



# Preliminary Research on Enggano Island: The Role of Enggano Island in The Past Based on Archaeological Remains and Historical Literature

Sigit Eko Prasetyo\* ; Fadhlan S. Intan; Indah Permatasarie Tjan

National Research and Innovation Agency

\*Corresponding author. Email: [sigit1105@gmail.com](mailto:sigit1105@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

Enggano Island is one of the foremost islands on the West Coast of Sumatera. Geologically, this island has never been one with Sumatera mainland, therefore this island has unique characteristics, both in terms of flora, fauna and culture. Archaeological exploration was conducted for the first time in 2018 with the aim of recording archaeological remains. At the end of the 19th century until the mid-20th century, the island was controlled by the Dutch, thus changing the way of life of the island's native population and making this island a source of plantation resource and forest products. During Japanese rule, Enggano became the leading island of defense during World War II in Southeast Asia. Most of archaeological remains on this island came from the colonial period, both from Dutch and Japanese rule and the megalithic tradition. The megalithic tradition on this island has the same chronology as the arrival of foreign nations. The location of Enggano itself was once part of shipping/trade routes in the past along with other areas on the West coast of Sumatera such as Pisang Island, Sibolga, Barus, Air Bangis, and Tiku Island.

**Keywords:** *Enggano Island, Archaeological remains, trade*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Enggano is an island located on the West Coast of Sumatra, precisely in the southwestern part of the mainland of Sumatra Island. Administratively, the island is included in North Bengkulu Regency, Bengkulu Province. According to Presidential Regulation No. 78 of 2005, the government established the outer islands, then in 2017 Presidential Decree No. 6 of 2017 was issued regarding the outer islands in Indonesia, in which Enggano Island is included. Enggano Island is administratively a sub-district level area called Enggano Island which is divided into six villages, namely Kahyapu Village, Kaana, Malakoni, Apoho, Meok, and Banjarsari Village. The area of the island is approximately 680 km<sup>2</sup>, with a length of 40 km and a width of 17 km (Tjahjono, 1995:37). The island has the same orientation as the island of Sumatra, which is northwest-southeast and is surrounded by small islands such as Merbau Island, Dua Island, and Bengkali Island. Geographically, the island is closer to South Bengkulu Regency than North Bengkulu Regency.

The current settlement of the Enggano people is on the east coast (the area facing Sumatra Island) which has been connected with asphalt road access. There are two passenger and freight ports, in Malakoni village (east of the island) and Kahyapu village (southeast of the island). The airport is located in Meok Village in the center of the island. (Map of Enggano Island). The opposite condition is found in the western part of the island where there are no settlements. This area is known by local residents as "Sebalik". The Sebalik area is currently utilized by local residents as a place to farm, fish, or for family recreation (Prasetyo, 2021).

Geologically, this island has never been united with Sumatra, so that human presence on this island is certain to have to go through the sea waters surrounding the island. Research conducted by the South Sumatra Archaeology Center from 2018-2021 on Enggano Island dated approximately 130 years ago (Prasetyo, 2021: 5) at the Gunung Botak site on the north coast of the island. From the Library's search, the name Enggano was first mentioned in Cornelis de Houtman's travel report during an expedition with the aim of finding spices. On July 5, 1596, they arrived at the first Indian island. The word Enggano comes from Portuguese which means lie or disappointment (Loeb, 1972:28; Keurs, 1994:4). From this information, there is approximately 300 years of difference between literature data and field data. Archaeological research on Enggano Island is still in the exploration stage, and it is also mentioned in the study, there is still a lot of potential to dig deeper considering that there are still many findings that may have older dates (Prasetyo, 2021: 70).

