

Research Article

The Life of Tondo Kingdom in 9th Century: An Analysis of the Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna Inscription

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DOI: 10.23917/sosial.v6i1.6918

Abstract

The discovery of the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* inscription in 1989 has significantly altered perspectives on the historical and prehistoric periods within Philippine historiography, as well as on the influence of external cultures on the development of cultural practices in the Philippine archipelago during the precolonial era. The inscription was composed in Old Malay and incorporates several lexical items from Old Javanese, indicating the influence of Old Malay and Old Javanese cultures during the precolonial period in the Philippines. The *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* was issued by the Kingdom of Tondo in the year 900 CE (822 Saka). This study aims to examine the life of the people of the Tondo Kingdom in the 9th century through the lens of the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* inscription. The research employed historical methods and linguistic analysis with a qualitative approach. The inscription reflects a complex society with a hierarchical structure, as evidenced by titles such as *senāpati* and references to debt forgiveness, indicating the existence of an established legal and economic framework. From a linguistic perspective, the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* reveals substantial influence from Old Malay and Old Javanese cultures, particularly through the use of Old Javanese script and Sanskrit loanwords, suggesting strong trade and diplomatic interactions with other kingdoms such as Śrīvijaya and Medang. The term *sang pamgat mdang* clearly links Tondo Kingdom to the Medang Kingdom, while *senāpati di tunđu* underscores Tondo's local adaptation of administrative concepts originating from beyond the Philippine archipelago.

Keywords: *binatbát na tansô ng laguna inscription; laguna copperplate inscription; tondo kingdom; medang kingdom; kingdom srivijaya*

Abstrak

Penemuan Prasasti *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* pada tahun 1989 telah mengubah perspektif periode sejarah dan prasejarah dalam historiografi Filipina, serta dampak budaya luar terhadap perkembangan praktik budaya di kepulauan Filipina pada periode prakolonial. Prasasti tersebut dibuat dalam bahasa Melayu Kuno dan menggunakan beberapa kosakata dari bahasa Jawa Kuno, yang menunjukkan pengaruh budaya Melayu Kuno dan budaya Jawa Kuno selama periode prakolonial di Filipina. Adapun *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna*, dibuat oleh Kerajaan Tondo pada tahun 900 M (822 Saka). Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui kehidupan masyarakat Kerajaan Tondo pada abad ke-9 melalui Prasasti *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna*. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah metode sejarah dan analisis linguistik dengan pendekatan kualitatif. Prasasti ini mencerminkan masyarakat yang kompleks dengan struktur hierarki, yang dibuktikan melalui gelar seperti *senāpati* dan referensi mengenai pengampunan utang, menunjukkan adanya kerangka hukum dan ekonomi yang telah mapan. Dari segi linguistik, *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna*

menunjukkan pengaruh budaya Melayu Kuno dan Jawa Kuno yang signifikan, terutama melalui penggunaan aksara Jawa Kuno dan kata serapan dari Sangsekerta, yang mengindikasikan adanya interaksi perdagangan dan diplomatik yang kuat dengan kerajaan-kerajaan lain seperti Sriwijaya dan Medang. Istilah sang *pamgat mdang* secara jelas menghubungkan Kerajaan Tondo dengan Kerajaan Medang, sementara *senāpati di tuṅḍu n* menegaskan adaptasi lokal Kerajaan Tondo terhadap konsep administratif yang berasal dari luar kepulauan Filipina.

Kata Kunci: *binatbát na tansô ng laguna inscription; laguna copperplate inscription; kerajaan tondo; kerajaan medang; kerajaan sriwijaya*

Received: October 19th 2024 | Accepted: May 2nd 2025 | Available Online: May 7th 2025

Introduction

Philippine historiography before the early 1990s largely developed through narratives following the arrival of Spanish conquistadors and missionaries to the archipelago (Postma, 1992). This development is supported by Antonio Pigafetta's diary, which recounts his journey across the seas with Captain Ferdinand Magellan leading to the discovery of an archipelago in 1512, now known as the Philippines (Alderley, 1902). As a result, it was long believed that the literate period—the era in which writing was first used in the Philippine islands—began in the 16th century (Manuel, 1995). However, the discovery of the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* or Laguna Copperplate Inscription has significantly reshaped Filipino historians' and archaeologists' perspectives on the literate period in Philippine historiography.

The *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna*, discovered in 1989 in Laguna, Luzon Island, Philippines, dates to 900 CE (822 Saka) and was issued by the Kingdom of Tondo (Postma, 1992). The inscription records the settlement of a debt owed by an individual named *Namwran* and is written in Old Malay with elements of Sanskrit, Old Javanese, and Old Tagalog. Its discovery has compelled Filipino historians to confront complex questions regarding external cultural influences in shaping cultural practices in the Philippines. It also highlights the need for a paradigm shift in understanding the role of Old Malay and Old Javanese cultures in precolonial Philippine historiography (before 1512) (Clavé & Griffiths, 2022). The inscription demonstrates that writing was already present in the Philippine archipelago as early as the 9th century—much earlier than the previously assumed 16th century.

