

The *Satera Jontal* Script in the Sumbawa District in Eastern Indonesia¹

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1. Introduction

Satera Jontal is a script found in the Sumbawa district of the NTB (West Nusa Tenggara) province of Indonesia. The term *Satera Jontal* can be translated as ‘palm leaf literature’ or ‘palm leaf script’; *satera* means ‘literature’ and *jontal*, ‘palm leaf.’ The script is a variant of the Bugis script, *Aksara Lontaraq*, used in south Sulawesi. This paper is an attempt to provide a preliminary overview of *Satera Jontal*.

The structure of this paper is as follows. Section 2 offers a brief overview of the script’s history including the recent local government initiative to develop *Satera Jontal*. Following this, a comparison between *Satera Jontal* to the standard *Aksara Lontaraq* is presented to explore the deviations and innovations exhibited in *Satera Jontal*.

2. History and recent development of *Satera Jontal*

Satera Jontal is used by the Sumbawa people, who inhabit in the western part of the Sumbawa Island, Indonesia. This area administratively forms two districts, the Sumbawa district and the Western Sumbawa districts, both of which belong to NTB province in the Republic of Indonesia. The Sumbawa people are the majority ethnic group of in this region. They refer to themselves *tau Samawa* (‘person Sumbawa’), and their language, as *basa Samawa* (‘language Sumbawa’).

¹ I would like to thank the coordinators, Christopher Miller, Sualala Pangilinan (Mike Pangilinan), and Anthony Jukes for giving me the opportunity, and the incentive, to present this research. This study is based on my own fieldwork in Sumbawa Besar and Empang, Sumbawa, NTB between 1996 and 2013. I also would like to thank Dedy Mulyadi (Edot) for assisting my field work at Sumbawa, the late Pak Muslim Yasin (Mr. Imbik) and Pak Munmun for allowing me to access the precious script of *Satera Jontal*, and Anthony Jukes (again) and Ibu Nurhayati Rahman for sharing their valuable knowledge of *Aksara Lontaraq* and Makassarese.

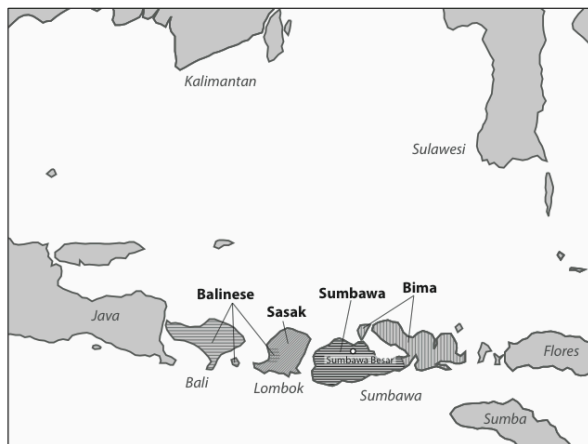


Figure 1 The location of the Sumbawa region

In spite of the present affiliation, historically, this area has been under the influence of the authority of the South Sulawesi, especially Makassar. Legend tells that the first Sultan of Sumbawa was a descendent of a nobleman from Makassar and an indigenous princess of Sumbawa, who in turn descended from a nymph of paradise. *Satera Jontal* can be viewed as byproduct of the cultural influence that affected the Sumbawa people. According to Manca (1984: 37-38), *Satera Jontal* had been traditionally used to exchange poems between friends or lovers called *lawas*. The use of *Satera Jontal*, however, seems to deteriorated some time ago, though the tradition *lawas* is still retained among the Sumbawa people. Documents in which the Sumbawa language is written have not yet been attested.

In 2003, in the private collection of Pak Munmun, the present author discovered various old documents written in *Satera Jontal* in Sumbawa; the language of the documents is Makassar. However, the script exhibits qualities characteristic of *Satera Jontal*. These features are described in Section 3. The script seems to have been made at some point in the Dutch Era, but the exact date is not certain, according to Pak Munmun. Figure 2 shows an example page of a *Satera Jontal* document from Sumbawa.

