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Palembang City in Time: A History of Social and Cultural Change

Kota Palembang dalam Lintasan Waktu: Sejarah Perubahan Sosial dan Budaya

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Abstract

This article discusses the history of Palembang, which can provide many exciting things to learn more about this city, such as its history, culture, and even culinary aspects. This article aims to find out the origin and background of the formation of Palembang's colonial cities and towns, as well as to find out the state of society during the colonial period and also to find out the symbolic post-colonial Palembang city. This research uses the historical method through four stages: Heuristics, Source Criticism, Interpretation, and Historiography. The result of this research is that there has been a change in the order of Palembang city from river to land carried out by the colonial government. The community activity here is trade; the economy of the Palembang people is very successful, where the price of rubber, coffee, and sap is expensive, so the Palembang people are nicknamed the Golden Rain. After Indonesia's independence, a symbolic building of Palembang was built, the Ampera Bridge.

Keywords: *City History, Palembang, Symbolic, Social, Cultural*

Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas tentang sejarah kota Palembang, yang dapat memberikan banyak hal menarik untuk dipelajari lebih lanjut tentang kota ini, seperti sejarah, budaya, dan bahkan kulinernya. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui asal-usul dan latar belakang terbentuknya kota-kota kolonial di Palembang, serta untuk mengetahui kondisi masyarakat pada masa kolonial dan juga untuk mengetahui simbol kota Palembang pasca kolonial. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode sejarah dengan melalui empat tahapan: Heuristik, Kritik Sumber, Interpretasi, dan Historiografi. Hasil dari penelitian ini adalah adanya perubahan tatanan kota Palembang dari sungai menjadi daratan yang dilakukan oleh pemerintah kolonial. Aktivitas masyarakat di sini adalah berdagang, perekonomian masyarakat Palembang sangat berjaya, di mana harga karet, kopi, dan getahnya mahal, sehingga masyarakat Palembang dijuluki sebagai Hujan Emas. Setelah Indonesia merdeka, dibangunlah sebuah bangunan simbolik kota Palembang, yaitu Jembatan Ampera.

Kata kunci: *Sejarah Kota, Palembang, Simbolik, Sosial, Budaya*



INTRODUCTION

Cities do not form in a short period of time as artificial environments but are the result of a long process of development. The city's current state is the culmination of all past growth phases and is influenced by several political, economic, and socio-cultural variables. Complex physical environments are created in every part of the city to accommodate people's movement (Alfian, 2007:5).

The importance of learning urban history is because it is a discipline that studies the development of cities from the past to the present, including the influences that affect these developments, such as social, political, economic, and cultural factors. The history of cities covers various aspects, such as urban planning, building architecture, transportation systems, economic development, and people's social life. By studying the history of a city, we can understand how the city has changed and how current influences have affected the city.

A city is an area that is the center of government, economic, and cultural activities. Generally, cities are characterized by many public facilities (such as shops, hospitals, and schools). Jobs in cities are also more diverse than in villages. Generally, employees form trade or professional associations. Some organizations are formed based on shared interests and lifestyles, such as doctors' organizations, book lovers' organizations, or sports organizations. City residents need many facilities, such as electricity, water, sanitation, telephones, and public transportation. That's why the city needs careful governance, regulation, and management to do all the business well, as evidenced by the shape of Palembang. In addition, the residents around the city are usually only briefly described as those who live in separate settlements with distinctive customs and under the authority of their village chief (Kanumoyoso, 2011).

Palembang City has a long history and rich culture (Anwar, 2004:32). Palembang, one of the earliest cities in Indonesia, was part of the Sriwijaya Kingdom, which is mentioned in the Kedukan Bukit inscription. Looking back, Palembang is synonymous with one of the most glorious kingdoms in the past, namely Sriwijaya (Eni Heldayani, Muhammad Idris, 2015). Not unlike what was explained Anggela (2021:20) Palembang also has many historical relics, making it a historical city with culture and history. Palembang also has many historical relics, making it a historical city with culture and history (Umar, 2004:16).

Menurut Sastika (2015) Palembang is home to various exciting things, including delicious cuisine that is famous throughout Indonesia and beautiful tourist sites. It is an exciting tourist location and worth visiting for all of that. Large and small rivers flow along the banks of Palembang, a seaside city with beautiful scenery. Thanks to its geography, which differs from other cities in Indonesia, travelers can enjoy a unique and exciting travel experience in Palembang.

