



A STUDY OF BUGIS ETHNIC POWER IN THE SULTANATE OF ACEH 1727-1903 M

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyse the role and influence of Bugis ethnicity in the Sultanate of Aceh during the period 1727-1903 CE. This study uses a historical approach and combines qualitative-descriptive methods. The results show that the ethnic Bugis played an important role in the political, economic and cultural dynamics of the Aceh Sultanate. Their contributions not only strengthened the Sultanate's power structure, but also created networks that expanded Aceh's influence in the Southeast Asian region. The findings provide new insights into cross-ethnic interactions in building Islamic civilisation in the archipelago.

Keywords: Aceh Sultanate; Bugis ethnicity

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of ethnic power dynamics in the political landscape of the archipelago has always been a topic of interest to historians (Yani, 2007). One of the ethnic groups that played a significant role in the political and cultural arena in several regions of the archipelago is the Bugis ethnicity (Wasilah & Hildayanti, 2016; Harun et al., 2013). As a resilient community of sailors and traders, the Bugis people have left their historical mark on various kingdoms, including the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam (Maunati, 2010). During the period 1727-1903 AD, the relationship between the Bugis and the Sultanate of Aceh reflected a complex interaction involving politics, economics, culture and religion (B. Andaya, 2010).

The Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam, which reached its peak in the 16th and 17th centuries, is known as one of the centres of Islamic power in Southeast Asia (Badri, 2021). In the 18th century, however, Aceh began to experience significant internal and external challenges. In this situation, the Bugis people emerged as important actors who influenced its political and social

dynamics. The relationship between the Bugis ethnicity and the Sultanate of Aceh cannot be separated from the migration of the Bugis people to various parts of the archipelago, (Maunati, 2009) due to internal and external conflicts in South Sulawesi. These migrations often involved Bugis political elites who brought with them military, diplomatic and trade skills, enabling them to establish strategic positions in the destination areas (Maunati, 2010).

The Bugis were prominent, particularly in the context of power structures and the military. Bugis leaders, known for their diplomatic and military skills, were often invited by Acehnese elites to help resolve internal conflicts and deal with external threats (Sahur, 2010). One important figure in this relationship was Daeng Mansur, a Bugis immigrant who married the daughter of a Pidie cleric named Teungku Chiek in Reubee, giving birth to sons and daughters who would hold strategic positions in Aceh in the early 18th century (Abang Shabir Official, 2024) Their role was not limited to military functions, but also included significant cultural and economic influence.

The Bugis were often trusted as leaders of the Aceh Sultanate's troops. Their success in warfare and loyalty to the sultan often made them a respected group. However, their involvement in Acehnese politics also created tensions with local elites. The relationship between the Bugis and the Acehnese elite reflects a complex power dynamic in which loyalty, competition and negotiation are intertwined (L. Y. Andaya, 2010).

This article aims to further explore the role and contribution of ethnic Bugis to the Sultanate of Aceh during the period 1727-1903 CE. The research will highlight aspects such as the motivations for Bugis migration to Aceh, their role in the power structure, as well as the social, economic and cultural impacts resulting from the interaction of these two groups. Using a historical approach, this article seeks to understand how the ethnic Bugis not only became part of the Aceh Sultanate, but also shaped the political and social dynamics of the kingdom.

This research is important not only to fill a gap in the study of Aceh's history, but also to enrich the understanding of ethnic interaction in the archipelago. It is hoped that this study will reveal how the Bugis adapted to and capitalised on opportunities in Aceh, and how these interactions influenced the history of the Sultanate of Aceh as a whole. In its analyses, the article will draw on a range of primary and secondary sources, including local manuscripts, colonial records, as well as oral traditions that have survived in Bugis and Acehnese communities.

As such, this article aims not only to reconstruct the role of ethnic Bugis in the Sultanate of Aceh, but also to provide a new perspective on understanding power networks and ethnic dynamics in the archipelago in the 18th and 19th centuries.

2. METHODS

In this research entitled *The Study of Ethnic Bugis Power in the Sultanate of Aceh 1727-1903 AD*, the research method used is a historical approach utilising a qualitative research framework. This approach allows researchers to reconstruct historical events comprehensively based on the analysis of primary and secondary sources. The focus of the research was on the dynamics of ethnic Bugis power in the socio-political context of the Aceh Sultanate, which

required a method that could reveal the processes, patterns and interactions between various actors and factors that contributed to the formation of this historical reality.

A. Historical Approach

A historical approach was used to trace the development of Bugis ethnic involvement in the Aceh Sultanate's power structure. This approach includes several steps, namely (Dudung Abdurahman, 2011).

