

# SCRIPT AND IDENTITY OF INDONESIA

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## ABSTRACT

Writing about civilisation in Indonesia began with the Yupa inscriptions from the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century AD in East Borneo. The beginning of the writing about tradition opened a new era in human life; out of prehistory into the era of history. Writing became a tool to express the thoughts of a man about the many aspects of life, such as politics, economics, literature, customs, law and the likes of his time, which afterwards became the object of study for future generations and the source of supplying information about the civilisation of people. Pallava script, Arabic script and Latin script were the foreign scripts which were developed in Indonesia. With time as the political power, geographic and socio-cultural changes came, the Pallava script underwent development and changed in shape, style and name. Since the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century there developed a variety of scripts, which in principle remained the same but had their styles, and were used for the writing of inscriptions in the Old Javanese language: it was called Old-Javanese script. On the island of Sumatra since the 10<sup>th</sup> century there was known the Ancient Sumatra script, used to write inscriptions in Ancient Malay, its script did not show much difference from Old-Javanese script, but possessed a number of characteristics only found in Sumatra inscriptions. The same can be said of Ancient Bali inscriptions. The three different systems of writing which entered Indonesia, further developed and accommodated themselves to the language, culture and society of the different regions, adopting their identity in the context of Indonesia as a united whole.

*Keywords: epigraphy, philology, identity, palaeography*

## INTRODUCTION

The civilisation of scriptwriting in the Archipelago (Nusantara) started with the discovery of Yupa inscription originating from the 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> century AD in East Kalimantan. The introduction to the writing tradition opened up a new era for human life and changed it from pre-historic era to that of history. The script opened up the boundary of time and place to express human thoughts and feelings during certain periods. Writing is a means of delivering human thoughts and ideas on various aspects of life, for instance, politics, economics, literature, traditions, religion, law, etc. in an era that may serve as important records to study in order to learn about the level of civilisation of people.

Inscription as the oldest written artefact in Indonesia is an evidence of the existence of foreign scripts, such as the Pallava, Siddhamatrka and Tamil scripts that started to be introduced during the era of the Hindu-Buddha influence and followed by the Arabic, Chinese, Japanese,

and Latin scripts during the era of the Islamic and colonial influences. The Indian influence in Southeast Asia mainland and archipelago was brought through the arrival of Hindu and Buddhist religious teachers, and through the international trading that took place at that time which accompanied the cultural exchange and the adaptation initiated by groups of local elites (Damais, 1995,p.4-6). This influence is identified in the introduction of writing, language, architecture, statues, government structure, etc.

That explains how various types of scripts that were spread throughout Southeast Asia bear similarities. Two scripts, initially known among the people of Southeast Asia mainland and archipelago were the Siddhamatrka and Pallava scripts that were originated from India. The Siddhamatrka (Siddham) script or also known as the Prenagari script estimated to come from North India that was often used to record Buddhist mantras and was sometimes used to write complete manuscripts. The Siddham script was also found in few Indonesian inscriptions in Sumatra, Java, and Bali.

The Pallava script originated from South India underwent rapid development in Southeast Asian mainland and archipelago, and some varieties were also found in inscriptions in Fu-nan, Champa, Cambodia, the Mon country, Sunda (Tarumanagara), Kalimantan (Yupa), Central Java (prasasti Canggal inscription), and Sumatra (Sriwijaya inscriptions) (Damais, 1995, p.6-7).

The Pallava script originated from South India was most probably a semi-syllabic script derived from the Brahmic script. Richard Salomon (1998, p.143-159) as agreed by Griffiths (2014) stated that the Indian script was initially used in Indonesian inscriptions in Java, Sumatra, and Bali was a variation of the late Brahmic script from the Kusana Dynasty in early AD era (older than Pallava) that came from North and Central India.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The oldest inscriptions discovered, named as, the Yupa inscriptions (7 of them) were written using Old Pallava script in Sanskrit. Despite the script and language used originating from India, the content of the inscriptions describe kings in East Kalimantan, particularly those in Muara Kaman, the site where the inscriptions were found. Afterwards, six inscriptions were found carved on natural stone originating from the Tarumanagara kingdom and categorised as Pallava script inscriptions written in Sanskrit. These oldest inscriptions are estimated to date from the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

Inscriptions written in Late Pallava script were using Old Malay and were issued by the Sriwijaya kingdom in a late 7th century and another one, the Canggal inscription of 732 using the Pallava script in Sanskrit, was stated by J.G de Casparis as the development of the old Pallava script (de Casparis, 1975).

