

# EPIC ADVENTURES

Heroic Narrative  
in the Oral Performance Traditions  
of Four Continents

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LOR 3186, p. 8. Jaka Penulup, the younger blowpipe hunter, dated  
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## THE SLEEPING GIANT: DYNAMICS OF A BUGIS EPIC (SOUTH SULAWESI, INDONESIA)

Sirtjo Koolhof

This essay has its origin in an invitation by one of the organizers of the conference that stood at the base of this book. He invited me to prepare a paper for a conference about 'Death of the Epic'.<sup>i</sup> Having worked on a corpus of epic texts, called *La Galigo* which, from the moment of its first reference in (western) publications in the early 19th century has been seen as being in decline, if not dead, I was certainly interested in his proposal. However, when some time later a formal invitation fell on my doormat, – lo and behold – the conference's theme was 'Emergent Epics'.

Both of these themes evoke a process, a development. 'Death', 'emergence', 'loose authority', 'demise', 'rise', 'fall' are the words used in the invitation letter; they suggest that at some time in the past people's attitude towards epics was different from today. Epics once went through a Golden Age that has come to an end – or, on the contrary, that very Golden Age is coming closer. And of course the question could be asked whether particular epics have ever been more popular, more widely known and respected than they are now. Or, in correspondence with the metaphor above: was epic ever more alive or vital?

As for *La Galigo*, the epic to which I will restrict myself here, there is no way to prove that it was more vital in the past than it is now. Since the earliest reference to it in western sources in the early 19th century, the people who have understood its language or could give information about have always been very few. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that *La Galigo* never enjoyed a huge popularity; on the other hand, there is no indication that it ever did.

Let me first provide some information about the epic *La Galigo* and about the Bugis, the people who created it. The Bugis are the largest ethnic group on the south-western peninsula of the island of Sulawesi, formerly known as Celebes, in Indonesia.<sup>ii</sup> The Bugis now number around 3.5 million people, comprising nearly two per cent of the total population of Indonesia. In the past they were organized in kingdoms of which the borders roughly coincide with those of the present Indonesian regencies (*kabupaten*). In the early 17th century the rulers of these kingdoms adopted Islam as their religion. In the 20th century Bugis were generally regarded as strict Muslims, although they have retained certain elements of traditional religion. The Tolotang, a group of some 25.000 people, who mainly live in the regency of Sidenreng, adhere to a form of traditional religion. Formally, however, they are adherents of the official

Hindu religion. Hierarchy is very strictly followed in Bugis communities; at the same time there is a fierce competition between individuals.

The *La Galigo* begins with the myth of origin of the Bugis people. It tells the story of how the earth is populated by human beings originating in the Upper World. The first human being, Batara Guru, descends to the earth after his father, Lord of the Upper World, has been convinced by his servants to send one of his children down to earth, which is still empty, saying, 'How can you be a god, if there is no one to worship you?' (Salim et al. 1995: 58). Batara Guru's descent sets in motion an extremely long story, covering the adventures of the first six generations of humans. The main hero is Batara Guru's grandson, Sawérigading, whose son, I La Galigo, has given his name to the epic. Taken these adventures together, *La Galigo* is one of world's longest epics with a length of approximately one and a half times that of the Indian *Mahabharata*.

The *La Galigo* has been transmitted in manuscripts written in the Bugis *lontaraq*-script. Each manuscript contains only a small part, usually one or two episodes, of the story as a whole. The *La Galigo* is not the only written 'genre' in Bugis society. The written heritage of Bugis consists of histories of the various kingdoms, diaries, manuals, heroic poems based on the life of historical figures, legal works, and ritual texts – to mention just some categories. It is not always clear how these texts were read, but most likely *La Galigo* manuscripts were usually performed before an audience by an individual or a group of reciters.

The *La Galigo* is composed in a language that the Dutch Bible translator B.F. Matthes (1818-1908), the first and still authoritative western scholar to study the Bugis language and literature in depth, labelled 'Old Bugis'. The Bugis themselves nowadays refer to this language as *bahasa asli* 'original language', *basa kuno* 'ancient language', *basa to ri olo* 'language of the ancestors', *basa alusq* 'refined language', or *basa galigo* 'galigo language'. Perhaps the qualification 'literary' is more appropriate than 'old' since there is no indication that 'Old Bugis' represents an older stage of the language spoken at present. It is characterized by its strict pentasyllabic metre and an abundant use of words and expressions that do not occur in everyday spoken Bugis; many of these words are also found in other poetic works as well as in the liturgical songs of the *bissu*, transvestite priests at the former courts of the Bugis.

