



BRILL

BIJDRAGEN TOT DE TAAL-, LAND- EN
VOLKENKUNDE 181 (2025) 191–225



brill.com/bki

A Batak *Pustaha* Looted from the Last Singamangaraja

Uli Kozok | ORCID: 0000-0002-1317-980X

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Honolulu, Hawai'i

info@ulikozok.com

Received 22 November 2023 | Accepted 16 July 2025 |

Published online 25 September 2025

Abstract

In June 1907, the last Singamangaraja¹ of the Batak was killed in a skirmish with Dutch colonial forces. Reports at the time noted that the loot seized by the Dutch included various 'valuables'. Captain Christoffel, who led the Dutch troops, later sold his collection to the City of Antwerp, where it is now housed at the Museum aan de Stroom. It includes two Batak manuscripts previously unknown to scholars and the general public. Given their provenance, it is highly probable that the two manuscripts once belonged to the Singamangaraja himself. Manuscript AE.1922.0001.1007 contains a text detailing the use of magical practices in warfare. It also features an oracle based on the 19 characters of the Batak script, intended to protect and guide warriors in battle. This study compares the oracle in this manuscript with two other renowned Batak bark books that preserve similar divination methods.

Keywords

Sumatra – Batak – Singamangaraja – colonial war – philology – manuscript – history – pustaha

¹ While *singamangaraja* is a title (meaning priest king), it is often used or interpreted as a personal or dynastic name; therefore, I write it with a capital throughout this article.

1 Introduction

This article examines the provenance, content, and historical significance of a Batak *pustaka* (bark book) currently held in the Museum aan de Stroom (MAS) in Antwerp under inventory number AE.1922.0001.1007. Allegedly seized during the final Dutch military campaign against the people of the Batak highlands in 1907, this manuscript was likely looted by Hans Christoffel, a Swiss-born officer in the colonial Korps Marechaussee (Colonial Gendarmerie of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army), during a military expedition that led to the killing of Ompu Pulo Batu, the last Singamangaraja.

This case study raises a number of questions: Who originally owned this *pustaka*, and how did it come into Christoffel's possession? Can a combination of palaeographic, linguistic, and topographic analysis enable us to reconstruct the manuscript's provenance more precisely? What can the contents of the manuscript tell us about its function, intended users, and the historical context in which it circulated? And, finally, what role can philologists play in the larger debate about the restitution of colonial-era cultural objects?

Drawing on comparative evidence from other *pustaka* manuscripts, this article situates the Antwerp manuscript within a network of magical war texts, specifically those containing the Rambu Si Porhas war oracle, also known as the lightning cord oracle.² Through an analysis of internal features—such as chains of transmission, regional toponyms, and script variants—the article argues that the manuscript was most likely produced in the south-western Lake Toba region and may have been presented to the last Singamangaraja by a ritual specialist (*datu*) as a spiritual contribution to his anti-colonial resistance.

The article also contributes to the growing discourse on colonial-era manuscripts and their afterlives, aligning with recent scholarship, such as the essay by Arlo Griffiths, Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan, and Eko Bastiawan (2024). Like the Minto Stone case, the MAS *pustaka* raises urgent ethical and scholarly questions about the responsibilities of museums; the need for meticulous provenance research; and the central role philologists can play in decoding, contextualizing, and, ultimately, restoring the cultural meanings of inscriptions and manuscripts dislocated by colonial violence.

2 *Rambu* denotes 'cord' or 'string', and *porhas* means 'lightning'.

2 Batak Divinatory Books

Before the arrival of colonial powers—including German missionaries, the Dutch colonial army, and administrative officials—the highland interior of what is now North Sumatra, Indonesia, was inhabited by five culturally and linguistically related yet distinct ethnic groups, collectively referred to as the Batak. These groups shared a common writing system derived from the Old Sumatran script, likely introduced around a thousand years ago. Writing media included bamboo, buffalo bone, and, most notably, leporello-folded bark books known as *pustaha*, from Sanskrit *pustaka* पुस्तक. These manuscripts were crafted from long strips of bark from the alim tree (*Aquilaria*), folded concertina-style, and often bound with wooden covers (*lampak*) affixed to the first and last folios. In the Toba region, these books were also referred to as *lo pian* or *lapian*, while in the neighbouring Pakpak and Karo areas they were known as *lapihin* and *lapihan* (Voorhoeve 1975:175, 247), suggesting a possible shared tradition with the Old Javanese bark paper books called *lepihan* (Jákl 2016; Van der Tuuk 1861:478).

Both the text and the numerous illustrations—mostly anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and zoo-anthropomorphic—were drawn using a pen (*suligi*) made from small sticks found in the fibres of the sugar palm. These were dipped into black ink (*mangsi*) and applied to both sides of the bark strip. The Batak script consists of 19 characters, supplemented by four vocalic diacritics, a diacritic to indicate a syllable-final /ŋ/ sound, and another to cancel the inherent /a/ vowel of each consonantal character. Punctuation was absent except for small, decorative symbols called *bindu metmet*, which marked new paragraphs, and larger ones (*bindu godang*), which indicated the start of new chapters.³

The content of *pustaha* primarily focused on divination techniques, ritual practices, and methods of protecting one's community from adversaries. They also occasionally included myths and legends. These manuscripts were composed by Batak ritual specialists and shamans, known as *datu* or *guru*, who used them as repositories of esoteric knowledge and ritual instruction passed down through generations. Scholars such as Voorhoeve (1951), Winkler (1925), Manik (1973), and Kozok (2009) have extensively analysed their content, while Teygeler (1993) and Teygeler and Porck (1995) have studied their physical characteristics and production processes.

Little is known about literacy rates among the Batak before European missionaries arrived in the mid nineteenth century. Early accounts provide con-

3 The Batak word *bindu* is derived from Sanskrit *bindu* (बिन्दु) 'dot'. *Metmet* means 'small' and *godang* 'large'.

flicting perspectives: some suggest that literacy was limited to a small elite of ritual specialists, while others claim it was widespread, even among younger generations (Kozok 2000). According to Kozok's assessment, approximately 30 to 50 % of Batak men were literate (Kozok 2009:186). Data on female literacy are lacking but are presumed to have been significantly lower.

Due to their unique nature as reference books or aide-mémoires, only a handful of *pustaha* have been fully transliterated and translated. A *pustaha* functioned as a learning tool through which a *datu* transmitted his ritual knowledge to his *sisean*, apprentices training to become ritual specialists themselves. It was never intended for silent or individual reading, but, rather, as a guide for oral instruction within the teacher-student relationship.

Knowledge transmission was primarily oral, leading to omissions, spelling variations, and inconsistencies that make translating *pustaha* challenging. However, these imperfections didn't pose a problem for the *datu*'s apprentices, who studied alongside the teacher. In fact, they were likely viewed as advantageous, as they helped maintain content secrecy and individuality.

Although the handwriting in each of the three manuscripts discussed in this article clearly points to a single author, many *pustaha* were in fact collaboratively produced by multiple scribes. The practice of copying material from various sources into a new manuscript often introduced further inconsistencies and inaccuracies. As a result, it is common to find passages in *pustaha* that can be traced—sometimes verbatim—to earlier manuscripts, reflecting a tradition of textual transmission that blends replication with adaptation.

Manuscripts written by non-specialists, such as letters, threatening letters, and love laments are always written in one of the five scripts that corresponds to the mother tongue of its writer. However, when it comes to *pustaha* manuscripts written by *datu*, it is often challenging to determine to which of the five languages and scripts a particular manuscript belongs. In the pre-colonial era, only *datu* and traders had the freedom to travel across the Batak lands, leading to a significant exchange of knowledge and influence on the language used in manuscripts among *datu* from various Batak groups. This exchange, combined with the fact that *pustaha* were written in *hata poda*—an ancient variant of the Batak language with many Malay loanwords, only known by the *datu*—resulted in manuscripts that contain elements from two or more Batak ethnic groups in both the language and the script used, as the author of a *pustaha* also often incorporated words from his own mother tongue.

Due to this complexity, the mobility of the *datu*, and the absence of clear-cut cultural and linguistic borders between the five Batak ethnic groups, it is difficult to determine the origin of a *pustaha* manuscript. Additionally, the

hata poda is phonetically distinct from the northern Batak languages, such as Karo and Pakpak. Therefore, even an examination of the script may not always provide a clear indication of the provenance of a *pustaha* manuscript.

3 Museum aan de Stroom Manuscript

The *pustaha* from the Museum aan de Stroom, Antwerp, with inventory number AE.1922.0001.1007 (hereafter ‘MAS manuscript’), shares many similarities with the Great Pustaha and the Batipuh Pustaha, both of which also include the Rambu Si Porhas war oracle in conjunction with the alphabet oracle Surat na Sampulu Sia.

The *pustaha* manuscript from the Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen, Amsterdam, with inventory number A 1389 (hereafter ‘KIT manuscript’), is famously known as the Great Pustaha due to its remarkable beauty and impressive length of 17 m when fully unfolded. It was collected in Sumatra by the linguist Herman Neubronner van der Tuuk in the 1850s, but its true age is perhaps older.⁴ This manuscript was composed in Lobu Siregar (Siborongborong) by Guru Tumurun Hata ni Aji of the Simanjuntak clan. It was later partially translated into Dutch by H.J.A. Promes, the Capuchin priest, teacher, and researcher in North Sumatra (Dros 2020).⁵ Unfortunately, Van der Tuuk did not provide any details on how he acquired the book.

Another notable *pustaha* is the Batipuh Pustaha, extensively studied by Winkler (1954) in his article titled ‘Das Zauberbuch von Batipuh’ (The spellbook from Batipuh). This text, which is housed in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, with inventory number Ms. or. quart 800 (hereafter ‘SBB manuscript’), was acquired by the Berlin State Library in 1890 from the Frankfurt-based bookshop Joseph Baer & Co. How the manuscript, originally acquired in 1842, found its way to a bookshop in Frankfurt is unknown.

The KIT manuscript, the largest *pustaha* ever recorded, measures 17 m in length and is folded into 56 folios. The SBB manuscript, comprising 67 folios, each measuring 19.7 × 14.5 cm, is, at 9.6 m, considerably shorter. The MAS manuscript is 7.5 m long with 54 folios, each 22.5 × 13.8 cm in size.

