

In response to I La Galigo

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LANGUAGES

Subject language : Wotu, Tae' (Luwu'-Rongkong), Wolio, Ledo Kaili,
Bugis, Mori Atas
Language of materials : English

DESCRIPTION

R. A. Kern's book concerning manuscript copies of the Bugis I La Galigo narrative was published in 1939. Later that year, after receiving a copy, the linguist Samuel J. Esser wrote a response. Esser's letter, published posthumously in 1964 in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* and here translated into English, touches on a number of subjects related to Wotu and surrounding languages, and indicates areas where Esser's research might have taken him had his life and work not been cut short during World War II.

SOURCE

Esser, S. J. 1961 [1939]. Naar aanleiding van I La Galigo. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 117:384–385. Original pagination is indicated by including the page number in square brackets, e.g. [p. 384].

VERSION HISTORY

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BRIEF COMMUNICATIONS

IN RESPONSE TO I LA GALIGO. The following is taken from a letter from Dr. S. J. Esser to Mr. R. A. Kern, dated 30-8-1939 and written in response to the receipt of a copy of Kern's book, *Catalogue of the Buginese manuscripts belonging to the I La Galigo epic of the Leiden University library as well as those in other European libraries*, Leiden, 1939, with updates to the Dutch spelling:

The first thing that attracts attention in South Sulawesi, when one comes from the Manado Residency, is that the old still lives here so much more powerfully than in the north. Presumably the westernizing of the Minahasa has left its mark on the entire residency. In Wotu people still live in the atmosphere of the spirits and gods of the Lagaligo, at least in part, since the figure of Lagaligo himself is for example almost entirely unknown. Sawerigadi¹ is well known, but it is evidently the old *datus* of Luwu and such with which the people live. It is a pity that they are so secretive about everything concerned with their religion, so that these things can be difficult to discover. A great deity seems to be Mohole, but so far I have not been able to ascertain more. Across all of Luwu one could obviously call Islam more an ornament than the religion of the people (except for foreigners).

I have all sorts of data from Wotu, which I am currently working on to put together in a book, which book should include: grammar, stories and other texts with translation and notes, and some explanations of an historical and ethnographic nature. I fear, however, that this book will not be ready so soon,² because your I La Galigo has made it clear to me how much value that data can have, and I would therefore like to study it further and discuss it with authorities, including in Cerekëng and Ussu (near Malili),³ where the oldest seat of Luwu was located. Unfortunately, the people there speak Buginese; to my shame I am still weak at this language.

When your book came out, I had just delivered a quarterly report to the Director of Education in which I argued, among other things, that the Luwu problem is the most important of all Celebes, because Luwu has traditionally been the center from which influences have radiated all over the island with the exception of the north.

¹ [translator's note: Sawerigading is the father of La Galigo. Both were sea captains and wanderers. See Abidin (1974) for an overview of the I La Galigo epic cycle.]

² [translator's note: In fact Esser's extensive Wotu materials (Noorduyn 1963:356–359, also mentioned in Van Ronkel 1947:168) were never recovered following the ravages of World War II.]

³ [translator's note: For the location of Cerekëng, Ussu, Malili, Nuha, and Matano as they were known to Esser, see the map on page x in the first volume of his *Klank- en Vormleer van het Morisch* (1927). This map has also been reproduced in Esser (2011:xix).]

You do not speak much about the geographical location of the parts mentioned in the poem. But Tompotika (I spell the words according to Wotuese, which doesn't have glottal stop) lies in the "Bird's Head" (Balantak peninsula near Luwuk) and from various data from those regions ... it is clear that the origin of Banggai and the kingdoms that had been there in the past must also be linked to Luwu. So too the kingdom in Kaili, as in fact also emerges from Kruyt's book.⁴

The relationship between Ledo and Wotuese (Laedo) has now become clear to me: according to the tradition in Wotu, a number of emigrants from Wotu went to Palu with a prince who could not get along well with the Datu (at that time a woman). Under the same circumstances another prince went to Butung. The Datu was their younger sister, who was promised at her birth that she would become Datu. Indeed, Wolio and Ledo are in many respects different from the languages in their environment, which is attributable to Wotuese influence. Wolio is much simpler than the other Butung languages, and should be regarded as a special language, still [p. 385] within the Butung group, yet with many Wotuese elements in it. Ledo is a dialect of Kaili, which differs because a number of words and forms are not common Kaili. The latter are then due to Wotuese influence.

However, people also speak of an older move under Sawerigadi. Here comes to the fore the question of what language was spoken by the oldest kraton of Luwu (I note in passing that Malimongĕng is a low mountain near the mouth of the Kalaena): Wotuese or Buginese or something else?

