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Constructing the polity of Sriwijaya in the 7th – 8th centuries: The view according to the inscriptions

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Sriwijaya is one of the most intriguing polities ever to have existed. For a long time it was almost completely forgotten, and was only brought to light in 1918 by Coedès. Since then many scholars have studied its history. The questions that surround Sriwijaya arise from the scarcity of data concerning its existence: we have only relatively complete inscriptions written in Old Malay, in an unknown, probably, Proto-Malagasy, and/or in Sanskrit, and some minor records consisting only of the word *siddhayātra*. Some archaeological investigations were undertaken in the last quarter of the twentieth century, and the Chinese chronicles and the Arabian texts contain some information about medieval Southeast Asia (Coedès 1930; 1964; De Casparis 1956; Boechari 1979, 1986; Ferrand 1922; Manguin 2000; 2002; 2004). This paper is concerned with the political organisation of Sriwijaya during the seventh and eighth centuries CE, since the inscriptions mentioned above belong to this epoch.

The study of Sriwijaya's political organisation started with the publication of the Telaga Batu inscription (hereon, TB-2) by De Casparis in 1956. The terms in the text were considered to be designations of different officials and/or relatives of the king. De Casparis kept the descriptions 'state' and 'empire' for Sriwijaya (1956: 15, 17 et al.). One of the most important fragments of the TB-2 inscription is the list of participants of the oath ceremony which included the ritual drinking of water (*minum sumpah*). '*Kāmu vañak=māmu rājaputra prosōāra bhūpati senapati nāyaka pratyaya hājipratyaya daídanāyaka ... mūrddhaka tuhā an vatak=vuruō addhyāksī nījavarīa vāsīkarana kumārāmātya cātabhaḍa adhikarāīa karmma ... kāyastha sthāpaka puhāvai vaīyāga pratisāra dā ..kāmu marsī hāji hulun=hāji vañak=māmu urai nivinuh sumpaō*' (lines 3–5) (De Casparis 1956: 32). De Casparis offered the following translation: '(3) All of you, as many as you are, – sons of kings, ... chiefs, army commanders, *nāyaka*, *pratyaya*, confidants (?) of the king, judges, (4) chiefs of ...(?), surveyors of groups of workmen, surveyors of low-castes, cutlers, *kumārāmātya*, *cātabhaḍa*, *adhikarāīa*, ... clerks, sculptors, naval captains, merchants, commanders, ... and you – , (5) washermen of king and slaves of the king, – all of you will be killed by the curse of (this) imprecation'.

The terms *yuvarāja*, *pratiyuvarāja* and *rājakumāra* designate categories of princes: the crown prince, the second crown prince and other princes respectively (De Casparis 1956: 17–18). De Casparis admits that the meaning of the first word in the list, i.e. *rājaputra* 'children of kings', is vague and varies depending on place and time. However, he believes it refers either to the children of the king born to concubines or to vassal princes (De Casparis 1956: 19). The

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second word of the list *prosòāra* is not clear. The ambivalence of the term *bhūpati* in Sanskrit does not enable us to define its exact meaning in the narrow context of the TB-2. It could mean ‘vassal’, although the term ‘chief’ was used in translation (De Casparis 1956: 19, 37, n. 4).

Of the terms *senapati*, *nāyaka*, *pratyaya*, *hājipratyaya*, *dandanāyaka*, neither the first nor the last cause difficulties in interpretation, since they denote an army commander and judge respectively. In his translation, De Casparis kept the terms *nāyaka* and *pratyaya* but has assumed that they could be the lowest-ranking officials, whose responsibilities include taxation and/or lower district officers (1956: 19, 37, n. 5, 6). The word *hājipratyaya*, consisting of Indonesian and Sanskrit roots, is tentatively translated as ‘the confidants of the king’; the version ‘royal sheriffs’ was also given. De Casparis believes the term *mūrdhaka* denotes a leader of a certain group of people, and translates this word as ‘chief of’ (1956: 19–20, 37). But this interpretation is rather problematic. First, there is a lacuna in the inscription before this word. Second, it means ‘*ksatriya*’ in Sanskrit (Böhtlingk, T. V. 1884, S. 95). On the contrary, in Old Javanese the term *mūrdha* has the Sanskrit origin meaning of ‘head, highest part, chief’ (Zoetmulder 1982: 1161). Therefore, the interpretation by De Casparis is probable, but not proven.

Tuhā an vatak=vuruh and *adhyāksī nīcavarīa* mean ‘surveyors of groups of workmen’ and ‘surveyors of low castes’; *vāsīkarana* is ‘cutler’ (De Casparis 1956: 20, 32, n. 6, 37, n. 8). The next three terms, *kumārāmātya*, *cātabhaḍa*, and *adhikarāia*, were not translated. Following M. De and K.P. Jayasval, De Casparis holds that *kumārāmātya* means ‘the minister of non-royal blood, but on account of merit considered by royal decree as an equal of a prince’ (1956: 20). The translation of *amātya* as ‘minister’ seems to be unconvincing. It is more likely ‘an associate, a companion’ (Leliukhin 2001: 23–24). The other terms of the TB-2 list do not cause special difficulties. ‘We meet there with clerks (*kāyastha*), architects (*sthāpaka*), shippers (*puhāvam*), merchants (*vaīyāga*), commanders (*pratisāra*), royal washermen (*marsī hāji* if our translation is correct) and royal slaves (*hulun=hāji*)’ (De Casparis 1956: 20). At the same time, in the translation we find *sthāpaka* instead of ‘architects’ ‘sculptors’, and *puhāvam* instead of ‘shippers’ ‘naval captains’ (De Casparis 1956: 37).

