Twitter Thread by ❄■■■■



❄■■■■
@uglyluhan

First thread of the year because I have time during MCO. As requested, a thread on the gods and spirits of Malay folk religion. Some are indigenous, some are of Indian origin, some have Islamic

> i wonder if you can make a thread bout witchcraft in malaysia.. or list of our own local gods/deites..
>
> — r a y a \U0001f319 (@lcvelylilith) February 20, 2020

Before I begin, it might be worth explaining the Malay conception of the spirit world. At its deepest level, Malay religious belief is animist. All living beings and even certain objects are said to have a soul. Natural phenomena are either controlled by or personified as spirits

Although these beings had to be respected, not all of them were powerful enough to be considered gods. Offerings would be made to the spirits that had greater influence on human life. Spells and incantations would invoke their names

https://t.co/3QhLXi8FHO

> Animist ceremonies of a religious or magical nature were normally held for the purpose of divination or making a request. This would either be done at a keramat or at a shrine similar to the Thai spirit houses or Chinese roadside shrines pic.twitter.com/I1hliyi0x3
>
> — \u2745\u1710\u170b\u1713\u170e (@uglyluhan) June 16, 2019

Two known examples of such elemental spirits that had god-like status are Raja Angin (king of the wind) and Mambang Tali Arus (spirit of river currents). There were undoubtedly many more which have been lost to time

Contact with ancient India brought the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism to SEA. What we now call Hinduism similarly developed in India out of native animism and the more formal Vedic tradition. This can be seen in the multitude of sacred animals and location-specific Hindu gods

While most practicing Hindus adhere to certain beliefs, not all worship the same gods. A popular deity in Chennai might be rarely spoken of in Bengal. Additionally, regional gods were brought into the fold as emanations of a more established deity, e.g. Ayanar as a form of Shiva



This process happened in Southeast Asia as well. Hinduism didn't supplant native beliefs, but merely added to them. Certain indigenous beings were also made more orthodox through association with important Hindu deities, as we shall see

Finally, there was the introduction of Islam. Unlike Hinduism or Buddhism, Islam preached a specific cosmology that required fidelity to a single omniscient God. Most Malaysians assume that this changed everything. And, well, you'd think it would've had that effect

But while Islam did heavily influence the Malays who adopted it, old habits die hard. The Islamisation process was gradual, spanning many generations over hundreds of years. This was a time when people lived their culture, and couldn't simply imitate what celebrity preachers said

Instead, Malays adapted their old practices in some cases, and retained them in others, even if they contradicted the new religion. This was the state of Malay Islam as late as the beginning of the 20th century, and in some areas, as recently as your grandparents' time

Probably the most heretical example of this was the Malay belief that other gods existed and were not evil. Rather, their time had passed and humans didn't need them anymore now that they knew of the one all-powerful creator God

Malay Muslims back then, as now, most often referred to the one God by the Arabic word Allah. Older writings also use the Sanskrit-derived term Dewata Mulia Raya, roughly meaning the "honourable high devata"

For any orthodox Muslim, Allah is the one and only God, the creator and ruler. But for many ordinary Malays, Allah was simply the highest god

https://t.co/EPzRLssYde

> Whatever the case, the Hikayat Seri Rama as we know it gives us a glimpse into the early Malay-Muslim worldview which corresponds to other legends of the time. That is, it manages to keep the original Hindu story but reframe it within a more acceptable Islamic narrative
>
> — \u2745\u1710\u170b\u1713\u170e (@uglyluhan) October 2, 2019

In fact, the creator of the world for Malays was the Pawang Asal (original shaman) or Pawang Yang Tuha (elder shaman), "tuha" being an alternate form of tua meaning old

Perhaps concurrent with the one God was the Hindu concept of Iswara. Yes, like the car. In Sanskrit, Ishvara is a supreme being of some sort, but what it means to Hindus depends on who you ask, and it's difficult to tell how Hindu Malays would've interpreted the term



