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COMPTES RENDUS

Stuart Robson and Hadi Sidomulyo, *Threads of the Unfolding Web: The Old Javanese Tantu Paṅgəlaran*. Translated by Stuart Robson with a Commentary by Hadi Sidomulyo. Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2021, ix + 325 pp., ISBN: 978-981-4881-99-9 (hard copy); 978-981-4951-00-5 (pdf).

The *Tantu Paṅgəlaran* is an Old Javanese prose literary work that “is not history, and also not fiction” (p. 3), which intends to transmit aspects of life and belief of, and for, the communities of Śaiva hermits inhabiting the network of religious institutions (*maṇḍala*) located in the mountains of ancient Java. The title of the text, poetically translated by Stuart Robson as “Threads of the unfolding web,” refers to such network (*paṅgəlaran*, lit. “that on which st. is spread out”)¹ of institutions dotting the Javanese landscape, while the threads (*tantu*) “may be viewed as its manifold permutations, whether in the form of sacred sites, holy orders, or established ‘lines’ of continuity” (p. 73). Mixing myth and legend with “quasi-history,” the *Tantu Paṅgəlaran* is closely linked with the topography of Java and its socio-religious setting, and could thus be regarded as an account of a Javanese “pilgrimage circuit.”

The text, as noted by Robson in his Introduction, is characterized by a down-to-earth, “rustic” style, which suggests that it originated in non-courtly milieus, probably from oral traditions circulating in the countryside. Just like the majority of Old Javanese texts, the *Tantu Paṅgəlaran* is anonymous and undated; however, the colophon of one of its manuscripts contains a date equivalent to AD 1635, which serves as a *terminus ante quem*. On account of its language, which is close to that of the *Calon Arān* and the *Pararaton*, Robson suggests that the text may have been written around the 15th century in East Java; however, he also speculates that parts of it may originate from an earlier period, i.e. before 1222 AD, given the fact that the

1. Zoetmulder, P.J. (with the collaboration of S. Robson), *Old Javanese-English Dictionary*. 2 vols. 's-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982. Henceforth: OJED.

only cities (*nagara*) mentioned by name are Daha and Galuh, which are associated with the Kaḍiri Kingdom (p. 4). Given the attention paid by the text to topography, as well as some matching details about religious traditions mentioned in epigraphic documents and in the text (see below), this hypothesis does not seem unwarranted. Be this as it may, the *Tantu Paṅgalaran* fills a gap in the historical record of the “age of transition” in Javanese history, which witnessed the shift from the Hindu-Buddhist to the Muslim religious and socio-political order, by providing modern readers with a glimpse into socio-religious realities that are seldom described in the largely prescriptive Old Javanese Śaiva literature, as well as in *kakavins* (which often present us with idealized descriptions of hermitages located in the countryside).

The book is divided into two parts, which are the distinct fruits of a collaboration between Stuart Robson and Hadi Sidomulyo, two leading scholars of ancient Java specializing in Old Javanese philology and East Javanese history and archaeology, respectively. Part I mainly coincides with a translation of the Old Javanese text into English by Robson, which is the only translation to have been undertaken after Pigeaud’s Dutch translation of 1924. Robson’s translation is based on the edition prepared by the latter scholar, which is photographically reproduced in Appendix 3 of the book (pp. 223–294, corresponding to pp. 57–128 of the 1924 publication). Hadi Sidomulyo in the Preface explains that a new critical edition would hardly be possible since “the whereabouts of two principal manuscripts used by Th. Pigeaud for his dissertation were no longer known” (p. vii). Still, various manuscripts bearing the title *Tantu Paṅgalaran/Pagalaran* exist in Bali,² but whether they are copies of the manuscripts containing inferior readings used by Pigeaud, or of different versions of the text, it is not known, as Robson does not mention any of them. His very short Introduction treats the codicological tradition of the text in just one paragraph, and does not provide much information about the text indeed. Hadi Sidomulyo’s Introduction to his study delivers some extra information, yet a unified Introduction at the beginning of the volume would have been more practical.

