

Slaves as Gifts to Accompany Letters: A Critical Study of the *Bo' Abdul Kadim*

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Abstract. This study discusses the tradition of letters in the kingdom of Bima, especially concerning giving enslaved people as gifts to accompany letters. The data for this study were taken from the manuscript bundle of *bo'* (official royal records) during the reign of Sultan Abdul Kadim Muhammad Shah (1751–1773). Now, the manuscript is part of the collection of the Samparaja Cultural Museum, Bima, West Nusa Tenggara and is coded C.011 Bo. Within the manuscript bundle, we found 117 (out of a total of 548) letters discussing slaves and slavery in the Bima kingdom. We first used philological research methods, then these texts were analysed with historical records to obtain a complete understanding of slaves and slavery in the 18th century AD societal traditions. The results showed that slaves giving as a gift accompanying the letter was a symbol of respect for the recipient of the letter, which was following the Malay correspondence tradition. For local rulers, slaves were the most valuable treasure. Slaves were also a determinant of social status among the nobility in the past. This practice applies not only in Bima but throughout the Malay land and even Southeast Asia.

Keywords and phrases: Malay letters, slaves as gifts, diplomacy in Malay countries, kingdom of Bima, slaves and slavery

Introduction

Writing letters is an essential aspect of diplomacy between kings or sultans in Malay countries. Letters are used as a sign of magnificence, honour and dignity. Naturally, the tradition of writing letters received particular attention in Malay

kingdoms or sultanates. Through the hands of the clerks (scribes), all kingdoms or sultanates competed to create decorative letter layouts, good writing and neat shapes. The royal scribes also had to ensure that the language used in the letters was ethically correct. One thing that is no less important, is the opening sentence in the letter, as much as possible, reflects the close relationship between the king and Islam and the sincerity of his words (Adam 2009, 6–7).

He also stated that the Malay writing tradition has been around for at least 500 years. He based his statement on stories in the Malay saga, which always describe the habit of receiving and reading letters in the kingdom/sultanate, indicating its importance for the Malay kingdom/sultanate's life. In addition, many *terasul*, the Malay manuals of letter-writing, were copied and passed on from generation to generation to be used as a guide in writing various types of letters, especially official letters of the kingdom/sultanate (royal letters) (Adam 2009, 79). Based on Proudfoot's (1992, 511–515) records, from 1868 to 1920, at least 20 of the *terasul* were documented and printed in various lithographic editions and published in Singapore.

The tradition of epistolary writing throughout the Malay world had developed, at least in the second decade of the 16th century, and it continued until the 20th century. More intriguingly, even though they are separated by distance and time, the Malay royal missives have similarities, especially in terms of presentation. According to Gallop (1994, 12), the condition confirms that all Malay letters have one basic structure, eliminate regional boundaries and are equally influenced by Persian and Arabic. Marsden (1812, iii) mentioned this fact long ago. He argued that the Malays have a congruent writing style, and it was not only in terms of writing prose and poetry but also in correspondence. Based on his own experience, he admitted that he had no difficulty translating letters written by the rulers, both from the Maluku Islands, Kedah and Terengganu on the Malay Peninsula and Minangkabau on the island of Sumatra.

Referring to the provisions in the *terasul*, scribes must pay close attention to several aspects of letter-writing, such as cover letters, royal seals, letter headings (*kepala surat*), praise and language style and the arts of illumination and calligraphy. In addition, rulers in Malay lands also have several “customs” that accompany sending letters. One of them is gift-giving to the letter recipient. According to Gallop (1994, 78), gifts are usually given by the parties who intend to establish a brotherly relationship. Long before he took office as Lieutenant-Governor of Java and its Dependencies, Thomas Stamford Raffles knew very well about the existence of this custom. Not surprisingly, when he moved from Pulau Pinang to Malacca in early December 1810, he brought several items which would later be given as gifts to many parties.

Maka diam-lah Tuan Raffles itu di Malaka, di-Kampong Bandar Hilir, di-kĕbun anak Kapitan China yang bĕrnama Baba Cheng Lan. Bĕrmula maka ada-lah di-bawanya bĕbĕrapa pĕrkara barang-barang yang indah-indah dari-pada pĕrbuatan Eropah, ia-itu sĕpĕrti bĕbĕrapa macham bĕrpĕti-pĕti, dan pistol, dan kain antĕlas yang mahal-mahal harga-nya, dan kain khasah bunga mas, dan lagi bĕbĕrapa jĕnis pĕrkakasan yang bĕlum pĕrnah di-lihat orang, dan sakhlata yang halus-halus bĕbĕrapa jĕnis, dan horloji yang indah-indah, sĕrta kĕrtas mĕmbuat surat ka-pada raja-raja Malayu yang tĕlah tĕrtulis dĕngan bunga mas dan perak, dan lain dari-pada itu bĕbĕrapa banyak pĕrkakasan akan mĕnjadi hadiah ka-pada raja-raja Malayu ada-nya. (Abdullah 1932, 58)

Gifts that typically accompanied letters included valuable items like clothes and jewellery. Additionally, slaves were also commonly given with letters. One of the proofs is a letter sent by the sultan of Ternate to the governor-general of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in Batavia. In his Malay letter dated 11th September 1733, the sultan stated that he was sending “four slaves, three males and one female, three of them straight-haired and one Papuan (i.e., frizzy-haired) and twenty parrots” (BN Mal-Pol. 210 1912 cited in Gallop 1994, 83). We can also find another proof through John Anderson’s story, a late agent to the governor of prince of Wales Island as well as a deputy secretary to governor, when he visited the sultanate of Siak in 1823. A letter was sent to him on board, enclosed, as usual, in a yellow silk bag; a small parcel in yellow cloth, and a slave boy. Anderson (1826, 183–184) stated, “The latter I could not decline receiving; and I therefore made the little fellow as comfortable as possible, knowing he would be emancipated, according to custom, immediately on his arrival at Pinang, where his condition would be much better than at Siack”.

We also found this reality in the tradition of letters in the kingdom of Bima, West Nusa Tenggara, especially in the 18th century AD. This kingdom used the Jawi script (Malay Arabic script) and the Malay language in correspondence so that it could be included in the treasures of Malay culture. In that tradition, the officials in the Bima kingdom had not only sent slaves as a gift (accompanied the letters) but also livestock and manufactured goods (such as nuts, onions, candles, sea cucumbers and so on). These details compelled us to explore further about the traditions that took place in the kingdom, especially in the 18th century AD.