The *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* provides new insights into the historical interactions among maritime kingdoms in Southeast Asia during the 9th century. Particularly noteworthy is the use of the term *sang pangat·mdang*, which refers to the Medang Kingdom in Java, and '*senāpati di tuṅḍu n'*, which refers to a commander or leader in the Kingdom of Tondo (Morrow, 2001). These findings have sparked various speculations about the relationship between the Medang Kingdom in Java (Indonesia) and the Kingdom of Tondo in Luzon (Philippines). This speculation is supported by the use of *Kawi* script, reflecting the influence of Old Javanese culture in the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* (Postma, 1992). Additionally, the use of Old Malay in the inscription, similar to that found in the *Kedukan Bukit* Inscription from South Sumatra, suggests a cultural connection between the Śrīvijaya Kingdom and the Kingdom of Tondo (Clavé & Griffiths, 2022).

Throughout its history, the Medang Kingdom in Java was known for its extensive maritime trade, exerting influence over southern Thailand, the Kingdom of Tondo in the Philippines, and the Khmer Kingdom in Cambodia (Coedès, 1975). This influence is evidenced by depictions of *Borobudur ships* found in the reliefs of the Borobudur temple, a cultural legacy of the Medang Kingdom. These ships—double-outrigger sailing vessels made of wood—date back to the 8th and 9th centuries in Southeast Asia (Hornell,

1946). The Śrīvijaya Kingdom dominated maritime trade routes in the region, thus extending its cultural and economic influence to parts of the Philippine archipelago, including the Kingdom of Tondo (Clavé & Griffiths, 2022). The Kingdom of Tondo itself served as a major trading hub located in the northern delta of the Pasig River on Luzon Island. It managed to monopolize trade in Chinese goods across the Philippine islands, establishing itself as a dominant commercial power in the region (Scott, 1992). Within this context, the relationships between the Medang and Śrīvijaya Kingdoms and the Kingdom of Tondo are best understood through maritime and cultural interactions that introduced Old Malay and Old Javanese cultural influences into the Kingdom of Tondo (Postma, 1992). Consequently, the Kingdom of Tondo was capable of composing the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* in Old Malay, while also incorporating elements of Old Javanese vocabulary in the 9th century (Clavé & Griffiths, 2022). The influence of the Medang and Śrīvijaya Kingdoms thus had a significant impact on the social and cultural life of Tondo's society in the 9th century.

Previous research has already examined the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* inscription. One of the earliest studies was conducted by Antoon Postma (1992), titled *The Laguna Copper-Plate Inscription: Text and Commentary*. As an epigraphy and Philippine cultural expert, Postma conducted a thorough analysis of the text, including its translation and interpretation. His work laid a critical foundation for subsequent research by revealing that the inscription was not merely a local document but also demonstrated Old Javanese cultural influence through its script and use of Sanskrit vocabulary. Prior to Postma's analysis, the inscription had been considered a mysterious artifact discovered near the Lumbang River in Laguna, Philippines, in 1989, without any clear understanding of its content or context. Postma successfully decoded the text and confirmed that the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* is the oldest known written document in the Philippines, dating to 822 Saka or 900 CE.

A study was conducted by Benito Villareal (2022) in his study *The Laguna Copper-Plate Inscription: A Local Language-game Validation*. Villareal explored the linguistic relationship between Old Tagalog and Sanskrit in the inscription. His research aimed to understand how language interactions in the text reflect cultural exchanges and the potential adaptation of foreign vocabulary into local communication systems. This study offers a new perspective on how pre-Hispanic Filipino communities engaged in broader linguistic and cultural networks across Southeast Asia.

Another significant study was carried out by Elsa Clavé dan Arlo Griffiths (2022) in their work *The Laguna Copperplate Inscription: Tenth-Century Luzon, Java, and the Malay World*. They extended previous analyses by situating the inscription within the broader context of 9th-century Southeast Asian intercultural interactions. Their research examined the connections between the Old Tagalog-speaking communities in Luzon and the maritime kingdoms of Java (Medang) and the Malay world (Śrīvijaya). Their findings

emphasize that the inscription not only documents an economic transaction but also evidences political and cultural exchanges across the archipelago prior to Western colonialism. One of their main conclusions is that the script and language used in the inscription—*Kawi* script influenced by Sanskrit—point to a direct link with Old Javanese writing traditions, particularly those of the Medang Kingdom (Hindu Mataram).

However, prior studies have yet to fully explore the daily life and societal structure of the Kingdom of Tondo in the 9th century as revealed through the analysis of the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna*. This gap is particularly significant given that the inscription was produced under the influence of both the Medang and Śrīvijaya Kingdoms. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate more deeply the societal life of the Kingdom of Tondo in the 9th century by analyzing the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna*. With this objective in mind, the findings of this study are expected to offer a broader understanding of how the Medang and Śrīvijaya Kingdoms shaped social and cultural life in the Philippine archipelago at the time—specifically within the Kingdom of Tondo. This research aspires to contribute to the growing awareness of the historical and cultural influence exerted by the Medang and Śrīvijaya Kingdoms on the Kingdom of Tondo.

