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MANUSCRIPT PRODUCTION AND AKṢARA  
MYSTICISM IN THE *BHĪMA SVARGA*



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# MANUSCRIPT PRODUCTION AND AKṢARA MYSTICISM IN THE *BHĪMA SVARGA*

## Aditia Gunawan

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# Manuscript Production and Akṣara Mysticism in the *Bhīma Svarga*<sup>1</sup>

Aditia Gunawan

## ABSTRACT

*As in other parts of Asia, the figure of Bhīma was made the subject of cult worship in Java. The popularity of this character is documented in numerous archaeological remains, such as inscriptions, statues, and reliefs, as well as textual documents that have Bhīma as the main character. The appearance of Bhīma as the main character in various texts, such as the Navaruci, Deva Ruci, and Bhīma Svarga, often pertained to his role as a semi-divine warrior figure who was able to master the true essence of all esoteric knowledge (Tattvajñāna). The text that we will discuss, the Bhīma Svarga, is one of many existing versions of this tale, and may be the oldest one. Written before the 16th century, this text has never been satisfactorily investigated. This text includes a dialogue between Bhaṭāra Guru and Bhīma, who wishes to save his father, Pāṇḍu, from hell. All the questions from Bhaṭāra Guru are answered perfectly. It is Bhīma's responses that have become the core essence of the text, which consist of the doctrines of Śaivism and its rich cosmological and philosophical elements. In this article, I will introduce the manuscript sources containing the text of the Bhīma Svarga from a West Javanese scriptorium, whose connection to the Balinese manuscript tradition of the Bhīma Svarga has been ignored thus far. I will also examine in particular the sections of the manuscript that will give valuable insights for codicologists specialising in Nusantara manuscripts. These sections are those pertaining to manuscript production and 'akṣara mysticism'. The data in the text explain how manuscripts were produced and the significance of akṣara during that period.*

**Key words:** Bhīma Svarga, Old Javanese, Codicology, Manuscript Production, Akṣara Mysticism.

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INTRODUCTION<sup>2</sup>

Bhīma, the second of the five Pāṇḍava brothers, was worshipped and deified in Asia, primarily in Nepal and Java. He was not only venerated due to his heroic escapades during the great war of Bhāratayuddha, but also because of his association with the God Śiva, particularly in his terrifying manifestation (Śiva-Bhairava).<sup>3</sup> It is difficult to pinpoint when this veneration began, but a figure named Bhīmsen has been venerated by the Nepalese since 1540 in Nepal, particularly by the Newar community (Bühnemann 2013).

In Java itself, Bhairava-Śivaism was known to have existed during the Kaḍiri dan Siṅhasari period since the 12th century. The type of tantrism that involved the veneration of Bhīma reached its apex at the end of the Majapahit period, which Stutterheim termed as the age of the 'Bhīma-Bhairava cult in Java and Bali'. Stutterheim linked this figure to Bhairava as one of the manifestations of Śiva in his terrifying form (Stutterheim 1935). According to Duijker's (2010:248) recent work, in the mid-15th century, Bhīma's role as a deified figure became more prominent and the cult of this character reached its apex, particularly at the end of the Hayam Wuruk period. During the Girīśavardhana period (1456–1466 CE), this cult came under royal protection as the kingdom's centre moved to East Java.

There are many texts that have Bhīma as the central figure in this tantric context, works such as the Śaiva texts *Navaruci* and *Bhīma Svarga*, or in the Buddhist *Deva Ruci* and *Bhīmastava*. In these texts, Bhīma appears as a much-venerated figure. He is the intermediary as well as the saviour of mankind. The veneration of this figure in the eyes of Javanese writers did not come to an end after the Majapahit period. Islamic texts that used Bhīma as the main character were composed after the fall of the kingdom, such as the *Serat Cabolek*, a Sufistic work of Yasadipura I in the 18th century, which was based on an older text, namely the *Deva Ruci* (Soebardi 1975:17–18). This transformation did not diminish Bhīma's fundamental role, as was depicted in the pre-Islamic texts.

## BHĪMA SVARGA

The text that we will discuss, the *Bhīma Svarga*, is one of the many that attribute to Bhīma the primary role in the story. The tale of Bhīma, who saved his father Pāṇḍu from hell (*neraka*), is very popular in Bali. Besides being represented in Balinese hand-painted works—the beauty of which can be found in the temple of Kerta Gosa (Pucci 1992)—the *Bhīma Svarga* theme was also presented in the form of an exorcist *wayang* performance (*wayang ruatan*) that is normally held during cremation and ancestral worship ceremonies (*pitrayajnya*). Hinzler (1981) has reviewed this tale thoroughly within the context of

<sup>2</sup> The NSC Working Paper Series (WPS) editors would like to thank Mr. Nicholas Chan for his assistance in editing this WPS issue. They would also like to thank Ms. Foo Shu Tieng for her assistance in translating its contents.

<sup>3</sup> The spelling the writer uses for this article should be explicated. In order to avoid confusion related to using various sources from Old Javanese, Javanese, Balinese, and Old Sundanese, all citations are standardised based on the spelling used in the *Old Javanese English Dictionary* (OJED) (1982) by Zoetmulder, with the following exceptions: *e-pepet* is transcribed as *ə*, not *ē*, while *ŋ* becomes *ñ* and *w* becomes *v*. As the spelling system used in Old Sundanese does not differentiate the vocal *ə* and *eu*, I only use the symbol *ə*. Terms that have gained wide currency in Modern Indonesian and Balinese (*wayang*, *Hayam Wuruk*, etc.) are reproduced according to the prevalent conventions (i.e. they retain *w* and *ng*).

traditional Balinese wayang. Besides using the material from the wayang story, she also mentions two textual sources, both *kidung* poems, which she believes to be the basis of the tale for puppet masters (*dalang*).

Textual sources regarding the *Bhīma Svarga* include an abundant corpus of manuscripts. Hinzler chronicled tens of manuscripts, including this tale, which are spread across various Indonesian and European libraries. The manuscripts that Hinzler recorded were almost all in the form of the *kidung*, with only one manuscript written in prose (*prosa*) entering the list, namely the *Tampakan padalañan satua kavi*. Among the versions she listed, the most popular version in Bali is thought to originate from the *kidung* version (primarily what was mentioned as Version A by Hinzler), whose narrative tale I will summarize from Hinzler (1981:199–203) as follows:

Kuntī called for and assembled the entire Pāṇḍu family. She informed them that after the death of the Pāṇḍava brothers, two of their parents, Pāṇḍu and Madri, were still suffering in hell (*neraka*). The two were punished as Pāṇḍu had committed a grave sin, which was to hit a deer with an arrow. The deer then changed into a hermit (named Bagavan Kindama) until he met his mortal end. The act was not tolerated in the Hindu religion, such that Pāṇḍu and Madri were punished throughout the remainder of their mortal lives, and in hell (*neraka*) after death. Kuntī and the four Pāṇḍava each entered parts of Bhīma's body (this is called *añkusprāña* in Old Javanese) with the intention of joining the heavy and extremely dangerous duty that Bhīma was to carry out.

Bhīma went to the kingdom of Yama. He arrived in a field where humans were reborn (*Tagal Panañsaran*). In an area where the servants of hell congregated, the punishment for sinners was announced by Jogormanik and Suratma. Bhīma witnessed how sinners were punished in various painful and simultaneously heart-wrenching ways. Bhīma also witnessed how virtuous souls, whether male or female, were blessed. Bhīma faced various challenges, such as having to navigate through jagged rocks, wobbling or shaking bridges, and other trials that would have impeded him from entering further into the kingdom of Yama. However, Bhīma was able to handle all of those trials with ease. Subsequently, Bhīma met with the leader of the guardians of hell (Jogormanik or Suratma). Bhīma was questioned as to what he was seeking for in hell. Bhīma answered that he only wanted two souls, namely a male and female (variant: three souls, male, female, and hermaphrodite). His request was not granted.