Given the prominence of Shiva in Java and Siam, it's likely that Malays associated Iswara with Shiva, just as Shaivite Hindus do. But Iswara can also be a monotheistic god, like this song which equates Iswara with Allah

https://t.co/zLxXZOWz42

Siwa is the localised name for Shiva, but Malays more often referred to him by the epithets Mahadewa and Maheswara/Maswara. Less common Malay names for Siwa included Nataraja (king of dance) or even the Arabic title Malik after the introduction of Islam



Some of the names linked to Siwa could have possibly been entirely separate figures who were later viewed as alternate forms of the deity. For example, Malays also associated Siwa with the indigenous crocodile and tiger spirits (Tok Panjang Kuku)

https://t.co/LTrUhHp6sO

> For Malays, the tiger and crocodile were the two most dangerous and feared animals, one on land and the other in the water. In fact, they were even said to be related pic.twitter.com/PrOMetyNTp
>
> — \u2745\u1710\u170b\u1713\u170e (@uglyluhan) October 13, 2019

The most prominent of Siwa's Malay titles was Betara Guru, from the Sanskrit word bhattara meaning "lord". The names of other important Hindu gods are also prefixed with this term like Betara Indera (Indra) and Betara Berahma (Brahma)

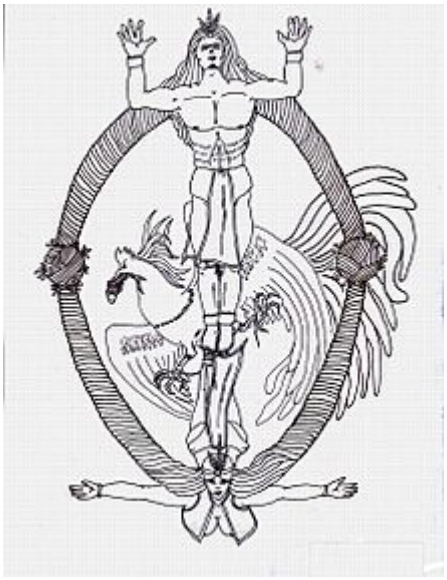


Betara Guru (also called Batara Guru, Tok Batara Guru, or Sang Hyang Manikmaya) is the most important among the Malay gods. He appears in the pantheon of several cultures in both Malaysia and Indonesia

https://t.co/yfVQnM085I

> Today Hindus celebrate Maha Shivaratri, the most important of the monthly #Shivaratri honouring the god Shiva, known as Siwa in Malay. Shiva is one of the most popular Hindu deities in South & Southeast Asia. Malays knew him best in his manifestations as Batara Guru and Mahakala pic.twitter.com/nJTHeMysxc
>
> — \u2745\u1710\u170b\u1713\u170e (@uglyluhan) March 4, 2019

The Filipino cognate of the Sanskrit bhattara is Bathala, the Tagalog word for the supreme god, which should give you some idea of Betara Guru's place in Malay folk religion



Reconciling Betara Guru with tauhidic belief was an important part of the Islamisation process

https://t.co/XJ9BfFxfnc

A few other members of Betara Guru's family from Javanese myth appear in Malay wayang stories, but their genealogy varies. He may either be the son or brother of Sang Hyang Tunggal. His other brother is Sang Hyang Ismaya, better known as Semar

SILSILAH RAJA-RAJA LOKAPALA

Ada sebuah kerajaan besar disebut negeri Lokapala. Rajanya masih jejaka bernama Prabu Danaraja atau Danapati. Ia terkenal sakti mandraguna, dan selalu menang dalam peperangan. Ia sangat tampan. Rakyat dan tentaranya terdiri dari setengahnya manusia dan setengahnya lagi raksasa. Bala tentaranya rata-rata ahli dalam ulah keprajuritan.

Sang Prabu keturunan dewa. Batara Guru adalah putra Hyang Tunggal dari ibu Dewi Rekatawati. Hyang Tunggal sendiri adalah putra Sang Hyang Wenang dari ibu Dewi Sahoti. Sang Hyang Wenang sendiri adalah putra Sang Hyang Nurasa dari ibu Dewi Rawati. Sang Hyang Wenang mempunyai kakak kandung bernama Sang Hyang Darmajaka.

