Archipel

Études interdisciplinaires sur le monde insulindien

100 | 2020

Varia

Recent Archaeological Surveys in the Northern Half of Sumatra

Récentes prospections archéologiques dans la moitié nord de Sumatra

Daniel Perret , Heddy Surachman et Repelita Wahyu Oetomo

Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/archipel/2061>

DOI : 10.4000/archipel.2061

ISSN : 2104-3655

Éditeur

Association Archipel

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 15 December 2020

Pagination : 27-54

ISBN : 978-2-910513-84-9

ISSN : 0044-8613

Référence électronique

Daniel Perret , Heddy Surachman et Repelita Wahyu Oetomo, « Recent Archaeological Surveys in the Northern Half of Sumatra », *Archipel* [En ligne], 100 | 2020, mis en ligne le 28 novembre 2020, consulté le 10 décembre 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/archipel/2061> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/archipel.2061>

ARCHÉOLOGIE ET ÉPIGRAPHIE À SUMATRA

DANIEL PERRET¹, HEDDY SURACHMAN², REPELITA WAHYU OETOMO³

Recent Archaeological Surveys in the Northern Half of Sumatra

After 25 years of archaeological research on old settlement sites of North Sumatra Province, it seems appropriate to review what is now known of such sites and associated ones dated prior to the sixteenth century in this province and in the adjacent areas of West Sumatra and Riau provinces.⁴ The recent surveys conducted with this aim were also an opportunity to collect new field data, either from locals or through pedestrian survey and soil core sampling. Two fieldtrips were conducted in 2019, the first from 28 January to 11 February and the second from 16 to 27 July (fig. 1).

Barus, on the west coast of the North Sumatra Province, north of Sibolga, where archaeological research had been undertaken from 1994 to 2005, was revisited on the occasion of the first trip, because we hoped that recent chance finds might shed light on the location of the site which, according to local traditions, predated the site of Lobu Tua (late ninth to late eleventh centuries CE), and where, according to the legend, a certain Andam Dewi cut the head of a *garuda*. It turned out differently: both pedestrian survey and two small test-pits (02°02'25.4" N, 98°22'00.7" E; 02°02'34.6" N, 98°21'47.8" E) in an area that would correspond to these traditions in terms of toponymy proved negative. The only new information is the existence of a sacred place called

-
1. École française d'Extrême-Orient / French School of Asian Studies, Kuala Lumpur.
 2. Pusat Penelitian Arkeologi Nasional Indonesia, Jakarta.
 3. Pusat Penelitian Arkeologi Nasional Indonesia, Balai Arkeologi Medan.
 4. The authors warmly thank Arlo Griffiths for his editing of the English-language.

Fig. 1 – Archaeological sites mentioned in the text (D. Perret).

Keramat Aulia 44 in the village of Aek Busuk. A new place shall therefore be added to the list of toponyms linked to the legend of the 44 Muslim saints well known in the traditions of Barus and beyond (cf. Perret 2009: 583–584). Near Aek Busuk, the core of the Lobu Tua site (Desa Lobu Tua, Kecamatan Andam Dewi, Kabupaten Tapanuli Tengah) remains in the same condition as twenty years ago, covered as it still is by a coconut grove without any new constructions (02°02'17.6" N, 98°22'09.4" E).

Twenty years ago, the village of Gabungan Hasang already extended over Bukit Hasang, the other major settlement site of Barus (twelfth to early sixteenth centuries CE). The densification of occupation continues. In the hamlet of Pananggahan (Kecamatan Barus, Kabupaten Tapanuli Tengah), just north of Gabungan Hasang, the hill overlooking the old Islamic graveyard known as Makam Ambar (02°01'52.9" N, 98°24'56.3" E), which has been quarried for some eight years, will soon disappear (fig. 2). It is on this hill that, in 2003, we uncovered the stone bearing the oldest dated funerary inscription (751 H / 1350 CE) identified so far in the Barus region (Perret et al. 2009: 487, nr. 14 p. 500) (fig. 3).

(1) Month of Djûmadâ II of the year	(١) شهر جمادى الاخر سنة
(2) 751 / August 6th – September 3rd 1350	(٢) أحد و خمسين و سبعمائة.
(3) .x.x.x.	.+.+.+. (٣)
(4) xxxx.x.	.+.++++ (٤)
(5) xxx.x.x.	.+.+.+++ (٥)

The Arabic inscription on PNG2 tombstone

The keeper at the Ambar cemetery having had the presence of mind to save several dozen tombstones from destruction, we had the opportunity to document 21 whole or fragmentary inscribed stones, some decorated with stylized mosque lamps or interlacings or floral motifs (fig. 4). All these texts in Arabic characters are religious inscriptions (L. Kalus, pers. comm. with D.P., February 2019).

Among these tombstones rescued just in time, one drew our attention in particular since we recognized an inscription in Indic script on one of its sides (fig. 5, fig. 6). Our suggestion was soon confirmed by Arlo Griffiths, whose readings reveal that the inscription is in Old Malay (see his article

Fig. 2 – Pananggahan hill (Daniel Perret, Feb. 2019)

Fig. 3 – The PNG2 tombstone (Daniel Perret, 2003)

Fig. 4 – Gravestones from Pananggahan hill (Daniel Perret, Feb. 2019)

Fig. 5 – The Old-Malay inscribed gravestone from Pananggahan (Daniel Perret, July 2019)

Fig. 6 – The Old-Malay inscription (R.W. Oetomo, Sept. 2019)

in this issue for a decipherment and translation as well as comments). Apart from a number of rings and gems inscribed with Indic characters, this type of find is rare in Barus. Until recently only two texts found in Lobu Tua were known: the famous inscription in Old-Tamil dated 1088 CE, and an inscription in Old Javanese in two fragments still to be thoroughly analysed, so far dated paleographically from the tenth century CE (Guillot et al. 2003: 299–300).

Although fragmentary, this Pananggahan stele (49×29×12 cm) shows a carved decoration in the style of the PNG2 tombstone mentioned above and found on the same hill fifteen years earlier. There is the same horizontally arranged brace, whose scrolls are decorated in this case. The chain motif is also found in both, a horizontal strip separating the brace from the inscription and in two vertical strips on either side of the inscription (inscribed panel: 8×14 cm). In the PNG2 stele, each vertical strip is on the top of a bell shape that can be interpreted as a pillar base.