Bo' Abdul Kadim Manuscript

The object of this research is a bundle of manuscripts belonging to the collection of the Cultural Museum of Samparaja, Bima, West Nusa Tenggara, and is coded C.011 Bo (*Bo Besar Lama*). However, in the catalogue compiled by Mulyadi and

Salahuddin (1992), this manuscript bundle is coded 1.10 Bo. This manuscript bundle is popularly known as “*Bo' Abdul Kadim*”.¹ The tradition of writing this type of book was inherited from the kingdom of Bima from South Sulawesi. In the past, in South Sulawesi—especially in the Bugis and Makassar-speaking areas—there was a distinctive bibliographical tradition in the form of *lontara bilang*, namely very detailed notebooks written in the king’s palace or the homes of several dignitaries. Based on the memory of the Bima people today, the tradition of writing *bo'* was started by prime minister, Tureli Nggampo Makapiri Solo, after studying the government system of the kingdom of Gowa and Luwu'. At first, *bo'* was written using the Bima script and language on palm leaves. However, on 15th Muharram, AH 1005 (to coincide with 13th March 1645), Sultan Abi al-Khair Sirajuddin ordered that the next *bo'* be written on paper “using the Malay language in a written form that is blessed by Allah ta'ala” (Abdullah 1981, 7–8 cited in Chambert-Loir and Salahuddin 2012, xiii–xiv).

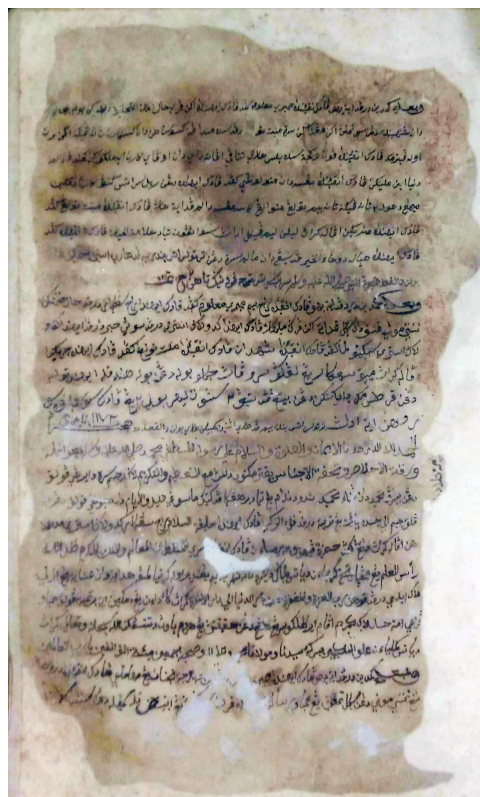


Figure 1. The first page of the *Bo' Abdul Kadim* bundle of manuscripts



Figure 2. The last page of the *Bo' Abdul Kadim* bundle of manuscripts

The manuscript bundle, which is the object of this research, consists of 139 pages of European paper measuring 25.5 cm × 41.5 cm.² According to Salahudin and Mukhlis (2007, 75), these papers have a “VI” watermark and a Strasburg Lili (a crown on a shield with lily flowers). However, the authors of this article did not find any watermark on all the papers in the bundle. The text is written back and forth (recto-verso) to form 278 pages. However, there are two blank pages. Thus, there are 276 pages containing text, where the text fills a space that averages 21 cm × 32 cm. The number of lines of text on each page varies and is in the range of 25 to 34 lines of text (Salahudin and Mukhlis 2007, 75).

Most of the texts are written in black ink, but some marginal notes are written in red ink. Most of the texts are in the form of letter copies, but some are in notes of important events during the reign of Sultan Abdul Kadim Muhammad Syah (1751–1773). However, the texts contained in this bundle were written during the last 10 years of the reign of Sultan Abdul Kadim, in 1764–1773³ to be exact. Based on the authors’ count, there are at least 548 letters/records of events in the bundle. The letters are the result of Sultan Abdul Kadim’s correspondence with various parties, such as officials within the Bima kingdom (i.e., *tureli*,⁴ *jeneli*,⁵ *dalu*,⁶ *gelarang* [head of village], *nakhoda* [skippers], *syahbandar* [harbour master] and clerks),

the kings of Bima's neighbours (i.e., Dompu, Sumbawa, Tambora, Sanggar, Pekat and Selaparang), colonial officials (*petor* Bima [resident of Bima], governor of Sulawesi and so on), indigenous or colonial officials in Java, or traders. In addition, the majority of the texts are written using the Jawi script and the Malay language. However, six letters are written using the Lontaraq script in the Bugis language and one is written using the Arabic script in the Bugis language (Serang script).

Most of the manuscripts are in good condition and can still be read clearly. However, in many manuscripts, there are overflows of ink which reduces the legibility of the text. In addition, there are also manuscript papers that are torn, even almost in half, sloppy on the edges or with holes in the middle. This condition makes the text in these manuscripts unable to be read entirely. However, this study only discusses letters dealing with slaves, both slaves who were used as gifts and slaves who experienced a practice known as "trafficking" today. Of the 548 letters in *Bo' Abdul Kadim*, 117 letters discuss slaves.

Results and Discussion

Slavery in *Bo' Abdul Kadim*

As stated in the previous section, *Bo' Abdul Kadim* contains 117 letters that discuss slavery. In detail, there are 85 letters discussing slaves as a trading commodity and there are 34 letters discussing slaves as gifts accompanying letters. If calculated, there are 119 letters in total. The difference is because there are two letters discussing both slaves as a trading commodity and gifts accompanying letters. We present a letter excerpt discussing slaves as a trading commodity. The letter was written by the resident (*petor*) of Bima (Johan Tinne) to Sultan Abdul Kadim Muhammad Syah on "sepuluh enam hari bulan Agustus [Agustus] hijrah sanah 1179 alif" or the year 1765. In *Bo' Abdul Kadim* (p. 55), the letter is in the 89th sequence.

