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AN EXAMINATION of BUKIT SIGUNTANG as the HALLOWED LEGACY of the MALAY NATION'S PROGENITOR LAND: TRANSITIONING from PROFANE to SACRED

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Abstract

Bukit Siguntang is an important piece of evidence of the historical heritage of the Srivijaya Kingdom in Palembang. It is estimated to have originated in the 6th century AD. Although the system of Palembang society has changed from Buddhist society to Islamic society since the development of the Palembang Sultanate, the heritage is still considered sacred by the Malay community around the site so that the existence of the historical site is preserved. However, the condition of the site is not maintained according to its function now. This study aimed to analyse changes in the meaning of the site by the community and government and its impact on the site damage. This study used a qualitative method with a historical approach. The results of the study showed that there was a change in the meaning of the Bukit Siguntang site between the government and the community, so that there was a struggle for space utilization between the government and groups of activists to rescue the historical heritage. The local government interpreted the site as a tourism asset that had to be "sold", while the activists interpreted it as a historical heritage that had to be rescued since it kept the collective memory of the Malay nation. This resulted in different approach in utilizing the site. Since the 1980s, the government has emphasized a development approach for the people's welfare, while historical activist groups have viewed the government's actions as destroying historical heritage considered sacred by the community. Due to these differences, conflicts between the government and the community activists of the Malay

heritage often occur. It is hoped that the conditions there can be returned to their original state even though they are no longer original.

Keywords: *Historical Heritage, Sacred, Collective Memory, Site Damage*

INTRODUCTION

The Srivijaya Kingdom was known as the first maritime kingdom in the archipelago whose territory extended from the western archipelago to the Malay Peninsula. It was known as Shih-li-fo-shi in Chinese sources and as Zabag or Sribusa in Arabic sources. The politics and trade of Srivijaya were so extensive that they provided opportunities for wealth (gold, silver, and other commodities) and comfort because Srivijaya was able to force passing ships to stop by for trading and pay tribute at its ports. The heyday of Srivijaya lasted from the 7th to 12th centuries. According to Hall¹, Sriwijaya in the range of time from 670 to 1025 was able to control trade in Southeast Asia because it managed to control and utilize the Melaka Strait as the most important area at that time with Palembang as the center. Vlekke expressed a similar opinion that Srivijaya was strong and controlled trade and shipping in the Malacca Strait and the Sunda Strait, the two most important straits at that time.² Srivijaya became the fulcrum of west-east trade (India and China), so that It occupied a special position in China with the status of "special commerce". All wanted to trade on behalf of Srivijaya.³

As the big empire, the Srivijaya Kingdom left a lot of heritage for the present and future generations. Many archaeological remains were found in Palembang⁴ (as the center of Srivijaya kingdom from 7th to 10th centuries) and in several regencies in South Sumatra. Many inscriptions (Kedukan Bukit, Talang Tuo, Bukit siguntang, Telaga Batu, Boom Baru, and many Siddhayatra inscriptions) were found in Palembang, and other heritage centres such as Bukit Siguntang, Geding Suro, Candi Angsoko, Kambang Unglen, Kambang Purun, Kedukan Bukit, Suak Bujang, Tanjung Rawo and others.⁵ Srivijaya heritage centers are located in Palembang and most are found in the western region, in essence Bukit Siguntang as the religious center at that time.

¹ Hall, D. G. E. (1988). *Sejarah Asia Tenggara*. Surabaya: Usaha Nasional.

² Vlekke, B. H. M. (1961). *Nusantara: A History of Indonesia*. Leiden: The Hague

³ Dick-Read, R. (2005). *The Phantom Voyagers: Evidence of Indonesian Settlement in Africa in Ancient Times*. Inggris: Thurlton Publishing.

⁴ Schnitger, F. (1937). *The Archaeology of Hindoo*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

⁵ Manguin, P. Y. (2014). *Palembang dan Sriwijaya Hipotesis Lama, Penelitian Baru (Palembang Barat)*, dalam Kadatuan Sriwijaya. Depok: Komunitas Bambu-EFEO- Pusat Arkeologi Nasional.

The historical and archaeological remains at Bukit Siguntang function as a meaningful inheritance of the Srivijaya Kingdom, and are respected as a collective heritage by the Malays. This hill is traditionally considered as a sacred space for the Malay community, as evidenced by the large number of visitors coming for pilgrimage, both from Palembang (South Sumatra) and other areas in Indonesia, and it is important for pilgrims from Melaka (Malaysia) and Singapore since their ancestors came from there. Unfortunately, at present, many of these remains have been lost or damaged due to the lack of attention from the government; the unclear boundaries of their territories have led to encroachment for settlement by residents. In addition, the government, as the holder of the authority of Bukit Siguntang, seems to be wrong in interpreting historical heritage resulting in the destruction of these objects since the 1980s. The last case was the destruction using heavy equipment under the pretext of "revitalization" in 2016-2018 in order to welcome the Asian Games.

The formulation of the problems based on the description above is as follows, first, why was Bukit Siguntang so important? Secondly, what caused the damage to Bukit Siguntang? Thirdly, how did the group of activists of historical heritage such as historians, archaeologists and cultural observers react to the destruction?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used qualitative research method. Moleong states that qualitative research is:⁶

“a research that intends to understand a phenomenon experienced by research subjects such as behavior, perception, motivation, action, etc. holistically, and by means of descriptions in the form of words and language, in a special natural context and by utilizing various scientific methods”

So, qualitative research means examining the condition of natural objects as a whole and describing them scientifically with an emphasis on meaning. While John W. Creswell states that "qualitative research is methods for exploring and understanding the meaning (by several individuals or groups) ascribed to social or human problems".⁷ This method aims to explain a phenomenon in depth, by collecting and analyzing data in detail.