Although primarily known to us in the form of manuscripts, *La Galigo* texts show characteristics of what is usually called an oral tradition: they are highly formulaic and repetitive, different texts of the same episode showing considerable variation in wording and length, with abundant parallelism. This is not to say that at some point in time, very long ago, the *La Galigo* was a 'pure' oral tradition which was then put to into writing, keeping some traces of its oral origins; rather, in its written form it has features that are usually regarded as being characteristic of an oral transmission. For example, the fluidity, the variation between manuscripts containing the same episode, and the permanent

re-composition of episodes. It is not clear when the composition of *La Galigo* was initiated; given the fact that its language shows extremely little Arabic influence in its lexicon, contrary to the spoken language, Bugis literary language must have been established before the south-western part of Sulawesi was islamized in the late 16th century.

To investigate how vital the *La Galigo* tradition is and was, and in what respects it underwent change, I differentiate three different, albeit not always inseparable, aspects of the tradition. First is the production and transmission of texts in the form of manuscripts. Second is the presentation of these texts to an audience, or performances. And third is the use of themes, motifs, and persons from the epic in other settings. Before elaborating on these three points, I will present a short, more or less chronological account of references to the *La Galigo* in western sources.

The poet and linguist John Leyden was the first European who referred to the *La Galigo*, in 1811. Although he does not use the term *La Galigo*, in his article 'On the languages and literature of the Indo-Chinese nations' he gives a list of 53 titles of Bugis texts that bear the names of characters appearing in the *La Galigo*. He writes that 'The greater part of these compositions [...] celebrate the deeds of their national heroes', and offers a strikingly accurate translation of a few lines from an episode ('the only *Bugis* story in my possession') (Leyden 1811: 195-7). Six years later, his good friend Thomas Stamford Raffles wrote the following:

*'La Galiga*, the reputed son of *Sawira Gading*, is considered the author of the history of *Sawira Gading*, which is a kind of heroic poem, and is read in a chaunting voice, with a pause at the end of every fifth syllable. The measure consists of a dactyl followed by a trochee [...]. He is the only author whose name is commonly known; and all books, even the most modern, which are written in the same manner, are called after him *Galiga*, although, properly speaking, the term should only be applied to the history of the heroes who are supposed to have lived previous to the seven generations of anarchy which subsisted at *Bóni*. (Raffles 1817: clxxxviii)'

Raffles and Leyden never visited Sulawesi; they must have gathered their information from Bugis who had migrated to the western part of the Archipelago, or from visitors returning from Sulawesi. Their contemporary John Crawfurd, another English civil servant did, however, pay a visit to Sulawesi. In 1820 his three-volume study entitled *History of the Indian archipelago* was published, in which he states:

*'The Bugis are said to be possessed of a recondite and ancient language parallel to the Kawi of Java and the Pali of the Buddhist nations; but the knowledge of it is confined to a very few, and I have met no specimens.'* (Crawfurd 1820: 61)

Although Crawford does not mention the *La Galigo* by name, it is likely that his 'ancient language' refers to the epic's 'literary language' already mentioned. Twenty years later, James Brooke, the famous 'white raja of Sarawak', mentions a small island in the north-eastern part of the Gulf of Boné:

'April 20. [1840] – Crossed over to the eastern bank, and made it out to be an island, called Pulo Paloèh (or separated mountain), which is bold and wooded, being divided from the main by a moderate channel. Tradition says Sawira Gading anchored on the coast; and cutting down a tree, it fell and divided this island from the shore.' (Mundy 1848, I: 159.)

This is clearly a reference to the *La Galigo* episode in which Sawérigading fells a huge sacred tree that he needs to build a ship to sail to the country of his bride-to-be, and although no specific geographical references are found in the texts, (oral) tradition has it that the Wélenréng, the name of the tree concerned, stood on the mainland in the vicinity of Malili. When it fell down, it split the island of Buluq Puloé in two.

The Dutch scholar Matthes who spent almost forty years in South Sulawesi (from 1848 to 1886) was especially keen on collecting information about the *La Galigo*. In his reports to the motherland he time and again complained about the fact that almost nobody was capable of explaining the meaning of the texts to him. So as to be able to ask the *bissu*, the transvestite guardians of the regalia, about the 'old language' of which they seemed to know more than almost everybody else he had to overcome his disgust for these examples 'of how low human nature can sink'.