Seperkara lagi, petor minta begitu lekas bayar itu budak. Jikalau saudarah tiada membayar dangan [dengan] budak melainkan bayar dangan [dengan] kupang dan bunganya. Dalam yang seratus, seriyal bunganya pada sebulan karena apa saudarah petor tiada bayar ini kasih lebih dahulu kupang jikalau tiada dangan [dengan] perintah Kompeni adanya.

The excerpt of the letter reveals that *petor* Bima asked the sultan of Bima (Abdul Kadim) to pay for the slaves that had been handed over immediately. If he could not pay with slaves (as in a barter system), the sultan could also pay using money (*kupang*). However, if payment by money is chosen, the sultan must also pay

interest for late payments. The company applies an interest rate of one riyal per month for every 100 riyals owed. Thus, the *petor* requested the sultan to pay for the slaves immediately.

Apart from being a trading commodity, the slaves in the Bima sultanate, especially during the reign of Sultan Abdul Kadim, were also used to pay debts and as a means of exchange (replacement for money). We can see slaves as a payment for a debt in the example of the 125th letter in *Bo' Abdul Kadim*, as presented in this excerpt:

Wa ba'dahu. Kemudian daripada itu bahwa paduka kakandah memberi maklum kepada paduka adindah akan perihal surat sepucuk itu telah sampailah dengan selamat sejahteranya. Maka paduka kakandah menyambut dangan [dengan] kedua belah tangan serta membu [membuka] daripada lipatan meterainya, lalu membaca huruf yang wasikh dan maknanya yang sarikh serta mengeratinya [mengerti] baik bunyi dalamnya akan mengatakan paduka adindah menghendaki memohon kepada paduka kakandah riyal barang seribu yang mauh bayar dengan budak itu. (*Bo' Abdul Kadim*, p. 82)

The letter is a correspondence between two indigenous leaders who each refer to themselves as *kakanda* (older sibling) and *adinda* (younger sibling). Although it is not known precisely who they were, one of them was Sultan Abdul Kadim Muhammad Syah, the sultan of Bima. Unfortunately, we do not even know when the letter was written. Nonetheless, we can clearly understand that the indigenous leader who called himself *adinda* intended to borrow at least 1,000 riyals from the *kakanda*. In the letter, it was also revealed that *adinda* would repay them with slaves.

It seems customary in the Bima kingdom that debts can be paid in currency or slaves. On certain occasions, the debtor is given the choice to use money or slaves. This is as stated in a letter from the sultan of Bima to the sultan of Sumbawa, the 158th in the *Bo' Abdul Kadim* manuscript bundle:

Wa ba'dahu. Kemudian daripada itu bahwa paduka ayahandah bermaklum kepada paduka anakandah Raja Sumbawah akan perihal hutang paduka kakandah yang budi dua ratus dua puluh lima riyal akan janji dangan [dengan] budak. Maka sekarang yang mutalazim maka syarr al-qulub paduka ayahandah terlebih lain harap dan percayah akan membayarkan kupang itu [...] paduka anakandah kupangkah atau budakkah ambil segerahnya. (*Bo' Abdul Kadim*, p. 94)

Furthermore, in the Bima sultanate, slaves were also treated as a medium of exchange as stated in the two sample letters. The first example is a letter written in the name of the sultan of Bima and addressed to Bumi Wawo Radah, a sultanate

official. The letter was written on 8th Muharram, AH 1186 (11th April 1772) and is the 181st in the *Bo' Abdul Kadim* manuscript bundle.

Syahdan bahwa paduka tuan kita telah sudah mengambil barang2 kepada Encek Nang itu akan janji bayar dangan [dengan] budak dua yang bagus akan sekarang ini hendaklah Bumi Wawo Radah membayar dangan [dengan] budak yang bagus. Jangan sekali2 ada suatu kecelaan kepada budak semuanya badannya budak pembayar kepada Encek Nang itu karena yang dari tuan kita demikian memang janji dangan [dengan] Encek Nang itu adanya. (*Bo' Abdul Kadim*, p. 102)

Meanwhile, the second example is a record of events which is the 453rd in the *Bo' Abdul Kadim* manuscript bundle with the added description, "Alamat membeli perahu".

Hijrah al-nabiy salla al-lahu 'alayhi wa sallam seribu seratus tujuh puluh tujuh tahun2 Waw pada dua belas hari bulan Zulkaidah hari Ahad. Ketika itulah duli tuan kita Seri Sultan tahta Kerajaan Bima membeli perahu paduwakang kepada orang Mengkasar bernama Muhammad Daeng Mandapa'i cucunya nyonya Sah Bintang harganya tiga orang budak laki2 di hadapan ganti kerajaan bergelar Tureli Bolo bernama Ismail dan Bumi Loma Rasana'e bernama Abdul Ghafur dan sekalian hulubalang atas Sungai Gunung Talu. Maka jikalau orang merupakan, lepaslah duli tuan kita melainkan atas orang menjualnya demikianlah adanya. (*Bo' Abdul Kadim*, p. 229)

In the first example, we can immediately understand that the sultan of Bima bought a number of goods from a merchant named Encek Nang. The sultan had also promised to pay for the goods with two "good" slaves. The word "good" can be interpreted as the slave's appearance (beautiful or handsome) or body. In the letter, the sultan ordered Bumi Wawo Radah to hand over the slaves in question to Encek Nang. In addition, Bumi Wawo Radah had to ensure that the slaves given were following what was promised. Meanwhile, in the second example, there is information that the sultan of Bima had bought a *paduwakang* (Makassar's traditional boat) boat from a Makassarese named Muhammad Daeng Mandapa'i. The purchase of the boat used three male slaves as a medium of exchange. The event occurred on Sunday, 12th Dhu al-Qi'dah, AH 1177 (13th May 1764) and was witnessed by several officials in the Bima sultanate.

As stated in the previous paragraph, in the *Bo' Abdul Kadim* manuscript bundle, 34 letters discuss slaves as gifts accompanying letters. Of course, usually, the slaves were accompanied by gifts in the form of livestock or crops. For more details, pay attention to the examples.