- 1) Heuristics: The process of collecting relevant historical sources, both primary and secondary. Primary sources include local manuscripts, colonial archives, official letters, travel records and administrative reports from the Aceh Sultanate period. These sources were obtained from libraries, national archives and private collections, such as Bugis manuscripts and Hikayat Aceh.
- 2) Source Criticism: Evaluation of the authenticity and credibility of sources is done through external criticism (examining the physical aspects of the sources) and internal criticism (analysing the content of the sources to ensure the relevance and accuracy of the data). For example, the research will compare information from Dutch colonial archives with local oral traditions and documents to gain a balanced perspective.
- 3) Interpretation: The data was analysed by linking the historical facts found in the sources, in order to map the relationship between the ethnic Bugis and the Aceh Sultanate during the research period.
- 4) Historiography: Systematic and critical presentation of the historical narrative to provide a coherent picture of the research theme.

B. Multidisciplinary Approach

To enrich the analysis, this research also uses a multidisciplinary approach by integrating the perspectives of sociology, anthropology and political science.

- 1) Historical Sociology: Used to understand the migration patterns of ethnic Bugis, their interactions with Acehnese society, and how they form social identities within the Acehnese cultural context.
- 2) Historical Anthropology: Helps to analyse the oral traditions and cultural aspects inherited by ethnic Bugis in Aceh, such as language use, customs, and adaptation strategies in a new environment.
- 3) Political Science: Provides a framework for understanding the power strategies pursued by Bugis elites, including their diplomacy, alliances and military role in the Aceh Sultanate.

C. Source Usage

The research sources consist of:

- 1) Primary Source (Al-Rahman, 1999): Dutch colonial archives (VOC and Dutch East Indies government), traditional manuscripts such as Hikayat Aceh and Bugis manuscripts (including Lontara), and official documents of the Sultanate of Aceh.

- 2) Secondary Sources: Relevant academic literature, including books, journal articles and dissertations that discuss the history of Aceh, Bugis migration and power dynamics in the archipelago.

D. Data Analysis

The data obtained was analysed descriptively-interpretatively. This research used data triangulation techniques to compare information from various sources, so as to minimise bias and ensure the accuracy of the research results. In the analysis, the researcher sought to uncover the motives, strategies and impact of Bugis ethnic involvement in the Sultanate of Aceh, both from a local and external perspective.

With this method, the research aims to produce a full and in-depth picture of how ethnic Bugis contributed to the dynamics of power in the Sultanate of Aceh, as well as how their role influenced the course of Aceh's history as a whole.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. History of Bugis Ethnic Arrival in Aceh

The arrival of ethnic Bugis to Aceh can be traced to the 17th century, (B. Andaya, 2010) when maritime trade routes in Southeast Asia were at their peak. South Sulawesi, the Bugis' homeland, has a strong maritime tradition. The Bugis are renowned as accomplished seafarers who are able to sail the vast seas in their *Pinisi* boats. This facilitated trade relations and cultural interactions with other regions, including Aceh, which at the time was known as the centre of Islamic power and the spice trade (Anwar, 2012). As a major Sultanate in the western region of the archipelago, the sultanate of Aceh held a strong attraction for Bugis migrants. Its strategic position on the Strait of Malacca made it an important node in the international trade network, linking the Malay world with global markets such as the Middle East, India and China (Hadi, 2010). For Bugis traders, Aceh was an ideal place to expand their economic influence. At first, their arrival was sporadic and limited to trading activities. Over time, however, more and more Bugis groups settled in Aceh, bringing with them their skills and expertise.

The main motivation behind Bugis migration to Aceh was not only economic, but was also fuelled by the factor of *siri'* (Nurnaningsih, 2015), due to the political and social dynamics in Bugis lands. In the 17th and 18th centuries, South Sulawesi became an arena for internal conflict involving Bugis kingdoms such as Bone, Wajo and Soppeng. War between kingdoms often fuelled instability, prompting many Bugis families to seek refuge and new opportunities outside Sulawesi (Nuraeni & Akramullah, 2024).

One of the key events that prompted massive migration was the fall of the Kingdom of Gowa in 1667 as a result of its defeat against the Dutch, who allied themselves with other Bugis kingdoms in the Treaty of Bongaya (Arif et al., 2021). This defeat created a wave of displacement among the Bugis people, especially for those who opposed Dutch colonial domination (Hasudungan, 2021). They sought new territories that could serve as a refuge while offering economic and political opportunities. Aceh, as a strong Islamic centre free from colonial influence at the time, became one of the main destinations.

