

## Analysing the Presence of Enslaved Black People in Ancient Java Society

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### Abstract

Since the 7th century, Java has been one of the trading centres of Southeast Asia. It is recorded in an inscription in Java which contains several terms that indicate the presence of foreigners in old Javanese society, including enslaved Black people. The research questions posed include: Who are they? How did they get to Java? What was their role in Javanese society? The data used for this research are inscriptions, Chinese news sources, and contemporary literary texts. Its information was analysed and classified to determine its origin and presence in Java. The results showed that there were several enslaved Black people in Java. Based on the term used to describe them, they came from East Africa and Papua.

Implicitly, the brief information shows that the existence of enslaved Black people in Java was linked to the trade conducted by Persians and people from East Indonesia. It shows that work in Java from the 7th century AD to the 15th century AD was performed with various nations. The king used the existence of enslaved Black people in Java as a way to gain spiritual "strength" from their skin colour, which was different from the Javanese society. Its belief continued until the time of the Islamic Mataram Kingdom with the presence of the Palawija courtiers, a group of disabled people who were considered a sign of the king's greatness.

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### Introduction

Since the 7th century, Java Island has been one of the trade centres of Southeast Asia (Qingxin 2006). Its status attracted many foreign traders to Java to trade, as evidenced by the mention of several terms indicating the presence of foreigners in inscriptions (Maziyah 2017, 2018b), among others, showing the presence of enslaved Black people among the royal servants. The research questions posed in this article include: First, what was the background of enslaved Black people who had lived in Java since the 7th century. Second, what was their role in Javanese society?

Studies related to enslaved Black people from Africa have been conducted by several researchers such as Gerbeau (1978), Wilensky (2002), Welie (2008), Jákl (2017), also Chakraborty and van Rossum (2020). They linked enslaved Black people to trade. Most researchers focused their studies on events after 1500 (Gerbeau 1978; Welie 2008; Chakraborty and Van Rossum 2020). Only Wilensky (2002) and Jákl (2017) discuss enslaved Black people in pre-Islamic times. According to Wilensky (2002), information about Arab traders who brought several enslaved East Africans to China came from the Tang Dynasty.

From the 8th to the 14th centuries, the Arabs controlled the vast slave trade, stretching not only along the coast of East Africa and throughout the Arab world but as far east as China. Enslaved Black people were only one of many commodities in Arabia's large-scale maritime trade with China, which peaked during the Tang and Song Dynasties (960-1275). In this research, Wilensky does not discuss the presence of enslaved Black people in Java. In contrast to Wilensky (2002), Jákl (2017) examines people from Africa who were black about maritime trade routes in the pre-Islamic period. His research uses data on inscriptions and literary texts in the Old Javanese language and is related to the term *jagi*. The results of his study show that black Africans were always conceptualised as 'another different

nation' in Java and China and were always associated with the slavery system in the pre-Islamic Javanese kingdoms. What has not been mentioned in the study is the existence of enslaved Black people from Eastern Indonesia. Therefore, research that aims to determine the background of the presence of enslaved Black people in the Hindu Mataram Kingdom and its role in contemporary society can be continued.

## Method

The data used to determine the origin, position, role, and arrival of enslaved Black people in Java comes from inscriptions issued by Javanese kingdoms, Chinese foreign news sources, and contemporary literature. This work begins with tracing based on information contained in inscriptions, Chinese foreign news sources and literature, based on terms related to enslaved Black people in Java. Furthermore, these terms trace how their background and process came to Java. These brief pieces of information are interrelated and can be used to reconstruct the existence and arrival of enslaved Black people in Java. The various data were then analysed and classified to obtain information about their origin and presence in Java.

## *Hulun Haji* in Old Javanese Society

The Old Javanese people were people who geographically lived in the central part of Java and the eastern part of Java. They communicated using the Old Javanese language and most embraced Hinduism and Buddhism. This information is known based on the distribution of contemporaneous inscriptions that use the Old Javanese language and have a Hindu and Buddhist background (Boechari and Wibowo 1986). The governmental system in the kingdom. During the 7th century to the 15th century AD, the Old Javanese people were under the auspices of several domains that alternated their reigns-the Mataram Kingdom (Hinduism) in the 7th to 11th centuries, the Pañjalu Kingdom (Kadiri) and the Mataram Kingdom (Kadiri). Jenggala in the 12th century, the Singhasari Kingdom in the 13th, and the Majapahit Kingdom from the 14th to the 15th century (Poesponegoro and Notosusanto 1993).

