

The Lost Island of Java

By

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The use of the name *Yawa/Jawa* in early texts is somewhat confusing. It is well known that in classical Malay the word *Jawi* being a “kramanized” form of *Jawa* meant both “Javanese” and “Malay”. (The verb *menjawikan*, i.e., “translate into Malay”, etc.). Moreover, the earliest Indian, Chinese, Greek and Latin descriptions of the island(s) bearing the name(s) in question do not tally with the geographical situation and geology of the island of Java. Thus, according to the Sanskrit *Brahmandapurana*, “the said island of Java abounds in mines of various precious stones; / there is also a mountain called Gleaming (Dyutimant), rich in minerals; / it produces rivers and it produces gold (*yavadvīpamiti proktam nānāratnākarānvitam / tatrāpi dyutimānāma parvato dhātumanditah / samudragānām prabhavah prabhavah kāñcanasya tu...*)². Claudius Ptolemy (died in A.D. 168) mentions that *Ιαβαδιου (Iabadiou)* produces a large quantity of gold and that its eastern extremity is situated further north of the western one. As Roland Braddell rightly pointed out, “since *Yava-dvipa* and *Iabadiou* were each famous for gold, ... neither of them could have been Java; ... since Ptolemy shows most clearly that his *Iabadiou* was a completely different place from his Golden Chersonese and since the latter most clearly was the Malay Peninsular, *Iabadiou* could not have been that Peninsula... *Iabadiou* was an island very much to the *east* of the Golden Chersonese and ... its eastern extremity was considerably *north* of its western. It is obvious

that neither of these indications could fit the islands of Java or Sumatra...³ Moreover, the facts pertaining to Fa Xian (the old romanization Fa-Hsien)'s sail from Sri Lanka to China seem to be in favour of identifying his Yepoti with Borneo. "It seems clear that Fa-Hsien left Ceylon on a trader bound for Ye-po-ti, that he left on the Southwest (SW) monsoon and arrived on the Northeast (NE), and that he had to wait for the change of monsoons until he could start for China... Fa-Hsien set forth [from Yepoti to Canton - S.K.] on the SW monsoon and therefore... Ye-po-ti was north of the equator... It is a noticeable fact that the date when Fa-Hsien sailed, *viz.* the 16th of the 4th moon [the mid-May - S.K.], coincides with the time when the SW monsoon usually sets in properly on the coast of Borneo ... if the Iabadiou of Ptolemy and the Ye-po-ti of Fa-Hsien were the same, they could not have been Java, Sumatra or the Malay Peninsula but were most probably Borneo";⁴ on the identification of Yepoti with Borneo on meteorological grounds.⁵ Thus, it seems to be established beyond doubt that the cognate names recorded in early written sources as *Yavadvīpa*, *Ιαβαδίου* *Yepoti*, *Shepo*, *etc.*, represented in different periods not one and the same but at least three islands of what is now called Nusantara, i.e., Java, Sumatra and Borneo.⁶ Such a phenomenon can hardly be taken as a mere coincidence and calls for an explanation.

To solve the riddle one has to turn to the original meaning of the name "Java". At first sight its Sanskrit etymology, from Sanskrit *yava* "barley", seems fairly convincing. Many place-names of the so-called "indianized" states of Southeast Asia were of Sanskrit origin, e.g., Campa, Kambuja, Śrīvijaya, etc. Such an etymology is further supported by the data of Claudius Ptolemy whose *Ιαβαδίου* can be safely identified either with Sanskrit *Yavadvīpa* or a corresponding Prakrit locution. The similarity is the more striking since Ptolemy actually gives an absolutely correct Greek translation of the Indian idiom, which runs *κριθῆς νησοῦς*, i.e., "Barley Island"⁷. Hence the tendency to accept the Sanskrit etymology despite the fact that there is no barley in Java and explain the discrepancy by more or less far-fetched interpretations. For instance, it has been stated that *yava* in this case means simply "corn"⁸; yet the primary meaning of both the Sanskrit word and the Greek *κριθῆς* is "barley". Certain scholars believe that the name has to do with the shape of the island allegedly being similar to that of a barley grain⁹; however, as we have seen, the name was applied to various islands of different proportions. It seems therefore that the Sanskrit

idiom is but a "folk etymology" of the local name and an alternative solution should be looked for.

