

Muara Jambi: Status and Existence of Buddhist Legacy Between two Powers

Yanuar Al Fiqri^{1*}, Firdaus Hadi Santoso², Rizki Ananda Hasibuan³

^{1,3}History Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Riau, Indonesia

²History Education, Faculty of Social Sciences, Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia

*correspondence email : yanuar.al@lecturer.unri.ac.id

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Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan keberadaan kompleks candi Muara Jambi dalam perjalanan Sejarah Indonesia. Sebagai salah satu kompleks candi Buddha terbesar di Asia Tenggara, Muara Jambi belum banyak dikenal oleh masyarakat Indonesia. Muara Jambi selama ini hanya dikenal masyarakat luas sebagai nama sebuah daerah tanpa mengetahui bahwa di dalamnya terdapat situs-situs penting dalam perjalanan sejarah Indonesia kuno. Peninggalan candi yang selama ini lebih banyak dikenal di pulau Jawa dan dijadikan tujuan wisata sejarah utama peninggalan masa Hindu dan Budha, minimnya penulisan dan penelitian tentang Muara Jambi menjadi salah satu penyebab utama ketidaktahuan masyarakat tentang kompleks candi Muara Jambi. Salah satunya adalah mengenai status dan keberadaannya dalam sejarah kerajaan-kerajaan di Sumatera, yang pada akhirnya berujung pada dua kerajaan besar, yaitu Kerajaan Melayu dan Sriwijaya.

Kata kunci: muara jambi, status, eksistensi.

Abstract

This article aims to explain the existence of the Muara Jambi temple complex in the course of Indonesian History. As one of the largest Buddhist temple complexes in Southeast Asia, Muara Jambi is not widely known by the Indonesian people. Muara Jambi has only been known as a large number of people as the name of an area without knowing that there are important sites in the course of ancient Indonesian history in it. The temple heritage that has been more widely known on the island of Java and is used as the main historical tourist destination for the relics of the Hindu and Buddhist periods, the lack of writing and research on Muara Jambi is one of the main causes of people's ignorance about the Muara Jambi temple complex. One of them is about its status and existence in the history of the kingdoms in Sumatra, which eventually led to two major kingdoms, namely the Malay and Srivijaya Kingdoms.

Keywords: muara jambi, status, existence.

INTRODUCTION

Diversity and richness describe Indonesia in its various aspects, especially in terms of its culture, one way to trace the diversity and culture of Indonesia is through its historical traces. Indonesia as a nation is still relatively young, but as a unitary region, Indonesia's historical traces are very rich and diverse. The Hindu and Buddhist period is a period of history in Indonesia that produced many cultural relics that became an attraction for local

and foreign tourists. The most famous relics are Borobudur and Prambanan temple, which are relics of Hindu and Buddhist civilizations in Indonesia during the Ancient Mataram Kingdom.

But of course, these two relics are only a small part of the historical and cultural heritage that Indonesia has today. In addition to these cultural relics that are widely known and are familiar tourist sites, there are still relics that are no less large and important. However, due to the

fact that the relics are located in difficult to reach locations or are not very attractive to most people, there is a lack of interest in visiting these relics. One of the other relics of the Hindu Buddhist period is the Muara Jambi Temple Complex, which is the largest Buddhist temple complex in Indonesia and even Southeast Asia.

As the largest temple complex, it seems that it is not enough for Muara Jambi to compete with Borobudur and Prambanan. This is due to the lack of interest and information owned by the community, especially for the people of Indonesia. The lack of information and interest about Muara Jambi Temple is due to the lack of data and writings that discuss Muara Jambi specifically. The lack of data and writings causes the status and existence of Muara Jambi to still be questioned, both historical information, as well as the form of its structure and function. In this regard, this paper intends to collect fragmented information into a fairly interpretative explanation of the Muara Jambi Temple Complex. This paper aims to explain the history of its discovery, its temple complex, and its status in the Hindu and Buddhist historical periods in Indonesia.

METHODS

This article uses a historical research method that has stages: Topic selection, Heuristics or source collection or source

finding, verification, Interpretation and Historiography or historical writing (Kuntowijoyo, 2018: 69-81.) This historical research is written using a literature study approach, which means that data is obtained through written sources consisting of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are in the form of travel records of Buddhist monks who have stopped and settled in Srivijaya and Malay and several Chinese news records that explain the arrival of envoys from the Malay land. Secondary sources are obtained from the results of archaeological research, books and articles that support. The sources that have been obtained are then synthesized so that an explanation of the existence of the Muara Jambi temple complex in the history of the Malay and Srivijaya Kingdoms is obtained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Founding of the temple complex

Muara Jambi archaeological site is located about 30 km downstream from the city center of Jambi with a position on the banks of the Batanghari river. The temple site has an area of about 12 km² and is connected by about six canals that were once thought to be used as waterways and transportation. The temple complex contains eight large Hindu-Buddhist temples, as well as approximately 30 other smaller structures that are thought

to date from around the 9th to 14th centuries AD (Bonatz, et al, 2019.34).