Method

This study employed the historical method with a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach served to construct knowledge statements grounded in a constructivist perspective, such as meanings arising from personal experience, social values, and historical context, with the aim of developing specific theories or patterns of understanding (Creswell, 1992). This approach focused on the lived experiences of research subjects within holistic and specific contexts, utilizing multiple methods to explore phenomena (Kusumastuti & Khoiron, 2019). It was particularly valuable for researchers seeking to understand the underlying meanings embedded in social phenomena (Adlin, 2013). Furthermore, the complex nature of data collection in qualitative research enhanced the quality of the study's findings (Lune & Berg, 2017). This approach has also been applied in historical science using the historical method (Gorman, 1992).

The historical method aimed to systematically uncover the complexity, meaning, events, and ideas of the past that have influenced and shaped current conditions (Kuntowijoyo, 2018). According to Sartono Kartodirdjo (1992), the historical method comprised a series of systematic steps, including: (1) heuristics; (2) source criticism; (3) interpretation; and (4) historiography. The first step, heuristics, focused on locating and collecting sources relevant to the research topic. The subsequent step, source criticism, involved evaluating the credibility and reliability of historical sources. Interpretation followed, consisting of the analysis and synthesis of historical data and facts through an objective lens. The final step in the historical method was historiography—the process of writing history based on sources that had been discovered, evaluated, selected, and critically analyzed—reflecting the researcher's competence in conducting the study.

The processes of source criticism and linguistic analysis in this study required a systematic approach to ensure analytical reliability and depth. Source criticism was conducted through textual content analysis to assess reliability, for instance, by comparing information on the socio-economic structure of the Tondo Kingdom found in the inscription with historical records from China, such as those from Chinese travelers referring to trade relations with “*Ma-i*” (believed to be a reference to the Kingdom of Tondo) (Herlina, 2020). Meanwhile, linguistic analysis focused on reading and interpreting the text written in *Kawi*, using Old Javanese script (Abidah, 2007). The initial step in this research involved transliterating the script into the Latin alphabet, guided by expert studies such as those by Antoon Postma, to ensure reading accuracy. This was followed by morphological and syntactic analyses to identify vocabulary in the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* inscription. Key terms such as *ginto* (gold) and *hutang* (debt) were examined to understand the belief system and economic structure of the Tondo Kingdom, while place names such as *Tundun* (Tondo Kingdom) and *Mdang* (Medang Kingdom) were traced to reconstruct trade networks. The influence of Sanskrit—evident in terms such as *waisākha* (the second month in the Hindu calendar)—as well as linguistic parallels with Old Malay and Old Javanese, served as evidence of cultural ties with other Southeast Asian kingdoms. The integration of source criticism and linguistic analysis enabled a historical reconstruction of 9th-century life in the Tondo Kingdom, including aspects of social hierarchy and economic activity.

Results

An Overview of the Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna

The *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna*, or the *Laguna Copperplate Inscription*, is a copper plate measuring approximately 20 by 30 centimeters (7.9 by 11.8 inches), inscribed with raised characters on its surface (Morrow, 2001). This inscription is discovered in 1989 by a laborer working near the mouth of the Lumbang River, in Wawa Village, Lumban City, Laguna Province, on Luzon Island, Philippines (Postma, 1992). Following the discovery, the inscription is translated and further analyzed in 1990 by Antoon Postma, a Dutch anthropologist also known for his research on the Hanunó’o script (Clavé & Griffiths, 2022). Prior to Postma’s involvement, the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* is temporarily sold on the antique market by local villagers in 1989. However, the artifact is eventually turned over to the National Museum of the Philippines in Manila in January 1990 after failing to attract buyers (Postma, 1992).

Initially, Antoon Postma assumes that the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* originates from Java (Indonesia), regarding it as a historical forgery potentially fabricated for Philippine political interests. However, this assumption is later proven to be incorrect. Postma elaborates on this in his scholarly article *The Laguna Copperplate Inscription: Text and Commentary* (1992).

"When I first examined the writing on the copperplate, I immediately assumed it came from Java (Indonesia) and had no relevance to the Philippines. This assumption was based on the use of Kawi script found on the inscription. I initially suspected it was a replica being promoted as a relic of precolonial Philippine heritage. However, upon deeper investigation, I identified clear differences from Javanese inscriptions. While inscriptions from Java generally concern tax exemptions on land granted by royal representatives (often kings) to beneficiaries, the Laguna inscription deals with debt repayment. Therefore, it is highly likely that this inscription is indeed authentic and originated in the Philippines, albeit influenced by Old Javanese and Old Malay cultures. I named it the Laguna Copperplate Inscription or Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna because it was found near Laguna de Bay, a lake located east of the Philippine capital (Manila), and it is made of copper."