Strikingly, the dates deciphered on both stones are very close to each other. The fact that two tombstones from the same site bear inscriptions in Arabic and Old Malay languages and bear dates within close range the one from the other recalls the case of the bilingual pair of inscriptions (also in Old Malay / Arabic) of al-malika Wabīsa's tomb in Minye Tujuh near Pasai, which include the year

781 H / 1380 CE in the Old Malay inscription written in Palaeosumatran characters (van der Molen 2007: 360–361) and 791 H / 1389 CE in the Arabic inscription (Guillot & Kalus 2008: 313–314). This precedent of Minye Tujuh, revealed more than a century ago and verified several times since, leads us to suggest that the PNG2 stele and the inscribed gravestone recently identified in the same hamlet of Pananggahan, both made of tuff and probably locally made, would come from the same grave. The major difference from the Minye Tujuh tomb would be the mention of two dates in different eras (Śaka and Hijrah). Another funerary monument displays inscriptions in two different scripts (Malay written in Jawi and in Palaeosumatran characters), the use of the Śaka and Hijrah eras, as well as a discrepancy regarding the dates. This is the inscribed pillar of Pengkalan Kempas (Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia), on which the inscription in Jawi indicates the year 872 H (1467/68) while the inscription in Palaeosumatran characters bears the year 1385 Ś (1463/64) (Boden Kloss 1921; de Casparis 1980).

The hypothesis of a unique grave is also based on another observation: the two Pananggahan stelae show a very similar style without any equivalent known so far in the Barus region.

It may not be a mere coincidence that in 2009 we had already noticed the similarities in form and style of PNG2 with two tombs of Pasai documented in 2006, located at Dusun 44 near Kuta Kareueng, an old graveyard identified as Peut Pleuh Peut by C. Guillot and L. Kalus. Carved in granite showing black inclusions, their inscriptions unfortunately do not include names or dates (Guillot and Kalus 2008: 272–273).⁵

This use of the combination of Arabic and Old Malay languages, as well as the style, both of which are reminiscent of the Pasai region, raise another tantalizing question: would the Pananggahan tomb, which is 30 or 40 years older than the one at Minye Tujuh, be the burial place of an ancestor of al-malika Wabīsa?

In his reading of the inscription, Arlo Griffiths proposes to translate “*bhagi(n)da*” by “his/her highness,” which of course immediately comes to mind. In the historical context of Barus, and in particular of its close and apparently ancient links with the Minangkabau area, it is worth recalling the use of the term *bagindo* as a title of nobility in the regions of Pariaman and Tanah Datar (Moussay 1995: 113). Could the “*bhaginda*” of the inscription be linked to one of the re-founders of Barus (after the destruction of Lobu Tua), who according to local chronicles is said to originate from Tarusan, south of Padang (Drakard ed., 2003: 144-5, 216, 234)? In a previous publication (Perret 2009: 561) we had already noted a common point between old inscriptions of the Minangkabau area, Barus and Minye Tujuh, that is the use of the word

5. We thank Véronique Degroot for pointing out other similar motifs on Pasai old tombstones, in particular the motifs above the inscriptions of KK21 (1415 CE) and KL02 (1441 CE) (see Guillot and Kalus 2008: 164, 342).

Fig. 7 – Gaṇeśa image (Lumut River) (Daniel Perret, Feb. 2019)

“*tuhan*” interpreted as an eminent title.

Still on the west coast of North Sumatra, in the southern sector of Sibolga Bay, we looked near Lumut (Kecamatan Badiri, Kabupaten Tapanuli Tengah) for the discovery site of the stone Gaṇeśa observed nearly twenty years ago by Lucas P. Koestoro (2001). The aim was to check whether the surroundings might subsequently have provided indications of an ancient settlement site. The discovery site (01°35'16" N, 98°49'57.5" E) is located on the slopes of a hill overlooking a small tributary of the Lumut River upstream from the village of Jago-Jago. Gold is being mined at the foot of the hill. The statue carved in tuff is still there, but in a fragmentary and very degraded state (height 66 cm, base 45×28 cm) (fig. 7). At the same place, fragments of another image (undetermined) carved in tuff are also visible. The thick vegetation covering the hill at this location prevents effective survey, but the former landowner is not aware of any chance discovery of shards or bricks made recently, either on the slopes or at the top of the hill. The presence here of these two apparently isolated statues remains unexplained. As early as the eighteenth century, explorers who wanted to venture into the hinterland from the west coast left from the Bay of Sibolga (also known as Bay of Tapanuli), particularly from the Lumut region. This was the case of Miller, Willer, van der Tuuk and Junghuhn, the latter then reaching Portibi in Padang Lawas, after following

the Batang Toru, Batang Angkola and Sirumambe rivers. It is known also that the Lumut region was at that time already rich in camphor trees.⁶ In addition, the search for gold veins still active today was certainly practiced in the area in ancient times.

Further south, still on the west coast, the place name Batu Mundam/Mundom (Kecamatan Muara Batang Gadis, Kabupaten Mandailing Natal) caught our attention because the word *mundam* is still in use in the Tamil language,⁷ and this raises the question of the existence of a settlement frequented by Tamils in former times, as in Barus further north. The only significant feature in the landscape near the village is a steeply sloping hill called Bukit Peti (01°16'37.7" N, 98°51'42.2" E). This hill, no longer frequented, is at the centre of various beliefs among the locals (presence of a pond with perfumed water, an anchor, a carved house post, also a place of meditation in former times). The present village of Batu Mundam is said to have been founded five or six generations ago. According to the locals, the village's founders originated from Kampung Sawangan, on the opposite bank of the Batang Toru River. During our brief visit, we didn't hear of any find indicating the presence of an ancient settlement site in the vicinity.