Table 1. Some examples of texts about giving gifts to recipients of letters in the Bima kingdom during the reign of Sultan Abdul Kadim

Sender	Receiver	Date	Letter excerpt
The governor of Celebes	Sultan of Bima	2nd June 1760 (7th letter)	Dan lagi, orang besar akan menerima kasih banyak ² sebab ia sudah menerima hal kiriman daripada raja itu adanya, budak dua orang, dan kacang empat tampah, dan bawang empat karung, dan hayam kabiri enam ekor adanya. (<i>Bo' Abdul Kadim</i> , p. 7)
Sultan of Bima	The governor of Celebes	6th Dhu al-Qi'dah, AH 1175 or 29th May 1762 (27th letter)	Suatu pun tiada alamat al-hayat paduka Seri Sultan datang kepada tuan Gurnadur hanyalah budak laki dua orang dan kacang empat karung dan hayam kabiri empat ekor dan bawang empat keranjang... (<i>Bo' Abdul Kadim</i> , pp. 19–20)
Sultan of Bima	Grand interpreter	No year (28th letter)	Suatu pun tiada alamat al-hayat paduka Seri Sultan datang kepada juru bahasa besar hanya budak seorang laki ² hayam dua ekor kacang dua karung bawang dua keranjang... (<i>Bo' Abdul Kadim</i> , p. 20)
Jeneli Woha	Sultan of Bima	17th Jumada al-Awwal, AH 1179 or 1st November 1765 (101th letter)	Budak seorang tandah hayat ayahandah Tureli Donggo seorang yang memang akan sembah Dalu Todo ke bawah duli tuanku dan hayam jantan dua ekor, seekor Jeneli, seekor Bumi Pertiga bepersembahnya ke bawah hadirat maulana. (<i>Bo' Abdul Kadim</i> , p. 60)
Prime minister of Bima sultanate	Governor of Celebes, Van der Puur	11th Sha'ban, AH 1186 or 7th November 1772	Sesuatu pun tiada burhan al-hayat hanya doa selamat panjang umur serta budak dua orang, seorang perempuan dan seorang laki ² , dan kepada seorang perempuan kepada syahbandar dan seorang kepada petor akbar dan budak seorang perempuan kepada juru bahasa besar. (<i>Bo' Abdul Kadim</i> , p. 104)

Bima and the practice of slavery in the world

Bima is located in the middle of a maritime route that crosses the Indonesian Archipelago, making it an essential stopover in the trade network from Malacca to Maluku. Several ancient relics and inscriptions and some quotations from Old Javanese texts, such as *negarakretagama* (a country with sacred [religious] traditions) and *pararaton* (the rulers), prove that traders have visited the port of Bima since at least the 10th century AD. It is not surprising that Bima became a reasonably well-known trading centre when the Portuguese explored the archipelago in the 16th century AD (Chambert-Loir and Salahuddin 2012, xv).

In the second decade of the 16th century AD, Tome Pires described Bima as an island ruled by a “heathen king”. The island had a lot of boats and foodstuffs, especially meat, fish and tamarind. Sapang wood was also one of the commodities of Bima, which was to be sold in Malacca. The island also houses many slaves and horses to be sold to Java. Pires also described that the trade was very active and busy. Traders who wanted to sail to Banda and Maluku stopped by to shop for various types of cloth to be sold in Banda and Maluku. The island also had a little bit of gold (Cortesao 1944, 203). A century later, the Dutch recorded that the boats arriving in Batavia and Ambon brought merchandise obtained in Bima, namely rice, sapang wood, wax, sandalwood, tamarind, sulfur, cinnamon, palm sugar and slaves. According to various records, at that time, Bima had also established trade relations with Banjar, Makassar, Banten, Palembang and even China. Another record mentions other goods, namely woven cloth, horses, buffalo, onions, mung beans and gantri seeds (Chambert-Loir dan Salahuddin 2012, xvi, referring to the Dagh Register in 1624–1665).

The information from Tome Pires clearly stated that the Bima sultanate had many slaves. This condition was also cited by Chambert-Loir and Salahuddin (2012, xvi). With further understanding, Tome Pires was describing the condition of Bali, Lombok and Sumbawa Island. It is said that the islands were ruled by kings and each island had a lot of ports, waters, foodstuffs and slaves (both male and female). The king who ruled on the islands was described as a robber. They have *lanchara* (a type of ship), went looting, and are all *kafir* (heathen).⁸ They brought food and cloth of their kind to trade, and many slaves and many horses they brought to Java to sell (Cortesao 1944, 200–202). Thus, the practice of slavery does not only apply in Bima but also in Bali, Lombok and Sumbawa. In fact, a similar condition applies to Sangiang Island (Foguo). Tome Pires’ explanation brings us to an understanding that the slave trade was a common thing at that time and, as such, was not an unlawful practice as it is today. Moreover, referring to information through letters contained in *Bo’ Abdul Kadim*, even the practice of the slave trade was also carried

out by VOC officials. One such proof is in *petor* Bima's letter to the sultan of Bima, which was written on 3rd August 1765 (the 397th letter):

Amma ba'duh. Kemudian daripada itu bahwa paduka saudarah tuan petor memberi maklum kepada saudara Raja Bima akan perihal sudah dilihat di dalam surat punya saudara punya surat belum ada dapat budak utang utang. Dari itu, saudara petor minta pada saudara Raja Bima cari lekas karena apa ada dia punya tempo sekarang perkirim di Batawiyah. Tetapi saudara barangkali terbolelah dapat budak, baik bayar kembali itu kupang dangan [dengan] dia punya bunga di atas satu riyal seratus satu bulan karena itu kupang saudara petor mau suruh beli budak pada lain tanah. Tetapi barangkali ada sekarang ini saudara punya tangan, baik menyuruh pada perahu Melayu saudara petor punya tangan adanya. (*Bo' Abdul Kadim*, p. 201)

