Javanese Inscriptions

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By the mid-eighth century in Java, inscriptions were starting to look different from earlier prototypes found in Bravan and Sumatra. Language began to get more complicated, and the clear early reliance on Indian forms began to be replaced by a more hybrid style that elevated Javanese concerns. The Satjaya inscriptions from Canggol, dated very precisely to October 6, 772 CE, show the beginnings of these changes. Though still clearly influenced by Indian forms, the actual diction of the Satjaya inscription differs from its almost purely Indian antecedents. Descriptions of a “body [that] dissolves like gold and whose matted locks are comparable to the flames of the fire” are more common and fuller than earlier writings; “he, who lies on the surface of the watery bed, the petals of whose eye-lenses are not red though meditating,” evokes a very different image than the more prosaic writings of earlier inscriptions. It is clear that the Javanese of this period were beginning to experiment with their own styles, not abandoning Indian templates, but rather increasingly bending them to their own purposes. When we are told that the first Javanese king named Sangas has “the splendour of the bright color of gold that has been smitten in the flaming fire,” and that he has “great arms, big thighs, and (a) head resembling like the mountain peaks,” we believe it. These are the boasts of a vigorous new civilization facing its challenges.

The Inscription of Satjaya from Canggol, Central Java,
Dated October 6, AD 772

1. When the year of the Saka king that is brought to numbers with four, five, and six [652] was passed, on Monday, the thirteenth day of the bright half of the month, which follows [the tenth] Bhadra, in [the month of] Kartika, while the legs stood under Kumbara in the port called Tugu, the king [who is] the illustrious Satjaya, for obtaining tranquility, established on the hill, a linga [i.e., phalus] with [all] auspicious marks.

2. He who is a Sun in the darkness of the world; who had for his crest jewel the Moon on his matted locks which are beautiful by the surging waves of the Ganges; on whose body dazzling with the brilliance of ashes, scatters its brilliance the necklace of snakes; who is praised by the gods with graceful and soft palms (of their hands) folded in the form of a vessel; he, Siva, may bestow on you the most perfect bliss!

3. May that remarkably beautiful pair of feet-lotuses of the three-eyed one [Siva] which are constantly praised by the greatest of gods and demons and others with their bent crowns which are [comparable to] the bees [that kiss the lotus]; whereas the slightly copper-coloured petals are the toes and whereof the end is decorated by bright flames or rays [issuing] from the nails, may [that pair of feet] grant you perpetual bliss!

4. May the three-eyed one [Siva] whose matted locks are adorned with the crescent moon, who, by reason of excess of His divine attributes, is a receptacle of great, and even wonderful, things; who, given to solitude, by his renunciation [of all things] always creates the wonder of yogins [i.e., ascetics]; who, by his eight-fold bodies and through compassion but not selfishness, sustains the universe; may he, the lord of [all] beings, protect you!

5. May the self-created Lord (Brahma), the object of worship of the world, whose pair of feet-lotuses are revered by the gods; who has fixed the regulations of the world to the point of the Vedas; who is the source of religion, worldly prosperity and desire; whose body dazzles like gold and whose matted locks are comparable to the flames of the fire of his own body; may he, the lord of Yogins, the venerable one, reward you with success!

6. May he, who lies on the surface of the watery bed, the petals of whose eye-lenses are red through meditation; who is beloved by the gods for protection; who is always favouringly viewed by the goddess Sri on seeing the beauty of her own image reflected on the side levels of the jewels on the upturned crown of the king of serpents; may he, the lord of Sri, grant you prosperity!

7. There is a great island called Yava, abundantly supplied with rice grains and other seeds and rich in gold mines; that island is acquired by immortals [by mantra] and other means; where there is a wonderful place dedicated to Sambhu, a heaven of heavens, surrounded by the Ganges and other holy resorts and laid in a beautiful woodland inhabited by elephants, existing for the good of the world.

8. In that excellent island called Yava which is the great mark of footprints of Purusha, there was a king of very noble lineage of the name of Sanna who was of established reputation and who, by means of conciliation and gift, ruled the subjects in a proper way, out of attachment, just like a father [taking care of] the child from his very birth and who with
his enemies subdued, protected the world for a long time with justice like Manu.

(9) He [the king] named Samsa, the [very] Moon of the family, while thus ruling over the goddess of royalty, having, in the fullness of time, gone to enjoy happiness in the heavens which is the accumulated results [of his meritorious deeds]. Then the earth, separated [from him] roamed in grief for being bereft of her lord.

(10) The one who sprang from him was like the [Mount] Meru and possessed a wealth of manifold qualities: he has the splendor of the bright color of the gold that has been smelted in the flaming fire; he has great arms, big thighs, and head upraised like the mountain peaks, and has the shelter of his high-raised feet on the kings of stable dynasties obtaining on the earth.

(11) The illustrious king called Suhjaya, who is beautiful and respected by the assembly of the learned as an adept in the subtle meanings of Sātric lore; who, excelling in bravery and other virtues, but, like Raghu, overthrown many crooks of feudal lords; who is like the sun in fame and whose splendor spreads in all regions; he, the son of Sannabha, the very life of his sister, is (now) ruling the kingdom justly.

(12) While he is ruling the earth which has for her girdle the waves of the seas and for her breasts the mountains, people can sleep on the road side without being startled by thieves or by other fears. And men rich in fame, always earned in plenty [the three aims of life, namely,] religion, worldly prosperity, and the objects of desire. Certainly Kali is crying much in despair as no sign of [Kali's] limbs is shining [i.e., is in existence].