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Reading the Lontars: Endangered literary practices of Lombok, eastern Indonesia

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1. Introduction¹

The Sasak, who live on the island of Lombok in eastern Indonesia, have a literary tradition of writing on the dried leaves of the lontar palm (*Borassus flabellifer*) which they share with their western neighbours, the Balinese and Javanese. The lontar manuscripts are written in *Kawi* (a form of middle Javanese), or Sasak, or a mixture of both. Historical evidence suggests that this tradition originated from contact between the Sasak and the Javanese and Balinese, both of whom dominated various parts of Lombok at different times. Compared to research on Balinese and Javanese literary traditions (Rubinstein 2000, Brandes 1901-1926, Creese 1999, McDonald 1986, among others), there has been very little work done on Sasak lontar (with the exceptions of van der Meij 1996 and Achadiati et. al. 1999), and virtually nothing has been published about the performances (called in Sasak *pepaòsan*) associated with reading lontar (in Sasak *mace*). This paper reports on aspects of the Sasak tradition in its sociolinguistic context, and briefly and incompletely describes a performance observed in southern Lombok in 2002.

2. Geography and history

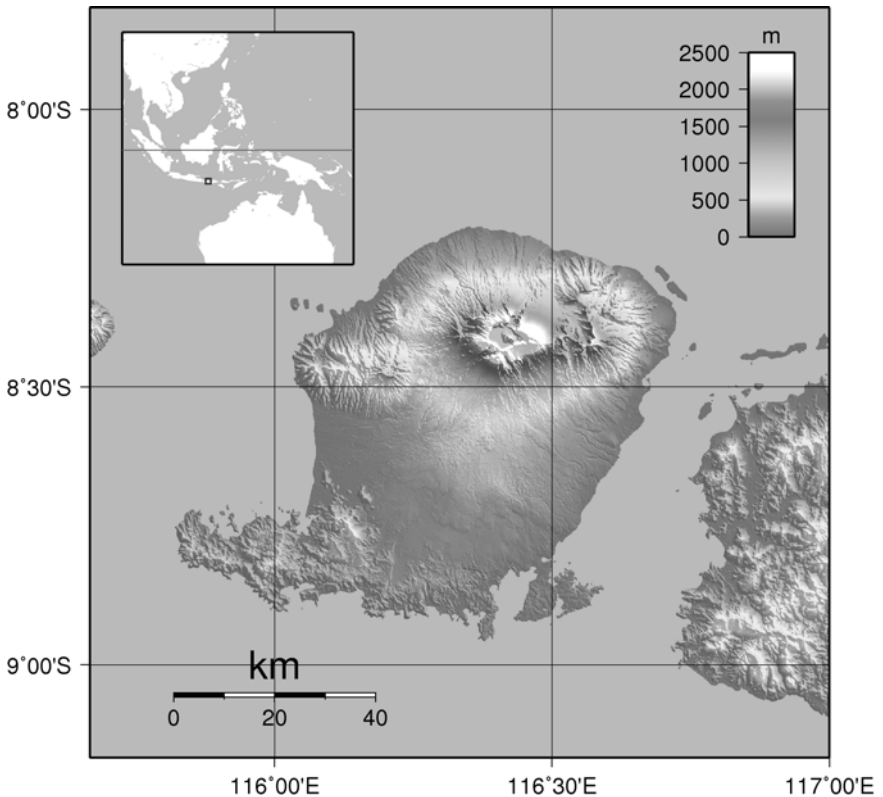
The island of Lombok is located immediately to the east of Bali (approximately 8.5° South, 116° East) in the Lesser Sunda Islands in the Indonesian archipelago (Figure 1). Physically, Lombok is dominated by the active volcano Gunung Rinjani which at 3,726 metres is the third highest

¹ Research on Sasak has been supported at various times by the Australian Research Council, the School of Oriental and African Studies, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies and the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung. I am grateful to Sasak colleagues Nur Ahmadi, Lalu Dasmaras, Ispan Junaidi, Yon Mahyuni, Syahdan, Sudirman and Herman Suheri for teaching me Sasak, and to Sudirman and the people of Penujak, especially Amaq Nurul, for inviting me to observe a *pepaòsan* there in August 2002. This paper was written while I was on sabbatical leave from SOAS and held a Humboldt Fellowship at Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt; my thanks to Jost Gippert, Arndt Graf and Bernd Nothofer for sponsoring my visit. I alone am responsible for any errors or misunderstandings in this paper.

mountain in Indonesia. To the south of the mountain is a fertile plain approximately 25km wide where the majority of the population of about 2.3 million lives. This geographical distribution has important social and linguistic consequences, especially in terms of the distribution of dialect features discussed in Section 3 below.