Robson’s translation is, as usual, elegant (to the extent that the style of the text allows) and pleasant to read, and mostly accurate. He does not provide any cross-references to the page numbers of the relevant portions of the edition, which makes it difficult and time-consuming to compare the translation against the Old Javanese text. This is made even more complicated by the fact that Robson’s division of the text into three headings (brought down from the seven in Pigeaud’s book) is not found in the original text, which has no obvious divisions. The footnotes to the translation are intended to draw attention to lexicographical and textual problems rather than providing an exegesis or contextualization of passages of the text, a task that is undertaken by Hadi Sidomulyo in Part II. Without commentarial footnotes explaining and contextualizing the many enigmatic passages of the text, the same comes across as abstruse and at times hardly intelligible or meaningful even for the specialist. The “stories” related in the text are deeply embedded in the coeval Javanese religious and socio-historical context (which ultimately owes to a South Asian religious

2. See, for instance, the romanizations produced in the framework of the Hooykaas-Ketut Sangka project (*Sang Hyang Tantu Pagelaran* [HKS 5454]; *Tantu Panggelaran* [HKS 3459 and 4504]), as well as two *lontars* in the collection of the Pusat Dokumentasi Budaya Bali in Denpasar, accessible on ww.archive.org.

background), and even if Part II attempts to interpret this context, a more thorough annotation would have helped the reader to grasp it, and access a level of meaning that goes beyond the *prima facie* meaning provided by the bare-bones translation. As an example of Robson's terse style of annotation, I may refer to footnote 44 (p. 22), which, commenting on the "riddles" set by Viṣṇu and Brahmā to Gaṇa, glosses the latter's statement "you [Viṣṇu] keep killing your fellow gods"—an explanation of the Sanskrit compound *brahmahatya* (*sic*)—as: "in fact 'brahman-murderer' (Z[oetmulder's OJED, p.] 255); the T[antu] JP[aṅgōlaran] has a somewhat different interpretation here." This note suggests that Robson may have been unaware that in Sanskrit literature the sin of *brahmahatyā* or murder of a brahman is associated with the cutting of the fifth head of the God Brahmā (a brahman by definition) by Śiva, who thus commits the heinous sin. Indeed, the text itself makes this transparent by relating how the five-headed Brahmā reproached Gaṇa for the fact that he has only four heads, as a result of which Śiva Parameśvara cuts Brahmā's middle head with his left hand, homologized to Viṣṇu: "it turned out that the god Gaṇa was proven right regarding the god Viṣṇu, that he was a *brahmahatya* (god-murderer)" (p. 23). While Robson correctly (yet inconsistently with respect to his own remark in fn. 44) grasps the sense of the riddle by translating *brahmahatya* as "god-murderer" (the "god" being Brahmā), he does not unpack its mythological and sociological background.

Some instances of alternative translations, or translations of corrupted words, could be proposed. I will discuss below four such instances. First, the exceedingly common word *bhāva* is translated differently according to the context, usually as "way of living/behaving," in contrast to Pigeaud's *staat* ("state, interviewed 'condition'; see p. 6 of the Introduction); however, on p. 25 Robson applies the meaning of "state" to a passage where it does not seem to be entirely apt: "Lady Umā was angry, quickly took hold of the weapons of the gods, and these were her state [*sic*] (*bhāwa*)," which I would rather translate as "... this was her state of mind" (a meaning closer to the original Sanskrit; compare OJED p. 225, "temperament, state of mind or body"), or "... this was her behaviour." Second, on p. 27, Robson translates *taba-habāt* (or *tabāh-abāt*) as the command "perform austerities on the side of the road," and connects it to the stem *abāt* (related to *habāt*, *aṇabāt*, "a very old term for 'to commit armed robbery,' indeed occurring on the side of the road"; fn. 69), which he interprets as referring to "a community of religious persons," rather than to the stem *tabāh*, "beating/striking a musical instrument." However, the passage is about performers ("you must go around in the world; you must be a performer [...] you must tell stories about the world"), like the *vidu* and the *abaṇḍagaṇa aṇgoḍa* (left untranslated on p. 27, but rendered as "performer" in Robson's translation of the *Wangbang Wideya*³). Indeed, those characters were interpreted as performers by Pigeaud, and I may add that there is nothing unusual about Śaiva ascetics involved in performance, especially

3. Robson, S., *Wayban Wideya: A Javanese Pañji Romance*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971, p. 18. Compare the comments on *abhaṇḍagarya* and *dhārabhaṇḍa* in *Kuṇjarakarna* 33.3, defining *bhaṇḍagaṇa* as "buffoonery" (related to the Sanskrit *bhaṇḍa*, "jester, buffoon" and *bhāṇḍa* "mimicry, buffoonery, a musical instrument"), which notably forms part of the description of *devapūjā*: Teeuw, A., and S.O. Robson, *Kuṇjarakarna Dharmakathana: Liberation through the Law of Buddha—An Old Javanese Poem by Mpu Ḍusun*, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1981, p. 194.