This type of research consists of several stages, namely determining the problem to be researched, arranging various questions according to the problems

⁶ Moleong, L. J. (2012). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*. Bandung : PT Remaja.

⁷ Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research Design : Pendekatan Kualitatif, Kuantitatif, dan Mixed*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar

determined, collecting and analyzing data, and answering questions. This study used historical research⁸ because it involved past events, Bukit Siguntang, an area where many relics of the Srivijaya era were found and continues in the aftermath. Data about Bukit Siguntang were collected and researched (internal and external criticism), interpreted, and narrated. With this historical approach, it was hoped that this research would produce qualified scientific writing.

RESULT and DISCUSSION

1. Theoretical Framework

Sacred is anything that has to do with things full of mysteries both amazing and scary. All of these are the views and feelings of humans (groups or individuals), religion, or ethnicity towards certain locations or objects; even abstract ones (God, angels, spirits, devils, and others) considered to contain something sacred or frightening. As a result, the location or object in question is increasingly sacred. Awe is a mixture of adoration and fear. Both of them can be combined or separated. The point is a feeling⁹ that is difficult to describe, however, can be felt by the person experiencing it. Amazed and scared can be separated depending on the person or group that feels it.¹⁰

If the above definition is associated with sacred land, it is admired by supporters, thus encouraging them to come to it with awe, or even fear that if they are not present, they will get something scary or dangerous. Thus, sacred land must be preserved and protected from various forms of threats, violations, and pollution. Something sacred should be glorified because if it is not done properly, the admirers will get cursed either directly or indirectly. Therefore, it must be guarded and glorified so that feelings of anxiety, guilt, fear, and others do not arise. This is the basis for why humans always keep whatever is sacred. Sacred locations are generally guarded and sanctified, placed in a high location as a form of respect. According to the concept of human belief, something above / highest is something sacred. For example, the belief of the Toraja tribe named *Aluk*; they believe that their ancestors who came from heaven descended to earth meaning that the forerunner is above. That is why they know the upper world besides the human world and the

⁸ Johnson, R. B and Christensen, L. (2014). *Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches*. California: SAGE Publications, Inc.

⁹ Nothingham, K. E. (1985). *Agama dan Masyarakat : Suatu Pengantar Sosiologi Agama*. Jakarta: Rajawali.

¹⁰ Daradjat, Z. (1985). *Perbandingan Agama*. Jakarta: Bumi Aksara.

underworld.¹¹ Another example, there is a very spectacular relic in the form of a Neolithic mass grave at an altitude of about 176 meters above sea level (asl) in Gua Harimau, District of Ogan Komering Ulu South Sumatra.¹² All of this clearly shows that the high position is a sacred location.

As time changes, it is not impossible that what is originally sacred can turn into profane due to various causes. According to Emile Durkheim, as quoted by Mariasusai Dhavamony¹³ in his work entitled "Phenomenology of Religion" (1973), the change from sacred space to profane is as follows:

"The world is divided into two domains: one containing all that is holy and the other containing all that is profane, an attitude which is separate from religious thought ... The striking feature of the religious phenomenon is that it always presupposes two divisions of the whole world, known and unknowable, into two classes which encapsulate all that exists, but radically negate each other. Holy things are things protected and isolated by prohibitions; profane things are things which are subject to these prohibitions and must be far from the first. Religious beliefs are those which reveal the nature of holy things and the relationships which they support, both among themselves and with profane matters"

Thus, profane is all that is the opposite of sacred.

These changes can be caused by space struggle resulting in space changes. Meanwhile, space changes can be seen as a necessity because every human activity must use space or arena, so space becomes very important, it becomes an object of struggle, especially in cities where the population continues to increase.¹⁴ So, this opinion emphasizes that the struggle for space is more caused by population growth. Meanwhile, Bourdieu¹⁵ and Wacquant¹⁶ see it by discussing the arena or field. According to him, an arena is a social arena in which there is a struggle to fight over

¹¹ Tetalogi. (2020, May 10). Animism and dynamism in Indonesia and the tribes that still adhere to it. *Boombastis.com*. Online acces at <https://www.boombastis.com/animisme-dan-dinamisme/41629>

¹² Sofian, H.O. (2011). Hunian Gua di Kawasan Pegunungan Karst Bukit Barisan, Wilayah Provinsi Sumatera Selatan. *Jurnal Arkeologi Siddahayatra*. 16 (2).

¹³ Dhavamony, M. (1973). *Phenomenology of Religion*. Rome: Gregorian University Press. *Ancient Times*. Inggris: Thurlton Publishing.

¹⁴ Prins, Wil J.M. and Peter J.M. Nas. (1983). *The Struggle for The Third World City in G. Ansari and P.J.M. Nas (ed.). Town-Talk: The Dynamics of Urban*. Leiden: Brill.

¹⁵ Bourdieu, P. (1989). Social Space and symbolic Power. *American Sociological Association*. 7 (1) pp. 14-25.