Figure 1: Lombok

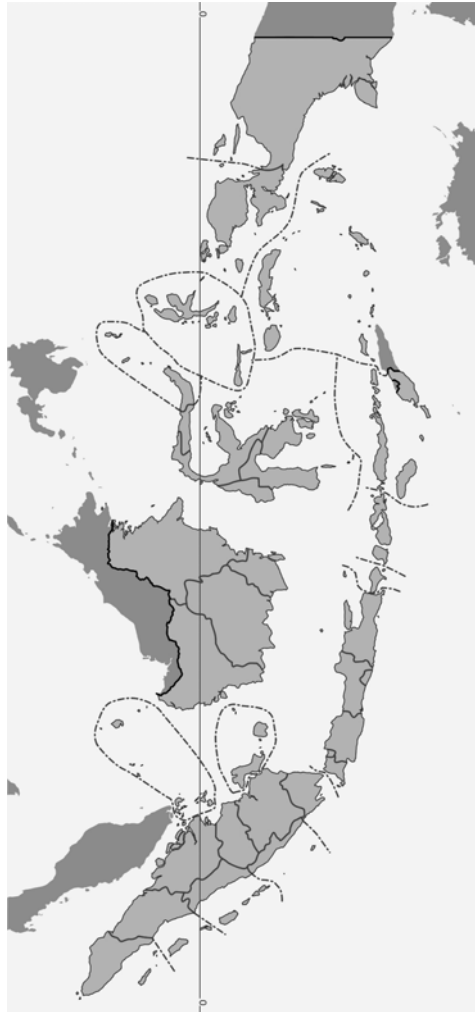
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Lombok_Topography.png



Administratively, Lombok belongs to West Nusa Tenggara province (Nusa Tenggara Barat), together with Sumbawa Island to its east. Lombok itself is divided into four regencies (*kabupaten*): North Lombok (*Lombok utara*), Central Lombok (*Lombok tengah*), East Lombok (*Lombok timur*) and West Lombok (*Lombok barat*); the provincial capital is Mataram.

Figure 2: Indonesia provinces

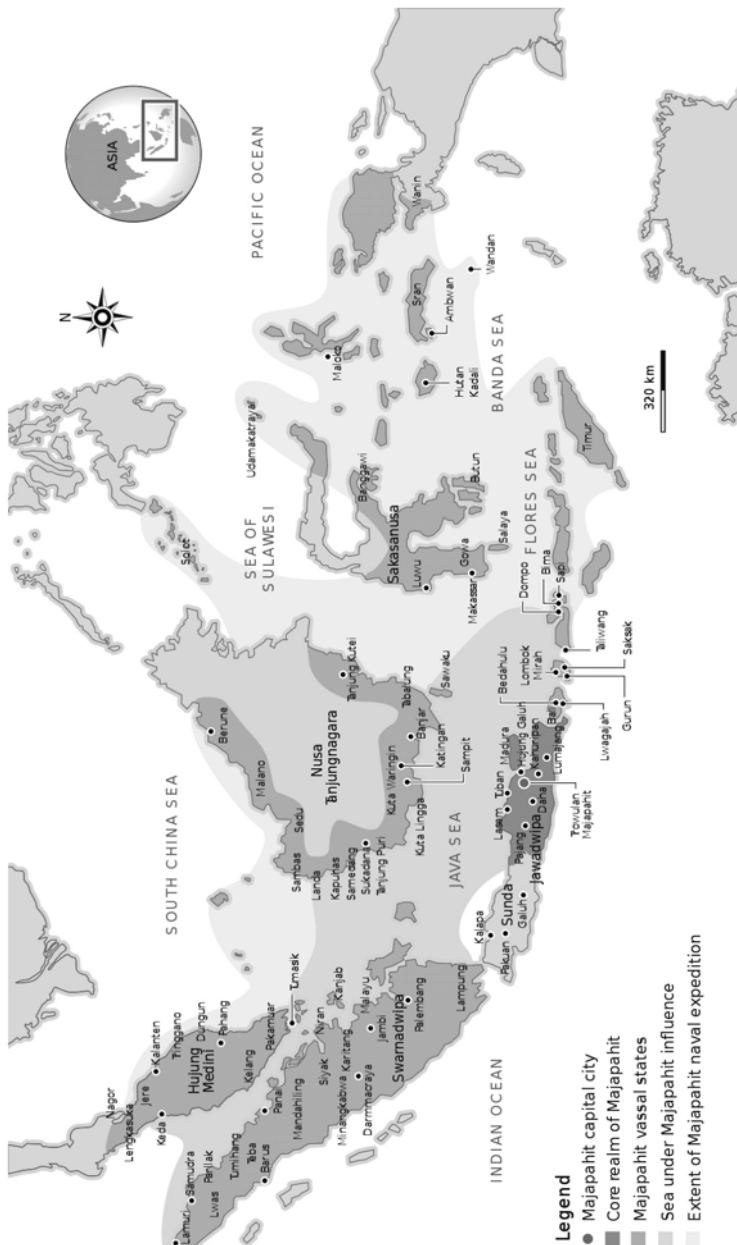
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Indonesia_provinces_blank_map.svg>



The early history of Lombok is not well documented, but the *Nagarakretagama* manuscript (written in Javanese in 1365 and taken from Cakrenegara by the Dutch in 1894) refers to Lombok's link to the Majapahit empire (1294-1478) during the 14th century. Hayam Wuruk (1328-89), the Majapahit King from 1350 to 1389, is said to have expanded Majapahit's influence over Bali and claimed Lombok, Sumbawa and parts of Sulawesi (Ricklefs 1993: 19; Clegg 2004: 71; see Figure 3).