Thus, the list of the TB-2 inscription was interpreted by De Casparis in detail. He also supposed that ‘the inscription consists of one extensive imprecation against all kinds of possible insurgents and traitors. So only those categories of people need be mentioned that might constitute a possible danger’ (De Casparis 1956: 20–21). He also wrote:

An interesting expression not yet known from the other Sriwijaya inscriptions is *huluntuhānku*, apparently meaning ‘my empire’ (lines 7, 11, 12, 14, 17 and 23); the literary meaning seems to be: ‘my slaves (*hulun*) and lords (*tuhān*)’, implying classification of the subjects into two large groups, either slaves and free man or, more probably, the common people and the ruling class, the former comprising also the population of the conquered territories (De Casparis 1956: 26).

On the same page De Casparis translated the term *kadātuan* as ‘*kraton*’. But on page 18 he noticed that *kadātuan* means ‘empire’ as a whole that is divided into the great number of *mandalas*. So the meaning of the Old Javanese term ‘*kēraton*’ (royal residence) cannot be applied to *kadātuan*. According to De Casparis, the relation between the *dātu* and *kadātuan* was not direct: the former ruled a *mandala*. On the contrary, Coedès held that the king appointed as *dātu* everyone over whom a *kadātuan* should rule (Coedès 1930: 54)). As De Casparis translated two different Old Malay words only by the term ‘empire’, his theory seems to contain an inner contradiction. It should be emphasised, however, that the term *huluntuhānku* ‘my slaves and lords’ refers to private connections (bonds) between the ruler and his subjects,

instead of the territorial or other formal connections. Van Naerssen and de Jongh considered *kraton* and *kadātuan* as synonyms meaning ‘the place of the ruler’ (Van Naerssen and de Jongh 1977: 17, 27). In any case, De Casparis offered the first detailed theory of Sriwijayan political organisation.

I will summarise some recent conceptions of Sriwijaya as a Southeast Asian polity before giving my own analysis. The most famous of these theories belongs to Prof. Wolters. On the grounds of Braudel’s structuralism, Tambiah’s ‘galactic polity’, an Indian idea of *mandala*, and Heine-Geldern’s conception of the god-king, Wolters offered the *mandala* theory:

The map of earlier Southeast Asia which evolved from the prehistoric networks of small settlements and reveals itself in historical records was a patchwork of often overlapping *mandalas*, or ‘circles of kings’. In each of these *mandalas*, one king, identified with divine and ‘universal’ authority, claimed personal hegemony over the other rulers in his *mandala* who in theory were his obedient allies and vassals... In practice, the *mandala* (a Sanskrit term used in Indian manuals of government) represented a particular and often unstable political situation in a vaguely definable geographic area without fixed boundaries and where smaller centres tended to look in all directions for security. *Mandalas* would expand and contract in concertina-like fashion. Each one contained several tributary rulers, some of whom would repudiate their vassal status when the opportunity arose and try to build up their own networks of vassals. Only the *mandala* overlord had the prerogative of receiving tribute-bearing envoys; he himself would dispatch officials who represented his superior status (Wolters 1982: 16–17).

In Wolters’ theory, the term *mandala* denotes relations within the polity, i.e. its inner structure. Without reservation, Wolters characterised Sriwijaya as a *mandala* (1982: 17, 22f.). He also did not use other terms of political vocabulary to describe Sriwijaya. But Wolters did not account for the rare usage of the word *mandala* in the available epigraphic data, since he did not study them.

The only example of the use of this word is in the Telaga Batu-2 inscription (TB-2), and it precludes any application of Wolters’ theory to Sriwijaya. The phrase *sakalamaīḍalāña kadātuanku* ‘you, who protect all the provinces of my *kadātuan*’ refers to small-sized territories (De Casparis 1956: 35). The term *mandala* never occurred together with the name *Sriwijaya*. But we find the expressions ‘*kadātuan Sriwijaya*’ in the inscriptions from Kedukan Bukit, Kota Kapur, Palas Pasemah and Bungkuk and ‘*vanua Sriwijaya*’ in the texts from Kota Kapur and Karang Brahi (Nilakanta Sastri 1949: 113–116; Sriwijaya 1992: VII). Therefore the polity of Sriwijaya cannot convincingly be defined as a *mandala* in Wolters’ sense of the word.

Wolters tries to turn the Sanskrit term *mandala* into a generic concept to define local polities.² But this enterprise seems to be doubtful, as the term denotes geopolitical interrelations between Indian political formations, and not an inner political structure. In the available texts of the Sriwijaya polity, *mandala* means a small unit, but not the political situation in Sriwijaya as a whole. Thus, one may reject Wolters’ hypothesis.