4 Van der Tuuk (1824–1894) spent several years pioneering the study of the Batak languages in the service of the Nederlandsch Bijbelgenootschap (NBG, Netherlands Bible Society), composing a dictionary, a grammar, a reader, and a translation of the bible.

5 Erik Jan Dros, 2020, Archief Herman J.A. Promes en Petrus Voorhoeve, Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek Leiden. <https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/2428095> (accessed 2-7-2025).

The KIT manuscript is distinguished by its exceptionally elaborate wooden covers, while the SBB manuscript likewise features finely carved geometric ornamentation. In contrast, the MAS manuscript is notably more modest in appearance. It lacks wooden covers and instead displays a blackened first folio to imitate the look of wood—a common practice among *pustaha*. Additionally, unlike most *pustaha*, which employ both black and red ink for their illustrations, the MAS manuscript is exclusively rendered in black ink.

Similar to the MAS manuscript, the SBB manuscript was not obtained through legitimate purchase but was looted from the village of Batipuh during a military expedition in 1842 by ‘the naval captain M.A. Kluyskens, commanding a detachment of 100 sailors and marines’ (Winkler 1954:340). Batipuh is located in the Tanah Datar regency of the Minangkabau highlands in West Sumatra, approximately 500 km south of Lake Toba. Batipuh is in close proximity to Pagaruyung, which served as the seat of the Minangkabau kings. Winkler (1954:339)⁶ notes that it remains unclear how this Batak manuscript came to be in the possession of the Minangkabau people, who are culturally and linguistically distinct from the Batak. He suggests that the *pustaha* may have been presented to the king of Pagaruyung, possibly by Ompu Sohahuaon, the father of the last Singamangaraja, who reigned from circa 1830 until his death in 1876.⁷

However, given that the last sultan of the Pagaruyung kingdom, Tunggal Alam Bagagar, was exiled to Batavia in 1833, this assumption is questionable, and the manuscript might have been gifted by an earlier Singamangaraja to the king of the Minangkabau. Despite their linguistic, religious, and cultural differences, the Batak priest-kings and the rulers of Pagaruyung maintained political relations (Winkler 1954:340).

While the KIT and the SBB manuscripts are relatively well-known *pustaha*, little is known about the MAS manuscript. For over seventy years, it was part of Hans Christoffel’s collection, initially housed by the City of Antwerp and later transferred to the Museum aan de Stroom. Despite holding considerable historical significance due to its association with the last Singamangaraja, it has never been studied by a scholar.

Hans Christoffel, a Swiss-born officer who became a naturalized Dutch citizen in 1906, led the ‘tiger unit’ of the Korps Marechaussee te Voet (Colo-

6 Dr Johannes Winkler (1874–1958) was a German missionary doctor, who worked among the Batak in Indonesia. Winkler befriended Ama Batuholing, a Batak shaman, and from him learned the secret language used to compose the famous Batak bark books.

7 There are multiple spellings of the name, with the most commonly used today being *si singamangaraja* or *sisingamangaraja*, both including the personal article *si*. The final ruler bearing this title is almost always referred to as the twelfth *singamangaraja*. However, whether he was truly the twelfth in the line is questionable.

nial Gendarmerie of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army). This elite unit was primarily engaged in counter-insurgency operations in the Dutch East Indies.

Christoffel gained notoriety not only for his bravery but also for his brutality during military campaigns in Borneo and Sulawesi. However, it was in the Gayo and Alas lands that he attracted particular attention, as thousands of civilians were ruthlessly massacred during a military expedition led by Van Daalen and Christoffel in 1904 (Kempees 1905). After subjugating Alas, they advanced into Batak territories via western Karo, traversing Pakpak and reaching Humbang and Toba. However, they failed to capture Ompu Pulo Batu, the last Singamangaraja of the Batak people.

Three years later, Christoffel was assigned the mission to track down Ompu Pulo Batu, who was hiding in the densely forested mountains between Humbang and Pakpak. The expedition concluded in less than three months. On 17 June 1907, the last Singamangaraja and two of his sons were fatally shot, while the rest of his family was detained.

An article from *Het Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* (21 June 1907) lists items seized that day, including 'one rifle Model 1895, one breech loader, bladed weapons, and valuables'. The MAS *pustaha* may have been one of these 'valuables', taken by Christoffel or his troops during the Dutch military campaign in the Batak lands between April and June 1907. It is highly probable that the MAS manuscript had been in the Singamangaraja's possession during his years of exile, before eventually falling into Christoffel's hands.

4 Area of Provenance

Determining the precise location where a *pustaha* was written is often challenging. Although the MAS manuscript contains several toponyms, it does not explicitly state where it was composed. Therefore, this assessment draws on three lines of evidence: geographical references, script, and language.

The geographical references in the MAS manuscript strongly suggest it originated in close proximity to the residence of the Singamangaraja in the valley of Bangkara,⁸ as well as the area to which he retreated after being expelled by Dutch troops from Bangkara in 1883—namely the Humbang–Samosir region,

8 We have preserved the original and historical spelling Bangkara, which in the Batak language is pronounced Bakkara, and is also often written as such. As the Indonesian language does not have double consonants, the official spelling of the valley's name is Bakara. In the literature, all three spellings are common.

which roughly corresponds to the present-day regencies of Humbang Hasundutan and Samosir.

Pages B34–B31 attribute an earlier version of the manuscript to a *datu* named Guru Mamo[n]tang Raja Bunga Dodar, described as its spiritual progenitor. He is said to have hailed ‘from the Limbong Habeahan land, Huta Horbo division’ (*tongon tano li[m]bong habea[ha]n turpuk huta horbo*).⁹ The Limbong *bius*, a traditional territorial organization, is located in the Samosir Regency, a few kilometres west of the present-day town of Pangururan. Habeahan lies in the south-eastern part of the Limbong Valley, approximately 2 km from the Lake Toba shoreline, near the villages of Harian and Boho. This area is the birthplace of Ompu Babiāt Situmorang, a close relative and one of the strongest allies of the Singamangaraja. The distance from Harian to Bangkara is approximately 30 km by boat.

On pages A3–A6 of the MAS manuscript, there is an invocation acknowledging every *datu* who contributed to the manuscript’s creation. This practice of documenting the chain of transmission from one *datu* to the next is common in Batak *pustaka*. The manuscript provides information about the *datu*’s names and their places of residence, aiding in determining the manuscript’s origin. While some place names and associated names are mentioned in the MAS manuscript, not every toponym can be correlated with an existing locality. However, there are three toponyms that appear to be unmistakable.

Regarding Datu Raja ni Aji, it is mentioned that ‘his village is located in the land of Naigolan’ (*na morhutahon di tano Naigolan*). Nasals preceding plosives are frequently omitted in this manuscript, and therefore we should read this toponym as Nainggolan, a place on the island of Samosir, separated from Bangkara by a 12 km wide body of water, and roughly halfway between Harian and Bangkara.

Raja Palluhuton ni Aji resided at ‘Tambak Toguan Sitonggor Paya’, probably pointing to Sitanggor, a village at the shore of Lake Toba, located 18 km east of Bangkara.

Guru Manatar ni Aji lived at ‘Ae Pollung’, identified as Aek Pollung, a stream where the village Pollung is situated, approximately 16 km north-west of Bangkara. This village is also the hometown of Boru Nadeak, one of the Singamangaraja’s wives.

While the fact that all three *datu* mentioned originate from the Humbang–Samosir area does not conclusively prove that the manuscript was composed

9 Undoubtedly, Libong should be read as Limbong, given the consistent omission of nasals preceding plosives in the manuscript. In the instance of Habeahan, the character *ha* was mistakenly omitted.

in one of these specific locations, it nonetheless significantly strengthens the likelihood of it originating in this region. A provenance from the other Toba Batak-speaking areas located in the current regencies of Tapanuli Utara, Tapanuli Tengah, or Toba is unlikely, with the exception of the narrow stretch of shoreline between Bangkara and the Uluan Peninsula, where the Singamangaraja had strong local support prior to the area's incorporation into the colonial territory shortly after 1883.

It is plausible that one of the *datu* mentioned in the manuscript may have presented the *pustaka* as a gift to Ompu Pulo Batu, the last Singamangaraja, with the intention of providing him with magical support in his resistance against the Dutch.

The MAS manuscript is written in the Toba Batak script, in which the letters *ta*, *wa*, and *ba* each appear in two variant forms:  and  for *ta*,  and  for *wa*, and  and  for *ba*. The first set of variants (, , and ) is commonly referred to as the 'northern' forms, as they are typically associated with the northern Batak languages—namely Karo and Pakpak. The second set (, , and ) is linked to the southern Batak languages, including Simalungun and Angkola–Mandailing. Although Toba Batak also belongs to the southern linguistic group, it makes use of both northern and southern script variants.

While there is insufficient research to determine whether the use of these northern variants reliably indicates a manuscript's origin in the Samosir–Humbang region, their presence in the MAS manuscript lends support to this proposed provenance. Conversely, it argues against an origin in the southern and south-eastern Toba Batak-speaking regions of Silindung and Habinsaran—which broadly correspond to the southern parts of the modern regencies of Tapanuli Utara and Toba.

A distinctive orthographic feature of the MAS manuscript is the frequent, though inconsistent, omission of nasals /m/, /ŋ/, and /n/ before plosives. This results in spellings such as *rabu* instead of *rambu*, *musuta* instead of *musunta*, and so on. Generally, the spelling in the manuscript appears to be quite random, and it is not unusual that a word occurs in multiple spelling variants. For example, besides the 'standard' spelling *dadurunghon* 'to be thrown', we also encounter variations such as *daduruhon*, *dadurukhon*, and *daduru* with the suffix *-hon* omitted. The spelling variants are, however, not entirely random, as *dadurunghon* is indeed pronounced *dadurukkun* and occasionally also spelled as such (compare with Zollo 2020:172). Orthographic variations occur frequently in Batak manuscripts, but they do not offer any meaningful clues regarding the provenance of the MAS *pustaka*.

The five Batak ethnic groups have languages that originate from a shared protolanguage, but they have diverged to the extent that, for instance, Toba

and Karo are mutually unintelligible. The division of the Batak script into these five subgroups arose due to significant phonetic differences among the five linguistic groups.

