



Notes on Conference

The Past and Present Ownership Status of the Banten Sultanate's Assets



A number of seminars on the history of the Banten Sultanate have been held in universities and research centers in Banten and other places in Indonesia. Such seminars more often than not discuss the importance of Banten as one of the centers of intercontinental commerce region and Islamic teaching in Southeast Asia during the 16th to 18th century. One who wishes to make a relation between Banten and Islam usually refers to Snouck Hurgronje's report that states that Bantenese were pious Muslims who were more aware with religious practices than other Muslims in Java. Furthermore, his report informs us that at the end of the 19th century, a number of Bantenese were among the many Muslim students and teachers in the *Jawi* community who resided in Mecca. We also know that a lot of research activities on some aspects of Banten have been conducted, such as on the following subjects: archeology, politics, economy, and linguistic. However, there is a lack of research dealing with specific themes, such as the status of the Banten Sultanate's assets; in this case the land.

The former center of the Banten Sultanate has a long history. It was built by the founding fathers of the Sultanate, Syarif Hidayatullah and his son, Hasanuddin. According to Babad Banten, they moved the center from Banten Girang, located not far from the city center of Serang, to the current site in the area known as Banten Lama (Old Banten), located further north. The relocation indicates a strong motivation from the founders that the

strong influence of Hinduism associated with Banten Girang needed to be replaced with a new character of Islam. From then on, Banten Lama became the center of political, economic, social, and religious activities of the Sultanate for centuries. The Sultanate came to an end when H.W. Daendels, the Governor General of the Netherlands East Indies demolished the Surosowan palace, the center of the Sultanate. Daendels then exiled the last Sultan, Sultan Shafiuddin, to Surabaya and there he passed away in 1899.

After the establishment of the Banten province in 2000, many segments of society in Banten question about the existence of Banten Lama. This situation was generated by the fact that the site, Banten Lama, has a number of economic potential that can be utilized to boost local economy. These segments were also convinced that the revitalization of the Sultanate would inspire the Bantenese to realize about the importance of the Sultanate in the past. However, there is a major obstacle to deal with before these segments can revitalize the Sultanate: the ownership status of the center of the Sultanate. At the moment the ownership status is unclear; some factions of the Sultans of Banten's descendants claim that they have the right to manage the center.

Therefore, discussions on the ownership status of the center of the Sultanate are very essential for three reasons. *Firstly*, they will have the possibilities to explore and trace the possibly precise area of the Sultanate. *Secondly*, they have the opportunities to inform the Bantenese about the problems related to the past and present ownership status of the center. *Thirdly*, they may encourage the Bantenese to have more concerns about the future of the site for the current condition is extremely crowded, dirty, and messy.



Laboratorium Bantenologi and Balai Pelestarian Cagar Budaya (BPCB) jointly organized a seminar on October 2nd, 2013 in the auditorium of IAIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten. The speakers of the seminar were Dr. Harto Juwono (University of Indonesia), K.H. Tb. Fathul Adhim (the former Banten Lama's caretaker), and Dr. Mufti Ali (former director of Laboratorium Bantenologi), while Yadi Ahyadi, S. Ag. acted as the chair. Meanwhile, among the participants of the seminar were local government officials, university students, local NGOs, researchers, lecturers, members of youth organizations, members of mass organizations, and journalists.

According to Dr. Juwono, the Banten Sultanate was one of the *zelfbestuur* areas in Java which had a significant role in spreading Islam as well as playing political and commercial functions in Southeast Asia. Playing a key role in political and commercial aspects, the Sultanate became the main competitor for some Islamic kingdoms in Southeast Asia, such as Mataram and Cirebon, as well as the VOC. The Sultanate in the 17th century gained its heyday by occupying, among other things, Sumedang which had been occupied by Mataram, and some areas in southern Sumatra. During the reign of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, the Sultanate implemented Islamic law. He was the ruler and owner of the land in the Sultanate area. The sultan lent his land to the people. In return, they had to give a certain number of their income from the land to the Sultan as gift or tax.

Meanwhile according to Dr. Ali, before the destruction of the Sultanate by Daendels, Banten had had four categories of land: *tanah liar* (*woestegronden*), *tanah wakaf* (*wakapgronden*), *tanah milik pribadi* (*gronden in privaatzit*) and *tanah kesultanan* (*rijksgrondenstaatsdomein*). One of the *tanah kesultanan* was the rice fields called *Sawah Nagara* which covered 400 villages, spreading from Badamusalam in northern Banten to Sogong and Binuangen in southern Banten. After the fall of the Sultanate, the cultivators of the land no longer gave the tax to the Sultan but to the Dutch. Furthermore, after a number of changes in agrarian regulations (*agrarische wet* 1830, 1870, and 1910), the ownership status of the Sultanate's assets became blur.