Further south, Singkuang (Kecamatan Muara Batang Gadis, Kabupaten Mandailing Natal) is located at the mouth (now silted up) of the Batang Gadis River. The toponym Picar Koling was still known near this mouth in the second half of the nineteenth century. Picar/Pijor Koling is a relatively common place name in North Sumatra, recorded from the west to the east coasts. It may refer to a gold smelting workshop run by people from the southeast coast of India. According to this interpretation, Pijor/Picar would be the modern Indonesian *pijar-pijar*, namely borax, a flux used to lower the melting point of gold, and Koling would be a variant of Keling, a term well known in maritime Southeast Asia to designate people from the Indian subcontinent. Finds of "antique objects" were reported there at the end of the nineteenth century.⁸ In addition, in his pseudo-historical work entitled *Tuanku Rao*, Parlindungan (c. 1964: 33–4, 38) probably made use of oral traditions to assert the presence of various foreign populations in Singkuang in ancient times. However, data collected during our survey do not go back beyond the colonial period (two Muslim tombs: Makam Syeh and Makam Raja – 01°03'40.6" N, 98°55'53.2" E), except perhaps the foundation of the Singkuang village itself by people of

6. On these points, see Perret 2014.

7. *Muṇṭam* means "head" or "forehead" in Tamil (https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/tamil-lex_query.py?qs=muntam&matchtype=default, retrieved July 2020). The term is also used in Acehese to designate a water container of the *kendi* type (Djajadiningrat 1934, II: 106–107).

8. *Notulen van de Algemeene en Directievergaderingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen*, 25, 1887: 56.

Tarutung village at about one hour by boat. The memory of the toponym Picar Koling seems definitively lost and no finds indicating presence of an ancient settlement site in the vicinity seem to have been reported recently.

About 80 km to the south, the small fishing port of Natal (Kabupaten Mandailing-Natal, North Sumatra Province) is situated in the middle of a bay protected by the tip of Ujung Sikara-kara in the north and the tip of Ujung Rakat in the south. Unlike Barus, Natal has a real coastal plain about 15 km wide. Natal is now connected both by a good mountain road (pass at an altitude of 1,270 m) to Panyabungan, although this road is frequently cut by landslides, and by an excellent coastal road to Singkuang.

The many gold-washers still in action in the torrential part of the Natal River have swapped sieves (*dulang*) for pumps that suck sediment from the river bed. The richness in gold of the Natal River basin has been known for a long time.⁹ It is already mentioned by Marsden at the end of the eighteenth century, gold making the reputation of the port of Natal itself. Moreover, the discovery of old gold ornaments and rings by gold panners was reported at the beginning of the twentieth century. Whereas in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Batang Natal was navigable nearly twenty kilometres upstream of its mouth for boats carrying cargoes up to three tons, this is no longer the case today: navigation is prevented by trees falling into the river and by the erosion of its banks. The hinterland of Natal was also known for its camphor tree forests. Willer thus noticed that in the first half of the nineteenth century, camphor trade in the region was monopolized by traders from Natal. And as for Singkuang, Parlindungan's *Tuanku Rao* (c. 1964: 33–4, 38) claims that various foreign populations were present in Natal in former times. All these indications of course encouraged us to visit Natal.

A topographical landmark that immediately attracts attention is the hill (Bukit Bendera), which is about 100 m high and overlooks the small town (fig. 8). An access road leading to a telecommunication relay station built at the top has been cut into the slopes, exposing stratigraphic sections 1–3 metres deep over several hundred metres. As the thickness of the humus layer does not exceed a few centimetres, this hill does not show interesting potential as regards ancient settlement sites. A dry-stone enclosure at the foot of Bukit Bendera protects the grave of Syeh Abdul Fatah (1282 H = 1865 CE). Backing on to Bukit Bendera, on the hill of Bukit Kayu Batu, which does not exceed an altitude of 40 m, there is a graveyard (00°33' 22.3" N, 99°06' 59.6" E), including Syeh Abdul Rauf's tomb (1286 H = 1869 CE). Here, the thickness of the brown topsoil layer exceeds 50 cm and several pits could be the remains of illegal digging. However, pedestrian survey on the hill did not reveal any ancient artefact. It should be noted that the legend of the 44 Muslim saints, mentioned above about Barus, is also still alive in Natal.

9. For references about the points discussed below, see Perret 2014.

Fig. 8 – Natal seen from Bukit Bendera (Daniel Perret, Jan. 2019)

A pedestrian survey conducted on the opposite bank of the Batang Natal revealed that sandbanks cover the land, suggesting that an old settlement site could now lie under several metres of alluvium. It should also be borne in mind that, like the main river in Barus (now known as the Sirahar River), the lower reaches of the Batang Natal may have moved over the past millennium, a dynamic which would further complicate the location of any old settlement site(s). The only remains that could be relatively old uncovered during our survey are two graves oriented East-West, delimited with stones, that are now forgotten in a deserted garden (00°33'09.8" N, 99°07'19.3" E).

The main lesson of this survey on the west coast of the province of North Sumatra is that Barus, with its settlement sites dating back to the end of the first millennium CE, its numerous old Muslim graves (dated from the fourteenth century CE), and its wealth of pseudo-historical Malay texts, remains an exception. Elsewhere, no clear indicators of ancient settlements have been found, and the transmission of historical and toponymic knowledge, pseudo-historical traditions and legends, seems to have nearly broken down.

In the interior of this *kabupaten* of Mandailing-Natal, the Simangambat temple remains (01°02'31.1" N, 99°28'54.8" E, Desa Si Mangambat, Kecamatan Siabu), near Panyabungan, constitute the oldest 'classical' monument known to date in the northern half of Sumatra. Dated from the second half of the ninth century CE, a number of indications suggest that it

Fig. 9 – Candi Simangambat (Daniel Perret, Feb. 2019)

probably served a Javanese community of Śiva worshipers. Spotted by a Westerner in the 1840s, it was cleared and excavated in 2009–2010 (fig. 9).¹⁰ Candi Simangambat is strategically located at the crossroads of two river systems, the Batang Angkola to the north and the Batang Gadis flowing from the Muara Sipongi region to the southeast, with a mouth into the Indian Ocean at Singkuang mentioned above. It is also near the Sorik Merapi volcano, at the top of which four small *stūpas* bearing Old Malay inscriptions have been found, one of which dates back to 1242 CE (Griffiths 2014: 233–235; Perret 2018: 261–263). The Sorik Merapi site also revealed three brick structures containing funeral urns. In addition, the Batang Natal River was formerly connected by a path to this volcano. It has been suggested in an earlier publication that the Javanese community linked to Simangambat could be at the origin of the building of the oldest monuments at Si Pamutung in Padang Lawas (Perret 2014: 327).

