La Galigo and writing

Campbell Macknight[1]

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This paper seeks to understand more fully the extraordinary cultural product we know under the name of La Galigo. In particular, it advocates careful use of the terms we use in our discussion of the material. I also suggest some questions which invite further research. As all of us know who have entered the entrancing world of La Galigo, there is much we do not yet understand.

The earliest reference to La Galigo may be in Godinho de Eredia's *Description of Malacca, Meridional India, and Cathay*, which he wrote in 1613. In his discussion of religious ideas in the Indonesian archipelago, Eredia turns his attention to 'the idolators of the Aromatic Archipelago [which possibly suggests the eastern part of the archipelago]' and describes their belief in the transmigration of souls. He then continues:

> And they maintain yet other ridiculous heresies, for they allege that the human race is descended from animals, birds, and plants as for instance that the Perumal [Brahma] was descended from a cow. For their histories maintain that the family of the Kings of Gilolo and Maluco was born from the eggs of a cobra or serpent, and the King Lubo [Luwu] in Macazar from the pith of a bambooo from the clumps, and other people from stones, and from particular things of no consequence (Mills 1997:50).

I believe that the reference to a Luwu king being born from the pith of a bamboo could be a garbled account of Batara Guru's descent from the Upperworld, early in the La Galigo cycle. It is not clear whether the 'histories' referred to are oral accounts of these wonderful doings or actual written manuscripts, though the former seems more likely.

Until very recently, the cycle of stories known as La Galigo has taken two forms: remembered knowledge in the mind of certain Bugis individuals and manuscripts written in lontara' script (Macknight 2003:350–1). While developments such as Robert Wilson's stage production and printed transliterations in Latin script have been derived from the manuscripts, the widespread traces of the stories across the archipelago reflect the knowledge Bugis migrants have carried with them, often adapting them to local circumstances (Zainal Abidin 1974).[2]

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[1] College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University, Canberra. Email: macknight@ozemail.com.au I wish to thank Sirtjo Koolhof for advice and helpful comments on a draft of this paper.

[2] Particular examples of local knowledge of the La Galigo stories are also to be found in Rahman (2003) and papers in the present volume.

My concern in this paper is with the creation of the manuscripts in Bugis lontara' script.[3] When and how and why were these manuscripts written? With minor exceptions, the manuscripts are the primary source for appreciating the La Galigo cycle and to fully understand this wonderful tradition we must look carefully at the manuscripts. At the outset, it is worth defining and exploring the sense of the terms we use in this discussion.

The first of these concerns the definition of La Galigo itself. Matthes, in the nineteenth century, came to the question with concepts drawn from his education and background. On the one hand, he says that he was seeking 'a complete copy of this poem', while immediately afterwards he acknowledges that what he found were 'fragments each of which could be seen as a separate manuscript' (Matthes 1872:251). Today there is no longer a search for 'a complete copy' of a single poem. The most convenient English term for La Galigo as a whole is 'cycle' which is defined in the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* as 'a series of poems or prose romances collected round a central event or epoch of mythic history and forming a continuous narrative.' The cognate term also occurs in the Dutch titles of Kern's two catalogues (1939; 1954). I suggest that the best Indonesian equivalent is *siklus*, rather than *seri* which suggests a single narrative order.

Within the cycle, there are episodes — and *episoda* seems also to be accepted as the best Indonesian term. There is a clear explanation of the way in which the episodes together make up the cycle in Koolhof (2017:4–5), drawing on the ideas of Nurhayati Rahman. Koolhof distinguishes a 'main plot' (*alur pokok*) from the plot of each episode or sub-plot (*sub-alur*). An episode is usually built around a particular character or characters with much use of flash-backs and predictions, so that the construction of a single chronological sequence of episodes is complex. The various genealogical relationships of the characters provide much of the overall coherence of the main plot. The late Muh. Salim once explained the structure of the cycle to me as a tree with episodes being sections of branches, and that, although we could grasp the overall shape of the tree, we did not necessarily have all sections of every branch. Taken as whole and allowing for some remaining difficulties, the coherence of the 'main plot' in both narrative terms and in the relationship of characters is remarkable.