Bhīma was enraged. He fought with the leader of the guardians of hell along with his men. Bhīma was able to defeat everyone, and as a result, his wish was granted. The hero then went to the crater. He searched the crater in order to ascertain whether his father and mother were inside the crater. As a result, all the spirits and souls were released from the crater. However, it seemed that Pāṇḍu was not among them. Pāṇḍu's sin was so grave that he was located at the base of the crater.

Bhīma's actions were then reported to Yama (variant: to Jogormanik). For Yama (Jogormanik), Bhīma was blamed for his trickery as it was thought that he did not keep his word about freeing only two souls, namely the male and female (also hermaphrodite). Bhīma explained that the male and female (also hermaphrodite) would each count as one as they represented one type of grouping.

A battle was unavoidable. Yama was defeated by Bhīma. In order to repay the mercy that Bhīma showed in sparing Yama's life, the god of death promised to release Pāṇḍu and Madri. However, Yama created a ruse. He took Pāṇḍu and Madri from the crater, showed them to Bhīma for a moment, and instead of handing over them to Bhīma, he threw them back into the crater after beating them several times.

Bhīma was furious. He emptied the whole contents of the crater towards Yama. Yama ran away and reported Bhīma's actions to Śiva Guru. Śiva Guru used fire (variant: Deva Bayu) in order to kill Bhīma. Bhīma was killed, but was revived by Śiva Guru (variants: Navaruci, Tuṅgal). In the end, Bhīma was permitted to remove the bones of Pāṇḍu and Madri from the crater.

Kuntī and the other four Pāṇḍava left the body of Bhīma. One by one, they began to pray to Pāṇḍu and Madri, until the bones became whole and they came to be clothed again. They still could not speak, because Bhīma refused to pray to them. Nakula and Sadewa then tricked Bhīma into pressing his palms together, so that in the end, Pāṇḍu and Madri could speak again. Bhīma became angry. He wanted to attack his siblings, but was prevented by Darmavangsa. Pāṇḍu and Madri went to heaven, freed from their punishment, and the Pāṇḍava went back to their kingdom.

That is the essence of the *Bhīma Svarga* tale in its most popular form in Bali. Setyawati, Wiryamartana, and van der Molen (2002) compiled and published a catalogue on Merapi-Merbabu manuscripts 20 years after Hinzler's research. The catalogue lists at least six manuscripts that contained the *Bhīma Svarga* text, which Hinzler had not yet identified. All are written in prose (*prosa*) form. The manuscripts in question are: (1) PNRI L 5 Peti 5, (2) PNRI L 58 Peti 1, (3) PNRI L 156 Peti 9, (4) PNRI L 234 Peti 1, (5) PNRI L 333 Peti 1, and (6) PNRI L 455 Peti 16.

With regard to these manuscripts, we can identify two versions: version 1 can be represented by manuscript PNRI L 5 Peti 1, PNRI L 156 Peti 9, PNRI L 234 Peti 1, and PNRI L 333 Peti 1; version 2 can be represented by two manuscripts, consisting of L 455 and L 58. If we add the one manuscript that Hinzler recorded, then there are 3 versions of this text. Meanwhile, insofar as the present author has found, the manuscripts from West Java, consisting of PNRI L 623 and one manuscript from Ciburuy<sup>4</sup> as well as two manuscripts from Bali (Gedong Kirtya, Bali no. 1460 and HKS 7507), can be classified under the second version. Table 1 provides a visual representation of the *Bhīma Svarga* prose versions.

**Table 1. *Bhīma Svarga* Prose Versions**

Version 1	Version 2	Version 3
PNRI L 5 Peti 1 PNRI L 156 Peti 9 PNRI L 234 Peti 1 PNRI L 333 Peti 1	PNRI L 455 Peti 16 (WJ) PNRI L 58 Peti 1 (MM) PNRI L 623 (WJ) Ciburuy Manuscripts (WJ) Gedong Kirtya no. 1460 (Bal) HKS 7507 (Bal)	Tampekan Padalangan Satua Kawi

<sup>4</sup> The author has identified one manuscript that contained the *Bhīma Svarga* text from the manuscript repository at Kabuyutan Ciburuy by using the results of Aciri and Darsa's (2009) digitisation. The manuscript was separated into three different manuscript chests (*peti*), consisting of the Lontar VII Ciburuy Peti 1c, Kropak Ciburuy XIII Peti 3a, and Kropak 20 Peti 1a. The manuscript was made from dried Palmyra palm leaves (*lontar*).

The version that will be discussed at this time is version 2, edited by the author in a master's thesis (Gunawan 2016) discussed at Inalco, Paris, whose publication in *bahasa Indonesia* is in preparation. The author's edition of version 2 are based on five manuscripts, which comprise: PNRI L 455 (ms. A, *gebang* palm-leaf manuscript, 'Old West Javanese' quadratic script; PNRI L 623 (ms. B, *lontar* palm-leaf manuscript, 'Old Sundanese' script); Ciburuy (ms. C, *lontar* palm-leaf manuscript, 'Old Sundanese' script); Gedong Kirtya no. 1460 (ms. Q), and HKS 7507 (ms. R). The manuscript from the Merapi-Merbabu PNRI L 58, which contains a text of the same version, was not available to the author until the final edits to the thesis were already completed.<sup>5</sup>

When compared to the poetic version, whose tale we have summarised above, the textual structure of the *Bhīma Svarga* in the version that will be discussed here is completely different. Almost the entirety of the text is in the form of a direct dialogue between Bhaṭāra Guru and Bhīma. There is nearly no narration, except at the beginning of the text. The dialogue in this version can presumably be contextualised according to the viewpoint of the narrative version popularised in Bali that the author is aware of. This long philosophical dialogue between Bhīma and Guru is a new work intended to elaborate the most crucial episode of Bhīma's mission to heaven. From the narrative version's point of view, the dialogue takes place when Yama ran away and reported Bhīma's actions to Bhaṭāra Guru. The early part of the dialogue of this version confirms this:

*aḍoh bhīma mati si yama yen kva vruh in bapamu, matanien guruaniñ sakadevatān kabeh, tan bhasmībhūtaa*

Oh, Bhīma, Yama [will] die if you want to know your father. That is why [you] would like to become a guru in all the heavens. Do not destroy it!

It is in this narrative framework that the dialogue between Bhīma and Bhaṭāra Guru presumably takes place.

As discussed above, there are at least three manuscript traditions that passed down version 2 of the *Bhīma Svarga*: the Balinese one, the one of Merapi-Merbabu (Central Java), and the West Javanese one. A special explanation ought to be given for the last manuscript tradition. Firstly, the *Bhīma Svarga* is not the only example of an Old Javanese text that was borne from a tradition of pre-Islamic manuscripts from West Java. Even so, it should be noted that of the approximately 100 palm-leaf manuscripts and *daluwang* that are still available today, this text is preserved in three manuscripts, a number that shows that this text was quite popular in the Sundanese community during the pre-Islamic period. Although the archaeological evidence in West Java regarding the cult worship of Bhīma appears to be non-existent, the expression '*Bhīma Svarga*' is mentioned since at least the beginning of the 16th century, as it was recorded in two Old Sundanese texts, namely the *San Hyañ Siksa Kandañ Karāsian* (SSKK, 1518CE) and the *San Hyañ Svavar Cinta* (circa 16th century). The first text mentions *Bhīma Svarga* as one of the narrative texts (*carita*) brought by the *memen* (SSKK 16, in Atja and Danasasmita, 1981:14).

