

La Galigo in comparative perspectives

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Abstract: The La Galigo materials can be best understood and appreciated in a comparative context. The concept of 'oral composition', developed first by scholars of Homer, is described in some detail, as this concept provides the key to understanding the nature of the La Galigo tradition and its manuscripts. The consequences of this understanding for modern publication and for studying the social functions of the tradition are then discussed with reference to some other traditions from the archipelago. Finally, the cosmology and status system evident in La Galigo are compared with materials from other Austronesian-speaking societies, especially in the Pacific. An appendix presents some statistics on the 'size' of La Galigo.

By any measure, the La Galigo materials represent a significant cultural achievement. Of course, most societies possess bodies of story which find diverse forms of expression and relate to wider cultural patterns in various ways, but this is an extraordinary case. My chief purpose in this paper is to outline some of the work by scholars over the last century or so on several bodies of material which may usefully be compared with the La Galigo materials, noting as well some contrasts. Looking at issues in a comparative way suggests questions and approaches which allow better understanding of the nature and purpose of La Galigo and, thereby, improve and extend our appreciation, in the world of the twenty-first century, of these wonderful materials.

One preliminary matter needs to be resolved; of what exactly do the La Galigo 'materials' consist? What is it that we are seeking comparisons for?

The La Galigo materials take two main forms. The primary form, it seems to me, is a shared and self-conscious knowledge, by many Bugis individuals over several centuries at least, of a particular narrative account. In this account, which encompasses many episodes, certain characters over several generations conduct their lives — and loves — within a world bearing some resemblance, at least, to the geography of South Sulawesi and elsewhere in the archipelago. Two features of the narrative are remarkable: its self-containment and its elaboration. By self-containment, I have in mind the way in which the Creator's decision to initiate the sequence of events in the Middle World is balanced by the concluding departure of the characters from that world. The narrative is complete in itself and does not depend on any other account for justification or significance; at the deepest level, it is coherent. Moreover, as Pelras has shown (1983), this coherence covers a highly elaborate and symmetrical pattern of relationships. To put the

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matter this way, to see a shared body of knowledge as a 'form' of La Galigo, is, of course, a construct in itself, but as Pelras has also pointed out (1979: 290), such a construct is needed in order to provide an overall context for any part of the narrative.²

The second form taken by the La Galigo materials, and their main tangible form, is in manuscript texts of particular episodes. These texts, in a flexible five-syllable metre (Sirk 1986), are typically substantial in bulk³ and display highly developed linguistic and dramatic sensibilities. I will return below to the issue of the sheer bulk of material and the question of the degree to which alternative versions of a given episode should be considered as 'overlapping' manuscripts or as separate items.

The best way in English to describe these materials is as a 'cycle' or, more fully, a 'cycle of stories'.⁴ This phrase stresses the point that it is wrong to search for a single work; rather, we have to deal with a collection of linked episodes. Within an over-arching narrative, individual episodes can be seen as having their own dramatic unity as stories. It also allows a distinction to be drawn between content, that is the shared knowledge of the narrative, and the expression of that content in a particular metre or pattern of language. There is undoubtedly more work to be done on defining the limits of the La Galigo narrative. Thus Kern (1939: 506–7) argues — and with good reason — for the inclusion of materials not covered by the overall summary of Arung Pancana Colli'pujié.⁵ There are, however, some texts in the five-syllable metre which appear to be quite unrelated to the La Galigo cycle of stories.

Having now described the La Galigo materials, there are several issues to take up with comparisons: oral composition and the production of manuscript texts, the publication of texts, the social utility of La Galigo materials, and the structure of the stories.

Oral composition and the production of manuscript texts

The unity or 'wholeness' of a creative work, whether in literature, music, painting or any other form, exists first in the mind of an individual. Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere (Macknight 1984), it is this unity in the mind of a creator which defines a 'work', that is an item for critical appreciation and investigation. In practice, of course, we usually have only the creation itself, with no independent access to the creative mind, and this leads to many problems in literary theory. Moreover, an initial unity may be corrupted or fragmented in many ways, or perhaps never realised in the first place. If a creative work is to be

² It would, I think, be a feasible project to enquire into what people today know of the overall La Galigo narrative. How is this knowledge regarded by individuals? From where is it obtained? What factors affect interest in such matters and a person's level of knowledge?

³ See the appendix for some discussion of the 'size' of La Galigo.

⁴ *The Shorter Oxford Dictionary* gives as a specific meaning of cycle 'A series of poems or prose romances collected round a central event or epoch of mythic history and forming a continuous narrative.'

⁵ Koolhof (1999: 380–1) discusses the addition of Muslim materials.

appreciated by others, it must be presented in some form, and then, possibly, preserved. By at least the fifth century BC within the Greek intellectual tradition, there are significant examples of named individuals creating literary works in a form, namely alphabetic characters on papyrus scrolls, which would ensure their reasonably accurate transmission to the present. In Thucydides, most notably, we have an author who tells us something of his own life and of his aspiration to write a coherent historical narrative which, in fact, he did not live to complete. Similarly, though with many complications, many books of the Old and New Testaments of the Bible are ascribed to particular creators. From its classical antiquity onwards, the common European tradition has continued to pay attention to creators as individuals and has had the technology, by and large, to preserve the works created.⁶ It is somewhat ironic that all the critical theory of the last century devoted to questioning the too easy identification of 'author' with a specific person has done little to reduce interest in literary biography and authentic texts.

An essential linkage here is between the assumption of a literary work being primarily a text, that is, a deliberate sequence of words, and the means available for transmitting that text. Whether transmission was ensured by memorisation, manuscript or print, it is based, in the European tradition, on the idea of an original, definitive text, 'authorised' by its creator. In this tradition, the need for critical scrutiny and comparison of manuscript versions of a given work in order to arrive at an authoritative text was first appreciated at Alexandria as early as the third century BC. Later, during the Renaissance, renewed interest in classical texts, above all the Bible, allied with the capacity of printing to produce large numbers of identical texts, drove an intense interest in textual criticism. Those of us working outside the European tradition need to remember the frankly stupendous amount of scholarship that has been expended over the last 500 years on classical texts, including the Bible.