Pustaka are not written in any of the vernacular Batak languages, but in *hata poda*, the ritual 'language of instruction'. *Hata poda* is an archaic dialect, likely rooted in the Toba Batak area, incorporating a significant number of Malay loanwords. It features numerous obscure terms whose meanings are often difficult to determine. This is not a spoken language but a specialized register known only to *datu* and their apprentices and exclusively used in ritual texts. In a society with limited literacy and a deep reverence for the supernatural, this cryptic language served as a tangible expression of the *datu*'s wisdom, authority, and spiritual power.

The MAS manuscript shows consistent use of certain Malay-derived terms—*boras* (from Malay *beras*, 'rice') is one such example. Other Malay borrowings are used inconsistently: for instance, the word *dongan* (from Malay *dengan*, 'together with') appears in about one-third of occurrences, while the native Batak equivalent *dohot* is used elsewhere.

Unlike Batak manuscripts from outside the Toba Batak-speaking region, which often reveal their origin through distinctive vocabulary or orthography, the MAS *pustaka* contains no such indicators. It also does not exhibit any influence from other Batak languages. Taken together with the toponymic and palaeographic evidence, we can assert with a high degree of confidence that the manuscript was composed in the Humbang–Samosir region.

5 Content of MAS AE.1922.0001.1007

The MAS manuscript primarily focuses on the war oracle Rambu Si Porhas, which was used alongside other divinatory tools, such as Pormesa, Pormamis na Lima, and the Pagar Surat na Sampulu Sia alphabet oracle. In the latter, the alphabet, known as *surat na sampulu sia* 'the nineteen letters', served as a *pagar* 'protective charm'.

Batak *pustaka*, including the MAS manuscript, were made of lengthy strips of bark, folded in a concertina-like manner. The first page was usually left blank, or glued to the wooden cover, if one is present. One side of the bark is commonly referred to as the A-side, while the reverse side is called the B-side. Each side of the bark strip of the MAS manuscript contains 54 folios separated by a fold. The A-side is where the text begins. In most *pustaka*, the A-side is physically marked; for instance, by ornaments carved onto the upper wooden cover, or by an extra-large chapter marker at the beginning of the text, known as

bindu godang. Each folio consists of two pages, with the reverse side of A1 being referred to as B1. Once the A-side of the bark is fully inscribed, the writing continues on the B-side. In the MAS manuscript, the text begins on page A2 and proceeds through to A54, after which it continues on the reverse side, from B54 to B4, leaving the remaining pages blank.

A1 The first page has been left empty.

A2 *Poda ni hata-hata ni Rambu Si Porhas susuran Batara Guru Debata Panaluan Jati* 'instructions concerning the lightning cord oracle as taught by Batara Guru, the invincible and powerful God'.¹⁰ The same title (*Rambu Si Porhas susuran Batara Guru*) is also given to the oracle in the SBB manuscript.

A3–6 These pages contain the chain of transmission from one *datu* to another.

A7–10 *Ia hasaya ni Rambu Si Porhas* 'these are the ingredients of the lightning cord oracle'.

A11–19 *Poda ni pangarumai ni Rambu Si Porhas*—instructions to find out the fate of each warrior from his *ruma* 'house; location' on the lightning cord. Certain positions on the lightning cord are assigned to various persons; for instance, *ruma ni ulubalang porjolo-jolo di munsung ni rambu si porhas, iya pandondon asu na bara; dapot ma musu[n]ta porjolo-jolo, morpangir di hita ulubalang porjolo-jolo*, 'the location of the foremost *ulubalang* (champion) is at the end of the lightning cord; a red dog should be eaten to consolidate the luck; we shall take captive the foremost *ulubalang* of our enemy; our own *ulubalang* should perform a ritual hair-washing ceremony'. This passage is almost verbatim identical to a passage in BAT. 5 (Cod. Bat. 2), which can be found in the Royal Library in Copenhagen (Voorhoeve 1975:103), in which the *datu* also bears the same title of *Guru So Dumpangon ni Aji*, and who is also from Nainggolan, which in both manuscripts is spelled 'Naigolan'. Voorhoeve mentions that the Copenhagen manuscript is written using the southern *ta* (𐌑), whereas the MAS manuscript uses the northern *ta* (𐌒). This suggests that the two manuscripts were authored by different individuals, but it doesn't necessarily imply that they were composed in different locations. It appears more probable that both manuscripts independently reproduced the same passage from an older manuscript.

A19–26 contain a list of 26 omens, beginning with *Jaha Rambu Si Porhas* 'when the lightning cord', each followed by its corresponding interpretation.

10 The *datu*'s instructions commonly begin with the phrase *poda ni*, where *poda* means 'advice' or 'instruction' and *ni* is the possession marker ('of'). This is usually followed by the topic of the advice, which is occasionally preceded by *hata-hata* 'words'.

These omens, structured into 26 paragraphs separated by paragraph markers known as *bindu* (visually resembling ☸), pertain to situations of war or conflict that would ultimately culminate in violence (*gora*).

A26–28 *Poda ni susuranta* ‘instructions for divination’, followed by ten paragraphs that all begin with *jaha susuran dabuanghon*. Voorhoeve (1975:254) translates *susuran* as ‘an instrument of divination, especially rambu siporhas’. According to Van der Tuuk’s dictionary (1861:410), *dabuanghon* is ‘to be banned’. *Dabuanghon* also means ‘to be thrown away’, allowing this phrase to be translated as ‘when the oracle is cast’ (by throwing the divination strings). The outcomes of the ten oracles are, again, related to *hasuhuton* ‘war’ and *gora* ‘violent disputes’.

A29–31 The *bindu* placed at this section is larger than a standard paragraph marker but smaller than a chapter marker, indicating a subchapter. This subchapter comprises six paragraphs, one of which begins with *jaha susuran dabuwa[ng]hon*. The final paragraph concludes with the invocation: *ale amang na morjaga-jaga di lapiyan ni si mangulak guru so du[m]pangon asa dimangsihon ho ma di lapiyanhu inon ale tulang di lapiyanhu inon di lapiyan ni rambu si porhas* ‘hail you, Father who takes care of the sacred books of Si Mangulak, the *guru* who exercises genuine magic, to be written in my sacred book delivering the Rambu Si Porhas oracle’.

A32–40 *Poda ni Rambu Si Porhas susuran Batara Guru, debata panaluwan jati*. As on page A2, this chapter is also devoted to the divine being Batara Guru, ‘who knows how to kill people, to kill the enemy’s warriors’. This is followed by 36 paragraphs, which all begin with *ruma ni rambu* (ominous spots of the oracle strings) and contain oracles that determine the outcome of a war.

A40–50 *Poda ni porbisihan ni Rambu [Si Porhas]*. *Porbisihan* is an oracle where omens are taken from the position of grains of rice that are thrown onto a piece of cloth. This oracle is, like all the other minor oracles mentioned in the text, integrated into the Rambu Si Porhas divination. The introduction to the oracle contains a short lament on pages A41–42 of a lonely person who has lost his mother and has to care for a younger brother and a sister. This lament contains a number of *hata andung*, words that are only used in laments (*andung*). Then the rice oracle continues with 29 paragraphs beginning with *jaha boras ...* ‘if the grains of rice’

A50–51 The chapter starts with *raja ni dangdu ma inon* ‘this is the Dangdu figure’, followed by the Batak alphabet in the following order: *a, ha, ba, pa, na, wa, ma, ta, sa, ya, ga, ja, la, nga, ra, da, i, u, nya*, where each character is joined by a *bindu*.

The order of the alphabet is only partly consistent with the most common variant of the Batak alphabetic order, which is *a, ha, ba, pa, na, wa, ga, ja,*

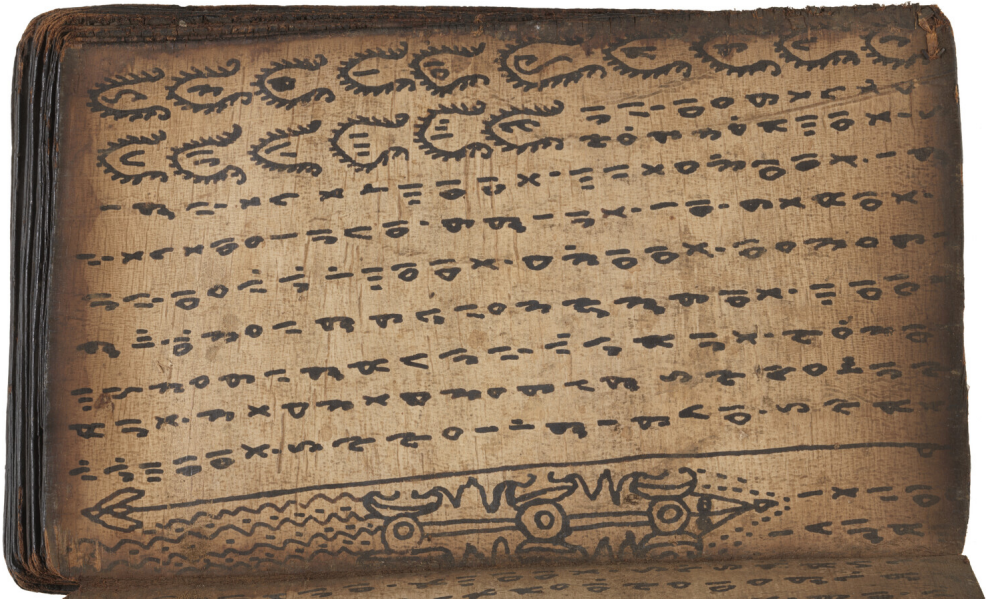


FIGURE 1 Raja Tolong Asing, MAS manuscript page A51

da, ra, ma, ta, sa, ya, nga, la, i, u, nya. The text continues with *raja ni di tolaboron ma inon patujolo pe inon* ‘this is the Tolaboron figure, make him the leader’, followed by the Batak alphabet in yet another slightly different order: *a, ha, ba, pa, na, wa, ma, ta, la, ga, nga, ra, da, i, u, nya* (*ja, sa,* and *ya* are missing). Then the text continues: *Raja ni tolong asing taking ma ino[n] a[sa?] patujolo pe inon i do bahenon patujolo ni paranganta tu porpantomon* ‘this is the Tolong figure appointed as the leader who commands our warriors on the battlefield’. Why these figures are called Dangdu, Tolaboron, and Tolong is unclear; *tolong* is a kind of grass, but *dangdu* and *tolaboron* are not listed in any dictionary and are not toponyms either. This divination contains phrases such as ‘let us send the warriors into the battleground’ and ‘so that we will not be defeated in the war’.