<sup>5</sup> The author would like to thank Mr. Agung Kriswanto (National Library of Indonesia) for his transliteration of a section of the text.



*Hyañ ñaho di sakvehniñ carita ma: Darmajati, Sañ Hyañ Bayu, Jayasena, Sedamana, Pujayakarma, Ramayana, Adiparva, Koravasarma, Bhīma Sorga, Raṅga Lave, Boma, Sumana, Kala Purbaka, Jarini, Tantri; siñ savatak carita ma memen taña.*

[If you] would like to know all the stories: *Darmajati, Sañ Hyañ Bayu, Jayasena, Sedamana, Pujayakarma, Ramayana, Adiparva, Koravasarma, Bhīma Svarga, Raṅga Lave, Boma, Sumana, Kala Purbaka, Jarini, Tantri*—all kinds of stories—ask the performer.

Atja and Danasasmita (1981:39) interpret the word *memen* as *dalang*, a person who presents wayang tales. This interpretation can surely be questioned, as the word *memen* in Old Javanese means the presenter of performances in general. Despite this, the *Sañ Hyañ Svavar Cinta* mentions this story as one of the wayang tales (Wartini *et al.*, 2011:67–68):

Boma dāñōn Ramayana,	<i>Boma and Rāmāyaṇa,</i>
Korava dāñ Adiparva,	<i>Koravā(śrama) and Ādiparva,</i>
Añdegaparva Dornaparva	<i>(read: Udyogaparva?), Droṇaparva,</i>
Santiparva Salyaparva,	<i>Śāntiparva, Śalyaparva,</i>
Karnaparva Sorgaparva,	<i>Karṇaparva, Svargā(rohaṇa)parva,</i>
kalavan na Sovera Patra,	<i>also Sovera Patra?,</i>
...	...
Puṅgava dāñ <u>Bhīma Sorga</u> ,	<i>Puṅgava and <u>Bhīma Svarga</u>,</i>
Vivaha dāñ Pandava Jaya,	<i>(Arjuna)vivāha et Pāṇḍava Jaya,</i>
...	...
sagōlar sañ hyaṅ wayaṅ.	<i>all will be performed in wayang.</i>

The appearance of the word *wayang* in the pre-Islamic Sundanese text is important to note, because all this while, the general assumption regarding the spread of wayang in Java was that it was done through the spread of Islam by one of the Wali Sanga (Andrieu, 2014:32). As for the Sundanese wayang golek, their creation is claimed by the Regent of Bandung, Dalem Karang Anyar Wiranatakusuma III, who ordered three *dalangs* in Tegal and Pekalongan to invent a new form of wayang in 1845 (*ibid.*:32).

Of course, it is legitimate to question whether the *Bhīma Svarga* mentioned in the Old Sundanese texts above in fact refers to the text that we are about to discuss at this time. Unlike what happened in Bali, as far as the author knows, this tale is no longer known as a *lakon wayang* (puppet play) in Sunda. In wayang golek performances, the plays that have Bhīma as the main character are the *Bhīma Munkus*, *Bhīma Murka*, and *Bhīma Suci*, all of which display a clear Islamic element. Nevertheless, in the West Javanese pre-Islamic context, the evidence that shows that the figure of Bhīma was worshipped as a cult figure by the Sundanese was recorded in the travel notes of C.L. Blume, who in 1824 visited the Baduy, a community in Sunda that held strongly onto pre-Islamic traditions. According to Blume, the people in the said region worshipped this figure as a protector and an intermediary between the worlds of humans and gods (Blume [1822] cited in Termorshuizen's [1993:38] version).

Bhaṭāra Bhīma was the protector and mediator, to whom, and also to other holy figures, they offered prayers, so that they might get what they want from these benevolent beings. Their prayers were usually furnished with offerings of rice or other items. They were not

allowed to represent The Mighty One (*Sang Kuasa*), including the intermediary Bhaṭāra Bhīma, in any shape or form, even though they worshipped along the Ciujung river various stone representations of other holy creatures, who might influence their fates.<sup>6</sup>

**Fig 1.** Relief showing the dialogue between Bhaṭāra Guru and Bhīma (Source: Wikimedia)



There is no indication of the time of composition of the *Bhīma Svarga* in the colophon found in the extant manuscripts. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to study the iconographic context of Bhīma in Java during the Majapahit period in a deeper manner through a relief at Candi Sukuh, a site located at the base of Gunung Lawu, which undoubtedly represents Bhaṭāra Guru and Bhīma (Figure 1). This large relief has the shape of a horseshoe traditionally believed to bear some similarity to the shape of a uterus. Each end of the horseshoe is carved in the shape of a stylised deer (Duijker 2010:176,179),

<sup>6</sup> Original quotation: *Batara Bhīma is de magtige beschermer en middelaar, aan wien, zoo als ook aan eenige andere heiligen, zij hunne gebeden rigten, om bij dat algoede wezen de vervulling hunner wenschen te erlangen, bij welke gebeden zij gewoon zijn rijst enz. te offeren. Zij mogen noch het opperwezen, noch hunnen voornamen middelaar Batara Bhīma door eenig beeld zinnelijk voorstellen, terwijl zij daarentegen aan vele andere heiligen, aan welke door hen een bijzondere invloed op hun lot wordt toegekend, in steenen beeldtenissen langs de oevers van den Tjioedjoeng hunne hulde hebben toegebracht.*

of which only the two front legs and head are represented. Although the heads are missing, the ears and antlers are clearly identifiable. Something hangs from the right bottom of the object held by the two human figures represented at the bottom of this carved scene. This hanging shape is thought to be a baby whose umbilical cord is dangling. The figure of the human on the left of the baby is seen to be holding an object, which seems to be a knife. The human figure on the right is holding an object as well. The three figures are placed at the very bottom of the aforementioned relief. Above it, the figure of a human with the hairstyle of a hermit is depicted as kneeling, holding the figure of a small child in front of him. Above them, a small *balai* (pavillion) can be seen. These two groups in the lower part of the relief are separated from the upper part by a two-headed snake with open mouths, looking outwards. Above this snake stand two figures facing each other, representing Bhaṭāra Guru and Bhīma.

The most accepted interpretation until now has been that proposed by Stutterheim (1935), who linked this relief with the *Bhīma Buṅkus* play, a Javanese interpretation of the birth of Bhīma. According to this tale, Bhīma was born in a *buṅkus* (a kind of sack) that was so hard that there was not a single person who could break it. Kuntī left Bhīma wrapped up in the layers of the *buṅkus* at the grave of Gandamayū. Śiva ordered his offspring Gajahsena, who had the form of an elephant, to release Bhīma and bestow the child with supernatural powers.

According to Stutterheim, the two human figures in the bottommost part of the panel are hermits, and the large sack in the middle depicts Bhīma being encased. Nevertheless, the activities that the two hermits were enacting is not known, for the objects that they hold are indistinct. It should be noted that these activities are not described in the *Bhīma Buṅkus*, the source used by Stutterheim (1935:55). The figure holding the child in the middle of the relief was understood by Stutterheim to be Nārada, and the small child in front of him to be Bhīma after he was freed from the sack. This event can be found in version A of the *Bhīma Buṅkus*. Finally, Stutterheim is of the opinion that the main panel depicts, without a doubt, Bhaṭāra Guru and Bhīma. Stutterheim (1935:62) links this relief with the tale of *Pāṇḍu Papa*, a play inspired by the *Kiduṅ Bhīma Svarga*.

