

# The Development of Arabic and Islamic Education During the Mataram Sultanate (Sultan Agung's Era 1613-1645)

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## Abstract

Arabic and Islamic education played a pivotal role in the Mataram Sultanate, particularly during the reign of Sultan Agung Hanyakrakusuma and that time was the greatest era of Mataram Sultanate. So, that time was the best Islamic and Arabic education system at that time. His work *Sastragendhang* exemplifies the integration of Arabic linguistic elements and Islamic values into Javanese culture. This study aims to trace the historical presence and influence of Arabic language and Islamic education in Java during Sultan Agung's administration. Employing a literature review method, the research examines historical texts and references related to the educational practices of the period. Findings reveal that Arabic and Islamic teachings were disseminated through *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts, *kutub turâts*), a pedagogical approach still prevalent in contemporary Islamic boarding schools. The study concludes that the Mataram Sultanate laid a foundational role in embedding Arabic and Islamic education into Javanese society, leaving a lasting legacy that continues to shape religious and linguistic traditions in the region.

**Keywords:** Arabic Education, Islamic Education, Mataram Sultanate, Education, Sultan Agung

## Introduction

Arabic is a language of great importance for Muslims, and Islamic education is equally essential. Today, Arabic is one of the international languages and is also one of the official languages of the United Nations, spoken by more than 450 million people. Islamic education has been recognized in the Nusantara (Indonesian Archipelago) along with the Arabic language.

As we know, the majority of the Indonesian population follows Islam. This did not suddenly happen, considering that the Nusantara is geographically distant from the Middle East, the birthplace of Islam and the Arabic language. There are various theories regarding how Islam entered the archipelago. However, Arabic was not used as an everyday language in the archipelago, but it played a crucial role in the spread of Islam, which can still be seen in the influence of Arabic on local languages.

The spread of Islam and Arabic occurred through education conducted by preachers (*ulama*) who came to the archipelago, allowing Islam and Arabic to disseminate. During this period, Islamic kingdoms began to emerge, reaching their peak in the 17th century. This is evidenced by inscriptions in the Archipelago that were influenced by Islam, particularly in how Arabic influenced Malay, Javanese, and other languages (Nazurah, et al., 2024).

During this era, numerous sultanates were established across the archipelago. Many of these sultanates were ruled by great sultans who played a significant role in advancing their domains while adhering to Islamic principles. Arabic played a crucial role in implementing Islamic laws, considering that Islamic sources were written in Arabic, with the primary source being the Qur'an.

As a result, Islam and Arabic became deeply rooted in the archipelago, influencing its culture and society. Several prominent sultanates of the time included the Aceh Darussalam Sultanate, the Banten Sultanate, the Banjar Sultanate, the Ternate Sultanate, the Tidore Sultanate, and the Mataram Sultanate, which covered almost all of Java except Banten. These sultanates contributed significantly to the spread of Islam and Arabic, ensuring their enduring presence in the archipelago. Although Arabic was not the official language of these sultanates, it was the language of Islamic education and influenced the official languages of the sultanates, as seen in the Arabic loanwords in Acehnese and Javanese (Madjid, et al., 2022).

One of these sultanates was the Mataram Sultanate, located in Java. The Mataram Sultanate reached its peak during the reign of Sultan Agung Hanyakrakusuma. During his rule, many Javanese cultural elements were adapted to Islamic traditions, including Arabic influences on the Javanese language. Arabic continued to be taught, even though the primary language of the Mataram Sultanate was Javanese. One of Sultan Agung's enduring legacies is the adaptation of the Javanese calendar to align with the Hijri calendar, highlighting the strong influence of Islam during his reign (Susilo, 2020; Suryaningsih, 2020).

The Mataram Sultanate, especially during the reign of Sultan Agung Hanyakrakusuma from 1613 to 1645, has been a fascinating subject for historians. A number of studies have explored how Sultan Agung not only consolidated his power but also played a crucial role in spreading Islamic influence and shaping Javanese culture.