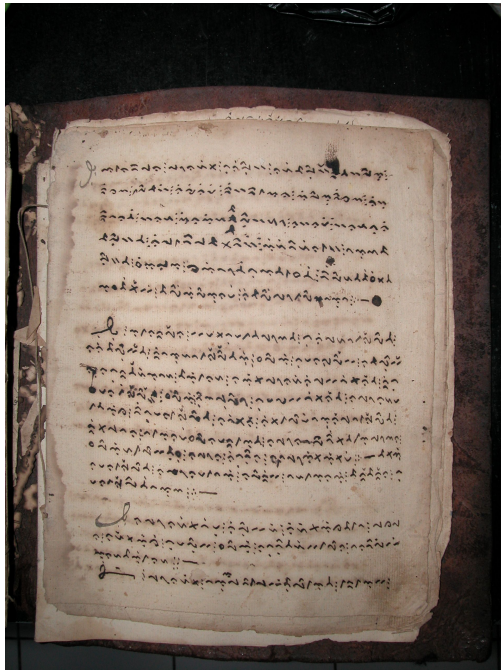


Figure 2 Example page of the script discovered in Pak Munmun's collection in Sumbawa

Despite of the substantial lack of attested usage, Sumbawa people have considered the script to be an important part of their unique cultural heritage. Since the end of the New Order, the local government has attempted to develop the script as a unique cultural feature that the district retains. As of 2000, they have adopted *Satera Jontal* as one of the subjects taught in the local primary school curriculum. The local government also published a textbook to teach the subject (Hijaz 2003); see Figure 3.

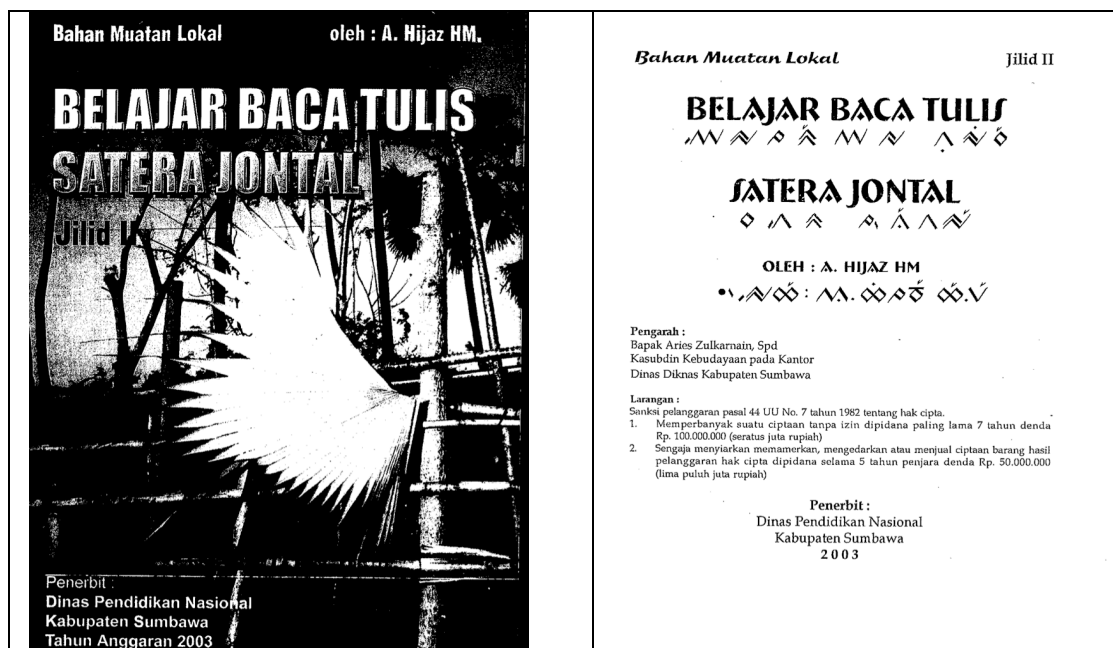


Figure 3 The cover page (left) and title page (right) of the text book *Belajar Baca Tulis Satera Jontal* [Lesson in reading and writing *Satera Jontal*] (Hijaz 2003)

In addition, *Satera Jontal* now appears on street name signs, as shown in Figure 4.





Figure 4 Street name signs written in *Satera Jontal*

3 *Satera Jontal* as a variant of *Aksara Lontaraq*

In this section the features of *Satera Jontal* is shown based on the textbook that is mentioned in section 2 (Hijaz 2003).

Table 1 is the list of the basic letters used in *Satera Jontal*. These 20 basic letters are used.

//	^	^	^	^	^	^	^	^	^	^	^	^	^	^
ka	ga	nga	pa	ba	ma	ta	da	na	ca	ja	nya	ya	ra	la
wa	sa	a	ha	za										

Table 1 The basic letters of *Satera Jontal*

As a general features, *Satera Jontal* employed here exhibits very plain style that is constituted of only a straight line and a dot.