A 19th-century philologist, Matthes was of the opinion that at some time in the past there had been a long, consistent epic that over the years or centuries had later fallen apart – which is how he came to realize that collecting a 'complete' version of the epic was even more difficult than obtaining the correct information about the contents of the manuscripts he collected.

'That is why it is to deplore that nowhere is to be found a complete copy of this poem. The natives content themselves with – from time to time, especially at the occasion of feasts – rattling off small parts of it, either written on palm leaf or on paper. I spent many years collecting as many as possible of those fragments that each count as a separate manuscript. [...] I do fear, however, that I will never succeed in collecting all the parts into one coherent whole again.' (Matthes 1872: 251)

Matthes's fears were justified. At his request, Colliq Pujié, the queen-mother of the kingdom of Tanété, set out to write a 'complete' version for him, but she produced no more than approximately one-third of her (imagined) 'complete' text. As well as these 2853 folio pages in writing,<sup>iii</sup> she presented Matthes with a summary of what she thought to be the full story, which reads like the main

story line, leaving out many of its branches. Perhaps Colliq Pujié did not know these branch episodes, or perhaps she thought they did not really belong to the *La Galigo*. Matthes, who usually based himself on Colliq Pujié's opinion, took a clear stance in this question: in his catalogue he characterized these side stories as 'stories written in the metre of the *La Galigo*'.

More than a century of scholarly research of oral and written epic traditions should make us aware of the dangers of talking about the 'demise' and the 'disintegration' of a once glorious narrative. In the case of *La Galigo*, it is quite conceivable that the reverse process of what Matthes mentioned has taken place and that the epic has been growing from a longer or shorter core story that has been expanded and ornamented by a long series of poets who created new episodes and incorporated already existing narratives not directly related to the themes of *La Galigo*. Raffles seems to support this idea of growth when he talks of 'all books, even the most modern, which are written in the same manner, are called after him *Galiga*'.

'Growth' instead of 'demise' perhaps, but how this process took place is hard to tell, as Matthes' confusion witnesses. Very few of the manuscripts are dated, and from most of them it is unknown where and from whom they were obtained. It is not clear, either, if these manuscripts were newly composed or copied from other manuscripts, or a combination of both. Was the epic expanding in the sense that new episodes were added, or that existing episodes were elaborated and extended, thanks to more widely available writing paper? And, if the latter is the case, was a more or less pure oral tradition (if it ever existed at all) losing its authority to writing? Unfortunately there is no way to know an answer on any of these questions.<sup>14</sup>

Matthes, like us, was a product of his time. Not only did he think in terms of a complete epic, a narrative of the adventures of a hero that summarizes and reflects the values and ideas of Bugis society, he also worked from a clear distinction between, on the one hand, 'high literature' of which the *La Galigo* was a good example, and, on the other hand, folk stories, legends and fairy tales. Of course, this 'high literature' could, in his eyes, only be produced by the Bugis nobility. Matthes was convinced of the fact that not noble men – who according to him wasted their time gambling, hunting, and smoking opium – but especially noble women were very much involved in the transmission and production of *La Galigo* literature – the earlier mentioned Colliq Pujié is a good example. However true this may have been – Matthes' contacts were almost exclusively with members of the nobility – doubts have to be expressed regarding this opinion, although noble women have played a significant role in the transmission up to the present day. An example is the late Andi Séngeq, a woman of the highest noble descent in Luwu, unmarried and well-known for her interest in Bugis traditional literature in the final decades of the 20th century. She, too, was very knowledgeable about the *La Galigo* and produced manuscripts for her own use or that of her family. When I asked her nephew if she ever performed before an audience, however, he answered that this would

be something inconceivable to do for a person of her status; at the most she would recite a manuscript in her own house in a very soft voice, and when a performance for a larger audience was needed, for example during wedding ceremonies, she would invite people from outside her own circles to perform and provide them with a manuscript. Another example is taken from a manuscript containing a *La Galigo* episode copied in 1972 at the request of the late H. Andi Ninnong, a former (female) ruler of the kingdom of Wajoq. A note on the fly leaf states:

Received from the Datu [ruler] on 3-4-1972. The copying began on Tuesday 4-4-'72 at our house in EmpagaE, Tanasitolo sub regency, Wadjo regency. Consists of 296 pages.