Despite adopting a cosmopolitan lens in his analysis, Postma chooses to apply a local perspective, which he terms the "Tagalog Angle," to explore the sociocultural dimensions of the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* (Clavé & Griffiths, 2022). He also proposes the possibility of a relationship between the Kingdom of Tondo and the Medang Kingdom, based on evidence from the inscription—a point he presents during the *14th Congress of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association* held in Yogyakarta in 1990 (Komisariat Ikatan Ahli Arkeologi Indonesia, 1991). During the same forum, other researchers speculate about the influence of the Śrīvijaya Kingdom on the Kingdom of Tondo (Patanne, 1996). The conference further highlights the significance of the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* or *Laguna Copperplate Inscription* in the context of debt and credit systems in Southeast Asia during the Hindu-Buddhist period, especially given the inscription's content relating to debt resolution (Christie, 1998).

In a more recent study titled *Traces of Old Javanese Script and Old Malay Language in the Philippines*, Mega Yohana (2023) emphasizes the distinctiveness of the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* or *Laguna Copperplate Inscription* compared to inscriptions from Java. One of her significant findings is that the calendar system used in the Laguna inscription is less complex and less detailed than that of Javanese inscriptions. Inscriptions from the Medang Kingdom typically include comprehensive information such as the day, date, month, year, and astronomical positions, whereas the Laguna inscription merely records a basic date—Monday, the fourth day of the dark half of the moon, year 822 Saka—without further elaboration. This discrepancy suggests that, although the people of Luzon adopted the Saka calendar, its implementation is adapted to local contexts or reflects limited understanding of the more intricate Javanese calendrical conventions.

Furthermore, Yohana notes the absence of the Medang ruler's name (Dyah Balitung) in the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* or *Laguna Copperplate Inscription* as an anomaly. In the same historical period, inscriptions issued in vassal or allied regions of the Medang Kingdom typically mention the reigning Javanese monarch as a form of political acknowledgment. Another crucial aspect of Yohana's research is the multilingual and hybrid nature of the inscription's language. Unlike Javanese inscriptions, which are predominantly in *Kawi* with Sanskrit elements, the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* or *Laguna Copperplate Inscription* incorporates vocabulary from several languages: Sanskrit for legal and religious terms, Old Malay for administrative terminology, Old Javanese for sentence structure, and possibly Old Tagalog, although its full extent has yet to be identified. This linguistic blend reflects a process of cultural adaptation in which Luzon elites not only imitate the Javanese model but also develop a writing system that integrates foreign influences with local needs.

The Content of Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna

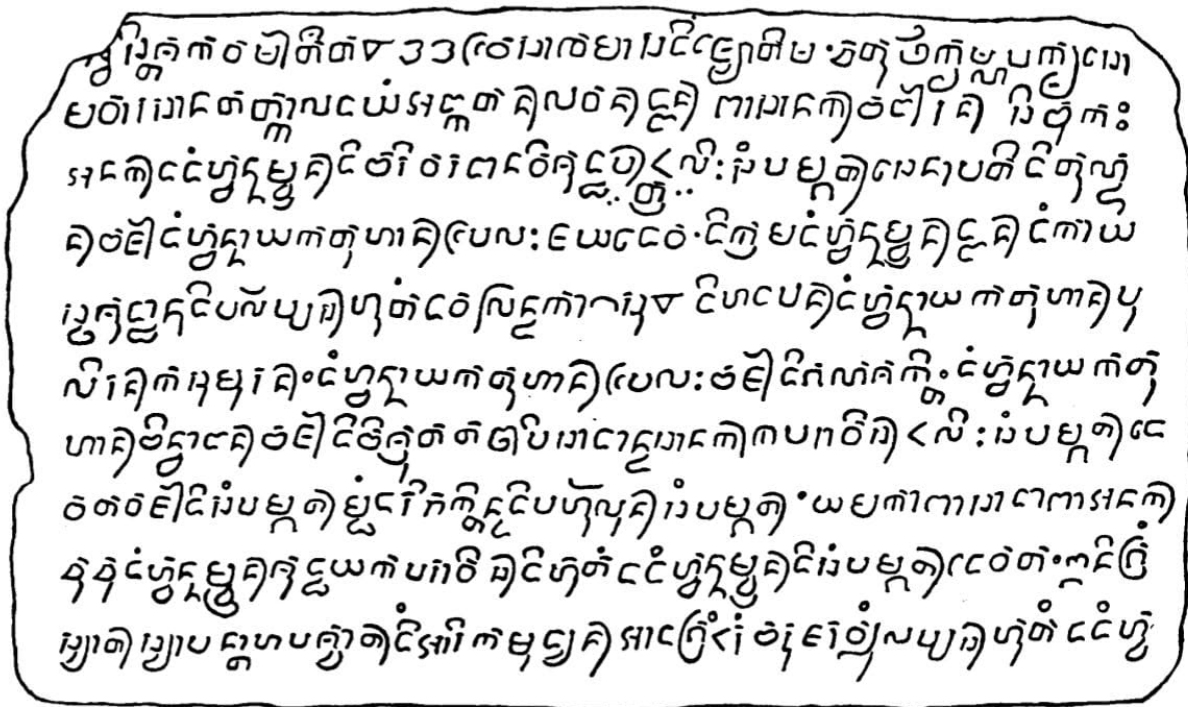


Figure 1. Transcription of the Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna by Antoon Postma

Source: *The Laguna Copper-Plate Inscription: Text and Commentary* (Postma, 1992)

Figure 1 displays the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna*, as transcribed by Antoon Postma (1992). The inscription appears on a rectangular copper plate with slightly rounded corners and an imprecise geometric form. The surface of the plate is uneven, showing signs of corrosion and weathering consistent with its age. The layout of the text reveals that the script is arranged in horizontal lines extending from left to right across

the plate. Although the number of lines is limited, the inscription is densely written. The transcription of the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* reads as follows.