Information from Nieboer (1900, 112–114) further confirms what, centuries earlier, Tome Pires had expressed. According to Nieboer, based on various research, the practice of slavery is widespread in the Lesser Sunda Islands and Maluku. He detailed the islands and island groups in question, namely Sumbawa, Sumba, Flores, Solor Islands, Bonerate and Kalao, East Timor, West Timor, Sawu, Rote or Rotti, Wetar, Kisar, Leti, Dama, Luang-Sermata Islands, Babar Islands, Tanimbar and Timorlao Islands, Aru Islands, Kei Islands, Watubela Islands, Seranglao-Gorong Islands, Seram, Ambon and Lease Islands and Sangihe-Talau Islands. “In all these cases, it is clear that slavery (on the islands) was or still exists”, Nieboer comments. He also revealed that the practice of slavery also applies in the Malay Archipelago, even throughout the world, although to a certain degree. What is happening in the Sakai community in Malacca, for example, is that “people who are in debt and their family members must work for the creditor for one or two months, based on the decision made forth from the local *penghulu* (village head)”. This, of course, was the beginning of debt bondage. However, such compulsory labour, previously limited to one or two months, did not constitute slavery in the truest sense (Nieboer 1900, 108, referring to De Morgan's research). It was relevant with Raffles' statement that the Malay law stipulates that after the decease of a debtor, his children, in the first instance, and after their death, the village to which he belonged, is still liable for the debt. Thus not only the original contractors were rendered slave debtors, as they are termed, but their offspring, and eventually the people in general, reduced to the same hapless state (Raffles 1824, 34).

VOC officials also practised the slave trade, as stated in the previous paragraph. In fact, in the early decades of their existence in the archipelago, they had sent tens of thousands of people who were made into slaves to various headquarters and trading posts in several regions. The slaves were tasked with building headquarters,

trading posts or forts and carrying out trading activities. The VOC took the slaves from some areas in Asia, such as India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, the Philippines and the islands of today's Indonesia, such as Bali, Sulawesi and Sumatra. In addition, the VOC also "shopped" for slaves in the East African slave market. During its two centuries in the East Indies, the VOC is estimated to have trafficked, employed and shipped between 600,000 and 1 million slaves. By comparison, the total slave trade in the West is estimated at 500,000 to 600,000 people (Baay 2017). According to Raffles (1830, 83–84), until 1814, there were still at least 27,000 slaves in the three principal cities of Java, namely Batavia, Semarang and Surabaya; in detail 18,972 slaves at Batavia and its environs, 4,488 slaves in Semarang and 3,682 slaves in Surabaya. The greatest number of slaves were procured from Bali and Sulawesi.

Slavery in Bima: Two different conceptions

The matter regarding slavery in the Bima sultanate seems to be inseparable from the history of conquest. Various sources on this can be found in several ancient manuscripts belonging to the Bima sultanate. One of the critical manuscripts that mention the conquest is *Bo' Sangaji Kai*, a record of the development of the Bima sultanate. In this manuscript, the conquest of the areas around Bima was carried out during the reign of King Mawa'a Ndapa (Rumata Sangaji). This task of expanding the power of the Bima kingdom is carried out by his older sibling, Makapiri Solo (Rumata Tureli Nggampo). The tradition continued until the reign of Mantau Uma Jati, the second sultan (Sultan Abi al-Khair Sirajuddin) (Chambert-Loir and Salahuddin 2012, liii; 3–7; 127–131; 382–386). According to the information obtained, the practice of slavery in Bima has taken place at least in the early 17th century AD or perhaps since the latter half of the 16th century AD. There is information about categories or requirements of slaves, as stated in the document dated 30th Shawwal, AH 1211 (28th April 1797):⁹

Sebagai lagi orang yang dibilang abdi itu, yaitu daripada empat syarat. Pertama, tawanan daripada kafir. Kedua, tebusan. Ketiga, disadakkan. Keempat, pusaka dari dahulu kala. (Chambert-Loir and Salahuddin 2012, 69)

This practice continued until the late 19th century, perhaps even into the 20th century. However, the end of slavery awareness has existed since at least the second decade of the 19th century. In this matter, we can refer to a document written by the governor of Sulawesi to the sultan of Bima on 30th July 1827.

Pada akhirnya aku memberitahukan, yang baharu ini, ada suatu perahu sudah singgah di Tope Jawa, ada muat sepuluh orang Manggarai. Maka nakhodanya perahu itu bernama Palampah, maka ia mengatakan yang Raja Manggarai berkirin itu orang kepada paduka Sri Sultan. Tiada usah

lagi aku panjangkan daripada hal itu karena aku sudahlah menentukan yang paduka Sri Sultan ada mengetahui yang gubernemen sudah mengeluarkan titah perintah yang tiada boleh sekali-kali budak dibuat kiriman. Dan lagi, pekerjaan yang demikian itu tiada serupa dengan pengasihannya kepada sekalian orang yang ada bernaung di bawah kebesarannya. (Chambert-Loir and Salahuddin 2012, 342–343)

In Bima, the slave trade persisted until the mid-19th century. J.P. Freijss proved this during his visit to Bima in 1854 until 1856. He was entrusted with a particular assignment by the High Government of the Dutch East Indies in Batavia to investigate the practice of the slave trade on the island of Flores, especially in Manggarai.¹⁰ Despite having encountered difficulties, Freijss (1860, 518) finally discovered that the practice of the slave trade still occurred on the island:

A trustworthy old man told me that the small boats send away five slaves each, and the large (boat) dispatched with ten or fifteen slaves every year from there. Previously, the skipper Samana also told me that the Sape traders obtained many slaves there.

Freijss admitted that he was in grief, discovering that slavery still happens in Manggarai. “How would not I be,” he said, “seeing the kind-hearted people of Manggarai who live in a country that is so abundant in resources succumb to the pressure of a handful of Bima people who have lost opium”. As a result, according to him, this condition causes Manggarai to be undeveloped, even uninhabited. The remaining residents hid in the most secluded places and were cut off from all communities. Instead of development, there was only mortification in the area. However, he felt there was no need to explain further how terrible the practice of violence against slaves (*slavenroof*) and the slave trade (*slavenhandel*) was. Moreover, the practice is common in that area. In his report, Freijss (1860, 518–519) confirmed that the Dutch East Indies government was committed to abolishing slavery in the Dutch East Indies.

In the report, Freijss recommended that the only way to abolish slavery in Manggarai was to expel the Bima people. The issuance of new regulations (treaties) is insufficient to abolish slavery in the area. Likewise, the policy of placing military personnel to guard the coast requires a very high cost and, of course, is troublesome. Moreover, the practice of crime should not be eradicated by burning villages continuously. After the Bima people were expelled, at least the local people could take over power in the area. Therefore, Freijss (1860, 519) asked the *dalu* (local rulers) in Manggarai to return all gifts that the Bima kingdom had given.