¹⁶ Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. (1992). *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chica go: University of Chicago Press.

limited resources and access. Arena is a battle field. Furthermore, Bourdieu states that an arena is the place to establish a stronghold, placing cannons in an effort to defend and even take it. The fierce struggle risked power, land, cultural objects, education, social class and others. Arena is a structured system of social positions (controlled by individuals or institutions), which is also a system of power in a dominant position, subordination (equivalence) to one another. This is due to the access they can get to objects or resources (capital) that are contested. Thus, the structure of the arena serves to support and create strategies that will be used by the rulers (individuals or groups) to protect and strengthen positions so as to increase their position. Arena is open to a variety of capitals (political, economic, social, cultural, and symbolic) which function to control the fate of oneself and others. However, the political arena (power) in the level of power relations remains the most important part, because it can help structure other arenas.¹⁷

Bourdieu's symbolic capital in "Language and Symbolic Power" is a person's prestige and honor. People Fight for it through the state resulting in "symbolic violence" committed by a social agent or person including through coercion on other members/groups.¹⁸ This will sustain the position of the people in power, by making camouflage as if what they are doing is a normal act, and making those in power accept it as legal.¹⁹ So, it's kind of obscuring what they're really doing. The theories above will be used in an effort to dissect the problem of "Bukit Siguntang space" caused by the seizure of the historical land / area and by the government as the holder of power, as well as by the people who need a place to live.

2. Bukit Siguntang and Srivijaya

Bukit Siguntang is a phenomenal hill since it is the only highest location (about 26 meters above sea level), and is very strategic location in Palembang city. In a legend, it is stated that Bukit Siguntang was the first land that emerged from the sea, the surroundings of which were inundated by water to the mouth of a river.²⁰ At this location there is the tomb of Iskandar Zulkarnaen, a very exalted figure. One of his descendants became ruler and settled on this hill. This tomb is highly respected by the scholars and the whole population, so they guard it. Pilgrims come from all

¹⁷ Ritzer, G. (2011). *Eight Edition Sociological Theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

¹⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁹ Swartz, D. (1997). *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

²⁰ Clercq, F. S. A. D. (1895). *Bijdrage tot de Geschiedenis van Ieland Bangka*. Bijdragen tot de taal, en volkenkunde van Nederlandsche-Indie ederlandsche-Indie, Jilid XLV.

over to pray, put offerings and give alms. There are lots of birds in the branches of shady trees, surrounded by gardens, and wide fields.²¹

Palembang City, according to its geographic location, most of its territory is located in the lowlands, which is periodically inundated by the high tide of the Musi River and its tributaries once a day and overnight. This description also strengthens the opinion on the importance of Bukit Siguntang as the highest location which is automatically holy in the city of Palembang. As Buddhist sites are generally located in high places (Manguin, 2014: 239). This sacredness can be proven by various relics found on the hill or around it (the area that has been most studied since 1979). The oldest evidence is a Buddha statue of Amarawati type South Indian in the early 20th century, which reaches almost three meters in height. His age ranges from 6-7 AD.²² Besides statues, there are also inscriptions, Bodhisattva, Lokeswara, and kuwera statues, stupa building structures, ceramics, pottery, gold plates and plates, inscriptions, padmasana, beads, brick structures, bricks²³ from the remains of buildings²⁴ around the tomb, and others.²⁵ Based on these important findings, the Bukit Siguntang site is believed to be a religious (Buddhist) site. Bukit Siguntang is the western boundary (upstream of the Musi River) of the Srivijaya Kingdom which stretches downstream to Sabokingking. If Bukit Siguntang is declared a religious center, then Sabokingking is the center of its government.²⁶ Meanwhile, Woelters²⁷ states that "the whole of Bukit Siguntang is part of Sumatra which used to be the heart (the heartland) of Srivijaya". Meanwhile, Soeroso complements the perfection of Bukit Siguntang during the Srivijaya period, stating that Bukit Siguntang and its surroundings were a meeting point.²⁸ Judging from the contents of the Kedukan Bukit inscription (682 AD), it was at this location, especially on the slopes of the hills, that they expressed joy because of the construction of Wanua on the south side of Bukit Siguntang. It is very natural that from various studies conducted by

²¹ Kock, A. H. W. D. (1846). Schetsen van Palembang. *Tijdschrift voor Neerlandsch Indie*, Vol. 8 No. 3 pp. 281-376.

²² *Ibid*

²³ *Ibid*

²⁴ Utomo, B. B. (1985). Karanganyar as a Srivijayan site: New Evidence for the study of settlement pattern of the Srivijayan period. Palembang: *In SPAFA Final Report Consultative workshop on Archaeological and Environmental Studies on Srivija*. Bangkok: SPAFA Co-ordinating unit.

²⁵ *Ibid*

²⁶ *Ibid*

²⁷ Woelters, O. W. (1984). *Kemaharajaan Maritim Sriwijaya & Perniagaan Dunia: Abad III-Abad VII*. Depok: Komunitas Bambu

²⁸ Soeroso. (2014). Palembang: Kerjasama Balai arkeologi Palembang dan Badan Penelitian, Pengembangan dan Inovasi Daerah Prov. Sumsel (tidak terbit).

archaeologists, it is stated that Bukit Siguntang is a religious center supported by the surrounding area (Tanjung Rawa, Kambang Unglen, Karang Anyar, Kambang Purun, Lorong Jambu and others). Automatically, Bukit Siguntang is the "upstream" of Srivijaya.