The location of Enggano Island in the west of Sumatra Island is a series of islands in the region. Nias Island in the north has archaeological remains from 12,000 - 1,000 years ago and megalithic cultural remains dating from 1,000-100 years ago (Wiradnyana, 2011 25-26). The Mentawai Islands are still often used as an object of research by experts on the ethnography of people who still use traditional ways of sustaining life (Guillaud (ed), 2006: 69). Research on the west coast of Bengkulu shows that trade has occurred at least in the 16th century AD. This chronology refers to the existence of local kingdoms in the region (Rangkuti, 2013:1). The bustling activity on the west coast of Sumatra is the impact of the location of Sumatra Island which is considered very strategic by many experts. In the northern part of Sumatra Island, there is the Bay of Bengal that connects Sumatra Island with South India. The famous archaeological site of Barus on the West Coast of North Sumatra is known to date from the 9th century AD to the 12th century AD (Guillot et al. 2008:32) Recent research in the North Sumatra region has found evidence older than the Barus site. This area is known as the Bongal Site which is located about 50-60 km to the southeast of Barus. Based on the findings, this site has existed since the 7th to 14th century AD (Purnawibowo, 2022.).

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this research is to reveal how the role of Enggano Island in the past, of course, with the culture of the people in it. The island has been absent from the world of research since the arrival of foreigners. Records of existing research on the island can be traced through the travel reports of past explorers. In addition, the island also has a historical heritage that must be recorded and cultural heritage that has begun to slowly disappear with globalization.

## 3. THEORETICAL REVIEW

During the literature search on Enggano Island, there has been very little research related to archaeology on the island. The Palembang Archaeology Center (South Sumatra) only explored the island once in 2003. Very difficult and limited access is one of the obstacles why research on the island is rarely carried out. However, the island has been visited by figures and researchers since at least the late 16th century. Besides Cornelis de Houtman, other expeditions by the Dutch took place in the early 17th century starting from 1602, 1614, 1622, and 1629. Their purpose of coming to this island was to look for merchandise. It was also recorded that in 1645, Dutch ships came to the island to look for slaves. During Dutch rule, the island was periodically visited by local officials. In 1852, Von Rosenberg stayed on Enggano for two weeks. He published his findings in an article in 1855 and a book in 1878. This is considered the first scientific approach to the island's culture.

In 1891, the island was visited by an Italian researcher named Elio Modigliani, he stayed on the island for eight months and his book entitled *L'isola delle donne. Viaggio ad Engano* was published in 1894. The illustrations in the book are still used today to show the indigenous people of Enggano Island. At that time, the people of Enggano still lived in the hills and highlands. Now the Enggano people have moved and many live around the coast (Keurs, 1994: 4). During the Dutch administration, it is said that the island was always troubled by disease outbreaks, so that by the early 20th century, there were only a few hundred inhabitants on the island.

In 1994, around 1600 people lived on the island and only 60% of the inhabitants claimed to be natives. In 1994, Pieter J. ter Keurs came to Enggano to record the culture of the people, in 2014, Roger Blench came to the island for linguistic research (Blench, 2014).

Indonesian researchers visited the island in 2003 by Darmansyah from the South Sumatra Archaeology Center and an expedition conducted by LIPI in May 2015. The expedition resulted in several new plant species that can be utilized for science. In 2018, exploration research was conducted by a team from the South Sumatra Archaeology Center. The first phase of this research succeeded in recording archaeological remains on the coastal and inland parts of the island. On the coast, archaeological remains are in the form of defense structures from the Dutch and Japanese colonial periods, while artifacts are in the form of bottles and ceramic fragments from the same period. (Prasetyo, 2018). Research in 2019 as the second exploration phase succeeded in recording part of the island in the southwestern part of the island or directly facing the Indian Ocean. This area is known to residents as "Sebalik". In this area, archaeological remains from the Japanese colonial period were recorded in the form of building foundation structures, bottles, and ceramic fragments. In the second phase of exploration, a megalithic site was also found with artifacts in the form of a collection of large stones. Archaeological excavations around the Gunung Botak site succeeded in obtaining pottery fragments. From the analysis of the pottery found, it is known that pottery is generally an open container and is made using the pinching technique. Pottery with decorative motifs is very few, the types of motifs are lines and nets. From the results of geological research, it is known that the rocks collected at the site did not originate from the site area, but came from

the Sebalik area located in the southwestern part of the island. The location of the Gunung Botak Site is on the northern coast of the island. The second phase of exploration also found one Gunung Jangkar site with the same type of site as Gunung Botak (megalithic), but its location is in the interior (highland) of the island. From the second phase of exploration, it is known that the island was also used as plantation land by the Dutch in the 19th-20th centuries AD (Prasetyo et al., 2019).

