

MTAH NDORO PAYUNG: HISTORY, EPIGRAPHY, AND RELIGIOUS TOURISM OF THE TOMB**Ahmad Baihaqi*¹, Fikrul 'Ilmi Nafi'uddin², Iin Nur Zulaili³, Nguliyatun Nuriya⁴**¹ Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia² Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia³ Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia⁴ Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia**Abstract**

This study examines the historical and spiritual values contained in the tomb of Mbah Nodoro Payung (Syekh Bentong) in Gresik as part of the local Islamic cultural heritage. The research focuses on three main aspects: the history of Mbah Nodoro Payung, an epigraphic study of Islam on his tomb, and an analysis of the tomb's role as a religious tourist destination. This study uses qualitative methods with historical and epigraphic approaches. The historical approach is used to trace the life and contributions of Mbah Nodoro Payung in the process of Islamization in Java. Meanwhile, the epigraphic approach is used to analyze the inscriptions on the tombstone to reveal the identity, religious messages, and cultural symbols contained therein. The research findings indicate that Mbah Nodoro Payung was a Chinese-Muslim Islamic missionary who played a role in the spread of Islam through cultural, social, and humanitarian approaches. Epigraphic analysis revealed inscriptions of Surah Ash-Shaff, verse 13, and the *shahada* on Mbah Nodoro Payung's tombstone, as well as Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 257, on his wife's tombstone. These inscriptions demonstrate strong Islamic values while also illustrating the process of acculturation between Islamic traditions and Majapahit culture, as reflected in the ornamentation and style of the tombstones. In addition to its historical and religious significance, Mbah Nodoro Payung's tomb continues to serve as a vibrant socio-religious space through the tradition of the "haul," pilgrimage activities, and the community's religious practices. The site also holds potential for the development of religious tourism, which can support the preservation of local Islamic cultural heritage and provide economic benefits to the surrounding community.

Keywords: Mbah Nodoro Payung; Islamic epigraphy; Local history; Religious tourism; Gresik.

INTRODUCTION

The process of Islam's entry and development in the archipelago is not only recorded in classical manuscripts, but also manifested in various physical relics such as mosques, Islamic boarding schools, and the tombs of scholars (Zahara, Delvira, Septiani, & Rahmi, 2025). Among these relics, tombs are an important medium for tracing the history of Islam. Many tombs of scholars have now become pilgrimage sites, centers of spiritual learning, and even symbols of local community identity. This shows that tombs are not merely places of final rest, but also hold historical and spiritual value that continues to live on in the lives of the people (Zahara et al., 2025).

The island of Java, especially East Java, has many tomb sites that serve as tangible evidence of how Islam developed and became embedded in the local culture (Ahmad Jubaidi, 2022). Areas such as Gresik, Surabaya, and Tuban are often referred to as the gateway to Islam in Java because it was in these areas that the great saints and scholars lived, preached, and were buried. Over time, their tombs have not only been remembered as historical monuments, but also become pilgrimage destinations that demonstrate the strong bond between the Javanese people and religious figures of the past (Hakim et al., 2024). This phenomenon shows the synergy between historical, cultural, and spiritual aspects that shape the Islamic identity of the people of East Java.

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Gresik, as one of the important centers of Islamization in Java, is widely known as the “City of Saints.” In this city, great figures such as Maulana Malik Ibrahim and Sunan Giri are buried, which to this day remain centers of pilgrimage and research (Fauziah, 2021). However, in addition to these great figures, Gresik is also home to many tombs of local scholars whose roles were no less important. They may not be as famous as the Walisongo, but their presence remains part of the chain of Islamic preaching that shaped the religious character of the local community (Fasih, 2022). One of them is Mbah Ngoro Payung, also known as Syekh Bentong.

Although Gresik is widely known as the “City of Saints” with many studies on great figures such as Maulana Malik Ibrahim and Sunan Giri, in-depth studies on local scholars are still limited (Siswayanti & Yunani, 2021). One such figure is Mbah Ngoro Payung or Syekh Bentong, whose tomb remains an important pilgrimage site to this day. Unfortunately, research specifically focusing on his history and tomb is still very limited, meaning that historical information about this figure has not been fully revealed.