In the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century, a type of script had existed that was found in Old Javanese inscriptions that paleographically constitute the development of Pallava script used to write texts in the Old Javanese language. This script was stated by JG de Casparis (1975) as the Kawi script or the Old Javanese script. JG de Casparis (1975) divided Kawi/ Old Javanese into chronological stages of scripts used to carve Old Javanese inscriptions in the formats of Early Kawi (750-850), Standard Kawi (for inscriptions issued by King Rakai Kayuwangi and King Rakai Balitung in 850-950), and the Late Kawi used when the centre of royal ruling was in East Java (years 950 up to around 1135). Along with the use of Late Kawi, another script, namely the Square script, came into being during the Kadiri era (12<sup>th</sup> century), characterised by protruded carving on stone as media. This square shape script continued developing until the late Majapahit kingdom era. In the Singhasari-Majapahit era (13<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> century) another format of the script developed that was

dominated by decorative curves. Several variations of scripts had developed since the Late Majapahit era, constituting Old Javanese script that represented the social as well as religious communities.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, old Balinese inscriptions were also written in Old Balinese language using a script that paleographically constituted the development of the Pallava script and known as the Old Balinese script. Despite the Old Balinese script having close resemblance with the Old Javanese, both have their respective characters that match the local social and cultural contexts, although there were certain periods, such as the reigning era of King Dharmodayana from the Warmadewa dynasty, when issued inscriptions were written in Old Javanese language. The Old Balinese script developed up to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and later on became the Mid Balinese and Modern Balinese scripts as currently used to date (Susanti et al. 2015,p. 130-135)

The 10<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the discoveries of inscriptions in old Malay in Sumatra that was written using a script that paleographically constituted the development of the Pallava script and can be referred to as the Old Sumatran script (Damais, 1995). The Old Sumatran script does not indicate obvious differences from that of the Old Javanese and Old Balinese. However, at a closer look, these three scripts bear their respective distinctions that constitute the typical characters of the scripts. It is therefore obvious that the basic difference here is the environment of the inscribers as expressed in their respective regional language. L.Ch introduced the term Old Sumatran for this script. Damais, with the intention to confirm that the script found in Sumatra during the 10<sup>th</sup> century cannot possibly be considered as Old Javanese script despite the close resemblance, in addition to the fact that the script has typical characteristics that are not found in Old Javanese script (Damais, 1995).

The Old Sumatran script was discovered in the Hujung Langit inscription (dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century), namely a stone inscription in South Sumatra. At least 78 inscriptions were found in various locations that spread over South Sumatra up to North Sumatra. Those that bear the oldest paleographic Sumatran scripts were found in South Sumatra and were later evenly spread out over the Central and Northern parts of Sumatra (Susanti et al. 2015, p.116-130).

Discoveries of inscriptions were also made in North Sumatra in Tamil language bearing Tamil script, containing trade agreement and information on taxation. This Tamil inscription is estimated to have been used by the Tamil community that had been residing in North Sumatra since the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Experts assumed that the Tamil script was derived from the Brahmic script such as the Pallava script and other scripts originating from South India with their respective characters, and was written in the Tamil language. The Tamil script did not develop as much as the Pallava script that underwent performing a major role, to write texts in the local, regional languages.

These Old Sumatran inscriptions contain variety of descriptions, unlike the Old Javanese inscriptions that mostly contain ultimatums towards regions that were not obedient to the Kingdom of Sriwijaya (the Sriwijaya inscriptions), the genealogy of King Adityawarman (the Kuburajo I inscription of the 14<sup>th</sup> century), the inauguration of the Wisadharani construction by the Bhairava sect (Suroasa I inscription of 1374), etc. An interesting phenomenon indicating the use of language to write on a stone inscription from the era of King Adityawarman is the alternating use of Sanskrit and Old Malay on the same inscription.

