles the metal-working vocabulary with more delicate tools and sophisticated techniques like soldering, fusing enameling, filigreeing—and adulterating—to produce dozens of varieties of chains and necklaces, brooches and pendants, pectorals and collars, diadems and bracelets, beads, rings, anklets and arm-bands, earring and plugs, and dental inlays. It was, as a matter of fact, the glitter of just such gold chains dangling from Filipino necks that first dazzled the eye of the Spanish conquistador—those *kamagi* as thick as a man's finger and reaching down to the chest, or the six-strand *gamay* or *lokay-lokayan* which so completely disappeared into colonial coffers that the terms were already archaisms when Father San Buenaventura recorded them (Scott 1982, 533).

Since gold appeared to be in the possession of almost everyone to a greater or lesser degree, it was not uncommon. But it seems,

that rather suddenly, for one or other reason, one could find his gold treasure completely gone. SB presents various Tagalog words for the Spanish *acabarse*, "to find oneself without any valuable possessions whatsoever." One of the reasons for this sudden reduction to the state of poverty, might be explained by the central theme of the LCI, expressed the the word, *utang* or debt, mentioned there several times.

In the SB the process of incurring debt is graphically described by a series of related words expressing the notion of borrowing in various degrees, with the attached rates of interest upon repayment. Depending on the agreement, a debt could increase on a daily, monthly or yearly basis by as much as 100 percent or, upon repayment within any time period agreed upon, with an increase from 50 to 150 percent interest. If not paid with money, land property was another means of payment, or service to the person indebted to. However, any food or other needs provided during these "service" activities, was chalked up additionally again as debt, etc. When a debt was finally paid, one could say (in OT): "*lapas na ang utang ko sa iyo*" (my debt to you is now dissolved), using almost the same words present in the LCI.

If, however, in the end, the debt could not be paid, either by money or by temporary servitude, the debtor could legally be forced to become a slave, often together with his whole family and descendants, thus becoming the victim of a purposeful scheme of the one who lent him the money, i.e., to acquire a cheap but valuable working force.

When the Spaniards arrived in the Phillipines in 1521, and fifty years later in Manila, they found established among the local population an elaborate and complicated system of permanent servitude or slavery. A wealth of early Spanish documents is still available attesting to this, and explaining in detail the intricate complexity of an enslavement maze that displayed the whole gamut of subservience and merciless exploitation. Many slaves were born that way, and acquired as "heritage" by a new master after the death of the former one. Others were purchased, after having been captured by pirates on one of their frequent maritime raids from the North or the South. The term given by SB for buying or selling slaves, is simply *bayar*, also meaning: "to pay."

On the highest rung of the enslavement ladder stood the *namamahay*, the slave who could live with his family in a house of his own, a privilege he had acquired by paying for it in gold. He could be

called upon by his master for work activities, but had more freedom than the slaves of a lower class. The *sagigilir* slave stayed in the the bottom-part of his master's house, who claimed total "ownership" of him and his family, and treated him in any way thought fitting. The lowest types of slaves, and the most wretched, were those whose master was a slave himself, whether a *namamahay* or a *sagigilir*, for there was little or no hope for any improvement in their miserable state.

Freedom from slavery could be obtained by "paying the price" which was higher for slaves of a lower class. Sometimes they became free, or *maharlika*, at the death of their master, through an express stipulation in his testament. Once free, a *maharlika* could be considered on the same social level as a *timawa*, a commoner, or a person who had never been a slave before.

Altogether, slavery was a taken-for-granted social institution during the sixteenth century. All the indications are there, and it is clear that, in view of its complex design, enslavement had first started many centuries earlier.

From the above it is clear that there were different degrees of social recognition in pre-Spanish Philippine society. Those on the top were the Principalities, the Chiefs, the Leaders. They possessed most of the gold and the power that came with it. However, the territory of a Chief or *Dato* (also *Maginoo*) was usually rather limited. The early Spanish reports on the Philippines mention that the Chiefs "ruled over but few people, sometimes as many as a hundred houses, sometimes even less than thirty" (Plasencia 1589). Also: "it often befalls that in one village, however small it may be, there are five, six, or ten chiefs, each of whom possess twenty or thirty slaves, whom he has the power to sell, or treat as he pleases" (Blair and Robertson 1903-1907, 3: 154). With regard to the different Chiefs referred to in the LCI, their territory would indeed be limited, if the placenames discussed above, prove to be Pulilan, Paila, Binwangan and Tondo, because these places are located within a relatively short distance from each other.

The next social level, below the Chiefs who were a class in themselves, was apparently occupied by the *timawa*, the commoner, and the *maharlika*, who was no longer a slave.²² Still, they had their obligations to their Chiefs, and had to avoid the dangers that could cause them to be punished or even be reduced to enslavement for often flimsy reasons.

The lowest of the social ranks in early Philippine society, probably constituting the majority of the population, was composed of the slaves, who among themselves had their own ranking system, as described above.