The tomb of Mbah Ngoro Payung is one of the pilgrimage sites that is still preserved today. Its existence shows that Islam in Gresik did not only develop through major figures recorded in national history, but also through influential local scholars in the region. The tradition of pilgrimage to this tomb reflects the community's respect for historical heritage as well as their belief in his spirituality (Barokah & Khoiruddin, 2024). The tomb has important historical value because it is related to the spread of Islam and the social dynamics of Gresik in the past. In addition to being a symbol of cultural and religious transmission, the tradition of pilgrimage that continues to this day affirms the existence of spiritual continuity rooted in religious values, local wisdom, and the collective identity of the community. Pilgrimage activities have become evidence of the negotiation of their ancestors' heritage with Islamic teachings, creating religious and contextual expressions that are still preserved in subsequent generations (Robert, 1987).

Various similar studies have also been conducted with a focus on historical and epigraphic studies, especially in an effort to uncover the identities of important figures of the past. For example, research by (Syarifuddin, 2014), revealed the figure of Kiai Hasan Maulani, an Islamic warrior from Kuningin, through historical and epigraphic studies of his tomb. Research by (Usfiah, 2020), revealed the date on the tombstone of Kanjeng Sepuh Sidayu in an epigraphic study. In addition, a study by (Mulyanto, 2023), mentions the contribution of epigraphic studies with case studies.

Although these various studies have made important contributions to the study of Islamic tombs in Indonesia, no research has yet been found that specifically examines the Mbah Ngoro Payung Tomb in Gresik through an integrated historical and epigraphic approach. Previous studies have generally focused on only one aspect-whether the history of the figure, the interpretation of inscriptions, or the development of religious tourism. Therefore, this study offers a novel approach by integrating a historical study of Mbah Ngoro Payung, an epigraphic analysis of the tombstone, and an analysis of the social functions and religious tourism that have developed in the surrounding area. Consequently, this study is expected to enrich the body of knowledge on local Islamic history, Islamic epigraphy, and religious tourism studies in Indonesia.

In this study, historical and epigraphic studies are necessary, with epigraphic studies tracing the position of Mbah Ngoro Payung in the context of Islamic history in Gresik. By examining written sources, oral traditions, and local archives, researchers can compile a narrative about the historical background of the tomb's existence. Meanwhile, epigraphic studies are conducted to decipher inscriptions on tombstones, both in Arabic and other scripts, which can provide information about names, titles, years of death, and religious messages contained therein. Epigraphy, as a discipline that studies inscriptions, plays an important role in strengthening historical data, because much of the factual information of the past has been preserved through writing on gravestones (Husni et al., 2024).

Based on this background, this study will focus on answering three questions, namely the history of Mbah Ngoro Payung, Islamic epigraphy on the tomb of Mbah Ngoro Payung, and an

analysis of religious tourism at the tomb of Mbah Ngoro Payung. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to the development of local Islamic history, strengthen the study of Islamic epigraphy in Indonesia, and serve as a step towards preserving the nation's cultural heritage.

RESEARCH METHOD

Study uses a qualitative approach by combining historical and epigraphic methods. The selection of this method is based on the nature of the research object, which is a tomb site and the inscriptions on its gravestones (Prayogi, 2021). Qualitative research is considered relevant because it allows researchers to explore the meaning contained in material relics, oral traditions, and related documents, rather than just numbers or statistical data. This approach is oriented towards a deep understanding of the historical and cultural context surrounding the existence of the tomb of Mbah Ngoro Payung in Gresik (Wibowo, 2022).

The historical method was used to trace the life of Mbah Ngoro Payung and his role in the dynamics of Islam in Gresik. The historical research steps include four main stages. First, heuristics, which is the process of searching for and collecting relevant sources, both written sources (manuscripts, archives, and academic literature), oral sources (information from tomb caretakers, religious leaders, and the local community), and material sources (the form of the tomb and gravestone itself). Second, source criticism, which is the effort to assess the authenticity, validity, and credibility of the sources obtained. External criticism is carried out to ensure the authenticity of the documents, while internal criticism is carried out to assess the content of the sources. Third, interpretation, which is the process of interpreting and connecting data from various sources in order to obtain a complete understanding of the historical background of Mbah Ngoro Payung. Fourth, historiography, which is the compilation of research results into a systematic scientific paper (Sayono, 2021).