For instance, one study delves into the "Existence of Islamic Mataram Sultanate Culture on the Development of Islamic Tradition in Java (Sultan Agung's Era 1613-1645 AD)". This work is valuable because it offers a historical perspective on how the Mataram Sultanate deeply influenced the Islamization of Java. Another interesting piece is a book titled "*Membaca Kebaikan Bersama Masa Mataram Islam*," which discusses the ideal identity of a Javanese Muslim, highlighting the lasting appeal of Mataram Islam in Indonesian history.

Titin Yenni's thesis specifically focuses on Sultan Agung's role in the development of Islam on Java. It portrays Sultan Agung as the greatest ruler of the Islamic Mataram Sultanate, a king who was instrumental in the spread of the religion and who also recognized the importance of uniting all of Java under his rule.

The leadership style of Sultan Agung has also been a subject of research. A journal article titled "The Existence of Sultan Agung's Islamic Leadership and Its Relevance to Islamic Education in the Modern Era" explains that his leadership qualities—including his curiosity, decisiveness, wisdom, and patience—are still relevant and can serve as an inspiration for modern Islamic education. This particular study uses a literature review to connect Sultan Agung's life and ideas with contemporary Islamic education.

Furthermore, research on the development of Islam in Mataram even extends to the period before Sultan Agung's reign. For example, a study on Panembahan Senapati (1584-1601) reveals that Islam was already widely embraced by the population during his time, though the religious practices were often a mix of different traditions. This provides a useful historical context for understanding the religious landscape of Mataram before Sultan Agung came to power.

While previous studies have thoroughly explored Sultan Agung's political and cultural influence on the development of Islam, there is still an opportunity for more in-depth research. There's a gap in the literature regarding the specific development of Arabic language and Islamic education as a formal system during his rule. Prior research has primarily focused on the broader political and cultural aspects of Islam, but a detailed examination of the educational structures and methodologies from that era is still needed.

Based on these explanations, this study aims to examine the historical development of Islamic and Arabic language education in the Mataram Sultanate under Sultan Agung Hanyakrakusuma, who ruled from 1613 to 1645 for a total of 32 years—a considerable period for shaping education and cultural policies.

## **Method**

The research method used is a literature study, drawing on both contemporary and ancient texts. Modern texts include research findings relevant to this study, while ancient texts include works such as "*Sastra Gendbing*" by Sultan Agung Hanyakrakusuma, which contains Islamic moral values and Arabic influences.

Ancient manuscripts are studied to identify Arabic vocabulary, indicating the role of Arabic in linguistic and educational aspects during Sultan Agung's reign. The presence of Arabic in historical texts suggests that Arabic and Islam have been integrated into the Archipelago, particularly in Jawa for a long time ago (Lexy J. Moloeng, 2019).

The scientific articles and books that will be used as research sources by researchers are scientific articles and books related to Arabic language education, the development of Arabic, the history of the Mataram Sultanate, Islamic education in general in the archipelago, and also Islamic and Arabic education in the Mataram Sultanate. This is important to be used as research sources because Indonesia, or at that time called Nusantara, has a vast archipelago and different cultures that make Islamic and Arabic education in each region in the archipelago have their own characteristics.

Therefore, from this, important points can be taken that can be used as research sources by researchers.

## **Result and Discussion**

### *Brief History of Islam's Arrival in the Archipelago*

The spread of Islam in the archipelago occurred hundreds of years ago. However, there are multiple theories regarding its dissemination, leading to different historical perspectives on how and when Islam spread. Some argue that Islam spread through trade from South Asia, while others propose alternative theories.

Another theory suggests that Islam entered the archipelago during the first century of the Hijri calendar or the 7th/8th century CE. This assumption is based on the discovery of a tombstone or inscription found near Surabaya, which is dated 475 Hijri or 1082 CE and belongs to Fatimah binti Maimun. According to this theory, Islam reached Indonesia much earlier than the Gujarat theory, which claims that Islam spread from South Asia, specifically from the Gujarat region, which is now part of India (Jayusman, 2016).

