




Sunan Prawata and The Geopolitics of Demak

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Abstract. This research examines the development of the Demak Sultanate over time, starting from the leadership of Raden Patah to Sunan Prawata. Demak became the first Sultanate in Java with an intriguing historical record when examined in depth. Through this research, it can be studied that the Demak Sultanate had internal intrigues during power struggles. This study will analyze these issues using geopolitical theory and delve into the detailed exploration of Sunan Prawata using the literature review method. The research problem formulation consists of the following: 1) Biography of Sunan Prawata, 2) Geopolitics of Demak in the 16th century with the following objectives: 1) to understand the figure of Sunan Prawata and his role in the Demak Sultanate, 2) to examine the political conditions of the Demak Sultanate using geopolitical theory.

Keywords: The Demak Sultanate, Sunan Prawata, Geopolitics

1 Introduction

The fading influence of Hindu-Buddhist power in Java marked the beginning of the emergence of Islamic sultanates, spearheaded by the Demak Sultanate. Chronologically, the Demak Sultanate experienced rapid growth following the collapse of the Majapahit Kingdom, which had a predominantly Shiva-Buddhist character. However, this statement cannot be considered an absolute truth, as Islam and the process of Islamization in Java had already occurred even during the reign of the Majapahit Kingdom. This is evidenced by the discovery of an Islamic tomb complex in Troloyo, dating back to the year 13 CE. The existence of this tomb complex serves as evidence that Islam had already existed in Java, albeit under the authority of the Majapahit Kingdom [1].

According to Tome Pires' account in "The Suma Oriental," there are two opinions regarding the spread of Islam in Java. The first is that non-Muslim rulers embraced Islam and continued to hold power in their respective territories [2]. The second is that foreigners from various regions arrived in the northern ports of Java and settled there. Given the location of Demak, which is situated on the Muria Strait and served as a major port, the second opinion from Tome Pires is more plausible in understanding the spread of Islam.

Demak became the first Sultanate on the island of Java, established by Raden Patah, also known as Senapati Jin Bun in Chinese chronicles. According to the Babad Tanah Jawi and Chinese chronicles, Raden Patah's appointment as the leader of Demak

began when he was brought to Majapahit to meet his father, Kerthabumi (Brawijaya), and was granted the title of Adipati of Demak (referred to as Bin Ta La/Bintara) [3]. In 1481, Demak rebelled against Majapahit and emerged victorious, thereby gaining control of Java and establishing the Demak Sultanate.

Strategically located as a port city connecting the western and eastern regions, Demak flourished economically. Its main commodities were rice, which was the sole rice exporter, and woven fabrics in the Indonesian archipelago. However, after Malacca fell into the hands of the Portuguese in 1513, Demak's ability to freely export its commodities to Malacca was hindered. Feeling threatened by the presence of the Portuguese, Demak decided to confront them using its own strength. The attack was led by Pati Unus, also known as Pangeran Sabrang Lor [4]. The fleet gathered by Pati Unus was stationed in Jepara. In this endeavor, Pati Unus received assistance from Palembang. However, their efforts to expel the Portuguese, who had already taken control of Malacca, were unsuccessful.

The death of Pati Unus triggered the initial political conflict within the Demak Sultanate. In 1521, Pati Unus died while leading an expedition to attack the Portuguese in Malacca. His death resulted in a power vacuum within the Demak Sultanate, leading to a rivalry among the descendants of the royal family to claim the throne. This conflict sparked a prolonged war and eventually led to the destruction of Demak. The power struggle took place between Pangeran Sekar Seda Lepen and Pangeran Trenggana, both of whom were descendants of the Demak Sultanate. The two princes claimed the right to ascend the throne of the Demak Sultanate. In terms of age, Pangeran Sekar Seda Lepen was older and believed he had a stronger claim to the throne than Pangeran Trenggana. However, Pangeran Sekar Seda Lepen was born from a concubine of Raden Patah, the daughter of Adipati Jipang, while Pangeran Trenggana was born from the queen, the daughter of Sunan Ampel. Thus, Sultan Trenggana was more eligible to succeed the throne of the Demak Sultanate due to his royal lineage.