The Muara Jambi temple site was first discovered by an English captain named S.C. Crooke in 1820. He recorded the discovery of ruins of stone and brick buildings containing pictures and sculptures. He stated that Muara Jambi was once a capital city. In 1921 and 1922 T. Adams published papers in the *Oundheldkundig Verslag* and mentioned a ruin of Stano (Astana) east of Muara Jambi village (Schintger, 1937:5). In March 1936 F. M Schintger began surveying and excavating the ruins area, and began to uncover some new discoveries, such as the carving of a headless statue, and uncovered seven ruined buildings. The easternmost is the Stano building, which according to local residents is a noble burial complex. This building is considered sacred and further excavation is not allowed, in addition to starting excavation on the Gumpung temple. About 43 meters west of Gumpung temple is a tall temple surrounded by a wall.

In total, Schintger recorded seven ruins of ancient buildings which he named as follows: Stano (Astano), Candi Gumpung, Candi tinggi, Gedong I and II, Gudang garem and Gunung Perak. In addition to the ruins, there were also discoveries of several ancient objects, such as buddha statues, elephant statues and makara. Schintger stated that based on the number, size and beauty of the

buildings, Muara Jambi was part of a large city, perhaps larger than Palembang ((Schintger, 1937: 6). The temple is identified as a relic of Buddhism, due to many findings in the form of buddha statues, as well as brick findings that have sculptures and images of Padma or Lotus (Santiko, 2014: 114).

In 1954, the area was studied by a team from the Ministry of Education and Culture under the leadership of R. Soekmono. The team took new photographs and concluded that there was a connection between this area and the Srivijaya kingdom. Then in 1975, restoration of the crumbling temples began by the Directorate of History and Antiquities, Ministry of Education and Culture. During the clearing of the forest, field workers managed to reappear seven ruins of relatively large temple complexes, namely Kotomahligai, Kedaton, Gedong I and II, Gumpung, Tinggi, Kembar batu, and Astano. In 1985, the National Survey and Mapping Coordinating Agency conducted aerial photography of this area. It is clear on the map that the Muarajambi area has a canal system made around a natural embankment. Meanwhile, from the aspect of building restoration in the Muarajambi area, it has been carried out by the Directorate of Protection of Historical Heritage and Antiquities (Ditlinbinjarah) since 1978 after massive cleaning in several temple buildings. The first

restoration was carried out at Tinggi Temple in 1978/1979, then Gumpung Temple from 1982 to 1988. From 2009 until now, the restoration and preservation activities have continued on the buildings of Astano Temple, Twinbatu Temple, Gedong I Temple Fence, Gedong II Temple Fence, High Temple I, and Kedaton Temple (Mundardjito, 2009: 25).

Then in 2009 the Muarajambi Percandian Area was registered with UNESCO as a world heritage or world heritage and has received a registration number (Tentative Lists of World Heritage UNESCO no. 5465) but until now it is still waiting for its determination. Furthermore, based on the decision of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia number 259/M/2013 in 2013, it was designated as the Muarajambi Geographical Space Unit as a National Ranking Cultural Heritage Area with an area of 3,981 Hectares (Suryansha, et al, 2015: 6).

Muara Jambi Temple: Between two great Kingdom

The current Jambi region was once the territory of the Ancient Malay Kingdom, and is suspected to have a capital center on the banks of the Batanghari river (Rahim, 2022:177-178). The Ancient Malay Kingdom is one of the early kingdoms that stood in the Hindu Buddhist period in Indonesia. The Ancient Malay Kingdom was established around the 7th

century AD, this is evidenced by the first Malay envoy sent to China in 644 AD (Munoz, 2009: 158). As one of the kingdoms located in Sumatra, this kingdom will certainly be compared to the Sriwijaya Kingdom, which is the second largest empire besides Majapahit. Sriwijaya's territory included Jambi and other areas even as far as the Philippines.

The Muara Jambi Temple complex is widely spread in the Jambi region, with relics in the form of temple ruins before excavation. So far, very little has been written about Muara Jambi specifically, so its exploration is still largely dependent on archaeological sources and analysis. Apart from archaeological sources, some early written records are also thought to contain Muara Jambi. In 672, a Chinese traveler named I-Ching (i-Tsing) who before traveling to India, stopped first in Malayu to deepen the Sanskrit language. In the record of his return journey from India, I-Tsing stated that he stopped again in Malayu, which is now become Bhoga; *“we come after a month to the country of Malayu, which has now become Bhoga; there are many states under it”* (Takakusu, 1896:xxxiv).