In that long period, the Old Javanese people had divided society's social strata. Based on the honorifics attached to each person's name contained in the inscription, it can be seen that there were three layers of society, namely: clergy, aristocrats, and ordinary people (Maziyah 2019). However, it turns out that there was still another layer of society called *watĕk i jro*. They were a group of palace servants (Raharja 1995, 259; Zoetmulder 2000, 428) who were tasked with preparing royal necessities, including clothing (Maziyah 2018a) and the *hulun haji* or the king's slaves. Not all inscriptions mention the existence of *hulun haji* or the king's slaves. Table 1 is an inscription that informs the presence of the *hulun haji* and the people who belonged to the group.

Based on the ten inscriptions used as data, not all inscriptions mention the ten types of people who belonged to the group of *hulun haji*. The *Kuĕi* inscription (840 AD) only notes the existence of white people. The *Tihang* (914 AD) and *Gandakuĕi* (1042 AD) inscriptions only mentioned two types of pilgrimages whose meanings are not yet known, namely *singguh* and *pabrĕsi*. The *Waharu III* (n.d.) inscription only mentions the existence of two *hulun haji*, called *pujut* and *bondan*. The *Kakurugan* inscription (1023) mentions four *hulun haji*, namely *singguh*, *pabrĕsi*, *pujut* and *bondan*. The *Waharu IV* inscription (931 AD) mentions 8 types of *hulun haji*, namely *jĕnggi*, *singguh*, *pabrĕsi*, *pawulung wulung*, *panĕak*, *wungkuk*, *pujut*, and *bondan*. The *Balawi* inscriptions (1305 AD) and the *Waringin Pitu* inscriptions (1447 AD) mention all types of *hulun haji* except white people. Based on information from the ten inscriptions, it can be seen that the presence of the *hulun haji* continued from the 9th century to the 15th century AD.

Table 1. *Hulun Haji* on Old Javanese inscriptions 9th-15th century AD

No	Name of Inscription	Year (AD)	<i>Hulun Haji</i>										Total
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1.	<i>Kuṭi</i>	840	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	1
2.	<i>Tihang</i>	914	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
3.	<i>Waharu III</i>	n.d.	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	2
4.	<i>Waharu IV</i>	931	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	8
5.	<i>Pabuharan</i>	n.d.	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
6.	<i>Kakurugan</i>	1023	-	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	4
7.	<i>Gaṇḍakuṭi</i>	1042	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
8.	<i>Garaman</i>	1053	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
9.	<i>Balawi</i>	1305	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	9
10.	<i>Waringin Pitu</i>	1447	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	9

Table description:

- |                  |           |
|------------------|-----------|
| 1. Jěṅgi         | 6. pujut  |
| 2. singgah       | 7. boṅḍan |
| 3. pabrṣi        | 8. bule   |
| 4. pawuluṅ wuluṅ |           |
| 5. wuṅkuk        |           |

If we look at the kingdom's existence in Java since the 7th century, it is possible that in the 7th century, there were already *hulun haji*, but that it had not been written on the inscriptions. Information related to the existence of the *hulun haji* obtained before the 9th century AD include Chinese news from the Tang Dynasty (Groeneveldt 2009, 21) that stated that in 813 AD, a messenger from *Ho-ling* (The Chinese term for Java that refers to the Kalingga Kingdom located in Jepara) came to China with offerings of four slaves. *Sangchi*, multicoloured parrots, *pínka* (The type of bird is not known clearly) and other things. Groeneveldt mentions that the term *Sangchi* slaves was often used in Chinese news texts and seemed to denote black people. However, Groeneveldt did not know the origin of this term. In Old Javanese inscriptions, the enslaved people were called *jěṅgi*.

Broadly speaking, based on the meaning of each type of *hulun haji*, there were two groups, namely black slaves (*jěṅgi*, *pawuluṅ wuluṅ*, *pujut*, and *boṅḍan*) and people who had physical disabilities, such as midgets (*paṇḍak*), hunchbacks (*wuṅkuk*), white people, and dwarfs (*wwal*). The meaning of the stop and the *pabrṣi* is not yet known clearly. This article discusses the enslaved Black people, especially regarding their origin and how they came to be part of the *hulun haji*.