Meanwhile, epigraphic methods were used to examine the inscriptions on the tombstone (Wiku Atmojo, Saefuddin, & Yulianto, 2022). Epigraphy, as a science that studies ancient writings on hard media (such as stone, metal, or wood), is very relevant for analyzing the tombstone of Mbah Ngoro Payung, which contains Arabic text. The epigraphic analysis in this study includes several stages. First, identification of the inscription, which involves reading and describing the text on the gravestone, whether it be a name, title, prayer, or quotation from the Qur'an. Second, paleographic analysis, which is the study of the shape of letters, calligraphic style, and written ornaments used, so that the period of writing can be estimated. Third, content analysis, which involves interpreting the meaning of the text in religious, social, and cultural terms. For example, certain prayers or formulas on gravestones can illustrate the religious views of the community at that time. Fourth, contextual interpretation, which involves linking epigraphic data with the historical and cultural conditions of Gresik during the period in question (Astri & Isana, 2025).

Data collection techniques were carried out in several ways (Purnamasari, Hasrianti, Sritimuryati, & Suryaningsi, 2024). First, field observation, which involved directly observing the physical condition of the tomb, its architectural form, geographical location, and the inscription on Mbah Ngoro Payung's gravestone. The observation was supplemented with documentation in the form of photographs and field notes to facilitate analysis (Anggraini, Monang, & Harahap, 2022). Second, a literature study, which involved searching for academic works, colonial archives, local historical records, and previous research related to the development of Islam in Gresik and Islamic epigraphic studies in Java. Third, in-depth interviews with the tomb keeper, Mr. H. Thohir Husein, religious leaders, and the surrounding community to gather oral information about the figure of Mbah Ngoro Payung, the history of the tomb, and the pilgrimage tradition that continues to this day. Fourth, visual documentation, in the form of detailed photographs of the tombstone and inscription as material for more detailed epigraphic analysis (Sambodo, Suprpto, & Yuniarno, 2020).

The collected data was then analyzed using a descriptive-analytical approach. Descriptive analysis was carried out by presenting the physical condition of the tomb, the shape of the gravestone, and the contents of the inscription in detail. Furthermore, analytical analysis was

carried out by linking epigraphic data with historical sources, thereby obtaining a more comprehensive understanding of the identity of Mbah Ngoro Payung, his socio-religious role, and the position of the tomb in the history of Islam in Gresik. To maintain data validity, the researcher used source triangulation techniques, namely comparing data from observations, literature, and interviews. Thus, the research results are expected to have a high level of validity (Ule, Kusumaningtyas, & Widyaningrum, 2023).

By using this historical and epigraphic qualitative method, the study is expected to not only reveal the identity of the figure buried there, but also explain the socio-cultural significance behind the existence of Mbah Ngoro Payung's tomb (Zahara et al., 2025). In addition, this method also allows the study to contribute to the preservation of local Islamic cultural heritage, while enriching the wealth of Islamic epigraphic studies in Indonesia.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The History of Mbah Ngoro Payung

Sheikh Bantong, also known as Tan Go Wat, was an important figure in the early history of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago. He came from the Ming Empire in China during the reign of Emperor Yung Lo (the third emperor of the Ming Dynasty). In 1414 AD, Sheikh Bantong came to Java with his father, Sheikh Hasanuddin or Sheikh Quro, and 77 students. This group was sent by Emperor Yung Lo and escorted by the Chinese commander, Admiral Cheng Ho, to carry out the mission of spreading Islam to Southeast Asia (Kautsar et al., 2025).

They first landed at Karawang Port, then continued their journey inland and settled in the Amparan Jati forest. There, Sheikh Hasanuddin and Sheikh Bantong built a simple hut made of teak wood, which served as a center for Islamic preaching. As the preaching activities began to flourish, Sheikh Hasanuddin ordered his son to go to Gresik and study under the great scholar, Sheikh Maulana Malik Ibrahim, while also participating in preaching with him.

In 1415 AD, before leaving for Gresik, Sheikh Bantong met another great Islamic figure, Sayyid Jamaluddin Husein Jumadil Kubro, in the Troloyo area of Majapahit. This meeting was part of the task given to him by his father and also a mandate from Emperor Yung Lo for Sheikh Bantong to visit important Islamic figures in Java. After delivering the message, Syekh Bantong continued his journey to Gresik and stayed at the hermitage of Syekh Maulana Malik Ibrahim (Mahfudz, Afif, & Zuhri, 2024).

In Gresik, Sheikh Bantong not only studied, but was also active in missionary activities. In 1416–1417 AD, he was married by his teacher to Siu The Yo, the daughter of a Chinese merchant of Palembang descent. This marriage strengthened the cross-ethnic *da'wah* network between Chinese scholars and the local community, and showed that the spread of Islam at that time was carried out in an inclusive manner that respected cultural diversity (Ansori, Fauzan, & Amelia, 2024).