In the preceding paragraph, *raja* was translated as ‘a drawn figure’. While in the Batak language the word *raja* means ‘king’, within the sociolect of the *datu* known as *hata poda*, *raja* is a loan word derived from Malay *rajah* ‘(drawn) figure’. In this case, the letters of the alphabet are presented in a manner that resembles a figure, hence the choice of translation as ‘figure’.

A51–A54 and B54–B52 *Poda ni pangarumai*. This divination practice, integral to the Rambu Si Porhas, involves the use of *napuran* ‘betel leaves’ and *pinang* ‘areca nuts’. This chapter is continued on the reverse side (B54–B52) of the *pus-taha*.

B52–B49 *Poda ni saru ni Rambu Si Porhas* ‘instructions for making offerings to the Rambu Si Porhas’. For each of the twelve months of the year, there is a chicken of a particular colour which is the *saru* for the Rambu Si Porhas. Van der Tuuk defines *saru* as a ‘joyful festivity’, but in this context it seems to refer to food offerings. Manik (1973:90) also translates *saru* as ‘offering’.

B49–43 *Poda ni saru ari na to[lu] pulu ma inon* ‘instructions for making offerings on the 30 days’ of the Batak calendar. The offerings for each of the 30 days are specified. As an example, in the case of Boraspati ni Tangkop, on the twelfth day, it specifies that the offering for the Rambu Si Porhas ceremony is a *manuk sampur borna*, a chicken with multicoloured feathers.

B43–B40 *Poda ni parombunan*. Oracles based on the shapes of clouds (*ombun*) are frequently described in bark books under the title *parombunan*. Typically, such texts are accompanied by drawings illustrating the cloud shapes observed by the *datu*. However, in this manuscript, no illustrations are provided. The interpretations depend on the resemblance of clouds to specific animals or celestial bodies, such as an elephant, a chicken, a tiger, a snake, or a star. These shapes can be either auspicious signs or warnings, particularly regarding warfare. B40 contains only three lines of text, with the remainder of the page left blank.

B39–38 These two pages contain no text or illustrations.

B37–B34 *Poda ni porsili*. The *porsili* (‘replacement; substitute’) is a ritual object used to ward off misfortune by acting as a surrogate for a person. It is typically crafted from the trunk of a banana tree or another soft-wooded tree and shaped into a human figure.¹¹ The purpose of the *porsili* is to lure away the malevolent spirit believed to be causing an illness, transferring it from the afflicted individual into the substitute figure. The *porsili* is then buried, cast into a river, or thrown into a ravine to deceive the spirit into believing the person is dead. In this way, the *porsili* serves as a sacrificial substitute, ensuring the protection of the individual.

In the context of this text, the *porsili* is not created to heal a sick person but rather to safeguard warriors from harm. The anthropomorphic figure is carved from the wood of the *andulpak* tree (*Homalanthus populneus*). For each of the twelve months of the Batak calendar, there is a different *porsili*, each designed to provide protection for warriors.

B34–B31 *Poda ni Porsili ni Ari na Pitu* (‘Substitutes for the Seven Days’). This section details the *porsili* assigned to each of the seven days of the Batak

11 Various plants and objects—including the 19 letters of the Batak alphabet—can also function as *porsili* (Voorhoeve 1961:76).

calendar. Guru So Dum[p]angon ni Aji is addressed, and Guru Mamo[n]tang Raja Bunga Dodar from Limbong Habeahan is mentioned as one of the original holders of this divination knowledge. He is identified as the grandchild of Ompu Ujung Barita.

The text suggests that Guru Mamontang was the composer of an earlier version of this *pustaka*, while the final author is Si Mangulak. This is explicitly stated in the phrase: *asa dimangsihon ho ma di lapiyan ni Si Mangulak inon* ('to be written by you in this folding book of Si Mangulak').

B30–B20 Pormamis na Lima and Surat Sampulu Sia alphabet oracles. Both divination techniques form integral parts of the Rambu Siporhas oracle and are analysed in greater detail in the following pages.

B20–B9 This chapter, like A32, begins with *poda ni panuruni Rambu Si Porhas, debata panalu jati*. On B19, the text contains a series of intransitive verbs with the prefixes *mor-* and *mar-*, such as *mortinutung*, *mormanuk*, *mornapuran*, *morbagot*, *mornilapiyan*, *marbonang*, *morlobu-lobu*, *morhujur*, *marpiso*, *mortuhaling*, *mortali pasa*, and *mordunghor*. Many of the root words carry ritual connotations, for instance *manuk* 'chicken', *napuran* 'betel', *bagot* 'sugar palm', *lapian* 'folding book', and *bonang* 'cord'. From these roots, verbs are formed, such as *mormanuk* 'soothsaying by means of a chicken' or *morlapian* 'to consult a divination book'.

The remaining text lists numerous items that are separated by *dongan* 'together with; and' (derived from Malay *dengan*). B14–B12 contain eight incantations directed at *batara pangulubalang ni guruku* 'the revered *pangulubalang* of my *datu*' that begin with *surung*, a word that is used to encourage the *pangulubalang* to take action against the enemies.¹² Each *pangulubalang* is given a metaphorical name reflecting their strength in battle, such as *Si Parage-Rage* ('the one who piles up the bodies of fallen enemies').

The bottom of B11 features a *bindu* encircling seven zoo-anthropomorphic figures (*raja-rajaan*), described as *raja ni dangdung gordang*. While *dangdung* is not found in dictionaries, it likely represents the sound of a beating drum (*gordang*). The text at the very bottom of B11 elaborates on the seven figures on page B10 named *raja ni gon pa hi du*. Following this, a third section on the same page features another set of seven figures described as *raja ni idahing, idahing pahiduwa*. The meanings of both names are unknown. On the bottom of B10

12 The word *pangulubalang* is derived from *ulubalang* (champion, leader in a war). This is a kind of fighting spirit or magical device that destroys the enemy but also protects one's own community. *Pangulubalang* guardian statues of stone are often erected in close proximity to a village. According to Van der Tuuk (1861:369), *batara*, from Sanskrit *bhāṭṭāra*, 'revered, worshipful', is also a title given to a *pangulubalang*.

are eight lines of text containing the word *paranganta* 'our warriors', with two anthropomorphic figures on each side of a zoo-anthropomorphic figure, each with one or two stars. Page B9 continues the text of B10 and is the last page of this chapter. It contains only four lines of text. The following page, B8, has been left blank.

Pages B7–B6 feature an illustration of the Pane na Bolon ('Great Dragon'), stretching across two pages. The Pane, a serpent-like mythological creature, is depicted coiled around a figure believed to represent a turtle. According to the diagram, the Pane completes a full rotation every ten days, with only one day—marked in the bottom-right corner—ensuring victory for the warriors. Pages B5–B4 describe the movement of the Pane's head and tail from north to south, indicating the directional flow of its influence.

6 The Lightning Cord Oracle

The oracle Rambu Si Porhas, which can be translated as 'lightning cord' or 'thunder string', is a popular topic addressed in *pustaha* literature. This oracle is dedicated to warfare through magical means, known as *bisara na godang* or 'the great dispute', as opposed to *hasuhuton na bolon*, which refers to fighting with weapons. One of the main purposes of the lightning cord oracle is to determine suitable days for attacking the enemy:

The string of the datu's side is called lightning string (*siporhas*), that of the enemy corpse string (*sibangke*). Both strings have heads made of beads, and *siporhas* has the 'houses' of various persons marked with silk and beeswax. From the way the strings fall and their relative position the datu predicts the outcome of a war or an expedition.

VOORHOEVE 1969:164

Winkler (1954:354), who published a photograph of a Rambu Siporhas device, illustrates how the cords were used: The *datu*, after being fed offering-rice and palm wine, connects the two cords. The Rambu Si Porhas cord is then divided by wrapping it in sections (*ruma*) and placing it in a magic hut. Prayers are offered first to the *pangulubalang* and then to the ancestral spirits, the serpentine female water deity Boru Saniang Naga, and the deity Boru na Mora. Various food offerings, floral decorations, betel leaves, palm wine, slices of ginger, and a fish cut in pieces are provided. A prayer is offered to ensure the *datu's* victory. Upon returning to the village amidst shouting and cheering, the *datu* and his companions are greeted by dancing villagers accompanied by the tunes of

the *gondang* orchestra near to the sacrificial basket. The basket with the sacrificial food is then taken to the magic hut, where two chickens are sprinkled with holy water, one for the Rambu Si Porhas string and the other for the hut. At daybreak, the lightning cord is ceremonially inaugurated by making offerings and invoking the female natural deity Bauta ni Tano, incarnated in the earth lizard Boraspati ni Tano. The Bindu Matogu design, featuring a human figure at its centre, is drawn with rice flour on the village square. As part of the inauguration ceremony, steamed rice is offered to the deity, participants perform ritual dances, and grains of rice are given to chickens. Village heads offer sacrificial cakes and dance while carrying the lightning cord. The *datu* then throws the lightning cord onto an *ulos ragi hidup*, a ceremonial woven cloth. By observing the way in which the cord falls and its subsequent position on the cloth, the *datu* can predict the outcome of the war (Winkler 1954:342–55).

The Rambu Si Porhas oracle is often used in combination with other divination techniques. One of these techniques is the Pormamis na Lima, which is based on the five times of the day.

7 The Pormamis na Lima

The Pormamis na Lima refers to the five deities that govern the five (*lima*) periods of the day: Mamis, Bisnu, Sori, Hala and Borma. Each period of the day is associated with its own distinct colour. Mamis, representing the early morning hours (*sogot*), is associated with the colour yellow. Bisnu, who rules the late morning hours (*pangului*), is associated with the colour green. Sori governs the midday hours (*hos*) and is associated with the colour white. Hala, the deity of the afternoon (*guling*), is associated with the colour black. Lastly, Borma, the ruler of the evening hours (*bot*), is associated with the colour red.