The copying was finished on 27-4-1972

The copyist, a civil servant of the Wadjo Cultural Office,  
Sengkang, [signature]

Although she was the head of a noble household, Andi Ninnong obviously asked (or ordered) an outsider to copy a manuscript for her, either because none of the household members was capable of doing so or because none was expected to do so. In her memoirs Andi Ninnong noted that in her youth 'from time to time someone who could read *lontaraq*-manuscripts was summoned', an indication that in those days it was not a member of the royal household who performed the recitation. When I interviewed her daughter Andi Muddariah in 1995, she told me that she herself had never been involved in either producing or reciting *La Galigo* manuscripts, although she owned quite a few of them. If I was interested, she would be all too happy to summon someone well versed in the tradition to her house. Such examples seem to suggest that the nobility, and foremost the women, played an important role in the transmission and production of the tradition. But then, that role could perhaps better be described in terms of patronage than of direct involvement in the production of manuscripts.

Do we know very little about the ways of production and transmission of *La Galigo* stories, even less is known about the circumstances under which the (written) texts were brought to life. By whom, how, and when were they read? Matthes' observation that 'The natives content themselves with – from time to time, especially at the occasion of feasts – rattling off small parts' of the epic is, together with Raffles' remark that 'it is read in a haunting voice', the only direct reference to the way *La Galigo* texts were presented in the 19th century. The 20th century has not made the question of presentation very much clearer: no information can be found where, when, how often, by and for whom performances took place.

It is assumed that poetical texts were recited or read aloud (*massureq*, 'to read *La Galigo*') before an audience. This assumption is confirmed by what we know of what is done in most manuscript traditions, in particular those in



Indonesia. Handwritten texts were often called to life during social events, usually ceremonies or rituals, but not exclusively so. Andi Ninnong remembers how people were summoned to the palace to read manuscripts, and nowadays many people have stories of how their grandmother was sitting somewhere in the house reading *La Galigo* episodes in a soft voice, sometimes just to her self, at other times to her children or grandchildren. I myself remember an occasion in 1996 when I went with a Tolotang community leader to one of his houses in a remote village in the regency of Wajo. He was especially interested in *La Galigo* literature and did all he could to collect photocopies of manuscripts. During our visit we managed to borrow a manuscript from one of the villagers, and in the evening we had long discussions with them about the *La Galigo*. After I went to bed, I heard him chanting in his room from the manuscript he had borrowed; when I fell asleep after an hour or so, he was still reading and when I woke up the next morning I heard him reading again (or still?).

When people are asked on which occasions *La Galigo* texts are or were read, they usually answer that they are read at wedding ceremonies. This should not surprise us, as weddings are the most elaborate and most important ceremony in Bugis culture. Their importance is reflected in the *La Galigo* itself: the main event in a large number of episodes is the wedding of one of the characters, and in many other episodes, the adventures (such as long journeys to one's prospective bride or fights between two rival lovers) are usually related to a wedding. Other occasions where *massureq* takes place, I have been told, are the moving to a new house and the beginning of the planting season.

During my fieldwork in South Sulawesi in 1991, 1996 and 1999 I never witnessed a spontaneous performance for an audience of a *La Galigo* text,<sup>9</sup> people would tell me, instead, that such readings had been 'very popular in the past' or 'in other places', or 'among other groups'. My research was focussed on the Tolotang, a group of Bugis who are not Muslims but adhere to what is regarded by most as the original Bugis tradition or religion, and is officially categorized by the national government as being part of the 'Hindu religion'. Other Bugis used to tell me that they are the people who not only follow the religion of the *La Galigo* but also perform episodes of the epic during their rituals. Apart from this view being erroneous regarding the religion of the Tolotang, it is also incorrect concerning the performances. Of course, I was often told, in the not too distant past the *La Galigo* had been very popular and was performed regularly. But, if I really wanted to know more I should better look among a sub-group of the Tolotang who were still regularly performing episodes at their ceremonies. Even names of the performers were mentioned. Unfortunately... But, these people told me, in the village of Cerekang in Luwuq (see below) ... And so on.