The death of Sultan Trenggana was closely related to the political conflict within the Demak Sultanate. In 1546, Sultan Trenggana died while leading an expedition to expand the Demak Sultanate's power. According to Portuguese records by Fernandez Mendez Pinto, the case of Sultan Trenggana's assassination began when he attacked Panarukan (an area at the eastern end of Java) under the rule of Blambangan [5]. Actually, there is controversy surrounding Fernandez Mendez Pinto's notes regarding the naming of "Pasuruan" and "Panarukan." Interestingly, this controversy has become a consensus due to Pinto's background not being that of an academic traveler but rather that of a Portuguese sailor [6]. When Sultan Trenggana died during his military expedition to Pasuruan in 1548, there was no designated crown prince to succeed the sultan. Therefore, the nobles quickly gathered to discuss the selection of a new king. This task was entrusted to eight regents. However, after seven days, there was still no agreement on this matter, leading to a tremendous turmoil in the city of Demak due to the vacuum of the Sultan's position. The selection of Sunan Prawata as the successor to Sultan Trenggana was influenced by a murder plot. The Babad Tanah Jawi mentions that Pangeran Sesda Lepen, who should have been Trenggana's successor, was already killed, and Sunan Prawata was suspected to be one of the masterminds behind the incident. After this conflict, it became the starting point for conflicts arising from the revenge of the descendants of the Demak Sultanate. To understand the political role of the Demak Sultanate and the figure of Sunan Prawata (Susuhunan Prawata) more

comprehensively, it is essential to delve deeper into their political endeavors. Therefore, the formulated research questions are as follows: 1) Biography of Sunan Prawata, 2) Geopolitics of Demak in the 16th century. The objectives of the study are: 1) to understand the figure of Sunan Prawata and his role in the Demak Sultanate, and 2) to examine the political conditions of the Demak Sultanate using the theory of geopolitics.

2 Research Methods

The literature review is a data collection technique that involves reviewing books, documents, records, and various reports related to the problem to be addressed. The following steps are taken in this process: selecting the general ideas of the research topic, searching for supporting information on the topic, refining the research focus, finding and obtaining the necessary reading materials, classifying the reading materials, reading and taking research notes, reading and enriching the reading materials, re-categorizing the reading materials, and finally, beginning to write the report.

In accordance with the research problem, which is the history of Sunan Prawata and the geopolitics of Demak, the available primary sources are very limited. These sources primarily come from foreign travelers' reports, such as Armando Cortesao, Fernando Mendez Pinto, and Tom Pires, among others. Specifically, regarding sources containing information about the geopolitical situation, it can be initially obtained from Mendez Pinto's travel reports, which documented his journey eastward, even during the reign of Sultan Trenggana in the Demak sultanate.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Biography of Sunan Prawata

The Power Vacuum in the Demak Sultanate due to the death of Sultan Trenggana during his expedition for the Islamization of the northern region of Java was one of the reasons for the selection of Sunan Prawata as the fourth leader of Demak. This was justifiable as Sunan Prawata was a direct descendant of Sultan Trenggana. The title "Sunan" was given to Sunan Prawata due to his high spiritual rank and authority [7]. Meanwhile, the name "Prawata" was derived from the area where Sussuhunan resided, which was Gunung Prawata, hence the name Sunan Prawata. According to the genealogy recorded in the Banten Chronicle, Sultan Trenggana had five children named Pangeran Lepir (Lepen), Pangeran Ratu, Pangeran Jepara (Jipang), Putri Ratu, and Ratu Sigantou[7]. Although Sunan Prawata was not specifically mentioned in the genealogy, there is a presumption that Sunan Prawata was the second child, namely Pangeran Ratu (Sang Sultan).

Historical records state that Sunan Prawata ruled the Demak Sultanate from 1546 to 1549 CE. However, there are very few records about Sunan Prawata's reign, and there is little to no information about his governance. Conversely, Javanese records extensively mention murders and revenge related to the Demak Sultanate's rule. The appointment of Sunan Prawata as the fourth Sultan of Demak caused disappointment in Arya Penangsang. Arya Penangsang believed that he was more deserving of becoming Sultan Demak IV because before Sultan Trenggana ascended as Sultan

Demak III, Sunan Prawata had murdered Pangeran Sekar Seda Lepen, Arya Penangsang's father. Sunan Prawata, the son of Sultan Trenggana, killed Pangeran Sekar Seda Lepen, who was seen as an obstacle to Sultan Trenggana's claim to the throne of Sultan Demak III. Therefore, in 1546, Sunan Giri, along with the elders of the Demak Sultanate, agreed to appoint Sunan Prawata, the eldest son of Sultan Trenggana, as the fourth King of Demak with the title Sultan Syah Alam Akbar JiemBoen-ningrat IV. Sunan Prawata was crowned as the king because he was a direct descendant of Sultan Demak III, Sultan Trenggana. Sunan Prawata decided to move the capital of the Demak Sultanate from Bintara to the Prawata hill area in the village of Prawata, Sukojiwo, Pati [8].