Sang Hyang Darmajaka mempunyai seorang putri dan tiga orang putra yaitu Dewi Dremani, Hyang Darmana, Hyang Triyatra, dan Hyang Caturkenaka. Hyang Caturkenaka inilah yang kemudian berputra Batara Narada atau Hyang Kanekaputra.

Dewi Rekatawati, istri Hyang Tunggal, adalah putri Prabu Rekatatama dari Kahyangan di dasar samodra. Walaupun Prabu Rekatatama sendiri berwujud seekor kepiting raksasa, putrinya Dewi Rekatawati adalah seorang putri yang sangat cantik.

Dewi Sahoti, istri Sang Hyang Wenang, adalah putri dari Prabu Hari dari negeri Keling dari ibu Dewi Sawati.

Batara Guru kemudian memperistri Dewi Uma. Dari perkawinan ini lahir lima dewa, yaitu Batara Sambo, Batara Brama, Batara Endra, Batara Bayu, dan Batara Wisnu.

Batara Guru mempunyai kakak kandung yaitu Batara Maya atau Hyang Ismaya. Batara Maya kemudian memperistri Dewi Kanastren. Dari perkawinan ini lahir sepuluh dewa, yaitu Batara Bongkokan, Batara Tamburu, Batara Kuwera, Batara Mahyati, Batara Siwah, Batara Surya, Batara Candra, Batara Yamadipati, Batara Kamajaya, dan Dewi Darmanasti. Batara Maya atau Hyang Ismaya ini adalah yang kemudian menjelma menjadi Semar yang selalu mengikuti dan menjaga keturunan dewa yang berdarah Pandawa.

Semar is interesting figure. His human incarnation is that of an ugly hunchback, who serves as the clown in wayang kulit, belying his true power as one of the highest gods. He also acts as counselor to the heroes of the Hikayat Pandawa (Mahabharata)



A similar clown in Malay wayang is Pak Dogol. Some treat him as the same Semar character, but he's usually said to either have been created by Sang Hyang Tunggal, or that he is an emanation of Sang Hyang Tunggal himself



Another prominent deity is Kala. Now this one is confusing because there are actually more than one figure in Malay mythology with this name. In Sanskrit, "k■lá" indicates time, and "k■la" means black

Mahakala, a fierce black-skinned form of Shiva, is known in Malay as Betara Kala. He represents time and the destructive aspects of Siwa. But while the connection is always acknowledged, Kala is treated as a separate deity, often the son of Siwa



But there's another being, a black jin named Sang Kala. The king of jin, he has a wife named Sang Gading (presumably white since her name means ivory), and all their children are also black jin