While all the questions relating to Candi Simangambat itself are far from being resolved, the location of the settlement of the community that built and frequented this monument remains unknown. The name of a place located near the confluence of the Batang Angkola and Batang Gadis had caught our attention for several years. It is Kota Tua, practically facing Candi

¹⁰. See Soedewo (2014) for a review of the research on these remains.

Fig. 10 – Foundation memorial at Kota Tua (Daniel Perret, Feb. 2019)

Simangambat on the opposite bank of the Batang Angkola. Car access to this village requires a long detour to reach the Sayurimatinggi bridge. From there, one enters an area called Tantom Angkola (Tano Tombangan Angkola), which appears to have been opened during the 1930s by people originating from the south of Lake Toba, probably to develop ricefields. Kota Tua happens to be one of the villages founded at that time and a memorial commemorating its foundation (16 Nov. 1934) and its founders has been erected in the middle of the village (01°00'48.4" N, 99°25'58.7" E) in 2005 (fig. 10), a very rare initiative in the region! The names of the villages in this area seem to originate from the migrants' home villages, including Kota Tua. Neither the latter, nor the area at the confluence of the Batang Gadis and Batang Angkola rivers, about two kilometres from Kota Tua, seem to have yielded artefacts indicating the presence of an old settlement site. Such misleading toponymy is not an isolated case in Sumatra and may be one of the characteristics that differentiates field research on this island from what one encounters on Java.

Further south, entering West Sumatra province, Kabupaten Pasaman constitutes another area with geographical and economic assets that may have been crucial in ancient times. The source of the Batang Gadis is here. Moreover, from Pasaman, following the Batang Asik valley, it is also possible to reach the Barumun River

Fig. 11 – *Dvārapāla* and *makara* (Padang Nunang) (Daniel Perret, July 2019)

basin to the north, oriented towards the Strait of Malacca, a basin well known to archaeologists for its many Hindu-Buddhist remains of Padang Lawas. In Pasaman also flows the Batang Sumpur, which has its source in the south, near Lubuksikaping, receives the Sibinail and Batang Asik rivers before flowing into the Batang Tibawan, a tributary of the Rokan Kiri River. The latter then joins the Rokan Kanan before flowing into the Strait of Malacca in Bagansiapiapi. From Pasaman, it is therefore possible to access three watersheds: the Rokan River in the northeast, the Barumun River in the north and the Batang Gadis/Batang Angkola in the northwest. Moreover, the Pasaman region is thought to shelter gold mineral clusters and perhaps alluvial gold, as well as silver. In fact, the Rokan River basin figured among the auriferous regions of Sumatra mentioned by Tomé Pires at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and *rākān* is mentioned among the tributaries of the Majapahit kingdom in the famous *Deśavarṇana*, an East Javanese court poem from 1365. It also appears in the Porlak Dolok inscription (Padang Lawas) dated to the thirteenth century CE (Griffiths 2014: 219-224).

All these elements suggest that Pasaman was home to a major settlement in ancient times, especially since Hindu-Buddhist remains have been found there since the 1960s. At Padang Nunang (Nagari Lubuk Layang, Kecamatan Rao Selatan) a stone *dvārapāla* and a stone *makara* (fig. 11) were found in the Sibinail/Simunair river that passes through the village, which explains their poor condition.¹¹ Although their style is very similar to Padang Lawas sculptures, the material is different. These two images are made of sandstone

¹¹. On these sculptures, see Soedewo 2014: 196, 210; Degroot 2014: 45; Perret 2014: 310, 318, 322.

Fig. 12 – *Makara* recently discovered at Padang Nunang (Datuak Amran, Sept. 2019)

Fig. 13 – *Makara* recently discovered at Padang Nunang (Datuak Amran, Sept. 2019)

while the *dvārapālas* and *makaras* of Padang Lawas are made of tuff. Both statues are now protected under a shelter (00°33'10.5" N, 100°03'11.0" E).¹² Two months after our July survey a much better preserved *makara* was discovered in the same area (fig. 12, 13). Its style is very similar, if not identical, to the Padang Lawas *makaras*.

In the same *nagari*, the village of Kubu Sutan shelters the so-called Kubu Sutan or Lubuk Layang inscription discovered some fifty years ago. The inscribed hard red stone (fig. 14) was reportedly found at its current location among the roots of a burnt *beringin* (*Ficus benjamina*) near the Batang Tingkarang (00°32'41.5" N, 100°04'16.9" E). The inscription is discussed by Arlo Griffiths in this issue.

More recently, the Pasaman region has revealed a number of monumental remains that have been surveyed by the Balai Arkeologi Medan and the Balai Pelestarian Cagar Budaya (BPCB) Sumatera Barat at Batusangkar. In 2013 (the year of their rediscovery by villagers), two remains of heavily damaged Hindu-

12. *Makara*: height 83 cm, base 40×60 cm (the height of the figure in the mouth is 48 cm); the *dvārapāla* is fragmentary (head missing): height 85 cm, length 40 cm, width 28 cm.