The coronation of Sunan Prawata caused disappointment in Arya Penangsang, as the murderer of his father, Pangeran Sekar Seda Lepen, had successfully seized the leadership position of the Demak Sultanate. Arya Penangsang, filled with anger and seeking revenge for his father's death, eventually sent messengers to kill Sunan Prawata and his family. The death of Sunan Prawata left the Demak warriors without their highest leader. Some of the Demak troops joined the Jipang forces, while others who disagreed with Jipang joined the Jaka Timgkir forces based in Jipang [9]. Despite this, during his leadership, Sunan Prawata had a mission to Islamize the entire land of Java. This is in accordance with the account by Manuel Pinto, who reported that the Javanese King (presumably Prawata) was expanding to all ports in Java to prepare for an expedition against Malacca and had ambitions to become the "Segundo Turco" [7].

The information provided by Manuel Pinto suggests that Sunan Prawata had access to information from the European nations. There is a belief that a Portuguese convert to Islam named Coje Geinal (presumably Khoja Zainul Abidin), who worked as a cannon maker for the king, played a role in obtaining information for Sunan Prawata [7].

Sunan Prawata's mission to Islamize the entire island of Java marked the beginning of the failure of his reign in the Demak Sultanate. This was because Sunan Prawata focused solely on the process of Islamization without considering the political and diplomatic aspects of the Demak Sultanate. On the other hand, the massacre carried out by Arya Penangsang against Prawata marked the end of the Demak Sultanate's rule, which did not reflect the prestige left by its predecessors through architectural achievements. Nevertheless, Sunan Prawata's efforts in leading the Demak Sultanate and his vision of maritime dominance in Java should not be underestimated. The title of Susuhunan (Sunan) he acquired also signifies the authoritative personality of Sunan Prawata.

3.2 Geopolitics of Demak in the 16th Century

Geopolitics is an international political perspective that views the world as a unified global entity. In essence, geopolitics examines the relationship between the geography of a country and the forces that shape it, such as politics, economics, and socio-cultural aspects [10]. Therefore, the study of geopolitics also contributes to understanding how a statesman formulates foreign policies and responds to foreign political actions through an understanding of the environment and geography surrounding their country. When applied to the Demak Sultanate, the study of geopolitics in the Demak Sultanate would examine its foreign policies (in terms of power struggles) from the perspective

of geographical conditions that influence various other aspects of life. According to McKinder, in the study of geopolitics, the strategic position of a country depends not only on the possession of resources but also on the ability of state actors to utilize stimuli from other countries to promote political, social, and economic development and progress [11]. From this perspective, it can be said that a figure plays a significant role in the geopolitical conditions of a region. In this case, regarding the Sultan who leads the Demak Sultanate, they play a crucial role in the geopolitical conditions of the Demak Sultanate.

This section will examine the geopolitical conditions of Demak from different periods based on the leadership of the Demak Sultanate in the 16th century. The location of Demak has significant advantages, both in terms of trade and agriculture. In the past, the Demak District was located on the strait that separated Mount Muria from Java. The strait used to be quite wide and easily navigable, allowing trade ships from Semarang to use it as an entrance to Rembang. However, since the 17th century, this shortcut route can no longer be continuously navigated.

This location eventually became a major trading center for Muslim traders. Many of them actively engaged in trade in this strait area and interacted with each other in their business activities. In addition to selling their merchandise, these Muslim traders also played a role in spreading the teachings of Islam to the local communities who had already embraced the religion. The continuous arrival of traders to Demak Bintoro was influenced by several factors, including bustling trading activities, strategic geographic location, and support from a sound trading theory. These factors became attractions for traders to come to the area [12]. Thus, Demak developed into a Sultanate that had rice as its main commodity and became the largest rice exporter in Indonesia. One of the target destinations for Demak's exports was Malacca (see Fig. 1).