Right at the beginning of the classical world, in the century after 600 BC, there were written texts for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The *Iliad* runs to 15,693 lines and the *Odyssey* to 12,110 lines of Greek poetry in a rather complex metre — dactylic hexameter, averaging about 15.5 syllables per line. They describe two relatively brief episodes from an extended cycle of stories that we also know from many later sources. (Later authors were, of course, very familiar with the two earlier accounts.) The name of Homer was attached to the texts as that of the putative author, as required by the cultural norms, but there is no significant evidence beyond the texts themselves as to when, where or by whom the two works were created. The processes of transmission — in part by memorisation initially, as well as through an abundant manuscript heritage — provided scope for attempts to reconstruct original texts, or at least the texts as they had been in classical times. Indeed, the need for authoritative texts of these two poems seems to lie at the origin of Alexandrian textual criticism. From at least the eighteenth century, however, consideration of many wider issues concerning the form of the works or questions relating to their 'author' seemed unsatisfactory. The spectacular

⁶ The argument might be extended beyond purely literary materials, but that would take us too far out of our way here.

archaeological discoveries by Heinrich Schliemann and others in the late nineteenth century at sites mentioned in the two works only made more pointed our ignorance on the subject of 'Homer'.

A quite new understanding of the nature of the two Homeric works came by looking beyond the texts to a wider context, and with the help of some new technology. In 1928 an American, Milman Parry, published an analysis of the style of language in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, linking these works with other long narrative poems known from folklore studies. He then went on to describe and apply to the Homeric works the concept of what he called 'oral verse-making'. This concept, now more commonly called 'oral composition', was a major discovery for scholars — if not for practitioners — and, once grasped, proves useful in a very wide range of contexts. Its application, however, requires care as we shall see below, since there are several elements to the concept as originally developed; specifically, more is involved than just 'orality' as Lord (1960: 5) makes clear.⁷

Linking the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* with long narrative poems from other times and places suggested the possibility of testing Parry's ideas derived from analysing the Homeric style. Armed with a primitive recording device, Parry set about recording the performances of *guslari* or 'singers of tales' throughout the various lands of the former Yugoslavia. Although Parry died in 1935, the work was continued by his student and colleague, A B Lord, who has been responsible both for a clear general statement of the concept of 'oral composition' (Lord 1960) and the publication as written text of the many performances recorded by Parry and himself.

The essence of Parry's approach was to focus on the creative moment in a performance. 'For the oral poet the moment of composition is the performance ... [C]omposition and performance are two aspects of the same moment ... An oral poem is not composed *for* but *in* performance.' (Lord 1960: 13) The act of creation, of course, requires a range of skills and knowledge; three elements may be distinguished. The first relates to the actual words employed. The *guslari* had to find the words to fit a ten-syllable line, with a break after the fourth syllable. Parry discovered that their main resource was a rich stock of formulas, that is anything from one or two words to whole lines, or more precisely in Parry's own words 'a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea' (Lord 1960: 30, Parry 1971: 13, 272). The stress here is on the convenience of particular words and phrases for the composing performer (or performing composer).

The second element is what Parry and Lord call themes, that is 'groups of ideas regularly used in telling a tale' (Lord 1960: 68). These are usually incidents of some sort, such as a gathering of people for a feast, or the sending of a

⁷ Parry's work is most easily consulted in the collection of his writings edited by his son (Parry 1971). The issues for Homeric scholarship raised by Parry's insights are still fiercely debated. Morris and Powell (1997) offer a recent survey. Whatever the relevance of Parry's work to Homeric studies — and I take it to be fundamental — the value of setting out Parry's ideas at some length here lies in their relevance to understanding La Galigo.

messenger, or the arming of a warrior. Themes function as blocks of narrative from which the work as a whole is built up by the performer. Particular instances of a theme may be shorter or longer, more or less elaborated upon, to take account of circumstances, but it is probable that an individual performer will have relatively set ways of dealing with the themes he uses most frequently.

The third element required by a performer is content; there must be a story. The actual content of narratives is a matter to which Parry and Lord seem to have paid less attention in their analysis, at least in respect of the Yugoslav materials. There is no question of an oral performer creating a new narrative in the sense of that devised by a modern, literate novelist; the names of characters and places, as well as an over-arching narrative or set of relationships are part of the tradition. It is often assumed that the techniques of using formulas and themes in the ways identified by Parry and Lord necessarily result in the production of 'epics' dealing with events in an 'heroic age'. Kirk, for example, in his *Homer and the Epic* (1965) uses the terms 'epic' and 'heroic' freely and Bowra in his *Heroic Poetry* (1952) uses 'heroic' to limit the range of his comparative gaze. Lord (1960: 6), however, is rightly suspicious of both words and I myself have difficulty in finding any useful meaning in them; they are better avoided.

In the matter of content, there is, in fact, an essential contrast between the Yugoslav materials and the Homeric narratives. The narratives of the former relate — very loosely, it must be said — to the history of the Balkans since the Ottoman advance in the fourteenth century; the tensions and the names — Kosovo, Sarajevo and so on — are all too tragically familiar today. There is a given set of relationships between Serbian Christian and Muslim Turk, between rulers and ruled, but no master narrative. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, by contrast, are but two episodes from a long cycle of stories and frequent references are made to incidents and relationships outside the particular focus of the moment. Any appreciation or even understanding of any particular story requires a knowledge of the wider narrative cycle. Leaving aside the sections devoted to the doings of the gods, the question of whether there is any possible correspondence — however loose — between the doings of the named heroes and those of actual historical individuals is one which has fascinated the generations since Schliemann demonstrated the archaeological reality of late Bronze Age settlements at sites named in the poems. It is worth noting that it is the whole cycle which needs to be considered, not just the events of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.⁸

An important issue, to which we will return below and to which Lord devotes a whole chapter, is the relationship between writing and the oral tradition. He discusses and illustrates the difficulties of taking down an oral performance without a mechanical or electronic recorder of some type. He argues that the performer's skills are not necessarily affected by the process of such recording and that some more or less successful transcriptions have been made. More