There is an old etymology first put forward, as far as I know, by W. von Humboldt (though he mentions P.P. Roorda van Eysinga's personal communication in this connection).¹⁰ According to it, the place-name Java derives from Old Javanese *yawā*, i.e., "outer". The Old Javanese lexeme eventually goes back to the Proto-Malayo-Polynesian etymon **b-awaq* "lower"¹¹ - Malay *bawah* "under, below"; Buginese *awa*; Tagalog *i-baba* "id"; Sa'a dialect of the Sa'a-Ulawa language *baba* "bottom part"; Samoan *fafa* "nether world", etc. However, as Walther Aichele pointed out, the Old Javanese lexeme was itself a loanword. It was borrowed from a language where, as, for instance, in Buginese, the proto-language glottal stop disappeared altogether¹², while in an authentic Old Javanese word it would have become **-b¹³*. Thus, one can treat the Old Javanese *yawā*, like Tagalog *i-baba*, as a combination of a locative prefix *i-* and the word **(b)awa* "low, down"; the above-mentioned Buginese *awa*. In this case the name in question could be translated "The Downward, resp. Outlying, (Island)". The interpretation tallies both with the well-grounded hypothesis of the settlement of the Malay Archipelago and the application of the name **Yawa* to a number of islands; since the Austronesian speakers came from north-east¹⁴, it would have been natural for them to treat the yet unexplored westerly islands as a whole and to refer to them as to "The Outlying". It is worth noting that, according to Raffles, '*Jawa* or *Jawi* is also the name by which Borneo, Java, Sumatra, the Malayan Peninsula and the islands lying among them, are known among the nations of Celebes'¹⁵.

The above interpretation shows the exact, though diametrically opposite, parallelism to the later vision of relations between Java and the other islands of the Archipelago. In the Majapahit period all the lands beyond Java were called *Nushāntara*, i.e., "Outlying islands"¹⁶. Thus, in comparison with the prehistoric period, the same juxtaposition remained though the former periphery had become the centre and vice versa¹⁷. One can cite, as typological parallels, numerous regions of medieval Europe called "The Marchs", "Les Marches", etc., i.e., "Borderlands", or the name of the Ukraine (*Ukraina*) meaning literally "Outskirts"; hence the definite article, uncharacteristic of proper names, in English.¹⁸

However, before the above discussed etymology of the name "Java" is adopted, one is bound to prove that such, so to speak, "inter-island" lexical borrowings were possible. Much was done in this respect by Aichele in his above-mentioned pioneering paper. He has shown most convincingly that pre-historic linguistic and cultural interactions in the Malay Archipelago could well have been even more close than the later ones. At least, there are certain data on the prehistoric contacts between the bearers of languages, which seem to have been separated in the period described by local written sources. Thus, such words as Ngaju *tamanang* "to be barren", Malagasy *tamánana* "heifer", and Toba *tamanang* "menstruation" are borrowed from Buginese or Macassarese. In the latter languages it is a regular formation involving the word *ana* "child", negative particle *ta-*, prefix *ma-*, and suffix *-ang*, while the above-mentioned Western Indonesian languages show a different form of the word "child" - Malagasy *anaka*, Toba and Ngaju *anak* - and a different form of suffix: Toba and Ngaju *-an*¹⁹. Actually, as Ūlo Sirk (personal communication) kindly pointed out to me, the way of borrowing was even more devious, since the regular reflexes of the said etymon in South Sulawesi languages are Buginese *t̄mm[ar]anak̄ng* and Macassarese *tam[m]anakkang* "barren, childless" while the synonymous words *tomanang/tamanang* in Buginese and *tamanang* in Macassarese seem to be borrowed from some other languages of Sulawesi. The Old Javanese *badangan* "buffalo" seems likely to be a Ngaju loan-word. Ngaju *hadangan* "sacrificial buffalo" is a regular derivation from the word-base *-bidang* "to serve or present (food)" (*pabidang* "sacrificial food for the dead") with a regular substitution of *-a-* for *-i-* in a pre-tonic syllable.²⁰