(1) swasti śaka warṣātīta 822 waisākha māsa ding jyotiṣa, caturthi kṣṇapakṣa so (2) mawāra sāna tatkāla dayang Añkatan· lawan· dñan·ñā sānak· barnāran· si bukaḥ (3) Anak·da dang hwan namwran· dibari waradāna wi śuddhapātra Uliḥ sang pamgat· senāpati di tuṅdu (4) n· barjā dang hwan nāyaka tuhān· pailaḥ jayadewa, dikrama dang hwan namwran· dñan· dang kāya (5) stha śuddhā nu diparlappas· hutangda walānda kā 1 su 8 dihadapan· dang hwan nāyaka tuhān· pu (6) liran· kasumuran; dang hwan nāyaka tuhān· pailaḥ barjādī gaṇasakti, dang hwan nāyaka tu (7) hān· binwānan· barjādī biśruta tathāpi sādānya sānak· kaparāwis· Uliḥ sam pamgat· de (8) wata bar jādi sang pamgat· mḍang dari bhaktinda diparhulon· sang pamgat, ya makāñā sādāña Anak· (9) cucu dang hwan namwran· śuddha ya kaparāwis· dihutangda dang hwan namwran· di sang pamgat· dewata·ini grang (10) syāt· syāpantāha paścāt· ding Āri kamudyan· Āda grang Urang barujava wlung lappas· hutangda dang hwa ...

(1) Greetings! In the Saka year 822; the month of Waisakha; according to the calendar: the fourth day of the dark half of the moon; on (2) Monday. At that time, the noble lady Dayang, together with her brother, named Bukah, (3) the children of the Honorable Namwran, are granted special assistance, a document (inscription) of full release, by the Leader and Commander of Tundun , (4) representing the Leader of Pailah, Jayadewa. This signifies that the Honorable Namwran, through the respected Scribe, (5) is fully released from debt regarding the payment of 1 kati and 8 suwarna (weight in gold), in the presence of the Honorable Leader of Puliran, (6) named Kasumuran; the Honorable Leader of Pailah, named Ganasakti; and the Honorable Leader (7) of Binwangan, named Bisruta, along with all of Namwran's family. At the request of the Leader of Dewata (8) and the Leader of Medang, due to his loyalty as a servant, all descendants (9) of the Honorable Namwran are declared released from all debts owed by the Honorable Namwran to the Leader of Dewata. This inscription (10) is made so that if anyone, at any future time, claims that the Honorable Namwran's debt has not been settled... (in English translation)

The content of the inscription reflects a legal and ceremonial act involving debt remission, witnessed by various regional leaders, and highlights the integration of legal-administrative traditions influenced by Old Javanese, Old Malay, and Sanskrit terminology. It serves as primary evidence of a complex

socio-political and economic structure within the Kingdom of Tondo in the 9th century and illustrates the multicultural linguistic environment of the time.

Discussion

Analysis of the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* Inscription

The *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* Inscription can be understood as an official document declaring the settlement of a debt owed by the family and descendants of *Namwran*. The debt is settled by the highest-ranking leader of Tundun (the Tondo Kingdom), represented by *Jayadewa*, the ruler of *Pailah* (now Pila) (Postma, 1992). The debt involves a substantial amount of gold—one *kati* (617.6 grams) and one *suwarna* (38.6 grams)—making a total of 1.5 *kati*, or approximately 926.4 grams of gold. *Namwran*'s family is recognized as loyal servants to the ruler of Tondo, which prompts the Tondo authority to intervene in resolving the debt, which is owed to the regional ruler of Dewata (interpreted as the ruler of Mount Diwata, Mindanao, Philippines) (Abinales & Amoroso, 2005). Furthermore, *Namwran* has a daughter named *Bukah*, who serves as a court lady (*dayang*) in the Tondo Kingdom. The tenth and final line of the inscription appears to issue a warning to anyone who might challenge the authenticity of the document. However, the text ends mid-sentence, indicating that at least one other copperplate may have originally formed part of the complete *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* inscription (Postma, 1992).