⁸ For a brief example of differing views on as central a matter as the Trojan war itself, see Finley and others 1964. Bulbeck and Caldwell (2000) report recent archaeological work on and around sites central to the La Galigo cycle.

recently, Janko goes even further. He believes that 'the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were taken down by dictation, much as we have them, from the lips of a single eighth-century singer' and that 'once a poet has adjusted to the slower pace of dictation, he can take advantage of it to create a larger, finer and more elaborate song than he would have been able to sing' (Janko 1992: xi and 38). Even for Lord, the real enemy of quality lies elsewhere: 'Those singers who accept the idea of a fixed text are lost to oral traditional processes. This means death to oral tradition and the rise of a generation of "singers" who are reproducers rather than re-creators.' (Lord 1960: 137) The fixed text, whether in print or manuscript form, is, of course, associated with the concept of the authored work of the European tradition, as noted above. Where texts are not fixed, new possibilities open up, as we shall see below.

The concept of 'oral composition' or rapid re-creation of a narrative line in accordance with specific forms and dealing with particular content is an analytic tool of remarkable power; examples are all around us from jokes to jazz. This was most extensively demonstrated at a highly successful conference in Canberra in 1981 on Transmission in Oral and Written Traditions. Papers ranged over a remarkable breadth of specific content: mediaeval European poetry, Aboriginal music and ceremony, Japanese court music, modern urban hitchhiking stories, and much else. Further consideration of the Homeric materials have made it clear that the analogy with Yugoslav materials, which was Parry's great contribution, should not be applied too rigidly; in important respects, especially in literary quality, the scale of the works and some instances of relatively fixed 'blocks' of text, Homer is different. But what the 1981 conference showed was that the general principle underlies very many kinds of literary, musical and dramatic performance and creation; moreover, 'oral composition' or the principle understood in a general sense produces patterns within which formulas and themes can be identified.⁹

Several consequences flow from this expansion in the range of comparisons. Perhaps the most important is that we can now draw a distinction between the principle of 'oral composition' with its various techniques and what Bowra calls 'heroic poetry' or material ostensibly dealing with a relatively distant past. A nice illustration of this point may be found in Peter Parkhill's description of two 'folk epics' from Melbourne (Parkhill 1983). The first by John Harb is in Arabic and draws on the Lebanese *zejal* tradition; it describes the 1979 Australian Rules football final. The second by Kostas Tsourdalakis in Greek uses various Cretan traditions to comment on the political events in Australia during 1975. In both cases, the compositions represent contemporary events within the forms of 'oral composition', including the musical forms of presentation and accompaniment.

⁹ The papers from this conference have not been published as such, though no doubt many have found their way into print in one way or another. There is now a vast literature developing and exploring the application of the concept of 'oral composition'.

Nearly thirty years ago, I drew attention to the need to bring to any study of the La Galigo materials an awareness of the work of Milman Parry and his followers (Macknight 1975: 133). I could not, at that time, point to any demonstration of the principle of 'oral composition' in La Galigo material on the basis of specific textual analysis, but that has since been done in convincing fashion by Koolhof (1992, summarised in Macknight 1993). It is also a pleasure to note that a 'proper edition of at least some part of an I La Galigo text' which I then saw as 'a project of the highest priority', has now been realised several times over.¹⁰ While much remains to be done by way of detailed analysis, it is now beyond dispute that the La Galigo texts display the general stylistic features of 'oral composition' as understood by Parry and Lord. Just as, however, there have proved to be problems in applying Parry's conclusions from his Yugoslav material too directly to Homer, we should not expect to be able to apply them, or the analysis of any other body of materials, to the La Galigo materials in a mechanical way. The analogies are never exact and what we need to look for are general patterns.

Taking a broad comparative approach, then, two features of the La Galigo materials stand out as highly distinctive. The first is the completeness of the cycle, a completeness moreover that lacks for nothing in bulk. As described above, the completeness of the cycle can be understood both in the sense of coverage and in structural balance. Episodes deal in detail with the arrival of the characters in the Middle World and all the events of subsequent generations, while maintaining a high degree of overall consistency. The sheer narrative scope is extraordinary.

Secondly, there is the quantity of manuscript text — whether counted as 'duplicated' or 'unduplicated'. This represents a major creative impulse. Indeed, the existence of *any* written materials prior to the intervention of modern scholars is remarkable. I have suggested elsewhere that the manuscripts were created by 'writing composers', that is creators skilled in all the techniques of 'oral composition' who were able to commit words to writing more or less at the instant of composition (Macknight 1993: 29). I still believe that to be a useful idea, though it appears to conflict with the effects of bringing Yugoslav 'oral composers' into contact with writing, as observed by Parry and Lord.¹¹ In particular, it supports Janko's view, quoted above, that slowing down the process of composition promotes the elaboration of narrative and the literary quality of a text. Koolhof (1992) analyses the differences between orally recorded and manuscript versions of La Galigo and demonstrates the higher literary quality of the latter.

Writing for the Bugis, however, does not necessarily imply a fixed text and there is little interest in the 'author'. The case for lively interaction between orality and writing in the manuscript register has been made most extensively by Pelras (1979) and this argument underpins much of the discussion in a recent treatment

¹⁰ In addition to the three large volumes mentioned in the appendix, see also Nyompa 1983 and Koolhof 2000.

¹¹ Lord (1960: 129) argues specifically against the production of worthwhile material by this method, which he calls 'autograph oral'.

of variation in Bugis manuscripts (Macknight and Caldwell 2001).¹² While analogies must always be used with care, the concept of the 'writing composer' of the La Galigo materials is not without interest in understanding other cases where we have a pre-modern written record of 'oral composition'.

It should also be noted that not all orally delivered material is 'orally composed'. Manuscripts can be read aloud and, as Amin Sweeney and Henk Maier have shown in a series of studies, many texts seem better suited to be heard than to be scanned by eye. Texts can also be memorised and the capacity of the human mind, especially the non-literate mind, to remember accurately should never be underestimated. It seems that many of the ritual texts with marked parallelism from eastern Indonesian (and Toraja) contexts are much more fixed, and much shorter, than La Galigo texts. Many examples of such texts are discussed in Fox 1988, together with examples of the heavy consequences of making an error in recitation. Such regard for fidelity is completely contrary to the concept of 'oral composition'.