Figure 3: The Majaphit Empire

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Majapahit_Empire.svg>



On Lombok there were a number of Sasak kingdoms which were frequently in conflict. In 1334, the Majapahit Regent Gajah Mada visited the two most important Sasak kingdoms, Selaparang in east Lombok and Pejanggik in central Lombok (Clegg 2004: 72). It was probably at this time that the Sasaks adopted a caste system and an aristocracy modeled on the Javanese court (see Section 3 below), and began to be influenced by Hindu-Buddhist cultural concepts and practices, including literacy (Pelras 1996: 108). From the 16th century onwards, the Sasaks adopted Islam, mainly beginning in East Lombok with the Selaparang kingdom. A syncretic form of Islam (called *wetu telu* in Sasak) that blends Hindu-Buddhist, Islamic and ancestor and spirit worship developed alongside more orthodox Sunni Islam (called *waktu lime* in Sasak). The significance of these religious divisions for lontar reading is discussed further below (see also Cederroth 1981, 1996).

In the 16th century, the Southern Balinese Gelgel kingdom dominated west Lombok centred on the port of Ampenan (Clegg 2004: 76-77), while east Lombok came under the influence of the Islamic Makassarese empire that established relations with the Selaparang Kingdom in 1637 (Andaya 1981: 1). In 1678, Gelgel drove the Makassarese out of east Lombok to Sumbawa, but sporadic resistance by the Sasaks of Selaparang continued (Kraan 1980: 4). Clegg (2004: 81) points out that:

Unlike East Lombok, there were no Sasak courts or aristocracy in West Lombok and the relationship between the Balinese rulers and the ruled Sasak was 'orderly' (Kraan 1980: 4). Through inter-marriage and religious influence many Sasak were partially integrated with their Balinese rulers. Sasak who adhered to *Wektu Telu* [sic.], the mystical form of Islam strongly influenced by Hindu-Buddhist and spiritual beliefs, often participated in Balinese religious festivities and worshipped at the same shrines (Harnish 1991). In East Lombok, where Balinese authority had only asserted a shadowy presence since 1668 and where a frustrated Sasak aristocracy existed, relations between the Balinese and Sasak were less harmonious. Adherents to purer form of Islam in east Lombok regarded the Balinese as 'unbelievers'.

In 1740, Gusti Wayahan Tegeh, son of the Karangasem Balinese King, conquered the Gelgel Balinese of West Lombok and took control of much of the island. He also introduced law books and other texts and established a priesthood, promoting Balinese culture (Kraan 1975: 94); Clegg 2004: 82). Following his death in 1775, separate Balinese states developed in west Lombok (Kraan 1980: 5), and by the early 19th century, there were four rivals:

Karangasem-Lombok (Cakranegara), Pagesangan, Pagutan, and Mataram. As Clegg (2004: 83) notes:

The Karangasem-Lombok Kingdom was the strongest and sought to enhance its court by collecting the greatest works of the Balinese and Javanese literary tradition eventually making it the centre of literary tradition even greater than those of their rival Kingdoms in Bali. Ironically, by following what they considered a 'Javanese model of culture', they were actually being 'ultra-Balinese' ... (Vickers 1989: 59).

The literary tradition of writing lontars in both Kawi and Sasak must have been strengthened by these developments.

In the 19th century, there were rising tensions between the Balinese kingdoms in west Lombok and the Sasaks, who revolted in 1855 and 1871, led by Islamic aristocrats from east Lombok. The Dutch intervened militarily in 1894 following a further Sasak rebellion in 1891, destroying the Balinese Mataram kingdom and occupying the whole of the island by the end of August the following year. Dutch control continued until 1942 when the Japanese occupied Lombok, and was reestablished in 1946 by the Nederland Indies Civil Administration (Clegg 2004: 99-100), finally ending in December 1949 when Lombok became part of the Republic of Indonesia.

3. Sasak people and language

The current population of Lombok is approximately 3 million of whom 85% are ethnic Sasak (about 2.6 million). There are also approximately 300,000 Balinese, mostly living in the western part of the island in and near the capital Mataram.

The majority of Sasaks are rural farmers earning a living from cultivation of rice and other staple crops, as well as tobacco, melons, chilis, etc. There is an increasing trend towards urbanisation, with growth of the main towns of Mataram, Praya and Selong. Mataram has a growing mixed population from throughout Lombok as well as from outside the island. There has also been population movement through government-sponsored transmigration, and men and women seeking paid work overseas, particularly in Malaysia, the Philippines and the Middle East. The bulk of the Sasak population is Muslim and *adat* (social and cultural traditions), especially for inheritance and marriage, remains a very strong influence on most people's lives, particularly those living in rural areas.

Since at least the 14th century, Sasak society has been divided into the following caste-like social classes:

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| <i>mènak</i> | 1st caste - nobles |
| <i>prewangse</i> | 2nd caste |
| <i>jajarkarang</i> | 3rd caste - commoners |
| <i>sepangan</i> | lowest caste, servants of <i>mènak</i> |

The *mènak* comprise about 8% of the Sasak population and identify themselves as descendants of the royal courts. The *mènak* live in separate villages and follow strict social principles; they intermarry as a group and any female *mènak* who marries outside the group loses her noble status and is shunned by her family. There are strong language use preferences associated with the *mènak*–commoner distinction, and marking of this by sociolectal speech level differences is mentioned further below (see also Austin 2010).