There have been several attempts to outline the 'main plot' of the cycle or parts of it and to identify separate sections. The first useful published account of the whole was provided by Matthes (1872:251–62), drawing directly on information from his expert guide, Colli'pujié. After a long introductory paragraph, this consists of 122 short paragraphs for the whole cycle. A similar division into a large number of sections is found at the beginning of each of the 12 parts of the manuscript known as NBG 188 which Colli'pujié put together for Matthes (Salim and others 2017). In the first part,

[3] It may be that there is no longer anyone who is able to perform La Galigo stories, that is to *ma'galigo*, without a written text. Sirtjo Koolhof (1992:78) describes his recording of three oral texts, which he then transcribes and translates. Tangdilintin (1987; 1989) also provides transcriptions and translations of La Galigo material which deserve further analysis. I thank Sirtjo Koolhof for drawing these books to my attention. It would be well worthwhile searching for any further people able to perform orally and recording their performance.

for example, there are 25 sections, in four groups, though as Koolhof notes (2017:47), these are not a reliable source for the actual content of each part. Taking this rate of division as average would produce a total of about 300 sections for NBG 188 which covers, of course, only about a third of the whole cycle. Kern, in his catalogue of the European manuscripts (1939), distinguishes 78 sections of the 'main plot' in the Jonker collection in Leiden, though the Indonesian translation (Kern 1989) sensibly reduces this to 39. Koolhof provides a slightly different reduction of Kern's list to 38 sections, helpfully keyed into Kern's catalogues, in Dutch (Koolhof (1992:21–41) and in Indonesian (Koolhof (2017a:23–46).[4]

While the Kern division of the Jonker collection, and other lists derived from this, provide some order in the mass of material, it needs to be remembered that this order has been devised by Kern himself. This can be seen in the table showing the variety of manuscript items and parts of items supporting each section (Kern 1939:1077–82).

Distinguishing episodes within the 'main plot', however, is not as straightforward as it might seem. To begin with, it is not possible to link items in the Jonker collection with the individual manuscripts from which they were copied. Many of the divisions made by Kern, which seem reasonable and are often supported by reference to other manuscript sources, occur in the middle of Jonker's items. Nor can NBG 188 help much either, since it was deliberately written to provide a coherent narrative which would obscure the separation of episodes.

In practice, identifying episodes must rest on other manuscripts, of which we have many, and some judgement about breaks in the narrative structure of the cycle. Koolhof (1999:370) estimates that there are about 40 to 50 episodes in all. It would be a helpful aid to future research for someone to draw up, on the basis of already published materials, a list of episodes, listing what texts we have for each. At least that would throw up the problematic cases.

Some episodes are more popular than others. Those around Sawérigading's quest to marry Wé Cudai' seem to have produced a large number of manuscripts and have attracted scholarly attention. Fachruddin Ambo Enre (1999) has given us a magnificent edition of that section of the 'main plot' dealing with Sawérigading building a palace in Luwu, then felling the Wélenréngngé tree and sailing to Cina. He discusses seven manuscripts dealing with this section of the narrative and in his sub-title claims it as one episode. In choosing which of these manuscripts to transcribe and translate, he is guided by an analysis of the nine scenes (*adegan*) which occur in some or all of the manuscripts. His conclusion is to concentrate on the relevant sections of parts 7 and 8 of NBG 188 (1999:41–67).

[4] Outside the 'main plot' there are also the *Méompalo karellaé* texts dealing with Sangiang Serri and the origins of rice; these have little to do with the La Galigo tradition. Many of the folktales found across the archipelago only relate to the tradition through the use of personal names, especially that of Sawérigading (Zainal Abidin 1974). Akhmar (2016; 2018) has published an important text showing Muslim influence which falls outside the usual range of cultural reference.

The next section of the narrative has been presented by Nurhayati Rahman (2006) who has surveyed 19 manuscripts and edited two of these. In choosing these manuscripts, she too has been guided, in part, by a very detailed analysis of scenes. A particularly valuable feature of her work is the transcription and translation of her manuscript F, which is a lontar strip roll in the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam (item 673/4). This is much shorter and more direct than the usual manuscripts on paper which is not surprising given the nature of the medium. She suggests that it may have been a kind of mnemonic device, just giving an outline of the narrative, rather than the usual full narrative text (Rahman 2006:106).[5]

Nyompa (1983) provides transcription and translation of a related section of the cycle derived from two very similar manuscripts which he prefers over a third (1983:9). Lastly Koolhof has published a Dutch translation of the section of the narrative dealing with Sawérigading's arrival in disguise at the palace of Wé Cudai', based on a manuscript in Middelburg and another which was once in Makassar (Koolhof 2000:14–49, 213–14).[6]