Over time, the spread of Islam varied across different parts of the archipelago, leading to the emergence of various sultanates such as the Samudera Pasai Sultanate, the Malacca Sultanate, the Demak Sultanate, the Banjar Sultanate, and many others. In Java, the largest sultanate after the Demak Sultanate was succeeded by the Pajang Sultanate, which was later replaced by the Mataram Sultanate. The Mataram Sultanate eventually became the most powerful Islamic kingdom in Java (Nazurah et al., 2024).

### *The establishment of sultanates in the archipelago*

There are many sultanates in the archipelago and among them many sultanates have survived for quite a long time. The existence of these sultanates signifies the spread of Islam through political channels, namely through government channels because each Sultanate is led by a Sultan or king who implements Islamic religious regulations so that Islam can spread widely. (Annisa dkk., 2016). The following is a brief history of some of the great Sultanates that existed throughout the archipelago.

There are many sultanates that once stood in the archipelago that are now part of countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore, which of course are closely related to the spread of Islam in the archipelago, especially in Indonesia. The process of Islamization of the archipelago began in the westernmost region of the archipelago, namely Aceh.

In Aceh, an Islamic Sultanate or kingdom was established in 840 AD called the Perlak Sultanate which is now part of Aceh Province which ended in 1292 AD. This was caused by the arrival of 100 people from the Middle East to the coast of Sumatra led by the Nakhoda Khilafah in 840 AD.

After the unification of the Perlak Sultanate and the Pase Sultanate, a new Sultanate emerged, namely the Samudera Pasai Sultanate or the Samudra Pasai Kingdom which was established in 1267. With the presence of the Samudra Pasai Kingdom, Islam began to develop rapidly in the Sumatra region. This Sultanate survived until 1524 AD,

in which year a new Sultanate emerged which became the strongest Sultanate in the archipelago, namely the Aceh Darussalam Sultanate. (Jayusman, 2016).

After that, there were also the Malacca Sultanate that once existed in Malaysia, the Banjar and Brunei Sultanates that once existed on the island of Kalimantan, the Gowa Tallo Sultanate that once existed on the island of Sulawesi, the Ternate and Tidore Sultanates that once existed in the Maluku Islands. The same thing also happened on the island of Java, there were several large Sultanates that once existed on the island of Java such as the Banten Sultanate, the Cirebon Sultanate, the Demak Sultanate, the Pajang Sultanate and finally as the largest Sultanate on the island of Java was the Mataram Sultanate. Although the Mataram Sultanate is the largest Sultanate that ever existed on the island of Java, the first Sultanate to be established was the Demak Sultanate which is currently part of Demak Regency, Central Java Province.

#### *A brief history of the founding of the Mataram Sultanate*

The Mataram Sultanate was the largest Sultanate that ever existed on the island of Java. At first, this Sultanate was only a duchy under the Pajang Sultanate which was originally only a forest area called the Mentaok forest. The forest area was given to Ki Ageng Pemanahan by Sultan Hadiwijaya (Joko Tingkir) the King of the Pajang Sultanate for Ki Ageng Pemanahan's services in fighting Arya Penangsang earlier Pati jipang panolan which is now the Bojonegoro Regency area of East Java Province. Ki Ageng Pemanahan worked together with Ki Panjawi where Ki Panjawi got the Pati Regency area from Sultan Hadiwijaya which is now part of Central Java Province (Nazurah, et al., 2024).

After that Ki Ageng Pemanahan together with his son Danang Sutawijaya who would later become the first king of the Mataram Sultanate with the title Panembahan Senopati Ing Ngalaga changed the forest into a rural area. Over time the village turned into a bustling city. Although initially rejected by several groups in the process of building the city, Ki Ageng Pemanahan and his son continued to build the city and named it Kotagede which at that time was still under the rule of the Pajang Sultanate with the name Kadipaten Mataram.

After Ki Ageng Pemanahan died in 1575 AD, the development of the city was continued by his son, Danang Sutawijaya. The Mataram region became stronger so that Danang Sutawijaya wanted to establish a new kingdom to replace the Pajang Sultanate even with resistance to the Pajang Sultanate. Finally, Sultan Hadiwijaya died so that Danang Sutawijaya appointed himself as the king of Mataram with the title Panembahan Senopati Ing Ngalaga (Annisa dkk., 2016).