² Craig Reynolds observed that the term *mandala* in Wolters’ theory ‘is a hermeneutic aid, not a thing’ (1995: 427), hence scholars can use it in the Southeast Asian context. I cannot agree with the conclusion. In addition to the arguments cited above, I should emphasise that a scientific approach needs concepts with strict sense and meaning, whereas if the term *mandala* is ‘a hermeneutic aid’, it looks like an ideal type in the Weberian tradition. These ideal types are constructed arbitrarily by scholars but should derive from necessity and/or conceptualisation of actual phenomena.

Nevertheless, Wolters offered a far more interesting investigation of Chinese concepts concerning Sriwijaya. He discussed the texts of Chinese Buddhist pilgrim I-tsing, which described Sriwijaya in 671 and 689 by means of the Chinese term *kuo*. This term has been interpreted as ‘country’, ‘kingdom’ and ‘state’ by Chavannes, Takakusu, and Pelliot respectively. But Wolters noted that the term *kuo* was also applied to Funan, a mainland Southeast Asian polity. C. Jacques has shown that Funan was a conglomerate of chiefdoms but not a state (1979: 371–379). Thus as applied to Sriwijaya, these meanings of the term *kuo* are probable, although not necessary.

On the other hand, a *kuo* in the Chinese imperial histories may mean a specific place in the form of a ‘capital city’, says Wheatley, citing the example of the Langkasuka *kuo* in the Singora area on the Thai isthmus and considered the word *kuo* in this instance to mean ‘capital’ or simply ‘city’, and he goes on to define quite precisely the nature of the political unit involved as ‘a polity in which a focally situated settlement exercised direct control over a restricted peripheral territory and exacted whatever tribute it could an indefinite region beyond’ (Wolters 1986: 16; Wheatley 1983: 233).

Wolters holds that the Chinese pilgrims knew not only their own Chinese political and geographical vocabulary but also Indian geographical concepts. I-tsing’s predecessor, Hsüan-tsang (c. 596–664), adopting the Indian conventions, wrote that India was ‘divided into seventy and more *kuo*’. This traveller ‘reserves the term *kuo* for smaller territorial units, corresponding with political ones and situated within the large areas signified by ‘the regions’ of the Five Indias’ (Wolters 1986: 16). I-tsing follows the same usage but prefers to speak about ‘the lands’ of the Five Indias. He also knows some other *kuo*, e.g. the Tāmralipti *kuo* was between sixty and seventy *yojana* east of Nālandā, the famous Buddhist monastery situated in the east of India (Wolters 1986: 17). Wolters offered the translation of the term *kuo* as ‘polity’. It is a neutral term and begs no question about its institutional form (Wolters 1986: 17). Another Chinese term used to refer to Indonesian territorial units is *chou*, a synonym of a Sanskrit word *dvīpa* ‘land bordering on the sea’ and ‘island’ (Wolters 1986: 17–18).

Thus, Sriwijaya is described by I-tsing as *kuo*. But there is one note in the text of *Mūlasarvāstivāda-ekaṣatakarmān*: ‘Malayu *chou* has now become one of Sriwijaya’s many *kuo*’ (Wolters 1986: 18). Malayu was also characterised as *kuo* when I-tsing visited it in 672 (Wolters 1986: 19). Kedah, situated on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula, was a *kuo* and was dependent on Sriwijaya (Wolters 1986: 19). Hence the term *kuo* does not have an exact political dimension, as it could denote quite different political units. Therefore, one cannot refer to it as a strict definition of Sriwijaya’s polity.

One of the most influential historians who studied the political organisation of Sriwijaya was Kulke (1991; 1993). He offered the evolutionistic scheme ‘chiefdom – early kingdom – empire / imperial kingdom’ in 1986 (cf. Reynolds 1995: 428). Kulke focused on the study of spatial concepts mentioned in the relevant inscriptions. He tried to establish regions with different degree of central power and functions of officials. Following Wolters and Tambiah, Kulke believed Sriwijaya was a classical example of the concentric state in Southeast Asia. He developed an influential theory by analysing some terms of the TB-2 inscription: *kadātuan*, *vanua*, *samaryyāda*, *mandala*, and *bhūmi*.

Kulke asserted that the *vanua* of the inscriptions was ‘the semi-urban area of Sriwijaya’ where a Buddhist monastery, *vihara*, was located. The term *samaryyāda* referred to the neighbouring region beyond the *vanua* Sriwijaya as it means ‘having the same boundaries’ (*maryyāda*) (Kulke 1991: 9). Wolters’ preferred *mandala* referred to autonomous and semi-

autonomous principalities and chiefdoms at the periphery of later imperial kingdoms (Kulke 1991: 10).

Apart from providing us with a conceivable model of an early concentric state, Sriwijaya also provided us with the first generic term of such a state....Coedès, De Casparis, and Boehari regarded *vanua*, *kadātuan*, and *huluntuhān* as such a comprehensive term and translated them accordingly as ‘le pays’, ‘empire’, or ‘kingdom’. But, according to my interpretation, none of these expressions had a comprehensive spatial connotation in the context of early Sriwijaya (Kulke 1991: 10).