In Buddhist concepts, Buddha statues, the Tripitaka Book, and monasteries are very glorified (sacred). This is in line with the writings of Coedes which states that Bukit Siguntang is a sacred mountain, also Buddhist sites are often located in high places, large statues found on the slopes of the hills came from the top of Bukit Siguntang.²⁹ Thus, it is very natural that the Bukit Siguntang site is a location with various important relics as a sacred site, and has become a place of pilgrimage for Buddhists to this day. The fact is that Bukit Siguntang is crowded, especially every Thursday night (Friday night). The visitors come from various regions, even from outside the province and outside Indonesia, to make pilgrimages to the graves on it. Their presence is related to vows or prayer as well as pilgrimage. The prayers offered are usually accompanied by vows if the prayers are answered (sustenance, mate, free from problems, lottery and others). They also come to say thank you for having answered prayers (paying vows) as well as praying for other needs which are usually accompanied by vows. The ritual has been going on for years and it is not known when it started. The caretakers are only able to say that the ceremony has been going on for a long time. The prayers and vows are usually carried out at night and during the day. While recreation, pre-wedding, and so on are only carried out during the day. Something that stands out is the presence of people from neighboring countries, especially Malaysia and Singapore.

As the only location that does not change, in the sense that Bukit Siguntang has been a silent witness from the very beginning of its existence, it has become a leaning place for the various civilizations that have occupied it from generation to generation. The definition from generation to generation is none other than that this location continuously becomes a religious center during the Srivijaya era (a sacred place during the kingdom and the Palembang sultanate), colonial period, and until now.

3. Bukit Siguntang as the "parent"

What is meant by Palembang in this paper is the territory of the Palembang Sultanate with the following boundaries, north and northwest with Jambi Kingdom, west and south with Bengkulu, east and northeast with Karimata Strait and Natuna Sea, and southeast with Lampung.³⁰ The choice of territory during the Palembang Sultanate was due to the clear boundaries of the area, and the strong influence of the

²⁹ Coedes, G et al. (2014). *Kedatuan Sriwijaya*. Depok: Komunitas Bambu.

³⁰ *Ibid*

center (the capital city of Palembang as the center of government) on the areas under its control. All of this is in an effort to further see the inner relationship between the center where the Bukit Siguntang is located and the areas under its control. On that basis, it will be seen the ties of Bukit Siguntang in various stories written by various authors, and collective memories that are still valid, and are believed by residents. The Palembang Sultanate has an area that is divided into *uluan* (upstream) and *iliran* (downstream). *Uluan* is a highland area in the west, while *iliran* is in the east, which consists of lowlands and swampy beaches. (ANRI, Palembang Bundle No. 62.2). These two terms are also used to differentiate areas based on river flow. The vast area, which is now mostly part of the province of South Sumatra, has many rivers known as Batanghari Sembilan. This means that in this area³¹ there are nine rivers that link to the Musi River.³² In accordance with the geographical and topographical location, these areas are connected to one another through these rivers. Meanwhile Palembang city is the center of power, civilization from time to time. The dependence on one another, between *uluan* and *iliran*, due to the fact that Palembang is the only city / port in *iliran* (Until now, there is no city other than Palembang from Palembang city to the mouth of the Musi River, Sungsang about 80 kilometers away) a meeting place for foreign traders with their various commodities. So, *uluan* depends on imported products, as well as selling its products in the city of Palembang. Automatically, Palembang city is also very dependent on *uluan* products in order to fulfil its own needs and exports.

The linkage between *iliran* and *uluan* can be traced from various legends, including the Serunting Sakti story from Pasemah. It is stated that on Bukit Siguntang there was a very famous holy man, and he met a figure to get supernatural power. His journey was not in vain because he succeeded in getting what he aspired to, being able to turn a person / group of people into stone by licking it. Since then, his name has changed to Si Pahit Lidah.³³ Besides this story,³⁴ other stories show the close relationship between Palembang and the *uluan* area (see the Simbur Cahaya Law, and the Sindang Mardikai Law) and Bangka.³⁵ These various sources indicate the role of Bukit Siguntang as a place of protection and strength.

³¹ *Ibid*

³² *Ibid*

³³ Andaya, B. W. (2016). *Hidup Bersaudara : Sumatra Tenggara pada Abad XVII & XVIII*. Yogyakarta: Ombak.

³⁴ Brauw, C. A. D. (1855). *Iets Betreffende de Verhouding der Pasemah-Landen tot de Sulthan Van Palembang*. TBG, Jilid IV.

³⁵ ANRI. *Algemeen Verslag van den Staat der Residentie Palembang over het Jaare 1839, 1840 en 1841*. Bundel Palembang.

4. Bukit Siguntang as the Sacred Heritage of the Ancestral Land of the Malay Nation

The relationship between the Malay Nation and Bukit Siguntang can be seen in this history embodied in the monumental work, *Melayu History* (early 17th century). Among the various Malay History books, Shellabear's work is the most famous one. One of the sections mentioned about:

Sahibul Hikayat said, there was once a country in the land of Andelas, Perlembang was the name, Demang Lebar Daun was the name of the king. The origin of the son of the king of Suran, Muara Tatang was the name of the river. The country of Perlembang is now given the name Palembang. In the upstream of Muara Tatang, there was a river called Malay. In the river there was a hill called Bukit Siguntang, the upstream of Mount Mahameru, on its land there was a field called Padang Penjaringan. There were two women farming, Wan Empuk and Wan Malini. Both of them lived in Bukit Siguntang, their residence was too large. And then the paddy rice was about to ripe, unspeakable; the paddy rice was almost ripe.³⁶