Fig. 14 – Kubu Sutan / Lubuk Layang inscription (Daniel Perret, July 2019)

Buddhist brick monuments were excavated by the Balai Arkeologi Medan at the Air Tobiang site (Nagari Tarung-Tarung, Kecamatan Rao) ($00^{\circ}32'29.2''$ N, $100^{\circ}01'29.7''$ E), near a tributary of the Batang Tingkarang mentioned above. The size of the main mound is 14.5 m (NS) by 7 m (EW). In the same *nagari*, the village of Pancahan, more precisely at the Rambah/Kubu Tanjung site, at the confluence of the Tingkarang and Kepunan rivers, there are four brick mounds ($00^{\circ}31'25.5''$ N, $100^{\circ}01'35.4''$ E), remains of Hindu-Buddhist structures partially excavated by the BPCB Batusangkar in 1993 (BCPB Sumatera Barat 2018). The size of the main mound is 19 m (NS) by 13 m (EW) (fig. 15). A clearly visible ditch could be related to this mound. On a hill a few hundred metres away, we saw a number of erected cut stones ($00^{\circ}31'26.7''$ N, $100^{\circ}01'14.6''$ E). At Tanjung Bariang (Nagari Lubuk Layang, Kecamatan Rao Selatan), a site a few hundred metres from the Batang Asik and Sibinail rivers revealed four large brick mounds and many smaller ones almost entirely destroyed ($00^{\circ}34'14.1''$ N, $100^{\circ}03'05.2''$ E). The Balai Arkeologi Medan and the BPCB Batusangkar conducted limited excavations at this site between 2011 and 2013. Nearby is a grave showing two carved markers ($00^{\circ}33'57.5''$ N, $100^{\circ}02'56.8''$ E), one of which is anthropomorphic (fig. 16).

The most unusual site in the Rao region is undoubtedly Bukit Koto Rao (Jorong Tanjung Aia, Nagari Lubuk Layang, Kecamatan Rao Selatan), a long hill of several dozen hectares near the confluence of the Batang Sumpur,

Fig. 15 – Mound at Pancahan (Daniel Perret, July 2019)

Sibinail and Batang Asik rivers. A succession of terraces, on which rows of brick and stone mounds can be seen (or at least made out), have been built around its periphery. The Balai Arkeologi Medan and the BPCB Batusangkar have already conducted limited excavations there, the latter having cleared in 2008 the remains of a brick structure measuring 3x3 m (Sri Sugiharta 2008). The hill is currently covered with a rubber plantation and generally thick vegetation, making it impossible to get a precise view of its topography and the density of mounds. A topographical survey would of course be essential, but it would require considerable clearing work, unless aerial survey techniques such as Lidar or drone can be used if not disturbed by the vegetation cover. During this survey, we carried out soil core sampling (between 37 cm and 86 cm deep) at ten points on the northern part of the hill to get an idea of the stratigraphy and density of archaeological finds.¹³ The more or less sandy humus, 30 cm thick on average, covers a yellowish brown or reddish brown

13. Point 1 (near the northern limit of the hill): 00°32'38.3" N, 100°04'17.4" E (depth 70 cm); point 2: 00°32'36.4" N, 100°04'17.4" E (depth 77 cm); point 3: 00°32'35.3" N, 100°04'17.4" E (depth 74 cm); point 4: 00°32'35.4" N, 100°04'18.1" E (depth 37 cm); point 5: 00°32'35.5" N, 100°04'19.1" E (depth 38 cm); point 6: 00°32'35.8" N, 100°04'20.1" E (depth 86 cm); point 7: 00°32'34.4" N, 100°04'19.4" E (depth 42 cm); point 8: 00°32'33.2" N, 100°04'18.9" E (depth 56 cm); point 9: 00°32'32.7" N, 100°04'19.1" E (depth 55 cm); point 10: 00°32'31.6" N, 100°04'19.6" E (depth 42 cm).

Fig. 16 – Anthropomorphic grave marker, Tanjung Bariang (Daniel Perret, July 2019)

sandy-clayey layer. Apart from a few brick fragments in soil core no. 6, these ten cores did not reveal traces of ancient occupation surfaces or artefacts. As this survey covered only a small part of the hill, it would be premature to rule out the presence of any old settlement site.

The uncovering of all these ancient monument remains over the last two decades in the Rao region is in line with our hypothesis of a major ancient settlement site in this area. In the current state of knowledge, the surroundings of the Bukit Koto Rao site would be a strong candidate.

It should be recalled here that the remains of the Buddhist brick structures at Tanjungmedan (Jorong Petok, Nagari Panti, Kecamatan Panti, Kabupaten Pasaman) are located upstream on the Batang Sumpur. Four monuments were excavated and restored between 1992 and 2004 (Zakaria 1998; BPCB Sumatra Barat 2018) (fig. 17). Known since the 1860s, the site has yielded at least two inscriptions, one of which, clearly revealing the Buddhist affiliation of the site, is believed to be dated no later than the twelfth century (Bosch 1930: 133–4).

Further south, the inscribed tuff block of Ganggo Hilia (Jorong Pasar, Nagari Ganggo Hilia, Kecamatan Bonjol, Kabupaten Pasaman) is now protected under a shelter (00° 00' 59.2" S, 100° 13' 29.3" E) along the Batang Bubus (fig. 18). A tentative reading of the inscription was published in 2005,¹⁴ but an in-depth study remains to be done. This river does not seem to be a tributary of the Batang Sumpur, but flows towards the Indian Ocean.

14. The boulder was found on the bank of the river (Setianingsih 2005).

Fig. 17 – Tanjungmedan site (Daniel Perret, July 2019)

Fig. 18 – Ganggo Hilia inscribed stone (Daniel Perret, July 2019)

The most famous Hindu-Buddhist remains of the Kampar River Basin in Riau Province are those of Muara Takus (Desa Muara Takus, Kecamatan XIII Koto Kampar, Kabupaten Kampar), on the right bank of the river (Kampar Kanan). Revealed in 1860 by the mining engineer Cornelis de Groot, clearings of the monuments yielded four Buddhist inscriptions (three on stones and one on gold plate) paleographically dated between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries CE (Griffiths 2014: 236–7). A monumental complex of four structures, including the imposing Candi Mahligai (00° 20' 09.2" N, 100° 38' 31.8" E), has been restored between 1977 and 1994.¹⁵ The site is surrounded by an earthen wall, now partially submerged, along with several of the formerly surrounding villages, in the Koto Panjang reservoir, upstream from Bangkinang. Researches conducted since the 1970s have focused on the mapping of the earthworks and the excavation of remains of structures made of permanent materials inside and outside the walled area (Kusen et al. 1995a, 1995b). The Balai Arkeologi Medan recently cleared the remains of a brick structure on the periphery of the complex (see Soedewo et al. 2015).