The Sasak language is spoken by ethnic Sasaks across the island in family and village domains but has no formal status and no literacy functions for most speakers. Bahasa Indonesia is the language of education, media, government, business, literacy and status. It is also the language of inter-ethnic communication. There is some evidence of language shift towards Bahasa Indonesia taking place in urban areas where there are mixed populations, however this is mainly seen in the form of code-mixing and code-switching, rather than wholesale abandonment of Sasak (Syahdan 2000). The language shows a great deal of regional variation (Austin 2003, Mahsun 2006, Teeuw 1951, 1958), both in lexicon and grammatical structure (Austin 2003, 2006). So, for example, we find the pronoun forms set out in Table 1 for different village locations across Lombok.

Table 1: Sasak pronouns

| | Selong | | Ganti | | Praya | | Penujaq | |
|-------|-------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| 1sg | <i>aku</i> | = <i>ku</i> | <i>aku</i> | = <i>kò</i> | <i>aku</i> | = <i>k</i> | <i>aku</i> | = <i>k</i> |
| 1pl | <i>ite</i> | = <i>te</i> | <i>ite</i> | = <i>te</i> | <i>ite</i> | = <i>t</i> | <i>ite</i> | = <i>t</i> |
| 2masc | <i>ante</i> | = <i>mèq</i> | <i>kamu</i> | = <i>ò</i> | <i>kamu</i> | = <i>m</i> | <i>kamu</i> | = <i>m</i> |
| 2fem | <i>kamu</i> | = <i>bi</i> | | | | | | |
| 3 | <i>ie</i> | = <i>ne</i> | <i>ie</i> | = <i>ng</i> | <i>ie</i> | = <i>n</i> | <i>ie</i> | = <i>n</i> |

Sasak also possesses a system of speech levels (Nothofer 2000, Austin 2010), similar to that of Balinese and Javanese (Clynes 1994, Errington 1983), coded by lexical differences. There are three levels (low, mid, high) together with humble (speaker-reference) and honorific (non-speaker reference) forms. In Sasak, the non-low forms are referred together as *alus* ‘smooth, polite’. The

distribution of the level contrasts is quite irregular with different lexical items showing a range of different patterns, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: *Speech levels in Sasak*

| | Low | Mid | High | Honorific | Humble |
|-----------|----------------|------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| 1sg | <i>aku</i> | | <i>tiang</i> | | <i>kaji</i> |
| 2 | <i>kamu</i> | <i>side</i> | <i>pelinggih</i> | <i>dekaji</i> ² | |
| 3 | <i>ie</i> | | | <i>deside</i> | |
| 'eat' | <i>mangan</i> | <i>bekelór</i> | <i>madaran</i> | <i>majengan</i> | |
| 'see' | <i>gitaq</i> | <i>seréóq</i> | <i>sermin</i> | <i>cingakin</i> | |
| 'say' | <i>uni</i> | <i>base</i> | <i>manik</i> | | <i>matur</i> |
| 'go' | <i>laló</i> | | <i>lumbar</i> | <i>margi</i> | <i>lampaq</i> |
| 'give' | <i>bèng</i> | | | <i>ican</i> | <i>atur</i> |
| 'receive' | <i>terimaq</i> | | | <i>panggih</i> | <i>tampi</i> |
| 'yes' | <i>aóq</i> | | <i>nggih</i> | | <i>meran</i> |
| 'eye' | <i>mate</i> | <i>penenteng</i> | <i>penyerminan</i> | | |
| 'head' | <i>òtak</i> | <i>sirah</i> | <i>tendes, prabu</i> | | |
| 'body' | <i>awak</i> | <i>perane</i> | <i>dèwèk</i> | <i>batang</i> | <i>rage</i> |
| 'hand' | <i>ime</i> | | <i>gading</i> | | |
| 'all' | <i>pade</i> | | <i>sami</i> | | |
| 'what' | <i>ape</i> | | <i>napi</i> | | |
| 'this' | <i>ni</i> | | <i>niki</i> | | |
| 'that' | <i>nó</i> | | <i>nike</i> | | |

The non-low forms are used in formal contexts and with social superiors, especially in situations where *mènak* are involved. Interestingly, this system of speech levels appears to be uniform across all Sasak regional varieties (the same non-low terms are used in all varieties, even when the low forms show striking regional variation), and is fixed with about 300 non-low items. The relationship between the levels is completely lexicalised, with no regular morphological formations deriving forms in one level from those in another level. Nothofer (2000: 83) argues that the data on Sasak speech levels: 'lend further support to the hypothesis that this system is not a Sasak creation but a

² Also, *rage* 'body', *dóé* 'possession'.

borrowing phenomenon.’ Nothofer (2000: 83) identifies influence from Balinese, and also from at least two types of Javanese:

one can indeed identify two different periods during which Javanese must have had an impact on Sasak. High words such as *bije* ‘child’ (N3), *pulih* ‘to obtain’ (V16), *panggih* ‘to receive’ (V22) and maybe *dóhur* ‘head’ (N8) appear to have been borrowed from the kind of Javanese as it was spoken during the Majapahit reign. On the other hand, high vocabulary such as *layang* ‘letter’ (N10), *bemanik* ‘to call’ (V7) or *nurge* ‘excuse me’ (V3) appears to have been borrowed from a kind of Javanese as it might have been spoken in the 17th century when Lombok was Islamised.