We can raise a few objections to this interpretation. The first objection is that Stutterheim proposed a hypothesis from a single relief on the basis of two narrative sources: *Bhīma Buṅkus* and *Pāṇḍu Papa*. Although this method can be accepted in the interpretation of ancient Javanese art, we should acknowledge the possibility that there may be one story that is the source of the relief as a whole. We may also ask, for example, why the first panel is absent in the *Bhīma Buṅkus* play. Finally, the dialogue between Bhaṭāra Guru and Bhīma can be found not only in the *Pāṇḍu Papa* play, but also in the *Navaruci*.

A reading of the contents of the version of the prose *Bhīma Svarga*, and in particular the section that refers to the questions that the Guru had about Bhīma's various names during his life (81.6–88.9), suggests that this relief refers to this version. This interpretation is based on the identification of the small line that links the frame with the baby in the bottom panel as an umbilical cord. The figure of the baby is none other than the newly borne Bhīma, whose umbilical cord is still dangling towards the ground. In the version of the *Bhīma Svarga* written in prose, the Guru asked Bhīma about his name when he was

in the uterus, when he was just born, and significantly, when his umbilical cord was cut.<sup>7</sup> The two figures at the bottom may be two priests who are conducting a ritual to cut the umbilical cord, which may be recognisable as what looks like a knife in the hands of one of the hermits. The middle panel is thought to refer to the same text (87.4–8), which tells of Bhīma when he was learning to wear the *cawet* (a kind of underwear) and *basahan* (a type of cloth used to cover the body when bathing).<sup>8</sup>

As far as the author knows, no other stories containing a tale of Bhīma's childhood have been found in Old Javanese literature, other than the *Bhīma Svarga* in the version that we are currently discussing. This relief illustrates beautifully the dialogue between Bhaṭāra Guru and Bhīma regarding Bhīma's name at a time when the hero had not yet become an adult. Thus, the two small panels below the main panel are visualisations of moments referred to in the dialogue.

The relief in question does not contain a date; however, from the inscriptions in the temple complex, experts date Candi Sukuh to a period between 1359 and 1381 śaka (1439–1459 CE).<sup>9</sup> Archaeological experts date this relief to the same period (Duijker 2010:176). In other words, if we accept the assumption that this relief refers to the *Bhīma Svarga* that we have discussed, primarily as relating to the sections that the writer has pointed out, then this text can presumably be dated to the middle of the 15th century, while the 16th century, when this text was well known by the pre-Islamic Sundanese community, can be referred to as the *terminus ante quem*.

#### MANUSCRIPT PRODUCTION

The *Bhīma Svarga* text provides a substantial amount of information relating to the production of manuscripts in Java during the 15th century. This analysis hopes to supplement previous studies on the implements used to write Old Javanese texts, in the manner of Zoetmulder (1974), Robson (1976), and Hinzler (2001) regarding books in the premodern Javanese period.

The *Bhīma Svarga* mentions a word referring to the supports for writing manuscripts, which has never been discussed before, except in a recent contribution by the present writer (Gunawan 2015). The aforementioned word is the *gebang* leaf (*roniñ gəbañ*). This word appears three times in the text and is always referred to as a writing support. It first appears in Bhaṭāra Guru's response to Bhīma's question regarding the origins of manuscripts (*pustaka*):

7 Aforementioned dialogue: *duk pva tinugəlan pusərmu, sapa aranmu, sañ hyaṅ nāgāṅəlak aranku, ari- arimu duk binuñcal, sapa aranmu, sañ hyaṅ kiṭa prāṇa*. [Guru:] “When your umbilical chord was cut, what was your name?” [Bhīma:] “My name was Snake with the Gaping Mouth (Saṅ Hyaṅ Nāgāṅəlak).” [Guru:] “When your placenta was disposed of (buried), what was your name?” [Bhīma:] “My name was the Worm of Holy Life (Saṅ Hyaṅ Kiṭa Prāṇa).” (BS 85.2–5).

8 *bisa cacavət sapa aranmu, sañ hyaṅ rājalilā aranku, duk bisa aṅaṅgon sapa aranmu, sañ hyaṅ komāra aranku, bisa babasahan sapa aranmu, sañ hyaṅ jātivarṇa aranku*. [Guru:] “When you could wear the *cawet*, what was your name?” [Bhīma:] “My name was The King's Pleasure (Saṅ Hyaṅ Rājalilā).” [Guru:] “When you could wear clothes, what was your name?” [Bhīma:] “My name was The Prince.” [Guru:] “When you could wear the *basahan*, what was your name?” [Bhīma:] “My name was The Essential Appearance.” (BS 87.4–8).

9 There are 13 inscriptions with dates from this temple complex (see Noorduyn 1978:260, fn. no. 7, 261).

[Bhīma:] *guru m̄ne dak atakon iri kita, paran rika kamūlaniñ pustaka hirəñ iku, mantaniē sinañguh ləvih, paran kañ ginave.*

[Guru:] *Bhīma dak varah ta kita, mūlaniñ pustaka hirəñ, ronin gəbañ, pinukah pinada-pada lvane lavan davane, tinitisan gañgā vira tanu, gañgā riñ bañu, vira riñ panuli, tanu riñ mañsi (66.2–4).*

[Bhīma:] There is more, Guru. I would like to ask you. How did the earliest manuscript turn black, until it was said to be the best, how was this done?

[Guru:] I would like to talk to you, Bhīma. The earliest manuscript turned black. The *gebang* leaf, cut in the same manner length-wise and width-wise, [is then] transformed into life by the *gañgā*, *vira*, and *tanu*. *Gañgā* is water, *vira* the pen, *tanu* the ink.

It should be noted that this discourse is not uniquely found in the *Bhīma Svarga*, but has also been recorded in the *Saṅ Hyañ Sāsana Mahāguru* (SSMG),<sup>10</sup> an Old Sundanese text from the 16th century; it has also been preserved through the centuries via the opening presentations of the wayang *Ləlampahan Sutasoma dan Pamahbah* play in Bali.<sup>11</sup> This narration is even immortalised in the form of Wayang Kulit in the coastal regions of current day Central Java, with editorially insignificant differences.<sup>12</sup>

The relationship of the three elements *gañgā* with water, *vira* with the pen, and *tanu* with ink need further explanations. *Gañgā* is the name of an Indian river which is well known in Java and understood as a ‘water source’ by mid-century Javanese authors. *Vira* means ‘brave man, hero’ (OJED, s.v. *wira*), and its connection with the *panuli* ‘pen’ is difficult to understand because, despite literary practices having become a masculine profession in general, and as Hinzler (2001:166) mentions, women were able to read and ‘read aloud,’ and change love poems (*vilāpa*). With regards to *tanu*, Zoetmulder (1982:s.v. *tanu* III) defines it as ‘writing, letter’. Nevertheless, there is a possibility that *tanu* is a synonym for ink, as one of the main elements that make the *akṣara* ‘visible’.<sup>13</sup>

In a previous article (Gunawan 2015), the author has shown how the term *gebang* (*Corypha gebanga*), which was recorded in contemporaneous sources, whether it be from Old Javanese or Old Sundanese sources, refer to a writing support made of palm leaf that has long been mistakenly identified as *nipah*, which has never even been mentioned in available Javanese sources. In contrast to the *lontar*, which was etched, *gebang* manuscripts were written using black ink (*mañsi*).

