

Religious and Economic Contributions of Sayyid Hadhrami in Palembang During the 18th – 21st Centuries

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Abstract

As the oldest cosmopolitan city in Indonesia, Palembang has a diverse range of ethnic groups that interact on political, economic, and religious levels. Among these groups, the Sayyid Hadhrami community, descendants of the Prophet Muhammad who came from Hadramawt, South Yemen, actively preached Islam and engaged in trade in Palembang from the mid-18th century. While numerous studies have explored the Sayyid Hadrami's activities on the island of Java, few have focused on their role in Palembang. This article examines the political, economic, and religious of Sayyid Hadhrami in Palembang from the 18th to the 21st centuries. The study employs qualitative research using a historical approach. This study found that during the 18th – 19th centuries, the Sayyid Hadhrami served as clerics for Palembang propagators of Islam and intermediaries of Indian Ocean trade. Following the collapse of the Palembang sultanate in the 20th - 21st centuries, the Hadhrami community established their own religious regime. Central to their identity is their role in propagating Islam and their affiliation with the Tarekat Alawiyah, a Sufi Order originating from the Hadhrami Sayyids. Religious traditions in the Tarekat Alawiyah include Ziarah, Mawlid, and Haul. The Sayyid Hadhrami in Palembang Successfully transformed trade capital into religious capital to maintain their religious authority.

Keywords: Political Economy, Religious, Sayyid, Hadhrami, Palembang

Abstrak

Sebagai kota kosmopolitan tertua di Indonesia, Palembang memiliki beragam kelompok etnis yang berinteraksi dalam bidang politik, ekonomi, dan agama. Di antara kelompok-kelompok tersebut, komunitas Sayyid Hadhrami, keturunan Nabi Muhammad yang berasal dari Hadramawt, Yaman Selatan, secara aktif mendakwahkan Islam dan melakukan perdagangan di Palembang sejak pertengahan abad ke-18. Meskipun banyak penelitian telah mengeksplorasi kegiatan Sayyid Hadrami di pulau Jawa, hanya sedikit yang berfokus pada peran mereka di Palembang. Artikel ini mengkaji politik, ekonomi, dan keagamaan Sayyid Hadhrami di Palembang dari abad ke 19 hingga abad ke-21. Penelitian ini menggunakan penelitian kualitatif dengan menggunakan pendekatan sejarah. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa selama abad ke-18 hingga 19, Sayyid Hadhrami berperan sebagai ulama penyebar agama Islam di Palembang dan perantara perdagangan Samudra Hindia. Setelah runtuhnya kesultanan Palembang pada abad ke-20 dan 21, komunitas Hadhrami mendirikan rezim keagamaan mereka sendiri. Inti dari identitas mereka adalah peran mereka dalam menyebarkan agama Islam dan afiliasi mereka dengan Tarekat Alawiyah, sebuah tarekat sufi yang berasal dari Sayyid Hadhrami. Tradisi keagamaan dalam Tarekat Alawiyah meliputi Ziarah, Maulid, dan Haul. Para Sayyid Hadhrami di Palembang berhasil mengubah modal perdagangan menjadi modal keagamaan untuk mempertahankan otoritas keagamaan mereka.

Kata Kunci: *Politik ekonomi, Keagamaan, Sayyid, Hadhrami, Palembang*

Introduction

The famous Chinese traveller, I-Tsing, first reported the presence of Muslims from the Middle East in the archipelago during the Srivijaya period in 671 AD. He boarded Arab and Persian ships from Canton that were anchored to the Sribhoga or Sribuza estuary port. Modern scholars have identified Sribuza, also known as Palembang, as the capital of the Srivijaya kingdom (Azra, 1989). Arab traders began conducting business in Palembang during the Srivijaya empire, although their stay were brief, as trade was their primary purpose (Zakharov, 2023).

From the 12th to 15th centuries, Arab Sayyid colonists settled in several coastal port cities in India, such as Gujarat, Malabar, Bijapur, and Surat, before spreading from India to Southeast Asia, particularly Malaysia and Indonesia (Ramli et al., 2014). The first wave of Arab migration to the region likely occurred in the sixteenth century (Serjeant, 1957).

Evidence from the 17th-century Dutch map indicated that, Arab settlers had already established separate communities in Palembang, specifically in area now known as Patrajaya or Bagus Sekuning Cemetery. This map shows the Arab and Chinese community settlements in Palembang in the 17th century, located opposite the Palembang Royal Palace. Historical data reveals, Ulama accompanied the grave of the first Sultan of Palembang, Sultan Abdurrahman Kiemas Hindi (1659-1704), is a Sayyid named Sayyid Mustafa Assegaf (Purwanti, 2016).



Figure 1: **De stad Palembang met haar 3 forten**, Johan Nieuwhof, 1682
Source: <https://am.adlibhosting.com/amonline/Details/museum/103909>

The Sayyids stopped in Aceh, before making Palembang their destination. The success of Sultan Mahmud Badarudin Jayo Wikramo (1724-1757) in mastering the pepper and tin trade in the Malay Peninsula, attracted the attention of Sayyid Hadhrami. The title of Sayyids signifies their descent from the Prophet Muhammad (Morimoto, 2012). Their ability to trade within international networks extended to the Indian Ocean. In regions like Siak, they have a wielded significant influence, comparable to Bugis in Johor (Wade, 2019). The tin trade from Palembang naturally draw their attention. Consequently, Palembang developed as a center of Islamic learning in the 18th century, alongside Aceh and Pattani (Ricklefs, 2008).