After Addition Senopati died who became the king of Mataram in 1584-1601, the throne of Mataram was continued by his son with the title Prabu Hanyakrawati or known as Panembahan Sedha Krupyak where during this period there were not too many significant changes in the Mataram Sultanate. After he died in 1613, the throne of Mataram was continued by his son named Raden Mas Wuryah who served as king of Mataram for one day because he had an illness so he was unable to run the government. Then, the throne of Mataram was continued by his son named Raden Mas Jatmika or what we usually know as Sultan Agung Hanyakrakusuma where during his tenure as

king of Mataram, the Mataram Sultanate experienced very rapid progress so that it reached the peak of its glory during his time (Putri Nirmala Puji dkk., 2022).

#### *Islamic Education and Arabic Language Education in the Mataram Sultanate*

During the time of Sultan Agung Hanyakrakusuma, Islam experienced extraordinary development including the development of the Arabic language. Islam and Arabic are identities that are quite attached to the Mataram Sultanate. He approached it by means of cultural acculturation so that Islam was easily accepted by the Javanese people at that time, many Javanese ancestral traditions were adapted to Islam so that they did not violate Islamic law. There are several typical Javanese traditions that are still preserved until now, for example Sekaten which is still preserved until now and this tradition is still preserved by two Keratons that were part of the Mataram Sultanate, namely the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Sultanate and the Surakarta Hadiningrat Kasunanan. *Sekaten* is a celebration intended to commemorate the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad SAW where the word "*Sekaten*" itself comes from Arabic, namely *Syabādatain* which means two sentences of the creed(Putri Nirmala Puji dkk., 2022).

In addition, there is also a change in the Javanese calendar that is adjusted to the Hijri calendar still using Javanese terms but also including terms from Arabic which happened when Sultan Agung changed the calendar, so that it still established the old culture and welcomed the new culture. The calendar is said to still be used by the Javanese people today.

So, the explanation indicates that Islam and Arabic have a strong influence on the Mataram Sultanate, especially during the time of Sultan Agung Hanyakrakusuma. The process of Islamic education in the Mataram Sultanate and also the process of Arabic language education in the Mataram Sultanate will be explained below. (Susilo, 2020).

#### *Islamic Education in the Mataram Sultanate*

During the Mataram Sultanate, there was already a massive Islamic religious education where the learning tradition is still preserved until now, namely with the existence of Islamic boarding schools that teach Islam and Arabic. There are many books written by scholars so that they can be studied and these books are books that are commonly used by Islamic boarding schools in the archipelago, especially in Indonesia today, and that is the yellow book. The yellow book itself has been known for hundreds of years, namely since the 16th century and this book was once brought by Europeans from the archipelago around 1600 AD, one of which is the book *al-Taqrīb fi al-Fiqh* by Abu Syuja' al-Isfahani.

Apart from that, the yellow book was not only taught in the Java region, but many regions in the archipelago used the yellow book to study Islam and also Arabic, considering that the yellow book was in Arabic, so students who at that time studied the yellow book had to learn Arabic as well. (Sururin, 2012).

Considering that the origin of this yellow book is in the archipelago, this period is close to the existence of the Mataram Sultanate, especially during the era of Sultan

Agung Hanyakrakusuma as the greatest Sultan of the Mataram Sultanate and of course he had great ambitions in preaching Islam throughout Java, even during his era, the territory of Mataram's power had reached areas outside Java such as parts of Sumatra and Kalimantan.

In addition, Sultan Agung Hanyakrakusuma has his own literary work on Islamic education that must be carried out as a Muslim both for himself, the successor to the throne of Mataram and also his people called Sastra Gendhing. Sastra Gendhing is one of his works that is famous for its beautiful Javanese language style and has very strong Islamic values and Javanese language influenced by Arabic. Here are some verses of Sastra Gendhing (Kusumo, 2008; Aziz & Abdurrahman, 2022).