The names of these five deities are derived from Sanskrit. Mamis, Bisnu, Sori, Hala and Borma are the Batak representations of the Hindu deities Maheśvara, Viṣṇu, Śrī, Kāla, and Brahmā. However, the Batak people did not directly adopt these names from Sanskrit. Instead, they were influenced by the Hinduized civilizations of the Javanese and Malay, who had reworked the names. In these Hinduized cultures, Sri represents the goddess of rice; Batara Kala represents the god of the underworld; Batara Brahma represents the god of fire; Batara Wisnu represents the god of justice and welfare; and Batara Maheswara, the 'great god', represents Shiwa, who, together with Brahma and Wisnu, forms the trinity of supreme divinity, Trimurti.

The Pormamis na Lima is a divination technique that used to be widely practised in Indonesia and was embraced by various ethnic groups, including the

Malay community. In the Malay culture, this technique is known as Ketika Lima ('the five times'). It is believed that the Batak people might have adopted this method of divination from the Malays, as suggested by Van der Tuuk (1861:419) and Voorhoeve (1951):

These [the Pormamis na Lima and the Malay Ketika Lima] have still the Sanskrit names of gods in Malay. In Batak the names are mamis, bisnu, sori, hala and borma, with mamis for the Malay maheswara. The Malay word *seri* in the sense of 'drawn (of a game)' is taken from this series, as Seri occupies the middle position among the five.

VOORHOEVE 1951:289

The oracle known as Pormamis na Lima spans five pages (B30–B25) in the MAS manuscript. It commences with the phrase: *Iya porsili ni pormamis barang hita laho morparang [...]* *asa hita monang* 'these are the substitutes for the five times of the day when we go to war so that we will win'.

The section B30–B28 serves as an introduction and repeats some of the information found on page B34 (names of *datu* etc). On page B27, it is mentioned that *asu na bara* 'a brown dog' is the *porsili* for Mamis (here consistently spelled *mamasing*), the ruler of the first time of the day. In addition, a *manuk mabugang andorana*, 'a chicken with a wounded breast' is the *porsili* for the ruler of the fifth time of the day, known as Bisnu, which is here spelled *Basing*. Moving on to B26, the *porsili* for Hala, the ruler of the second time of the day, is *manuk na lomuk*, 'a tender chicken'. As for the third time of the day, ruled by Sori, the *porsili* is *isang-isang ni babi* 'a jaw-bone of a pig'. It seems that these *porsili* are food offerings intended to ensure the safety of the warriors during the respective times of the day. The *porsili* for the fourth time of the day, ruled by Borma, is not listed in the text.

At the top of page B25 is a table with five columns and five rows (see Table 1). Each row contains the five characters *ma*, *na*, *sa*, *ha*, and *ba*. The letter *na* has the diacritic *u* attached, rendering it as *nu*. The five letters represent the Pormamis na Lima: *ma* for Mamis, *nu* for Bisnu, *sa* for Sori, *ha* for Hala, and *ba* for Borma.¹³

The first row represents the five times of the first of the five days. This suggests an older indigenous calendric system that is based on a week of five days, like the *pasaran* from Java and Bali. The Batak calendar as it is known to us has a

13 In Van der Putten and Zollo's publication (2020:73), a *pormamis* diagram similar to the one found in the MAS *pustaha* is featured.

TABLE 1 Pormamis na Lima diagram

ma	nu	sa	ha	ba
nu	sa	ha	ba	ma
sa	ha	ba	ma	nu
ha	ba	ma	nu	sa
ba	ma	na	sa	ha

week of seven days. The second row represents the second day of the week, and so on, following a pattern similar to the Malay Ketika Lima described by Farouk Yahya (2015:105). In the Ketika Lima, each day is also divided into five parts, with each part being ruled by either an Islamic prophet or an angel: Ahmad (Muhammad), Jibrail (Gabriel), Ibrahim (Abraham), Yusuf (Joseph), and Izrail (Azrael). The Hindu counterparts to the five Islamic watches are as follows: Ahmad corresponds to Śrī, Jibrail corresponds to Viṣṇu, Ibrahim corresponds to Brahmā, Yusuf corresponds to Maheśvara, and Izrail corresponds to Kāla.

The *MAS pustaha* does not provide any explicit commentary on this specific *pormamis* diagram. It is likely that the *datu* utilized it alongside the divination practice involving the nineteen letters of the alphabet (*surat na sampulu sia*), where each letter is associated with a specific day of the month.

8 Alphabet Oracle Surat na Sampulu Sia

In his article ‘Das Zauberbuch von Batipuh’, Winkler (1954) provides a transliteration as well as a translation of the text, but otherwise he addresses the alphabetic oracle of the *SBB* manuscript only sporadically. The following is the author’s translation from the original text in the German language:

The sorcerers were highly regarded because they were the keepers of ancient secret sciences, passed down through generations in the *pustaha*.

These sciences included black magic, which involved harnessing the magical powers associated with the nineteen characters of the Batak script [...] In a dispute (*bisara na godang*) the sorcerers would use their magical abilities. This was often accompanied by food offerings to astrological spirit powers that govern the seven days of the week, the three periods of ten days of the month, and the four quarters of the year. [...]

The sorcerers would create magic potions, which were thrown into the enemy’s village as a declaration of feud. [...]

The characters of the Batak script were drawn five times on leaves of plants, trees, and various objects, with a preference for women's weaving gear. These inscribed objects served as plates for the food offerings made to the deities of the seven days of the week.¹⁴

WINKLER 1954:356

Batak *pustaha* often feature alphabet oracles based on the nineteen letters of the alphabet. Both the KIT and SBB manuscripts include an alphabet oracle that closely resembles the one found in the MAS manuscript. To illustrate the similarity among the texts, consider the example associated with the letter *ya*: 'I am the *ya-ya* champion. Write *ya-ya* on a weft beater and throw it in front of our enemies on Boraspati (the first Thursday of the month).'

Botara si ya-ya banua, suraton di baliga, daduruhon di adopan ni musu[n]ta di Boraspati arina.

MAS

Ahu ma si ya-ya di banua, rajaonghon di baliga ni portonun, di boraspati arini, asa dadurunghon ma tu adopan ni musu[nta].

KIT

Ahu Batara si ya-ya a di banua, rajaonghon di baliga, di Boraspati ni Tangkop arini, asa dadurukhon ma tu adopan ni a[lonta].

SBB

The paragraphs in all three manuscripts exhibit similarities, but they also display significant differences. Specifically, when comparing the letter *ha*, KIT and SBB demonstrate similarity, whereas MAS stands out as being distinct:

I am the champion *ha-ha* in the world, to be written on the leaves of the ti plant or on a leaf of a dying tree, on the day of Suma, to be thrown in front of our enemies, hail you, Father, our magician; hail you, magician.¹⁵

KIT

14 Food offerings (*pinangan ni ari*) are mentioned in the SBB manuscript but not in the KIT *pustaha*, nor in the MAS text.

15 'Ahu ma si ha-ha di banua, rajaonghon di bulung ni silinjuang bea di bulu[ng] na pungguron boban, di Suma ari(+ni), dadurunghon tu adopan ni musunta inon, ale amang datunami, o ale datu.'

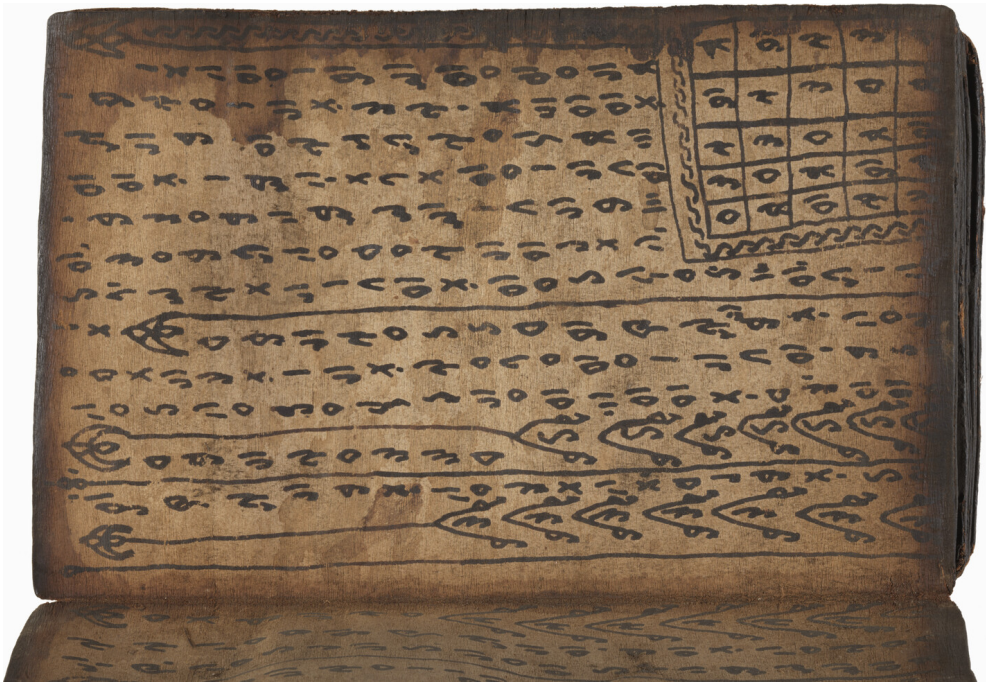


FIGURE 2 Alphabet oracle in MAS manuscript

I am the champion *ha-ha* in the world, to be written on the leaves of the ti plant, to be thrown in front of our enemies, so that our enemies will run away.¹⁶

SBB

Champion *ha-ha* a in the world, to be written on the frond of the sugar palm [used as a weft beater], hail our magician.¹⁷

MAS

The *pormamis* diagram is located on page B25 of the MAS manuscript. It is separated from the alphabet oracle by a vignette and a double line. Within this double line, there is a third waved line embedded, which marks the end of the Pormamis na Lima oracle. The alphabet oracle spans pages B25 to B20 and is introduced with the following words:

16 ‘Ahu Batara si ha-ha di banua, surat[onghon} di bulung ni silinjuang, asa dadurunghon ma tu adopan ni al[on]ta inon, asa maporus musu[n]ta inon.’
17 ‘Batara si ha-ha [di] banua, surat[hon] di hodong [ni] bagot, ale [datu gurunami].’