Unfortunately, unlike *lontar* manuscripts, which are still being used in Bali, *gebang* manuscripts are no longer being produced. From the above-quoted paragraph, we at least

10 *Sāsana Māha Guru III: tipuk divasa pupus gəbañ lavan lvantar, tinut pinada-pada, lvane lavan davane, tinitisan asta gañga vira tanu, apa ta sinañguh asta gañga vira tanu, asta naraniñ tañan, gañga naraniñ bañu, vira ta naraniñ panurat lavan panuli, tanu naraniñ mañsi* (Gunawan 2009).

11 *Hirika ta hana pupusiñ gəbañ, sevala tuñgal, hika ta pinek pva tatas pinada pada pañjañnya tañan lvarnya, hika ta timestesan haṣṭa gañga, uvira tanu, ndya ta inaranan mañkana, haṣṭa, na, tañan, gañga, na, toya, uvira, na, panuli, tanu, na, mañsi* (Zurbuchen 1987:ix).

12 *Vonten sujanma tapa vontən pucakiñ sivalan tuñgal, pinatak pinada-pada kinarya asta gañgā virantanu, asta tañan, gañga bañu, vira papan, tanu mañsi*. After that the *dalang* explains the four wind directions and their sacred letters.

13 Compare, for instance, parallel sentences in *Koravāśrama* 130.26: *sañ hyañ mañsi madapa riñ rambut* and 134.6: *tanu madapa ri rambut*.

know that the *gebang* leaves are measured and cut into the same size ‘*pinukah pinada-pada*’. In relation to this last phrase, it is interesting to note van der Molen’s (1983:91) observations regarding the *gebang* manuscript LOr 2266 containing the *Kuñjarakarna* text. He observed that there were press-marks in the form of lines, sometimes clearly, sometimes vaguely visible; one on the left side, one on the right side, and two in the middle. By looking at the distance between these marks (the difference being a millimetre or less), it appears that the production of the leaf that becomes the writing support is manufactured in a very careful manner. Van der Molen proposed two hypotheses: firstly, if the tools are standard, then we may find important clues as to the identity of the workshop in the size of the manuscript, the length, width, and distance between holes, and the distance between the holes and the ends of the manuscript; secondly, if the type of leaf is standard, then the size may be the same in a large area. By looking at the size of the entire corpus of *gebang* manuscripts that is available to us (fewer than 32 manuscripts), it seems that the first hypothesis is difficult to accept, given the extremely uniform size of the manuscript (their length being between 22 and 47 cm and their width between 3.5 and 4 cm). Nevertheless, the right age for the *gebang* leaf as a writing support seems to have been considered by the makers. This type of leaf is not recorded in the *Bhīma Svarga*, but in the *Śāsana Mahāguru* and *Lelampahan Sutasoma*; the use of the word *pupus* before the word *gəbañ* gives some clue as to the age of the leaf. Zoetmulder (1982:s.v. *pupus*) defines *pupus* as ‘the young (just unfolding) leaf of the banana and the *lirang*-palm’. At what age this leaf is ready to be transformed into a writing support remains a mystery.

The word *gəbañ* appears again in relation to one of the elements of manuscripts (*pustaka*). In the minds of the author, these elements, whether they be physical or metaphysical, contain the characteristics of godliness. Such elements are mentioned among others: manuscript cover-boards (*papan*), *gebang* leaves, straps made from rope (*tali niñ pustaka*), ink (*mañsi*), the body (*śarīra*), and voice/vocalisation (*śabda*). The *Pustaka* in its entirety alone is a manifestation of *Sadāśiva*:

*Sadāśiva pustakañku, papanku brahmā śiva, gəbañku bhaṭāra bāyu, taliniñ pustakañku, sañ hyañ suntagi mañik, pustaka śabdaku, lətik kalimahoşadha śarīra, hiḍəpku mañsi, sañ hyañ śambhu devatane śastrañku (74.9–75.2).*

My manuscript is *Sadāśiva*, my board the God *Brahmā* and *Śiva*, my *gebang* *Bhaṭāra Bāyu*, my book straps *Sang Hyang Suntagi Mañik*, the manuscript is my word, the essence of *Kalimahoşadha* is [my] body, the ink is my thoughts, the God that guides my writings is *Sang Hyang Śambhu*.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to being associated with the gods, the word *gebang* is one of the manuscript elements that has also been associated with *Yudhiṣṭhira*, the first son of the *Pāṇḍavas*:

<sup>14</sup> Compare *Tattvajñāna* 4.16–17, which mentions that *Sadāśiva*, in his manifestation in the physical world (*sakala*), is considered to be the author of various sacred texts, philosophies, mantras, and even grammar: *kunañ gave bhaṭāra sadāśivatattva riñ sakala / sañ hyañ śāstra āgama aji vaidya tarkka vyākaraṇa gañita yatika gave bhaṭāra sadāśivatattva*.

*Yudhiṣṭhira pinakagəbañ, arjuna pinakatatali, nakula sahadeva pinakapapan, tulis in pustaka, sañ hyañ dharmarāja, kañ asədahan pustaka, sañ hyañ bhagavān citragotra, dudū rika guru (72.6–8).*

Yudhiṣṭhira is a *gəbang*, Arjuna is the rope, Nakula and Sahadeva are the board. The writings in the manuscript are the Sañ Hyañ Dharmarāja, he who has completed the manuscript is Sañ Hyañ Bhagavān Citragotra,<sup>15</sup> is that not so, o' Guru?

As Rubinstein (2000:56–57) has noted, references regarding the Pāṇḍavas in the context of manuscripts are also found in the *Tutur Aji Sarasvatī*. Interestingly, although they contain the same associations, the writing supports that are mentioned are different. The *Bhīma Svarga* mentions *gebang* as the manuscript material, while the *Tutur Aji Sarasvatī* (Gedong Kirtya ms. 2289) mentions *lontar*. Aside from that, Bhīma is not mentioned in the *Bhīma Svarga*, probably due to the fact that he is a character in the story, while in the *Tutur Aji Sarasvatī*, the second son of Pāṇḍu was associated with the rope, while Arjuna is associated with the *lontar*, and Dharmatanaya (Yuḍhiṣṭhira) with textual content (*śāstra*), and the twins Nakula and Sahadeva are associated in both texts with the manuscript cover-board.

The venerated deities associated with the ritual of reading manuscripts aloud are Gaṇapati and Dewi Sarasvatī. In the *Bhīma Svarga*, Bhīma invites Bhaṭāra Gaṇa to fuse with him in the mantra appearing at the beginning of the manuscript: *Om̐ gəmut gaṇapati!* 'Om̐ may Gaṇapati fuse [into my body]!' At the end of the mantra, after binding the manuscript (*analyaniñ pustaka*), he recites another similar mantra: *om̐ gəmut giram̐ gaṇapati* 'Om̐, may Gaṇapati, [The God] of Speech (?), fuse [into my body]'.

The Goddess Sarasvatī resides in the writings (*Sañ hyañ sarasvatī, ri śāstrañku*). This Goddess of Wisdom is venerated because she herself resides in the base, the middle, and the end of the liver, as well as on the tip of the tongue, a vital place associated with the production of knowledge. Something similar can be found in the *Tutur Aji Sarasvatī* and *Dharma Pavayanān*, which states how the Goddess Sarasvatī resides at the tip of the tongue. This section of the body, in Balinese belief, is the place where speech began (Rubinstein 2000). *Arjunavijaya* 2.1–5, one of the *kakavins* originating from East Java, illustrates how the Goddess enters the tongue of Kumbhakarṇa until he says the opposite of what he wishes to say (Supomo 1977:186).<sup>16</sup> In another tale, mentioned in the *Purvāgama*, Sarasvatī is the Goddess Śakti Brahmā. She was the one tasked by the God Brahmā to come down to earth to bring language, culture, and civilisation to mankind (Zurbuchen 1987:49). Hooykaas (1977:75) also notes how the thoughts of the Pamangku were concentrated when carrying out worship: 'direct the sacred syllable OM̐ to the tip of the tongue; when OM̐ has arrived, imagine that the Goddess Sarasvatī is standing at the tip of the tongue'.