The Hadhrami diaspora aligns with long-established political and economic networks, as well as religious networks based on Shafii schools and Sufi practices. Early Hadramaut migrant groups were both traders and Islamic scholars, mostly from *Sadah* groups (plural of sayyid), forming a trade and religious diaspora (Manger, 2010). This present study aims to further explore the retrospect of the Sayyids' trade activities and the spread of Islam within the Palembang political system from the 18th to the 21st centuries.

Literature Review

The trading expertise of the Hadhrami Arabs with the outside world was inherited from the Sabas who lived in Yemen in the centuries 1000-750 BC. The Hadramaut people had long mastered shipping and trade in the Indian Ocean before the emergence of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula (Arai, 2017). The Proximity of Aden's port to the coast, facilitated frequent visit to Chinese ports through the Strait of Melaka

for trade. During this period, they also visited the islands around the Malay Archipelago, such as Mul Jawa (Java), Sribuza (Srivijaya), Kalah (Kedah), Panhang (Pahang), Jambi, Palembang and Tiyuman (Tioman) (Al-Attas, 1996).

The Hadhrami Arabs' mastery in international supported by their cultural identity and daily practices in Hadhramaut. Historians have reported that each social class in Hadramaut possessed distinct business skills (Alkatiri & Hayaze, 2022)Click or tap here to enter text.Their trade activities spanned the East Coast of Africa, the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, India, and the southern coast of Arabia, particularly the ports of Maskat, Zafar, and Aden. Key traded commodities included wheat, honey, dates, and indigo-dyed textiles, with dates being the most significant export (Fauzi, 2012).

As religious missionaries and merchants, the Sayyid Hadhrami combined their ethics and piety with profitable trade. Their involvement in publishing religious books is an example of how they merged commercial interests with religious proselytizing (Arai, 2004). Similarly, investing trading profits into libraries elevated their status and demonstrated their commitment to learning. This dual role extended their influence from religious status and genealogy to a broader moral community (Manger, 2010). The Sayyids emphasized ritual observance and often built houses of worship in their territories, converting trade profits into religious capital through endowments (Peeters, 1997).

The Islamic legal system allows Muslims to give away part of their property as Waqf, which provides a means for Muslims to support various charitable activities, thus converting capital that would

typically go to the market sector into moral capital that can retain traders as moral human beings. By facilitating this process, Waqf became a critical mechanism for maintaining the religious hegemonic position of the Sayyids (Hamoudi, 2020). This allowed them to combine their involvement in trade with da'wah activities, which helped strengthen the position of the Tarekat Alawiyah. Waqf has played an essential role in the economic development of Hadhrami. However, its importance is more than a direct economic institution; it is a mechanism that facilitates the relationship between the market sphere and the moral sphere, raising the issue of Hadhrami's understanding of morality in the economic sphere. Such Waqf can fund schools and thus facilitate the journey towards education, which is essential for the Sayyids (Manger, 2010).

The process of Islamization, driven by trading capital, was not limited to villages, which Arabs socially and economically controlled (Bodi, 2018). With the addition of Sayyid status, other social groups became interested in this prestigious cultural pattern. Especially for the wealthy people of Palembang, the Arabs became an example of good observance of the Islamic religious ritual code. Social prestige can primarily be expressed through the protection of religion, which often takes the form of violent development (Faiza, 2023). Unfortunately, not much is known about the construction of Waqf in Palembang during the 19th century. Still, as a result of this development, at the beginning of the 20th century, there were 32 waqfs on the Ilir side and 36 waqfs on the Ulu side of the city (Peeters, 1997).

Through their economic prowess, the Sayyids established a strong presence in the Malay society of Nusantara. However, this should

not be seen as a limitation on their influence in Islamization (Abdul Hamid & Hassan Mydin, 2021). On the contrary, their role as merchants was pivotal in the religious domain. Their influence as merchants and religious authorities was deeply intertwined. The authority they held in the religious domain was often used to further their trade. Thus, many Arabs in the Malay world effectively juggled two roles: one as merchants in the realm of commerce and the other as influential figures in religious affairs. The presence of Arab immigrants in the Malay world was widely accepted by the natives, who saw them as religious authorities (Riddell, 2001).

The process of rural Islamization was based was not the resistance of the *santri* (Geertz's term) to the dominant *priayi* culture but the imitation of the wealthy elite. By its very nature, this process reflects a series of social and religious hierarchies that culminate in the city and end in the economic support areas of large port cities. The artificial isolation that Benda revealed about rural Islam consciously wants to reverse by starting a statement from the centre of the modern Islamization process, namely the large port city in the archipelago (Peeters, 1997). One of the most striking phenomena of the 19th century and whose cultural implications have hardly been explored by historians is the size of the Hadramaut commercial fleet that is conspicuous in significant port cities, especially Singapore, Palembang, Surabaya, Gresik and Semarang (Alatas et al., 2022). However, it would be wrong to portray this as a one-sided process based on blind imitation. Palembang nobles also played an active role in the Islamization process. Historically, there was a close social bond between the Sayyids and the Priayi, based on familial relationships and daily interactions (Maulana, 2022).

In the 19th century, capital formation was almost identical to the ownership of merchant ships. After the collapse of the sultanate, Palembang became the geographical center of the Islamization process (Subchi, 2019). The wealthy Sayyids held prominent roles as merchants and business people, creating a finely woven network of endowments covering the entire city.

Over the past two decades, many scientific writings have been produced about the Sayyid Hadrami in Southeast Asia. However, the discourse and scientific writings about Sayyid and Islam in Palembang tend to be marginalized in the trend of Islamic studies in Indonesia. This article addresses academic concerns about the political, economic and religious roles of the Sayyid Hadhrami in Palembang from the 18th to 21st centuries.