After getting married, Sheikh Bantong returned to Karawang with his wife to help his father expand the missionary cottage and build a larger mosque. This construction was fully funded by Siu The Yo from her inheritance. She was known as a generous figure who devoted all her wealth to supporting the missionary activities of her husband and family. In 1418 AD, after the construction in Karawang was completed, Sheikh Bantong returned to Gresik and settled in Karangesem Hamlet. After the death of his teacher, Sheikh Maulana Malik Ibrahim, he showed his respect by ordering a special tombstone from Samudra Pasai, which later became a marker for the great teacher's grave (Firdausy et al., 2019).

In Gresik, Syekh Bantong continued his preaching in a very wise manner, adapting to the social conditions of the Majapahit community. At that time, the social structure was still strict, and only the Brahmins were allowed to talk about religion. Realizing this, Syekh Bantong chose a subtle preaching strategy through charity. Every Friday morning, he and his students distributed alms to the community without mentioning religious intentions. When asked about the source of the alms, they simply replied that they were from “Ngoro Bantong” (Siddiq & Billa, 2023).

This method of preaching was very effective because it introduced Islamic values gently without causing social conflict. Thanks to his patience and wisdom, the local community gradually accepted Islamic teachings. The name “Ngoro Bantong” itself originated from how the local community referred to him, and he was also nicknamed “Ngoro Payung” because he was considered a protector and guardian of the people (Arif, 2021).

From his marriage to Siu The Yo, Sheikh Bantong had four children: two sons and two daughters. One of them, Siu Ban Ci, married Prabu Kertawijaya of Majapahit and gave birth to a son named Raden Hasan, who later became known as Raden Patah, the founder and first Sultan of the Demak Bintoro Sultanate. This family relationship shows the continuity between Islamic preaching and the birth of the first Islamic political power in Java.

In addition, Sheikh Bantong's other children also played an important role in the world of da'wah. For example, Sheikh Zaenuddin al-Akbar continued the da'wah of Sayyid Jamaluddin Husein Jumadil Kubro in Troloyo, and Sheikh Bahrul Alam continued the da'wah in the Tuban and Gresik areas. It was from their descendants that various figures who spread Islam in East Java developed (Fasih, 2022).

However, there is also another version that states that before the era of the Walisongo, Syekh Bantong or Syekh Bentong Musanuuddin had played an important role in the propagation of Islam in the archipelago. According to Dadan Wildan (2003) in *Sunan Gunung Jati antara Fiksi dan Fakta* (Wildan, 2003). Syekh Bentong was a Chinese scholar and a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad through Sayyidina Husein bin Ali. His father, Syekh Quro Hasanuddin, came from Campa and participated in Admiral Cheng Ho's fleet in 1409 AD.

The arrival of Sheikh Quro and Sheikh Bentong to the archipelago marked the beginning of the development of Islam in the northern coastal region of Java, particularly in Karawang and Cirebon. They established the Quro Islamic boarding school as a center for Islamic preaching, which later became the forerunner of the Islamic boarding school tradition in Java. Although they were initially rejected by the Hindu Pajajaran kingdom, their influence remained strong, especially after the marriage between Nyai Subang Larang, the daughter of Ki Gedeng Tapa, and Raden Pamanah Rasa (Prabu Siliwangi). It was from this lineage that Raden Patah, the first king of the Demak Sultanate, was born.

Over time, Syekh Bentong also became known as one of the first generation members of the Walisongo during the reign of Raden Patah (1475–1518 AD). In the Walisongo council, he served as the chief advisor in formulating Islamic missionary strategies in Java alongside other saints such as Sunan Ampel, Sunan Giri, Sunan Bonang, and Sunan Gunung Jati (Kumar Jha', 2025). Towards the end of his life, Sheikh Bentong returned to Karawang and continued his father's struggle to develop Islamic boarding schools and spread Islam in the region. Before his death, he left a meaningful message:

“Ingsun titip masjid, langgar, lan fakir miskin anak yatim dhuafa.”

“I entrust the mosque, the prayer room, and the poor, orphans, and the weak.”

This message became a symbol of Islamic social teachings, urging the community to always maintain places of worship and care for those in need (Husein, n.d.).