Most of the basic letters, namely those indicating *k*, *m*, *t*, *d*, *n*, *j*, *ny*, *r*, *w*, *s*, *a*, and *h* exhibit exactly the same shape as found in Bugis scripts.

	k	m	t	d	n	j
<i>Satera Jontal</i>	//	^	^	^	^	^

Aksara Lontaraq						
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	ny	r	w	s	a	h
<i>Satera Jontal</i>						
Aksara Lontaraq						

However, the three letters: j, r, and a display some variation.



	j	r	a
Canonical form			
Western variation			
Western variation			

Three basic letters, namely those indicating *g*, *p*, and *c* exhibit the same shape in *Aksara Lontaraq*, but maintain a slight difference in style.

	g	p	c
<i>Satera Jontal</i>			
Aksara Lontaraq			

The two basic letters: *ng* and *l* exhibit slight differences from their equivalent in *Askara lontaraq* in their direction, or in the structure of the constituents.

	ng	l
<i>Satera Jontal</i>		

Aksara Lontaraq		
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The two basic letters: *b* and *y* exhibit entirely different shape from their equivalents in *Aksara Lontaraq*.





	b	y
<i>Satera Jontal</i>		
Aksara Lontaraq		

Table 2 shows the vowel markers, or diacritics, with the basic character indicating *k*. For the most part, they exhibit the same shape and position as their equivalents in *Aksara Lontaraq*.











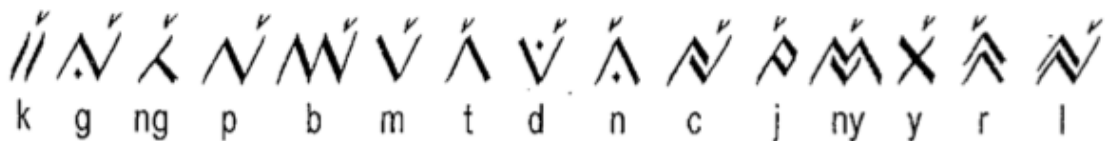
	<i>ka</i>	<i>ki</i>	<i>ku</i>	<i>ke</i>	<i>ko</i>
<i>Satera Jontal</i>					
Aksara Lontaraq					

Table 2 Vowle Diacritics in *Satera Jontal*

There are two types of independent innovations in *Satera Jontal* that are not observed in *Aksara Lontaraq*.

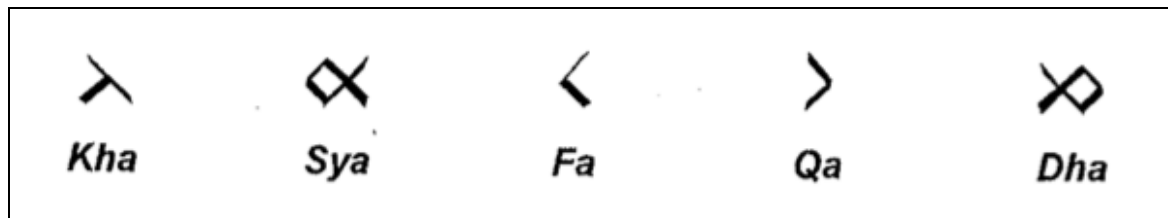
First, a diacritic functioning as a ‘vowel killer’ was included. This diacritic appears in the form of a tick (✓) and occurs above a basic letter when a consonant is not followed by a vowel.



The word *Jontal* ‘palm leaf’ is velow; the vowel killer occurs in the closed syllables—in this case, above the letter indicating *n* and *l* respectively.



Second, the five basic letters that indicate borrowed sounds were very newly developed: *kh*, *sy*, *f*, *q*, and *dh*.



Some of the basic letters of *Aksara Lontaraq*, namely, those representing a sound cluster consisting of a nasal and its homorganic oral sound, *ngk* ʌ, *mp* ʌ, *nr* ʌ, and *nc* ʌ, are not used in the *Satera Jontal*, because the Sumbawa language does not have these sounds.

4. Final remarks

This paper has provided a preliminary overview of *Satera Jontal*. Section 2 offered a brief history of the script, including the local government’s recent initiative to develop it. Section 3 compared *Satera Jontal* to the standard *Aksara Lontaraq* to explore the deviations and innovations exhibited in *Satera Jontal*.

References

- Manca, Lalu. 1984. *Sumbawa pada masa lalu: Suatu Tinjauan Sejarah*. (Sumbawa in the past: a historical consideration.) Surabaya, Indonesia: Rinta.
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