Method

The study employs historical fragmentation through a narrative connected to research data related to the Sayyid Hadhrami in Palembang. Each historical moment is presented in a general overview and then analyzed through a historical lens. Manuscripts and other unpublished documents are utilized, with the standard edition method applied to study Jawi script texts (Sunliensyar, 2020). The period from the 18th to the 21st centuries has seen prominent figures like Sayyid Hadhrami, whose activities influenced the socio-political, religious and economic contexts of Palembang.

The methodologies employed in this research include archival research, which clarifies Sayyid Hadhrami's status and activities in Palembang. Governmental papers, treaties, correspondence related to

colonial rule, and other documents from archives and libraries provide insights into the politics of the time. Archival research involves searching for reports in libraries and archives that house regional collections on Southeast Asian history. These manuscripts are valuable sources that contain stories, views, and activities of past societies and cultures, offering context about the environment in which they were created. Sayyid Hadhrami is recognized as a key figure in the socio-religious life of Palembang, illustrating the convergence of political power, economic progress, and religion during a period of change in Indonesian history. By studying traditional manuscripts related to Hadhrami, scholars can understand the political and economic order and the religious factors that shaped the community.

In addition to archival documents, interviews with descendants and community representatives are crucial for understanding Sayyid Hadhrami's legacy. Interviews with local historians, religious figures, and Hadhrami families help piece together his life story and local impact. Analyzing Hadhrami's broader impact on local livelihoods involves examining internal changes through time series models of trade and agricultural output. Trends or changes in population structure or religious adherence can be identified using census information.

Secondary sources, including journal articles and books, are also consulted and integrated into the narratives. These sources provide interpretations of Hadhrami's life and works, allowing scholars to situate their research within the broader context of Indonesian history. Interdisciplinary approaches further enhance research findings. Political scientists, economists, and scholars of religious studies

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contribute to understanding Sayyid Hadhrami's legacy from various perspectives, broadening the scope of analysis and aiding in data collection and integration.

Results and Discussion

a. Economic and Religious Construction

Trade capitalism flourished in Islamic civilization from its inception until its decline, even beginning in pre-Islamic Arabia. Throughout the long history of Islamic civilization, it is not an exaggeration to describe this as trade plus capitalism, characterized by economic, ethical and state justice. This concept is referred to as “religious capitalism” in this paper (Sastrodiharjo & Suraji, 2021). In examining the formation of the economic structure of society, the relationship between the city of worship and its level of prosperity is straightforward. At that time, God was considered a significant contributor to economic growth. Places of worship were expected to provide assurance and protection for honest business practices. Equally important, the role of the city as a place of worship also facilitated the development of international trade. What Silver presents remains relevant today, long after ancient times (Muhammad, 2017).

In De Jonge's study of tobacco in Madura, he analyzed the relationship between the commercialization of agriculture and the institutionalization of religion. De Jonge concludes that these two developments influenced and strengthened each other. As merchants invested their profits in religious institutions, knowledge of Islam and religious experience increased as a side effect of agricultural

commercialization. Wealthy merchants, along with religious leaders under their patronage, led the religious communities in their territories (Peeters, 1997).

The emergence of Palembang in the 18th century as the center of Islamic culture is significantly linked to the growth of the Arab community and its role in facilitating increased contact between South Sumatra and the Middle East. The growth of Arab immigration, especially Hadhrami, was stimulated by the protection offered by Palembang's rulers. Attracted by these measures, Muslim scholars migrated to the banks of the Musi River, where they assumed a strategic place in the local economy and religious hierarchy (Andaya, 1993).

During the 18th century, Hadhrami influence increased, led by adventurers, *sayyids* (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad), migrants and merchant scholars (Ho, 2006). They supported Rum-oriented courts in Aceh, Palembang, Perak, Siak, Jambi and southwest Kalimantan, especially Pontianak, due to expanding Dutch commercial activity. These interactions extended to the Hejaz and often to Istanbul, Damascus and Cairo. *Sayyids* led *ṭarīqah* networks in trans-regional networks, which connected mosques, madrassas (Islamic schools) and waqf (charitable donations) in urban centres (Alatas, 1999).

The Hadhrami generously funded these points of Muslim interaction and were powerful conduits for the spread of religious polemics, such as those by 'Abd al-Samad al-Palimbani (1719–89) (Kathirithamby-Wells, 2012). Sayyid 'Abd al-Samad b. 'Abd Rahman al-Jawi, also known as al-Palimbani, was born in the

economically prosperous Arab area of Palembang. He was a *muqallid*, a mixed descent and born locally. Al-Palimbani's father, Sayyid ‘Abd al-Jalil b. Sheikh ‘Abd al-Wahhab came from Sana'a, Yemen, and was likely one of many Hadhrami people who migrated through Aden. Al-Palimbani was known for being one of the most vocal anti-Dutch pan-Islamic polemicists of his time (Azra, 2004).

The *Hikayat Palembang manuscript*, Cod.Or.2276C (Mastung, 1831), which is set in the Sultanate of Palembang in the 19th century A.D., tells of a figure named Sayyid Zen Bafakih, who informed the Sultanate of Palembang that the Dutch had lost the war to the British. This event provided an opportunity for Palembang to break away from the Dutch influence at that time.