Publication of La Galigo texts

From all that has been said so far, one issue can be quickly resolved. Using the concept of a 'work' as being the unit held in the mind of a creator (Macknight 1984), the term is most usefully applied to each version of a particular episode in the overall La Galigo narrative, even though, as noted above both composer and audience have a general understanding of that overall narrative.¹³ It thereby follows that the task of the modern editor is to present a particular version of an episode. This could be as a transcription of an oral performance, as Koolhof does with his three short examples; there is much more opportunity, however, to present a text based on a manuscript. To the extent that the 'writing composer' can be thought of as performing on paper, then the manuscript represents a performance. It is important to note the distinction between recording or enregistering an oral performance with modern sound technology (from which a written transcription can be taken at leisure) and the manuscript produced by a 'writing composer'.

Once the 'writing composer' has produced a manuscript text, that manuscript may be re-produced in various ways. It may be read silently or spoken in a quiet voice for the benefit of a reader; or it may be sung to an audience; or it may be copied in whole or in part by a scribe to create a new manuscript. Pelras' comments (1979: 281) on the care taken in copying La Galigo manuscripts, in

¹² The point made here is not contradicted by Pelras' observation (1979: 281) of the respect given to La Galigo *sure'* (that is, manuscripts) and the care given to their copying. Macknight and Caldwell (2001: 147) also report signs of the careful copying of La Galigo materials. The question at issue is the effect of a fixed text in the sense meant by Lord at the moment of creation and, as Pelras recognises, and Kern sets out, there are often several versions of any particular episode. Despite — or perhaps because of — Pelras' emphasis on the careful copying of La Galigo texts, it would be interesting to identify a manuscript copy of a known model and to study the accuracy of the copying process.

¹³ Though Koolhof (1999: 369) uses the term 'work' for the whole cycle, there is no important difference in our understandings of the relationship between versions of episodes and the cycle.

contrast with the more casual attitude in respect of other kinds of material, are important here.

All available re-productions of the 'writing composer's' text will be of interest to an editor — and as we have seen, their internal relationship may also be worth noting. In practice, of course, we are more likely to have manuscript copies, rather than the original autograph of a 'writing composer' to work with. None of this affects the conceptual usefulness of seeing the editor's task as being to prepare (and normally publish in print form) a particular version of an episode. Any notion of a 'correct' or 'authoritative' version of an episode must be avoided.

The application of this policy could lead to an interesting, if somewhat ironic outcome. If we take a text, or some derivative of it, to be the product of a particular composer, whether as 'writing composer' or in oral performance, then we may assume that it will display particular features characteristic of that composer. These features would be the usage of particular words, formulas and themes. By analysing texts for these features, it should be possible to identify texts created by different composers, or the same composer.¹⁴ Analyses of this type are common in art history. In other words, even without having names, we might be able to identify individual composers — or authors!

The importance of this issue of concentrating on a particular version of oral material can be seen in the remarkable and very valuable publication of an Iban chant from Sarawak (Masing 1997). The major part of this text was created by a renowned bard, Igoh anak Impin, in 1949–50. In collaboration with Derek Freeman's field assistant, Patrick Ringkai, Igoh managed to produce about 20 pages of transcribed text in a day. This text, which eventually ran to 927 pages, did not conform with the usual pattern of performance which involves extensive repetition, but reads as continuous narrative. Masing himself collected the final episode of the text, as published, in 1978–9 from Sanggau, a former student of Igoh.¹⁵

The published text is unequivocally based on a flourishing tradition of 'oral composition', and in his discussion, Masing explicitly refers to the ideas of Parry and Lord. What we have, though, seems to differ to a considerable degree from a transcription of an actual performance, or rather two performances almost thirty years apart. Some obvious, if probably unanswerable questions arise, such as the nature of the alterations induced by the transcription (though I suspect that both Lord and Janko would be pleased by the quality of the resultant text), the differences in content between the versions of various bards, especially in neighbouring districts, and what stylistic distinctions there may have been even between Igoh and his pupil. One might also debate the decision to present the creations of the two bards as parts of a single 'work', essentially on the basis that

¹⁴ See Lord 1960: 93, and especially 283, n.13 for similar thoughts.

¹⁵ This account is drawn from Freeman's Foreword and the introduction to Masing (1997: ix–x, 1), as well as from a conversation which I was privileged to have with the late Professor Freeman on 1 December 2000.

Sunggau's episode follows on from and blends with the earlier narrative. In this particular case, the editorial and practical judgements have produced a published text of quality and a high degree of integrity. Similar issues, but not necessarily the same outcomes, arise for any publication of a La Galigo text.

The Social Utility of La Galigo

This matter has been thoroughly discussed by Koolhof (1999) who, drawing the analogy with Havelock's (1963) analysis of the function of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in early Greek society, treats La Galigo material as a 'tribal encyclopaedia'. (See also Macknight 1993: 33–4.) It is important, however, to notice a difference. Havelock is concerned with the distinction in the fifth century BC between the memorised texts of Homer and the written prose of, above all, Thucydides who, freed from the commitment to memory, was enabled to assess information critically. Yet almost all the examples we have of people using La Galigo materials for guidance or any other purpose involve someone consulting manuscripts. As Matthes remarks: 'the native always satisfies himself with droning a small part of it [that is, the 'complete poem'], written on lontar or paper, from time to time, especially on the occasion of festivities' (Matthes 1872: 251, in Macknight 1993: 30–1). Salim (1987: 57–9) provides some useful data on this point and has observed La Galigo manuscripts also being read for sheer pleasure. Koolhof's recording in 1991 of genuine 'oral composition' is exceptional — if all the more valuable for that.