Apart from political factors, economic aspects were also a major attraction. South Sulawesi, with its agricultural resources, was limited in providing large-scale trade commodities. Aceh, on the other hand, offered great opportunities through access to the trade in pepper, gold and other crops that were in high demand on the international market (Kamza et al., 2023). The presence of the Bugis community in Aceh strengthened the maritime trade network in the Strait of Malacca and helped them expand their trading influence to other regions, including Sumatra, the Malay Peninsula and Borneo (binti Anchong & bin Haji Mail, 2020).

Religious motivations cannot be ignored either. As devout Muslims, ethnic Bugis regard Aceh as a prestigious centre of Islamic scholarship (Fatianda & Badrun, 2022). Many Bugis came to study religion in Aceh, especially as the sultanate was known as one of the guardians of Islam in Southeast Asia. Moreover, this spiritual connection also strengthened the cultural closeness between the two groups, making integration easier.

The early integration of the Bugis community into Acehnese society reflects a remarkable adaptation strategy. The Bugis not only traded but also forged close relationships with local rulers and communities. Their expertise in trade, navigation and military strategy earned them the respect of the Acehnese nobility. In return for their contributions, many Bugis were given access to strategic positions in the Acehnese government and military (Manan & Arifin, 2019).

One important aspect of this integration was the ability of the Bugis to build alliances with Acehnese rulers. These alliances were often realised through political marriages, in which Bugis women married Acehnese nobles (Wajo, 2023). Such marriages not only strengthened social ties but also gave the Bugis community political legitimacy, allowing them to play a greater role in the power structure of the Aceh Sultanate.

On the economic side, the Bugis community became a key player in the pepper trade, a commodity that formed the backbone of Aceh's economy. With their expertise in building international trade networks, the Bugis helped Aceh expand its export markets (Usman, 2003) In addition, their presence in Aceh's strategic ports reinforced the sultanate's role as a centre of maritime trade in Southeast Asia. This role further strengthened the Bugis' position as indispensable partners of the Acehnese rulers.

Cultural integration was also an important factor in Bugis-Aceh relations. The Bugis quickly adopted local customs without compromising their own identity (Hadrawi, 2020) The Malay language, which was used as a lingua franca in Aceh, was adopted by the Bugis, while the Bugis language remained in use within their communities to maintain cultural heritage. On the other hand, they introduced Bugis values and traditions, such as respect for hierarchy and a hard work ethic, which were welcomed by the Acehnese.

This ability to adapt without losing their identity made the Bugis one of the most successful migrant communities in Aceh. In a short time, they not only became an integral part of Acehnese society but also played an important role in determining the direction of the Sultanate's political and economic policies.

B. Bugis Ethnic Influence in the Aceh Sultanate's Power Structure

The ethnic Bugis played a strategic role in the power structure of the Sultanate of Aceh from the early 18th century. They successfully utilised diplomatic, military and economic expertise to gain access to the core circles of power. These relationships were not merely transactional but developed into deep influence, with some members of the Bugis community even reaching the pinnacle of power as Sultans of Aceh (Akhmar et al., 2024).

History shows that the Bugis presence in Acehnese politics began with their appointment as advisors and administrators within the court. The Bugis' administrative skills meant that they were trusted to manage important areas of the Aceh Sultanate, particularly those related to trade and finance (Madjid, 2014). Many of them were given noble titles, emphasising the formal recognition of their contributions to government.

a) Bugis Contributions through Military Strategy

One significant contribution of the Bugis ethnic group was in the military. The Bugis were known as strong sailors and warriors, skills that were highly valued by the Sultanate of Aceh, especially during the colonial threat from the Dutch (Kamza et al., 2023). They played an important role in building Aceh's naval fleet, which became the Sultanate's main force in defending its territory.

Bugis warriors often commanded Aceh's warships in battles against the colonial fleet. Their clever naval warfare strategies, combined with renowned bravery, made them a crucial component in the defence of Aceh's sovereignty. Within the military structure of the Sultanate, Bugis were also often given the position of naval commander, demonstrating the level of trust placed in them by the Sultan.

b) Ethnic Bugis Descendants who Became Sultans of Aceh

The influence of the Bugis ethnicity in the power structure of the Sultanate of Aceh reached its peak when several Bugis descendants succeeded to the throne of the Sultanate. This process occurred as a result of close ties between Acehnese noble families and the Bugis community through political, economic and marriage alliances (Harun et al., 2013).

1. Sultan Alauddin Ahmad Syah (1727-1735)(Serambi, 2022)

Sultan Alauddin Mahmud Syah I was one of the Sultans of Aceh who came from Bugis lineage. He was known as a smart and decisive leader in facing internal political challenges as well as external threats from the Dutch. During his reign, Sultan Alauddin Mahmud Syah I worked hard to strengthen the Sultanate by reforming the administrative system and strengthening the fleet.