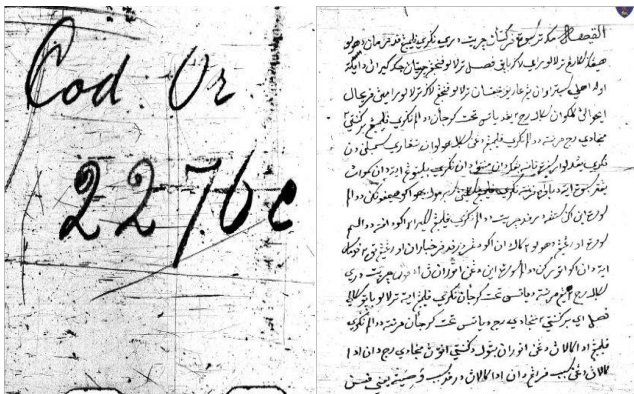


Figure 2. Hikayat Palembang Manuscript, Cod.Or.2276c

A manuscript entitled *Syair Perang Menteng* (Rasip, 1819) tells the chronology of the war and victory of the Palembang side under the leadership of Sultan Mahmud Badarudin II against the Dutch led by Herman Warner Muntinghe in 1819. Several verses in this manuscript describe several heroic figures from among the Sayyids who participated in the jihad against the Dutch. It was mentioned

that Sayyid Zen, who was an artillery expert, was burned to death due to the explosion of cannon gunpowder. Sayyid Husin, Sayyid Agil bin Muhammad, and Sayyid Ahmad bin Ali, who were artillery experts, were also mentioned.

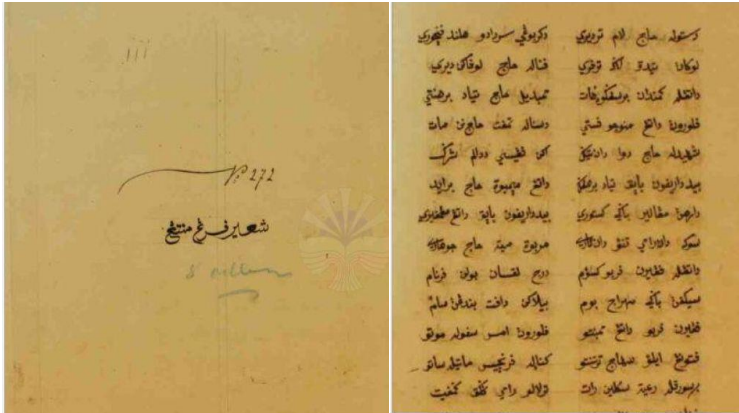


Figure 3. Syair Perang Menteng Manuscript.

Ulama from the Sayyid circle received extraordinary respect from the ruling Sultans of Palembang. To elevate the status of the ulama, the Sultan created a bureaucratic system by assigning them political positions and leadership roles. The head of this system was a cleric called *Penghulu Natagama*, responsible for overseeing religious affairs. The harmonious relationship between the Sultanate of Palembang and Muslim scholars was so profound that, upon their deaths, the ulama were buried alongside the Sultan as a tribute from the government and the people. In sultanate cemeteries, the tombs of ulama or Imam Sultan are always placed at the westernmost end of the row with the Sultan (Mujib, 1997).

Archaeological data indicate that all Imam Sultan were ulama from the Sayyid lineage. For instance, Sultan Abdurrahman Kiai Mas Endi bin Pangeran Sedo Ing Pasarean (1659-1706) was associated

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with Imam Sultan Sayyid Mustafa bin Ahmad Assegaf. Similarly, Sultan Mansyur Jayo Ing Lago bin Sultan Abdurrahman (1706-1714) was associated with Imam Sultan named Sayyid Ali bin Agil Almusawa. Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin Jayo Wikramo bin Sultan Muhammad Mansyur (1724-1758) was associated with Imam Sultan named Sayyid Idrus bin Abdullah Al-Idrus. Prince Ratu Kamuk Raden Gemuk Belati (1755) bin Sultan Mahmud Badarudin Jayo Wikramo was associated with the Imam Sultan Sayyid Muhammad bin Yusuf Al Anggawi. Sultan Ahmad Najamuddin Adi Kesumo (1758-1776) was associated with the Imam Sultan Sayyid Abdurrahman bin Husin Al-Idrus. Sultan Muhammad Bahauddin (1776-1803), Imam Sultan named Sayyid Muhammad bin Ali Al-Haddad, was titled Datuk Mughni. Almost all the sultans of Palembang appointed Imam Sultan from among the Sayyids (Purwanti, 2004).

Apart from their political and religious roles, Hadrami Sayyids also played a significant part in the economic sector of 18th-century Palembang. Although they accounted for just 2% of trade commodities in Javanese ports from 1774 to 1777, they operated large ships and traveled longer distances than their competitors, except the Dutch East India Company (Riddell, 1997). From the mid-1750s, the Hadrami specialized in sailing from Java to Palembang and Melaka on both sides of the Strait of Malacca. The average size of ships owned by the Hadrami Arabs was over 50 tons, with some being much larger. Hadrami captains residing in Java mainly lived in central and eastern parts of the North Coast, particularly in Semarang, Pekalongan, Gresik, and Surabaya (Knaap, 1996).

The Sayyids were the largest merchant ship owners in the 18th-century trade network until the last quarter of the 19th century, centered in Gresik, Semarang, Pekalongan, Surabaya, and Palembang. They operated the most prominent private ships, covering extensive distances. Their success was due to their expertise in gathering information on natural resources, trade, medicine, and shipbuilding. This commercial route also served as a conduit for religious ideas through markets, mosques, and madrasas (Wahyudi & Suaedy, 2022). They generated trust among fellow Muslim traders and played significant roles in processing forest products for trade with China and Minangkabau for gold, tin, gambier and coffee (Kathirithamby-Wells, 2009).