There are several previous studies discussing Palembang City, such as Safitri (2017) Which discusses the economy of Palembang. In addition, Sary (2018) researched Kuto Besak Fort Palembang. From the research, no one has addressed in depth the history of the founding and symbolic formation of Palembang City. Therefore, the author is interested in learning more about Palembang City. So, in this case, the author formulates the problem: how is the history of socio-cultural changes in Palembang City?

METHOD

This research uses the historical method through four stages: Heuristics, Source Criticism, Interpretation, and Historiography. At the Heuristic stage, researchers collected data from various online publication sources such as www.andri.go.id, Telpher, and the British Library, as well as essays, journals, and books, as well as information about the history, culture, and tourism of Palembang City from related literature. After the data was collected, the Source Criticism stage was conducted to select and evaluate the accuracy and credibility of the information, including verification and assessment of the reliability of the sources. The Interpretation stage then analyzed and arranged the data coherently to reconstruct the history of Palembang City and the formation of the Ampera Bridge, ensuring that the data contributed to a deep historical understanding. Finally, in Historiography, the author compiles historical writing based on the results of interpretation to provide a comprehensive picture of the development of Palembang City during the colonial era and the symbolism of the Ampera Bridge as an essential icon of the city. This research aims to deepen the understanding of Palembang City's past and present.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

History of the founding of Palembang city

In the past, Palembang was known as “Venetie van Oost,” “de Oostersch Venetie,” “de Indisch Venetie,” “Venice of the East,” or “Venice of the East”. (Kingdomsriwijaya, 2023).” The Venetian city in southern Italy, called Venice, is called by this name. The splendor of Palembang, which lies on the banks of the Musi River and has a network of rivers and canals running through it, was described as the “Venice of the East” in the 16th and 17th centuries. The Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie (V.O.C.), a Dutch company, and the Sultanate of Palembang were involved in trade during the 19th century. The development of Palembang City was greatly influenced by this trade relationship, especially in terms of infrastructure and economic expansion. Therefore, Palembang is one of the most famous cities in Indonesia and earned the nickname “Venice of the East” due to its long and significant history in international trade (Dedi Irwanto Muhammad Santun, 2010: 15).

In his book written in the 19th century, Commissioner J.L. van Sevenhoven gives an interesting description of Palembang, the capital of the country. He claimed that the largest river on the island of Sumatra, the Musi River, bisects and divides this metropolis. Because of its harbor and many historical buildings, Palembang earned the nickname “Venice” from Europeans. The Musi River that divides the city and its inhabitants gives vitality to the people of Palembang (J.L Van Sevenhoven, 1971).

In the past, the center of Palembang City was located on a hill. The center of Palembang City was on Bukit Seguntang, according to the archaeological evidence of the Sriwijaya Proclamation found in the stanzas of the Kedukan Bukit inscription. If translated, Bukit Seguntang means an area that twists, grunts, or floats. The central location of Palembang City changes with the times. Palembang's early development started with the royal capital, as did other historical cities in Indonesia. As a result, the palace or the king's residence became the center of the city's development. Economic issues also had a significant impact on the growth of Palembang City (Mikail, 2018: 18).

Political changes in Palembang occurred when the Srivijaya Kingdom collapsed and the Palembang Sultanate rose. According to Farida, Rochmiatun, & Kalsum (2019), The Palembang Sultanate built the Kuto Gwang palace in Hilir. The city center of Palembang was moved to the Beringin Junggat area after the V.O.C. burned this palace for three days and nights on 23 and 26 November 1659. Major building projects included the alun-alun, the market complex, the Sultan's family tomb, and the Great Mosque. In front of the palace is a sizable grassy area called Alun-Alun, which is used for various neighborhood events.



Figure 1: Great Mosque of Palembang
Source: (Dedi Irwanto Muhammad Santun, 2010)

Markets play an essential role in a city's life as the center of economic activity. Since trade was conducted on the water's surface, floating markets or stalls on rafts in the palace era became the hallmark of Palembang City. According to research conducted by Safitri (2017:89), Almost every river in Palembang City has a floating market where traders and buyers sell their goods from boats. The floating market became famous as a major tourist destination during the reign of the palace city because of its distinctive characteristics, which attracted tourists from all over the world. One thing that sets Palembang City apart from other cities is the floating market on rafts, which has become an essential aspect of local culture and life.