Instead, Kulke offered the term *bhūmi* as this generic concept. He grounded this idea by means of the following reasoning:

It [the term] occurs twice in Sriwijaya’s inscription. One instance is in a more or less identical passage found in all the *mandala* inscriptions, which threatened the disloyal ‘people inside the land (that is) under the order of *kadātuan* (*uran di dalanña bhūmi ājñāna kadātuan-ku*). As this passage occurs only in the *mandala* inscriptions it has to be inferred that the places where they have been found either constituted a *bhūmi* or formed part of a larger polity which was called *bhūmi*. Although the first meaning cannot be excluded, two other references make the latter connotation of *bhūmi* more likely in the context of early Indonesian history. The first of these references comes from the important passage of the Kota Kapur inscription of the year 686 which announces the departure of an army expedition against *bhūmi jāva*, which had not yet become submissive to Sriwijaya. The other evidence of a *bhūmi* polity comes from several inscriptions of the late ninth and early tenth-century Java that refer to *bhūmi* Matarām. As in the case of *bhūmi* Java and *bhūmi* Matarām, the Sriwijayan concept of ‘the *bhūmi* under the control of my *kadātuan*’ apparently referred to the whole sphere that had come under the control of Sriwijaya (Kulke 1991: 10–11).

Kulke’s hypothesis appears to have some serious drawbacks. First, the name ‘Sriwijaya’ never occurs alongside the term *bhūmi*, whereas, as cited above, we find the expressions ‘*kadātuan Sriwijaya*’ in the inscriptions from Kedukan Bukit, Kota Kapur, Palas Pasemah and Bungkuk and ‘*vanua Sriwijaya*’ in the texts from Kota Kapur and Karang Brahi (Nilakanta Sastri 1949: 113–116; *Sriwijaya* 1992: VII). Second, all the passages mentioned by Kulke may be interpreted by means of the main Sanskrit meaning of the word *bhūmi*: ‘land, soil’. Therefore it is not necessary to imply that the term has a specific political form. Third, one has no grounds to believe that *bhūmi jāva* was considered as the arch-rival rival of Sriwijaya with the same political structure. The expression *bhūmi jāva* probably means no more than a ‘land of Java’.³

According to Kulke, Sriwijaya was the first Indonesian state that succeeded in extending its direct political authority beyond its own *vanua* into the *samaryyāda* hinterland and to conquer even far-off powerful chieftaincies and trade emporia (e.g. Malayu and Kedah) and to establish some sort of hegemony over these outer *mandala* (1991: 11). This hegemony was ensured by a ‘fairly developed staff of “administrators”, the *huluntuhān*’. Nevertheless, such an interpretation of the Old Malay word is very strange, as one must remember that Sriwijaya’s control over its own subjects was weak, as I will explain below.

³ In Old Javanese *bhūmi* means ‘the earth, the world; ground; land; basis’ (Zoetmulder 1982: 271), and has no political connotations.

Kulke summarised his ideas this way:

...Early Sriwijaya was neither an empire nor a chieftaincy but a typical Early kingdom, characterised by a strong centre and surrounded by a number of subdued but not yet annexed (or 'provincialised') smaller polities. The unique feature of Sriwijaya's future development was its peculiarity that it never succeeded, or perhaps even never tried, to change this structure of its *bhūmi* polity ... In fact, one may even argue that the longevity and the flexible greatness of Sriwijaya was based on the very non-existence of those structural features which historians regard as a prerequisite of a genuine empire (Kulke 1993: 176).

The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia contains two different conceptions of the political organisation of Sriwijaya. Taylor thinks Sriwijaya is a generic term for the succession of thalassocracies centred in southeastern Sumatra from the seventh to the fourteenth centuries, with the inscriptions of the seventh century showing the origin of the Sumatran polity as a 'pyramidal network of loyalties among Malay rulers' (Taylor 1999: 173–174). Taylor develops Bronson's thesis (1979) combining it with Wolters' views on the nature of *mandala*. He also does not apply the concept of 'empire' to Sriwijaya. On the contrary, Hall asserts that Sriwijaya must be characterised as an empire. 'The creation of this realm was a political feat achieved not simply by force but, of equal importance, by the adroit merging of both local Malay and imported and adapted Buddhist symbols of power and authority' (Hall K. 1999: 197). Thus, one and the same phenomenon was interpreted in different and opposing ways.

In 1990 some scholars introduced the concept of port-polity to describe the political structure of ancient and medieval Southeast Asia. It appears to be a variety of the well-known city-state idea which is often used to conceptualise the data on Sumer and Ancient Greece and Rome. Kathirithamby-Wells is one of those who has viewed Sriwijaya as a port-polity (1990: 3, 4). Wisseman Christie held that the first Southeast Asian states arose in the 3rd century BC long before the penetration of Indian influence into the region (1990: 39–60). She also doubted that Sriwijaya was an empire and noted that 'in the last analysis, perhaps the sole *necessary* criterion for defining a polity as a true 'state' is the fact that its members so regard it, that they view themselves as members of a political rather than a purely tribal unity' (Wisseman Christie 1990: 50). But she assumed that this criterion cannot be verified on the archeological data. She argued in favour of trade as the basic factor of the genesis of the state, but the existence of a state without government, in the form of administrative personnel, is highly doubtful. We also cannot prove its existence in the third century BC in Southeast Asia by referring only to the evidence of exchange/trade relations. These relations are not inextricably interwoven with the state formation as, e.g. the tin producers of ancient Britain had not such political organisation. Thus, Wisseman Christie's dating of the first Southeast Asian states seems to be unconvincing.