The trading and shipping system also sustained the kinship structure between the Hadramaut Sayyids and local rulers. By the mid-18th century, trade between localities in the archipelago had reached considerable levels, even as the V.O.C. was nearing bankruptcy. The Hadhrami community played an essential role in the provision of shipping services, which formed an essential pillar in their economic activity until the decade of the 1870s (Abushouk & Ibrahim, 2009).

This policy improved the position of Hadhrami shipowners above their competitors. In 1820, Sayyid Umar bin 'Ali, a Hadrami *sayyid* in Palembang, partnered with his uncle Sayyid Muhammad bin Harun al-Junayd in Singapore, building a large business (Buckley, 1902). By 1850, the Hadhrami community owned over 50% of the ships registered with the government, with ship weights ranging from 150 to 500 tons. These ships connected colonial ports with other regions, and Hadramaut Sayyid shipowners received fiscal exemptions as a form of respect for their lineage. However, the

golden age of Hadhrami shipping activity had to end in 1888 when the colonial government sought to eliminate competitors in shipping services, and leading to the near-monopoly of KPM (Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij) (Alatas, 2010).

After the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, steamboat travel became widespread and faster than traditional boats, facilitating more efficient and quicker movement of ships and immigrants. This increased the Arab diaspora to foreign lands in India, Africa, and Southeast Asia, including Malaya (Riddell, 1997). Despite this, long-distance inter-island trade remained primarily in the hands of Hadramawt shipowners. These traders sold Palembang products and brought goods with a good market in Palembang. They also bought supplies from other Arab ships that stopped at Palembang. Initially, trade was aimed at Java, with Palembang as the base port. The Arabs maintained links with major ports on the north coast of Java, such as Batavia, Cirebon, Pekalongan, Gresik, and Surabaya, importing textiles and ironware made in Java (Ramli et al., 2014).

In Pekalongan, Arab traders from Palembang purchased materials from the thriving batik industry, which flourished under the leadership of Arab entrepreneurs. The Arab trading networks extended beyond Java. After the establishment of Singapore in 1819, there was intensive shipping traffic (De Jonge, 2022). This new business center in Singapore played a significant role in international trade. From this port, the Hadramaut trade network reached China in the east, and India, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea in the west (Peeters, 1997).

The transfer of power significantly disrupted the economic development of the Arab colonies. During the early years of colonial rule, Hadramaut merchants' share in the Palembang commercial fleet was still small. In the 1830s, the almanack of the Dutch East Indies Government recorded only three Arab ship owners in the port of Palembang. However, with the establishment of Pax Neerlandica after 1840, the number of Arab shipowners increased, along with their share in the entire commercial fleet in Palembang. The period between 1840 and 1880 was an age of great prosperity for the Hadramaut colony in Palembang. In the mid-19th century, Pangeran Syarif Ali bin Abubakar bin Saleh from the Syechbubakar clan was the most prosperous ship owner (Gibson, 1856). His father, originally from Hadramaut, settled in Palembang and married a woman of noble descent. The family's prominence rose rapidly in 1833 when Pangeran Syarif Ali was appointed the chief leader of the Arabs by the colonial rulers.

During the 19th century, there was a significant increase in the number of Arabic ships owned by the Hadhrami people based on Indonesia's outer Islands. Palembang, located in South Sumatra, was an essential centre for this trade. The ships, typically between 200 and 600 tons, included barks, brigs, and schooners (Weismann, 2012). The schooner ship belonging to the Sayyids in Palembang sailed the seas in the archipelago and the Indian Ocean, to commercial ports throughout the archipelago, even to the Philippines, Cambodia, China and also to the west towards Sri Lanka, Oman, Yemen, the Persian Gulf. They were also transporting pilgrims to Jeddah. This ship weighs between 400-500 *koyan*, or about 800-1000 tons.

The following names are merchant ships belonged to Sayyids in Palembang in the 19th century. The *Nurul Asyiqin* ship owned by Sayyid Ahmad bin Ali Syihabudin, the *Thoif* ship owned by Sayyid Abdurrahman bin Abdullah Alkaf. The *Qatmir* ship belonged to Sayyid Alwi bin Ahmad bin Abubakar Alkaf. *Yusrain* ship owned by Sayyid Alwi Alkaf Yusren, *Jayyidul Bari* ship owned by Sayyid Idrus bin Ahmad bin Abdullah Almadihij, the *An Nur* ship owned by Sayyid Abdurrahman bin Ahmad Almunawar.

Sayyid Hamid bin Alwi Alkaf owned the *Almaas* ship. Sayyid Ali bin Usman Baraqbah owned the *Fathul Mubarak* ship. The *Athiyatul Rohman* ship was owned by Sayyid Abdullah bin Salim Alkaf. The *AlFakhr* ship was owned by Sayyid Abdullah bin Abubakar Assegaf Alfakhr. The *Kasbul Khair* ship was owned by Sayyid Ahmad bin Syihabudin. Sayyid Alwi bin Syeh bin Syihabudin owned the *Al Yusr* ship. Sayyid Ahmad bin Husein Jamalulail owned the *Fathur Rozzaq* ship. Sayyid Muhammad bin Abdurrahman bin Segaf Ashofi owned the *Hud Hud* ship. The *Al Jelani* ship was owned by Sayyid Muhammad bin Ali bin Syehbubakar. The *Amanatul Rohman* ship was owned by Sayyid Ali bin Ahmad Alkaf. The *Nur Hasyim* ship was owned by Sayyid Husein bin Muhammad Shihabudin. Sayyid Ahmad bin Usman Baraqbah owned the *Maimun* ship. Muhammad bin Ali Al Musawa owned the *Athiyyatul Maula* ship (Syehbubakar, 1981).