His most notable contribution was to strengthen the international trade relations of the Sultanate of Aceh. He ensured that the pepper trade route, the backbone of Aceh's economy, continued to run smoothly despite Dutch attempts to monopolise trade in the region. Sultan Alauddin is also known as a leader who strengthened Aceh's relations with other Islamic kingdoms in the archipelago, including the Sultanate of Johor and the Sultanate of Riau-Lingga.

2. Sultan Alauddin Johan Syah (1735-1760) (Official, 2022).

Sultan Alauddin Johan Syah continued the Bugis influence in the Sultanate of Aceh as the 24th Sultan. He ruled for more than two decades, a period that marked the consolidation of ethnic Bugis influence at court. Sultan Johan Syah was known as a visionary leader, who prioritised strengthening the economic sector and diplomacy. Under his leadership, Aceh strengthened trade relations with the Malay region and foreign traders. His reign also showcased Bugis expertise in maritime strategy and economic management, allowing Aceh to remain an important trading centre in Southeast Asia.

However, his reign also faced serious challenges, including internal conflict and increasing Dutch influence in the surrounding region. Sultan Johan Syah is known as a leader who endeavoured to maintain Aceh's independence amidst growing colonial pressure.

3. Sultan Muhammad Daud Syah (1874-1903) (Wikipedia, 2024).

Sultan Muhammad Daud Syah, the last Sultan of the Sultanate of Aceh, also had Bugis blood. He ascended the throne at a young age in the midst of a very difficult situation, namely when Aceh was fighting against the Dutch in the Aceh War (1873-1903) (Siahaan et al., 2021). Despite facing tremendous pressure, Sultan Muhammad Daud Syah showed courage and determination that inspired his people to continue fighting colonialism. Under his leadership, the guerrilla warfare strategy became the main way of defending Aceh's territory (Setiawan et al., 2023). Although the Sultanate eventually fell to the Dutch, the resistance under his command had a major impact on Indonesia's later national struggle.

C. The Contribution of Ethnic Bugis to the Government of the Sultan of Aceh

In addition to the Sultans who came from Bugis lineage, many other Bugis figures played important roles under the rule of the Sultans of Aceh. They often served as court advisors, royal treasurers and military commanders. As advisors, Bugis figures often liaised between the Sultanate of Aceh and the outside world, both in diplomacy and trade. On the economic front, the Bugis played a role in managing Aceh's strategic ports, such as Banda Aceh and ports in western Sumatra. They helped increase royal revenues through trade taxes and the management of natural resources such as pepper, gold and other forest products (Nurcahyani & Asnaini, 2019).

Many Bugis were appointed as regional chiefs or uleebalang, important positions in Aceh's power hierarchy (Baqi et al., 2022). This position allowed them to manage the territory autonomously but remained under the control of the Sultanate.

Acehnese sultans with Bugis blood were known for their pragmatic approach to governance (Rahmi, n.d.). They understood the importance of strategic alliances to maintain Aceh's sovereignty in the face of colonial threats.

Cultural influences are no less important (Hadi, 2010). The presence of the Bugis community in Aceh enriched the Sultanate's cultural heritage, particularly in the areas of language, art and maritime traditions (Mulyadi, 2016). The combination of Bugis and Acehnese values created a unique identity that continues to endure in Acehnese society to this day.

4. CONCLUSION

The arrival of ethnic Bugis to Aceh began in the 17th century, fuelled by their strong maritime traditions and the political and economic conditions in South Sulawesi. The Bugis were known as accomplished seafarers who were skilled in trade. Aceh, as the centre of Islamic power and the spice trade in the Strait of Malacca, became a strategic destination for Bugis migration. Ethnic Bugis played a very significant role in the power structure of the Aceh Sultanate. From being court advisors to occupying the throne of the Sultanate. While their contributions spanned political, economic and military aspects, Sultan Alauddin Mahmud Syah I and Sultan Muhammad Daud Syah brought a new vision to governance, focusing on diplomacy, trade and defence. These influences not only helped the Sultanate of Aceh survive for two centuries, but also left a legacy that continues to be felt today.

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Authors' contribution

The authors of the article were six people consisting of lecturers, students and collaborative lecturers across universities, with the following contributions: Susmihara and Abu Haif, contributed in responding and proofreading the article. Chaerul Mundzir Mochtar Lutfi contributed to the interpretation and editing of the article. Ahmad Siddiq Fakhruddin contributed in the editor. Muhammad Husni contributed to the heuristic process. And Muhammad Arif as the first author contributed to the process of analysis, criticism, interpretation and historiography of this article.

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