<sup>15</sup> Compare a similar passage in the *Koravāsrama* (Swellengrebel 1936:112), which also mentions Citragotra as the one who is responsible for writing *pustaka* (*bhagavān citragotra pva masədahan pustaka*). This name refers to none other than Citragupta, the scribe Dharmarāja (Yama) who is tasked with keeping the record book of human karma.

<sup>16</sup> See also *Dharma Pātāñjala* (Acri 2017:280, 369).

## INK

In contrast to the writing supports and implements, which have been discussed by experts, the identification of inks in the writing tradition of Old Javanese has never been discussed. Zoetmulder, in his well-known introductory book to Old Javanese Literature, *Kalangwan* (1974), did not elaborate on the inks used in the Javanese writing tradition of the past. This is understandable since nearly all Old Javanese texts were kept as *lontar* manuscripts, and by way of inference we can imagine that the ink that was used in the past was the same as that which is employed in Bali today, namely the *kemiri* oil that is applied to palm leaf after it has been etched.

Hinzler, in her article entitled ‘The Book in Ancient Java’ (2001), briefly discusses the scant data on the use of ink in ancient Java in one paragraph, by citing references found in Old Javanese texts. While it is difficult to know when ink was first used in the Javanese writing tradition, a *terminus ante quem* may be provided by the *Rāmāyāṇa* (9th century). Sarga XI tells the tale of how Rāma read a beautifully written letter by Sita, and then cried over the letter until his tears caused the script to fade, and he became regretful as he could no longer read its contents. According to Hinzler (2001), this explanation seems to give clues that the letter that was read was written in ink.

There is one paragraph in the *Bhīma Svarga* that explains how ink is produced. Although this is only based on one paragraph (66.6–8), the analysis below hopes to give a clearer picture regarding the materials and process of ink making in Java during the period in which this text was composed. This explanation coincides with Bhīma’s question about the making of ink.

*Kukusiṅ laṅa dilah, ghināṣa riṅ lavak tambaga, jineran laṅḍaniṅ kəpuh, vinoran lāka, inulig inənah riṅ pamaṅsen, ya ta maṅsi arane, ikaṅ ta prasiddha ṅgvaninṅ agave pustaka (66.6–8).*

The smoke of the oil lamp, rubbed in copper shells, dissolved in the *laṅḍa* of the *kepuh* tree, mixed with lac, [and then all] mixed in the right doses into the inkwell. This is what is called ink. Its role in the making of books is well-known.

The use of soot as the main ingredient of ink is well-known. Ding Choo Ming (1993) mentions the use of soot as the main basic ingredient of ink for Melayu manuscripts. Meanwhile, Permadi found many carbon elements in the *daluwang* manuscript he tested in the laboratory, which point to the use of soot. The production of ink using soot can also still be witnessed in the production of ink at the Gentur Pensantren, Cianjur (Permadi 2012:93–97). According to the *Bhīma Svarga*, this soot was put in a dome made of copper before being polished for extraction (*ghināṣa riṅ lavak tambaga*). The contribution of archaeological research to understanding this ink production tool will be crucial.

What interests us here is the appearance of the word *laṅḍaniṅ kəpuh*. Zoetmulder (1982:s.v. *laṅḍa*) defines *laṅḍa* as ‘lye (an alkaline solution used for washing)’, whereas Robson and Wibisono (2002:s.v. *landha*) gloss it as ‘lye; water in which burnt rice stalks have soaked: used as shampoo and spot remover’. Here it is clear that what is burned is not the rice stalk, but the *kepuh* (*Sterculia foetida*). As to what part of the *kepuh* is burned,



a provisional hypothesis may point towards the thick skin of the fruit, which is used to solidify the colour when burned.<sup>17</sup>

It is thought that the function of this *landa kepuh* is the same as the *getah kulit manggis* (latex mangosteen skin) that was used to write Malay manuscripts as recorded by Ding Choo Ming (1993), and maybe also the same as *baja* for Batak manuscripts (Teygeler 1993). In the current Javanese context, according to the wayang expert Rudy Wiratama, the way that *landha* was made was to burn the skin of the *kepuh* fruit, and then boil the ashes in water. According to him, this process was still used in the colouring of wayang in the old days. The water that was also mentioned as *landha jangkang kəpuh* was then used to dissolve *ancur*, which is a colouring adhesive that originates from the sap of plants or from animal secretion.

The nature of this *ancur* is thought to be the same as the three elements mentioned in the *Bhīma Svarga*, which is *lāka*. The word *lāka* ('lac') refers to the solid sap that is produced by a type of insect. This word comes from the Sanskrit language *lākṣā* which, as noted by Monier-Williams (1872:865), means 'a kind of red dye, lac (obtained from the cochineal or a similar insect as well as from the resin of a partic. tree)'. Many people associate the word *lākṣā* with *lakṣa*, which means the unit 'hundred thousand', referring to the numerous amounts of insects that produce lac, even though this link is dubious. *Lāka* is produced by scale insects, particularly the *Kerria lacca* species, in the family *Coccidae*. The size of these insects are very small, their length is less than 1/20th of an inch. Their lifespan is four to six months. These insects suck the sap from the branch of their host tree through a syphon in such a manner that this results in a kind of solid encrustation, which sticks to the branch.

In the Javanese context, this *lāka* is thought to have been used as early as the 9th century, as recorded in the *Kakavin Rāmāyaṇa* (Kern 2015). In the tale of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa journeying towards the hermitage of Viśvamitra, the text states that when they bathed in a lake there, 'the sunrays made the lake shine like red lac'.<sup>18</sup> This material is often associated as a coloring agent for cloth, such as a red coloring agent for *daluvañ* cloth,<sup>19</sup> or as the color of clothing for the *lalāsa* nymphs (*bidadari*), made from *dukūla*, and colored with *tulalay* lac.<sup>20</sup> In addition to these descriptions, the instructions for the production of ink associated with writing is located in *sarga* 26.13, which was passed over in Poerbatjarka's (2010) edition because it was considered an interpolation. This verse consists of Kekayi's advice when she is comforting Kośalyā, who cannot hold back her emotions when she welcomes Rāma and Śita, who arrive after a long period of separation: 'Pain is charcoal and happiness is lac, both of the same kind, like ink that is ground up and mixed; see, this body is a metal cup for holding ink; always full of happiness and

17 In the Old Javanese context, as recorded by Zoetmulder (1982, s.v. *laṅḍa*), there is only one occurrence of the word *laṅḍa* as the compound *bhasmāṅkura laṅḍa*, within *Sumanasāntaka* 59.3: *tinuras raras nika lūd bhasmāṅkura laṅḍa rakwa sira sañ tuha-tuha nika yan sakeñ bibi*. Zoetmulder suggests that the phrase *bhasmāṅkura laṅḍa* may refer to the 'wiku' descendants from the mother's side. The context here is not very clear; it is only clear that one of the duties of the *Bhasmāṅkura* is to prepare the ash powder.

18 *Kakavin Rāmāyaṇa* 2.10: *kadi lāka mabāñ prabhānya*.

19 *Kakavin Rāmāyaṇa* 5.66: *lituhayu varṇa lāka daluvañnira rama mabāñ*.