in Java.⁴ This connection is made transparent by the text itself in another passage, where Brahmā and Viṣṇu are said to roam “the world practising the art (*giṇa*) of wayang performance, [so they were called *abhandagiṇa awayang*] [...] they went around singing and performing [and so were called *baṇḍagiṇa menmen*]” (p. 46). Third, on p. 53, we read that Mpu Barang is “sitting facing a bowl with excellent meat, the skulls of people his drinking cups, and the bodies of people his food.” Robson comments on the expression “excellent meat” in fn. 209 as follows: “*mahāmangsa*; Z[oeetmulder’s OJED, p.] 1082, ‘excellent food (meat).’ Also found in R[āmā]Y[āṇa] 26.24b.” Clearly, from the context of the passage, *mahāmaṇsa* is to be understood as a technical term denoting “human flesh,” which is commonly attested in Sanskrit literature.⁵ I am not sure whether Robson, who flatly follows Zoetmulder’s gloss, has grasped the actual meaning and background of that word, and I also wonder whether a general reader will grasp them (this is yet another instance where a more articulate exegetical note would have been in order). Finally, on p. 26, Robson does not translate the word *haṣṭapaḍāsārī* (used by Umā to refer to his middle son), noting that its meaning is unknown. Since the term is attributed to the son who would instruct mankind in the knowledge of letters,⁶ and who would become a Mpu Bhujaṅga (a type of religious practitioner/priest, but also a man of letters), it could be emended to *aṣṭapaḍākṣārī*, representing a Sanskrit *bahuvrīhi* compound meaning “one mastering the letters arranged in eight portions/divisions,” namely the eight *vargas* or classes of letters into which the Sanskrit (as well as Old Javanese) syllabary is traditionally divided (the sixteen vowels with the *anusvāra* and the *visarga*, the five groups of stops with the nasals, the semivowels, and the sibilants with *ha*).

I now turn to Part II, by Hadi Sidomulyo. This commentary, serving as a useful supplement to Pigeaud’s extensive notes, disentangles the threads and clears a path through the “encyclopedic jungle of Śivaitic traditions” (p. 73) that is the *Tantu Paṅgalaran*. The strong point of this section of the book is the discussion of the links between the narrative of the text and Javanese topography. As the events narrated in the *Tantu Paṅgalaran* unfolds against a landscape that is often still recognizable today, the author traces them to relevant sites surveyed by him and his team in recent years, thereby documenting significant archaeological vestiges (many of which have unfortunately disappeared as a result of looting, or have been damaged by the relentless action of nature). As such, it constitutes a most useful and well-researched piece of scholarship, whose value is further enhanced by the several photos of sites, artistic objects and inscriptions as well as maps accompanying it. The author, whose knowledge of East Javanese history and heritage is unmatched, expands on many other interesting elements found in the text, against the background of Javanese history

4. See Aciri, A., “Performance as Religious Observance in Some Śaiva Ascetic Traditions from South and Southeast Asia,” *Cracow Indological Studies* 20/1, 2018, pp. 1–30 (esp. pp. 15–24).

5. See, for instance, Monier Williams, M., *Sanskrit–English Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899, p. 789: *mahāmāṃsa* “‘costly meat,’ N. of various kinds of meat and esp. of human flesh.”

6. Printed in the edition as *akṣara vijjāna*, but probably to be read as the compound *akṣaravijjāna* (note the variant *akṣara vyañjāna*, “the consonant letters,” in mss. DE, p. 245).

from the Central Javanese period to the final years of Majapahit, as well as West Java, for instance by comparing information drawn from the *Tantu Paṅgəlaran* with relevant passages of the Old Sundanese *Bhujāṅga Manik* and *Carita Parahyaṅan*.

The author is very modest in admitting his limited expertise in religious matters, for example when he notes that an exhaustive study of the diverse religious communities treated in the text, “the nature of the various orders and their relationship to one another, as well as their distinguishing features, extend beyond both the bounds of this publication and the competence of the present writer” (p. 75).⁷ The same applies to the author’s self-admitted lack of expertise in matters pertaining to the history of Śaivism in the Indian Subcontinent. While duly recognizing the importance of the text for our knowledge of traditions of Bhairavika and Kāpālika Śaivism in Java, the author is content to refer to a single, mainly art historical publication by T.S. Gopinatha Rao⁸ when he draws comparisons with Indian material, thereby choosing to ignore fifty years of subsequent scholarship on those traditions, as well as David Lorenzen’s seminal work on the Kāpālikas.⁹ As a specialist of Javanese and Balinese Śaivism, I would also have expected a more thorough use of secondary literature on those religious traditions, especially for the benefit of the general readers, who may wonder about the identity of the “Rṣis,” the religious denomination distinct from the Śaiva and Buddhist traditions, or of the demon Bṛṅgiriṣṭi, into whom Kumāra is turned by Umā (pp. 45, 142),¹⁰ or again of the five deities called *pañcakuśikas* (p. 85).