It is a fact that the Sultan of Bima has exported slaves from Manggarai. The Dutch East Indies Government's prohibition on the slave trade was well known. Therefore, the Dutch East Indies Government was sufficient to expel the Bima people from Manggarai.

In turn, said Freijss, the Dutch East Indies government could accept authority over Manggarai. This is based on the fact that the Manggarai people cannot protect themselves. Therefore, the Dutch East Indies government could place the *daluh* in Manggarai under protection. Freijss added that it is a simple step and, of course, cheap. To achieve this, Freijss recommended that the Dutch East Indies government send capable and honourable staff officers to expedite Manggarai, especially to Reok and Pota, on the north coast. However, during the visit, he must also be accompanied by the *raja bicara* (prime minister) of Bima. Upon arrival, the officers must immediately call the *daluh* to return all forms of gifts, kris and jewellery, to the king of Bima. This symbolises that the *daluh* are no longer obliged to pay tribute or serve the sultan of Bima. Then, the officer shall invite all the Bima people, who run the government, to board the ship and return to Bima (Freijss 1860, 519–520).

After all that was done, all the *daluh* were welcome to run the government there, but under the supervision of the Dutch East Indies government. They were forbidden to fight with each other. They were also required to meet once or twice a year, under the direction of the competent authority in the Dutch East Indies government, to make and decide all the costs to be incurred by each party. In addition, the *daluh* must fully supervise the management of cinnamon. They had to provide assurances that the Dutch East Indies government could benefit from the sale of cinnamon in perpetuity. The Dutch East Indies government could also request the commodity from the *daluh* and the profit-sharing scheme. In addition, the government of the Netherlands East Indies will place supervisory officers who are well-trained in cinnamon processing. On the other hand, all the *daluh* have to provide labour to cut and peel the cinnamon. They would be paid according to the volume of cinnamon they produced (Freijss 1860, 520).

The Dutch East Indies government promised to repair the roads to ensure smooth trade. As Manggarai has many horses, road improvement is the best way to increase profits. The trade route could be directed to the north coast, where the empty ships from the Moluccas docked and were about to return to Java. However, cinnamon will be very profitable if sold in Java. From Java, cinnamon commodities can be purchased and brought directly to consumption centres, especially in America, France and Hamburg. At the time, England obtained its cinnamon supply from Sri Lanka (Ceylon) while the Dutch acquired cinnamon from Java (Freijss 1860, 520–

521). At the end of the recommendation, Freijss (1860, 521) wrote in a humorous tone:

With these measures, the poor people of Manggarai will be freed from their vicious oppressors, free from piracy and violence against slaves, and enjoy spreading wealth and prosperity. The (Dutch-Indies) Government has made sacrifices for all of that.

Unfortunately, until the eighth decade of the 19th century AD, the practice of slavery in Bima persists. We can see this fact in the report of D.F. van Braam Morris on 20th October 1886. He described that the population of Bima was divided into aristocrats, the middle class, slaves and pawns (*pandelingen*). At least throughout the 19th century AD, the number of slaves and pawnbrokers tended to increase. In contrast, the prevailing customs throughout the Bima kingdom contributed much to the increase in the number. At that time, the Bima kingdom imposed fines for almost all types of crimes and violations. If a convict cannot pay the fine imposed, he automatically becomes a pawnbroker or a slave. In addition, it is also common for someone to take debt to continue his habit of gambling or consuming opium by pledging himself. He will also automatically become a pawnbroker or a slave after not paying his debts. At times, one will first become a pawnbroker. However, if he cannot redeem himself in some time, his status ultimately changes into that of a slave. As a consequence, he can be sold to someone else. Tragically, the status of slaves was then passed down from parents to their children (Morris 1891, 199–200). This condition is common throughout Southeast Asia. Debt was a significant cause of slavery, whether through trading activities, inability to pay dowries, crop failure or other calamities, or gambling. Slavery can also be seen as an underlying concept for all other categories if prisoners of war are understood as mental debt for not being killed on the battlefield (Reid 2014, 137–139; 150–151).

In most cases in Bima, a family will voluntarily become slaves. Not infrequently, a family sells one of their children. Usually, this condition occurs when a family cannot free themselves from the trap of poverty and suffering from hunger. According to the prevailing tradition, the problem was that a slave could be traded freely, especially before the reform of the slavery law when Flores and Bima became warehouses for European slaves (Morris 1891, 200). However, one thing is worth noting from Morris' report. He stated that slavery in Bima was very different from similar practices in other places. In Bima, the practice of slavery is not accompanied by harsh treatment or specific oppression. The slaves there were only considered ordinary servants by their masters. In fact, not infrequently they also survive in these conditions. Because, in the long run and in many cases, they

can elevate their social status through marriage or liberation. Moreover, they can build property for themselves by taking advantage of their free time (Morris 1891, 200).

The results of Morris's observations were found to be true in the Bima kingdom document. In the form of a record of events, one of the documents comes from the reign of Sultan Alauddin Muhammad Syah, precisely on 24th Rabi' al-Akhir, AH 1158 (26th May 1745), as presented in the following excerpt:

Dewasa itulah duli tuan kita Seri Sultan 'Aliyuddin Muhammad Sah zhill al-lahu fi al-'alam menyuruh juru tulis menaruh dalam surat tanda sah sudah putus diberikan oleh Rato Ompo Maryam Jeneli Rasana'e bernama La Suma yang menaruh budaknya bernama La Sama Hapi La Juma karena tuan kita meminta sebab ia tukang pandai emas. Maka tuan kita menggelarkan dan nama Bumi Didi Mambojo serta ditetapkan dengan nama Pandai Mas sampai segala anak cucunya cicitnya yang kemudian tiada boleh lagi tuntutan oleh Rato Ompo Maryam sampai segala anak cucunya yang kemudian pula. (*Bo' Abdul Kadim*, p. 261)

In the mid-19th century AD, a similar incident was recorded in *Bo' Sangaji Kai*. Here we present one example:

Hijrat al-nabiy shalla al-lāhu 'alayhi wa sallam seribu dua ratus tujuh puluh empat tahun Dal Akhir pada hari Isnin tiga puluh genap hari bulan Jumadilakhir,¹¹ tatkala itulah paduka Yang Dipertuan Kita Wazīr al-Mu'azzam Bima ismuhū Muhammad Yakub ibn Abdul Nabi menyuruh juru tulis asi¹² bernama Abdullah menaruh di dalam surat serta diletakkan (dengan capnya) akan tanda sah serta ta'kid Bumi Ngoco Mbojo ismuhū Abdullah memerdehekakan budak pusaknya perempuan bernama La Lahu dengan anaknya perempuan bernama La Ami, yang tiada boleh disebut-menyebut lagi kemudian harinya. Dahulu putus kemudian putus. Wa al-lāhu a'lam. Barangsiapa merombakkan perkataan dalam surat ini, maka itulah dikutuki Allah wa al-rasūl sertai dimurkai oleh paduka Yang Dipertuan Kita dan istiadat Tanah Bima. Adapun saksinya pertama-tama Bumi Cenggu ismuhū Abdullah, dan Jena Jara Otuteru Daeng Marana'e, dan Jena Jara Mbojo ismuhū Jafar adanya. (Chambert-Loir and Salahuddin 2012, 411)

Slaves as gifts: A symbol of respect

In simple terms, a slave can be defined as a human being who belongs to someone else (the master), is politically and socially lower in status than the average population, and performs compulsory labour (Nieboer 1900, 4). Therefore,

the primary function of slavery is the division of labour in the broadest sense. According to Nieboer (1900, 6 citing Wagner n.d.), the division of labour does not only apply qualitatively, where one person does one type of work, and another person does another type of work but also applies quantitatively, where one person orders others to fulfil his wish. This condition will not occur in people who do not know the division of labour. As there, each individual will only work to fulfil his desires. There are no individuals who work to fulfil the wishes of another.

According to Puchta (1881), as stated by Nieboer (1900, 6–7), the division of labour is usually carried out in two ways. The first way is to take advantage of the strengths of others as needed. The steps taken are through free trade and do not interfere with the freedom of the employed person. Usually, this method is taken by making a contract letter regarding exchanging labour, skills, or products with other people who need it. The second way is through conquest. With power, one person can force others to work for him. Of course, this method would injure the personalities of the conquered. Usually, such conquests were limited to a specific purpose, such as tillage. Therefore, as a rule, conquest for a limited purpose does not necessarily deprive the conquered of freedom. The problem is, most of the time, the conquests are limitless. A person is subject to all his external life and is treated as a means to the ends of those who have power over him. According to Puchta, this is the institution of slavery.

We must understand that this definition was born based on an investigation in the 19th century AD. However, in this study, we discuss slaves and slavery practices in the 18th century AD. Therefore, we must interpret both of them based on phenomena, maybe even so-called traditions, the society that prevailed at that time, not in the past, let alone the present. As said in the previous section, slaves and slavery were commonplace. This practice occurs not only in Bima or the Malay Archipelago but also in many other places worldwide.

In Southeast Asia, especially during the period that Anthony Reid calls the “Commerce Period” (15th to 17th century AD), the ownership of a certain amount of people, whether as slaves, prisoners of war, or subjects, only revolved around economic matters. Ownership of a person (ruler) of a certain number of people will allow him to control labour or energy. Obtainment can happen through conquest in a battle or debt problems. In addition, during this period, there was also an obligation for submission of labour because of the entanglement in political relations, as was the case between, especially farmers in Java, Siam and Burma, and local rulers and kings. However, what happened in Southeast Asia cannot be feudal or based on slavery as in Ancient Rome.

In feudal Europe or Ancient Rome, the state or the church was bound by a system of laws and a series of laws that limited the powers of these institutions; and then guaranteed certain rights to everyone who was not the same level in society. Because, in the Middle Ages, in Europe, there was a difference between slaves and free people and serfs (non-free farmers) and free peasants. Such a system will eventually give rise to the capitalist system. Meanwhile, in Southeast Asia, the prevailing attachment is more of a personal relationship based on money. Subordinate loyalty is more important than law. In addition, each person has his own master, although that person can change his loyalty to other masters. In this context, money is needed to buy loyalty and usually through debt, not because of a specific employment contract. In Southeast Asia, one could not raise capital without buying the loyalty of several slaves. The reason is that slaves are needed to protect the wealth of those in power (Ongkhokham 2014, xxiv).

In Southeast Asia, vertical ties among people are significant. Three main factors influence this condition. First, the mastery of labour is seen as a sign of power and status that determines. This is because labour, not land, is known as a scarce resource (Reid 2014, 148). De Haan finds a similar discovery in the context of Priangan, where the wealth of an indigenous ruler is not determined by the ownership of property but by the number of people who serve him (Haan 1910, 19). In fact, in Banten, according to Scott (1606, 142 cited in Reid 2014, 148), the wealth of the elite there lies entirely with the slaves. Therefore, if their slaves were killed, the elite became beggars. Second, in general, human trafficking is expressed in terms of money. Over the centuries, maritime trade has entered their territory so Southeast Asians seem accustomed to thinking of themselves as assets that have cash value. Third, legal and financial protection from the state is relatively low, so the protector or the protected need to help and support each other. According to a Chinese report, the Malacca people stated that they were better off owning slaves than land. This is because slaves could protect their masters. Altogether, these three factors create a system of bonds, which are generally based on debt, with strong and close obedience, but at the same time can be transferred or traded.

Presumably, this kind of picture also applies in Bima. As stated in the previous section, Bima's society consisted of aristocrats, the middle class, slaves and pawnbrokers. This fact necessitated a vertical relationship between them, where the aristocrats and the middle class occupy the upper position while the slaves and pawnbrokers occupy the lower position. Ownership of slaves, especially in large numbers, became a marker of one's social status. The more a person owns slaves, the more a person is in control of energy and can be used for various purposes, especially those related to economic interests. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, slaves were the most valuable treasure for the rulers of Southeast Asia. Thus, in this context, we must comprehend the slavery practice in Bima in the 18th century AD.