20 *Kakavin Rāmāyaṇa* 17.113: *maken lalāsa ya dukūla lāka tulalay* 'They are wearing *lalāsa* clothing, which consists of [clothing made of] *dukūla*, dyed with *tulalay* lac.' One may wonder whether the *tulalay* 'trunk' is linked to the shape of the lac that is stuck along the tree.

unhappiness at the same time’ (Robson 2015:758).<sup>21</sup> From this description there appears to be at least three essential ingredients in the ink: carbon-rich charcoal (*jelaga*), which functions as a black dye; *laṅḍa kepuh*, an alkaline fluid which functions to solidify the colour; and *lāka*, used as the colouring adhesive along with the writing support.

Finally, it should be noted that the Balinese manuscript of the *Bhīma Svarga* HKS 7507 (R) contains an explanation about the mystical association that ink has with the deities. The deity that resides in the ink is Viṣṇu, who iconographically is always symbolised in black:

*Duk aku anulis kita bhaṭāra guru, hana riñ pamañsen, bhaṭāra viṣṇu riñ mañsiku, bhaṭāra brahmā riñ suntara, bhaṭāra śiva riñ śūnyatā, bhaṭāra rudra riñ lalāṭa, bhaṭāra mahadeva riñ lepanaṅku, bhaṭāra śaṅkara riñ jajarku, bhaṭāra Śambhu riñ sələraku, bhaṭāra ĩsvara riñ rupaṅku, bhaṭāra guru anulis pustakaṅku.*

When I write, You, Bhaṭāra Guru, are in the inkwell, Bhaṭāra Viṣṇu is in my ink, Bhaṭāra Brahma is in the *suntara* (?), Bhaṭāra Śiva is in the Void, Bhaṭāra Rudra is in my forehead, Bhaṭāra Mahādeva is in my wax, Bhaṭāra Śaṅkara is in my lines, Bhaṭāra Śambhu is in my vine-ornaments [on the binding], Bhaṭāra ĩsvara is in my colors, Bhaṭāra Guru writes my manuscript (ms. R, fol. 12–13).

#### AKṢARA MYSTICISM

The mysticism of written letters (*akṣara*) in Balinese texts, particularly in the *Tutur-Aji Sarasvatī* and *Svaravyañjana Tutur*, has been widely discussed in a monograph by Rubinstein (2000:39–60), as well as in a recent article by Acri (2016). The discussion below will present some additional textual sources that contain *akṣara* mysticism.

The *Bhīma Svarga* is centred on the esoteric dialogue between Bhaṭāra Guru and Bhīma. All the questions of the former are successfully answered by the latter. The brilliant answers Bhīma gave shows how he himself had truly mastered esoteric knowledge (*tattvajñāna*).<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that there is a scene where Bhaṭāra Guru gives a manuscript to Bhīma to read, but, instead of reading it, the hero spins it in such a manner that it catches fire. Naturally, Bhaṭāra Guru becomes angry and asked for the reasons behind such an impudent act. Bhīma answered that this was how the manuscript should have been read, by turning it into Śiva’s flames (Śivāgni). In other words, to read the manuscript is to read its subtle form (*sūkṣma*) which, in this context, is the smoke of the fire coming from the manuscript, which represents the colours associated with the series of consonants of the Sanskrit and Javanese syllabary, namely white (*ka kha ga gha ṅa*), red (*ca cha ja jha ṅa*), black (*ṭa ṭha ḍa ḍha ṅa*), yellow (*ta tha da dha na*), multicoloured (*pa pha ba bha ma*), pink (*ya ra la va*), and blue (*śa śa sa ha*) (BS 70.11–71.2).

Through this firing process, the elements of fire are unveiled. Each fire element is mentioned by Bhīma and is associated with *navadevatā* (the nine Deities) who dwell in *mahāpadma* (‘the great lotus’) in the body. These nine deities can be understood in

<sup>21</sup> *Rāmāyaṇa* 26.13: *Lara harəñ suka lāka sakaṅḍa ya, kadi ta mañsi ghināsa masaṅghani, nya si śarira ya gañsa pamañsyana, ya hibəkan suka duhka lanā pisan.*

<sup>22</sup> In the *Bhīma Svarga* (87.14–15), Sañ Hyañ Tattvajñāna is another name for Bhīma when he is able to master the knowledge of literature.

accordance with Balinese *nawasanga* symbolism, that is (read from the east following the pradakṣiṇa direction): Īśvara, Mahiśvara (=Maheśvara), Brahmā, Rudra, Mahādeva, Śaṅkara, Viṣṇu, and Śambhu. These deities are positioned in each of the *mahāpadma* petals, while Bhaṭāra Guru occupies the central position.

*Yen kukusika bhaṭāra īśvara, lalatunika bhaṭāra mahiśvara, vaṅvanika bhaṭāra brahmā, pəlatikika bhaṭāra rudra, urubiṅ gəni bhaṭāra mahādeva, vaṅkavanika bhaṭāra śaṅkara, harənika bhaṭāra viṣṇu kəmbaṅiṅ avu bhaṭāra śambhu, avunika bhaṭāra śiva, sariniṅ kukus apa, si kita bhaṭāra guru.*

... the smoke is Bhaṭāra Īśvara, the spark Bhaṭāra Mahiśvara, the cinders Bhaṭāra Brahmā, the particle Bhaṭāra Rudra, the flash of lightning Bhaṭāra Mahādeva, the halo Bhaṭāra Śaṅkara, the charcoal Bhaṭāra Viṣṇu, the spark Bhaṭāra Śambhu, the ashes Bhaṭāra Śiva. What is the essence of smoke? It is you, Bhaṭāra Guru!

Bhīma felt that he had the right to treat the manuscript in the way he had because all the *akṣaras* had already been internalised within his Self. The process of reading books had already been internalised into his body: the activity of opening the *pustaka* was in his heart, whereas closing the *pustaka*, which is symbolised by tying up (*analyani*) the *pustaka*, were in his hands.

Both vowels and consonants were united in Bhīma's body. The consonants fused within his body: *ka kha ga gha ṅa* in his skin, *ca cha ja jha ṅa* in his flesh, *ṭa ṭha ḍa ḍha ṅa* in his blood, *ta ta da da na*, in the muscles, *pa pha ba bha ma*, in his bones, *ya ra la va* in his veins, *śa śa sa ha* in his marrow. Furthermore,

*ka kha ga gha ṅa, bāhuṅku tənən, ca cha ja jha ṅa, bāhuṅku kiva, ṭa ṭha ḍa ḍha ṅa, sikuṅku tənən, ta tha da dha na, sikuṅku kivan, pa pha ba bha ma, lambuṅku, ya ra la va, ri pusərku, śa śa sa ha, ri pusuh-pusuhku (74.4-8).*

*ka kha ga gha ṅa*, is my right shoulder, *ca cha ja jha ṅa*, my left shoulder, *ṭa ṭha ḍa ḍha ṅa*, my right elbow, *ta tha da dha na*, my left elbow, *pa pha ba bha ma*, my stomach, *ya ra la va*, are in my belly button, *śa śa sa ha*, are in my liver.

The vowels, which in this text are called *akṣara tuha* ('old letters'), occupy the primary position in the human body as compared to consonants, for the letters in question are located in the head: *a ā* in the skull, *i ī* in the face, *u ū* in the eye, *ṛ ṝ* in the ear, *l ḷ* in the nose, *e ai* in the lips, *o au* in the mouth, and *ə ɛ̄* in the throat (73.9–10). This conforms to the situation that we find in Balinese (and Indian) texts on *akṣara*-mysticism (see Aciri 2016:160–161).