Table 1. Some verses of Sastra Gendhing

<i>Yekti tan ingaken darah</i>	Will not be recognized by family
<i>Ten tan wignya tembang kawi</i>	If you don't master Kawi songs
<i>Jer kamot sandining sastra</i>	Because it contains the secrets of literature
<i>Titiga logating tulis</i>	And the science of writing skills
<i>Kang dingin basa kawi</i>	The priority is in the Kawi language
<i>Tata-trapsilaning wuwus</i>	The manner of art of speaking
<i>Kang tumprap niti-praja</i>	Which applies to nobles
<i>Kasusilan trusing ngelmi.</i>	The virtues of a knowledgeable person.
<i>Pring tri sandining sasmita</i>	When the secret signs
<i>Karep lepasing samadi</i>	The pinnacle of meditation
<i>Ngesti tablehing panunggal</i>	achievement
<i>Nglinang sukma sarira-nir</i>	Achieving unity
<i>Purna wus angdir jati</i>	Melting the soul to lose oneself
<i>Marma sagung trah-Mataram</i>	Entering the true nature
<i>Den putus olah raras</i>	Then all the Mataram clans
<i>Sasmita sandining kawi</i>	Should be perfect training-sense
<i>Yekti angger satria</i>	Secrets in literature
<i>Ngolah sastra.</i>	Because every true knight
	Is a literary expert (Kusumo, 2008)

If we look at the text of Sastra Gendhing, Sultan Agung wants to convey a message about the manners of knowledge taught by Islam which he wants to continue by the next successor to the Mataram throne and also the people of Mataram. Then, there is Javanese vocabulary that is influenced by Arabic, namely the word "logating" which comes from the word *lughah* which means "language" in Indonesian (Windarti & Irawati, 2021; Megawati, 2017).

Apart from that, he not only educated the public in general but also palace officials, where Sultan Agung Hanyakrakusuma implemented Bagongan language as a special language for palace officials to unite them in the palace. (Muqomah, 2016; Hakami et al., 2023).

### *Arabic language education in the Mataram Sultanate*

Arabic is the language of the Qur'an so that when Islam spread to all corners of the world, Arabic will certainly be carried along including to the archipelago, especially to the island of Java. During the time of Sultan Agung, Arabic played an important role in the spread of Islam so that Arabic must be studied as a tool for studying Islam. Also, Arabic was the most popular language in the world that day because Islam was in the golden age and this is what happened to the Mataram Sultanate under the reign of Sultan Agung Hanyakrakusuma. Not only that, Arabic was the language of many knowledge like science and philosophy, so in that period Arabic was a very useful language for many knowledges until Arabic was the first international language. So, Arabic has a lot of influences in many knowledges and this is what happened in the Mataram Sultanate.

Thus, in the archipelago, particularly during the Mataram Sultanate, Arabic language learning continued to develop, given that the Mataram Sultanate was a center of Islamic studies, particularly during the reign of Sultan Agung Hanyakrakusuma. It was during this period that the Mataram Sultanate reached its peak, with extensive territorial power and strong influence, and the adoption of Islam as a cultural practice within the Sultanate. This was certainly inseparable from the learning of Arabic, which was still very much alive during his reign (Muradi dkk., 2021; Ulya, 2022).

If we look closely in Indonesia, there are still many Arabic language educational institutions or Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia that use the *kutub at-Turâts* (classical book) or what we often call the *kitab kuning* because it has yellow paper sheets. This method is a method that has long been used to study Islamic knowledge and Arabic, including during the Mataram Sultanate. In fact, this method was already used at the beginning of the spread of Islam on the island of Java, so this has occurred long before the emergence of the Mataram Sultanate. However, it was during the Mataram Sultanate that Islam began to spread to the interior of the island of Java, including the learning of Arabic (Nur et al., 2024).

Etymologically, the word "pondok" comes from Arabic *funduq* which means hotel or hostel. Meanwhile, the word "*pesantren*" comes from Sanskrit, and some say from Tamil, meaning a teacher or kyai. So, in terms of terminology, a pesantren is a place for Islamic education. Also, there are some theories said that this education system is inspired by education system of Hinduism where the teachers or scholars live together with their students in the same place like a hostel and the students will learn anything from their teachers or scholars especially about their religion. However, that was a way or method to keep the spread of Islam around the archipelago or *Nusantara* and of course to keep the Arabic because without Arabic Islam can not be spread and all of main Islamic resources are written in Arabic.