Turning to the manuscripts themselves, one is struck by how many of those which are easily accessible are clearly copies of other manuscripts, initiated by external encouragement. This very obviously applies to the vast bulk of the Jonker collection apparently made when Jonker was government linguist in Makassar between 1886 and 1896. Similarly, the La Galigo materials in the Schoemann collection in Berlin show every sign of having been copied to order in codices of a standard size and appearance, probably when Schoemann visited Makassar in 1849. Most items in the collection made under Cense's direction in the 1930s for the then Matthesstichting in Makassar are also copies made on pages of a standard size. In many cases, both the name and origin of the owner of the manuscript being copied are given, as well as the name of the copying scribe. While the status of all these manuscripts mentioned as copies can be deduced from the circumstances of their creation, it is confirmed by the frequent editorial corrections which occur. The copy has been checked against the model and casual errors corrected such as duplicated aksara struck through and omitted words, often a five-syllable segment, written in above the line.

The great manuscript, NBG 188, presents something of a puzzle. We know that it was created under Colli'pujié's direction to satisfy Matthes' desire for a more 'complete copy of this poem', but the details of its production still elude us. The editors of the first part or volume — in reality, just the first bound section of what is

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[5] Nurhayati Rahman (2006:69–70) describes this quite fully, adding to Kern (1939:879). A little more information on its origin and date is available on the museum's registration card: the item was received from Heer I Troostwijk of Amsterdam in March 1931. The donor said that he obtained it in 1906 or 1907 near Bua in the headwaters of the Pangkajene river and thought the contents related to the history of Luwu. Information on the contents, as supplied by Cense and Kern, are then given.

[6] Koolhof's first manuscript, which he describes as no. 8018, is the same as Kern's (1939:1072–3) 102. Happily, Kern (1954:46) was wrong in claiming that it had been destroyed in 1940.

one continuous manuscript — discern four styles of handwriting (Koolhof 2017:48), though I find these hard to pick up in the digital images of the manuscript now available from the Leiden University Library website. I note also that each of the three page-breaks where a change is said to occur is within a five-syllable segment. I made some further checks in later parts. There does seem to be a clear change of handwriting in part 2, p. 99, line 2 which is continued to the end of the part. In part 9 there is a gradual change in handwriting between p. 42 and p. 45, but it is hard to determine a precise spot. In contrast, there is a very sharp break between p. 190 and p. 191, and this also happens to be a break between segments. Fachruddin (1999:52) in his study of parts 7 and 8 noticed changes in the size of the handwriting, but he put it down to changes in the copyist's pen and says explicitly that he judges the material to have been copied by a single individual. As the editors note, there are occasional examples throughout all twelve parts of the great manuscript of the types of correction found in other copied material. There are also differences in the quality of paper used, even within those parts of the manuscript bound up in one binding (Koolhof and Rahman 2017:7).

My tentative opinion is that Colli'pujié, who, as we know, had a good idea of the 'main plot' of the cycle, brought together a number of manuscript codices dealing with various episodes and arranged her materials in the order required by the 'main plot'. She then arranged for these to be copied to create NBG 188. The copying began at the beginning of the 'main plot' and continued onwards from there using whatever resources of paper or scribal assistance were available. How many scribes were involved is not important, and it is probably not possible on present evidence to resolve the issue either by handwriting or inconsistencies in spelling and similar analysis. Possibly Colli'pujié herself, with her good knowledge of the cycle, was responsible for devising ways in which to blend one episode — or one source text — with the next. There is no sign at the end of the text in part 12 that this was seen to be the conclusion to an extraordinary labour and perhaps it was just that time and opportunity ran out.

In the wider field of Bugis philology, there are complications in the concept of copying. On the one hand, we can assume that a scribe dealing with a religious work would pay close attention to reproducing the Arabic script of a quotation from the Qur'an with extreme accuracy. On the other hand, a scribe dealing with a Bugis prose work seems to have had little regard for an exact reproduction of the model text. The various levels of variation in prose works are laid out by Macknight and Caldwell (2003). While there is some gap between model and copy in almost any situation involving manuscript copying whether within the Indonesian world or beyond, the degree and nature of such variation is particular to each case, such as the Bugis, whether the distinction lies in cultural understandings or script or anything else.