I have argued elsewhere (Macknight 1993: 34) that any consideration of the place and function of the La Galigo materials in Bugis society since the seventeenth century needs to take account of both Islam and writing as such. For over 300 years, the performing creator, whether as 'oral composer' or as 'writing composer', worked in a society where manuscripts on paper were the normal form of record and printed books were not uncommon. Moreover, if as Pelras memorably says, 'La Galigo, above all, offered the Bugis an ideal prototype of human society' (Pelras 1983: 63, in Macknight 1993: 34), that was a non-Muslim ideal. In such circumstances, the persistence of the La Galigo tradition is remarkable.

The mid-nineteenth century references, chiefly by Matthes, to the place of La Galigo in Bugis society once suggested to me that, by then to a large extent, 'this material had become the province of the courts' (Macknight 1993: 32). Koolhof, however, noting the widespread provenance of manuscripts and the non-noble associations of modern performers, argues for a wider social interest (1999: 384). It could be argued that there has been some change between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but we are so poorly informed about the full spectrum of Bugis society in the earlier period that the argument for change is hardly necessary. It is easier to assume a relatively good knowledge of the La Galigo cycle at all levels of pre-modern Bugis society.¹⁶

¹⁶ Kirk (1965: 3–4, 70) argues for a similarly broad social appreciation of Homer, and draws on various comparative materials.

In thinking about the social function of La Galigo in comparative context, we may therefore usefully consider situations where 'oral composition' is actively performed, as well as cases where people have access, in one way or another, to manuscript materials; we may look at the uses courts have for such traditions, as well as their functions at other levels of society.

This contrast between court tradition in manuscript form and more popular orally composed material is exemplified in the *Sejarah Melayu* (most accessible in Brown 1970) and *Bujung Tan Domang* (Effendy 1997). The former, which is intimately connected with the court of Melaka and its successors, consists of a series of prose stories. Although the work, like so many other Malay works, shows signs of being designed to be heard, that is aural consumption, it seems to originate in some kind of king list and to represent, essentially, a written tradition with many variations. Whatever its nature, however, it has long provided instances of proper Malay behaviour to a local audience as well as to scholars.

Bujung Tan Domang by contrast is the product of a non-royal oral tradition from the east coast of Sumatra. The continuous narrative as published — a mere 714 pages contains both text and translation — is claimed to represent a text with fixed content which is carefully memorised. The circumstances of establishing the text and some cursory inspection suggest rather that it is essentially 'oral composition', even if relatively fixed in form. More importantly and as detailed in Effendy's introduction, the work was once a rich 'tribal encyclopaedia' for its Petalangan creators and transmitters, though now lacking point in changed circumstances.

The structure of the La Galigo stories

There has been little analysis to date of the main structural elements in the La Galigo materials, particularly for the purpose of drawing parallels with other traditions. Definite results are hardly likely to emerge from such an enquiry and the possible range of comparative materials is very large, but it seems worth making a start. The possibility of making useful comparisons has been greatly enhanced by the recognition, over the last thirty years or so, of the broad shape of prehistory in island Southeast Asia and the Pacific. The fundamental point of relevance here is the common cultural heritage of societies speaking Austronesian languages.¹⁷ Whatever the many problems of detail in particular cases, comparisons can be justified on the basis of demonstrable past linkages between societies. Such linkages are not just phyletic, that is societies sharing a common origin, but in many cases also reflect on-going contact. Comparisons of this sort are different from the general methodological comparisons with which this paper has been concerned in previous sections. Similarities in techniques of

¹⁷ The essential references here are Bellwood 1978 and 1997. The four volumes so far published from the Comparative Austronesian Project at the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University illustrate the value of the comparative approach within this field. See Bellwood and others 1995, Fox 1993, 1997 and Fox and Sather 1996.

oral composition or in the social function of literature do not imply any kind of historical connection between societies.

Two structural elements in the La Galigo stories may be distinguished for at least preliminary comparison: cosmology (and the place of humans in this) and the status system (especially as reflected in marriage).

i) Cosmology.

Pelras (1983: 89–92) has usefully put together an overall account of the cosmological system of the La Galigo materials. This account, with some minor simplifications, is worth setting out in English:

The cosmos ... is thought of as tripartite. It consists of an Upper World, *Langi'*, or Heaven; a Middle World, *Lino*, the Visible World, or *Kawa'*, This World; a Lower World, *Pérétiwi*, the Depths, or *Uri' Liung* (sometimes *Buri' Liung* or *Uru' Liung*), the Lowest Bottom.

Heaven and the Depths form the gods' abode. In each of these realms reigns a divine couple, making up, each with two other subsidiary couples, an hierarchical grouping. The dominant couple live, one in *Boting Langi'*, the Highest Heaven, the other in the deepest of the Depths, *Pérétiwi* or *Uri' Liung* proper. The two sets of subsidiary couples live in a kind of frontier zone which, while still part of the neighbouring divine world, allows crossing to the Middle World. Below the furthest reaches of Heaven and above that of the Depths, seven intermediate levels (*pitung lapi'*) are located; all the levels are named (although there is sometimes uncertainty over the names) and each placed under the authority of one of the nine children of the dominant couple ...

It is possible that the divine worlds were oriented [to the four compass points] ...

In contrast with the divine worlds, organised vertically, the Middle World is arranged horizontally. Although never explicitly stated, the Earth (*Tana*) — which includes equally the solid ground of islands and the surface of the water in seas, lakes and rivers — seems to be conceived of as an extended plane, roughly circular in shape. The peripheral parts of the Middle World are far-away and dangerous; they border on the edges of the celestial dome, and are called *wiring langi'*, the Edges of Heaven. *Wiring Langi'* is also the more specific name of a country situated towards the easternmost edge of the earth and which, while still belonging to this world, already partakes of a markedly divine character. Going towards the westernmost edge, beyond well-known lands, one come first to *Assabureng Palojang*, the Outlet of the Ocean. This is a gigantic whirlpool by which the waters rush down into the Depths. Near there, on an island called *Posi' Tana*, the Navel of the Earth, and on which the youngest son of *Patoto'* [the Creator] reigns, there rises the gigantic *Pao Jengki'*, the Mango Tree of Zanj, an immense tree whose branches touch the sky and whose roots go right down to the Under World. Still further on, after having passed *Labu' Tikka'*, the Land of the Setting Sun, one comes to the Land of the Dead, *Majé*. Spirits arrive first at *Marapettang*, the Land which

confronts Darkness (?); then, having undergone the required rites of purification and crossed the 'golden bridge', *léténg soda*, they enter into *Majé* proper, which includes *Pamessareng*, where stands the palace of *Oddang Riwu'*, the rice spirit, before reaching *Amalingeng*, the Land where one is completely muddled up (*maling*); everything there is the inverse of the World of the Living.