The skill and competence of such a refined and exquisite technique on goldsmithing, the elaborate and ruthless debt-and-repayment usury apparatus, that could, and often did end up in abject slavery for generations to come, and the inevitable subdivisions in the class-strata of established society, didn't sprout up like mushrooms overnight, but had to take root over a considerable time, before they could develop into the incredibly complicated systems as described by SB, and to a lesser extent by his contemporary lexicographer SJ.

Returning to the LCI, we note the brief and matter-of-fact mention there of the situations described in detail by SB and others, as propounded above. There is no need for straining the imagination to construe a possible link between these two extremes in time, even if separated by a considerable number of years.

Conclusion

It seems that the Laguna Copper-Plate Inscription (LCI) can be considered the oldest calendar-dated Philippine "document" existing at present in the Philippines, predating the Pigafetta account by some 620 years. It also seems that the Philippines, or part of it, under whatever name, can now take its rightful place on the tenth Century map of Southeast Asia, in the presence of the Kingdoms of Sriwijaya (Sumatera), Mataram (Java), Angkor (Kampuchea), and the Cham Dynasty (Vietnam).

De Casparis called the LCI: "One of the most important discoveries of late," because the Philippines has now been freed from its pre-Spanish isolation, a well-organized form of government based on customary law has been shown to exist for more than a thousand years, and an important link in the history of the Malay (and the Tagalog) languages has been established.

In the light of this new historical evidence for an organized political existence of part of the Philippines, all previous pre-Spanish historical data pertaining to the Philippines, will have to be reexamined and reevaluated. For example a certain Chinese Record of the thirteenth century,²³ where mention is made of the place *P'u-li-lu*, and another Chinese record of the fourteenth century²⁴ where *Ma-li-lu* is

mentioned, both of which are considered to be identical. Scott mentions that "a consensus of scholars has come to consider (*Ma-li-lu* to be) Manila" (Scott 1982, 73). I wonder if *P'u-li-lu* could have been identical with Pulilan. In the light of the LCI much new research has to be conducted.

Notes

1. It is not uncommon to find threats or curses against misbehavior expressed in similar inscriptions. See Kern (1917, 27); Casparis (1950, 15-46).

2. I am grateful to Dr. de Casparis for correcting my previous erroneous reading of Saka 844 or 922 A.D.

3. The Saka Era was one of the various dating systems that have been used in India at different times and places. A separate dating system was usually introduced with the reign or dynasty of a new ruler, often on the occasion of having defeated an opponent. This happened with the Saka Era that started in 78 A.D. in Southwest India, and was afterwards used for dating inscriptions. This (Saka) dating system had been adopted as well for inscriptions on the Early Kawi Script, and remained in use for all subsequent inscriptions, well into the seventeenth Century A.D. To convert the Saka dating to a more common dating system of the western (influenced) world, 78 years have to be added to obtain an A.D. date.

4. With "Malayan" as area of language, I understand the whole of the region of Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines combined, where the languages generally are considered to belong to the same Austronesian language family.

5. I am indebted to "Indonesian Palaeography" by de Casparis (1975) for much of the following information.

6. In the Transcription, I write the initial "ng" as an "n" to distinguish it from the "ng" formed by the final *anusvara* dot. This distinction is not applied here.

7. For the small number of OM inscriptions found so far, see: Boechari o.c. 1966, Casparis, o.c. 1950 & 1956, and Coedes, o.c. 1930.

8. *Ber-* in Modern Indonesian/Malay: *mag-* in Tagalog.

9. For the repeated *namanda* (his/her/their name) in OM inscriptions, see Boechari (1966) and de Casparis (1950, 61-62).

10. Fr. Blancas de San Joseph (1610 [?]) (or: S)), P. de San Buenaventura (1613) (or: SB).

11. I am grateful to Dr. Jean-Paul G. Potet, a French scholar of Tagalog, for drawing my attention to this publication.

12. See also Kern (1917, 51), where he refers to the Tagalog *pamagat*, *pamgat*.

13. Used identically in the Tagalog language as well.

14. "Ai" is written in the LCI with the diphthong script-character for "ay" or "ai."

15. *Mdang* and *Tundan* (not *Tundun!*) do occur in OJ inscriptions earlier than the LCI. For *Mdang* as toponym, see Stutterheim (1940, 20).

16. This decree, issued under Narciso Claveria y Zaldúa, Governor and Captain General, presents all existing Philippine family names that could be collected, enlarged with other "names," e.g. from flora and fauna, in order to make them available to those Filipinos who were advised to adopt another surname.