As it turned out, *La Galigo* was not recited. I found some comfort in the fact that I was not the first one who was confronted with such 'misfortune'. Some 140 years ago, in 1856, Matthes had undertaken a trip to same village and reported as follows:

'The next day we walked to nearby Amparita [...]. The main purpose of this trip was to track down a complete collection of the *La Galigo* poems. I had imagined I would surely find them here, because here are various people who ascribe supernatural power to these writings. [...] But, like many times afterwards, I searched here in vain for an – even more or less – complete collection of these poems. Nothing more than a few bits and pieces were to be found here and there, and even then people were reluctant to give them on loan to me. This was a great disappointment for me.' (Van den Brink 1943: 180)

More comforting to me was the fact that it was easier for me than it had ever been for Matthes to borrow manuscripts. Moreover, I could have photocopies made of them whereas Matthes was forced to copy a manuscript by hand in the house of the owner 'ten days on end from early in the morning to late in the evening, to the amazement of a bunch of lazy natives' (Van den Brink 1943: 180-181).

I had already spent some six months in the village of Amparita, talking to people about the *La Galigo*, collecting manuscripts, and especially telling everyone that I was even more interested in performances than I was in manuscripts; then someone informed me that some days later one of the community leaders would move to a new house and there would be a ceremony at which a *La Galigo* episode was to be read. The performers were a group of women and men, of whom two were experienced and five others were doing it for the first time. Moreover, two days later someone else was organizing a ceremony in his house for the starting of the planting season. He had invited a group of friends, among them a man whose name was regularly mentioned to me as someone who 'often recites manuscripts'. When I asked the latter, he told me that it had been at least fifteen to twenty years since he had last recited a *La Galigo* text.

At the first ceremony the performance attracted the attention of an audience of about sixty people. However, within half an hour most of them started doing other things, and after two hours most were asleep. After four hours only three old men, the performers and a western researcher were still awake. The second performance, which was essentially organized for one household, attracted but some interest of the organizer's children and their friends for the first hour or so. After that, they remembered that I had made video recordings of the *massureq* two days before, and so they asked me if they could watch these. This created the somewhat strange situation: the children were (attentively) watching a video of a *massureq* performance in the front room, while at the same time in the backroom a live performance was going on. Marshall McLuhan would have loved it.

The main incentive behind organizing these performances turned out to be my presence as a researcher in the community for some period of time. Some people felt sorry for me, and they thought that my time would be wasted if I were not able to attend at least one performance. On the other hand, my

presence also influenced the view the people themselves had of the *La Galigo*. Through our discussions their interest was raised and manuscripts that had for long been hidden in a cupboard or on the attic, although always regarded as a valuable heritage, suddenly became the focus of attention. If someone was willing to travel thousands of miles to find them, they felt that they themselves should show more interest in them. People would start asking about and discussing *La Galigo* with others they regarded as more knowledgeable than themselves, both in my presence and when I was not there. And, although neglected for quite some time, performances could be called to life again.

So far I have described the *La Galigo* tradition in terms of production – transmission – and presentation. The third aspect that I intend to talk about is that of the use of *La Galigo* materials in other contexts than these two. In the first place it should be mentioned that it is unlikely that people obtained knowledge of *La Galigo*'s story by listening to the reciting of all or some of the episodes. Firstly, as Matthes experienced, there is no 'complete' *La Galigo* available anywhere, and it is most unlikely that it ever was. Secondly, the language of the epic is not comprehensible to most people. These two facts mean that the main story line must have been transmitted in much less formalized ways than by way of the performances at which manuscripts were recited. Maybe grandmothers used to explain stories to their grandchildren. Maybe every now and then a father would tell his son a story from the *La Galigo* to give him examples of how to behave or not to behave. Lately another medium has become available: an Indonesian translation (1989) of R.A. Kern's voluminous catalogues (some 1300 pages) of *La Galigo* manuscripts. Published in Dutch in 1939 and 1954 the two catalogues contain detailed abstracts of the contents of manuscripts kept in public collections in the Netherlands and South Sulawesi. Furthermore, the streets in South Sulawesi towns named after *La Galigo* characters, such as Sawérigading and I La Galigo, might sometimes provoke a question of who they were. Perhaps some people knew the answer – but then, when I asked younger people in Palopo, the capital of Luwuq, who were the people the streets were named after very few of them could produce an accurate answer. The most common answer was that they were *pahlawan*, '(national) heroes', since of course heroes have streets named after them in Indonesia.