The vowels *a* and *i* are also coupled with sacred syllables found in the introductory mantra that is often found at the beginning of Old Javanese texts: *om avighnam astu nama siddham*. The letter *a* is associated with the father, whereas *i* is associated with the mother.<sup>23</sup>

23 *Bhīma Svarga* 74.4: *a ā bapaṅku, i ī ibuṅku*. The opposition between the masculine traits for the *a* and the feminine vowel *i* is also listed in the Sanskrit-Old Javanese *Caṅḍakiraṇa*, in the chapter that discusses the divine origin of the letters: *a ā ananta sūkṣma sira pinakaguru i ruhur, viśeṣa sira vastu pramāṇa, i ī ibu tatvanira bhaṭāri Pṛthivi sira guruniṅ rāt 'a ā* is in the form of eternal smoothness, as guidance for those above (the sky), who have excelled in gaining the right skills and knowledge; *i ī* is the mother, the true

Every word of the invocation mantra is divided by the author in a manner that does not follow the exact grammatical rules of a Sanskrit sentence, as follows: *avighna riñ vātāṅku, mastu riñ śabdaku, namah riñ uripku, siddham riñ atīṅku, manava ta dudū*: ‘Avighna in my stomach, *mastu* in my speech, *namah* in my life, *siddham* in my heart. Is that not so?’ (74.1–2)<sup>24</sup>

It is clear that the sequence of *akṣaras* in the *Bhīma Svarga* follows the sequence of the Sanskritic syllabary.<sup>25</sup> It should be noted, however, that in the manuscript, not all the letters of the syllabary are represented. For instance, there are no aspirated *akṣaras* (*kha, cha, jha*, etc.). In addition, the pronunciation of dentals and retroflexes is not differentiated, and the phonemes *śa śa sa* are often interchangeable.

The word *akṣara* originates from the Sanskrit ‘syllable’, the smallest language unit that is indivisible. In Sanskrit, this word underwent etymological developments to become ‘indestructible, immortal’ (van Buitenen 1959). It is difficult to determine whether the Javanese and Balinese understood *akṣaras* in this sense when this text was written. However, according to Rubinstein (2000:44), the Balinese believed that *akṣaras* had a divine origin. Since these divine elements were eternal in nature, *akṣaras*, as manifestations of the divine, were also regarded as having the same properties.

A passage of the *Bhīma Svarga* confirms this idea. To Bhīma, the elements of writing are akin to the thousand eyes of the God Indra. Every consonantal group possesses an association with a Deity: Īśvara resides in the velars, Brahmā in the palatals, Mahādeva in the retroflexes, Viṣṇu in the dentals, Śiva in the labials, Gaṇa in the semivowels (*ya ra la va*), Śambhu in the sibilants (*śa śa sa ha*). Finally, these syllables can be bound into a word, which is nothing other than a representation of Bhaṭāra Guru itself.<sup>26</sup>

*Akṣaras*, just like the deities, are indestructible in nature, immortal.<sup>27</sup> The fusing of the *akṣaras*, which represent the smallest linguistic elements that form words (*pāda*), results in their changing form to become the sound (*śabda*), before finally resulting in

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essence from the sacred earth, as a guru for the universe (*jagatraya*)’ (Lokesh Chandra 1997:229). This kind of comparison can also be found in the text when Bhīma explains the meaning of the name of his father (Pāṇḍu), who is associated with the sky, and the name of his mother (Kuntī), who is associated with the earth. This concept is thought to originate from the *R̥gveda* (1.191.6), which mentions Dyaus Pitā ‘Father Sky’ and Pṛthivī Mātā ‘Mother Earth’.

24 The division of the phrase *avighna mastu* (which ought to be *avighnam astu*) can be found throughout the entirety of the manuscript, whether it be from West Java or Bali. This indicates the likelihood of mistakes that may have already happened in the archetype of the text.

25 The associations between *akṣaras* and their seats in the physical body is not always the same in all texts. Generally, there are two ways that *akṣaras* are composed: based on the Sanskrit alphabet (*ka kha ga gha ṅa*, etc..) or based on the Javanese alphabet (*ha na ca ra ka*, etc.). The first arrangement can be found in the *Bramokta Vidhi Śāstra* and *Tutur Aji Sarasvatī*, while the second case can be found in *Tutur Anacaraka* (see Zurbuchen 1987:56; Rubinstein 2000; Aciri 2016).

26 Bhīma Svarga 72.11: *ka kha ga gha ṅa, bhaṭāra īśvara, ca cha ja jha ṅa, bhaṭāra brahmā, ṭa ṭha ḍa ḍha ṅa, bhaṭāra mahādeva, ta tha da dha na, bhaṭāra viṣṇu, pa pha ba bha ma, baṭāra śiva, ya ra la va, bhaṭāra gaṇa, śa śa sa ha, bhaṭāra śambhu, suh pāda kita bhaṭāra guru*.

27 It is perhaps due to this framework of thought that the copyists’ corrections consisting in directly scratching out incorrect syllables onto the related letter are very rarely found in Javanese and Balinese manuscripts. According to Hinzler’s (1993) work on the *lontar* manuscripts of Bali, the most common type of corrections are the ones where a *cakra* sign is written above the related syllable to be deleted. The second most frequent case is to add an *i-kara* (*i*) and *suku* (*u*) to the relevant letter, so that it is not read.

knowledge, which is the internalised form of the *akṣaras* as a manifestation of the divine. In other words, the macrocosmic universe that can be found in the *akṣaras* is internalised in the microcosmic universe (*śarīra*), the essence of a *pustaka*.<sup>28</sup>

As Aciri pointed out in his latest article (2016), the tradition of placing vowels and consonants—that is, the whole syllabary—in the body (*svaravyaṅjananyāsa*) can be traced to speculations and Yogic practices in early Śaiva and Buddhist Tantras in Sanskrit. This practice of placing the *akṣaras* in the body, as an internalised form of the macrocosmos to the microcosmos, continues to be retained in Bali, whether it be from a conceptual, metaphysical, or even ritual angle. This paper has offered a preliminary contribution to supplement data relating to the concept of *svaravyaṅjananyāsa* in 15th-century Java.

#### CONCLUSION

Drawing from a prose version of the *Bhīma Svarga* text that has thus far never been investigated, I have discussed the interconnected aspects of manuscript production and the significance of *akṣaras* for the Hindu (Tantric?) communities in Java in the 15th century. This study is only preliminary and requires further research, either based on archaeological artefacts, textual and epigraphic sources, and modern ethnography. To conclude, the author will cite the notes given by Hinzler (1993:460) with regard to the introduction of the Dalang in the wayang performance in Bali:

The *dalang* first stresses that the performance is based on the holy Sanskrit texts *Mahabharata* or *Ramayana*, which have become known by writing the texts with ink on leaves of the *gebang*. He then enumerates the combinations of ten, five, three and two holy syllables and the all-encompassing syllable *ong*. He continues with the short and long vowels (*a, i, u, e, o, au*), and the consonants (*ka, kha, ga, gha, nga*, etc.). This is the order of the Indian alphabets.

This paragraph clearly suggests that the concepts of our premodern ancestors regarding the production of manuscripts and ink, as well as *akṣara* mysticism, have been faithfully preserved across the centuries through the memories of the *dalangs*.

<sup>28</sup> *Bhīma Svarga* 68.9–10: *kaliṅane śarīra juga pustakajāti, kaṅ ləvih mətu iki maṅke, śabda tuhu pinakataliniṅ buddhi.*

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