One of the most prominent Hadhrami shipowners in Palembang was Sayyid Ali bin Abu Bakar bin Shaykh Abu Bakr bin Sālim, an Arab captain who lived from 1833 until 1878. His family owned nearly half of the Arab merchant ships docked in the port in 1850. Although the trade initially went through Java, it shifted to Singapore after

1819. In the 1810s, Sultan Al-Qādrī of Pontianak, West Kalimantan, owned a brig and other merchant ships. In eastern Indonesia, the Hadhrami sailing vessel was centred in Ternate, Ambon, and Banda and was closely linked to Surabaya (Gervase Clarence-Smith, 1997). Using his good relations with the Dutch, Syarif Ali Syehbubakar managed to build a trade network that extended deep into the interior of Palembang. At the same time, Pangeran Syarif Ali rapidly expanded his merchant fleet in the port of Palembang, so that by the mid-19th century, half of the entire Arab trading fleet belonged to his family. The excellent relationship between Pangeran Syarif Ali Syehbubakar and the Dutch East Indies was evident in a trade letter in 1848 to A.H.W De Kock, the Besuki Resident and Bali Commissioner, in which Pangeran Syarif Ali requested the routine shipment of 200 koyan of wood to Palembang (Hazmirullah & Yani, 2021).

However, this dominant position was threatened again in the 1860s. Pangeran Syarif Ali remained in control of most of the trade in Palembang Port until his death in the 1870s. Besides Syechbubakar, other shipowners and clans such as Alkaf, Barakbah, Assegaf, bin Shihab, Almunawar, and Alhabsyi typically owned one or two ships. Overall, the Hadramaut trading community in Palembang in the mid-19th century consisted of 20 large merchants and nearly 150 medium traders (Peeters, 1997).



Figure 4. Pangeran Syarif Ali bin Syehbubakar (private collection)

With a commercial fleet consisting of barks, two-masted sailing ships, and schooners, Hadramaut merchants managed to master the import and export trade in the port of Palembang. Rapid economic growth also influenced the size of the Arab colony in Palembang, which, until the mid-19th century still attracted new migrants. As a result of expansion in 1885, the Hadramaut community in Palembang, numbering more than 2,000 people, became the most significant Arab colony in the Dutch East Indies after Aceh (Peeters, 1997).

After Pangeran Sharif Ali died in 1879, Pangeran Bakri ceased to be an Arab chief aide. However, there was an unfortunate event for the Sayyids in Palembang; there was one of the Sayyids involved, but the entire Palembang Arab community was exposed to adverse actions in his trade and shipping business. The person in question was Raden Syarif Abdullah bin Umar As-Seggaf, along with three grandsons of Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin, namely Raden Zainal Abidin, Raden Mat Aji, Raden Tating alias Abdulrahman, son of

Raden Muhamad Hanafiah and Raden Emuk Abdassamad bin Raden Acim bin Pangeran H. Krama Nandita.

Raden Syarif Abdullah bin Umar As-Seggaf, son of Habib Umar As-Seggaf, Advisor to Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II, and his son-in-law from marriage with the Sultan's daughter, R.A. Asima. Raden Sharif Abdullah was sent to study in Hadhramaut and several places in the Middle East and eventually participated in Turkish military training. Upon his return from the Middle East, Abdullah lived in Singapore; his wife was Sharifah from Malacca. Raden Syarif Abdullah, who has a relationship with Sayyid Juned Al-Junaid, the Turkish Consul in Singapore, is none other than the brother-in-law of Raden Syarif Abdullah. The nobility, which planned the fasting month uprising in 1881, hoped for Turkish help. However, this plan was known to the Dutch Resident through his employees, namely Raden Muhammad Ali. Consequently, all rebel leaders were arrested (Peeters, 1997). This incident was considered very dangerous and was a turning point in the colonial Government's belief in the image of Islam. The capital city of Palembang was considered a hotbed of militant Hajj crimes, and Arabs of Hadramaut origin in Palembang were great enemies. This image change was mainly reflected in the attitude towards the Hadramaut community in Palembang. The arrest of Sharif Abdullah Assegaf was seen as evidence of Sayyids' involvement in pan-Islamist propaganda.

b. Economic Revival and Religious Fervor

The political-economic activities of the Sayyid Hadrami businessmen were closely monitored by Snouck Hurgronje. This group of Hadrami businessmen, based in Batavia, had extensive

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commercial networks in Surabaya, Palembang, Singapore, and several major cities in the Dutch East Indies. Hurgronje even suspected the Arab Hadrami of being the main actors behind anonymous correspondence with Pan-Islamic groups (Benda, 1967). The decline of the Hadramaut merchant fleet in the 1880s was partly triggered by the colonial rulers' suspicion of the Sayyids in Palembang, particularly following the incident involving Syarif Abdullah Assegaf. The colonial rulers prohibited Arabs from settling in the interior, preventing Hadramaut wholesalers from participating in the rapidly growing crop trade at the end of the 19th century.

After the rebellion of 1881, Sayyid traders were forbidden to trade in the hinterland; this meant opportunities to trade forest products, such as rubber, coffee, and tea, with plantation products that began to harvest were closed. Rice, Coffee, Tea, and Rubber trade was freed up for Chinese traders (Peeters, 1997). The last obstacle was the Dutch Government's intervention in the commercial shipping business; faced with this, Sayyid Abdurrahman Syehbubakar, who had a broad view of the commercial business, sought a way out to maintain his company. With the increasing volume of trade in plantation products in the interior and the centralization of trade in Palembang, the Dutch Government moved the market from Sekanak to Ilir. For this, several shop blocks were built, and their construction was handed over to the private sector on an investment basis (Syehbubakar, 1981).