First I tended toward Wotuese, but the reading of your book has tilted me to Buginese as the oldest language (that the people now speak Buginese says little, because the villages are so sparse and there are Buginese immigrants everywhere). Yet I cannot yet believe that Luwu is the tribal land of the Buginese. Not just the ruling class, but also of the people? [Cf. I La Galigo p. 7]. There are currently living in the whole of Luwu (Kolaka included) perhaps no more than 40,000 Buginese, 10,000 of whom reside in the Palopo subsection. (These people only call themselves Buginese when they have immigrated from the Buginese country, otherwise "Luwuese," which is very confusing.)

The next month I want to hold an informal talk for the Department of Linguistics and Anthropology [of the Royal Batavian Society] about your book and what is related to it,⁵ especially the cultural-historical side of the matter, and encourage people sometime to undertake an archaeological study in the heart of the old Luwu, the coastal strip between Wotu and Malili.⁶ The island where Sawerigadi disappeared in the depths is properly in the mouth of the Malili River, which is also that of the river of Cerekĕng.

⁴ [translator's note: A. C. Kruyt's *De West-Toradja's*, published in 5 volumes. See particularly volume I, pages 17–21, 26 ff.]

⁵ [translator's note: This talk was given on September 21, 1939 (Noorduyn 1963:359).]

⁶ [translator's note: From 1997 through 2000, the OXIS Project (Origin of Complex Society in South Sulawesi) surveyed and excavated sumerous sites in this area. See Bulbeck and Caldwell (2000) *Land of Iron*

One interesting problem in this regard is that of Mori. The just-mentioned island is called Mori; the ruler of Mori (originating from Nuha, i.e. Matano) called himself Datu; and Cerekëng and Ussu actually lie in the middle of the Mori language area. The oldest settlement of Luwu is called Pungsi Mewuni (a mountain near Cerekëng), and this is Mori⁷ and means ‘hidden banana.’ In the mythical names I found in Wotu are all kinds of Mori elements, so also in a sacred song that Cense recorded in Cerekëng.⁸ Other songs in Cerekëng and Ussu have been placed back in Wotuese! The problem looks complicated enough.

In any case, the *mokole* of Matano is one of the country’s greats of Luwu. The word *mokole*, however, is again Tae’ [according to information from Dr. H. van der Veen not Tae’ but Bare’e],⁹ and this brings us to the problem of Tae’, because the language of Luwu (actually even of the city of Palopo) is undoubtedly Tae’. That Wotuese would be a Torajan language, as I had adopted on the language map,¹⁰ has proved to be wrong. It is indeed a South Sulawesi language, with different influences of Torajan and Mori origin.¹¹

If you have made a list of words that appear in the Lagaligo and that you cannot identify, then you may be able to institute a study in Wotu, because several words that are Matthes’s ‘Old Buginese’ are in daily use in Wotu. Moreover, in Wotu the proper names of the Lagaligo are used in their Bugis forms! The number of problems is legion.

for an overview and preliminary results, and the website of the OXIS Group (<https://oxis.org/research/oxis/>) for links to this work and related publications.]

⁷ [translator’s note: Specifically *pungsi* is Upper Mori. The form in Lower Mori is *punti*, in Padoe it is *pusi* (Esser 1927–1933:7).]

⁸ [translator’s note: During the 1930s A. A. Cense and his assistants at the Matthes Foundation were active in collecting examples of South Sulawesi literature (Noorduyn 1991:173). However I have not been able to locate the particular sacred song referenced here.]

⁹ [translator’s note: More precisely, the term *mokole* designated a tribal chief among the Bare’e (Pamona) living south of the Takolekaju mountains in the regions of Laiwonu, Rompo, and Rato (Schrauwens 1997:363). Outside of southern Pamona a term *mokole* designating a local ruler is limited to Mori and the other Bungku-Tolaki languages and to Lemolang, where the ruler was known as the *makole* of Waibunta (Sarasin and Sarasin 1905 II:144; Adriani and Kruyt 1950–1951 I:124). The *mokole* among the Pamona and Mori and the *makole* of Waibunta were direct or indirect vassals of the Datu of Luwu’. The term *makole* is not general Bugis, but Matthes (1874:241) confirms its use in the Luwu’ dialect of Bugis (presumably in reference to the aforesaid rulers). See J. Kruyt (1924:53 ff.) regarding Matano in the traditions of the Mori and Schrauwens (1997) for historical context.]

¹⁰ [translator’s note: Esser (1938) “Talen” (Languages); see references for full bibliographic details.]

¹¹ [translator’s note: The classification of Wotu has only recently been settled by historical-comparative linguists. Wotu is closely related to Wolio and Kamaru of Buton Island, Laiyolo of Selayar Island, and Kalao of Kalao Island (Donohue 2005). These languages together are closely related to Pamona and other languages of Central Sulawesi, particularly the Ledo variety of Kaili (Zobel 2020).]

A story I transcribed in Wotu shows that the Punna Liung, referred to in the I La Galigo, page 31, note 2, is indeed a crocodile. That people are transported on the backs of crocodiles occurs in other stories.

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