Note that these layers of Javanese are referred to in Sasak as *Kawi*. This is the literary language that is used in Sasak puppet theatre, poetry and in some of the lontar (see Section 4). Note also that *Kawi* continues to be used for hyperpoliteness in Sasak, especially by *mènak*, as in the examples in Table 3.

Table 3: *Kawi hyperpolite forms*

| Low | High | Kawi | Gloss |
|-------------|----------------|-----------------|---------|
| | <i>nurge</i> | <i>ampure</i> | apology |
| <i>maté</i> | <i>ninggal</i> | <i>mangket</i> | die |
| <i>awak</i> | <i>rage</i> | <i>pragayan</i> | body |

4. Sasak literature

As noted above, the Sasaks have a long literary tradition of inscribing texts on the dried leaves of the lontar palm which was borrowed from the Javanese and Balinese. The oldest extant texts date from the 19th century, many having been collected by the Dutch and now to be found in libraries in Bali or Leiden in the Netherlands (see Marrison 2000 for a full catalogue of manuscripts held in the West). The Mataram Museum also has a collection, and a number are held by individuals and families on Lombok where they are treated as heirlooms and handed down from one generation to the next.

Since the 1970s, there has been activity locally to copy the lontar texts onto paper and to publish them for study, performance and sale. This is especially true of lontar which deal with the history of the Sasak kingdoms, such as *Babad Lombok* (Wacana 1979) and *Babad Selaparang*. Very few of the texts have been well studied or translated into other languages.³ Thus,

³ Thus, van Erde (1906) and (1913) are romanisations of two Sasak lontar (unfortunately with errors in transcription) accompanied by short summaries in Dutch. No detailed translation is given.

Marrison (1999) has just seven pages on the history of study of Sasak literature, and van der Meij (2002: 3) points out that ‘in the Western scholarly tradition the literature of the Sasak has been all but ignored.’ This is, van der Meij (2002: 2) argues, because: ‘the island [of Lombok] had been ignored and was regarded merely as an appendix to Bali.’

The lontar of Lombok are written in Kawi, or Sasak, or a mixture of the two in a script that originates from southern India and is almost identical to the script used for Balinese. The basic letters are called *hanacaraka* and consist of a consonant plus the vowel *a*:

ហា នា ចា រា កា ដា តា សា ហា លា
 ha na ca ra ka da ta sa wa la
 បា ចា យា មា ណា ហា ហា ហា
 pa ja ya nya ma ga ba nga

Syllables with other vowels use these symbols and add diacritics above, below or around the basic *Consonant+a* symbol. There are also means for indicating syllable-final consonants and encoding consonant clusters.⁴ The following is an example of the Balinese script (Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)⁵ which illustrates the full complexities of the script:

មនុស្សម្នាក់ៗមានសិទ្ធិក្នុងការស្មើគ្នា
 ក្នុងការស្រឡាត់ស្រាវជាមួយគ្នា
 ហើយមានសិទ្ធិក្នុងការស្រឡាត់ស្រាវ
 ជាមួយគ្នា។

There are lontar from Lombok written in Kawi that were composed locally and are not copies of Javanese originals (van der Meij 2002). Both Kawi and Sasak lontars follow a small set of fixed metres and rhyming patterns that are similar to, but more limited than, the Javanese and Balinese models on which

⁴ See <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balinese_script> and <www.omniglot.com/writing/balinese.htm> for descriptions and illustrations of the major principles, accessed on 8 October 2010.

⁵ From <www.omniglot.com/writing/balinese.htm>, accessed on 8 October 2010.

they are based. For example, the metre *dangdang gule* consists of 10 lines of 85 syllables while *maskumambang* has 4 lines of 34 syllables. The metres show the following pattern of number of syllables and the vowel of the last syllable in the line:

| <i>dangdang gule</i> | | <i>maskumambang</i> | |
|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Syllables | Last syllable vowel | Syllables | Last syllable vowel |
| 10 | i | 12 | i |
| 10 | a | 6 | a |
| 8 | e | 8 | i |
| 7 | u | 8 | a |
| 9 | i | | |
| 7 | a | | |
| 6 | u | | |
| 8 | a | | |
| 12 | i | | |
| 8 | a | | |

The following is an example of *dangdang gule* from the lontar called *Rengganis*, which is in Sasak:⁶

| | |
|--|---|
| <i>Banjur turun Radèn Banjaran Sari</i> | Then descend King Banjaran Sari |
| <i>Lemanano, laiq balé kambang</i> | To there, to house floating |
| <i>Manjak mecó mòmòt baè</i> | Sit then think only |
| <i>Ndéqne lain dalem ujut</i> | Not like in life |
| <i>Mun Dènde Ayu La Rengganis</i> | Then Princess Rengganis |
| <i>Penggitan dalem bòsang</i> | Vision in stomach |
| <i>Ruanne tadah layu</i> | Appearance manner half-awake |
| <i>Pan ndéq uah njep lan nada</i> | Then not having slept and eaten |
| <i>Siqne sedih, si kangen Dènde La Rengganis</i> | Which=he sad, which recall Princess Rengganis |
| <i>Likatne léq kiri kanan</i> | Glance.over.shoulder to left right |

6 I am grateful to Sudirman for reciting this section of *Rengganis* for me; the transcription and literal word-for-word translation are mine.