In the middle of the Middle World is *Luwu'*, the land to which *Batara Guru* descended in order to establish the highest kingdom of all in its dignity. It is surrounded by an inner ring of friends and allies: *Tompo' Tikka'*, *Cina*, *Wéwang Riwu'*; and further out are the other countries which are visited occasionally to meet distant cousins living there: *Wadeng*, *Maluko*, *Taranati*, *Gima*, etc.

This vision of the cosmos undoubtedly contains some Indic elements, such as the name *Péretiwi* from the Sanskrit *prthwi*, with cognates in Javanese and Malay. The name of *Pao Jengki'*, with its reference to *Zanj*, the Arab term for East Africa, also suggests wider cultural links with the world of the Indian Ocean. Taken as a whole, however, this vision seems to me not to be Indic, and it certainly lacks specific Muslim or Biblical elements.¹⁸

I am more impressed by the parallels to be found to the east in the Pacific and believe that we can here perceive, however indistinctly, an underlying pattern of thought in Austronesian speaking societies. The Pacific historian, *Niel Gunson*, has made a particular study of what he refers to as shamanism in pre-Christian *Tonga*. His account of 'the spiritual geography of the shaman's world' deserves to be quoted at some length — again with some minor simplifications.

[T]ake a coconut and cleave it in two ... Imagine the ocean floating in the lower half. The rock of creation rises in the centre. The world in the shape on one's particular islands rises to one side. On the other, out of sight because it is far away, is *Pulotu*, a mirror image of the world. In real life, as every navigator knows, it is beyond the horizon. Under the Ocean is the Underworld, known in *Tonga* as *Lolofonua*, the realm of the *Maui*. At the base of the coconut shell is a cavern of volcanic fire. Between the known world and *Pulotu* is an underworld passage which goes beneath the Ocean. Under the top half of the coconut are seven layers of heaven which appear to rest on the tops of gigantic trees. The tree on the home island is a huge *toa* tree used by one of the gods or '*otua* to come to earth. The tree on *Pulotu* is ... the talking *Hernandia* tree ... At its roots is a lake or spring called *Vaiola*.

Pulotu itself was divided into three regions. The first level was known as *Floating Pulotu*, the middle region was known as *Pulotu full of roots*, and the third region was known as *Permanent or firmly fixed Pulotu*.

¹⁸ That is not to say that there are not synthetic accounts, especially of creation stories, which display such Muslim and Biblical elements. See most usefully *Pelras* 1983: 66 and the many publications of *Gilbert Hamonic*.

The seven heavens constitute the Sky ruled over by the gods or ancestors known as Tangaloa. The Underworld constitutes the realm of the gods or ancestors known as Maui. The Ocean is the realm of the 'otua Hea Moana Uli Uli. The known world is covered with trees and this constitutes the realm of the 'otua Lupe. Pulotu constitutes the realm of Hikule'o represented by a kind of lizard whose tail is tied by a sennit cord secured in the Sky above and the Underworld below.

The ordinary shaman is represented by Lupe, the pigeon, the bird which perches on the top of trees and which can fly into the realm of the Tangaloas or master sky shamans. In other mythologies Lupe or Rupe becomes the shaman *par excellence* whose voyages to the many heavens have converged with the tales of heroic navigation by the ancestors. The Maui are master shamans of the Underworld. Some islands ... were created by the Sky shamans while most of the other islands were created by the Underworld shamans. The shamans of the Ocean took the form of the sea snake. The name of the 'otua suggests that their access to the heavens was via the *hea* tree ...

The shamans of Hikule'o were probably the most powerful. These constituted a priestly caste because of their superior knowledge and *mana* and appeared in the known world as Lo'au or even priests of the Tu'i Tonga. Through the talking tree the shamans of Hikule'o had superior means of communication as the tree was supposed to be able to summon whatever Hikule'o required from the earth plane. The power of Hikule'o was so great that the 'otua had to be tied by the tail in order to save the world from destruction.

There is some debate as to whether or not Hikule'o was male or female. In the shaman's world gender was of little importance since both men and women had access to the spirit world ... (Gunson 1990: 15–17)

There are some obvious similarities between the two accounts — such as the Bugis *langi'* and Tongan *langi* for heaven or sky — but these are merely linguistic.¹⁹ I am more impressed by the structure of Upper and Lower Worlds, the creative role of the gods from both of these, the huge tree growing in that part of the Middle World where reality is mirrored or reversed, and the movement of individual characters between worlds. These features are structural and, in these two cases, even some of the specific details are quite close. It would be a considerable labour of scholarship to trace the occurrence of such features across the Austronesian-speaking world, each case being more or less transformed. Some fragments of this work have been attempted. Thus V T King offers an excellent summary for the cultures of Borneo:

¹⁹ Gunson (1993: 152) believes that 'Pulotu, ... the mirror image of the western Polynesians, was almost certainly based on Bhuvanloka, the original mirror image world of the Indianised Malays, a concept which did not reach eastern Polynesia. It is likely that when the concept reached the islands, Bhuvanloka, the original mirror image world, was confused with Bhurloka, the world of men (or homeland), this making an easier transition to Pulotu. The concentric spheres of the Vedic heavens are almost identical to those of Polynesia.' There seem to me to be some linguistic difficulties with this view, but more importantly, I cannot see an easy way to introduce Indic influences into the Pacific at any appropriate period — at least according to the standard view of the region's prehistory, which this detail challenges.

[B]eneath the surface of cultural variation, certain conceptions about the world and place of humans within it are strikingly similar, as are the principles which structure this worldview. My assumption is that these conformities go back to the culture of the early Austronesian settlers of Borneo. Nevertheless, these uniformities are expressed in different ways in traditional Bornean religions ...