Many Palembang Sayyid traders invested their capital in the ownership of this business. Henceforth, what remains of the Sayyids' treasures are mainly implanted in immovable objects. Economic

growth at the end of the 19th century resulted in increased pressure on living space in the city of Palembang. To create enough space in the rapidly growing trade sector, in 1871, a giant pier was built on the banks of the river Kampung 16 Ilir, and the surrounding land was distributed to build a stone market Village. Pasar 16 Ilir was mainly built with the capital of Arab business people, who leased these shops to small traders in Palembang. Due to their essential share in the market sector, the Sayyids, through colonial trading companies in Java, became agents of various imported goods, which were traded to intermediaries in the countryside. Besides, most of the textile trade was controlled by Sayyid Palembang who bought batik, and Hadramaut entrepreneurs in Pekalongan.

Most of the trade in Palembang in the 19th century was still controlled by Pangeran Syarif Ali Syekhbabakar and his family. However, the economic dominance of Alawiyyin was also severely threatened by shipping companies from Batavia and Singapore, which soon expanded their activities to Palembang. Since 1879, Palembang was connected with Batavia and Singapore via ships owned by the *Nederlandse Stoomvaart Maatschappij* twice a month, while from Singapore once a month also departed three ships to Palembang. In the same year, Palembang was also connected to the port of Semarang via Cirebon and Batavia (Peeters, 1997).

Excessive capacity since the 80s led to deadly competition in Palembang port. Owners of sailing ships with small capital can only survive short against fireship sharing. In 1884, only the Assegaf and Almunawar partners could operate small steamboats on the route between Bangka and Palembang. After 1890, the commercial fleet

of the Sayyids suffered losses, and then shipping was stopped in the first decade of the 20th century.

After this shipping business suffered a setback, some Sayyid families in Palembang sought a way out. In 1884, Firma As-Seggaf and Al-Munawwar bought a miniature railway for the Palembang-Bangka route, but this business is not growing. The As-Seggaf and Al-Munawwar families also worked on sawmills to market to Java and Singapore. Sayyid Abdurrahman Mahmud and bin Muhammad, bin Pangeran Syarif Ali, founded the Firma S.A. Shebubakar & Co., importing Wheat and Canned Milk from Australia and Cement, Iron, Concrete, and Nails from Japan. Some Alawi businessmen invested in building rented houses and shops in 16 Ilir to earn high rents. Some continue to survive in the batik and textile trade as before (Syehbubakar, 1981).

Sayyid Abdurrahman bin Syehbubakar also invested his capital and owned several houses for rent. Sayyid Abdurrahman also felt the need to adjust the trading system then. In 1918, with his family, Sayyid Abdurrahman founded a form of Legal Entity company, the Firma S.A. Shebubakar & Co., with the help of his two sons, Alwi and Muhsin, who had attended Dutch education. The firm imports cement, iron, concrete, and nails from Japan and Australia, as well as wheat flour and canned condensed milk under its company, Fa. S.A. Shebubakar & Co. on the packaging. With this label, the people of Palembang gave him the title Habib Abdurrahman, a wheat merchant. After the Japanese colonial period and the miserable revolutionary war in the early 1950s, its trading business with Australia was reopened. Still, it did not last long due to conflicts with applicable regulations (Syehbubakar, 1981).

According to Dutch sources, the first sawmill belonged to Sayyid Alwi Almunawar, who had 200 boards a day production capacity. In contrast, the others belonged to Masagus Abumanar and Usman Abdulhamid, each with a capacity of 250 boards. However, the largest panglong (sawmill) at the beginning of the 20th century belonged to the Almunawar and Assegaf families. This new sawmill, located in Musi Iilir, 150 km from the estuary, was driven by a 50 pk motor that produced 700 boards a day with a volume of 28 cubic meters (Peeters, 1997). The wealthy Sayyid families of the 1920s were the Almunawar and Assegaf families, with business assets above 1 million guilders. Their businesses consisted of wood mills, rice mills, and rubber smokehouses. At that time, the center of trade in Palembang was the 16 Iilir market, which merchants from the Arab and Chinese groups controlled. These merchants had little capital and chose a small hill market in the Kampung of 26 Iilir.

During the early 20th century, the Hadhrami merchants thrived in the Javanese ports. In Palembang, companies focused on external trade and urban enterprises due to Dutch political advances and restrictions on Arab access to the interior, which had previously been their key to success (Slama, 2011). Sayyid Alwi Sheikh Alsagaff, in partnership with Almunawar, is shipping timber to the Middle East and West. At the same time, Syeik Syihab Architects invests diversely in the rice and rubber industry, ice making, and construction businesses. In Singapore, the wealthy Hadhrami merchants outperform their Chinese counterparts in political influence, making the increasing urban orientation of Hadhrami's economic activities and associated maritime and international connections essential for Southeast Asia's relations with the wider

Islamic world. Until the end of the 90s, the trading business assets of the Sayyids in Palembang that continued to grow were the trading assets of the Assegaf and the Syehbubakar clans, plus the trading assets of several other clans, such as the Alhabsyi clan, the Alkaf clan, and the Shahab clan. Trading assets at the beginning of the 20th century continued to develop into variants of other types of businesses, such as ice factories, housing, intercity transportation services, and importers of certain profitable commodities from abroad.