Discoveries of inscriptions in the Western part of Java are not as numerous as those in the three previous locations. Scripts on several inscriptions discovered in West Java between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> century clearly show the development of the Pallava script. However, these inscriptions were written in Sanskrit (the 5<sup>th</sup>-century Tarumanagara inscriptions) and Old Malay (the Kebon Kopi II inscription of 932), as well as in Old Javanese (the Sang Hyang Tapak inscription of 1030). Old Sundanese inscriptions written in a script were developed from the

Pallava script that may be taken as Old Sundanese script which was discovered only in the 14<sup>th</sup> century containing information on Prabu (King) Niskala Wastu Kancana (Djafar 1991, p.5-25). Inscriptions in Old Sundanese carved on stone, and metal tablets generally contain the genealogy of kings, the commemoration of the merits of kings that built and repaired public facilities, such as trenches and road fortification (Batu Tulis inscription), the inauguration of sacred sites (Kebantenan III inscription), the glorification of the wise king, Parebu Raja Wastu, and the expectation that his wisdom be sustained by the successors (Djafar, 1991, p.3-8), etc.

## ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

During the Hindu-Buddhism or in the classic era, these scripts were mostly carved on hard and durable media, such as stone, metal, and horn, and were referred to as inscriptions.

After the end of the Hindu-Buddha (classic) era in Indonesia and the start of the development of the Islamic influence particularly around the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the use of the Old Javanese, Old Balinese, Old Sumatran, and Old Sundanese scripts, expanded increasingly and underwent modifications and were used to write texts in the respective regional languages across Indonesia. These scripts were carved on softer and less durable media, such as palm leaves (*lontar*), recycled paper made of tree bark (*daluwang*), animal hide, rattan, tree bark, etc., and were referred to as manuscripts. Such scripts were also found carved on hard surface media (inscriptions).

The 16<sup>th</sup> century is considered as the beginning of the development of regional scripts in Indonesia. The Old Javanese, Old Sumatran, Old Balinese, and Old Sundanese scripts originating from the Pallava script are scripts that bear the characters of the respective region and are embraced as the properties of the local people. A development was indicated alongside the development of Islam in the Archipelago, in which intellectuals across the Archipelago spread religions, science and knowledge as well as a culture through writing traditions that were created, developed and distributed to the society and communities. Example is, the Hanacaraka script was used to write Javanese texts in the Javanese language; the Cacarakan script used to write texts in the Sundanese language; the Balinese script to write Balinese texts in the Balinese language; the Sasak script used to write Lombok texts in the Sasak language; the Buda/Merapi Merbabu script used to write texts that were found in the slope of Merapi Merbabu mountains in the Javanese language; the Kaganga script used to write texts found in Lampung in the Malay language; the Ulu script used to write texts found in Bengkulu and Palembang in the Malay and Bengkulu languages; the Incung script used to write texts found in Jambi and Kerinci; the Batak script used to write texts found in North Sumatra in the Batak language; the Lontara script used to write texts found in South Sulawesi in the Bugis-Makassarese language, and the Mbojo script used to write texts found in Bima in the Bima language.

Judging by the content, inscriptions generally record announcements of the granting of *simas*, an autonomous status, to a region for certain reasons, and those are regarding the settlement of debts, and legal court process. Manuscripts in various regions are written scripts that are derived from the Pallava script and were used during the Hindu-Buddhist era and ultimately became the scripts of the respective regions that generally contain the expression of individual emotions in the forms of poetry, prose, religious teachings, or certain faith, law, customs, philosophy, trade agreement, and daily practical instructions, etc.

With the introduction of Islam in the Archipelago, the use of Arabic script was also started. These Arabic scripts were used to write inscriptions as well as manuscripts in the local, regional languages. These scripts were *Pegon* (the Arabic script used to write texts in the Javanese

language), *Jawi* (the Arabic script used to write texts in the Malay language), *Buri Wolio* (the Arabic script used to write texts in the Wolio language), *Serang* (the Arabic script used to write texts in the Bugis-Makasarese language), *Bilang-bilang* (the Arabic script used to write texts in the Bugis-Makasarese language), *Melayu Bima* (the Arabic script used to write texts in the Bima Malay language), etc.