In spite of the reservations expressed above, and keeping in mind the author’s restricted scope, the author is successful in extracting from the *Tantu Paṅgəlaran* precious information on Bhairava-worshipping religious denominations in premodern East Java. By integrating the data from the text with information gathered from epigraphical documents, he highlights the important place they occupied in East Java in the period from the 13th to the 15th century, as well as the continuation of distinctive themes of this current of Śaivism in later Javanese religious culture (see for instance the parallels with Siti Jenar discussed on p. 77). Particularly enticing is his remark that the combined data mentioned above, and the text’s association between the master Mpu Palyat and the King of Galuh (p. 150), “provide a reason to regard the court of Kaḍiri

7. Compare his Preface, p. ix: “One important area of study which has not received the attention it deserves is the Śaiva tradition in ancient Java. Since this constitutes the central theme of the *Tantu Paṅgəlaran*, it is clearly in need of a deeper investigation. The complexity of the subject, however, requires a separate study by a qualified expert.”

8. Gopinatha Rao, T.A., *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, 2 vols. Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1971.

9. Lorenzen, D.N., *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas: Two Lost Śaivite Sects*, 2nd revised edition, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991 (first edition 1971).

10. This is a Javanese development of Bṛṅgiriṣṭi, an elusive figure described in early Śaiva Sanskrit sources as belonging to Śiva’s holy family, and indeed identified as the son of Rudra and the brother of Vināyaka (Gaṇapati) in the *Śivadharmasāstra*, or as Śiva’s demon-son Andhaka in the *Vāmanapurāṇa* and *Haracaritacintāmaṇi*. The same Bṛṅgiriṣṭi features in the Old Javanese Śaiva text *Dharma Pātāñjala* as a son of Śiva along with Kumāra and Gaṇapati. See Aciri, A., *Dharma Pātāñjala: A Śaiva Scripture from Ancient Java Studied in the Light of Related Old Javanese and Sanskrit Texts*, second edition, New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 2017, p. 370.

as the cradle of the Bhairava cult in eastern Java” (p. 151), which is in harmony with Robson’s idea that the text could have originated from the same period and region. This fascinating hypothesis would have deserved a more thorough discussion.

Another important topic that could have been treated more extensively is sacred geography, especially the “recreation” on Java of the sacred geography of the Indian Subcontinent, which is a prominent theme of the *Tantu Paṅgalaran*, and indeed the numerous references to India (as Jambudīpa) found throughout the text. Particularly noteworthy is the one occurring in the context of a voyage by the Javanese brahman Mpu Barang, who witnesses the worship of the god Haricaṇḍana by Indian Brahmins, whom he submits, and with whom he ritually exchanges ash-marks. One wonders whether these references represent purely imaginary events, reflect historical memories going back to an earlier epoch, or suggest that networks of trans-Indian Ocean pilgrimage extending beyond the palatine centres of power existed in East Java during the 14th and 15th centuries.

A minor contentious point I wish to draw attention to is the author’s description of the stone artefact crowning the central terrace of the bathing place of Jolotundo in Trawas (East Java), completed in AD 977–978, as “displaying a symmetrical configuration of nine cylindrical stone columns in the coils of a serpent, symbolizing both the mythical Mahāmeru and the mountain Penanggungan itself” (fn. 63, p. 94). I would argue that the “cylindrical stone columns” are actually stylized *lingas* representing the body of Śiva according to the popular configuration referred to as *navasaṅga*, i.e. a central supreme Śiva surrounded by eight manifestations located at the cardinal and intermediate points of the compass. Of course, both interpretations need not be mutually exclusive.

As a whole, the book is a welcome addition to the library of scholars working on aspects of the literature, history, and religious traditions of both ancient and modern Java, as well as general readers interested in Javanese culture and its rich textual heritage. We should be grateful to the authors for making available such an important and difficult source. As they make clear that the book, “[a]lthough directed primarily to the scientific community, [...] has from the outset been conceived as a popular edition, designed to draw the interest of the general reader,” and “provides no more than the groundwork for ongoing research” (p. ix), it is only natural that the treatment of certain aspects, especially the central theme of Śaiva traditions in 12th to 15th century East Java and their South Asian roots, will have to be taken up by other scholars on the basis of the foundations laid by this book, as well as the previous work by Pigeaud. A worthwhile endeavour would be a comprehensive study of the religious establishments of the *maṇḍala* type in the light of a larger corpus of epigraphical and textual sources, as well as the later reception of the text in Java and especially in Bali, where it apparently played a role in the formation of the religious discourse from the 15th–16th century to the present, as suggested by the attestation of several of its central narratives in Balinese texts and oral lore (such as the story of Kumāra-gohpāla, corresponding to Rare Angon, associated with the birth of Kāla).

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