An example of *maskumambang* from the *Puspekrame lontar* is:

1 *Léq pancòran manggóng léq sedin perigi*
 loc waterfall arrive.and.sit loc side waterfall
 At the waterfall he sat by the side of the spring

2 *Pesiraman Radèn Teruna*
 bathing place Prince Terune
 The bathing place of Prince Terune

3 *Radèn Mas Witaesar*
 Princess Mas Witaesari
 Princess Witaesari

4 *Bijen Datu Indrekila*
 child King Indrekile
 The child of King Indrekile

Some of the *lontar* texts, such as *Rengganis* and *Tutur Mònyeh* are popular, and readings of them are performed on occasion, however other texts are much less well known. As van der Meij (2002:158-159) notes:

nowadays the reading of *lontar* is becoming increasingly rare. Owing to changes in the culture of the island and the different perceptions people have of their position in the world, the texts are read less and less often and the tradition is in danger of becoming extinct.

As the examples above suggest, the *lontar* texts are highly elliptical and poetic and their interpretation must be taught. According to my consultants, learning how to perform *lontar* readings takes place in a series of steps. Texts are studied in small groups with a reader who knows how to perform *mace* (see Section 5). The students first repeatedly copy out the script of the text without being able to read or understand it.⁷ Next, the teacher recites the text with the correct rhythm and intonation, and finally the interpretation and context of the text is imparted. Learning to read in this fashion can take several months or more.

⁷ Sudirman showed me a workbook of one of his student's which he had corrected.

5. Reading the lontar

Although catalogues of Lombok lontar exist, and some publications and translations of them have been made, there has been very little attention paid to performances of reading the lontars, called *pepaòsan* in Sasak. Thus, van der Meij (1996) is the first published description of *pepaòsan* but includes only four pages of information and all references to reading practices are in the past tense, such as: ‘*Rengganis* ... used to be very popular, and present-day Sasaks still remember readings of it. It was read at festivities where adolescents gathered to find a partner’ (van der Meij 1996: 156). Van der Meij (2002) has one chapter of just 13 pages on ‘Texts among the Sasak’ that includes brief descriptions of performances but these are all based on second-hand accounts from interviews. Van der Meij (2002: 5) explains that ‘being myself employed elsewhere and not in academia, I was not in the position to study manuscript usage in Lombok, as extensive fieldwork was impossible.’

My own research on Lombok has primarily concentrated on studying the morphology and syntax of Sasak using a range of research methods, including collection of narrative texts and conversations, use of stimuli such as the picture book *Frog Story* (Berman & Slobin 1994, Lüpke 2009), elicitation and participant observation. I discussed lontar reading with my consultants who pointed out that texts were widely used in a range of contexts, particularly for ceremonies such as circumcision, funerals and weddings, and in rural areas as part of a process to ensure fertility of cows, horses and water buffalo. The following is a conversation between Lalu Dasmara and Ispan Junaidi recorded in Melbourne, Australia, on 21 October 1999 (Sasak corpus, Text 57) where the topic was how the lontar *Puspekarme* is used.⁸

⁸ Lalu Dasmara is a *mènak* from Penujaq and speaks Meriaq-Meriku dialect while Ispan Junaidi is a commoner from Praya and speaks Menó-Mené dialect. Abbreviations used in the glosses are: 1pl – first person plural; 3 – third person; caus – causative; disc – discourse topic; fut – future tense; link – linker; loc – locative preposition; nom – nominaliser; pass – passive; perf – perfective aspect; rel – relative clause marker; tr – transitive verb marker.

Dasmara:

Jari ie tebait hikmah isiq jemaqaht saq tó Lòmbòk
jari ie te-bait hikmah isiq jemaqah=t saq tó Lòmbòk
 become 3 pass-take blessing by fellowship=1pl rel there Lombok

terutame tó tengaq takepan Puspekarme sini tebase
terutame tó tengaq takepan Puspekarme sini te-bace
 especially there middle lontar Puspekarme this pass-read

sekali setaun lamun dengan iaq nyelametang sampi jaran
se-kali se-taun lamun dengan iaq N-selamet-ang sampi jaran
 one-time one-year if/when person fut tr-save-appl cow horse

adén saq iniq gamaq nganak rémpus
adéq=n saq iniq gamaq N-kanak rémpus
 in.order.to=3 rel can really tr-child fertile

‘So it (having babies once every nine months) was taken as a blessing by our people who live there in Lombok especially there in central (Lombok), they read the lontar *Puspekarme* once a year if people want to celebrate cows and horses, or that they can really be fertile.’ [sas-t057s258]

Ispan:

Bilang bulan rimpus
bilang bulan rimpus
 every month fertile

‘Every month, fertile’ [sas-t057s259]

Dasmara:

Ndéqn jèq iaq nganak bilang bulan maraq due kali setaun
ndéq=n jèq iaq N-kanak bilang bulan maraq due kali se-taun
 not=3 disc fut tr-child every moon like two time one-year

sekali setaun
se-kali se-taun
 one-time one-year

‘It’s not that they have a child each month, twice a year or once a year.’ [sas-t057s260]

Ispan:

Adén saq rimpus maraq seninen raje
adéq=n saq rimpus maraq senine-N raje
 in.order.to=3 rel fertile like wife-link king

‘To be fertile like the King’s wives.’ [sas-t057s261]

Dasmara:

| | | | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <i>Jari</i> | <i>caren</i> | <i>mbace</i> | <i>lontar</i> | <i>sétó</i> | <i>maraq</i> | <i>meriaq</i> | <i>mòdèl</i> |
| <i>jari</i> | <i>care-N</i> | <i>N-bace</i> | <i>lontar</i> | <i>sétó</i> | <i>maraq</i> | <i>meriaq</i> | <i>mòdèl</i> |
| become | way-link | tr-read | lontar | that | like | like.this | model |
| | | | | | | | |
| <i>araq</i> | <i>kalimahn</i> | <i>saq</i> | <i>ngkene</i> | <i>ambabar</i> | <i>sang</i> | <i>pawistri,</i> | |
| <i>araq</i> | <i>kalimah=n</i> | <i>saq</i> | <i>N-kene</i> | <i>ambabar</i> | <i>sang</i> | <i>pawistri</i> | |
| be | sentence=3 | rel | tr-tell | have.baby | perhaps | wife | |
| | | | | | | | |
| <i>mbabar</i> | <i>sebiniq datu,</i> | <i>tecelup</i> | | <i>tó</i> | <i>ken</i> | <i>aiq</i> | <i>anuq sini</i> |
| <i>N-babar</i> | <i>sebiniq datu</i> | <i>te-celup</i> | | <i>tó</i> | <i>ken</i> | <i>aiq</i> | <i>anuq sini</i> |
| tr-have.baby | wife | King | pass-dip.in.water | there | loc | water | thing |
| | | | | | | | |
| <i>duntal</i> | <i>sini,</i> | <i>mut</i> | <i>mbace</i> | <i>malik,</i> | <i>mentó</i> | <i>baé</i> | |
| <i>duntal</i> | <i>sini</i> | <i>muq=t</i> | <i>N-bace</i> | <i>malik</i> | <i>mentó</i> | <i>baé</i> | |
| lontar | this | perf=1pl | tr-read | again | that | only | |
| | | | | | | | |
| <i>ansal</i> | <i>araq</i> | <i>kalimah</i> | <i>kene</i> | <i>mbabar</i> | <i>sebinian</i> | <i>datu</i> | |
| <i>ansal</i> | <i>araq</i> | <i>kalimah</i> | <i>kene</i> | <i>N-babar</i> | <i>sebiniq-an</i> | <i>datu</i> | |
| if | be | sentence | mean | tr-have.baby | wife-nom | King | |
| | | | | | | | |
| <i>mut</i> | <i>nyelup,</i> | <i>mut</i> | <i>nebuk</i> | <i>ken</i> | <i>aiq</i> | <i>duntal</i> | <i>sétó,</i> |
| <i>muq=t</i> | <i>N-celup</i> | <i>muq=t</i> | <i>N-tebuk</i> | <i>ken</i> | <i>aiq</i> | <i>duntal</i> | <i>sétó</i> |
| perf=1pl | tr-dip.in.water | perf=1pl | tr-dip.in.water | loc | water | lontar | that |
| | | | | | | | |
| <i>ie</i> | <i>caren</i> | <i>tebace</i> | <i>étó,</i> | <i>jari</i> | <i>saratn.</i> | | |
| <i>ie</i> | <i>care=n</i> | <i>te-bace</i> | <i>étó</i> | <i>jari</i> | <i>sarat=n</i> | | |
| 3 | way=3 | pass-read | that | become | cure=3 | | |

‘So the way they read the lontar is like this, there is a sentence which says: *ambabar sang pawistri* ‘the King’s wife had a baby’, the lontar is dipped in the water, we read it again, like that if there is a sentence which says the King’s wife had a baby we dip it in the water, we dip the lontar in water, that’s the way we read it, so it is a cure.’ [sas-t057s262]

Dasmara:

| | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|------------|------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|-----------|----------------|
| <i>Laón</i> | <i>aiq</i> | <i>saq</i> | <i>tekadu</i> | <i>nebuk</i> | <i>duntal</i> | <i>sétó,</i> | <i>ie</i> | <i>tekadu</i> |
| <i>laón</i> | <i>aiq</i> | <i>saq</i> | <i>te-kadu</i> | <i>N-tebuk</i> | <i>duntal</i> | <i>sétó</i> | <i>ie</i> | <i>te-kadu</i> |
| later | water | rel | pass-use | tr-dip.in.water | lontar | that | 3 | pass-use |

‘Later the water which is used to dip the lontar in is used to ...’ [sas-t057s263]

Ispan:

Ie tepénem
ie te-pe-énem
 3 pass-caus-drink

‘To make (the cows) drink it?’ [sas-t057s264]

Dasmara:

Tebóbós
te-bóbós
 pass-anoint

‘To wash (the cows’ heads).’ [sas-t057s265]

Ispan:

Oo, tebóbós
oo te-bóbós
 oh pass-anoint

‘Oh, to wash (the cows’ heads).’ [sas-t057s266]