The media used to write these scripts generally comprised of soft and non-durable materials such as recycled paper made of tree bark (*dluwang*), tree bark, palm leaf (*lontar*), etc. There was a little evidence of the use of hard and durable materials such as a stone in the form of tombstones or parts of building construction in manuscript writing.

Judging by the content, those manuscripts mostly contain religious teachings, customs, law, philosophy, environmental conservation, politics, literature, advice and instruction for the execution of certain work, for instance, the method of extracting honey from a certain tree (*sialang*), etc. Inscriptions during this Islamic era were found on tombstones bearing the names of the deceased and verses from the Quran and calligraphies, as well as genealogies that were also carved on wood, horn, and other hard surface materials.

Scripts developed from the Pallava dan the Arabic scripts used to write texts in regional languages in the respective locations in Indonesia may be considered as the scripts of the Archipelago.

The Indian script known by the people of the Archipelago since 5<sup>th</sup> century AD (Pallava) underwent significant development in later eras through its use, to record announcements of the rulers and was also used for the legal court process, debt settlement, and for evidence of victory. The development of the script also took place as the Pallava script which was used to record orders of the rulers in power in the local, regional languages as identified in the Sriwijaya inscriptions in the Old Malay, likewise the inscriptions made in the Old Javanese, the Old Balinese, the Old Sumatran, and Old Sundanese languages. The Pallava script originating from India had been modified by the phonetic order of the languages of the Archipelago through its use in writing and had grown to be taken as the scripts of the Archipelago, namely the Old Javanese, Old Balinese, Old Sundanese, and Old Malay scripts. These scripts had been embraced as the identities of the user societies, namely the Javanese, Balinese and Sumatrans.

A similar scenario took place in the Arabic script that was introduced alongside the development of Islam in almost throughout the Archipelago. The Arabic script had been used to write texts in regional languages in Indonesia and had been modified by the local, regional language phonetic system, marked to conform to the said regional languages and embraced as the properties of the local people, thereby became the identity of the supporting regional people.

## METHODOLOGY

Identity is an idea that revolves around a collection of particularistic and categorical attributes in an understood universal social structure (Meskell and Preucel, 2008, p.133). Identity is inseparable from the behaviours of the agents in the society and the inscription generating rulers. In other words, identity is not formed only by what is thought of at symbolical level, but also by the social relation that occurs in the daily life of their agents. Identity may relate to gender, nationality, ethnic, religious, sexual orientation, status, and power issues. Identity is highly multidimensional and liquid as previously mentioned, it covers various dimensions, such as power relation, ascription on one's self and others that relate to power relation, as well as issues on the sense of togetherness, and differences. These factors are designed to distinguish the

identity of a group of people from that of other groups. Developed identity is the distinction of status that is continuously attempted to be built and established (Rudyansjah 2009, 246-247)

The construction of identity may be political as it is based on the consideration of interest and stand in the midst of various elements in operation over local as well as regional areas and gains important role, for instance, it can be seen in the taking over of the Arabic script that was used to write texts in the Wolio language (Rudyansjah, 2009, p.261).

## CONCLUSION

The connection between script and identity occurs due to the Archipelagic scripts constituting the construction of identities of the Old Javanese, Old Malay, and Old Sundanese people/ rulers that may be considered as the result of response made by a group of agents to various forms of agreements and struggle in their historical and cultural process, and from the other cultures originating from their local areas as well as from wider regional units.

Similarly, with the development of Islam in the Archipelago, various regional scripts started to come into existence and developed as they were used to write texts in the local languages that were the identities of the local people and were embraced as part of their respective culture. The use of these regional scripts originated from the Pallava as well as from the Arabic scripts.

To date, three scripts have developed the identities of the Indonesian society and ethnic groups that are Pallava, Arabic and Latin. Latin alphabets were also used in inscriptions and manuscripts across the Archipelago since from the beginning period of the development of Islam and the Colonial era and are still in use today.

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