The main purpose of our brief survey was to search for indications of settlement within the enclosed area. Using an auger, a first East-West series of nine cores (covering a distance of about 200 metres) were bored in the lower part of the site. With a depth varying between 22 cm and 78 cm,¹⁶ they reveal a topsoil layer of grey-brown humus about twenty centimetres thick above a yellowish clayey sediment. These nine soil cores yielded only a few fragments of charcoal in the humus layer. The only artifact collected was a fragment of brick in the humus layer at point 5, and it should be noted that boring at points 6 and 9 was blocked by stones and tuff blocks respectively, possible indications of remains made of permanent materials. Three soil cores were bored along the river (fig. 19). Their depth varied between 102 cm and 123 cm.¹⁷ Point 10 revealed a grey clayey sediment with red spots to a depth of 69 cm, then a grey sediment layer about 12 cm thick, above a grey clayey sediment with red spots down to a depth of 95 cm, covering a reddish brown sandy-clayey

15. Atmodjo et al. 1997; <https://dapobud.kemdikbud.go.id/objek-benda/5bfc133b4abcfb04b4a6d55a/kompleks-percandian-muara-takus> - retrieved 16 Sept. 2019

16. Point 1 (near a concrete and steel tube fence erected in 2014): 00°20'16.3" N, 100°38'43.8" E (depth 35 cm); point 2: 00°20'15.5" N, 100°38'43.2" E (depth 38 cm); point 3: 00°20'14.7" N, 100°38'42.7" E (depth 34 cm); point 4: 00°20'12.6" N, 100°38'41.2" E (depth 78 cm); point 5: 00°20'12.6" N, 100°38'40.2" E (depth 66 cm); point 6: 00°20'12.1" N, 100°38'39.4" E (depth 22 cm); point 7: 00°20'12.3" N, 100°38'38.8" E (depth 59 cm); point 8: 00°20'12.8" N, 100°38'38.0" E (depth 58 cm); point 9: 00°20'13.1" N, 100°38'37" E (depth 39 cm).

17. Point 10 (the nearest to the river): 00°20'22.5" N, 100°38'16.1" E (depth 102 cm); point 11: 00°20'21.5" N, 100°38'19.3" E (depth 123 cm); point 12: 00°20'19.0" N, 100°38'23" E (depth 106 cm).

Fig. 19 – Soil core sampling, Muara Takus (Daniel Perret, July 2019)

sediment down to 102 cm. Point 11 revealed the same compact grey clayey sediment with red spots down to a depth of 35 cm, then a layer of dark grey clayey-sand sediment to a depth of 50 cm, covering a reddish brown sandy-clay sediment down to a depth of 123 cm. Point 12 revealed a reddish brown sandy-clayey sediment to a depth of 33 cm, then a light reddish brown sandy-clayey sediment to a depth of 88 cm covering a light sandy-clayey sediment to a depth of 106 cm. These three soil cores did not yield any artifacts. A South-North line of eight cores (covering a distance of about 525 m) was carried out in the highest part of the site (fig. 20). With a depth varying between 52 cm and 100 cm,¹⁸ these soil cores show a more or less sandy grey-brown humus topsoil layer about 20 cm thick above a brown sandy-clayey sediment. These eight soil cores yielded only a few fragments of charcoal in the humus layer.

To conclude the discussion of these twenty soil cores, with the exception of the results of cores 6 and 9 indicating possible structural remains in the subsoil, the other 18 cores did not provide any evidence of human disturbance and instead indicated forest soil. While these soil cores are far from having covered the entire enclosed area in detail, they nevertheless suggest that most

18. Point 13: 00°19'51.4" N, 100°38'34.2" E (depth 100 cm); point 14: 00°19'53.0" N, 100°38'34.2" E (depth 58 cm); point 15: 00°19'54.5" N, 100°38'34.2" E (depth 100 cm); point 16: 00°19'57.0" N, 100°38'33.9" E (depth 65 cm); point 17: 00°20'00.0" N, 100°38'34.2" E (depth 66 cm); point 18: 00°20'03.1" N, 100°38'34.2" E (depth 68 cm); point 19: 00°20'05.1" N, 100°38'34.2" E (depth 62 cm); point 20: 00°20'08.9" N, 100°38'35" E (depth 52 cm).

Fig. 20 – Soil core sampling, Muara Takus (Daniel Perret, July 2019)

of this enclosed area has never been occupied and that human activity was probably limited to the vicinity of places of worship. As in the contemporary site of Si Pamutung in Padang Lawas, it is quite possible that the main settlement site was located outside the enclosed area. Remains may have to be sought in the villages bearing the evocative names of Batu Basurat and Koto Tuo, that have never been excavated and are now submerged by the reservoir.

In a previous publication, we have discussed the location of the building (*māligai*) intended for a princess of Rokan, mentioned in the bilingual Tamil-Old-Malay inscription of Porlak Dolok in Padang Lawas (Griffiths 2014), dated to the thirteenth century CE. Among the sites considered was Tapak Mahligai, near the mouth of the Rokan River in the Strait of Malacca (Perret 2014: 344–5). If this name Mahligai really dates back to ancient times, a settlement site should be located nearby. Tapak Mahligai (Desa Sintong, Kecamatan Tanah Putih, Kabupaten Rokan Hilir, Riau province) is presently located in the middle of a rubber plantation not far from the Hindu-Buddhist remains of Candi Sintong. The North-South facing mound that measures 22×19 m is some four metres high ($01^{\circ} 30' 40.9''$ N, $100^{\circ} 58' 34.6''$ E). It is surrounded by a moat, and there is a batu Aceh-style gravestone at its top (fig. 21).

A partially levelled East-West earthwork and a ditch are visible just north of the mound. This earthwork connects to the Rokan River about 400 metres to the east, after passing along the south side of Candi Sintong. The latter was excavated in 2009 by the Balai Arkeologi Medan (Koestoro et al. 2011: 35–6), following a preliminary excavation carried out in 1992/93, and at the end of

Fig. 21 – Tapak Mahligai (Daniel Perret, July 2019)

which a twelfth-thirteenth centuries CE dating was suggested. It is difficult to imagine a princely building on this mound, curiously never excavated. It probably shelters a Hindu-Buddhist structure made of permanent materials. As no earthenware or stoneware shards seem to have been found in the vicinity of Tapak Mahligai, the existence of a significant settlement site in the area remains a question mark.