All Dayak groups either recognize a principal deity responsible for creation, which is comprised of two parts or aspects, sometimes separately named; or two main and separate deities. What is important is the principle of dualism which structures the native conception of the cosmos. It involves the union of the two aspects of the deity or the two deities, representing the heavens, skies or Upperworld on the one hand, and the primeval waters, earth or Underworld on the other ...

However, it does not necessarily follow that the creator deity, or other of its manifestations, is omnipotent and plays a central role in everyday religious life. Its position and status many vary between different ethnic groups ... The senior deities or deity are credited with establishing a framework, a set of rules and procedures for conducting social and religious life. They also bequeathed the main institutions and customary practices, including headhunting and rice agriculture, to human beings.

Dayaks also recognize important ancestor deities or spirits, whose exploits are usually related in epics and legends, and again these are often headed by two main figures, one male and one female. This Dayak oral tradition, including myths of creation, obviously relates to a spiritual plane of existence, which is intimately interrelated with the world of human beings, but separate from it. This spiritual realm connects humans to their origins and to the very beginnings of time. Although supernatural beings are now separate from humans, they were, in ancient times, living together with them. (King 1993: 232–4)

Again, one notices the Upper and Lower Worlds, the role of the 'senior deities' and the activities of 'ancestor deities or spirits' in the real world of people.

Gunson's reference to shamanism in the Pacific raises the question of whether it is worth looking for some shamanic element in the La Galigo materials, that is, does the performance of La Galigo narrative in some way establish contact with the spiritual domain — for good or evil. In a later paper, Gunson discusses just such an association:

Polynesian shamanic cycles were not simply confined to soul travel and initiation but [related] to all aspects of human life. From Tikopia and New Zealand to Hawaii there were ritual cycles and chants for all rites of passage and all the specialist occupations such as canoe and house building. (Gunson 1995: 216)

My own view is that such comparisons with Pacific traditions — and no doubt the comparisons could be extended elsewhere across the Austronesian-speaking

world — alert us to an important feature of La Galigo performances. That is not to say that such performances are only and always shamanic ceremonies; but we should not forget that the La Galigo characters are always more than merely human.

Two complications inhibit more precise conclusions on this matter. In the Bugis context, any discussion of pre-Muslim religion, and especially human contact with the spiritual realm, must involve the issue of the *bissu* or local shamans. Yet as several papers in this volume make plain, there is no necessary connection between *bissu* and La Galigo. We might speculate, though, that this association would be more pronounced were it not for the ‘capture’ of most life crises by Islamic cultural norms and practices. Secondly and more generally, we must note the wide range of possible intention in performances of narrative cycles or other chants. Joseph Banks in Tahiti in 1769 had a memorable encounter:

In my mornings walk today I met a company of traveling musicians; they told me where they should be at night so after supper we all repaired to the place. There was a large concourse of people round this band, which consisted of 2 flutes and three drums, the drummers accompanying their musick with their voices; they sung many songs generally in praise of us, for these gentlemen like Homer of old must be poets as well as musicians. (Beaglehole 1962, 1: 290)

Oliver (1974: 331) quotes this passage and places it in its full cultural context. Even in respect of La Galigo, Koolhof (1992: 45), in his discussion of its role as ‘tribal encyclopaedia’ as mentioned above, is moved to comment: ‘vermaak in de eerste plaats, en de lering daarna.’ [Entertainment first, and teaching after that.]

ii) the status system (especially as reflected in marriage)

Status is undoubtedly the dominant feature of Bugis society and much excellent ethnography traces the working of the status system in theory and practice. Naturally this basic point finds expression in the La Galigo materials seen as ‘tribal encyclopaedia’ — or to put the matter in the terms of the culture itself, social reality mirrors the world of La Galigo. It does this in two ways. Firstly, status is conceptualised as deriving from birth or, more precisely, by descent through all lines from ancestors of greater or lesser status. The basis for such distinction, that is the justification for differences in status between people, lies in relative purity of descent from the class of *tomanurung* or Descended Ones. The descent of Batara Guru (and the rise of his spouse, Wé Nyi’li Timo’) prefigures the appearance of the *tomanurung* and justifies the status of their descendants who take leading roles in the cycle.

Secondly, the model which La Galigo provides for the conduct of social life and, in particular, the importance of marriage is based, as in the daily life of Bugis society, on equivalence and difference in status. The link between status and action underlies the cycle’s central drama of the forbidden relationship between Sawérigading and his twin sister, Wé Tenriabéng, and then his search for her equal in Wé Cudai’. As Millar (1989) explains so well, the Bugis strive to find a

spouse of higher status than themselves, or of at least equal status, especially for those already near the top. For Sawérigading, the man of superlative status, who could be more equal than his twin? But to marry her, who had always been with him, even in their mother's womb, involved no search, no striving and deprived Sawérigading of the opportunity to prove his quality. Wé Tenriabéng is the impossibly perfect match. That is why Wé Cudai', for whom Sawérigading goes through so many adventures, must be her equal in every way. Wé Cudai' is the equally perfect match and Sawérigading's quest to marry her gives meaning and purpose to his life. It is in this, above all, that he provides the paradigm for all Bugis.

The first extended discussion of status in La Galigo was by Friedericicy (1933: 583–99), even if his perception of matrilineal moieties owed more perhaps to the anthropological literature of the day than to careful ethnography in the field. Friedericicy's central concern, though, was with status and he saw clearly how the La Galigo materials confirm in general terms his specific data. This matter has also been taken up most helpfully by Koolhof (1992: 24, 44, 148) and Mattulada (1978).