The inscription features several notable individuals, including *Namwran*, *Bukah*, *Jayadewa*, *Kasumuran*, *Ganasakti*, and *Bisruta*. *Namwran* is identified as a loyal servant who has a daughter, *Bukah*, and owes a debt to the ruler of Dewata, believed to refer to Mount Diwata in Mindanao, Philippines (Abinales & Amoroso, 2005). While *Jayadewa* is identified as the leader of Tondo from the Pailah region, the others—*Kasumuran* (*Puliran*), *Ganasakti* (*Pailah*), and *Bisruta* (*Binwanan*)—are recognized as regional rulers, though historical details about them remain limited. This limitation stems from the scarcity of sources on precolonial Philippine historiography, which consists primarily of four materials: the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna*, Chinese travel records, Philippine ceramics from the Sa Huỳnh culture (750–100 BCE), and the travel accounts of European maritime explorers (Jocano, 1998).

Toponymic analysis of the inscription reveals identifiable locations: *Pailah*, *Tundun*, *Puliran*, *Binwanan*, *Dewata*, and *Mdang*. *Tundun* is interpreted as the Tondo Kingdom, situated at the northern coastal delta of the Pasig River, which flows into Manila Bay, Luzon (Patanne, 1996). *Pailah* is most commonly linked to the village of Paila in Norzagaray, Luzon (Postma, 1992), although it may also refer to Pailaha in North Sulawesi, Indonesia (Yohana, 2023). *Puliran* is associated with a location along the Angat River in Luzon (Postma, 1992). Postma (1992) also identifies *Binwanan* as referring to Binuangan village, at the mouth of the Bulacan River in Obando, Luzon. *Mdang* is linked to the Medang Kingdom of Java (Abinales & Amoroso, 2005), while *Dewata* corresponds to Mount Diwata near Butuan, Mindanao (Patanne, 1996).

The inscription features technical vocabulary in Sanskrit, commonly found in South and Southeast Asian epigraphy, along with Old Javanese honorific expressions. However, the dominant language is Old Malay, which includes several words closely related to Old Tagalog. Postma (1992) identifies several terms with parallels in Old Tagalog, including *anak* (child), *dayang* (court lady), *hadapan* (in the presence of others), *hutang* (debt), *lap(p)as* (released), *ngaran* (name), *pam(a)gat* (leader/official), and *tuhan* (a revered entity). Many of these also exist in Old Malay and Old Javanese—languages within the Austronesian family. Both Old Malay and Old Javanese extensively borrow Sanskrit vocabulary, often modifying spelling, affixing grammatical particles, and simplifying pronunciation for local usage (Coedès, 1975). The inscription includes Sanskrit-derived terminology, such as the argeoastronomical *vaisākha*, used to specify the month according to the Hindu calendar (Pechilis & Raj, 2013).

The use of Old Malay in the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* is strategic, as it serves as the lingua franca of maritime Southeast Asia during the period. This linguistic choice facilitates communication with rulers beyond the Philippine archipelago, particularly in trading contexts across *Panyupayana* (pre-Islamic Philippines) (Santarita, 2018). The use of Old Malay suggests that the inscription may have been issued by an external authority—potentially the Medang Kingdom in Java—with political or economic interests in the region (Postma, 1992). It is also plausible that a local figure burdened by significant gold debt appealed to foreign rulers for assistance in arranging formal debt relief (Clavé & Griffiths, 2022). Alternatively, the inscription may have been issued by the Śrīvijaya Kingdom of South Sumatra, given Old Malay's widespread use in regional trade and epigraphy (Yohana, 2023).

Several Old Javanese words also appear in the inscription, notably *ngaran* (name) and *pam(a)gat* (leader/official). The latter is a standard term in Old Javanese inscriptions, typically preceded by honorifics such as *sang*, and also appears five times in the Laguna inscription (Casparis, 1950). Interestingly, *pam(a)gat* also survives in both Old and modern Tagalog, signifying a person of influence or merit (Valerio, 2007). This suggests that the term functioned as a mark of respect for local elites during the Panyupayana period, reflecting Old Javanese cultural influence.

A detailed linguistic analysis of the inscription—especially in comparison with other Southeast Asian inscriptions—offers a deeper understanding of its features and allows reconstruction of the cultural-political networks linking Tondo with other polities in the 9th century. Paleographically, the *Kawi* script used in the inscription bears strong resemblance to writing systems developed in Java between the 8th and 10th centuries. The *Sukabumi* Inscription (804 CE) from East Java, for instance, features letter forms such as *ka*, *ga*, and *ta* that closely match those in the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* (Nastiti & Widyastuti, 2012). However, certain characters such as *ma* and *na* align more with styles found in 7th-century Sumatran

inscriptions (Prakosajaya et al., 2021), potentially indicating either local script adaptation or different transmission pathways.

At the morphosyntactic level, the Laguna inscription's sentence structures adhere closely to conventions in Old Javanese inscriptions. The formulaic opening, "swasti śaka warṣātīta 822 waisākha," followed by the Saka date and ruler's name, mirrors that of the *Kalasan* Inscription (778 CE) from Yogyakarta (Trigangga et al., 2015). However, the connective particle *sang*—used before honorific names—is more typical of Old Malay inscriptions from Sumatra (Sutopo, 2006). Lexical analysis reveals that approximately 60% of the Sanskrit terms in the inscription have direct equivalents in Old Javanese inscriptions, especially those related to governance and religion. Terms like *senāpati* (military leader) also appear with similar frequency and meaning in the *Trowulan* Inscription (Turmudi, 2012). Another 25% of the vocabulary shows phonological adaptations more aligned with Old Malay, such as *anak* (offspring), *dayang* (female attendant), and *tuhan* (deity), common in the Sumatran epigraphic tradition (Martius, 2012).