Inter-island relations and interactions did not come to an end with the introduction of Sanskrit culture. Thus, the Old Javanese priest title *wabuta* was a Karo-Batak borrowing. It goes back to Karo *babuta*,²¹ which, in its turn, can be traced back to Sanskrit *bhūta* "a spirit of the deceased, ghost". If the Old Javanese word were borrowed directly from Sanskrit, one would have expected a loss of aspiration, as it actually did happen; Javanese *buta* "giant".²² I am tempted to suggest that such Malay words as, e.g., *babasa* "language", *pabala* "divine reward for good deeds" (from Sanskrit *bhāshā* "language" and *phala* "fruit", respectively), etc., which could hardly be the result of a usual "learned" borrowing from Sanskrit, might also be adopted through the intermediary of another (Batak?) Austronesian language.

Moreover, there is direct evidence of the emergence of a civilization possessing of a written language of its own among the speakers of Borneo languages, i.e., the so-called "introductory formulae" of several Old Malay inscriptions. These are written in an unknown Austronesian language and have not been (and, probably, never will be) adequately translated. However, certain traits of the language that can be established beyond doubt are of paramount importance to the study of culture genesis and state formation in the Malay Archipelago. Though such an eminent scholar as George Coedes regarded the idiom in question as a mere distortion of Old Malay, a kind of "cabalistic language with its own phonetics".²³ G. Ferrand as early as in the early 1930s tried to translate the text with the aid of Malagasy parallels.²⁴ His idea proved to be fruitful and had succeeded in demonstrating the system of phonetic correspondences between Old Malay and the unknown language. Thus, Old Malay *-s-*, *-b-*, and *-r-* (from **R*) correspond to *-h-*, hiatus and *-y-*²⁵ of the unknown language, respectively; Old Malay *parsumpahan* "oath" (the Kota Kapur inscription, line 2) and *paihumpaan* "id" of the introductory formula language. It appears therefore that there was a close affinity between the latter and the languages of south-eastern Borneo in the Barito river area as well as the closely affiliated to them Malagasy language, which show the same phonetic traits not to be found in its entirety in other regional language groups. The fact is truly striking considering that the modern Barito languages have no written form while the first documents in Malagasy date to the 16th century A.D. It seems likely, as W. Aichele rightly pointed out, that the language of the introductory formula was a literary language of early states of the Malay archipelago prior to Old Malay; it was probably in use in Srivijaya as Sanskrit in Java - early Old Javanese inscriptions written partially in Sanskrit and partially in Old Javanese.²⁶ Given the use of the language in question in Srivijaya, a sea power controlling trade routes, side by side with Old Malay, it seems likely that in the early 1st millennium A.D. it had been, as later Malay, a *lingua franca* of seafarers and merchants of the South Seas. Moreover, its life-span could have been even longer, since, according to the description of the 7th part of the 1st zone of the Earth by Idrisi, a renowned Arabian geographer, whose work dates to A.D. 1154, the inhabitants of the Zabaj islands, i.e. the Malay Archipelago, and the Zinjies, i.e. the natives of East Africa, understood each other.²⁷ It could hardly be the case even if the latter were actually not Africans but Malagasy; judging from the epigraphy, not to mention lexicostatistics, the divergence of Malay and Barito

dialects was well under way at a much earlier date. One cannot help wondering if the South Sea islanders and the East Africans actually used as a means of converse in the 12th century A.D. the unknown language recorded in Srivijayan inscriptions. The latter could survive for a certain period as a *lingua franca* in the emporia along the route used by the Austronesian settlers of Madagascar just as such an unmistakable Austronesian ethnic marker as outrigger canoes have survived along the same route, i.e. in the Andaman islands, Ceylon and South India, Hadhramaut or the southern coast of Arabia, and Somalia.