What we do not know is the attitude which a scribe brings to the copying of La Galigo texts, or other poetic texts. Is special care and attention given to the copying of such texts in a way which we might call 'close' copying? Does the pattern of the metre make casual variation less likely and provide a certain degree of stability? On the one hand, Pelras (1979/2016:24) claims that:

> In contrast with the *lôntara'*, the *sure' Galigo* are accorded remarkable respect

> in regard to their text. If it should happen that anything is changed in the copy, it is the result of a mistake in reading or failing to understand the meaning of an archaic expression which has become unintelligible. I know of no case of deliberate addition or modification.

This might be called a 'high' view of La Galigo text and is associated with stories of reverence for actual manuscripts. There seems, however, to be no case where we can test this claim. Leaving aside copying for use within Bugis society, we have not yet even been able to compare, in detail, the text of a La Galigo manuscript which has clearly been copied for one of the collections listed above with the text of either the model manuscript itself or another closely related to it.[7]

On the other hand, Koolhof (2007; 2008) has very convincingly attacked the idea of a firm distinction between *sure'* and *lontara'* as literary genres. While it is certainly the case that codices usually contain only La Galigo material or other works, there are also examples of codices with both kinds of material. Any distinction between La Galigo texts and texts of other works is more likely to reflect the uses to which the texts were put, than differences in attitudes to the integrity of the text.

What then is the relationship between manuscripts dealing with the same episode? Fachruddin has an important observation on this matter.

> It is clear from the comparisons above [that is, between manuscripts] that there are scarcely two manuscripts which describe an event in exactly the same sentences, even though many of their words are the same and the meaning is the same. Some just give the main points in outline, others give more detail, depending on the taste and need of the copyist. This shows that the copyists, as well as understanding the conventions of writing La Galigo, also had a fair degree of freedom (Fachruddin 1999:63).

This suggests a situation more akin to the 'free' copying of prose texts. This, however, is misleading. The whole question of copying, whether 'close' or 'free', implies a connection between texts which can be grouped under the concept of a 'work' (*karya*) in the sense defined by Macknight (1984), that is, a textual unit as envisaged by its creator.[8]

If we look at the comparisons provided by Fachruddin and Nurhayati Rahman for the texts they have consulted and their analysis of scenes, it becomes clear in each case that these texts are not usefully described as falling within the scope of a single

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[7] It would be interesting to make more detailed textual comparisons within the mass of private La Galigo manuscripts listed in the catalogue of the Proyek Pelestarian Naskah (Mukhlis and others 2003). There are also some private La Galigo manuscripts in the microfilms from my work in South Sulawesi in the early 1970s and held in the Australian National University Library and elsewhere.

[8] In Macknight (1984:105) I explicitly excluded La Galigo material from discussion of what constituted a 'work' 'until we have available a considerable amount of carefully edited text on which to decide'. That moment has now arrived. Koolhof (1999:369) uses the term 'work' for the whole cycle and acknowledges that this is a more general sense than that in Macknight (1984).

'work'. Nurhayati Rahman's work is particularly valuable here since she provides both the text of her manuscript F (10 pages in the printed version) and the text of manuscript Q (181 pages). These are different 'works' dealing with related narrative material. If this is the case, then it is not correct to speak of copyists (*para penyalin*), even with 'a fair degree of freedom', as Dr Fachruddin does in the passage above.

I suggest that a useful way to think about the issue is to return to the oral nature of La Galigo and think of an 'oral composer' presenting a performance [*pertunjukan*]. Such a performance required knowledge of the 'main plot' and skill in organising the details of one or more episodes. The actual content would be chosen to fit the occasion and the level of elaboration adjusted to fit the particular circumstances. Each performance was both transitory and unique.[9]

In the same way that each oral performance is a unit, so a manuscript dealing with one or more episodes can be seen as a performance in writing and, in a very real sense, a 'work'. Of course, a manuscript, once created, may be copied in ways discussed above and that explains the creation of most of the items in the major collections. Such copying, however, does not account for the creation of the original manuscript of the 'work'. Kern, who, after all, had read a great deal of La Galigo material, has a lyrical passage about the creation of performance:

> The same motifs, the same situations repeat themselves in succeeding generations. Thus there are many stereotypes in the poem. Yet one cannot say that the poets have parrotted each other. For a poem with a set rhythm, performed in a singing style in a world where literacy is not widespread, impresses itself in the memory of the audience. Whenever a singer sets himself the task of singing an episode, the description of events, which he is at the same time trying to describe, hums around in his head, memory drives the point of his pen or, as he improvises, flows out in his performance. Yet whatever the agreement between the similar descriptions, small differences, introduced here and there and relating to the varying circumstances, create a sense that the poet is always dealing with his subject; the text is alive (Kern 1939:10).