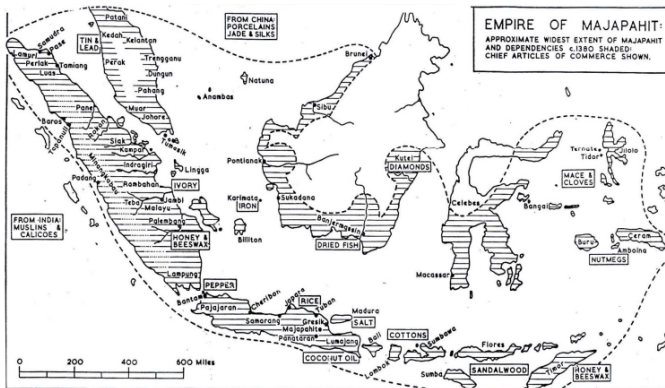
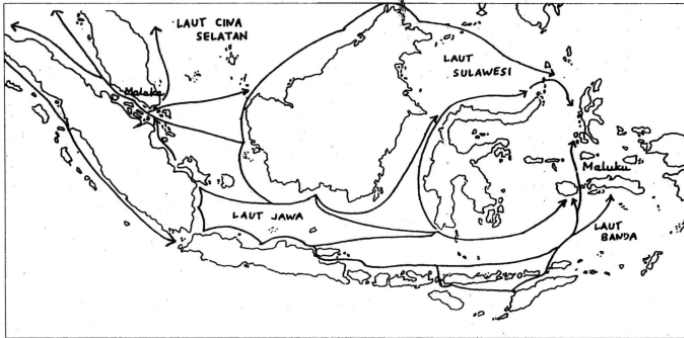


Fig. 1. Map of Commodity Regions in the Nusantara Archipelago [13]

At that time, Malacca had the potential to be controlled by the Portuguese, resulting in the disruption of Demak's access to Malacca. Therefore, in 1512, Demak, under the leadership of Raden Patah, launched an attack on Malacca in an attempt to prevent the Portuguese from entering Malacca. However, this effort failed, and the Portuguese managed to seize Malacca in 1513. Apart from threatening Demak's existence, the Portuguese's control over Malacca also severed the link between Western and Eastern traders (see Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. Map of Nusantara Trade Routes [14]



Therefore, in 1521, Demak launched another attack on Malacca but still failed, despite receiving assistance from the Palembang forces [15]. Later, during the reign of Sultan Trenggana, Demak conducted an expedition to Panarukan (a region in eastern Java) to incorporate non-Muslim territories through warfare. In addition to expanding the Islamic sphere of influence in Java, Trenggana's expedition aimed to strengthen the Sultanate of Demak and widen the reach of the northern seaports. After Trenggana's leadership, Demak experienced internal conflicts within the royal family due to competing support from the guardians who had potential successors to replace Sultan Trenggana, which also influenced the political situation within the sultanate. This conflict arose because several guardians had their own interests in spreading their religion through the use of the power possessed by their disciples.

The appointment of Sunan Prawoto as the ruler of the Demak Sultanate disappointed Arya Penangsang, as the murderer of his father, Prince Sekar Seda Lepen, managed to seize the position of power. Arya Penangsang felt anger and vengeance over his father's death. Eventually, Arya Penangsang sent messengers to kill Sunan Prawoto and his family. Ratu Kalinyamat, who was the sister of Sunan Prawoto, discovered evidence implicating Sunan Kudus in the assassination of her brother [7]. Ratu Kalinyamat went to Kudus to demand accountability. However, Sunan Kudus responded that Sunan Prawoto's death was due to karma, which disappointed Ratu Kalinyamat. While returning to Demak, Ratu Kalinyamat and Prince Hadiri were attacked by the Jipang forces. The Jipang forces successfully killed Prince Hadiri, while Ratu Kalinyamat was declared dead after jumping into a ravine under pressure, and her body was not found [16].

After the death of Prince Hadiri and Ratu Kalinyamat, Arya Penangsang succeeded in seizing the Demak Sultanate. Arya Penangsang still harbored unresolved vengeance and attempted to kill all the descendants of Sultan Trenggana. Arya Penangsang repeatedly tried to kill Jaka Tingkir, who was Sultan Trenggana's son-in-law, but his attempts always failed due to Jaka Tingkir's exceptional martial arts skills.

4 Conclusion

Demak's geopolitical strategy included the establishment of alliances and the utilization of military force to achieve its goals. Furthermore, Demak's naval power played a crucial role in its geopolitical maneuvers. The sultanate possessed a formidable navy

that allowed it to project its influence across the Java Sea, engage in maritime trade, and conduct military expeditions against rival sultanates. However, despite its initial successes, the geopolitical landscape of the Demak Sultanate in the 16th century was also marked by internal conflicts and power struggles. The assassination of Sultan Trenggana and the subsequent tensions between his descendants and rival factions, as exemplified by the rivalry between Sunan Prawata and Arya Penangsang, weakened the sultanate and eventually led to its decline.

In conclusion, the geopolitics of the Demak Sultanate in the 16th century revolved around its strategic location, expansionist ambitions, and religious mission. Demak's control over maritime trade routes, alliances with neighboring Islamic states, and naval power played vital roles in its pursuit of regional dominance. However, internal conflicts and power struggles ultimately hampered the sultanate's geopolitical standing and contributed to its eventual downfall.

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