Wisseman Christie later changed her views on early history of Southeast Asia (1995). She adopts Claessen's and Skalnik's definition of the state. They define it as:

a centralized sociopolitical organization for the regulation of social relations in the complex, stratified society divided into at least two basic strata, or emergent social classes—viz. the rulers and the ruled—whose relations are characterized by political dominance of the former and tributary relations of the latter, legitimized by a common ideology of which reciprocity is the basic principle' (Claessen and Skalnik 1978: 640).

Wisseman Christie analyses the Old Malay terminology of the TB-2 inscription more attentively than did Wolters, Hall, or Kulke. She thinks Sriwijaya was a multi-port state

(Wisseman Christie 1995: 272). Wisseman Christie criticises Wolters and Kulke for their passion for the word *mandala*, since it occurs once only, in the TB-2 inscription, with the meaning ‘provinces or territories under the control of the palace’ (1995: 267–268). She agrees with De Casparis’ interpretation of the term *huluntuhān* as ‘empire’. Wisseman Christie notes that this meaning covers all of the uses of the term and emphasises the political relationships rather than the geography of the state of Sriwijaya (1995: 267, n. 2; 268). She also adopts Bronson’s ‘dendritic’ model of exchange (Bronson 1977: 42f.) for her classification of states. Wisseman Christie believed that there were both one-port polities and many-port polities. She was probably elaborating on Wolters’ earlier thesis that Sriwijaya was a federation of ports. Certainly, her view has much in common with Kathirithamby-Wells’s ideas. But as Wisseman Christie’s classification is connected with Claessen’s and Skalnik’s definition of the early state, she needs to verify the existence of the state, rather than the existence of ports or trade. Unfortunately, she cannot use Claessen to do so, as he does not hold that Sriwijaya, as the unity of its *kadātuan* and the vassal lands, constitutes a state (1995: 444). He asserts that the concept of the state is applicable only to the Sriwijayan *kadātuan*. Claessen refers on the argument proven by Hall that the control of the Sriwijaya ruler was weak outside the *kadātuan*. Claessen supposes that Sriwijaya as a whole was no more than a conglomeration of ‘mutually cooperating, fairly independent regions scattered over a large area of the Indonesian archipelago’ (1995: 444). Thus, one may conclude that defining the political organisation of Sriwijaya remains an open question. One of the causes of this historiographic problem appears to be controversy surrounding the criteria for the existence of the state.

More recently Manguin describes Sriwijaya by means of the city-state concept (2000; 2002; 2004). Manguin asserts that Bronson’s ‘dendritic’ model is a ‘schematic representation of the hierarchic upstream–downstream organization of settlements’ (2000: 413, fig. 2). Manguin follows Kulke’s views that Sriwijaya is a *bhūmi* polity. He rejects explicitly the applicability of the predicate ‘empire’ to it (Manguin 2000: 411–412, fig. 1). Manguin holds that Sriwijaya contained more than one harbour-centred city-state. Thus, one may conclude that the dominant modern historiographic tradition has renounced the view of Sriwijaya as an ‘empire’, but that Hall is the exception, in that he believes Sriwijaya may be interpreted in a classical way as an ‘empire’.

I would like to utilise all the available reliable data to define the political organisation of Sriwijaya. In the first place, a polity is a political organisation of certain form. Political organisation is a system of institutions taking part within a political process (or policy). The latter consists of relationships of power, i.e. the attitude of influence, implying compulsion/coercion or another type of sanction. The existence of this attitude is constant, but its distribution varies depending on space and time. An institution is a reciprocal typification of habitual actions by different actors. Policy is one of the components of society, where society is ‘the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand’ (Marx 1973: 265). This sum of interrelations is not given directly; hence any society is partly conceivable as a unity as it is constructed by imagination, and by the transcendental unity of apperception. Thus, the polity as a political organisation of the society is also a conceivable or thinkable unity. Therefore one must pay attention to the ways of conceptualising manifold sets of relationships, ties, and attitudes. The historian has to analyse his/her own way of thinking, and the ways of thinking used by the people under examination, to achieve a deeper synthesis of the data.

If one describes a political organisation by means of the concept of the state, then one must define what the state is. But there are a lot of definitions of the state, as well as of other political forms. The variety of approaches is probably a result of the diversity of social relationships and of the differences between actors taking part in such relationships. These actors act in the world, which is constructed during primary socialisation through conceptualisation of diverse relations, into which an individual is included, by means of

language protocols. Thus these language protocols are already constructed and consequently constitute pre-constructions for any given individual. At the same time, the relevant phenomena continue to exist only as a result of the activity of individuals who have internalised these pre-constructions. And since the mastering of the data proceeds differently in various conditions and in view of varying abilities of actual people, the social order is characterised by ongoing changes. They also require conceptualisation and internalisation that leads to constant transformations of all the components of the human world (for more detail see Berger and Luckmann 1966). Thus, different interpretations of the state exist as pre-constructions in relation to historians who intend to study some phenomena from the point of view of their own political organisation.