Figure 2. Palembang floating market
Source: www.anri.go.id, 2023

The city underwent major changes when the Dutch took control of Palembang in 1821. This change reached its peak when Palembang City was designated as a city (Gemeente) based on the decentralization law passed on 1 April 1906. Despite being a Gemeente, the sustainable development of Palembang City only began in 1929, when Ir. Th. Karsten published a master plan to map the city (Farida et al., 2019). The creation of the masterplan by Ir. Th. Karsten in 1929 was the beginning of a more planned and systematic development of Palembang City.

Palembang has been under Dutch rule since 1821, but until the early 20th century, the colonial government made few significant physical improvements to the city. The colonial government began to develop Palembang in 1919. However, their initial efforts were limited to erasing the sultanate's reputation by transforming the Kuto Besak Fort in the heart of the city into a colonial building to entertain European visitors. Keraton Kuto Besak was "fenced off" with colonial buildings as part of the growth of European entertainment. These buildings included

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the Societet building, which served as a meeting hall; the Schouwburg, which served as a performance space; and the "Bioscoop Flora" and Oriental Cinema cinemas, located in the palace's flower garden (Dedi Irwanto Muhammad Santun, 2010). Although this development was carried out to fulfill the entertainment needs of Europeans, it did not have a significant impact on the overall development of Palembang city.

The Dutch government drained the surrounding waterways before building roads and bridges in Palembang City. This impacted the local people as they had to adjust to the new land pattern set by the colonial government. In the past, Palembang City was a water city where transportation mainly occurred along the river. Palembang people used various modes of transportation to get around as changes occurred, including walking, becak, sado, and cars. Due to its deliberate development from an airport to a city with a major highway, the physical characteristics of Palembang in the colonial period are profound and significant. The current ongoing project affects the transportation of local people and the economic and social development of Palembang city. Boat transportation, which used to be the primary means to reach the city center, has been replaced with transportation such as cars and motorbikes, which has improved the accessibility and mobility of the community. Although the colonial government's construction of roads and bridges brought significant changes to Palembang City, it also led to the loss of local and national traditional beliefs relating to sand and water.

Making the Tengkuruk River the main pedestrian route of the city helped the Dutch government build the roads in Palembang City. The river was made more comprehensive and swifter by flooding every area with "puruh" water, abundant in Palembang's hills. This aimed to transform Palembang from a water town to a land town with roads as the main means of transportation. In addition, colonial policy also included efforts to end the locals' "dependence" on water. Locals who previously drank river water were taught hygienic drinking methods by drinking tap water. The Palembang Gemeente office was built on top of a water tower, or Watertown, designed by the Surabaya man Ir. S. Snuijf to provide access to clean water. The water tower was built on two levels, started in 1926 and completed in 1931. The administrative offices were on the ground floor, and the water reservoir was on the upper floor. With this water supply policy, the local people of Palembang were able to gain access to healthier and cleaner water for drinking and daily use. Although the colonial government's construction of roads and water towers positively impacted the development of Palembang City, it also led to the loss of local wisdom and archipelago culture related to rivers and the use of river water s(Sujiyati & Ali, 2015).



Figure 3. Provision of clean water above the Gemeente office
Source: (Dedi Irwanto Muhammad Santun, 2010)

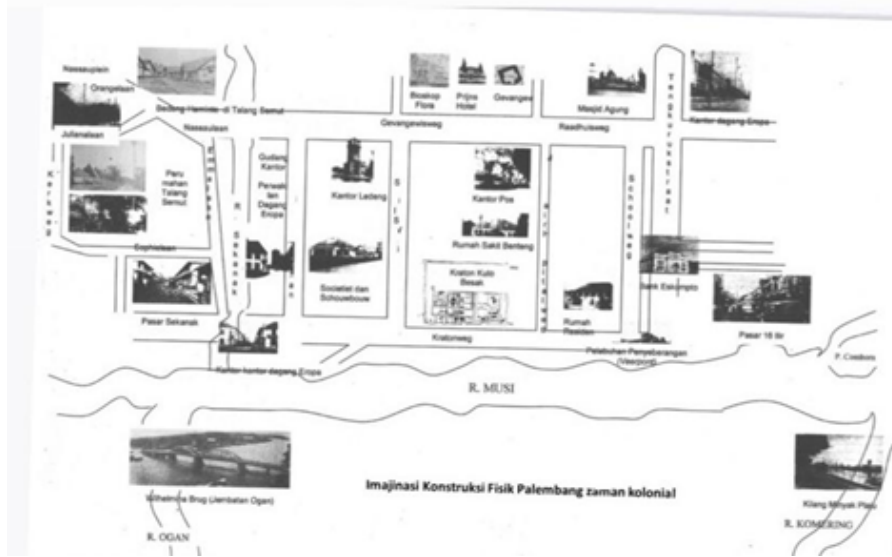


Figure 4. Imagining the Physical Construction of Colonial Palembang
 Source: (Dedi Irwanto Muhammad Santun, 2010)

Life in Palembang during the Colonial Period

The policies of the colonial government greatly influenced the lives of the people of Palembang during the colonial era. Social and economic changes occurred. Most Palembang people at that time were farmers and fishermen, but with the entry of the capitalist economic system, many turned into factory workers or traders.