The legacy of Sheikh Quro and Sheikh Bentong shows that the process of Islamization in the archipelago did not only occur through political power, but also through cultural, educational, and humanitarian approaches. Their preaching emphasized peace, tolerance, and respect for local wisdom. From this foundation, Islam then spread widely in Java and became an important part of Indonesian civilization (A Rosyid & Mulyaniz, 2025).

Islamic Epigraphy on the Tomb of Mbah Ngoro Payung

Islamic epigraphy is the study of inscriptions on tombstones and graves related to Islamic history, culture, and teachings. At the grave of Mbah Ngoro Payung, inscriptions play an important

role in determining the identity of the figure, the time of death, and the religious messages that have been passed down. These inscriptions are not only markers, but also reflect Islamic culture in Gresik. Through epigraphic analysis, traces of Islam, calligraphic art, and spiritual values in burial traditions can be traced.

Based on data and direct observations in the field, the following inscriptions can be seen on the tombs:



Figure 1. Photo of the Mbah Ngoro Payung Tomb Complex

Within the Mbah Ngoro Payung Tomb complex itself, there are three other tombs belonging to Mbah Ngoro Payung's wife and children. On the right is the tomb of his youngest daughter, Sui Ling Shi, followed by the tomb of Mbah Ngoro Payung himself. the third grave from the right is the grave of his wife, Siu The Yo, and the last grave from the right is the grave of his son, Syekh Muhammad Bahrul Alam.

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The inscription on Mbah Ngoro Payung's grave reads:



Figure 1: Inscription on the headstone on the inside of Mbah Ngoro Payung's grave

Written:

واخرى تحبونها نصر من الله وفتح قريب وبشر المؤمنين

Translation: "(There is another reward) that you will like, (namely) help from Allah and victory that is near (in time). Give good news to the believers.



Figure 2: Inscription on the headstone on the inside of Mbah Ngoro Payung's grave

Written:

لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله

Translation: "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah".

It can be seen that the tombstone of Mbah Ngoro Payung has a kalamergah and kurawal motif, similar to the tombstones in Ksetroloyo, with the distinctive characteristics of a Mahapahit official's tombstone. The reason for this motif was the order of Prabhu Sadmata, who was an official/dharmadyaksa of Giri Kedhaton, the successor to the Majapahit Kingdom. In the center of the tombstone is a circle representing the symbol of Majapahit, namely maja / maja fruit, which is shaped like a circle, similar to a modern-day medallion. The term medallion is used because there is a circular symbol with a string wrapped around it like a necklace, which is assumed to be like a medal given to someone who wins a competition (Kieven, 2017). At the top of the gravestone is a crown-shaped design resembling a wijayakusuma flower bud. In the center of the maja circle, or medallion, on the inner part of the headstone, is engraved a verse from the Quran, Surah Ash-Shaf, verse 13, while on the headstone itself is engraved the tahlil prayer (Arifia, Mahdi, Muhammad, Yaqin, & Alwi, 2025).

An epigraphic analysis of the inscription on Mbah Ngoro Payung's tomb reveals that the text chosen for the tombstone serves not only as an identifier of the grave but also as an ideological and spiritual representation of the figure buried there. The use of Surah Ash-Shaff, verse 13 which contains a promise of help and victory from Allah conveys a very powerful message of da'wah. This verse symbolically represents optimism, the triumph of religion, and the success of the struggle to uphold Islamic teachings. In the context of Mbah Ngoro Payung as a figure who spread Islam in Gresik, the selection of this verse can be interpreted as religious legitimization of the da'wah efforts he undertook. Thus, the inscription is not merely a quotation from the Qur'an, but a form of memorialization of the social and religious role of the figure buried there (Sofiyul, Rochmaniyah, & Touré, 2025).

Furthermore, the presence of the tauhid phrase "*Laa ilaaha illallah Muhammadur Rasulullah*" on the outer part of the tombstone indicates the tombstone's function as a medium for reminding visitors of their faith. Such declarations of faith are commonly found on classical Islamic tombstones in Java and serve to affirm Islamic identity. The presence of this phrase demonstrates that Islamic burial traditions in Gresik have integrated elements of da'wah into the art of epigraphy. In other words, the gravestone serves not only as a monument to the deceased but also as a medium for transmitting religious values to the community visiting the gravesite (Nikhlah & Alrianingrum, 2025).