In analysing Sriwijaya, I would like to apply some definitions of the state and of 'chiefdom' to the available data. These definitions play the role of pre-constructions as they were elaborated by the other scholars and exist independently of my intentions and wishes. The definitions of the state given below will be used as working hypotheses. Consequently, the discrepancy between them and the empirical data does not imply their general fallaciousness. My research does not pretend to prove which of these definitions is true. I think it is more important to study how theoretical constructions 'work' in the mind of scholars forming *eo ipso* their ways of perception, thinking, and action (*habitus*, according to Bourdieu) in contemporary social order, including construction of history.

In the case of Sriwijaya, we know of nine complete Old Malay inscriptions of this polity; Sriwijaya also is mentioned in the Sanskrit Ligor inscription found on the Malaccan peninsula, dated to 775 CE De Casparis published some fragmentary records (1956: 1–15). With the sole exception of the Kota Kapur inscription, all the other complete Old Malay texts were discovered in the area of Palembang on Sumatra. Three inscriptions are dated to 682 CE (Kedukan Bukit), 684 CE (Talang Tuwo), and 686 CE (Kota Kapur). The most important text is the Telaga Batu-2 inscription (TB-2). Based on the TB-2 inscription, one may conclude that Sriwijaya had administrative personnel, as this text mentions a lot of posts. But how was the polity organised and how did its administration function? First of all, the TB-2 inscription contains primarily a curse on all perjurers. As K. Hall has shown, the punishment is carried out by the ruler himself in the TB-2 inscription, whereas in the other-mentioned sources this action must be realised by a deity. Thus, the power of the Sriwijayan king was direct near the centre of his domain whereas the king was forced to emphasise the more theoretical and mythical aspects of his kingship in the hinterland, because there his power would seem to have been less direct (Hall 1976: 69).

The ruler of Sriwijaya is often named not only *hāji* 'king' and *dapunta hiyang* 'god-king' but also *dātu* 'chief'. *Dātu* is a traditional Malay title. It is mentioned in the Sriwijayan inscriptions and is applied to different people dependent on the *dātu* of Sriwijaya. Thus, the latter was *primus inter pares*. It seems very doubtful that the officials at the centre of Sriwijaya controlled all vassal lands directly, as the Kota Kapur inscription mentions only the *dātu* of Sriwijaya and the other *dātu* who recognised his power, but no officials (Sriwijaya 1992: 54–56). The king of Sriwijaya is also called *bhūpati* in the Ligor inscription (Nilakanta Sastri 1949: 120). The term *bhūpati* can be found in the TB-2 inscription and is translated by De Casparis as 'chief'. Hence, still in the 8th century the monarch of Sriwijaya probably remained the first among equals. Side A of the Ligor record mentions no officials, and the main actors are the ruler of Sriwijaya and *sāmantarāja* and *sāmantanōpa*, 'neighbouring kings' (Nilakanta Sastri 1949: 120).⁴ The Sriwijayan monarch also bears some other titles, including *nōpa*, *nōpati*, and *indrarājā*, in this text (Nilakanta Sastri 1949: 120). Finally, the inscriptions of this polity

⁴ Coedès proved that the side B of the Ligor inscription was not a continuation of the side A since the former does not mention Sriwijaya and the ruler bears completely different titles *mahārāja* and *rājādhirāja* (Sriwijaya 1992: 103–111).

contain only one means of its protection from any internal enemy – the curse to the perjurers. The Old Malay phrase *nivunuh kāmū sumpah* ‘you will be killed by this curse’ is found twenty five times in the TB-2 inscription. The same content is met with five other texts of Sriwijaya: Karang Brahi, Kota Kapur, Palas Pasemah, Karanganyar, and Boom Baru (Dorofeeva 2001: 39). Hence, the presence of management personnel does not imply the integration of all territories under the power of uniform administration.

How did the inhabitants of Sriwijaya conceptualise their own political organisation? De Casparis has translated the term *huluntuhānku* as ‘my slaves and lords’ and has interpreted it as ‘my empire’. In any case, the term refers to private connections (bonds) between the ruler and his subjects, instead of territorial or other formal connections. We find the expressions ‘*kadātuan Ḷrīvijaya*’ in the inscriptions from Kedukan Bukit, Kota Kapur, Palas Pasemah and Bungkok, and ‘*vanua Ḷrīvijaya*’ in the texts from Kota Kapur and Karang Brahi (Nilakanta Sastri 1949: 113–116; *Sriwijaya* 1992: VII). *Kadātuan* is etymologically a place/residence of *dātu*, hence this term probably refers in this context to the domain of the Sriwijayan ruler. *Vanua* means ‘community, inhabited land and country’ (Kullanda 1995: 217; Kullanda 1992: 80–81). This term occurs only once in the TB-2 inscription, in the expression ‘*dī samaryyādapatha dī vanua*’, translated as ‘the frontier regions of my empire’ by De Casparis (1956: 41, 34). But he offered the same meaning to two other Old Malay words, namely *kadātuan* and *huluntuhānku*. Thus, his interpretation gives no possible way of preserving any linguistic peculiarities of the original words. The terms *kadātuan* and *huluntuhānku* are found much more frequently in the Sriwijayan epigraphy. As the ruler of Sriwijaya was a *dātu*, the term *kadātuan* could hardly be applied to all people who were dependent on him. The TB-2 inscription mentions some people ‘who attack my *kadātuan*’ (*urāi ārambha kadātuanku*) and some threats ‘to destroy my *kadātuan*’ (De Casparis 1956: 33, 39–40). As the word *Sriwijaya* is met with only in combination with the terms *kadātuan* and *vanua*, it seems to be quite probable that the authors of these records did not need a special way to designate the unity of *kadātuan* and the dependent lands.