Furthermore, Shellabear wrote that one day three of the grandchildren (Nila Pahlawan, Krisyna Pandita, and Nila Utama) of the king of Suran flew and descended on Bukit Siguntang. The three of them found a mate there. Nila Pahlawan married Wan Empuk, Krisyna Pandita married Wan Malini, and finally Nila Utama married the daughter of Demang Lebar Daun. The marriage of the daughter of the ruler of Palembang with Nila Utama, caused this figure to become the ruler of Palembang to replace his father-in-law, and had the title, Sri Tri Buwana. This automatically³⁷ means that they are descendants of Iskandar Zulkarnain whose grave is on Bukit Siguntang.³⁸ Meanwhile, his two siblings continued their journey, which later became the rulers of Tanjung Pura (West Kalimantan) and Minangkabau (West Sumatra) respectively.³⁹

After about three years in power in Palembang, Sri Tri Buwana was determined to find a new life, so there was a massive shift from Palembang by sailing along the east coast of Sumatra Island to the Malacca Strait. During the voyage they

³⁶ Shellabear, W. (1989). *Sejarah Melayu*. Kuala Lumpur: Fajar Vakti.

³⁷ *Ibid*

³⁸ *Ibid*

³⁹ Miksic, J. (2013). *Singapore and the Silk Road of the Sea*. Singapore: Singapore National University Press. Singapore: Singapore National University Press.

stopped at Bintan,⁴⁰ then continued to Temasek and decided to stay there, and changed⁴¹ its name to Singapore.⁴²

Sri Tri Buwana's existence in Singapore was only about five years, and continued to Melaka since Palembang was controlled by Majapahit (1253). There appeared to be a close correlation between the occupations of Palembang, and followed by Singapore⁴³ which led to Sri Tri Buwana's withdrawal and established a new center of power in Melaka.⁴⁴ In this new place, he immediately developed this very strategic location as well as possible, so that it quickly developed and became a world trade center. In the early 16th century this great kingdom was faced with newcomers, Portuguese, so that the two faced each other in various fierce battles, and the ruler of Melaka (Sultan Mahmud Syah) had to recognize Portuguese supremacy in 1511. The Sultan and his relatives moved to Bintan (1513), here there were eight more battles with the Portuguese, so the Sultan decided to retreat to mainland Riau, Kuala Kampar, under the name of the Kingdom of Johor. Later in the early 18th century, Johor split into the Riau Kingdom of Johor Pahang, the Siak Kingdom, and the Terengganu Kingdom.⁴⁵ The transfer of the center of government, and the split into several kingdoms also indicated that the descendants of Palembang from Bukit Siguntang had spread to various areas in the Malay Region.

Other than that, the Acehnese tambo also did not separate from the story that their ancestors came from Bukit Siguntang. The close relationship between Palembang and Jambi can be drawn from Srivijaya era in the 7th century (Karang Berahi inscription and I-Tsing News) after that time, even until now. There was intermarriage between royal families, both from Palembang and vice versa. In Jambi folklore, it is stated that Demang Lebar Daun had two daughters. Her youngest daughter married the king of Tanjung Jabung Jambi. Thus, Palembang and Jambi had the same ancestor, Bukit Siguntang Palembang. Another story is the legend of a snake that was cut in thirds. The tail was placed at Bukit Siguntang Palembang, the stomach at Bukit Si Guntang Jambi, and the head in Minangkabau. The legend clearly wants to show that all three regions came from the same ancestor. In the book

⁴⁰ *Ibid*

⁴¹ Hashim, M. Y. (1990). *Kesultanan Melayu Melaka, Kajian Beberapa Aspek tentang Melaka pada Abad ke-15 dan abad ke-16 dalam Sejarah Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia.

⁴² Brown, C. C. (1970). *Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.

⁴³ *Ibid*

⁴⁴ Sturler, W. L. D. (1843). *Proeve Eener Beschrijving van Gebied van Palembang (Zuid-Oostelijk Gedeelte van Sumatra*. Groningen: J. Oomrens.

⁴⁵ Liamsi, K. R. (2016). *Prasasti Bukit Siguntang dan badai Politik di Kemaharajaan Melayu 1160-1946*. Pekanbaru: PT Sagang Intermedia Pers.

History of Malay (Shellabear) it is written that one of the founders of Jambi, Tun Talanai, was the son of Demang Lebar Daun.⁴⁶ So it is not an exaggeration if Westenek⁴⁷ and Winstedt⁴⁸ state that Bukit Seguntang is the place of the ancestral origins of the Malay people because that is the location where the figure of Iskandar Zulkarnain was buried.

The conclusion that can be drawn is that the relationship between Bukit Siguntang and the Malay world is widespread not only in the southern part of Sumatra, but also Sumatera island, the Tanah Melayu Peninsula and West Kalimantan. It is only natural if the distinguished srivijaya researcher, Manguin⁴⁹ states that "for the Malays, the Bukit Siguntang site is the most sacred site". As the land of origin, it has become a place to return, as well as identity and binding for its descendants who have spread to various countries. That is why Bukit Siguntang has become the object of pilgrimage for various Malays from generation to generation, both domestically and abroad. At the time of the Palembang kingdom and sultanate, Bukit Siguntang was not only a place to honor the sultan but also a place to take an oath of loyalty to the sultan for the wrongs/crimes they committed in *uluan*, and make pilgrimages.⁵⁰ This is the role of Bukit Siguntang, which seems to have never subsided from time to time.

5. Profane for Authority

The government interprets Bukit Siguntang not based on a cultural but an economic approach. It is interpreted as a professional asset that can be developed as a tourist attraction to increase local government revenue. For this purpose, economic development spots for the Palembang region were made in Bukit Siguntang.