Roughly 15% of the lexicon comprises native Philippine terms or phonetic forms not found in Javanese or Sumatran inscriptions. Words such as *waradāna* (document) and *Pailah* (place name) lack direct parallels in Java or Sumatra, suggesting a preserved local linguistic layer. These findings demonstrate that the *Binatbāt na Tansō ng Laguna* cannot be strictly classified within Javanese or Malay epigraphic traditions. Rather, it represents a distinctive linguistic development in the 9th-century Philippines. The inscription's hybrid linguistic features indicate a process of selective cultural assimilation, wherein foreign elements are adopted and modified to suit local needs, while native features are retained (Guillermo, 2012).

Societal Conditions in the Tondo Kingdom in the 9th Century

A thorough analysis of the *Binatbāt na Tansō ng Laguna* Inscription, dated to 900 CE (822 Saka), reveals a complex portrait of the socio-political and economic structures of the Tondo Kingdom in the 9th century. As the oldest known written document discovered in the Philippines, the inscription not only evidences an advanced writing system but also reflects a relatively sophisticated level of civilization. It references the term *alipin* (slave), indicating that slavery formed a part of Tondo's social structure during this period. This aligns with William Henry Scott's social classification system, which identifies three primary social strata in the Tondo Kingdom in his work *Barangay: Ninth Century Philippine Culture and Society* (1994), namely:

1. The *maginoo* class (ruling elite), which includes *lakan*, *rajah*, and *datu* (royal or chieftain titles);
2. The class of freemen (*malayang tao*), including *timawa* (freed slaves), *maharlika* (warriors), *mangangalakal* (traders), and *magsasaka* (farmers);
3. The *alipin* class (slaves).

The titles *lakan*, *rajah*, and *datu* denote tribal leaders, regional rulers, or monarchs in the Philippine

archipelago who belong to the *maginoo* class. Any male from this class could attain such a title based on personal merit (Scott, 1994). Scott (1994) further defines *timawa* as individuals who have gained freedom from slavery through payment or assistance. The term *maharlika* refers to warriors (Morrow, 2009), while *mangangalakal* and *magsasaka* denote traders and farmers respectively (Scott, 1994). The lowest tier, *alipin*, consists of two subgroups: *aliping namamahay* and *aliping sa gigilid*. According to Morrow (2009), the *aliping namamahay* are slaves with independent housing who pay tribute or labor on their master's land, whereas *aliping sa gigilid* reside in the master's home and serve as domestic helpers.

The *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* Inscription reveals that gold serves as the medium of exchange in Tondo society, including for debt repayment and slave manumission. While precolonial trade in the Philippines initially operated through barter, the inconveniences of such a system led to the use of items like gold as currency, given the abundance of gold in the archipelago (Capistrano-Baker, 2016). Precolonial Filipinos, including those in Tondo, used *Piloncitos*—small bead-like gold nuggets—as currency (Jocano, 1998). Blair, Robertson, and Bourne (1904), in *The Philippine Islands 1493–1898*, document this practice.

“The people on that island (Luzon) were highly skilled in managing gold. They weighed it with extraordinary precision and care. The knowledge of gold and weighing tools was the first thing taught to their children, as there was no other currency in use before we (Spanish explorers) arrived.”

Piloncitos play a key role in trade between the Tondo Kingdom and merchants from China, the Straits of Malacca, and Java (Capistrano-Baker, 2016). Tondo's coastal regions function as administrative and commercial centers, facilitating internal and external trade. Foreign goods typically enter the archipelago through settlements near river mouths, such as the Pasig River, before being distributed inland (Jocano, 1998). This gives Tondo control over inter-island commerce. Upon arrival in Manila Bay, Chinese, Malaccan, and Javanese vessels are held at Tondo's ports until they pay anchorage fees. These merchants are required to sell their goods to Tondo's rulers, thereby monopolizing trade across the islands (Scott, 1994). Consequently, the distribution of foreign goods becomes the most profitable economic activity in Tondo (Jungker, 1990), illustrating how trade from Malacca—then under the Śrīvijaya Empire—influences Tondo's cultural and linguistic landscape, as reflected in the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* Inscription.

Understanding Tondo's economic role in the 9th-century maritime trade network necessitates a multidisciplinary approach combining archaeological evidence, foreign textual sources, and contextual analysis of the inscription. While the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* does not explicitly describe trade, linguistic elements such as the use of *hutang* (debt) and *danghaya* (financial obligation) suggest a structured

economy centered on commodity exchange. Supporting this are archaeological findings near Manila Bay, including in Santa Ana and Lal-lo, which feature Tang Dynasty tradeware ceramics alongside local pottery. These finds, including Yue and Changsha ceramics, confirm Tondo's integration into the regional trade network that links southern China with economic centers in the Nusantara, such as Śrīvijaya and Medang (Punekar & Ji, 2016).