17. The r/l shift is a regular feature in Philippine linguistics [e.g.: ngaran/ngalan (name)] and does not change the meaning.
18. As recorded in the : "Gazeteer of the Philippine Islands," Washington 1945. Better read as: 14°54.2'N & 120°50.8'E., etc.
19. "Pai" being pronounced as one syllable, like the diphthong "ay" in the inscription.
20. I am grateful to Isagani Medina for pointing this out to me. Later I found it confirmed by the Official census Data for 1960.
21. These five placenames are clearly pre-Spanish in origin, but, except for Tondo, they don't appear as very important during Spanish times.
22. On these points the early Spanish reports were rather confusing, and sometimes contradictory. My reconstruction is based on information culled from SB.
23. Chao Ju-kua's "Chu Fan Chih" (An account of the various barbarians) of 1225 A.D.
24. Wang Ta-yuan's "Tao I Chich Lueh" (Summary notices of the barbarians of the isles) of 1349 A.D. cf. Scott (1984, 73), and Wada (1929, 147).

References

- Blair, E.H. and J.A. Robertson (B & R). 1903-1907. *The Philippine Islands 1493-1897*, 55 vols. Ohio.
- Bocchari, S.S. 1966. Preliminary report on the discovery of an old-Malay Inscription at Sodjomerto. *Indonesian Journal of Cultural Studies* 3 (October): 241-51.
- Bosch, F.D.K. Een Maleische Inscriptie in het Buitenzorgsche. *BTLV* 100, pp. 49-54.
- Casparis, J.G. de. 1975. *Indonesian Palaeography*. Leiden.
- _____. 1950. *Prasasti Indonesia i*. Bandung.
- _____. 1956. Selected inscriptions from the 7th to the 9th century A.D. Bandung.
- Coedes, G. 1930. Les Inscriptions Malaises de Crivijaya. *BEFEO*, XXX: 27-80.
- _____. 1960. *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*. Honolulu.
- Damais, L.-Ch. 1970. *Repertoire Onomastique de l'Epigraphie Javanaise (Jusqu'à Pu Sindok Sri . . .)*, Etude d'Epigraphie Indonesienne. *BEFEO* LXVI. Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient.
- Darmosoetopo, Riboet. 1976/77. *Laporan Penelitian Repertoire Onomastique (dari Sindok sampai dengan Airlangga)*. Proyek PPPT-UGM No. 103. Jakarta.
- Hall, Kenneth R. 1985. *Maritime trade and state development in early Southeast Asia*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Holle, K.F. 1882. *Tabel van Oud- en Nieuw-Indische Alphabetten*. 's Gravenhage.
- Kern, H. 1917. *Verspreide Geschriften*. Vol. VI-VII: *Inscripties van den Indischen Archipel*. 's Gravenhage.

- Laktaw, P.S. 1914. *Diccionario Tagalog-Hispano*. Manila.
- Medina, I.S. 1983. Ang kasaysayan panlipunan ng Pilipinas: isang rekonstruksyon mula sa mga diksyunaryo't bokabularyong Tagalog 1600-1914. *Asian Studies* 21 (April-December): 20-40.
- Noceda, J. de & P. de Sanlucar. 1860. *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala*. Manila.
- Panganiban, J.V. 1972. *Diksyunaryo-Tesaurus Pilipino-Ingles*. Quezon City.
- Plasencia, J. de. 1589. *Relacion de los Costumbres de los Tagalos*. In E. Blair and J.A. Robertson, *The Philippine Islands 1903-1907*, 173 sqq., vol. 7. Ohio.
- Postma, A. 1975. *Tagalog Rhyming Dictionary*. Ms. Panaytayan, 1975.
- _____. 1974. *Old-Javanese/Indonesian/Pilipino Wordlist*. Panaytayan.
- San Antonio, J.F. de. 1738. *Cronicas de la Apostolica Provincia de San Gregorio. . . .* In E. Blair & J.A. Robertson, *The Philippine Islands, 1903-1907*, 296 sqq., vol. 40. Ohio.
- San Jose(ph), Fr. Blancas de. 1610(?). *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala, Bataan*.
- San Buenaventura, P. de. 1613. *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala, Pila*.
- Scott, W.H. 1982. Sixteenth-Century Tagalog technology from the "Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala of Pedro de San Buenaventura" in GAVA, Band 17, pp. 523-35, Berlin.
- _____. *Prehispanic Source Materials*. Quezon City, 1984.
- Stutterheim, W.F. 1940. *Oorkonde van Balitung uit 905 A.D.* In *INSCRIPTIES van Nederlandsch-Indie*, pp. 3-28, Batavia.
- Teeuw, A. 1959. The history of the Malay Language. *Bijdragen tot de TLV*, 115(2): 138-56.
- Tenazas, Rosa C.P. 1968. A report on the archeology of the Locusin-University of San Carlos excavations in Pila, Laguna. Manila.
- Wada, S. 1929. The Philippine Islands as known to the Chinese before the Ming period. In *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 4: 121-66.
- Wilkinson, R.J. 1959. *A Malay-English Dictionary*. 2 Vols. London: Macmillan.
- Zoetmulder, P.J. 1982. *Old-Javanese-English Dictionary*. 2 Vols. 's Gravenhage.