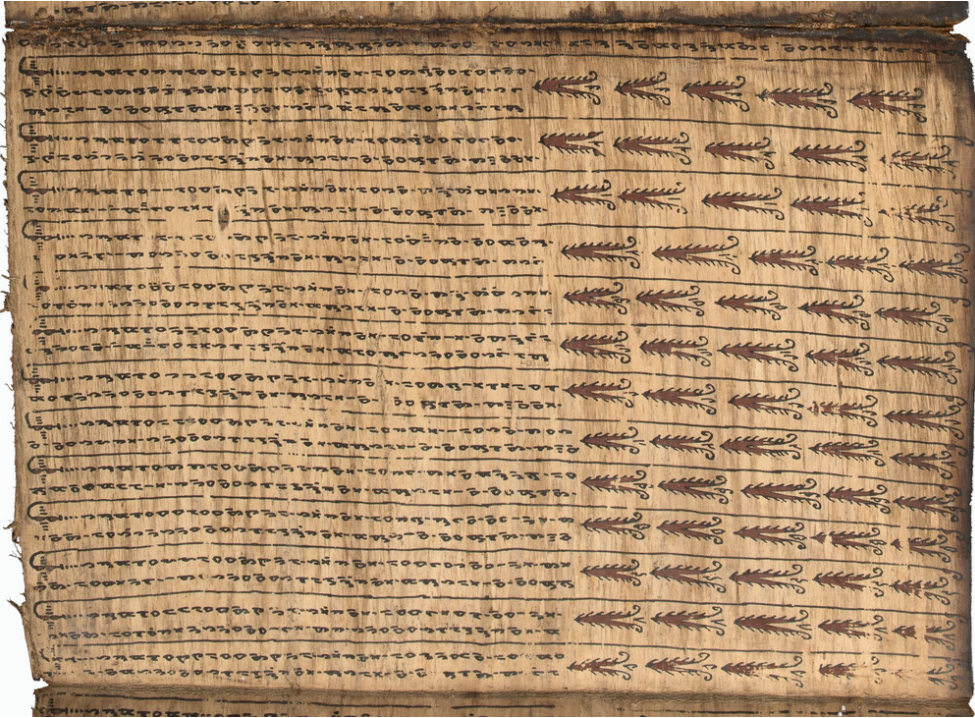


FIGURE 3 Alphabet oracle in KIT manuscript

Poda ni panuruni ni rambu si porhas ma inon. Surat na sa[m]pulu siya ma inon. Patujolo ni paranganta hita datu guru pangara[m]bu. Unang hi[ta] talu di bisara na godang, ale gu[ru] so du[m]pangon ni aji e. Unang lupa di po[da].

MAS B25

(This is the instruction in regard to the lightning cord oracle. These are the nineteen letters of the alphabet. Let our warriors proceed first, our Datu, the lightning cord *guru*. We shall not be defeated in the war. Hail you, Guru So Dumpangon ni Aji. Don't forget these instructions.)

The term *panuruni* is often encountered in *pustaha* manuscripts, but it is not included in any dictionary. Even well-known experts in Batak manuscripts, such as Manik, Voorhoeve, and Winkler, are uncertain about its exact meaning. Giuseppina Monaco suggests that *panuruni* is likely not derived from the root word *suru* 'to command', which is commonly used in texts related to aggressive



FIGURE 4 Alphabet oracle in SBB manuscript

magic. Instead, it may originate from the Malay loan word *turun* 'to descend'.¹⁸ In the verbal form *manurun*, it refers to the descent of the gods from the upper world (Van der Tuuk 1861:274). Van der Tuuk also notes that the verbal form *manuruni* is synonymous with *manabasi* 'to spell a mantra'.

The magician is addressed here as Datu Guru Pangarambu, the lightning cord *datu*. According to Van der Tuuk (1861:439), 'Datu Pangarambu is a seasoned magician-healer experienced with the Rambu Siporhas oracle'. Winkler (1954:342) also affirms that 'knowledge of this comprehensive oracle was considered evidence of a magician's mastery'.¹⁹

The 'great dispute' (*bisara na godang*) is the 'cold war' as Winkler (1954:342) aptly calls it. It refers to disputes that are addressed by magical means. The title of the *datu* is Guru so Dupangon ni Aji. *Guru* is a general term for male and

18 Personal communication with Giuseppina Monaco, 22-2-2023.

19 Die Kenntnis dieses vielumfassenden Orakels galt also als ein Ausweis für die Meisterschaft eines Zauberdoktors.

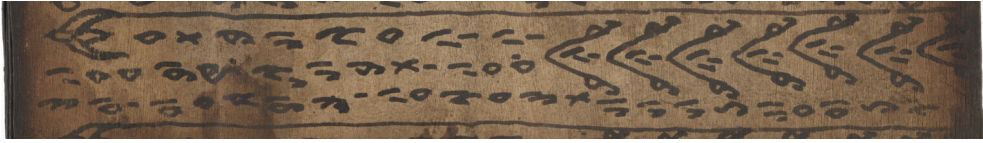


FIGURE 5 Bindu with line and seven branches containing letter ꦗ (ja)

female magician–healers, whereas *datu* is reserved for male magicians only. *Dupangon* means ‘branched’, and *so dupangon* can be translated as ‘straightforward’, with *ni* as a possessive preposition and *aji* representing ‘the art of magic’. However, as nasals preceding plosives are often omitted in the MAS manuscript, an alternative reading as Guru So Dumpangon ni Aji ‘the magician whose magic cannot be defeated’ is not only possible but also probable, considering that a *datu* in a *pustaka* from the Royal Library in Copenhagen bears the same name (Voorhoeve 1975:103).

The introduction is followed by 20 paragraphs (B25–B21) that are divided by vignettes (*bindu*), which serve as markers for each paragraph. The *bindu* is positioned at the left margin and is extended by a single line (Figure 4). Within each paragraph are seven ornaments in the shape of two strokes of equal length that connect at an acute angle on the left side, in which the letter that is discussed in the paragraph is embedded. KIT A1389, which uses a similar ornament (Figure 2), does not use seven but five ornaments, also with the letters embedded. This is interesting because the associated text mentions the *ari na pitu* ‘seven days of the week’.

Each of the 20 paragraphs corresponds to a specific letter of the alphabet, namely *a*, *ha*, *sa*, *pa*, *na*, *ja*, *ga*, *da*, *ta*, *ba*, *ma*, *ya*, *nga*, *wa*, *la*, *nya*, *i*, *ra*, *i*, and *ta*. The letters *i* and *ta* are erroneously listed twice. It is likely that one of the occurrences of the letter *i* should be *u*. The two letters look identical, except that one of them is upside down: ꦶ (*i*) and ꦵ (*u*).

As the Batak script belongs to the Brahmic script family, it consists of consonantal characters with an inherent /a/ sound. The 16 consonantal characters are complemented by three vocalic characters, namely *a*, *i*, and *u*, which are used in syllable-initial positions.

There are several alphabetic orders, but the most common order for the 19 letters is: *a*, *ha*, *ba*, *pa*, *na*, *wa*, *ga*, *ja*, *da*, *ra*, *ma*, *ta*, *sa*, *ya*, *nga*, *la*, *nya*, *i*, *u*.

All 19 letters of the alphabet are covered in the 20 paragraphs of the MAS manuscript (the letter *ta* was mistakenly listed twice), following roughly the same order as used in the SBB and KIT manuscripts:

MAS: *a, ha, sa, pa, na, ja, ga, da, ta, ba, ma, ya, nga, wa, la, nya, i, ra, i, ta*

SBB: *a, ha, sa, pa, ja, na, ga, da, ta, ba, ma, ya, nga, wa, la, nya, i, u, la*

KIT: *ha, sa, pa, ja, na, ra, ga, da, ta, ba, ya, nga, wa, ma, nya, i, u, la*

The SBB manuscript missed the letter *ra* and instead lists *la* twice. The KIT text omitted the letter *a*.

Each of the 20 paragraphs of the alphabet oracle in the MAS *pustaha* consists of six parts:

8.1 *Part 1*

- A. Each paragraph begins with the term *batara*—also spelled *botara*—which is derived from Batara Guru, one of the supreme gods in Indonesian Hinduism. In Batak mythology, Batara Guru is one of the Debata na Tolu (trinity gods) that rule Banua Ginjang, the upper world and the realm of the gods. However, in the context of this divination, *batara* does not refer to Batara Guru but instead serves as a title for a *pangulubalang* (a guardian spirit or protective entity).
- B. *Batara* is followed by the personifier *si*, combined with the reduplicated name of a letter. For example *batara si ha-ha* for the letter *ha*.
- C. This is followed by *di banua* ‘in the world’, though the locative preposition *di* is often omitted. The pattern results in phrases such as *batara si a-a di banua* (‘champion *a-a* in the world’) for *a*, the first letter of the alphabet; *batara si ha-ha di banua* for *ha*, the second letter; *batara si sa-sa di banua* for *sa*, the third letter, and so on.