*La Galigo* may well have been an important source for the ideology, world view, and religion of the majority of Bugis before competition with Islam pushed it to the margin. Nowadays, only small communities directly relate their customs and beliefs to the *La Galigo*. The clearest instance of this I found in the remote north-eastern corner of South Sulawesi.

Cérékang, a small village alongside the main road to one of the world's largest nickel mines, situated some 60 kilometres east of it, is regarded by those people who know about its existence as the area where according to the *La Galigo* the first humans descended to earth. The village is situated at the eastern border of Luwuq, the kingdom that is widely regarded as the cradle of Bugis

civilization,<sup>vi</sup> forms a small pocket of Bugis speakers amidst an array of other languages. Various sacred sites that are directly linked to events in *La Galigo* are close to it; the most important one, close to the village, is the hill of Pénsi Méwoni where Batara Guru arrived on earth in a golden bamboo. This place can only be visited by members of a small religious group called the Tossuq (from *to*, 'man, human', and Ussuq, the name of a village close to Cérékang). Only villagers of Cérékang and their relatives can be members of the Tossuq; they are not very keen on providing outsiders with information about their beliefs and rituals, and are even obliged to tell lies about these matters (Christian Pelras, personal communication).

The Tossuq are organized around two *puaq* (cognate to Bg *puang* 'lord m/f'), the *puaq makkunrai*, a woman, and the *puaq oroané*, a man. Both of them are assisted by five *paréwa* 'assistants': a Head (*panngulu*), a head (*ulu*), a shoulder (*salangka*), a hand (*lima*), and a foot (*ajé*). Local people told me that the two *puaq* are substitutes or successors of the first human being, Batara Guru, and his wife Wé Nyiliq Timoq. A note made in the 1930s tells us that the *puaq* are the successors of Sawérigading and his twin sister Wé Tenriabéng.<sup>vii</sup> This would, at least in the current situation, seem more likely: the two *puaq* live apart in different houses, are not married to each other, and very seldom share activities, and this would be more in concordance with the image of Sawérigading and the 'incestuous' relationship with his sister than with the happily married couple of the founders of humankind. However, a note in the margin of KITLV Or 545/200b says 'they are not always man and wife, but may be', which would oppose the latter interpretation. The *puaq oroané* is not allowed to ever leave the village, while his female counterpart can only leave the place in specific circumstances, usually in connection with ceremonies of the Luwuq royal house in the regency capital of Palopo, some 200 kilometres west of Cérékang.

The function of *puaq* is not hereditary. When a *puaq* dies, a successor is selected on the basis of the *paréwa*'s dreams: these ten assistants have to dream of the same person who should become the next *puaq* before this person can be appointed, a process that may take years. The candidate should be of Cérékang descent, but does not have to live in the village. The present *puaq oroané*, for instance, was called to this function approximately ten years ago when he was in his mid sixties, and had lived the longer part of his life in the province of Southeast-Sulawesi, where he made a living as a trader and owned a small plantation, while also acting as *imam*. The process of electing a new *puaq* is said to be inspired by *wéré* 'divine inspiration' (Ind. *wahyu*). The *paréwa*, who are seen as the successors of the close companions of Batara Guru and his descendants, are elected in the same manner: they, too, are elected on the basis of *wéré* of the *paréwa* who are in function.

This way of selecting a *puaq* may have worked effectively in the past – something we do not know due to a lack of documentation – but it became a point of disagreement in the early 1990s. After the death of the *puaq makkunrai*

it took some time before the *paréwa* were given the *wéré* to appoint her successor. The new *puaq* was a rather modern woman in her mid-forties; she used to watch television, read newspapers and she had a good command of Indonesian, the national language. For a group of villagers this was reason enough to question the correctness of this 'decision'. Of course they could not question the validity of the heaven-sent dreams of the *paréwa*, so they publicly questioned the validity of the selection procedure instead, allegedly on the instigation of a woman who had hoped to be the new *puaq* and organized the people around her to challenge the decision. Basing themselves on the discourse of the Indonesian state, they claimed that the way of selection was undemocratic, not in tune with the spirit of the times. The Tossuq should be called together (*musyawarah*) so as to choose a new *puaq* in a democratic way. However, no meeting took place, and the rift in the community exists until today.<sup>viii</sup>