Furthermore, there are many theories underlying the emergence of Islamic boarding schools. However, Arabic language learning using yellow books or as we know as *kitab kuning* has long existed, although it wasn't systematic and took place in the same settings as today's Islamic boarding schools. If we look closely, one of the Walisongo, known as Sunan Ampel, had his Islamic boarding school in Ampel Denta, currently located in Gresik.

Most theories of Islamic education and Arabic language education state that it occurred before the 16th century, even at the beginning of the spread of Islam, in the 7th century, during the lives of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. However, several Dutch researchers argue that the *pesantren* model of education did not emerge until after the 18th century. However, during the spread of Islam around archipelago, Arabic was a part of Javanese people in the Mataram Sultanate because of Islamic rules in the Mataram Sultanate especially during Sultan Agung Hanyakrakusuma's reign.

If we refer to the event of the founding of the Islamic boarding school founded by Sunan Ampel, then of course during the Mataram Sultanate, specifically during the time of Sultan Agung Hanyakrakusuma, Islamic education and Arabic developed rapidly considering that during that time Islam had truly entered the interior of Java considering that Sunan Ampel lived before the existence of the Pajang Sultanate and the Demak Sultanate which became the first Islamic kingdom before the existence of the Mataram Sultanate. Due to the rapid development of Islam during the time of Sultan Agung Hanyakrakusuma, during his time Arabic also had a strong influence on Javanese society at that time even though Arabic did not become their mother tongue as happened to Egyptian society which changed with the use of Arabic in daily activities (Harun et al., 2024).

Because of the great influence of Arabic on the island of Java, Arabic has an influence on Javanese so that Javanese has vocabulary borrowed from Arabic. As for the process of learning Arabic itself, it still uses the same method, namely using the yellow book as a learning reference and when the Teacher delivers material about learning Arabic, the form is like education in Islamic boarding schools. be it studying the science of *Nahwu*, *Sharaf*, *Kitâbah* and others (Sa'dudin & Safitri, 2020).

In addition, there is evidence that Arabic was quite popular among Javanese people at that time, namely the influence of Javanese on Arabic. Here are some examples of Javanese vocabulary that comes from Arabic in the religious field. (Arwan, 2019).

Table 2. List of loanwords from Arabic to Javanese

No	Origin Word (Arabic)	Loan Words (Javanese language)
1	نفس	<i>Nafsu</i>
2	قلب	<i>Kalbu</i>
3	أهل	<i>Ahlu</i>
4	علم	<i>Elmu</i>
5	حج	<i>Haji</i>

So, from the explanation above, it is clear that Arabic has an important role in the spread of Islam in the Mataram Sultanate and has a learning method with *kitab kuning* like Islamic boarding schools. Furthermore, many other Arabic words entered Javanese, indicating that Arabic was widely studied during that period. Furthermore, Sultan Agung Hanyakrakusuma was a deeply devout Muslim, so he loved Arabic and provided Arabic language learning facilities.

## Conclusion

Arabic and Islam have a big role in changing the social order in the archipelago so that large sultanates emerged throughout the archipelago. The existence of these sultanates made learning Islam and Arabic increasingly massive. This also happened to the Mataram Sultanate which at that time had a big role in spreading Islam especially during the reign of Sultan Agung Hanyakrakusuma the third leader of Mataram Sultanate. Considering that the Mataram Sultanate is a large sultanate, the services of Sultan Agung Hanyakrakusuma in maintaining Islam and the Arabic language cannot be ignored. Arabic and Islam experienced extraordinary development during the Mataram Sultanate led by Sultan Agung. It was during his time that the Mataram Sultanate reached its heyday, including in the fields of Islamic education and Arabic, although Arabic was not the language of the Sultanate, but its role was felt by the people at that time. The method used to study Islam and Arabic is a learning method like a *pesantren* where people use *kitab kuning* (classical islamic book) written by scholars to study and that time this method was the only way to learn arabic in Jawa especially in the Mataram Sultanate. This method still persists today as we see in many *pesantren* in Indonesia.

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