Let us now turn to yet another evidence of the "unknown language" impact on Classical Malay that has remained unnoticed so far. In the classical language there existed the archaic honorific prefix *hang* invariably used with the names of such epic heroes as Hang Tuah, Hang Jebat et al. instead of the more common form *sang*. The word still survives as a personal pronoun in the northern Malay dialects of the Peninsula.²⁸ It is merely listed in the dictionaries as an archaic doublet of *sang* without further elaboration while an explanation of such a phenomenon seems to be badly in need. I believe that such an explanation can be provided through the examination of the introductory formula language of the seventh-century Old Malay inscriptions. The pair *sang - hang* displays precisely the same phonetic correspondence, i.e., *s - h*, that the Old Malay and the introductory formula language. I suggest therefore that *hang* may be a survival of "pre-Old-Malay" literary language of the Archipelago. The once high prestige of the latter could well have accounted for the use of this prefix exclusively with regard to the most renowned epic personages. Moreover, there exists a link between the seventh-century Sumatran inscriptions and the late medieval epic, i.e., the inscriptions from Si Topayan (the Batanghari river valley, Central Sumatra) dated to the early 2nd millenium A.D.²⁹ and mentioning certain Hang Tahi, Hang Buddhi dan Hang Langgar.

To summarize, the above-mentioned evidence enables one to suggest that in the early 1st millenium A.D. the cultural centre of the Malay Archipelago lay in its north-eastern part, more precisely, in Borneo. The latter, however, was still called "Outlying", which fact is indicative of gradual westward migration of Austronesian speakers from Philippines to what is now Indonesia.³⁰ Admittedly, islands fully opened up ceased to be called "outlying" and eventually the name *Yawa/Jawa* became restricted to a single island, though traces of earlier broader use survived (*supra*). Once one adopts such an explanation one does not need to question the credibility of early written sources for the sake of uniformity.

NOTE

- 1 The variant with a final *-i* represents a well-known phenomenon of the so-called "kramanization" when certain syllables are arbitrarily changed to produce a socially/culturally marked lexical items. Thus, the original Javanese *-s-* followed by a vowel becomes *-njing-* in a word of a higher speech-level, e.g., *asu* "dog" in *ngoko* and *anjing* "id" in *krama*. Though speech-levels are not characteristic either of classical and modern Malay or of Old Javanese, the phenomenon of formation of "polite" words through phonetic changes dates back to a fairly early period. Suffice it to say that the standard Malay word for "dog" is *anjing*, the "higher-speech-level" transformation of the original **asu*, which has not survived in Malay.
- 2 *Brahmandapurana* - Calcutta edition, Vol. 52, pp. 14 & 19-21.
- 3 Roland Braddell, "An Introduction to the Study of Ancient Times in the Malay Peninsula and the Straits of Malacca (continued)", *JMBRAS*, Vol. XIX, Part. 1, 1941, pp. 32 & 42-43.
- 4 *Ibid.*, pp. 56, 58, 68; cf. also A. Grimes, "The Journey of Fa-Hsien from Ceylon to Canton", *JMBRAS*, Vol. XIX, Part. I. 1941.
- 5 On the identification of Chu-po mentioned in *Tai Ping Yu Lan*, Java Major of Marco Polo, etc., with Borneo see O.W. Wolters, *Early Indonesian Commerce: A Study of the Origins of Śrīvijaya*, Ithaca (N.Y.), 1967, p. 276 n. 26; Brian E. Colless, "Were the Gold Mines of Ancient Java in Borneo?" *Brunei Museum Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1975; Robert Nicholl, "An Age of Vicissitude: Brunei 1225-1425", *Brunei Museum Journal*, Vol. 7 No. 1, 1989.
- 6 The fact accounts for a certain confusion with regard to the data on the early history of the Archipelago, since the above-mentioned conclusions tend to be overlooked. The present author has to admit that he himself contributed to the said confusion having assumed in an earlier work S.V. Kullanda, *Istoria drevnei Javy (The History of Early Java)*, Moscow (in Russian with an English summary), 1992, pp. 110-112, that the names in question had to do solely with the island of Java.
- 7 Claudia Ptolemy, *Geographica*, VII. 29.
- 8 Hendrik Kern, "De naamoorsprong van Java", *Verspreide Geschriften*, Vol. 6, 1917 (1871).
- 9 Roland Braddell, "An Introduction to the Study of Ancient Time on the Malay Peninsula (Cont')", *JMBRAS*, Vol. XV, Part 3, p. 79.