From a paleographic and ornamental perspective, the combination of Majapahit-style gravestone forms with Arabic inscriptions indicates a strong process of cultural acculturation. Motifs such as medallions, kurawal, and crown shapes resembling the buds of the wijaya kusuma

flower are elements of local art that have been preserved, while the Arabic text and verses from the Qur'an represent Islamic identity. This phenomenon indicates that the process of Islamization in Java did not occur through confrontation but rather through cultural adaptation. Thus, Mbah Ngoro Payung's tombstone can be viewed as an artifact documenting the encounter between Majapahit visual traditions and Islamic symbols that emerged during the early period of Islam in Java (Rahman, Khoiri, Sunan, & Putri, 2025).

The presence of these inscriptions also demonstrates that Mbah Ngoro Payung's grave serves a social function as a medium of collective memory for the community. The text, ornaments, and symbols on the tombstone serve as a means of preserving the memory of a figure considered instrumental in the Islamization of Gresik. Therefore, epigraphic analysis of this tomb not only yields textual information but also reveals the ideological, cultural, and religious dimensions that are alive within the community that supports it.

The study of the inscription on Mbah Ngoro Payung's tomb is the main focus of this research. However, the existence of his wife's tomb in the same complex provides social and religious context, making a brief study of it relevant as a complement to the overall picture of the historical heritage at this location. The following is the inscription on the tombstone of Mbah Ngoro Payung's wife:



Figure 3: Inscription on the headstone inside the grave of Mbah Ngoro Payung's wife

Written:

الله ولي الذين امنوا يخرجهم من الظلمت الى النور والذين كفروا اولياؤهم الطاغوت يخرجونهم من النور الى الظلمت اولئك
 اصحاب النار هم فيها خالدون

Translation: "Allah is the protector of those who believe. He brings them out of darkness into light (faith). As for those who disbelieve, their protectors are the taghut. They (the taghut) bring them (the disbelievers) out of light into darkness. They are the inhabitants of Hell, wherein they will abide forever".



Figure 4 Inscription on the headstone outside the grave of Mbah Ngoro Payung's wife

Written:

لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله

Translation: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah".

It can be seen that the tombstone of Mbah Ngoro Payung's wife is made of andesite stone, which is commonly used in East Java and Central Java (Maler, Shyeh, Oetomo, & Saidin, 2020). The headstone has three curves with spiral decorations on the left and right (double spiral or buffalo horn motifs), which are often found in ancient Islamic tombs -such as Troloyo (Trowulan, Mojokerto) or Gresik. It bears an Arabic inscription in early Kufi or Naskhi calligraphy with a verse from the Qur'an, Surah Al Baqarah 257, on the inside and a tahlil sentence on the outside. The lower ornament features a cloud motif, vines, and symmetrical carvings, depicting the influence of Majapahit Hindu-Buddhist art adapted into Islamic form (Supatmo, Jazuli, & Syarif, 2025). These characteristics are quite distinctive in classical Islamic tombstones in Java from the 15th to 17th centuries AD (Kalus & Guillot, 2007).

Analysis of Religious Tourism at the Tomb of Mbah Ngoro Payung

Religious tourism at the Tomb of Mbah Ngoro Payung is one of the growing spiritual destinations in the Gresik region of East Java. The tomb not only has historical value, but also symbolizes the community's respect for a spiritual figure who is believed to have made a significant contribution to the spread of Islam in the region. Analysis of this religious tourism covers three main aspects: religious value, socio-cultural function, and the economic potential of the local community (Azarkasyi, Yusalia, Budianto, & Nur Kamila, 2025). In terms of religious value, the tomb of Mbah Ngoro Payung is a center of intense religious activity, especially at certain times. The religious value of the tomb of Mbah Ngoro Payung has existed since ancient times and continues to be preserved today.

Through interviews, it was learned that in the past, the religious activities of the local community were known as bari'an or bancaan, which were selametan traditions held as a form of gratitude and respect for ancestors at the tomb of Mbah Ngoro Payung (Manan, Kamarullah, Husda, & Rasyad, 2024). Over time, this tradition has undergone a transformation in terms of terminology and form, and is now known as haul. The commemoration of Mbah Ngoro Payung's haul is held every month of Syafar, usually between the 12th and 19th. During the commemoration, the community gathers at the tomb of Mbah Ngoro Payung to pray together, recite tahlil, and hold religious lectures as a form of respect for the figure who is considered to have contributed greatly to the spread of Islam in the region. This tradition shows that religious values are deeply rooted in the community's life and have become an important part of their spiritual identity (Tresnawaty & Risdayah, 2025).