The changes in Bukit Siguntang have occurred since the 1980s. This is due to the increasingly massive urbanization in the capital city of Palembang, which has a negative impact on Bukit Siguntang. During the Sultanate of Palembang, it was used to do special things, oaths, so that the perpetrators of the crime did not repeat their actions. During the Dutch colonial period, they made Bukit Siguntang as a location for recreation, enjoying the natural beauty without touching anything there.

Research conducted in 1979 by Manguin showed that there were no buildings in Bukit Siguntang and its surroundings, except in Tanjung Rawa one of the Srivijaya sites.⁵¹ This is similar to what was encountered by students of the History Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University in the

⁴⁶ *Ibid*

⁴⁷ *Ibid*

⁴⁸ Winstedt, R. O. (1938). The Malay Annals or Sejarah Melayu. *Jmbias*. 16: 1-226

⁴⁹ *Ibid*

⁵⁰ *Ibid*

⁵¹ *Ibid*

early 1980s when conducting field study there, they found many beads of various shapes and colors along the path down from Bukit Siguntang to Lebak Keranji, and there was only one tomb there, the tomb of Iskandar Zulkarnain (interview with Emilia, 2 May 2020). Unfortunately, when Manguin conducted research there in the 1980s (published in 1988) he found that conditions had begun to change, that was the existence of a highway to the southeast of Bukit Siguntang. Furthermore, he wrote that at the top of Bukit Siguntang there were seven tombs, the point being the tomb of Iskandar Zulkarnain (Alexander the Great). This research became very important to further elevate Srivijaya's heritage, even though at that time he stated that the research was too late. If in the 1980s Manguin made a statement "too late", you can imagine how the results of the research afterward were when the construction of roads, bridges, houses, schools, and other buildings increased. From the research, Manguin also testified that in Bukit Siguntang, there were seven graves, meaning that there was an addition of six graves.⁵²

To save Bukit Siguntang from looting of the population, the regional government of South Sumatra Province through the Cultural Service made a fence in an area of about 16 hectares in the early 1990s. In addition to the construction of fences, there was also evacuation of the many tombs on it, and leaving some that can be seen there until now. It could be that to complement the needs of tourism, without involving historians (the Archaeological Center was established in Palembang in 1996, while the Jambi Conservation and Cultural Heritage Center in 1989), the authorities, involving the private sector, built a permanent building at the top, under which there was a kind of pond surrounding it and the walls were made of reliefs about war and others. It turned out that one building was not enough, so a building like a lighthouse was also built, as well as large stones from iron frames (fake stones), latrines, gates, and so on. The changes to Bukit Siguntang did not end here, in the later period a fountain pool was built, a path leading to the top of Siguntang, a *musholla*, a gate, a toilet, a gazebo and others.⁵³ Meanwhile, the existing tombs were gradually built by pilgrims who paid vows since their aspirations / desires asked for at the tombs were successful. As a result, there were permanent buildings guarded by caretakers (*kuncen*). Thus, the face of Bukit Siguntang is increasingly changing. That is why senior archaeologist Dr. Retno Purwanti from the Archeology Center (Balar) stated that "the Archaeological Site of Bukit Seguntang was damaged in the 1990s".⁵⁴

⁵² *Ibid*

⁵³ Anwar, A. (2018, August 14). Siguntang Hill Site Damaged, Historian: Stop Construction. *Tempo.co*. Online acces at <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1117124/situs-bukit-siguntang-rusak-sejarawan-hentikan-pembangunan>

⁵⁴ Supardi, A. (2019, February 8). Seguntang Hill Tourism Object, Why Hasn't Been Opened To The Public?. *Tempo.co*. Online acces at

These various actions seem to be out of control, perhaps because there is no serious attention to the importance of protecting and preserving cultural heritage.

In the 2010s there were efforts to continue to change the sacred place with various plans, including building a tower so that many tourists would come and enjoy the beauty of Palembang city from the top of it. Thankfully the plan was not implemented. Furthermore, in 2015 there was an effort to create a public park, as well as a children's playground with a non-permanent building. The plan was rejected by the local government through the South Sumatra Provincial Culture and Tourism Office. The rejection was more "colored" because the submission involved Malay World Islamic World (DMDI), which was based in Melaka, Malaysia. There was a kind of heroism and nationalism put forward. By involving historians and archaeologists to provide scientific argumentative reasons, that if it is to be managed, it will be the Department of Culture and Tourism of South Sumatra Province who will manage it. Furthermore, it is not clear what actually happened, about one year later the same service carried out a revitalization starting June, using the 2016-2018 State Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBN) and 2016-2018 State Budget (APBD) which amounted to 15 billion rupiah, and revitalization financing used APBN funds through the Ministry of Public Works and Public Housing (PUPR). These efforts were made to increase the flow of tourist visits, especially preparation for the XVIII Asian Games, as well as to provide knowledge about the development and history of South Sumatra. Meanwhile, the construction of the gallery building aimed to trigger all of us to appreciate and preserve the culture of the past as a provision for future culture. How we meet the culture of the future⁵⁵ must start from the culture of the past.⁵⁶

The inauguration of the revitalization was carried out by the Governor of South Sumatra Province, on 26 June 2018. The governor said, "The inauguration of this gallery is a big step forward". It needs a continuous arrangement, and the addition of several relevant facilities, so that it is attractive, comfortable and safe for tourists (local, domestic and foreign) who come to Bukit Siguntang as one of the historical tourist destinations". In addition,⁵⁷ the inauguration of the gallery and all