Wright writes: ‘In contrast to a developed chiefdom, a state can be recognised as a cultural development with a centralised decision-making process which is both externally specialised with regard to the local processes which it regulates, and internally specialised in that the central process is divisible into separate activities which can be performed in different places at different times’ (Wright 1977: 383). This interpretation of the state may be formulated more simply: internal specialisation is present as a differentiated administration, or system of government, in which separate functions of government are allotted to certain positions/posts. The aggregate of these positions forms the staff of officials. As the TB-2 inscription contains a list of officials bringing the oath to the Sriwijayan ruler, one may conclude that the *kadātuan* was a state, according to Wright’s definition. But the unity of the *kadātuan* and the subjected lands could not constitute a state since the officials of the former did not control the latter (see above).

Engels thought that the state is ‘the organisation of the possessing class for its protection against the non-possessing class’. It is characterised by the existence of territorial division, public power separated from people, taxes, and also a professional army (the apparatus of coercion) (Engels 1972). First, the existence of slaves in the Marxist sense of the word in Sriwijaya appeared to be probable as we know of the term *hulun*, with such a meaning. But the word *huluntuhānku* ‘my slaves and lords’ covers all people subjected to the Sriwijayan ruler. One fragmentary inscription found near Palembang contains a curious expression *netā maddāsasenāyāō* ‘commander of an army of my slaves’ (De Casparis 1956: 6). Certainly, history gives good examples of armies consisting of slaves, e.g. the janissaries, but in the case of Sriwijaya this meaning seems to be unconvincing, as the list of the TB-2 inscription enumerates diverse titles and professions such as ‘merchant’ (*vāīyāga*), and the same

inscription shows the applicability of the word *huluntuhānku* to all these people. Thus, class differentiation in Sriwijaya was not strong. One also may recall the role of clan connections in this polity as it was evident from the widespread term *gotra* ‘clan’.

Secondly, territorial division could exist because we know the terms *mandala* and *deça* which were translated by De Casparis as ‘province’ and ‘region’ respectively (see above). But it remains unknown how these territories were organised and whether the monarch and the polity of Sriwijaya took part in their formation. I also have noted that the word *deçādhyaksa* is not mentioned in the Sriwijayan epigraphy. Hence, it is quite problematic to use territorial division as an attribute of the state in the case of Sriwijaya.

We know almost nothing of the existence of finance in Sriwijaya. The Chinese text of Chau Ju-kua, dated to the thirteenth century, contains a negative mention: ‘Local people ... pay neither a rent payment-*ch’iu*, nor the land tax-*fu*’ (translation of M. Ulianov) (Chau Ju-kua 1996: 143). It is difficult to say how far as this information can be extrapolated to earlier periods. K Hall holds that the king was connected with taxes, by referring to the idiom *dandaku danda* of the TB-2 inscription. De Casparis interpreted this idiom as ‘are fined by me with a fine’, but omitted it in his translation of the inscription (De Casparis 1956: 27, 42; Hall 1976: 80). De Casparis, however, pointed out that this phrase differs greatly from the main intention of the graver sentences which ‘almost always pronounced a death sentence against most criminals’. It also should be emphasised that only the TB-2 inscription contains this quite strange idiom. In any case, a fine is not tax.

As the TB-2 inscription mentions ‘an army which will undertake a punitive expedition’ (De Casparis 1956: 46, 45), one would conclude that Sriwijaya was a state, according to Engels’ definition. But what was this army and what were the principles of its organisation? Such knowledge is contained only in some Chinese chronicles. Certainly, these sources are dated to later times, but one may rely on them in this respect since all medieval maritime Malay societies enjoyed homogeneous economies based on trade and piracy. Chau Ju-kua writes: ‘The people either lived scattered about outside the city, or on the water on rafts of boards covered over with reeds, and these are exempt from taxation. They are skilled at fighting on land or water. When they are about to make war on another state they assemble and send forth such a force at the occasion demands. They (then) appoint chiefs and leaders, and all provide their own military equipment and the necessary provisions. In facing the enemy and craving death they have not their equal among nations’ (Hirth and Rockhill 1911: 60f.; Nilakanta Sastri 1949: 88–89). Chou-k’ü-fei, whose monograph is dated to 1178, refers to the same people’s custom to appoint chiefs and leaders (Ferrand 1922: 16). Hence the Sriwijaya’s monarch did not have the monopoly on armed forces: the people were an army in one and the same time. Thus, Sriwijaya cannot be described as a state according to its definition by Engels.