From a social and cultural perspective, the existence of Mbah Ngoro Payung's tomb has become a space for social interaction among people of all ages and backgrounds. The process of Islamization was born out of a long negotiation between local traditions and Islamic teachings. The haul tradition is not only a religious ritual, but also a moment to strengthen social solidarity and strengthen relationships between residents (Anam, Yusuf, & Karim, 2025). The phenomenon of the transformation from the bari'an tradition to the haul at the tomb of Mbah Ngoro Payung is one concrete example that emerged from the process of Islamization negotiation. The mutual cooperation in preparing for the event, from cleaning the tomb area, arranging logistics, to welcoming guests, reflects the values of togetherness and social care that are still maintained in modern society (Azzahra, Mulyani, & Binarsae, 2025).

In addition, cultural activities such as readings of the history of Mbah Ngoro Payung, hadrah art performances, and public recitations help preserve local cultural heritage while also serving as a means of spiritual education for the younger generation. The local traditions at the tomb of Mbah Ngoro Payung demonstrate a symbolic recognition of Islamic values that are embraced and

practiced by the community. This process of acculturation has enabled the internalization of Islamic teachings without having to abandon the existing cultural heritage of the ancestors. Thus, the existence of the tomb and rituals is proof that the people of Gresik not only identify as Muslims but are also able to express their Islam through spiritual and contextual practices rooted in local wisdom (M.C., 2013). Thus, the haul ritual at this tomb is not merely a form of cultural preservation, but a form of continuous tradition creation that reflects the spiritual dynamics and collective identity of the people of Gresik (Robert, 1987).

Meanwhile, from the perspective of the local community's economic potential, religious tourism activities at this tomb have a positive impact on the surrounding economy (Febrianti & Handoko, 2025). During the anniversary celebrations, the economic activity of the residents increases, with the emergence of food vendors, souvenir sellers, and parking service providers. This condition shows that the development of religious tourism can be an additional source of livelihood for the community if it is managed professionally and sustainably. The local government or sub-district authorities should also play a role in supporting the management of this destination, for example through the provision of supporting infrastructure, tourism promotion, and training for the community so that religious activities can also become a well-organized tourism potential without reducing their sacred value (Sasongko, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Mbah Ngoro Payung (Syekh Bentong) was a local figure who played a significant role in the Islamization process in Gresik through a cultural da'wah approach that emphasized the values of tolerance, humanity, and cultural acculturation. Historical findings reveal that Mbah Ngoro Payung's presence cannot be separated from the network of Chinese-Muslim Islamic da'wah in Java, as well as the socio-religious relationships that developed during the late Majapahit period and the early stages of Islam's spread along the northern coast of Java.

An epigraphic study of the tombstones of Mbah Ngoro Payung and his family revealed inscriptions of Qur'anic verses, the *shahada*, and ornamental elements that demonstrate a fusion of Islamic artistic traditions and Majapahit culture. These findings indicate that tombstones serve not only as grave markers but also as a medium for conveying religious messages, social identity, and symbols of Islamic cultural acculturation in Java. Furthermore, this study found that Mbah Ngoro Payung's grave continues to function as a vibrant socio-religious space through the tradition of the haul ceremony, religious activities, and religious tourism, which generate social and economic benefits for the surrounding community.

The contribution of this research lies in strengthening the study of local Islamic history and Islamic epigraphy in Indonesia, particularly regarding local figures who have thus far received little academic attention. This study also demonstrates that historical and epigraphic approaches can be used integrally to uncover a figure's identity, the meaning of inscriptions, and the socio-cultural dynamics developing around the tomb site. Thus, this study enriches the body of knowledge on Islamization in Java and supports efforts to preserve local Islamic cultural heritage.

However, this study still has several limitations. First, the scarcity of written primary sources regarding the life of Mbah Ngoro Payung means that some historical reconstructions still rely on oral traditions and secondary sources. Second, the epigraphic analysis conducted is limited to the reading of inscriptions and visual examination of tombstones, without being supported by archaeological analysis or laboratory analysis of the tombstone materials. Third, the research on the economic impact of religious tourism remains descriptive and has not yet utilized quantitative data on the community's socioeconomic conditions. Therefore, future research is expected to develop more in-depth archaeological, philological, and socioeconomic studies so that the significance of Mbah Ngoro Payung can be understood more comprehensively.

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