I have previously proposed and discussed in some detail the concept of the 'writing composer', that is 'a person, faced with a blank palm-leaf or page of paper, who composes the words which he or she writes' (Macknight 1993:29). As Kern notes, the work of improvisation may be 'at the point of his pen'. The product of a 'writing composer' would, therefore, be a 'work'. This has several implications and raises some possibilities.

Firstly, it provides a rationale for an editor to produce a diplomatic edition of a single manuscript — unless one can demonstrate actual copying in a second manuscript, whether close or free, from the same original manuscript on which the manuscript before the editor is based. It would be even better, of course, if one could

[9] Many years ago, I drew attention to the relevance for La Galigo studies of the methods developed by Parry and Lord in their analysis of Serbo-Croatian songs as they sought to understand the oral aspect of Homer (Macknight 1975:133). The usefulness of this comparative work is explored in some detail in Macknight (2003).

demonstrate that the manuscript to be edited was written by the 'writing composer' himself. Though it is certainly of interest to list other 'works' dealing with similar narrative material and they may help with understanding omissions or other problems with the 'work' being edited, they cannot contribute to the actual text of an edition.[10] In practice, this is the policy adopted in the recent editions described above.[11]

Secondly, the separate composition of manuscripts dealing with similar narrative material opens up the possibility of varying degrees of skill or differences in outlook between individual 'writing composers'. The potential for literary and linguistic analysis is almost endless. Kern expands on the detail and difficulty of what is involved:

> If one wants to know how much an individual contributes to the general good, then a comparison of parallel texts, such as those in the Jonker collection which show variation, could do this. It would then appear that, as noted, the descriptions of events which come together to form an episode, are comparable to a high degree, but the general idea, the purpose, is often strikingly different. This is only possible by reason of great familiarity with the material. In fact, analysing this poetry involves one going further with it than both poets and audience were aware. The difficulties which present themselves for us to disentangle did not exist for them. Individuality has most elbow room in the interludes which occur in some texts. Here there can arise the expression of a very personal taste. ... A poet was thus constrained on two sides: in the first place by the metre, a constraint which did not pinch but was often like a clear way on which he could easily proceed, and in the second place, which applies particularly in descriptions, he could not depart from what he had heard countless times. (Kern 1939:10)

Thirdly, if one assumes that the 'writing composer' may have produced his 'written performance' of a 'work' dealing with one or two episodes in the cycle at any time in the past, then there is no connection between the content of a particular manuscript and the antiquity of the La Galigo tradition as a whole. The cycle of stories lives in the mind of performers and elements of the cycle can be performed, whether orally or in writing, at any time. This is an important point for those who would seek to derive historical information from the stories.

There are further consequences when we address the actual production of manuscripts. Koolhof has noted that the oldest, securely dated La Galigo manuscript is that in the Deventer Stads- or Atheneumbibliotheek which was obtained from a man in Selangor in 1784 (Koolhof:1999:380). Possibly there are still earlier manuscripts in Sulawesi, but it is difficult to know how they could be dated. As we have seen, the content of a La Galigo episode provides no indication of its age and

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[10] Notice that this differs from the rationale for producing a diplomatic edition of a prose work, such as one of the chronicles, of which there are numerous 'free' copies. The issue there is the impossibility of controlling the variation between copies of the 'work' (Macknight and Caldwell 2001).

[11] Nyompa (1983:9) is unclear about the relationship between his manuscript a) and manuscript b) and the status of his published text.