<https://travel.tempo.co/read/1173627/objek-wisata-bukit-seguntang-mengapa-belum-dibuka-untuk-umum>

⁵⁵ Aries, M. (2018, June 28). In Picture: Revitalization of the Archaeological Site of Bukit Siguntang. *Republika*. Online acces at <https://republika.co.id/berita/pb14u5283/revitalisasi-situs-arkeologi-bukit-seguntang>

⁵⁶ *Ibid*

⁵⁷ *Ibid*

its equipment could be witnessed⁵⁸ before the 2018 Asian Games.⁵⁹ In fact, as of February 2019, based on a report by reporter Ahmad Supardi (Supardi, 2019), since it was inaugurated on 26 June 2018 to 8 February 2019 (more than seven months) Bukit Siguntang has not been opened to the public yet. Based on the investigation, it shows that the conditions there, especially the front part of the gallery, toilets and musholla (Islamic prayer room), are overgrown with grass. According to Acting Official of South Sumatra Tourism Office, the gallery has not opened yet because the Department of Culture and Tourism of South Sumatra Province is completing the gallery's contents with various replicas of statues, inscriptions, stupas, and ancient objects found from Bukit Seguntang.

From the various statements above, there did not seem the slightest explanation that the revitalization of Bukit Siguntang had been preceded by critical studies from archaeologists and historians though it was a very important point in every effort to change the Cultural Conservation Area (UUCB No. 11 Year 2010 Article 80 and its explanation). there are at least two main tasks (UUCB No. 11 Year 2010 Article 95 and Article 16), Authority of the Government and Local Government" (all of that of course in accordance with the Regional Regulation (PERDA) of South Sumatra Province No. 4 of 2017 concerning Preservation of Cultural Heritage, 26 April 2017, as a derivative of UUCB No.11 of 2010).



⁵⁸ Wulandari, D. (2018, June 27). Palembang Tour: Siguntang Hill Now Has an Information Gallery. *Bisnis.com*. Online acces at <https://sumatra.bisnis.com/read/20180627/533/810031/wisata-palembang-bukit-siguntang-kini-miliki-galeri-informasi>

⁵⁹ Tarso. (2018, June 28). South Sumatra Governor Inaugurates Siguntang Hill Gallery Palembang. *Tribunnews.com*. Online acces at <https://palembang.tribunnews.com/2018/06/28/gubernur-sumsel-resmikan-galeri-bukit-siguntang-palembang>

David Ming

*An Examination of Bukit Siguntang as the Hallowed Legacy of the Malay Nation's Progenitor Land:
Transitioning From Profane to Sacred*



The photos were privately owned on 29 October 2017.

The reaction of Rescue Activists to Historical heritage

The revitalization was rejected by archaeologists from the Palembang Archaeological Center (Balar), because they did not heed the Cultural Heritage Law number 11 of 2010. They rejected the pond at the top of the hill (in Hindu-Buddhist concept, the peak is *meru*, the most sacred place), replica stones made of cement, and others. Senior archaeologist, stated that the development should be accounted for academically, technically and administratively. Furthermore, he stated that during the construction there was no coordination with the expert team, either from the archaeological team or historians. As a result, Bukit Siguntang and other sites were damaged.⁶⁰ This criticism showed that the revitalization did not involve or listen to the opinions of archaeologists as a group directly involved in Bukit Siguntang together with both national and international archaeological figures in various excavations and research over the years.⁶¹

The next effort was to hold a Seminar on "Preservation and Protection of Cultural Heritage through Legal Instruments" on 29 March 2018 in collaboration between History Education Study Program Sriwijaya University and regional administrators of Al-Jam'iyatul Wasliyah of Palembang City, and MSI of South Sumatra Branch. The seminar was held in order to continue to attempt to sue the destruction of Bukit Siguntang with the aim of uniforming perception about Cultural Heritage and details of its preservation in line with UUCB No. 11 of 2010. The

⁶⁰ Sulis. (2020, March 01). Revitalization of Old Buildings in Palembang Criticized. *Palpres.com*. Online acces at <https://palpres.com/2020/03/revitalisasi-bangunan-tua-di-palembang-dikritisi/>

⁶¹ *Ibid*

keynote speakers were Anna Erliyana⁶² (Faculty of Law, University of Indonesia), Agus Aris Munandar (FIB University of Indonesia), and Reda Manthovani, (South Sumatra High Court).⁶³ The three speakers agreed that Cultural Conservation in Indonesia is still culturally vulnerable (damaged, evicted/destroyed) for pragmatic purposes, so it is often damaged by the culture itself. For this reason, all components of society need to have clear and in-depth knowledge about past events to know what ideas/concepts are cultural heritage's background (mental template). Because knowledge and understanding will create a sense of pride in the Cultural Conservation around them, the community, especially the younger generation, will be at the forefront of protecting Cultural Conservation, so it is sustainable. It is said that "the most important thing in preserving Cultural Conservation is to strengthen national identity".