- 10 W. Von Humboldt, *Über die Kawi-Sprache auf der Insel Java, Bd. I*, Berlin, 1836, pp. 56, 59-67.
- 11 Semantic shift "lower" - "outer" is fairly common in Austronesian languages. Mandailing *tu toru* "down; out". According to Aichele, such a perception is due to the design of typical Austronesian pile dwellings with entrance/exit hole in the floor, see Walther Aichele, "Sprachforschung und Geschichte im indonesischen Raum", *Oriens Extremus*, Vol. I, No. 1, 1954, p. 114.
- 12 Its only vestige in Old Javanese is the compensatory lengthening of final vowel.
- 13 Aichele, *Ibid.*, p. 114.
- 14 Apparently they had migrated from their homeland on the coast of the present-day South China and Taiwan first to the Philippine islands whence they spread to Western Indonesia, Eastern Indonesia and Oceania.
- 15 T. S. Raffles, *The History of Java*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 2. Cf. also B. F. Matthes, *Makassaarsch-Hollansch Woordenboek*, 2nd druk, Gravenhage, 1885, p. 558.
- 16 Modern use of the word *Nusantara* as a synonym of "the Malay Archipelago" is due to misunderstanding.
- 17 The fact in itself is sufficient to refute Kern's main objection against the etymology in question, since he erroneously held that place-names meaning "downward, outlying, etc." were quite uncharacteristic of Javanese toponymy.
- 18 Not to mention the well-known English idiom "down under" standing for both Australia and New Zealand.
- 19 Walter Aichele, "Sprachforschung und Geschichte im Indonesischen Raum", *Oriens Extremus*, Vol. I, No. 1, 1954, p. 109.
- 20 Aichele, *Ibid.*, p. 114.
- 21 Cf. Karo *babuta kuta*, an idiom used to designate the most honoured participants of traditional feasts, e.g., elders, etc.
- 22 Aichele, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-119.
- 23 Georges Coedes, "Les Inscriptions Malaises de Çrivijaya", *BEFEO*, Vol. XXX, 1930, p. 50; English translation see in: *Srivijaya*, 1992, p. 56.
- 24 W. Aichele, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-114 and Louis-Charles Damais, "Etudes Sumatranaises III, La Langue B des Incrptions de Sri Wijaya", *BEFEO*, T. LVIII, 1968.

- 25 It appears in the introductory formula under the guise of the second part of the diphthong *-ai-*.
- 26 One may refer, however, to different interpretations by Otto Christian Dahl, *Migration from Kalimantan to Madagascar*, Oslo, 1991 and K. A. Adelaar, "Malay Influences in Malagasy: Linguistic and Culture-Historical Inferences", *Oceanic Linguistic*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 1989; "New Ideas on the Early History of Malagasy" in "Papers in Austronesians Linguistics", *Pacific Linguistic*, A-81, 1991. Unfortunately, there is no mention at all of the introductory formula language either in James Collins, *Malay, World Language: A Short History*, Kuala Lumpur, 1998 or in *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia, Volume 4: Early History*. In the latter edition it is even stated that "the opening lines... of these early inscriptions are in Sanskrit"(!)
- 27 Gabriel Ferrand, "Quatre Textes Epigraphique de Sumatra et de Banka", *Journal Asiatique*, T. 221, 1932, pp. 299-300.
- 28 Yaakub Isa, *Kamus Bahasa Melayu Klasik*, Kuala Lumpur: 1997, p. 64.
- 29 F. M. Schnitger, *The Archaeology of Hindoo Sumatra*, Leiden: 1937, pp. 31-32.
- 30 Given the existence of South Sulawesi loanwords in Sumatran and Madagascar languages, one is tempted to suggest that before Borneo either Sulawesi or a certain region in Philippines (or Borneo?) inhabited by the bearers of South Sulawesi languages had been the core area of the Austronesian settlers of the Malay Archipelago.

ABBREVIATIONS

- BEFEO* - *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient*. Hanoi-Paris
JMBRAS - *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*. Singapore.

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