Dasmara:

| | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|--------------|
| <i>Tebóbós</i> | <i>ken</i> | <i>sató</i> | <i>hewan</i> | <i>sétó,</i> | <i>tebóbós</i> | <i>ken</i> | <i>ulu.</i> |
| <i>te-bóbós</i> | <i>ken</i> | <i>sató</i> | <i>hewan</i> | <i>sétó</i> | <i>te-bóbós</i> | <i>ken</i> | <i>ulu=n</i> |
| pass-anoint | loc | animals | animal | that | pass-anoint | loc | head=3 |

‘It’s poured on the animals, poured on their heads.’ [sas-t057s267]

In August 2002, an unexpected opportunity arose during my fieldwork in Lombok to observe and document a performance of *pepaòsan* and one type of Sasak literacy practice. I was invited by my consultant Sudirman to accompany him to Mòntókóq hamlet of Penujaq village in southern Lombok (where the Meriaq-meriku variety of Sasak is spoken) to see a lontar reading following a circumcision ceremony. Several hours of video and audio were recorded, and although some was analysed with Sudirman in July 2003 when he visited Frankfurt through sponsorship of the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung, most of the materials are yet to be transcribed and translated. I present here a short description of the performance which seems to have been quite typical of such contexts. Further work on the materials, and more data collection in the future is planned.

The performance began in the evening at around 7pm at a specially constructed covered location in the hamlet and involved three main readers and an audience of perhaps 100, all male. After eating a meal and reciting

prayers, the performers took their places in the centre of the *pepaòsan* area on mats, surrounded by the audience (Image 1).

Image 1: (Photograph by author)



Above the performers was a fluorescent light and brightly coloured cloths hanging from the ceiling (Image 2).

Image 2: (Photograph by author)



Paper copies of lontar were used, rather than palm leaf manuscripts, and they were placed on decorated pillows in front of the readers (Image 3), along with a container of betel nut and associated lime and leaves.

Image 3: (Photograph by author)



The performance began with one reader addressing the audience in a mixture of high Sasak and Kawi, inviting them to listen to the performance and apologising for any errors or mistakes. Then a number of lontar texts were read (*mace*) by two readers, who act in alternation. One reader (called *pemaòs*) recited one or two lines of the Kawi and/or Sasak text with the appropriate melody,⁹ and a second reader (called *pujangge*) provided an interpretation of the lines into contemporary Sasak. A third reader (or the audience) joined the *pemaòs* to recite the last few words (with their melody of each section). The performance was thus polyphonic, requiring the active participation throughout of the *pemaòs*, the *pujangge* and the audience. Text readings such as this take many hours and it is not uncommon for performances to continue until 1am or later, as this one did.

⁹ A proper study of the melodic structure of *pepaòsan* performances is necessary but beyond the scope of this report.

Our observations of this performance suggest that at least one previous claim about Sasak literacy and literary practices needs correction. Van der Meij (1996: 157) says that ‘we know that paper was introduced a long time ago (though no research has yet been done on this subject), but it has never been used for manuscripts in the Sasak area.’ Clearly, this is not correct for Lombok today, and was not true in the 1970’s, according to my consultants.

The number of people who can perform *mace* and the roles of *pemaòs* and *pujangge* is currently restricted and may be no more than 100 at the time of writing. The West Nusa Tenggara government promotes *mace* at the Mataram Museum as part of its support for *adat* but only a few texts are performed and performances are generally limited in time. Increasingly, texts in Arabic or Malay are used at funerals and other ceremonies.¹⁰ The performance of other texts is in danger of disappearing as readers who know them die without teaching others. Without a reader, the text cannot be learned or performed, even if a copy of the manuscript exists.

There is some evidence that the actual manuscripts as well as the performance tradition are also under threat. Van der Meij (2002: 193) points out that:

...the *waktu lima* are continuing their efforts to eradicate old customs and practices root and branch, which has resulted in the destruction of old manuscripts. Their preference goes out to Arabic teachings and orthodox books in modern Indonesian. The influence of the *waktu lima* on the *wetu telu* is substantial and many manuscripts are no longer found among the latter group ... Nowadays, because people need money, manuscripts are being sold in great numbers to the international tourists visiting the island, as well as on Bali ... many manuscripts are disappearing fast.

Clearly more work on documenting the existing materials needs to be done urgently.

6. Conclusions

The island of Lombok once had a vibrant literary tradition of writing on palm leaves (and paper) and performance of readings in Kawi and Sasak. This tradition has been little studied by outsiders, and today it is under threat as the influence of orthodox Islam within Lombok sees certain practices associated

¹⁰ An annual family celebration which I was invited to attend in Lombok in July 2010 was conducted entirely in Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic, though all the attendees, apart from myself, were Sasak.

with the past being negatively evaluated and performers are under pressure to stop carrying them out. The time is ripe for a proper ethnographically, linguistically and historically informed study of literary practices on Lombok, after many years of neglect, and before the literature and the skill to perform recitation of it disappears entirely.¹¹

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¹¹ The situation in Lombok is to be contrasted with Bali where in recent times “textual singing has undergone a process of remarkable renewal and transformation” and where a “cultural practice that a generation ago was threatened with extinction, and was seen as no longer of relevance to modern Balinese society, captured the imagination of so many Balinese and has been transformed into a popular culture mass media phenomenon” (Creese 2009: 210).

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