Johnson and Earle think the state – in contrast of the chiefdom – is a regionally-organised society whose population number in the hundreds of thousands or millions, and that such states are often economically and ethnically diverse (1987: 246). But the weakness of links between the *kadātuan* of Sriwijaya and the polities of the other *dātus* provides no possibility for us to suppose that Sriwijaya had three levels of administrative control. Therefore, it was not a state within the bounds of Johnson’s and Earle’s theory. These scholars assume that the forerunner of the state is the chiefdom. The latter has two basic forms: simple and complex. Following Carneiro, Johnson and Earle define the chiefdom as ‘regional system integrating several local groups within a single polity’ (1987: 207). The simple chiefdom differs from the complex one by the quantity of population. It includes from one to several thousand people whereas the complex chiefdom numbers already tens of thousands of people. Johnson and Earle write:

Within the chiefdom, the regional organization is based on an elite class of chiefs, often considered descendants of the gods, who are socially separated and ritually marked. The organization is explicitly conceived as a kin-based community-like organization expanded into a regional governing body. The chiefs are related to each other through descent and marriage, and the idioms of kinship and personal bonds remain central in the political operation of the chiefdom (Johnson and Earle 1987: 208).

Since the Kedukan Bukit inscription mentions an army of twenty thousand men and I-tsing refers to one thousand Buddhist monks in Sriwijaya, one may conclude that this polity numbered (at least at certain points of time) tens of thousands of people (Coedès 1964: 25; Takakusu 1896: XXXIV). The role of personal bonds within Sriwijaya is attested by the oath-taking ceremony, with the implication that the curse attached the only means of protecting the polity from internal enemies. As the ruler of Sriwijaya is called ‘the Lord of the Mountain’ and ‘the *Mahārāja* of the Isles’ in some Arabian texts, K. Hall concluded that the Sriwijayan ruler had magical control over the waters (1976: 85). The monarch also was responsible for fertility and plenty of his country. Chao Ju-Kua notes that the ruler of Sriwijaya could not eat grain on a specific day of the year for fear of the weather being dry, and grain expensive for the next year. He adds that this monarch could not have to wash in ordinary water to avoid a flood (Chao Ju-Kua 1996: 144). In the Talang Tuo inscription the ruler of Sriwijaya expressed his anxiety over all the difficulties facing the realm, and wished prosperity and wealth to all people under his rule and to all the country (Nilakanta Sastri 1949: 114; Hall. 1976: 89). All these examples show that he was ritually marked. Thus, one may describe Sriwijaya as a complex chiefdom, according to Johnson’s and Earle’s theory.

One of the most highly-regarded concepts of the state (more precisely, ‘the early state’) was advanced by Claessen and Skalnik. They define it as ‘a centralized sociopolitical organization for the regulation of social relations in the complex, stratified society divided into at least two basic strata, or emergent social classes – viz. the rulers and the ruled – whose relations are characterized by political dominance of the former and tributary relations of the latter, legitimized by a common ideology of which reciprocity is the basic principle’ (see above). Claessen thinks that its main features are a fixed territory, a minimum population of a few thousand persons, a production system providing a regular and reasonably stable surplus to maintain an aristocracy, an ideology legitimising the political and social hierarchy, and some sort of sacral position of the ruler (Claessen 1995: 444–445). These attributes may be found for the *kadātuan* of Sriwijaya, but with some questions. Were their inhabitants tribute-givers? They probably were, but we have only Chau Ju-kua’s negative answer and a strange mention of fines in the TB-2 inscription as evidence. Further, it is not obvious as to whether the surplus was regular and reasonably stable, since the archaeological evidence for Sumatra shows the absence of monumental temple architecture, one of the most famous features of medieval Java.

Weber defined the state as follows: ‘A compulsory political association with a continuous organization will be called a “state”, if, and insofar as, its administrative staff successfully claims the monopolisation of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its authority’ (Weber 1962: 119). As the monarch of Sriwijaya was only *primus inter pares*, and relied primarily on the oath-making ceremony, one cannot characterise Sriwijaya as a state following Weber’s conception. These observations also can be safely applied to Gellner’s theory of the state. He believed ‘the ‘state’ is that institution or set of institutions specifically concerned with the enforcement of order (whatever else they may also be concerned with)’ and ‘exists where specialized order-enforcing agencies, such as police forces and courts, have separated out from the rest of social life: they *are* the state’ (Gellner

1983: 4). Sriwijaya was not a state in this case since specialised organisations to keep order also were not in evidence.

While the concept of ‘empire’ was often applied to Sriwijaya, it denotes a more developed type of the statehood than, say, the early state. As one cannot describe Sriwijaya according to many of the possible concepts of the state, the concept of empire appears to be quite inadequate to conceptualise the empirical data on Sriwijaya.

Thus, the *kadātuan* of Sriwijaya may be characterised as a state if one adopts the theories of Wright and Kulke. Sriwijaya was not a state according to the theories of Engels, Weber, Gellner, Johnson and Earle. This polity was a complex chiefdom if one follows Johnson’s and Earle’s theory. Sriwijaya was probably an early state according to Claessen’s scheme, but this is disputable. The unity of the *kadātuan* of Sriwijaya and the dependent lands was not conceptualised by their inhabitants by means of general concepts, whereas Wolters’ and Kulke’s theories seem to have no ground. The ruler of Sriwijaya was *primus inter pares* and possessed, in the first instance, personal power.

Here I have accepted several concepts of the state as working hypotheses and compared them to the empirical data. Sriwijaya is well described by some of them and, on the contrary, cannot be characterised by others. The genesis of statehood in Southeast Asia can be represented differently depending on what approach a scholar assumes.

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