In the Medan region, the current capital of North Sumatra province, it is on the Kota Cina settlement site that almost all archaeological excavations in the region have focused since the 1970s.¹⁹ At that time, it was still possible to observe the remains of two earthworks at Deli Tua, on a hill overlooking the Deli River south of Medan. Pedestrian survey carried out at that time revealed earthenware and stoneware shards indicating an occupation that could date back to the fourteenth century (Milner et al. 1978: 29–30; Miksic 1979: 234). Of this site nothing more remains today than a segment of earthwork on the edge of the hill (03° 28' 57.3" N, 98° 40' 27.1" E). The hill is now a housing area (fig. 22).

¹⁹ For a review of archaeological research in Kota Cina, see Perret et al. 2013. The publication of the results of the French-Indonesian archaeological programme on Kota Cina, whose fieldwork was completed in 2016, is in preparation.

Fig. 22 – Deli Tua site (Daniel Perret, July 2019)

The only place reminiscent of a distant past remains Pancuran Gading, a regularly frequented sacred spring at the foot of the hill ($03^{\circ} 28' 59.6''$ N, $98^{\circ} 40' 28.5''$ E) (fig. 23). Tanjung Anom (Kecamatan Pancur Batu, Kabupaten Deli Serdang),²⁰ another old settlement site on the left bank of the Deli River, has recently been levelled, probably to become a housing area as well. Only a few shards of earthenware remain visible. Two soil cores were bored, including one (to a depth of 130 cm) in an area that had escaped the levelling operations ($03^{\circ} 31' 00.3''$ N, $98^{\circ} 36' 05.8''$ E). It did not yield any ancient artefact. The old settlement site of Kota Rantang (Kawasan Mojopahit, Dusun 1, Desa Kota Rantang, Kecamatan Hamperan Perak, Kabupaten Deli-Serdang) was discovered in the late 1970s, and yielded Chinese, Thai and Vietnamese wares (Milner et al. 1978: 29). Excavations carried out thirty years later revealed artifacts dating the occupation between the twelfth/thirteenth and seventeenth centuries.²¹ Earthenware and stoneware shards are still clearly visible on the site today ($03^{\circ} 44' 19.3''$ N, $98^{\circ} 35' 19.9''$ E), but the strong disturbances caused by agricultural activities (rice fields and oil palm trees) have certainly eliminated any possibility of stratigraphic excavation (fig. 24). On the last day of our survey in July, a visit to the small site museum at Kota Cina gave us the opportunity to observe a first assemblage of finds (earthenware, stoneware and glassware) coming from the recently rediscovered Bulu Cina site. If this site has not already suffered the fate of all the other old settlement sites around Medan, it should

20. Different from the Tanjung Anom (Tandam Hilir) site, about 16 km west of Kota Cina, reported by Milner et al. (1978: 29), then by Miksic (1979: 237-242).

21. See Harkantiningsih & Wibisono 2012; Edwards McKinnon et al. 2012.

Fig. 23 – Pancurang Gading, Deli Tua (Daniel Perret, May 2014)

Fig. 24 – Kota Rantang site (Daniel Perret, Feb. 2019)

provide a significant contribution to the history of the region, or even the Strait of Malacca. Exploratory fieldwork has just been conducted there by the Balai Arkeologi Medan at the time this report is written.

January 2020

References

- Atmodjo, Junus Satrio, Ghautama, Gatot & Sutopo, Marsis. 1997. "Studi Teknis Pelestarian dan Pemanfaatan Situs Muaratakus," *Amoghapasa* (Batusangkar) 6(III): 18-25.
- Balai Pelestarian Cagar Budaya Sumatera Barat. 2018. *Deskripsi Cagar Budaya Tidak Bergerak Kabupaten Pasaman, Provinsi Sumatera Barat. Hasil Daftar Pemutakhiran Data Cagar Budaya Kab. Pasaman Tahun 2018*. Batusangkar, Balai Pelestarian Cagar Budaya Sumatera Barat.
- Boden Kloss, C. 1921. "Notes on the Pengkalan Kempas Tombstone," *Journal of Federated Malay States Museums* 9 (3): 185-189.
- Bosch, F.D.K..1930. "Verslag van een reis door Sumatra," *Oudheidkundig Verslag uitgegeven door het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen*: 133-157.
- de Casparis, Johannes Gijsbertus. 1980. "Ahmat Majanu's tombstone at Pengkalan Kempas and its kawi inscription," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 53(1): 1-22.
- Degroot, Véronique. 2014. "The Architecture of Si Pamutung: Between Local Traditions and Javanese Influences," in *History of Padang Lawas, North Sumatra, I. Societies of Padang Lawas (Mid-Ninth – Thirteenth Century CE)*, D. Perret & H. Surachman (ed.). Paris, Association Archipel, *Cahier d'Archipel* 42: 37-63.
- Djajadiningrat, Hoesein.1934. *Atjèhsch-Nederlandsch Woordenboek*. Batavia, Landsdrukkerij, 2 vol.
- Drakard, Jane (ed.).1988. *Sejarah Raja-Raja Barus*. Jakarta/Bandung: École française d'Extrême-Orient/Angkasa, (reprint 2003, Jakarta, EFEO/Gramedia Pustaka Utama).
- Edwards McKinnon, E., Harkantiningasih, Naniek, Wibisono, Sonny C., Surachman, Heddy, Sarjiyanto, Purnawibowo, Stanov, Lim, Chen Sian & Vining, Benjamin. 2012. "The Kota Rentang Excavations," in *Connecting Empires and States: Selected Papers from the 13th International Conference of the European Association of Southeast Asia Archaeologists*, M.L. Tjoa-Bonatz, A. Reinecke & D. Bonatz (ed.). Singapore, NUS Press: 67-81.
- Griffiths, Arlo. 2014. "Inscriptions of Sumatra. III. The Padang Lawas Corpus Studied Along with Inscriptions from Sorik Merapi (North Sumatra) and from Muara Takus (Riau)," in *History of Padang Lawas, North Sumatra, II. Societies of Padang Lawas (Mid-Ninth – Thirteenth Century CE)*, D. Perret (ed.). Paris, Association Archipel, *Cahier d'Archipel* 43: 211-253.
- Guillot, Claude, Surachman, Heddy, Perret, Daniel, Dupoizat, Marie-France & Sunaryo, Untung. 2003. *Histoire de Barus, Sumatra. Le site de Lobu Tua. II : Étude archéologique et Documents*. Paris, *Cahier d'Archipel* 30.
- Guillot, Claude & Kalus, Ludvik. 2008. *Les Monuments Funéraires et l'Histoire du Sultanat de Pasai à Sumatra*. Paris, Association Archipel, *Cahier d'Archipel* 37.
- Harkantiningasih, Naniek & Wibisono, Sonny C. 2012. "Kota Rentang, Sumatra Utara: Jalur Perdagangan Pantai Timur Sumatra," *Amerta* 30(1): 45-55.
- Koestoro, Lucas P. 2001. "Ganesa dan Perempuan Penunggang Kuda, dua Objek Ikonografi di Tapanuli Tengah," *Berkala Arkeologi "Sangkhakala"*, 9: 50-59. (French translation: "Note sur une statue de Ganesha trouvée à Sumatra-Nord," *Archipel* 63, 2002: 15-16).