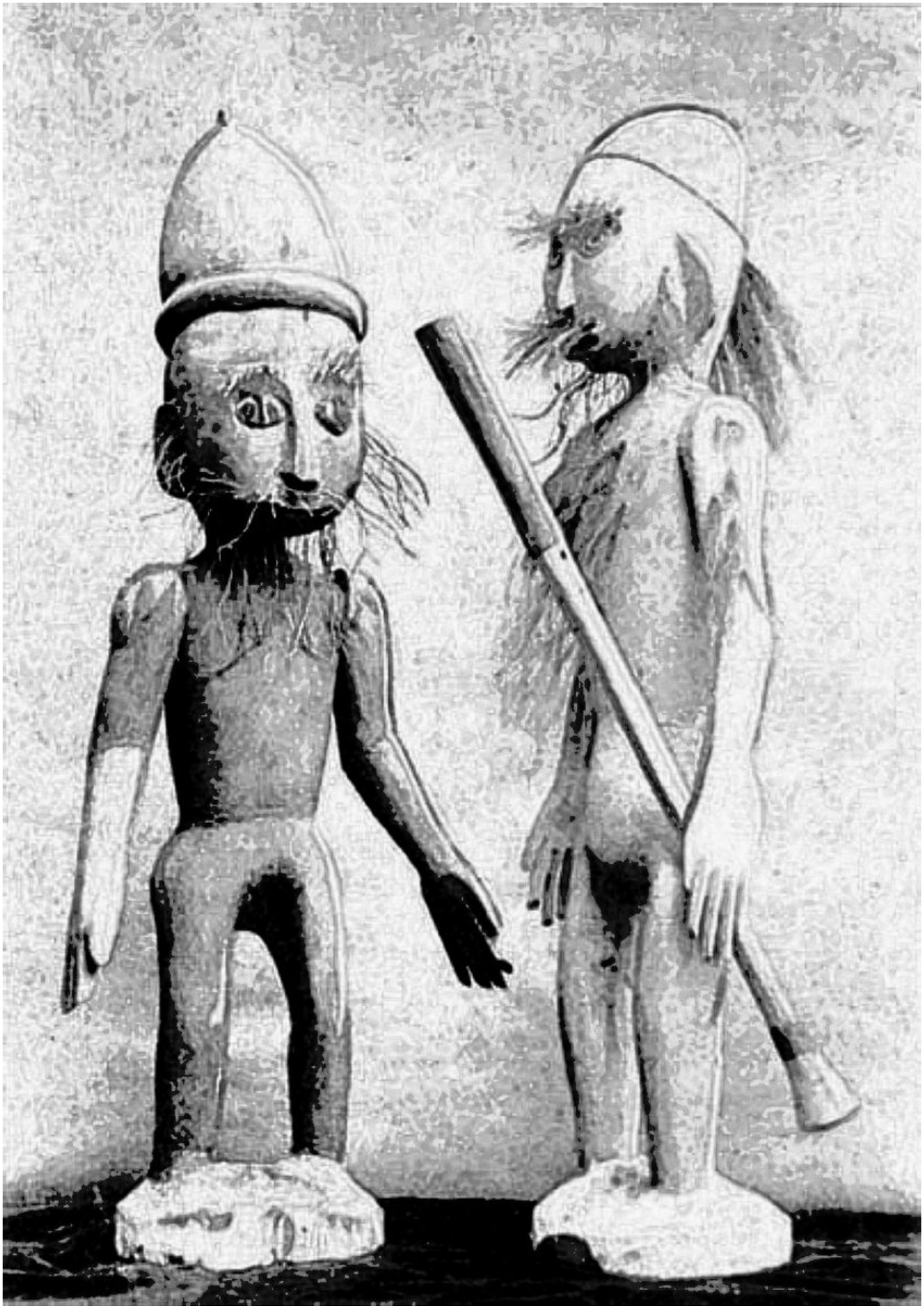


The black jin lives in the centre of the earth but he has a brother, a white jin called Tok Mambang Putih who's associated with the sun. A third being called mambang kuning is yellow in colour and linked to the sunset. Children were told not to stay out at dusk to avoid him



Of course there's a difference between the Arabic jin and the indigenous mambang (elementals), but this confusion is to be expected in the conversion to Islam. I suspect that all three beings were originally mambang

Both the black and white jin are identified with Siwa. Sang Kala is often confounded with Betara Kala ("the black form of Betara Guru") while Tok Mambang Putih is addressed as Mahadewa, an epithet of Siwa



The form of Betara Guru that rules the sea is Si Raya or Madu Raya, together with his wife Madu-ruti. Si Raya was a favourite among Malay sailors, and he may be the same as the "Elder jungle chief of the world"(Tok Rimpun Alam) who lives in the centre of the sea

Many other Hindu-Buddhist figures were known to Malays. By the Islamic period, most (but not all) were no longer objects of worship but remained important in rituals and stories. Some were forgotten and only exist in statues

https://t.co/NB8NocFnmT

> Evidence of the Hindu-Buddhist Malay heritage can be found in almost every aspect of the culture today. But let's start with something tangible. Here's an ancient statue of Avalokiteswara from Perak pic.twitter.com/I9t1nexwO8
>
> — \u2745\u1710\u170b\u1713\u170e (@uglyluhan) January 8, 2019

I don't want this thread to focus too much on Indian gods since info about them is easy to find. But here's an incomplete list of Hindu-Buddhist deities that existed in Malay mythology