It is now imperative to mention the issue of giving slaves as gifts to accompany letters, as was the tradition of the Bima kings. Because slaves are considered the most valuable treasure, we can understand that giving slaves as gifts is a sign of respect for the Bima kings towards the recipients of the letter. Moreover, letters from the Bima sultanate also show that the custom did not stop during the reign of Sultan Abdul Kadim, but was continued by his son, Sultan Abdul Hamid, who reigned from 1773–1817 (Suryadi 2010). In addition, as is the “custom” that prevails throughout the Malay lands, we can interpret giving gifts or parcels as an invitation to establish a brotherly relationship. Regarding giving slaves as gifts accompanying letters, we can also interpret that the Bima kings still humbled themselves even though they had given their most valuable possessions, namely slaves. The interpretation can be based on the last clause/sentence in the letter. Several clauses/sentences are commonly used to end letters right after revealing the accompanying gifts. Several variations of the clause/sentence, such as *jangan juga diaibkan karena tiada dengan yang sepertinya, seupama daun kayu sehelai juga adanya* (do not ignore it because there is nothing like it, just like a single leaf), *meski tiada patut, jangan sekali2 tuanku aibkan, hanya seperti daun kayu yang kering jua adanya* (even if it is not proper, do not ever ignore it, my lord, it is just like a dry leaf of wood), *...adalah seupama sekuntum bunga yang layu juah adanya* (is like a flower that has withered away), *meski tiada patut, jangan kiranya aibkan karena tanah ini seperti daun kayu yang kering di tengah padang juah adanya* (even though it is not proper, do not neglect it because this land is like a dry leaf in the middle of the field far away), *...yang tiada sepertinya, upama bunga sekuntum yang tiada berbau adanya* (which does not seem like it, like a flower that has no smell) and *...yang tiada sepertinya, seupama daun yang layu ditiup angin, jangan juga diaibkan* (that which is not like it, like a leaf that withers in the wind, do not be ignored). This is in line with Gallop’s finding that the phrase—and its variations—is perhaps one of the most enduringly idiomatic phrases in the Malay epistles because can be traced back to the very first surviving Malay letters of the 16th and early 17th centuries. It also implies that the tradition of formal letter-writing in Malay, with a shared set of conventions, was already well established in certain parts of the archipelago by that time. Although many aspects of formal Malay letters derive from clear Arabic or Persian roots, the development and consistent use of this epistolary element, which accords with Malay aesthetic notions of decorum and modesty, appears to be an indigenous rather than foreign feature. Indeed, it serves to underline the presence and persistence of distinctively Malay elements in letters which were otherwise written within a recognisable pan-Islamic tradition (Gallop 2003, 404; 407).

Conclusion

The previous section explains that the tradition of writing letters from the kingdom of Bima, as stated in *Bo' Abdul Kadim*, has increasingly complemented the treasures of writing letters in the Malay Archipelago. This is especially true in the custom of giving gifts to recipients of letters. The parcels accompanying the letter are in the form of valuable objects such as jewellery, produce, livestock and even slaves. Based on the explanation in the previous section, we also know that slaves were the most valuable treasure for native rulers, even more, valuable than land. The more slaves one has, the more a native ruler can control. No wonder then slave ownership is a marker of one's social status. We must also understand that at least in the 18th century AD when the texts in the *Bo' Abdul Kadim* bundle were written, slaves and slavery were still standard practices. Therefore, in the study, we must also use the eyes of society and the traditions prevailing at that time, not the past, let alone the present. Thus, because slaves were the most valuable possessions at that time, we understand that giving slaves as gifts can be interpreted as a tribute to the letter's recipient. This behaviour also follows the prevailing custom in the Malay correspondence tradition that giving gifts or gifts itself is a symbol of an invitation to establish a brotherly relationship.

Notes

1. The word *bo'* is thought to have come from the Dutch word *boek* and it can be estimated that it only entered the Mbojo language (the "official" language used in the Bima kingdom) at the end of the 17th century AD (Chambert-Loir and Salahuddin 2012, xiv).
2. Salahudin and Mukhlis (2007, 75) note that the papers in the bundle are 45 cm × 26 cm.
3. However, there is a letter from the reign of Sultan Alauddin Muhammad Shah (1731–1748).
4. Sultanate officials who were equivalent to ministers (Chambert-Loir and Salahuddin 2012, xxiii).
5. Sultanate officials who were equivalent to governors (Chambert-Loir and Salahuddin 2012, xiii).
6. The village head. In certain areas under the control of the Bima kingdom, this official was also called a *titleang* (Morris 1891, 180).
7. The word is not clear.

8. We suspect the word *kafir* here is meant to describe that the king (and all his people) still adhere to animism/dynamism, not *kafir* in the eyes of Muslims.
9. We suspect that this provision has been applied for generations of sultans of Bima. One of the indications is the sentence found at the beginning of the manuscript, stating “ketika itulah Yang Dipertuan Kita Wazir al-mu’azzam bergelar Tureli Donggo bernama Abdul Nabi ibn Hidir menyuruh juru tulis menyalin surat bicara ini dalam Bo’ besar”.
10. Freijss had managed to set foot on Flores Island in 1848. However, he failed to enter Manggarai because the guides were reluctant considering they did not have the permission of the sultan of Bima. The following year, Freijss tried to ask for the sultan of Bima’s permission but was refused. In 1852, Freijss returned there on the *Voorlooper* ship. However, “for some reason”, the trip to Manggarai was cancelled. It was only in October 1854 that Freijss, by chance, managed to enter Manggarai. Afterwards, the military and civil governor of Sulawesi and dependent territories, Colonel A. van der Hart, received a letter from the High Government in Batavia to send someone to Flores to investigate the case of a skipper named Saleh in Tongo who had brought slaves to Pidjoe as well as to make a report about the potential of Manggarai. The colonel was bewildered as he did not have the personnel to be sent to Flores. Freijss volunteered. He departed from Makassar Port on 13th October 1854 (Freijss 1860, 444–445).
11. The 30th Jumada al-Akhir, AH 1274 coincided with the 15th February 1858. Chambert-Loir and Salahuddin mistakenly converted that date to 25th February 1858 which apparently fell on Thursday. In fact, in the letter, it was clearly stated that the event of the liberation of the slaves took place on Monday.
12. Bima language, meaning “castle”.

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