- Koestoro, Lucas, Partanda, Setiawan, Taufiqurrahman, Suprayitno, Harahap, Fitriaty, Ratna & Setianingsih, Rita Margaretha. 2011. "Penelusuran Arkeologi dan Sejarah Bagansiapiapi, Kabupaten Rokan Hilir, Provinsi Riau," *Berita Penelitian Arkeologi* (Medan) 25: 24-60.
- Kusen, Kusumohartono, Bugie, Sutopo, Marsis, Hidayat, Teguh & Istiawan, Budi. 1995a. "Penelitian Arkeologi Kompleks Percandian Muara Takus," *Amoghapasa* (Batusangkar) 2(1): 11-33.
- 1995b. "Penelitian Arkeologi Kompleks Percandian Muara Takus," *Amoghapasa* (Batusangkar) 3(1): 10-31.
- Miksic, John Norman. 1979. *Archaeology, Trade and Society in Northeast Sumatra*, Ph.D. Diss. Cornell Univ., New York.
- Milner, Anthony C., Edwards McKinnon, Edmund & Luckman Sinar, Tengku. 1978. "A Note on Aru and Kota Cina," *Indonesia*, 26: 1-42.
- Molen, Willem van der. 2007. "The Syair of Minye Tujuh," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 163 (2/3): 356-375.
- Moussay, Gerard. 1995 *Dictionnaire Minangkabau-Indonésien-Français*, vol. I. Paris, Association Archipel, *Cahier d'Archipel* 27 / Editions l'Harmattan.
- Parlindungan, Mangaradja Onggang. [c. 1964]. *Pongkinangolngolan Sinambela gelar Tuanku Rao; terror agama Islam Mazhab Hambali di Tanah Batak, 1816-1833*. [Djakarta], Tandjung Pengharapan.
- Perret, Daniel. 2009. "Barus: société et relations extérieures (XII^e-milieu du XVII^e s.)," in *Histoire de Barus-Sumatra. III: Regards sur une place marchande de l'océan Indien (XIIe-milieu du XVIIe s.)*, D. Perret & H. Surachman (ed.). Paris, EFEO/Archipel (*cahier d'Archipel* 38): 533-642.
- 2014. "Societies of Padang Lawas (Mid-Ninth – End of Thirteenth Century CE)," in *History of Padang Lawas, North Sumatra, II. Societies of Padang Lawas (Mid-Ninth – Thirteenth Century CE)*, D. Perret (ed.). Paris, Association Archipel, *Cahier d'Archipel* 43: 283-372.
- 2018. "Building the Corpus of Indianized Inscriptions in Sumatra: the Pioneers (1818-1968)," in *Writing for Eternity: A Survey of Epigraphy in Southeast Asia*, D. Perret (ed.). Paris, EFEO, *Etudes thématiques* 30: 243-273.
- Perret, Daniel, Surachman, Heddy & Kalus, Ludvik. 2009. "Six siècles d'art funéraire musulman à Barus," in *Histoire de Barus-Sumatra. III: Regards sur une place marchande de l'océan Indien (XIIe-milieu du XVIIe s.)*, D. Perret & H. Surachman (ed.). Paris, EFEO/Archipel (*cahier d'Archipel* 38): 473-506.
- Perret, Daniel, Surachman, Heddy, Soedewo, Ery, Oetomo, Repelita Wahyu & Mudjiono. 2013. "The French-Indonesian Archaeological Project in Kota Cina (North Sumatra): Preliminary Results and Prospects," *Archipel*, 86: 73-111.
- Setianingsih, Rita Margaretha. 2005. "Prasasti Ganggo Hilia: Temuan Baru dari Sumatera Barat," *Sangkhakala* (Medan): 65-78.
- Soedewo, Ery. 2014. "Archaeological Remains Displaying Indian Cultural Influence in the Region of the Batang Gadis and Batang Angkola Rivers, Mandailing Natal Regency, North Sumatra," in *History of Padang Lawas, North Sumatra, II. Societies of Padang Lawas (Mid-Ninth – Thirteenth Century CE)*, D. Perret (ed.). Paris, Association Archipel, *Cahier d'Archipel* 43: 183-210.
- Soedewo, Ery, Oetomo, Repelita Wahyu, Nasoichah, Churmatin, Purnawibowo, Stanov & Siahaan, Pesta H.H. 2015. "Jejak Peradaban Hindu-Buddha di Kawasan Kompleks Percandian Muara Takus, Kabupaten Kampar, Provinsi Riau," *Berita Penelitian Arkeologi* (Medan) 29: 1-76.

Sri Sugiharta. 2008. "Jejak Hindu-Budha di Bukit Rao," *Amoghapasa* (Batusangkar) 12(XIV): 25-26.

Zakaria, Nurmatias. 1998. "Pemugaran Candi Tanjungmedan," *Amoghapasa* (Batusangkar) 7(IV): 31-38.