A more serious incident took place in Cérékang in May 1930 when one of the hamlet heads by the name of La Tangkeq incited a small scale rebellion against the Dutch colonial authorities. He claimed to be inspired by the gods of the *La Galigo*, and changed his name to Batara Guru, the first human being on earth, while his supporters took names of other characters in the epic. The group attacked a police station in the vicinity of Cérékang and then retreated to Cérékang. The military unit that was sent from the capital of Palopo, 'rendered them harmless', while 'in the other party two people were wounded by pistol shots' (*Patrouille-actie* s.a.). Later that year the Dutch came and took the sacred objects (regalia) that were kept in the village (*Detachement* s.a.: 1).<sup>ix</sup> Seventy years later this incident is still vividly remembered in the village. People told me that the great annual ritual at the top of Pinsi Méwoni had not taken place ever since, due to the absence of the sacred objects, a ban by the colonial authorities, and a lack of funds. Rather surprisingly they did not blame the Dutch, but La Tangkeq who had been too arrogant (Ind. *takbur*). When I suggested that the Dutch soldiers had robbed the sacred objects from Cérékang I was corrected: La Tangkeq himself had handed them over, because he realized that his magic could not compete with the much stronger magic of the Dutch.<sup>x</sup> Although they were deprived of their most important ritual (at least, if not performed in secret), the tradition has been kept alive. The *puaq* are still in function, performing their main task, praying for the well-being of the whole world, and participating in the ceremonies of the former royal line of Luwuq in Palopo.

Bugis academics prefer to treat *La Galigo* as a more or less reliable picture of the glorious past of the Bugis, full of references to real events and real places. However, as it suits an epic, those real events and real places are subject to various interpretations. And while the *La Galigo* is an epic of importance to the Bugis people as a whole, discussions about it reflect the tough competition between various groups that can be classified in terms of the half dozen or so kingdoms that have competed with each other for centuries. One of the subjects



of those discussions, to give just one example, is the exact location of the kingdom of Cina, where the hero Sawérigading travels to from his (and according to tradition all Bugis') home Luwuq to marry his cousin, a princess of that kingdom. The texts suggest that Cina, or Tanah Ugiq, 'Land of the Bugis', is located in the Bugis heartland, around the Lake of Tempe. For people of the former kingdom of Wajoq it is obvious that Cina is in their area, even though it now has the name of Pammana. For people of the kingdom of Boné the *La Galigo's* Cina is the village Cina, which lies south of Wajoq. Both have to face claims of other regions that Cina refers to China for which supporters find proof in the fact that Sawérigading's journey from Luwuq to Cina takes about seven months during which he has to defeat seven enemies and their fleets. A journey by boat from present-day Luwuq to Wajoq would take at most two days, they argue, and that is why Cina must be the empire of China. This interpretation is favoured by those who want to see in the *La Galigo* concrete proof that the Bugis have been bold sailors roaming the Asian seas for at least a millennium. Whether such discussions about the location of the places mentioned in the *La Galigo* took place in the past as well, I do not know. It seems conceivable, since Matthes, for instance, repeatedly states explicitly that *La Galigo's* Cina is not China, but a village in Wajoq.

Only a small group of people are actively engaged in discussions about *La Galigo*. What then, does it mean that a tradition is still 'alive'? How do we measure 'vitality'? One possible answer is given by the organizers of the 'International La Galigo Festival and Seminar', held from 15-18 March 2002 in South Sulawesi: the tradition should be 'revitalized' (*revitalisasi*), and Bugis cultural works should be returned to their 'owners' (*Festival* 2002: 2; *Minim* 2002). One magazine reported that the *La Galigo* tradition 'is only known in academic circles', and its 'spirit' had 'to be brought to life again' (Pareanom and Amir 2002: 69). The festival included all kinds of traditional and modern performances and games from fifteen regencies, including some non-Bugis areas. It brought thousands of people to the village of Pancana, some 100 kilometres north of the provincial capital Makassar, where Colliq Pujié, the noble lady who provided Matthes with the twelve-volume manuscript containing one-third of the complete *La Galigo* lived. The organizers effectively made Colliq Pujié the real heroine of the Bugis cultural heritage. 'We can not imagine what the fate of *La Galigo* would have been without her' (*Festival* 2002: 2), 'she should be honoured by the local as well as by the national government representing the people of Indonesia' (Fachruddin Ambo Enre 2002: 9). The festival received much attention from both the local and the national press; two of the papers presented at the seminar were published in the national newspaper *Kompas* (Tol 2002; Pelras 2002). To make sure that the '*revitalisasi*' would continue, its organizers sent a recommendation to the Indonesian Department of Education proposing that knowledge about *La Galigo* be included in the national curriculum (*Naskah* 2002), while Hasanuddin University in Makassar has set up a Centre for the Study of *La Galigo*.