There are only minor differences between the three manuscripts. The KIT and SBB manuscripts begin the phrase with the personal pronoun *ahu* ‘I’, which in the SBB manuscript is sometimes, and in the KIT manuscript always, followed by the emphasizing particle *ma*. The KIT manuscript consistently omits *batara*:

Botara si sa-sa di banua (‘Champion *sa-sa* in the world’)

MAS

Ahu batara si sa-sa di banua (‘I am the champion *sa-sa* in the world’)

SBB

Ahu ma si sa-sa di banua (‘I am the *sa-sa* in the world’)

KIT

TABLE 2 Correspondence between Batak characters, writing media, and days of the month

1	2 (Batak)	3 (English translation)	4
<i>a</i>	siborok	a kind of small fish	Aditia (1)
<i>ha</i>	hodong ni bagot	sugar palm frond (used as a weft beater)	–
<i>sa</i>	silinjuang	ti plant (<i>Cordyline fruticosa</i>)	Anggara (3)
<i>pa</i>	hapaoa (= hompa)	(leaves of) the wild areca palm	Anggara Poltak
<i>na</i>	talubolon	?	Boraspati (5)
<i>ja</i>	behan ni manuk	unfertilized chicken egg	Sihora Dudu (27)
<i>ga</i>	illegible	?	–
<i>da</i>	mayang apaoa (= hompa)	blossom of the wild areca palm	Aditia ni Aek (8)
<i>ta</i>	halto na rurus-rurus	a dropped blossom of the sugar palm	Su[ma] (2)
<i>ba</i>	guringan di pangarasan	a poisoned bamboo javelin	Anggara Sampulu (10)
<i>ma</i>	sarongdam	a kind of snake (sarondam)	Muda ni mangamo (mangodap?) (11)
<i>ya</i>	baliga	weft beater ('sword')	Boraspati (5)
<i>nga</i>	balobas	a ruler (drawing device)	Sihora Purnama (13)
<i>wa</i>	sangkop	a pot lid	Samisara (7)
<i>la</i>	guringan di bolonghon	a discarded poisoned javelin	Tula (15)
<i>nya</i>	napuran	betel leaf	Suma (2)
<i>i</i>	panggimunan	?	–
<i>ra</i>	tolong	a kind of grass	–
<i>i</i>	bulung ni panggu	panggu (kind of grass) leaf?	–
<i>ta</i>	singonglong	?	–

8.2 Part 2

The initial phrase is followed by the word *surathon* ‘to write’, which is either spelled *suratan*, *suranton*, *suraton*, or *suratton*. *Surathon* is followed by the preposition *di* ‘in, at, on’.

In the SBB manuscript, *surathon* is spelled *surathononhon*, and it is often replaced by the near-synonym *rajahononton*, also spelled *rajahonton* or *raja-onghon* ‘to draw’. The KIT manuscript exclusively uses *rajaonghon*.

8.3 Part 3

Following this phrase, the text specifies the items used as writing mediums. Most of these are leaves or objects made of wood or bamboo. However, three terms—*panggimunan*, *singonglong*, and *talubolon*—remain unidentified.

Table 2 provides a structured overview, where the first column lists the letters of the alphabet, while the second column specifies the medium designated for writing each letter. The third column provides the English translation of the writing medium, and the fourth column identifies the designated day of the month for the offering.

Numbers in brackets represent the specific day of the month. For example, the letter *sa* is to be inscribed seven times on a leaf from the ti plant (*Cordyline fruticosa*) on Anggara (the third day of the month).²⁰

The presence of two animals, *siborok* and *sarondam*, in the MAS manuscript is quite unexpected, as animals do not appear in the KIT and SBB *pustaha* and are unlikely to have been used as writing materials.

The standard spelling of *sarondang* is actually *sarondam*, referring to a large snake. It is probable that this does not indicate the living reptile itself but rather its skin, which could have been used as a writing medium. For *siborok*, a small fish commonly found in wet rice fields, there is a simple explanation. It appears that the writing medium was mistakenly omitted from the text: *suraton di* [?]. The rest of the paragraph can then be interpreted as a separate clause, with *siborok* as the subject and *porsili ni paranganta* as the predicate.

Since Batak script does not use punctuation marks, a full stop—or at least a comma—should be added in the transliteration before *siborok* for clarity. The reconstructed sentence then reads:

Batara si a-a banua suraton di [...]. Siborok porsili ni paranganta.

([I am] the champion *a-a* in the world, to be written on [?]. A Siborok fish shall be offered as a substitute for the life of our warriors.)

A contrastive analysis of the alphabet oracles found in the MAS, KIT, and SBB manuscripts reveals a shared pattern but notable variations in specific details. The materials used for writing the letters of the alphabet are consistent across all three manuscripts, primarily consisting of plant parts—especially leaves (*bulung*) from various plants—and parts of the loom (*baliga*, *hodong ni bagot*, *balobas*, *turak*, and *hulhulan*).

The KIT and SBB texts are almost identical in regard to the correspondence between the letter of the alphabet and its writing medium. However, the MAS manuscript matches the other two texts only in respect to the letters *sa*, *pa*, *ja*, *da*, *ta*, *ya*, *nga*, *la*, and *u*, as evident from Table 3.

²⁰ For the letter *pa*, a wild Areca palm (*hompa*) is mentioned. *Hompa* is always pronounced, and also often spelled *hoppa* (ᐃᐃᐃᐃᐃᐃ). The spelling in the text is *hapaoa* (ᐃᐃᐃᐃᐃᐃ).

TABLE 3 Correspondence between Batak characters and writing media in the MAS, KIT, and SBB manuscripts

	MAS	KIT	SBB
<i>a</i>	siborok		
<i>ha</i>	hodong ni bagot	bulung ni silinjuang bulu na pungguron boban	bulung ni silinjuang
<i>sa</i>	silinjuang	bulung ni silinjuang	bulung ni silinjuang
<i>pa</i>	hapaoa (= hompa)	anturbung bo'ok hompa	bulung ni hompa
<i>na</i>	talun bolon	anturbung beok	anturbung boyok hompa
<i>ja</i>	behan ni manuk	beuhan ni manuk	beuhan ni manuk
<i>ga</i>	? (illegible)	bulu poso	tabu poso
<i>da</i>	mayang apaoa (= hompa)	hompaa	hompaa
<i>ta</i>	halto na rurus-rurus	halto na marurus	halto na marurus hulhulan ni portonun
<i>ba</i>	guringan di pangarasan	hulhulan ni portonun	hulhulan ni portonun antur- bung boyok
<i>ma</i>	sarongdam	saludung ni bagot	saludung ni bagot
<i>ya</i>	baliga	baliga ni portonun	baliga
<i>nga</i>	balobas	balobas ni portonun	balobas ni portonun
<i>wa</i>	sangkop	guringan	guringan
<i>la</i>	guringan di bolonghon		guringan sangkop
<i>nya</i>	napuran	tolong bobbob (= bombon)	tolong bombon
<i>i</i>	panggimunan	bulu na pungguron	bulu na pungguron
<i>ra</i>	tolong	sangkop na tarulang guringan	
<i>u</i>	bulung ni panggu	bulu na pungguron	bulu na pungguron
<i>ta</i>	singonglong	turak ni portonun	halto na marurus hulhulan ni portonun

The letter *sa* is associated with the leaf of the ti plant; *pa*, with the leaf of a wild Areca palm; *da*, with the blossom of a wild Areca plant, with a dropped blossom of the sugar palm; *ya*, with a weft beater (weaving tool); *nga*, with a loom ledge; and *la*, with a bamboo javelin. The letter *ja* shall be written on the shell of an infertile chicken egg.

An interesting case is the letter *u*, which in the MAS manuscript is associated with *bulung panggu*. The meaning of *bulung* is leaf, while *panggu*, as per Van der Tuuk's dictionary, is a kind of reed grass. Nevertheless, Van der Tuuk

clearly identifies *panggu* as a Mandailing word, not Toba Batak. In both KIT and SBB, the letter *u* is associated with *bulu na pungguron*, where *bulu* means ‘bamboo’ and *punggur* is a ‘rotten or dead piece of wood, dead branch, club’. Therefore, *bulu na pungguron* seems to refer to pieces of bamboo taken from a deceased bamboo plant. It can be assumed that *bulu panggu* was erroneously copied from another manuscript.

The correlation between MAS and the other two manuscripts concerning the particular day of the month that was appropriate for launching the items into the enemy’s village is limited. For instance, in the MAS text, it is stated that the item inscribed with the letter *ja* should be thrown on Singkora Duduk, the 27th day of the month (in the ms. written as Suhora Dudu). In contrast, KIT and SBB assert that the day should be Boraspati, which is the 5th day of the month.

8.4 Part 4

Part 4 states that the items that have been inscribed with a certain letter shall be ‘thrown in front of the enemy’ (*dadurunghon di adopan ni musunta*) on a particular day. This phrase is used, with minor variations, in all three manuscripts. In the SBB manuscript, the word *musunta* ‘our enemy’ is often replaced with the synonym *alonta*.

In the MAS text, the passive verb appears as *daduruhon* and *dadurunghon* and once as *duruhon*, which could be interpreted as the imperative form meaning ‘throw it!’. Another possibility is that the passive prefix *da-* was erroneously omitted, probably because the occurrence of two *da* (<) in a row: <᠘᠑᠃᠒᠐ᠬ-. In the SBB and KIT manuscripts, *dadurunghon* is occasionally preceded by *asa* ‘in order to’, and in the KIT manuscript *dadurunghon* is followed by the emphasizing particle *ma*, and instead of the preposition of location *di* ‘in’, both SBB and KIT manuscripts use the preposition of direction *tu* ‘to’. Finally, in the SBB and KIT manuscripts *adopan ni musunta* is optionally followed by the demonstrative pronoun *inon* ‘those’. These are minor variations that do not change the meaning:

daduruhon di adopan ni musu[n]ta

MAS

asa dadurukhon ma tu adopan ni musu[n]ta inon

SBB

asa dadurunghon tu adopan ni musunta inon

KIT

The various spellings for *daduru hon* imply that the root word could either be *duruk*, *durung*, or *duru*. Van der Tuuk (1861:306, 540) mentions *duru* in the meaning of ‘edge, fringe, side’. In combination with the passive prefix *da-* and the causative suffix *-hon*, it can indeed mean ‘to be thrown at’, as Winkler also translates it.

A closely related oracle, which, however, does not involve the 19 letters of the alphabet, is part of a *pustaka* from the Elio Modigliani collection housed in the Museo di Storia Naturale, Antropologia e Etnologia, Florence, with inventory number 11118. In the manuscript, transliterated by Monaco (2020), the instruction is given to write ‘goddess of the serpent Saniang Naga’ multiple times on a long wooden pestle, which is then thrown into the village of the enemy:

Ahu debata ni saniyang naga suratonhon di indalu niulang durukhonnon-ton tu huta ni musunta ale datu oi.

(I am the goddess of the serpent Saniang Naga, write this multiple times on a pestle to be thrown into the village of our enemies, hail you, magician.)

