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The role of Tuban in History

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Geographical setting

Tuban lies in the northern coast of East Java. The River Solo runs in the southern part of the area and two other smaller rivers in the southern part of the area and two other smaller rivers are the Sarang in the west and the Lohgung in the east. (Bambang Budi Utomo: 1982: 277).

In rainy seasons the rainfall reaches more than 200 mm, and in dry seasons less than 100 mm, even about 4 mm in some areas.

Tubanin written sources

Tuban has accumulated a long record of history. It started with the inscription of Kambang Putih (0J0 CXVIII), bearing the royal seal in the form of garudhamukha (the head of garuda). It commemorates the privileges enjoyed by the people of Kambang Putih in connection with seafaring activities. Those people were also permitted to partake food fit for a king. Based on the form of the seal Krom accredited the inscription to King Airlangga (Krom: 1926: 261) but overlooked the name Garasakan mentioned in it. King Garasakan name was also mentioned in the inscription of Malenga, found in the vicinity of Tuban.

The inscription of Kambang Putih was found in the courtyard of the assistant resident's house. This denotes the importance of Tuban which was already connected with seafaring community. Garasakan was supposed to be a descendant of Airlangga and the inscription is dated around the eleventh century.

When King Krtanagara sent his army to Melayu, his prime minister accompanied the troop to Tuban (Brandes: Pararaton: 18). This means that Tuban was already functioning as a port whence ships depart to destinations outside Java.

According to De Casparis two kinds of ports were known during airlangga's rule: Hujunggaluh for the interinsular maritime traffic and Kambang Putih, which later on became Tuban – for the international relations. According to the inscriptions as mentioned in 0J0 LXIV it was already at that time that foreign people come to Java like the Khmers, Campa, Dravida and Sri Lanka.

In Chinese sources dating from the Yuan and Ming period Tuban called Tu-ping-Tsuh, and that there are for cities in Java without surrounding walls, viz, Tuban, Suraghaya, Greasik and Majapahit. Tome Pires mentioned that the capital city of Dayo (after the decline of Majapahit) lies about a two days' travel by foot from Tuban.

Two identical stone inscriptions from Bandungrejo near Tuban (Bambang Budi Utomo: loc.cit) both in the date as well as the content mention about a war waged in 1355 at which a row of soldiers stood at the riverside thus forming a stronghold of Tuban.

Archaeological and historical remains found around Tuban

Immovable monuments:

This comprises among others: in the village of Wangun: caves, one called the Gua Wayang with engraved wayang figures and another one with an inscribed date of 1295 Saka.

In the village of Bulujawa, bordering to the province of Central Java: remains of a temple on a hill looking over the sea. The material used is white stone blocks. In a few distances are found a yoni, a lingga and a nandi which are spread in the fields. Movable objects from other places: statue of a mahakala, a nadi, a block of limestone with engraved footprints. In the town of Tuban are found an altar, a lingga and a yoni in a courtyard, a lingga, a yoni and a watervat in Sunan Bonangs mosque and grave yard. Next to the two inscriptions from Bandungrejo are also found a stone lingga a Ganesa and a stone Nandi.

Artifacts which serve as proofs of the ancient trade activities comprise anchors from bancar: one is kept in Lasem and another one at the Mpu Tantular Museum in Surabaya.

Other artifacts:

The most important articles of commodity are ceramics. The latest spectacular finds are the owner found in the bay of Tuban, about ½ kilometres of the pier in the Harbour. They are found about 5 metres below the sea-level. A diving expedition on a grand scale was launched by the National Research Centre of Archaeology together with divers from the Navy and succeeded in accumulating ceramics up to 500 kilogrmas. (Abu Ridho: SPAFA Final Report 1984: 283-293). They consist of porcelain and earthen ware goods. Several of the small earthenware pots contain lime which is usually applied to betelnut chewing. These earthenware pots in different forms and sizes are supposed to be imported from mainland

Southeast Asia. The porcelain wares consist of Chinese, Vietnamese as well as Thai wares, in this case from Sukhothai. Other interesting finds are Chinese coins.

Products and commodities from Tuban

One of the interesting products is the so called bay salt which is obtained from seawater by evaporating. According to Chu-fan chih, this type of salt imported from Tuban is called ch'ing yen. Around the nineteenth century the product of salt in the Rembang and Tuban area amounts to 10 000 tons yearly.

Paul Wheatly in his geographical notes on some commodities involved in Sung maritime trade made up a list of trade wares which were produced as well as exported from places in Indonesia, including Tuban. Thus Tuban also acted as an entrepot during the 13-15 century. So next to salt we will also find:

Kapok and cotton cloth

Kapok grows in the area of Tuban and nowadays kapas or cotton is still grown there. Formerly kapas was imported from Bali (Meilink Roelofs) and after being woven as clothes in Java, exported to the eastern part of Indonesia. Pepper is also a product from Tuban, but second in quality to the West Javanese pepper. Chauyu kua listed among the export wares of Java tung kua or ta kua which was identified by Wheatly as unidentified melon. In Java a wellknown sweetmeat originating from China is called tangkueh which are made of the bligo melon. In the Kidung Sundaya yana is mentioned that when the Majapahit king was about to marry the Sundanese princess he ordered to fetch sweet meats from the Harbour. It seems that the bligo melons were exported to Dhina and later on imported as candies or sweetmeats.

Cloves and bartered it with spices from the Moluccas. Fermented liquor is still produced around Tuban, mentioned by rock hill and might also be extracted from the Siwalan fruit as we know today.

Tortoise shell must be a product from coastal Tuban and pearls which were produced in south Malang were exported to China via Tuban.

Sulphur was also produced from volcanic Java. Silk was imported from China.

As currency next to the Chinese coins Java money were also used. The Java money was a coinage of silver alloyed with tin and white copper.

The tradition of weaving cotton into colourful cloth is now still being preserved. The weaving of the gedog cloth made of course cotton and printed with batik in grey and red is still practiced in Tuban.

Conclusion

Tuban emerged in history in the 17th century and persisted until the fifteenth century. It declined after Gresik became an important port for rice and more merchants settled down in that place built by Chinese families.

Next to mercantile importance Tuban also played an important role in the ancient history as a place where the Javanese fleet embarked and where the Chinese troops landed in the thirteenth century, before proceeding to Kadiri.

The Harbour authority was also exercised by the Majapahit nobles as was also mentioned in the Babad Kasem that Bhre Paguhan was also a râjasamudra (Harbour authority) of the ancient Lasem.

It regained its fame by the coming of Islam, as centre of commerce but also of culture where a peaceful mixture between the Hindu culture and the Islam could be discerned at the out stretch of Tuban like the monument of Bonang, Sendangduwur and Mantingan.