Suria (Surya): the sun personified

Bayu (Vayu): god of the wind, father of Hanuman

Sang Gana (Ganesha): the elephant-headed remover of obstacles

https://t.co/daGwtfdB7v



> Take a look at this relief of a smithy from Candi Sukuh in Java. That type of cylindrical bellows on the right is still used by keris makers in both Malaysia and Indonesia. Also note the tantric Ganesha in the centre pic.twitter.com/MzCaTXghYT
>
> — \u2745\u1710\u170b\u1713\u170e (@uglyluhan) March 19, 2019

Krisna: the flute-playing son of Basudewa (Vasudeva)

Buda (Buddha): the enlightened one, founder of Buddhism

Maha Bisnu (Vishnu): the preserver in the Hindu trinity

Sri: goddess of rice

https://t.co/XnaPoWiHMg



> The union of the couple (in this case Raden Inu and Candra Kirana) is also symbolic of the gods Vishnu and Laksmi, known in Malay as Bisnu and Dewi Seri. And speaking of the sacred union, you might have noticed something pic.twitter.com/hS6OKXS24k
>
> — \u2745\u1710\u170b\u1713\u170e (@uglyluhan) February 4, 2019

Mahadewi: the supreme goddess

Kali: the blue-skinned slayer of evil

Durga: warrior goddess who rides a tiger or lion

Pertiwi (Prithvi): the earth personified

https://t.co/x4JluvPB1a



> In Indo-Malay animism, the earth is personified as the maternal figure Ibuku Bumi, literally meaning "my mother earth". Through Hindu influence, the earth mother was identified with the Indian goddess Prithvi, known locally as Pertewi or Pertiwi#MythologyMonday pic.twitter.com/Q8tcdRBXmw
>
> — \u2745\u1710\u170b\u1713\u170e (@uglyluhan) March 30, 2020

Now you might have noticed that many of the Malay gods of Javanese origin prefix their names with Sang Hyang. The word sang is an honorific while hyang is a type of deified ancestor, and the origin of the words kayangan (heaven) and sembahyang (pray)

As with other parts of Asia, Indo-Malay animism is strongly tied to ancestor worship, so the high gods were naturally regarded as primal ancestors

https://t.co/5hqgKiHpH8

> It would be more accurate to say these words came from Sanskrit, not necessarily Hinduism. For example they exist in Buddhism as well. Also the "yang" in sembahyang is actually Hyang, the primal ancestor in Malay/Indonesian animism. God in Balinese Hinduism is Sang Hyang Widi https://t.co/1dKzpF7zCa
>
> — \u2745\u1710\u170b\u1713\u170e (@uglyluhan) November 27, 2018

The practice of deifying revered personalities was in full force even after the introduction of Islam. In fact, it's part of the origin of datuk keramat worship

https://t.co/wUZ4uodpkA

> So I was requested to do a thread on the datuk keramat. This is something most of us have heard about, but few understand its history or where it comes from, which is sad because this is a great example of not just cultural exchange, but an underlying similarity between them https://t.co/uKoXm2QTpW
>
> — \u2745\u1710\u170b\u1713\u170e (@uglyluhan) January 23, 2019

Another example of this can be seen in the figure of Unggas Telang, supposedly a military commander (hulubalang) of the sea gypsies (orang laut). Though not a god, his image was used by Malays for divination



Deifying a warrior in this way was natural for Malays, to whom martial arts were closely linked to supernatural practices. Bomoh practiced silat, and their rituals included weapons. Fighters too practiced magical rituals, blurring the line between the two

https://t.co/mc95XSt8Zq

> There are a few main reasons for this. One is that silat movements exist in some shamanistic practices. The healing ritual Main Puteri from Kelantan incorporates silat, for examplehttps://t.co/0BADOspq3s
>
> — \u2745\u1710\u170b\u1713\u170e (@uglyluhan) June 14, 2020

I hope this thread makes two things clear. First, most Malays prior to the introduction of Islam were indeed what we today might identify as Hindu-Buddhist, but their beliefs and practices were not a simple copy from India

And second, the coming of Islam did not wipe out earlier folk religion. In fact, everything in this thread comes from the colonial period when Malays had already been Muslim for several centuries

Sources:

Sunardi D.M.
R.O. Winstedt
Walter William Skeat

Ghulam Sarwar Yousof
Farouk Yahya