The year 2000 marked the beginning of South Sumatra's economic stability after the economic crisis that hit Indonesia in 1997. The rapid growth in the trade sector in South Sumatra began in 1999. It was related to the development of extensive trade and retail sectors, both formal and informal, triggered by the increasingly widespread circulation of imported products in the region. As much as 92 per cent of the GDP of South Sumatra's trade sector during 2000-2005 came from large and retail trade (Robiani, 2006)

The economic revival of the early 2000s also encouraged the growth of new business centres and traded commodities. One that developed at that time was the Songket trade commodity and the trade of local and imported textile products. Economic growth at the beginning of the 21st century was also in line with the increasing religious spirit among the Sayyids. One form of religious tradition the Sayyid Hadhrami popularized in Palembang is the Ziarah Kubra tradition (Syukri, 2022).

The Ziarah Kubra is a collective tradition that requires significant funding from year to year. The cost required at the beginning of the

implementation in 2003, in the range of millions, continued to grow along with the increasing number of pilgrims from year to year until the *ziarah* activity in 2018 cost hundreds of millions of rupiah. Most of the financing of *ziarah* activities is obtained from the internal Sayyid Hadhrami in Palembang, especially from traders and business people, both domiciled in Palembang City and those outside Palembang City. The Sayyid Hadhrami in Palembang, during the *ziarah*, only wanted to receive financial assistance from the government, except for assistance in the form of facilities during the *ziarah* activities.

The financing of religious activities such as Ziarah, Mawlid, and Haul, is significantly bolstered by the support of several wealthy businessmen from among the Sayyid Hadhrami in Palembang. These businessmen, who have also diaspora to other cities such as Jakarta and Surabaya, play a crucial role in the transformation of trading capital into religious capital. Their contributions are instrumental in this process. Muslim countries in Southeast Asia, previously on the outskirts of the Muslim world, received the Islamic modernist ideology from Egypt (Slama, 2014). This ideology, with its progressive and reformist approach, was then passed on to the isolated Hadhramaut region, which was previously shielded from innovative developments in religious thought, enlightening the region with new perspectives and ideas.

The relationship between religious life and the polity of Sayyid Hadrami, which also involves economic hold in the Palembang area, is interesting. The conduct of these religious activities, such as Mawlid and *Haul*, is a religious activity that impacts economic and political activities (Amaruli et al., 2022). Sayyid Hadhrami in

Palembang took advantage of several religious occasions, such as Mawlid, which marked the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and *Haul*, which commemorates the death of some of the saints (*Waliy*) (Rijal, 2020), to unite the community and foster social relations. These gatherings involve large groups and enhance the participants' solidarity. As part of the tradition of the Alawiyah Tarekat, the religious traditions of the Sayyid are closely related to the traditions of Ziarah, Mawlid, and *Haul*.

The 40-night Maulid tradition, known as Maulid Arbain, has been observed by the Sayyids in Palembang since 1995, attracting thousands of Muslims. Additionally, the Sayyids organize at least 20 major Haul activities annually in Palembang, including Haul Habib Umar bin Ahmad Shahab, Haul Habib Alwi bin Ahmad Bahsin, Haul Habib Alwi bin Syeh Assegaf, and Haul Habib Muhammad bin Hamid Bin Syehbubakar. Economically, these events generate significant traffic and business for local firms. The celebration of Mawlid and Haul requires substantial funding, primarily supported by prominent businessmen from the Sayyid community in Palembang, who are religiously motivated by the Ulama to support such activities. These events also empower the Hadrami community by enhancing their social status in Palembang.

The relationship between Sayyid Hadhrami and local power administrators highlights the political implications of religious activities. Leaders and local dignitaries often participate in Ziarah, Maulid, and Haul, establishing connections that benefit both religious society and political structures. This interdependence not only sustains Islamic tenets but also enhances political influence. Economically, the control of wealth or resources in support of

religious activities enables the effective redistribution of resources for the benefit of the entire society. Attending religious ceremonies provides income for small business owners, many of whom are pious and seek to earn a living. Thus, these activities create a framework for active financial resource movement within the community, strengthening its economic position.

Religious practices also serve to strengthen the Sayyid Hadhrami community both internally and politically. This interaction process complements the other dimension of religion, which serves as an inspiration for citizens and encourages political activity. This demonstrates the importance of religion and its leaders in defining their role within the community.

Conclusion

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Sayyid Hadhrami served as clerics for the Palembang sultanate, facilitating the spread of Islam and acting as intermediary traders in the Indian Ocean. In the 20th and 21st centuries, following the collapse of the Palembang sultanate, the Sayyid community in Palembang established its own religious regime. The Sayyid Hadhrami in Palembang successfully transformed trade capital into religious capital, thereby maintaining their religious authority through the preservation of religious traditions in the Tarekat Alawiyah, such as Ziarah, Mawlid, and Haul. They adapted to the prevailing political systems in Palembang, forming a solid economic base within the community. Their role as traders significantly influenced the religious domain, establishing a distinct religious authority through the Tarekat Alawiyah, deeply rooted in Indonesia's Islamic heritage.

This study offers a valuable opportunity to enhance our understanding of Palembang's socio-economic and religious development from the 18th to the 21st centuries. It provides a unique perspective on the pivotal role of Sayyid Hadhrami in shaping political authority, Islamic practice, and economic activities in Palembang. This research contributes to broader discussions on the profound impact of religion on societal development in both economic and religious spheres. By examining the Sayyid Hadhrami, we gain insights that remain relevant today, allowing us to appreciate the historical interplay between religion and economics, the influence of religious leaders in shaping society, and the evolution of contemporary Islamic thought and practice in Palembang and Indonesia, built upon this rich history.

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