UNVEILING THE SECRETS OF THE SINGAPORE STONE: A DIGITAL PHILOLOGY INVESTIGATION

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ABSTRACT

The Singapore Stone was a part of a sandstone discovered at the mouth of the Singapore River with inscriptions on displayed at the National Museum of Singapore, with the whereabouts of the remaining parts unknown. With attempts at deciphering the stone, it still remains a mystery. This study aims to decipher the stone as well as looking into its missing fragments. Possible options are suggested for both the writing system and the language: Kawi for the writing system, and Old Javanese, Malay Pāli and Sanskrit for the language, and suggested several possible sites of the missing fragments.

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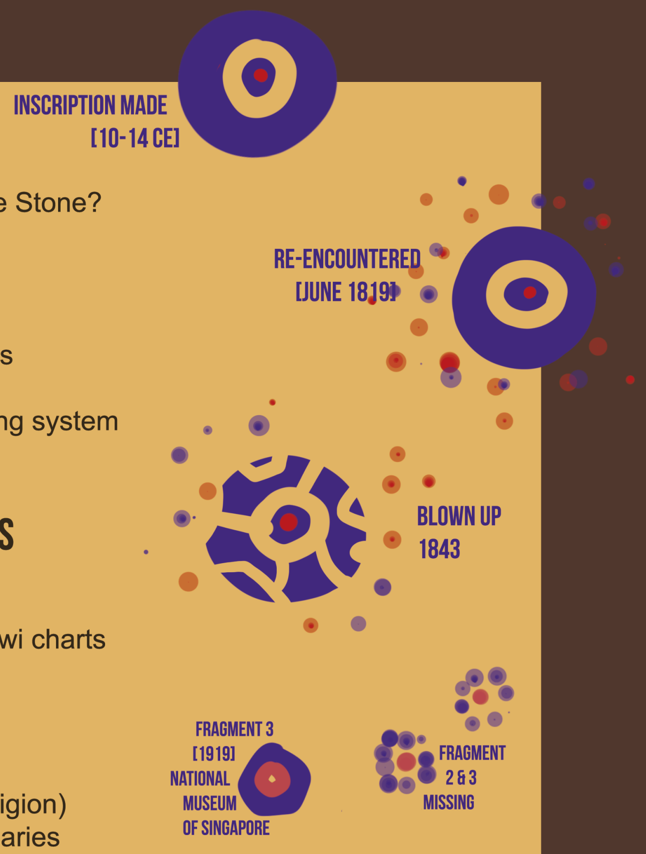


RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What language(s) is represented on the Singapore Stone?
- What might its content reveal?

CHALLENGES IN DECIPHERMENT

- Fragmentation: unknown order of limited fragments
- Erosion: effeaced graphemes, missing diacritics
- Ambiguous Script: [not definitive] language & writing system
- Contextual Loss: vague cultural-historical setting

METHODOLOGY HYPOTHESES &INTERPRETATIONS

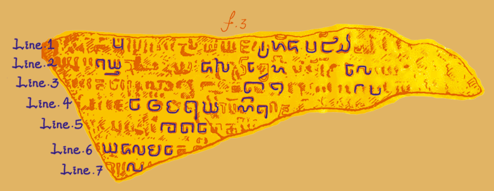
(Comparative Epigraphy)

- [1] Transcription Analysis:
  Identify surviving graphemes, compare with Kawi charts
  Assign tentative phonetic values consulting
  Old Javanese & Sanskrit & Malay Dictionary
  (Zoetmulder and Robson,1982; McDonell, 1893; Crawfurd, 1852).
- [2] Translation Analysis:
  Possible semantic grouping (e.g., war, food, religion)
  Cross-reference with Malay & Javanese dictionaries
- [3] Explore Pali cognates for religious vocabulary.
- [4] Contextual Inference: link possibilities with soci-political history

	Fragment One	
[L1]	ya-ca-ja la	"s/he avoids(/does not do) [...], then indeed [...]"
[L2]	ra-ta-ga-ya na-pa-pa-ya	"chariot, Gaya. the [sin/evil] / [plural/intensified something] of him/her..."
[L3]	ma-ra sa-la ga-la-la-sa ya-ta ...ra ya ha-ma-na-pa	"truly a mistake, s/he [...] great gold..."

	Fragment Two	
[L1]	ba-la ga-ga-ha-ja	"army, do not be brave/stand in one's ground"
[L2]	ta-ya-?-ta-pa-?	"then they [...] ascetic devotion"
[L3]	ka-pa-ra bha-ga	"unintentional place of wealth"
[L4]	ra-tha ba-la da-na da-na	"chariot, army, [...] great wealth..."
[L5]	pa-la-ha-ke-ra?-wa	"fruit/result together marsh"
[L6]	sa-ma-ra-ka-na-da ra-na	"battle [...] struggle [...]"