Will all this result in a vital or revitalized tradition, being brought back to its owners, the Bugis people? It may be telling that the festival's program did not schedule a reading of *La Galigo* (Festival 2002: 40-3),<sup>21</sup> a fact that also disappointed a 42 year old woman from Barru who visited the Festival especially to watch *massureq* (Pareanom and Amir 2002: 70). And Asdar Muis RMS, theatre director, poet, and journalist, publicly expressed his doubts about what will happen now that the festival is over. Surely the memory of *La Galigo* was given a boost, he wrote. But why did the organizers ignore or forgot the real pillars of the tradition? The way the invited *bissu* were ignored was a good example of 'cultural exploitation'; why were they not publicly thanked for their contribution to the preservation of the heritage? And why were the Tolotang 'neglected'? Asdar ended his article with the following remarks:

'The festival is over. Nothing is left. There are no follow-up discussions. What will be done and to what end with the results of the seminar? Yes, there is a recommendation to teach *La Galigo* in schools, but how far will the struggle go and where are the proofs? Those questions do not need an answer. [...] The *bissu* do not care. Together with the Tolotang community they remain the last pillars to safeguard *La Galigo*.' (Asdar Muis RMS 2002b)

I began this paper with some remarks about the terms 'death', 'demise', 'emergence' and 'rise', metaphors for describing the fate of epics over time. What I have tried to show is that at least for the *La Galigo* such terms are not very appropriate. It is impossible to say whether a hundred years ago, two hundred years ago, or ten years ago, *La Galigo* was more 'alive' than it is now. Epics could be defined as narratives that depict an imagined (and thus long gone) Golden Age in which everything was better, everyone happier and the world near to ideal. We should be careful not to view the epic itself as a product of a historical Golden Age in which it was known by all the people, performed at every corner of every street, and a guide to everyone's life.

A giant epic such as *La Galigo* is alive, but like every other living being it sleeps sometimes deeply, only to be woken by a wild dream or two – either in the form of a 'giant festival' (Asdar Muis RMS 2002a), or in a more modest shape like a ten-minute performance at a wedding ceremony. Moreover, it is good to realize that death can turn up unexpectedly during such a good night's sleep. But then, the dead live on in the memory of their loved ones.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I like to thank Ian Caldwell for his useful comments on this article.

<sup>2</sup> See for a general description of the Bugis, Pelras 1996.

<sup>3</sup> The first two volumes are published in Salim et al. 1995, 2000. For Colliq Pujie and her activities see Koolhof 1995.

<sup>4</sup> The oldest extant manuscripts containing *La Galigo* episodes are from the late 18th century. The majority of manuscripts date from the late 19th and 20th centuries.

<sup>5</sup> Neither did Christian Pelras during his visits to South Sulawesi from the late 1960s onwards (personal communication). Raymond Kennedy, who visited the area in 1949-1950 does not seem to have come across performances either (Kennedy 1953).

<sup>6</sup> See Bulbeck and Caldwell (2000) for the most recent discussion of this subject.

<sup>7</sup> KITLV Or 545/200b, notes on names and words from *La Galigo* by Noeroeddin Daeng Magassing.

<sup>8</sup> My information is based solely on what people close to the present *puaq* told me, which undoubtedly has coloured the data.

<sup>9</sup> I have not found any extensive report from the Dutch side on this incident. In the Algemeen Rijksarchief, Den Haag, only some short references are available: Groeneveld 1938; *Detachement* s.a.; *Patrouille-actie* s.a. An extensive hand-written account based on interviews with his older fellow villagers of Cerekang was compiled during the 1990's by Usman Daeng Matanang. He situates the events in the year 1928.

<sup>10</sup> This is not as strange as it may sound, because the Dutch are not regarded as outsiders. Like the people from Cérékang, and the other Bugis, the Dutch are descendents of Sawérigading, who begot their first ancestor by a woman in the Underworld (see Koolhof 1999: 381).

<sup>11</sup> A performance under the name of *massureq* is found in the program; however, this concerns a reading of *Meong Mpalo Karellaé*, a story not being part of the *La Galigo* (Festival 2002: 40).



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