### The Origin of Enslaved Black People in Java

The information above states that there are four terms to describe the black slaves: *jěṅgi*, *pawuluṅ wuluṅ*, *pujut*, and *boṅḍan*. According to Zoetmulder (2000), the four terms refer to black people. The difference is that *jěṅgi* is an Old Javanese term for *Zaṅgi*, a Persian word referring to Zanzibar people from East Africa who were slaves. *Pawuluṅ wuluṅ* is an Old Javanese local term for people with bluish-black skin. This bluish-black colour by the Javanese is called *wuluṅ*. If examined further, people with this skin colour were people from central Africa, called Negroes and had a black skin colour as if they were bluish-black (Kbbi Daring).

According to Zoetmulder (2000), *Pujut* was a term to refer to a group of black people from Negrito whose duties in the kingdom, among others, were *pāměṅ-aměṅan* or king entertainers. The nations belonging to the Negrito ethnic group inhabited Irian Jaya (Papua), such as the Dani, Asmat, Fak-fak and Arso tribes. As for *boṅḍan*, according to Zoetmulder, they were servants from Papua. It was not stated further what kind of task the *boṅḍan* had to carry out. Based on the four terms used

to refer to black people, it can be seen that they consisted of two groups. The first one came from Africa - East Africa (*jěŋgi*) and Central Africa (*pawuluŋ wuluŋ*), and the second from Papua, who had Negrito racial features, among others, indicated by their black skin colour. Old Javanese people called them *pujut* and *bonḍan*.

### Why Black People Ended up in Java

The sub-chapter above shows that there were two groups of enslaved Black people based on their origin: Africa and Papua (*Jěŋgi* and *Pawuluŋ Wuluŋ*). How did they come to Java? Although *jěŋgi* and *pawuluŋ wuluŋ* refer to places in Africa, the most information available is about *jěŋgi* because this term is derived from Persian, not originally Old Javanese. Old Javanese inscriptions mention more *jěŋgi* than *pawuluŋ wuluŋ*. Five inscriptions that mention *jěŋgi* are the *Waharu IV* inscription (931 AD), the *Pabuharan* (?), the *Garaman* inscription (1053) and the *Balawi* inscription (1305), and the *Waringin Pitu* inscription (1447 AD). Three inscriptions that mention *pawuluŋ wuluŋ* are the *Waharu IV* inscription (931 AD), the *Balawi* inscription (1305), and the *Waringin Pitu* inscription (1447 AD).

In the discussion above, it is mentioned that according to Zoetmulder (2000), *jeŋgi* or *Zeŋgi* in Persian is a term used to refer to black slaves from Zanzibar, East Africa and Ethiopia. Implicitly, the brief information illustrates that the existence of enslaved people is related to the trade carried out with the Persians from the 7th century to the 15th century AD in Java. Chinese News (Gungwu 2007) distinguishes two types of Persian traders based on their religion, namely *Po-sse* (non-Muslim Persian) and *Ta-shih* (Persian and Arab Muslims). Chinese News in Java already mentioned the term *Ta-shih* during the reign of Ratu Sima, King of the *Ka-ling* Kingdom in Jepara in the 7th century AD (Poesponegoro and Notosusanto 1993; Groeneveldt 2009). Based on this brief information, it can be seen that in the 7th century, Java already had trade relations with Arab or Persian traders.

In the discussion above, Groeneveldt (2009) stated that he did not know the origin of *Sangchi*, the Chinese term for *Zeŋgi*. This comes from a term often used by medieval Muslim geographers to refer to certain parts of Southeast Africa, namely Zanj in Arabic: from Persian: Zang, which means "Land of the Blacks". This term is also the origin of the name of Zanzibar, now an archipelago in the State of Tanzania. The word "Zanj" later developed into Zangī (زنگی) in Persian, which means "negro, black", and in Arabic as *Zanjī* (زنجي) and in Turkish as *Zenci* (ganaislamika n.d.).

Hitti (2002) states that during the Abbasid Caliphate (7th to 12th centuries AD), Bani Abbas had many divisions of enslaved people from various ethnicities, such as Turks, Kurds, India, China and Africa (Zanj). They were employed as soldiers, concubines, eunuchs, and manual laborers/labourers. Among the various ethnicities, enslaved people from Zanj occupy the lowest strata. At that time, enslaved people were one of the wealth of officials, and officials each other used to give tribute in the form of enslaved people. This was a common occurrence then, so the *Ka-ling* Kingdom in Java in the 8th century AD also offered tribute in the form of enslaved people from *Zanj* to the Chinese Empire (Groeneveldt 2009, 21).