In Bhoga I-Tsing found a large Buddhist community (Bonatz, dkk, 2009: 35). His travelling record show: *“In the fortified city of Bhoga, Buddhist priest number more than 1000, whose minds are bent on learning and good practices. They investigate and study all the subjects that*

exist just as in the Middle Kingdom (Madhya-desa, India); the rules and ceremonies are not at all different. If Chinese priest wishes to go the West in order to hear (lectures) and read (the original), he had better stay here one or two year and practise the proper rules and then proceed to central India”(Takakusu,1896:xxxiv).

From some of I-Tsing's travel notes above, we can interpret that the Malay country that became Bhoga was the territory of the Jambi Malay kingdom which had become part of the Srivijaya kingdom (Samin,2015:63). And the fortified city of Bhoga where there were many Buddhist priests was the Muara Jambi area. This is supported by the Muara Jambi temple complex which is surrounded by walls (Suryani, 2018: 231-235), especially the kedaton temple complex which is also thought to be a Buddhist teaching center. Moreover, with I-Tsing's records, Muara Jambi can be interpreted as a center for teaching Buddhism in Southeast Asia.

Besides T-Tsing, another Buddhist monk who lived and studied in Muara Jambi was Atisha, who came from India. He is believed to have left for Sumatra in 1012 and arrived a year later, after traveling for 13 months (Kalsang, 1974:31). In Sumatra he stayed for 12 years and studied Buddhism under Dharmakirti. He is believed to have returned to India in 1025, coinciding with

the collapse of the Srivijaya Empire (Chattopadhyaya, 1996:91).

It is not known exactly when the Muara Jambi temple complex was built. But at least Boechari states that one of the temples, namely Gumpung temple, was built around the middle of the 9th and early 10th centuries AD (Sedyawati, et al, 2014: 127), which was then expanded around the 11th-12th centuries AD (Bonatz, et al, 2019: 33). From Boechari's estimate of the construction period of one of the temples, then through I-Tsing's travel notes we can assume that the Muara Jambi temple complex was built during the Malay kingdom (7th century AD). because I-Tsing visited Bhoga in the 7th century CE, and he stated that Bhoga was already a center of Buddhism. So it is certain that the initial construction of the temple complex was done before I-Tsing arrived in Bhoga.

Regarding its function as a Buddhist teaching center, it is estimated that it reached its glory, when Malay became the territory of the Sriwijaya Kingdom. Due to the strong influence and power of Sriwijaya, it was able to make Muara Jambi a center for teaching religion in Southeast Asia. After the Srivijaya kingdom collapsed, one of which was caused by the attack of the Chola Kingdom in 1024 AD (Mulyana, 2011: 268).

The Malay Kingdom also revived and began to carry out a series of renovations to the temple. This can be

seen from Boechari's opinion that Gumpung Temple was renewed in the 11th-12th centuries AD, and the discovery of several Chinese ceramics around the temple that date back to a period long after Srivijaya collapsed. This indicates that after Sriwijaya collapsed, the Muara Jambi area survived and was still a center of Buddhist activity. This is reinforced by Chao Jukua's records which indicate that when Srivijaya collapsed at the end of the 11th century AD, its territories began to separate themselves, including the Malay region or what is referred to in the record is Chan-pei (Jambi). And successively in 1079, 1082 and 1088 began sending envoys to China (Coedes, 1975: 178-179).

CONCLUSION

The Muara Jambi temple complex has not been as visited by tourists as other temples in Java such as Borobudur and Perambanan. This could be due to its location that is a little difficult to reach, or it could also be that the heritage buildings are not as interesting as those temples. The lack of information about the Muara Jambi temple complex can also be one of the causes, because there are still few writings or research on the temple complex, especially its historical writings.

Temporary information about Muara Jambi temple cannot be ascertained in detail about its actual function and important role in the course

of Indonesian history. However, based on these few sources, when linked with other historical sources, it can be interpreted that Muara Jambi temple has an important role in the history of the Srivijaya and Malay Kingdoms, even its function as a Buddhist learning center in Southeast Asia. Based on existing sources, it can be interpreted that Muara Jambi temple has an important role in the development of Buddhism in Southeast Asia, especially during the Sriwijaya period, although there is information that Muara Jambi temple has been established since the Jambi region has not been conquered by Sriwijaya and is still under Malay rule. So Muara Jambi temple cannot be claimed as a relic of one of the Srivijaya or Malay kingdoms, but as a historical relic that is related and has an important role in the journey of the two kingdoms.

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