8.5 Part 5

Part 5 discusses the specific days on which an item must be thrown into an enemy’s village. In most cases, the day’s name is followed by *ari* (‘day’) or *arina* (‘its day’). The Batak calendar comprises twelve months, each containing 30 days, and follows a seven-day week. However, there are slight variations in the naming of these days across different sources.

The first day of the month, Sunday, is commonly referred to as *Artia* or *Antian*. However, in some cases—such as in the MAS manuscript—it retains its original Sanskrit name, *Āditya* (‘sun; sun-god’), though with slight spelling variations, such as *Aditia*.

Since the Batak alphabet has only 19 characters while the month has 30 days, not all days are explicitly mentioned in the text. Some days appear multiple times, while others are absent. In all three analysed manuscripts, at least one letter or *batara* (deity) is not assigned to any particular day. In the MAS manuscript specifically, six *batara* are not linked to any day, with no clear discernible pattern.

Table 4 provides examples illustrating the relationship between letters/*batara* and specific days across the three manuscripts. Notably, the KIT and SBB manuscripts exhibit a strong correlation, whereas the MAS manuscript shares only minor similarities.

TABLE 4 Correspondence between Batak characters and days of the month in the MAS, KIT, and SBB manuscripts

	<i>sa</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>ja</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>pa</i>	<i>ga</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>wa</i>	<i>ba</i>	<i>ya</i>
MAS	3	5	27	11	3	?	2	15	7	10	5
KIT	3	6	5	11	–	7	9	28	14	3	5
SBB	–	6	5	11	–	7	9	–	14	–	12

The seven days of the Batak week are, starting with Sunday, Artia (also Aritia or Aditia), Suma, Anggara, Muda, Boraspati, Singkora, and Samisara referring to the Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn. The numbers in the above table refer to the following days:

1 Artia	8 Artia ni Aek	15 Tula	22 Antian ni Anggara
2 Suma	9 Suma ni Mangadop	16 Suma ni Holom	23 Suma ni Mate
3 Anggara	10 Anggara Sampulu	17 Anggara ni Holom	24 Anggara na Begu
4 Muda	11 Muda ni Mangadop	18 Muda ni Holom	25 Muda ni Mate
5 Boraspati	12 Boraspati ni Mangadop	19 Boraspati ni Holom	26 Boraspati na Gok
6 Singkora	13 Singkora Purnama	20 Singkora Mora Turun	27 Singkora Duduk
7 Samisara	14 Samisara Purnama	21 Samisara Mora Turun	28 Samisara Bulan Mate
			29 Hurung
			30 Ringkar

The only discrepancy between the KIT and SBB manuscripts concerns the letter *ya*. In both the KIT and MAS manuscripts, *ya* is linked to Boraspati, the first Thursday of the month. However, the SBB manuscript associates it with Boraspati ni Tangkop, which, as noted by Winkler (1913:437) and Voorhoeve (1961:166), refers to the second Thursday and is therefore synonymous with Boraspati na Mangadop. The first Thursday is typically called Boraspati, though occasionally it is referred to as Boraspati ni Poltak. It is likely that the scribe simply confused *poltak* with *tangkop*.

8.6 *Part 6*

Part 6 serves as the closing formula that addresses the magician: *Ale datu guru so dupangon ni [aji]* ‘hail you, our magician, Guru so Du[m]pangon ni Aji’. This final part often ends abruptly or is omitted altogether.

9 Conclusion

The case of the Antwerp *pustaha* underscores the critical role philological analysis can play in reconstructing the provenance and cultural significance of manuscripts displaced by colonial violence. By tracing internal features such as transmission chains, script variants, and regional toponyms, this study has demonstrated that the manuscript originated in the south-western Lake Toba region and may have served the ritual and political needs of the Singamangaraja's resistance. As debates around restitution intensify, such detailed, interdisciplinary research is essential—not only for establishing provenance but also for restoring meaning, voice, and agency to cultural objects long separated from their communities of origin.

In considering directions for future research, several important factors warrant attention. From the eighteenth century onwards, large numbers of Batak manuscripts were collected by missionaries, colonial administrators, and travellers. Most of these collectors were drawn more to the manuscripts' 'exotic' appearance than to their textual content. As a result, the majority of these materials ended up in museums rather than libraries, where they have typically been treated as ethnographic or artistic objects rather than as texts for scholarly study. Today, it is estimated that around 95 % of the approximately 2,000 surviving Batak manuscripts are held in foreign collections. Museums have generally shown little interest in digitizing these holdings, making access—especially for Indonesian scholars—extremely difficult and limiting opportunities to engage with, and reclaim, this important part of Indonesia's cultural heritage.

The current state of scholarship underscores how much work remains to be done. To date, only a handful of *pustaha* have been fully transliterated and translated, a situation that reflects both historical neglect and the considerable challenges these texts pose to translators. Far from being simple narrative texts, *pustaha* served as reference works and mnemonic devices, central to the transmission of specialized knowledge within Batak ritual and healing practices. They were tools through which *datu* trained their *sisean*—apprentices preparing to become *datu* themselves—and were not meant for silent or private reading, as shown by the three manuscripts examined in this article. Fully understanding these texts requires recognizing that they were part of a wider oral and performative tradition of knowledge transmission—an aspect that presents both opportunities and challenges for modern scholarship.

Knowledge transmission in this tradition was primarily oral, which strongly shaped the nature of the *pustaha*. The manuscripts often contain omissions, spelling variations, and inconsistencies—features that can complicate modern translation and editing. However, these imperfections were of little con-

sequence to the *sisean*, who learned directly from their teacher. In fact, such variability likely served a purpose by helping to maintain content secrecy and individuality.

It is also not uncommon that museum curators fail to recognize the language or script of Batak manuscripts, resulting in them being misplaced within collections from other regions. In late 2023, three museums in Gera, Greiz, and Rudolstadt, Thuringia (Germany) discovered after more than 70 years that they had Batak manuscripts in their collections. The failure to recognize Batak manuscripts as books, possibly due to curators' inability to distinguish between letters and ornaments, is likely more prevalent than commonly assumed. An example of this is a Karo Batak lament inscribed on a weaver's shuttle, which was erroneously labelled a 'defloration instrument' on the index card of the Hamburg Museum of Anthropology (No. 75.10:53).

Although some Batak manuscript collections have been well-catalogued, often as a result of the work of Petrus Voorhoeve and Liberty Manik, others have never been catalogued or have not been updated for several decades. This lack of comprehensive cataloguing poses additional challenges for researchers and scholars.

These issues highlight the need for improved cataloguing, identification, and digitization efforts to ensure better accessibility and preservation of Batak manuscripts.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Johann Angerler, Willy Durinx, Roselyne Francken, Sita Magfira, Giuseppina Monaco, and Roberta Zollo for their valuable feedback, constructive critiques, and valuable contributions to this manuscript. Their input has greatly enhanced the quality and depth of this work.

References

- Griffiths, Arlo, Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan and Eko Bastiawan (2024). 'Restoring a Javanese inscription to its proper place', *Bijdragen tot de Taal, Land- en Volkenkunde* 180–2/3:133–211.
- Jákl, Jiří (2016). 'The folding book format (concertina) in pre-Islamic Java: Revisiting the Old Javanese term *Ləpihan*', *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 102:165–94.

- Kempees, J.C.J. (1905). *De tocht van Overste Van Daalen door de Gajo-, Alas- en Bataklanden van 8 februari tot 23 juli 1904*. Dalmeijer: Amsterdam.
- Kozok, Uli (2000). 'On writing the not-to-be-read: Literature and literacy in a pre-colonial tribal society', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 156:33–55.
- Kozok, Uli (2009). *Surat Batak: Sejarah perkembangan tulisan Batak, berikut pedoman menulis aksara Batak dan cap Si Singamangaraja XII*. Jakarta: École française d'Extrême-Orient, Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia.
- Manik, Liberty (1973). *Batak-Handschriften*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag. [Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland 23.]
- Monaco, Giuseppina (2020). *The Modigliani's collection of Batak manuscripts at the Museum of Anthropology in Florence: Description and philological analysis of the manuscript m118*. [PhD thesis, Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale, Naples.]
- Putten, Jan van der and Roberta Zollo (2020). *Die Macht der Schrift: Die Manuskriptkultur der Toba-Batak aus Nord-Sumatra | The power of writing: The manuscript culture of the Toba Batak from North Sumatra*. Hamburg: Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures. [Manuscript Cultures 14.]
- Teygeler, R. (1993). 'A study into the production process of the Batak book', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 149:593–611.
- Teygeler, R. and H. Porck (1995). 'Technical analysis and conservation of a bark manuscript in the Dutch Royal Library', *The Paper Conservator* 19:55–62.
- Tuuk, Herman Neubronner van der (1861). *Bataksch-Nederduitsch woordenboek*. Amsterdam: Muller.
- Voorhoeve, Petrus (1951). 'Batak bark books', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 33:283–98.
- Voorhoeve, Petrus (1961). *A catalogue of the Batak manuscripts in the Chester Beatty Library*. Dublin: Hodges Figgis & Co. Ltd.
- Voorhoeve, Petrus (1969). 'Four Batak manuscripts in Princeton', *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 30-3:158–70.
- Voorhoeve, Petrus (1975). *Catalogue of Indonesian manuscripts. Part 1 Batak manuscripts*, Copenhagen: The Royal Library.
- Winkler, Johannes (1913). 'Der Kalender der Toba-Bataks auf Sumatra', *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 45:436–47.
- Winkler, Johannes (1925). *Die Toba-Batak auf Sumatra in gesunden und kranken Tagen: Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis des animistischen Heidentums*. Stuttgart: Belser.
- Winkler, Johannes (1954). 'Das Zauberbuch von Batipuh', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 110:335–68.
- Yahya, Farouk (2015). *Magic and divination in Malay illustrated manuscripts*. Leiden: Brill. [Arts and Archaeology of the Islamic World 6.]
- Zollo, Roberta (2020). 'The Helga Peterson collection, Eindhoven', in: Jan van der Putten and Roberta Zollo (eds), *Die Macht der Schrift: Die Manuskriptkultur der Toba-Batak*

aus Nord-Sumatra | The power of writing: The manuscript culture of the Toba Batak from North Sumatra, pp. 169–75. Hamburg: Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures. [Manuscript Cultures 14.]