	Fragment Three	
[L2]	la-pa-pa-ga-ya ? ya-da-na ra-ta ? ha-pa ma-la-ya	"hunger break [...] the gift chariot [...] flee"
[L4]	ja-ta-? ma-?-ya pa-na-ta-ga-ja	"[...] born, the king's elephant"
[L5]	pa-pa kha-ta-ta ? ka-ya	"sin [...] tree
[L6]	ya-da-la-ma ta	"[...] they in, then"



OUTCOMES: HYPOTHESES & INTERPRETATIONS

- Writing System: likely Later Kawi
- Language: Old Javanese, possible Malay/Sanskrit/Pali influence
- Thematic Clues
  - [Religious]: tapa ({skt.} asceticism), papa ({skt.} sin), dana ({Mly} benevolent)
    → moral or spiritual injuctions, related to penance or vows
  - [Conflict/Royal]: samara/rana (battle), bala (army), rata (chariot), naya (policy wisdom), hama ({skt.} gold; royal terms), nmás (interior; {skt.} honor), nata (king), mata ({Mly} weapon's balde). laga ({Mly} war), tata ({Mly} array), pala (to beat), gagah (strong, stand in one's ground)
    → commemoration of a ruler, narration of military triumph
  - [Economy]: dāna (gift, donation), lapa (hungry), bhaga (fortune), gaga ({Mly} cultivation of rice in dry land), gala ({Mly} resource), pala ({Mly} fruit)
    → redistribution of wealth, offerings, or results of conest

*{skt}=sanskrit, {Mly} =Malay, Javanese if unmarked,
[F(n)-L(n)] represents the sequence number of Fragment and Line

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ANOTHER OPTION: PĀLI

Background

- From the 10th to the 13th century, Singapore was a maritime kingdom where Buddhism and Hinduism coexisted. Most inscriptions contained both Hindu legitimizing discourse for kingship and Buddhist notions of merit-making.
- Sanskrit and Pāli belong to Indo-European language, somewhat similar to each other in etymological senses.
- Some scholars speculate that the inscriptions are a combination of Sanskirt, old Javanese and the old Malay. Regarding Pali, it can be referred to Sanskrit.

Research Method

- Transcribe the reproduction and translate it with correspondent Latin letters
- Comparing Latin with Sanskirt identifying similarities
- Collecting possible Sanskirt words and trace back to Pāli

Outcomes

Religious ideas in Pali classics are expressed in Sanskrit in the inscriptions

Sanskirt	Pali	English Meaning
dharma	dhamma	law, righteousness, cosmic order
rōjō	rōjō	king
puṇya	puñña	merit, virtue
svasti	svasti	blessing, auspiciousness
yaśas	yasa	glory, fame
deva	deva	god, deity
sthōna	ṭhōna	place, site

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MISSING FRAGMENTS

Assumption

The missing fragments of the Singapore Stone may still exist in public or private collections, archaeological archives, or undiscovered locations in Singapore, India, or the UK.

Research Method

Archival Research

- British colonial records in Singapore and UK
- Academic and archaeological records

Auction House Research

- Conducted a comprehensive search of auction records from major international auction houses, including
  - Sotheby's (established connection with Singapore market in 1990, office opened in 1985)
  - Artprice (trading platforms, market dynamics, and price data reviewed)
  - BEST'S INTERNATIONAL AUCTIONS INC.
  - 33 Auction
  - Habsburg International Auction Co., Ltd. (founded in London in 1826)
- The active periods of these auction houses align with the era of the fragments' disappearance, but no traces were found in their records.

Community Engagement:

- Media campaigns and social outreach (Find Singapore Stone Fragments)
- Workshops, exhibits, and interviews with local communities in Singapore and Calcutta

Findings (Possible Locations)

- UK: British museums, military collections
- India: Indian Museum (uncataloged)
- Singapore: Local archaeologists, private collectors

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CONCLUSION

By conducting mostly comparative method, the study found that the writimg system on the Singapore Stone might be Kawi, and the language being Old Javanese, Malay, Sanskrit or Pāli. Vocabularies about food, war and religion are found from the four languages. Further research can be conducted to decipher the stone and explore its use. The study also suggests that the missing fragments of the stone might be in museums in India, Singapore and the UK, or collected by private ore military collectors.

Through the study, it is found that it is either positive or negative between "historical" and "comparative". While the historical comparative linguistics is a science which tries to explore the common rules of the change of language, the core of historical comparative linguistics lies in the language system itself, with literatures or inscriptions merely serving as a record of the language, which shows that although the ultimate goal is to make a judgment/idea about a language, the interests can be different, and historical comparative linguistics can balance the different dimensions in research.

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