Before the arrival of Islam, for hundreds of years, the *Zanj* people had been traded as enslaved to various parts of the world through ancient trade routes that spread across the Indian Ocean region. Port cities scattered on the coast of the Indian Ocean, from Arabia, Basrah in the Persian Gulf, India and the Archipelago to China, were familiar places for slave transactions, including those from *Zanj*, as shown in Figure 1. Slavery is not a stranger in the history of the pre-Islamic Arabs. However, this culture continued into the post-Islamic period (ganaislamika n.d.).

This trade route also answers one of the problems posed in this article, why enslaved people from Africa arrived in Java. Apparently, enslaved people from Africa were one of the trading commodities carried out by Muslim Persian traders (*Ta-shih*), who, during the Abbasid Caliphate in the 7th century to the 12th century AD, traded in enslaved people on a large scale. The enslaved people came to Java because Persian traders sold them.



Figure 1. Trade Routes in the Indian Ocean Around 5th-10th Century AD  
Source: McLeod, 2016, 20.

### Why *Pujut* and *Bonḍan* Came to Java

According to Zoetmulder (2000), the second enslaved Black person can be interpreted as coming from eastern Indonesia because the Negrito were one of the people that inhabited east Indonesia, especially Papua. How did these two types of enslaved Black people get to Java? Is it similar to enslaved people from Africa, who came as objects of trade?

Five inscriptions from the 10th century to the 15th century AD that mention *pujut* and *bonḍan* are the *Waharu III* Inscription, the *Waharu IV* Inscription (931 AD), the *Kakurugan* Inscription (1023 AD), the *Balawi* Inscription (1305 AD) and the *Waringin Pitu* (1447). It can be seen that from the 10th century to the 15th century AD, enslaved people were one of the trade commodities from Papua. According to Nugroho (2011) and Mahmud (2014), the delivery of enslaved people from Papua was the result of trade progress that had occurred in Java since the 10th century (Maziyah 1992).

According to de Casparis (1958), he suspected there had been trading between Java and eastern Indonesia since before Airlangga came to power in the 11th century AD. According to de Casparis (1958), they exchanged rice (Javanese) and spices (Eastern Indonesia). Trade in the archipelago became busier due to the use of the South Sea as a maritime trade route, as shown in Figure 2. From the 13th century to the 15th century AD, almost all areas in the archipelago had become trade routes. However, in his research, Hall (2011) did not mention the existence of trade contacts between Java and Papua. The following figure shows the results of Hall's (2011) research which provides information that there is no trade route relationship with Papua.



Figure 2. Maritime Trade Routes in Southeast Asia 13th-15th Century AD  
 Source: Hall, 2011; Maziyah, 2018.

However, Mahmud (2014) interprets that there had been trading relations between Papua and Java in that century. Mahmud bases his interpretation on *Chau Ju Kua*, who noted the toponym Tung-ki as one of the places that had a relationship with Java (Hirth and Rockhill 2011). According to Mahmud, the toponym can be equated with one of the places mentioned by *Nagarakertagama*, called *Wanim* or *Wwanim*, which denotes an area located on the West Papuan peninsula called *Onim*. The place had long been a coastal trading centre, part of the trade network that connected the Java Sea. Until the 15th century AD, enslaved people were still an attractive trading commodity from Papua. At that time, traders from the Seram Sea were significant players in the slave trade (Muller 2008). In fact, in 15th century Java, some inscriptions refer to the existence of enslaved people from Papua, namely the *Waringin* Pitu Inscription (1447 AD) created by Dyah Kertawijaya, one of the Kings of Majapahit. Therefore, it can be interpreted that there were still enslaved Black people from Papua in the Majapahit Kingdom until the mid-15th century.

## Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that enslaved Black people in Java came from Africa and Papua. Both arrived in Java because they were used as a trading commodities. Java was the main trade route from the 7th to the 15th century; both were visited by traders from places as far away as Persia. Traders from places as far away as Persia saw both. Still, there were also traders from the archipelago. All this information shows that the Javanese were a people with a tradition of establishing relations with other nations.

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