In addition to archaeological data, foreign textual records provide crucial context. Chinese sources from the Song Dynasty, such as Zhao Rugua's *Zhufan Zhi* (13th century), describe Ma-i (often identified as Tondo) as a Philippine trading hub that exports wax, sandalwood, and pearls (Rukuo, 2022). Although these accounts postdate the inscription, similar trade patterns likely existed in the 9th century, as evidenced by consistent Tang Dynasty ceramic finds. Furthermore, 7th-century Śrīvijaya inscriptions, like the Kedukan Bukit Inscription, mention trade and military expeditions to eastern islands, including Luzon (Khairunnisa et al., 2024). These data suggest that Tondo is not merely a passive trade center but actively competes in regional economic dynamics. The inscription's reference to gold (*Piloncito*) as payment underscores Tondo's participation in broader economic systems. Philippine gold has long been a prized commodity in Southeast Asian trade, as noted in the *Negarakertagama* (14th century) (Adams, 2005). Thus, the inscription reflects a legal and economic order robust enough to regulate complex trade, implying a relatively sophisticated administrative structure.

Most Tondo inhabitants are merchants, with relatively few engaged in agriculture (Scott, 1994). To ensure food security, Tondo engages in broader trade and political relations with Java and Borneo (Scott, 1992). Trade with Java, then under the Medang Kingdom, introduces Old Javanese cultural elements into Tondo, as seen in the inscription. In this exchange, *Piloncito* functions as a recognized currency between the two polities (Wardana, 2011). The inscription also reflects Hindu-Buddhist influence in Tondo's society, especially using the term *vaisākha* (Sumedho, 2015). While the extent of Hindu-Buddhist religious influence in precolonial Philippine societies remains unclear, Jocano (1998) affirms that such cultural and religious elements reach the archipelago indirectly through trade with Śrīvijaya and Medang kingdoms.

Conclusion

The *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* Inscription, discovered in 1989 and dated to 900 CE (822 Saka), is issued by the Tondo Kingdom and records the debt settlement of a loyal servant named *Namwran*. The inscription details *Namwran's* obligation to repay a debt of 926.4 grams of gold to the ruler of *Dewata* (identified as the ruler of Mount Diwata on Mindanao Island, Philippines). Composed in Old Malay and containing several terms from Old Javanese, the inscription has sparked scholarly speculation about the cultural influence of Old Malay and Old Javanese traditions in the Philippine archipelago. This discovery provides valuable

insight into the linguistic interplay between these languages in the inscription and highlights Tondo's cultural connections with other polities in the wider Nusantara region.

The discovery of the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* Inscription significantly alters the understanding of Philippine historiography, particularly regarding the onset of literacy and state formation. While the precolonial period was previously thought to begin in the 16th century, this inscription demonstrates that such developments were already underway by the 9th century. The inscription also reconfigures perspectives on the external cultural influences that shaped precolonial Filipino practices, particularly those of the Tondo Kingdom. The presence of Old Malay cultural elements can be attributed to trade relations with the Śrīvijaya Empire, while the presence of Old Javanese influence suggests interactions with the Medang Kingdom. Both Śrīvijaya and Medang also contribute to the transmission of Hindu-Buddhist religious practices through maritime trade routes, which shaped aspects of life in Tondo during the 9th century. Thus, the *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* Inscription illustrates the active participation of Nusantara societies in early Southeast Asian maritime trade networks. It further reflects a complex socio-political structure marked by social hierarchies, inter-polity relations, and an organized economic system. Although not stated explicitly, the use of gold as a medium of exchange in the inscription indicates the emergence of a currency-based economy to facilitate transactions.

This research holds significant implications for the historiography of the Tondo Kingdom and 9th-century Southeast Asia by applying historical and historical-linguistic methodologies to analyze the socio-economic structure of precolonial Tondo. However, several limitations affect the scope of this study, as much of the source material is drawn primarily from the works of Antoon Postma and the research of Elsa Clavé and Arlo Griffiths. The *Binatbát na Tansô ng Laguna* Inscription provides new evidence of an organized political structure in the Philippines during the precolonial period. Accordingly, existing historical data on early Philippine societies—particularly Chinese records such as *Zhufan Zhi*, *Pishoye*, *Sokbu*, and *Chu Fan Chih*—should be reassessed in light of this discovery.

Further research is necessary to investigate the toponymic origin of "Pailah," mentioned in the inscription, as no comprehensive studies have yet addressed this. Additionally, future scholarship should explore the quantitative scope of trade relations between the Tondo Kingdom and the Śrīvijaya and Medang Kingdoms during the 9th century to complement the current findings. Recommended directions for future research include maritime archaeological exploration in Manila Bay and the Luzon coastline to uncover physical traces of ancient ports and trade goods. These efforts hold the potential to significantly enhance our understanding of political and economic dynamics in classical Southeast Asia, particularly those involving the Tondo Kingdom.

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