This concern with status is, of course, hardly surprising in a comparative context. As Thomas remarks, with his eye chiefly on Marquesan society, the Austronesian world is 'a region in which hierarchical forms related to chieftainship and rank must be taken as elements of prior systems, to be modified and transformed in particular histories and local evolutionary processes' (Thomas 1990: 27). Fox, with a closer focus on eastern Indonesia, argues for the term 'precedence' rather than hierarchy and prefers to avoid seeing comparative relationships as developments from some prior system, but rather, as a common set of social categories (Fox 1996: 130–2). Within the wider field, which is so well explored in the Comparative Austronesian Project volume of papers on *Origins, Ancestry and Alliance* (Fox & Sather 1996), there are some clear groupings, such as eastern Indonesia. As Fox has so long argued, however, comparisons need to be made right across the Austronesian speaking world. I am much struck, for example, by the similarities between the Bugis concept of status, with its consequences in various historical situations, and the Tongan equivalent, also with various historical outcomes, as described by Biersack (1996).

This is not the place for — nor am I competent to undertake — an extended treatment of these issues, but Friedericicy was certainly right to perceive the potential of La Galigo to provide comparative data and we may hope that easier access to actual texts will facilitate their analysis to this end.²⁰

Comparisons between the structure of La Galigo and that of other traditions raise several questions to which there are no easy answers. Just what is specifically Bugis in the La Galigo tradition? Certainly, by far the most elaborate versions of

²⁰ Pelras (1996: 173–5) gives a more historically determined account of Bugis status. I prefer to see the factors he discusses as secondary supports, rather than primary causes.

the material are in the Bugis language. Does it follow, however, that the occurrence of Sawerigading and other leading characters in various contexts beyond Bugis lands (Zainal Abidin 1974, 1987, 1999: 75–97, Nourse 1998, Salombe 1975, 1987, and several papers in this volume) should be understood as Bugis influence, or as independent expressions of an underlying Austronesian tradition, or as some mixture of the two explanations? If we choose to explain the relationship as Bugis influence, then we need to describe the historical circumstances which produced such influence; if we look to deeper roots for the relationship, then that will affect our analysis of all traditions.

Conclusion

In this paper, it has only been possible to deal with a tiny part of the comparative issues and materials which can help us better appreciate La Galigo. Even this is sufficient though to show the value of the comparative approach. The benefit flows both ways, for scholars in other fields have much to gain from our endeavours. Whatever the problems of access for most to the vast ocean of La Galigo texts (and even continuing oral performances), enough is now understood and accessible to make plain what an extraordinary cultural achievement this is both in quality and quantity. We are deeply indebted especially to those scholars who have undertaken the massive task of editing, translating and publishing texts; yet their work is barely begun. This is a point we all need to stress to those able financially to support such scholarship in the future. The La Galigo materials deserve to be seen not just as a Bugis or even Indonesian cultural treasure, but as a precious Bugis contribution to the heritage of all peoples.

Appendix **The 'size' of La Galigo**

Some figures on the 'size' or extent of the La Galigo materials may be of interest, especially given the frequent references to their extraordinary extent. Kern's 1939 catalogue of La Galigo manuscripts in European collections distinguishes 118 items totalling 28,086 pages.²¹ His 1954 catalogue of the manuscripts in the Yayasan collection in Makassar covers 43 items with 3,200 very large pages.²² Almost all this material consists of copies from other manuscripts which were once, and in many cases probably still are, privately held in South Sulawesi. Some of these, and much new material as well, have no doubt been included in recent microfilming projects.

Allowing for 'overlaps', Kern (1939: 5) ventured a total of at least 7000 pages (in the same format as NBG 188 pages) for a single account of the whole narrative. He later specified this more closely (1954: v) as 5400 folio pages for the material

²¹ Admittedly, pages in the Jonker collection, which make up a good part of the total, are quite small. There are also four strip roll items, which are not counted in the total of pages given here.

²² Just of 1000 of these pages now appear to have been lost since Kern saw them, that is neither the manuscripts nor microfilms of them can be currently located. Kern estimates that about ten La Galigo manuscripts from the pre-War collection were not available to him (1954: iv).

in Europe, 600 folio pages for the material then in Makassar, and some allowance for further unknown material, but probably not enough to reach Matthes' guess of three times NBG 188, that is 8553 or 'about 8000' pages. These are not, though, meaningful figures and they certainly do not indicate the 'size' of La Galigo. Not only does Kern's estimate of the material unknown to him seem rather low in the light of recent microfilming, more importantly we should not eliminate 'parallel' versions of a single episode.

The figure of '7000 pages' does, however, provide an extremely conservative base line for some other measurements and comparisons.

Firstly, the figure can be looked at in terms of the three large volumes of text and translation recently published:

Salim and others 1995 258 pp. of Bugis text
[= NBG188, vol.1 with 184 ms. pp.]

Salim and others 2000 294 pp. of Bugis text
[= NBG188, vol.2 with 194 ms. pp.]

Fachruddin Ambo Enre 1999 262 pp. of Bugis text
[=NBG188, vol.7, pp.140–235, vol. 8, pp. 1–125, total 220 ms. pp. (also uses other paralalled texts)]

In total, these three wonderful volumes only provide access to 598 pages, or 21 per cent, of the total of 2851 pages in NBG 188 — or 8.5 per cent of 7000 pages. Comparable volumes containing transcriptions and translations of 7000 pages would take up well over a metre of shelf space.

Pushing this a little further, I estimate the 7000 pages to contain about 9.8 times the number of syllables in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* combined. [Homer comprises about 430,000 syllables; the 7000 pages of La Galigo about 4,218,000 syllables.]

Bowra (1952: 351–7) discusses the size of poems in various oral traditions. The only one which may possibly match, and even surpass, the size of La Galigo is the Kirghiz epic, *Manas*. Shoolbraid (1975: 40–8) refers to one version of this which is reputed to run to 400,000 lines, each of seven or eight feet, and which took six years to record. This is also mentioned by Koolhof (1999: 382).

Given the realities of oral composition, there is, in the end, little point in such comparisons. A skilled oral composer would perform an almost infinite number of lines in the course of a long life and the size of a recorded version has more to do with the recording than with the tradition. Moreover, as argued above, the concept of a 'work' in this material is better applied to a version of an episode than to the cycle as a whole. Given all that, though, it still remains that the La Galigo materials comprise an extraordinarily extensive collection of episodes, each recounted in versions of great fullness and detail.

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Abbreviations:

ASEMI	<i>Asie du sud-est et monde insulindien</i>
BKI	<i>Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde</i>

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