The government uses the term revitalization for Bukit Siguntang, while the Revitalization contained in UUCB No. 11 of 2010 Article 80 and the explanation is "the potential of a Cultural Conservation site or Cultural Conservation Area taking into account the spatial layout, layout, social functions and/or indigenous cultural landscape based on the study". Revitalization is carried out by rearranging spatial functions, cultural values, and strengthening information about Cultural Heritage. The question is whether the revitalization carried out by the local government with support from the center (Ministry of PUR) is in accordance with Article 80 and its explanation? If not, then in UUCB No. 11 of 2010 Article 66 states that every person is prohibited from destroying the Cultural Conservation, either in whole or in parts, from the unit, group, and / or from the original location. Even though the duties of the Government and Local Governments on Cultural Conservation have been regulated in UUCB No. 11 of 2010 Article 95, number (1) "The Government and / or Local Governments have the task of carrying out the Protection, Development and Utilization of Cultural Conservation", even according to the law in Article 96, it is stated that the Government and Regional Governments are authorized to, (h) conduct investigations into cases of violation of the law; also (p) terminate the spatial use process or the development process which may cause damage, loss or destruction of the Cultural Conservation, in whole or in part. As it is known that the Government and Regional Government are responsible for the supervision of Cultural Conservation in accordance with their respective authorities. The community participates in monitoring the Conservation of Cultural Heritage

⁶² Erliyana, A. (August 14, 2018). Law Enforcement in the Preservation and Protection of Cultural Conservation. *Faculty of Law Indonesia University*. Online acces at <https://law.ui.ac.id/v3/4385-2/>

⁶³ Munandar, A. A. (2018). *Cultural Heritage and Eidetic*. Depok: Indonesia University.

(UUCB No.11 of 2010 Article 97).⁶⁴ Here is the lengthy presentation followed by recommendations submitted to the head of Department of Culture and Tourism of South Sumatra Province. However, there is still no response and change that the destruction of Bukit Siguntang continues.

The struggle against the destruction of Bukit Siguntang has never subsided. Coinciding with the National Seminar on "Sriwijaya History and the Maritime Axis" in Palembang on August 9 2018, part of the group of presenters and seminar participants made a visit, including E. Edwards McKinnon, archaeologist from the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), and historians and archaeologists to Bukit Siguntang in order to see directly the condition of the hill, it is clear that the workers are in the process of completing the revitalization. With a deep sense of concern, seeing the existing conditions, McKinnon stated that the construction of a gallery on Bukit Siguntang site was very ironic because the perpetrator was the government. "It's ironic; a site that stands out has become a kind of Disneyland and derelict too." He further stated that the destruction was estimated to be in the 1990s. All this happened because local officials at levels I and II did not understand (did not care) the value of ancient sites, even though they were protected by UUCB No. 11/2010, and the Regional Regulation on Cultural Heritage of South Sumatra Province Number 4 of 2017. Furthermore, McKinnon suggested Bukit Siguntang to be a Cultural Heritage location where the legend of Sri Tri Buana came from and the establishment of the Sriwijaya kingdom. The hill should be a cultural heritage, the location where the legend of Sri Tri Buana came from, and the establishment of the Sriwijaya kingdom instead of a picnic field. As a form of deep concern, McKinnon and his colleague Ichwan Azhari made a Statement Letter that essentially demanded that the construction of Bukit Siguntang be stopped because it is very clear that it has violated the Cultural Heritage Law number 11 of 2010. Ichwan Azhari added that the historical site of Bukit Siguntang is significant for Srivijaya history and for the memory of Malay culture. We have witnessed that it has been damaged by and on behalf of the interests of development projects (Anwar, 2018). The above Statement Letter was sent to various domestic and foreign printed and electronic media (to various Malay World, particularly Malaysia and Singapore). This action was truly a slap not only for South Sumatra and Indonesia but for the Malay world in particular because they were considered negligent in protecting the ancestral lands of the Malay people. Unfortunately, the various protests above did not get a response from the Head of the Department of Culture and Tourism of South Sumatra Province, and the destruction of Bukit Siguntang continued.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*

To continue to raise the issue of Bukit Siguntang Conservation, MSI of South Sumatra Branch in collaboration with the Social Studies Department of FKIP Sriwijaya University held a Webinar on July 24, 2020. This webinar invited speakers from Malaysia (Prof. Muhammad Haji Salleh, Dr. Mohd Afendi Daud), Brunei Darussalam (Hj, Dzulkiflee Hj Abd Laif), and Indonesia.⁶⁵ A breakthrough that has never been made before, with the hope that all parties will increasingly realize that the preservation of Bukit Siguntang in particular, and cultural heritage in general must receive serious attention so that what has happened is not repeated and returns Bukit Siguntang to the way the hill was intended. This webinar produces recommendations that will be followed up by sending them to various competent parties in the field.

CONCLUSIONS

Bukit Siguntang is a sacred land. The evidence shows that its existence in history has existed since the 6th - 7th centuries with the findings in the form of Buddha statues (Amarawati type), inscriptions, and other archaeological evidence. This hill is also the ancestral land of the Malay people which was very glorified and sacred during the Palembang Sultanate until the 20th century. Significant changes in destruction have occurred since the 1980s, and the community also took part in taking and utilizing part of the hill area for settlement. However, the changes or destructions of Bukit Siguntang were carried out sustainably by the government as the "owner" of the hill.

Changing or destroying Bukit Siguntang on the pretext that it was developed as a tourist attraction, causing the hill to languish and lose its identity. Various protests were carried out by community activists or historical heritage lovers (MSI of South Sumatra branch, archaeologists and historical-cultural lovers) to the government by conducting activities such as dialogues, seminars, webinars, recommendations and others. Resistance continues to be echoed for the preservation of Bukit Siguntang.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

This article contributes to saving a very important historical and archaeological site, Siguntang Hill, so it remains sustainable as a sacred site.

⁶⁵ Wargadalem, R. F. (2017). *Kesultanan Palembang dalam Pusaran Konflik*. Jakarta: KPG

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