The social life of Palembang society is also influenced by the existence of increasingly evident social class differences. The higher social classes were usually Dutch people or Dutch descendants, while the indigenous groups were mainly squeezed into the lower groups. In addition, the Dutch colonial government's policy of separating education between the indigenous people and the Dutch also affected the level of education and the Palembang people's access to education. In terms of culture, the Dutch in Palembang had a significant influence. Palembang people began to recognize Western culture, such as the Dutch language, orchestral music, and European dances. However, local culture remains strong and continues to develop, for example, in traditional Palembang dance and music.

Palembang expanded rapidly and grew in importance in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with the help of new financial sources. In the early 20th century, local pride in the area known as Oejan Mas increased thanks to recognition and encouragement from mining and agricultural products such as coal and petroleum, as well as rubber and coffee (Dedi Irwanto Muhammad Santun, 2010).

Palembang's three distinct cultural regions are Palembang Kota, Palembang Iliran, and Palembang Uluan. This division is more spatial-cultural, especially regarding the religious and cultural aspects of each of the trilogy's fans of different cultural regions. The city culture influences the village culture, where the Islamic culture of Palembang Iliran is more prominent compared to Palembang Uluan due to its proximity to Palembang City. Due to its hilly terrain, Uluan Palembang is thought to have had difficulty assimilating the "good values" of Palembang City. This is because lowland areas are more accessible from the city than highland areas. Due to the influence of nature and the lowlands being more productive in agriculture and industry, Iliran Palembang is more vibrant than Uluan Palembang. In the lowland areas, commercialization of the economy is also more possible.

The difference between the people of Kota, Uluan, and Iliran is obvious. The Uluans are more focused on higher education and have even managed to get positions in the government, something that rarely happens to the Iliran. The Ilirans do not attend colleges or universities, and none even study abroad as they prefer to focus on learning to pray and recite the Koran and other religious knowledge. Their children are then transferred to lower schools. Parents in Iliran

villages don't want their children to become someone else's employees; therefore, after they graduate from school, they give them money to trade.

The ideological identity of Palembang city residents can be seen in the emergence of violent values that are no longer considered foreign in this city. City people, especially native city people, are generally known as hot-blooded people. Many of their activities lead to crime or criminal acts, and they use highly sharp weapons. People are courageous. The reason is city rulers and city officials often marginalize the city people. This condition triggers anger and dissatisfaction among citizens, which then leads to acts of violence and criminality.

Social and Cultural Change in Palembang

The Palembang city government faced many development problems during the transition period after the Netherlands recognized Indonesian sovereignty at the end of 1949. Except for doctors, there were few trained professionals at that time. The leaders of the public works and personal services departments, which were important organizations to drive urban development, needed more formal education and relied solely on experience. The scarcity of engineers, doctors and lawyers in Palembang in the 1950s was a serious problem. The Palembang city government provided scholarships to the best high school graduates in the region to address this problem. Through rigorous selection in places like Bandung, Jakarta, and Yogyakarta, they had to pass exams and fulfill requirements to be sent to Java (Dedi Irwanto Muhammad Santun, 2010). After receiving the scholarships, the scholars return to Palembang and provide their services to the city government.

The Palembang City Government is again trying to reorganize the municipality with the position of village head. Thus, the Palembang City Government returned the institution of the village head as an apparatus of its local government. As a state institution, the village council receives stationery provided by the council. In addition, the government has municipal development problems, such as the lack of funds for municipal development, so the state must borrow money from the state, but the main purpose of using borrowed funds must be for necessary construction projects, and it must be able to generate funds back. In addition, the government used its own funds to build and repair roads.

The expansion of Palembang City during the colonial period was more concentrated to the west of the city center, especially in the Seberang Ilir area. This expansion succeeded in building a "new Palembang" at Talang Semut. By focusing the city's development towards the east, there is currently an attempt to build a "new Palembang" that is different from the colonial era.