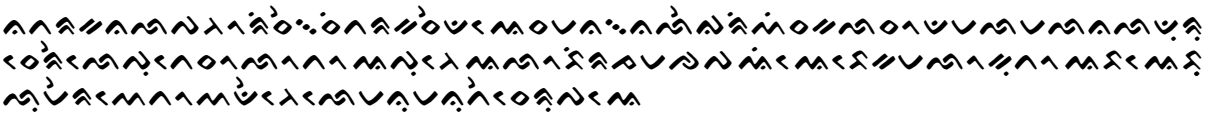
the general unwillingness to combine La Galigo text with other works in a codex means that there are few opportunities for dating by association. It may be thought that texts on lontar strip-rolls are older than manuscripts on paper, but this is not necessarily the case. Matthes records both being in use in the middle of the nineteenth century (1872:251). As noted above, the strip-roll manuscript published by Nurhayati was obtained in the early twentieth century. The other strip-roll in the Tropenmuseum, (Item 668/215), obtained in 1931, although it does contain a little La Galigo material, is mostly given over to a nineteenth-century *tolo'*. The registration card records Kern's judgement that the La Galigo text is 'worthless'. My guess is that it was made to illustrate the nature of a strip-roll and no care was given to the selection of textual material. In Kern's discussion of the strip-roll given to the Leiden University Library in 1906 (Kern 1939:580–3), he notes that such an item would not have had a long life and the text seems to be at the end of a long process of copying.

There would seem to be a necessary association between the sheer bulk of the La Galigo material in the manuscripts we have and the ready availability of paper. In practice, it is difficult to determine when sufficient supplies of paper were first available in South Sulawesi. After a review of the scant evidence, I have concluded that, although some paper may have reached South Sulawesi in the sixteenth century, not least in copies of the Qur'an, one cannot demonstrate widespread use of paper for Bugis writing before 1700 CE (Macknight 2016:59–60). I believe that the easiest assumption is that the 'writing performance' of the 'works' of which we have copies occurred mainly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

There is one feature of a 'writing performance' which has not been commented on, that is the extreme efficiency of the Bugis lontara' script. This can be easily demonstrated. Take the opening lines of NBG 188, volume 3 (Salim and others 2017,3:16).

natarakkaq na La Pangoriseng/ sitarakkaseng Daéng Samana/ naleggari wi sakkala sodda malaq-malaqna/ La Dunrung Séreng, lé Putténg Soloq to Apungngé,/ Alobiraja Mancapaiqé, Békaq Maloku to Abangngé/ Bulu Menrawé to Wadengngé,/ lé manuq-manuq tessérupaé.[12]

[204 characters, ignoring punctuation and spaces]



[87 aksara, plus 29 major vowel signs [ᨋ ᨌ ᨍ] and 15 dot vowels [ᨘ] ignoring 2 pallawa]

Not only are there far fewer characters in the lontara', but the most frequent characters are also simpler in shape (Macknight unpublished).

[12] Maka berangkatlah La Pangoriseng bersama Daéng Samana melepaskan pasung emas La Dunrung Séreng, La Putténg Soloq dari Apung, Alobiraja dari Mancapaiq, Békaq Maloku dari Abang, Bulu Menrawé dari Wadeng, dan aneka ragam burung lainnya (Salim and others 2017,3:17).

A 'writing composer' with a high level of expertise in the script would have been able to commit his performance to paper with speed and relative facility. With experience of lengthy oral performances and access to sufficient paper, there was no reason for a writing composer to restrict himself to a mere summary or outline. Hence we find the extended treatment of episodes in manuscripts. There is even a sense in which NBG 188 at 2850 pages can be seen as a single 'performance' and 'work'.

Much is made in the literature of the 'length' of La Galigo.[13] It will be clear from what has already been said that I believe this to be an unreal measurement. Yet even the treatment of one section of the narrative — and leaving aside the special case of NBG 188 — can often run to hundreds of pages. The elaboration and literary richness of the cycle, to say nothing of the sheer bulk of its elements, are impressive by any standards. In looking around the world with an eye to comparisons, what is truly remarkable about the texts of the La Galigo cycle is that these extended performances, which must originally have been wholly oral, have been brought to written form in an indigenous script within the culture itself. While European scholars may have played a role in commissioning and collecting copies, the creations of 'writing composers' seem to owe nothing to external influences. Today, this wonderful tradition lives on in the manuscripts which are rightly recognised as a special Bugis contribution to the memory of humanity.

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[13] Starting from Kern's famous estimate of 6000 pages (1954:v), Koolhof reached a minimum estimate of the equivalent 225,000 lines of 16 syllables (2017:1), that is, 3,600,000 syllables. Using a different approach and an estimate of 7000 pages, I reached a total of 4,218,000 syllables (Macknight 2003:351). It is not clear how the abundance of surviving manuscripts in private hands in Sulawesi as revealed in the catalogue of the great microfilming project (Mukhlis and others 2003) affects these calculations. How many of these manuscripts are new 'works' and how many are copies or perhaps even the models of 'works' otherwise included in the totals?

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