The lack of public hygiene at the time was a severe environmental problem for the local government. Therefore, the government went directly to the field to deal with the problem, such as routine maintenance of garbage by providing garbage bins and adequate transportation cars. In addition, the government also built good waterways for the community at that time, showing great concern for the welfare of its people. In addition, the construction of public facilities, such as football fields, was also an important concern for the city government, which was realized with the construction of the modest Cambodia Stadium.

The growth of the city, which began after the central government issued Presidential Decree No. 116 in 1952, was a tangible manifestation of the ideology that shaped New Palembang under the Ampere emblem. Building a bridge over the Musi River to connect the Ilir and Ulu sides was the most important development project at the time. This topic sparked heated discussions when Palembang returned to the Republic of Indonesia. Since as early as 1961, Palembang residents had anticipated a bridge across the Musi River; President Sukarno's construction of the bridge fulfilled this wish (Kabib Sholeh, 2018).



Figure 5: Jembatan Ampera

Source: (Dedi Irawanto Muhammad Santun, 2010)

According to Soekarno in an article written by Aryanti, Putri, Syarifuddin, & Irawanto (2022). The presence of the Ampera Bridge in Palembang symbolizes a strong determination to move forward, leaving the past behind and reaching a more modern and advanced era. The Ampera Bridge symbolizes the city's transition into a contemporary commercial and industrial center for the local government. The main use of the Ampera Bridge was as a route to transport products from the city's railway station in the southeast to the port and new factories close to the port area in the east. It also symbolically connects the recreational areas to the east and west of Kenten Road.

The construction of the Ampera Bridge significantly significantly changed the spatial plan of Palembang city. Sudirman Street became business center such as shops, banks, cinemas, and offices. The center of cultural institutions of Palembang City, including the Great Mosque, colleges, museums, libraries, hospitals, and art buildings, as well as a beautiful park with the remains of the Palembang Sultanate Palace fort, built on the west side of the Ampera Bridge facing north. Ampera Bridge facing north (Sastika, 2015). In addition to serving as a beautiful cultural icon for Palembang City, the historical buildings in this park also serve as a beautiful open square at the end of the bridge with a beautiful view of the river. Palembang citizens can enjoy recreational facilities in this park.



Figure 6. The atmosphere in front of the Great Mosque

Source: (Dedi Irawanto Muhammad Santun, 2010)



Figure. city government agency buildings
Source: (Dedi Irwanto Muhammad Santun, 2010)

The physical development of Palembang City underwent considerable changes with the Ampera Bridge. Vehicles crossing this bridge proudly to reach Java Island and vice versa represent the pride of Palembang City. This bridge represents the perception of Palembang City shown in the poem “Jaya,” which shows the importance of symbolism as an interpretation of Palembang City that is always victorious in the past, present, and future.

CONCLUSION

Palembang has a long and rich history, with an important role in trade and culture in southern Indonesia. The city was founded in the 7th century by the Kingdom of Sriwijaya, which became the center of maritime trade and culture in Southeast Asia at that time. Over the centuries, Palembang became an important regional trading center, rich in natural resources and strategically positioned on the trade routes between India, China and Southeast Asia. During the Dutch colonial period, Palembang became an important center for plantations and mining, even had the largest trading industry in Southeast Asia and became the location of the Indonesian independence struggle.

During the colonial period, the economy of Palembang experienced many changes due to the policies of the Dutch colonial government. The Dutch built infrastructure and developed trade in Palembang, mainly in commodities such as rubber, coffee, and palm oil. The Dutch established large plantations in Palembang, which made Palembang's economy increasingly dependent on the plantation sector. Not only that, Palembang was once nicknamed Oejan Mas because of the abundant harvest that made the people wealthy, to the point that every house bought cars and bicycles, which at that time cars and bikes were costly. But Palembang people could buy them because of the abundant harvest, and also, the prices of palm oil and rubber were expensive.

The symbolism of Palembang city is related to its rich and diverse history. One of the most famous symbols is the Ampera bridge, which symbolizes togetherness and unity between the diverse people of Palembang. In addition, the Great Mosque of Palembang is an essential symbol of the religion and culture found in this city and a beautiful and stunning example of Malay Islamic architecture. The delicious Palembang food such as pempek, model, and tekwan are also important symbols of the city's culinary and cultural diversity. This representation speaks of Palembang's distinctive and fascinating society and its rich history, culture and way of life.

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