#### **4. METHOD**

Archaeological research on Enggano Island has only been conducted intensively since 2018, 2019 and 2021. This research begins with a literature study, which traces the results of research on Enggano Island, as well as other research results that are considered relevant to the location. Then as much field data as possible was collected relating to material culture on Enggano Island. Data collection will be done through field surveys and excavations.

Material archaeological or cultural remains will be observed directly in the field. The research area is still general, namely on Enggano Island. The choice of location can be referred to research that has been done before. Areas that have been observed are then plotted to map the location of observations on Enggano Island. The results of the findings during archaeological surveys and excavations were analysed specifically to determine the relationship between findings with each other and with the environment. Integration of one data with other data then produces new data used for interpretation.

#### **5. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION**

##### ***5.1 Archaeological Findings and Historical Literature***

Research in the field of archaeology conducted on Enggano Island is still in its early stages. The exploration has yielded information about archaeological and historical remains on Enggano Island and how the island played a role in the past. The island has many relics from the colonial period that have a chronology around the end of the 19th century AD to the early 20th century AD. Archaeological remains are not only found on Enggano Island, but there is one small island that seems to have an important role in the early arrival of foreigners. The island, now called Pulau Dua, has the remains of a former infrastructure building that was quite complete in its time. The Dutch at that time established settlements accompanied by church buildings, hospitals and cemeteries. The findings on Enggano Island itself also have the same type of building, but there are defense buildings along the coast.

Based on the History of Evangelism on Enggano Island compiled by Ev PSH Hutapea Litt and Poltak M Simangunsong, Christianity was introduced to the Enggano community in 1902 by German pastor Agust Lett who was assisted by Killian L Tobing. In 1913 Killian L Tobing was appointed by the Dutch East Indies government as an Inlandsche Ofziener. He died in 1926 and was buried on Pulau Dua.

Based on archaeological remains, the Karkoa area was one of the early settlements of the Dutch and was also the location of the first Christian community on Enggano Island. This is based on the existence of an ancient tomb in the area that dates back to 1896. In addition, in the book *The History of Evangelism on Enggano Island*, it is mentioned that the Dutch East Indies government in 1870 authorized the van der Vessen Firm to manage coconut plants on Enggano Island. The book also mentions that Agust Lett settled in Karkoa and built a church and provided health services (Hutapea and Simangunsong 1994). The 1884 map of Enggano Island by JAC Oudemans also illustrates that in the waters around Karkoa there were anchorages marked by an anchor symbol.

The potential of these coconut resources led the Dutch East Indies government to build an administrative center on Pulau Dua, which is located to the southeast of Enggano Island. On Dua Island, a harbor was built equipped with infrastructure buildings that functioned as warehouses, houses, churches and prisons. At that time Enggano Island became one of the ports of call on the NV KPM shipping route between Batavia (Tanjung Priok) - Padang (Emmahaven).

Until the early 20th century, settlements on Enggano Island were found in almost all coastal areas of the island, especially in the southeast, north, northwest and south. These settlements were connected by a network of roads. Until now, archaeological remains of Christian background in the form of ancient tombs are found in almost all villages on Enggano Island, namely Kaana, Meok, Karkoa, Banjarsari (Dakoha) and Pulau Dua. Except in Meok village, the ancient cemetery is no longer used.

Other archaeological remains found were bottle artifacts. The bottles were found associated with the grave at Kaana. Based on their shape, these artifacts are beer and jenever bottles. It appears that the bottles were reused as part of the tomb ornamentation. Based on the shape of the lip and traces of manufacture these artifacts were produced in the early 20th century.

Information from local residents and some previous research results show that the Enggano community settlement has undergone three transfers. The initial settlements were in the hills inland. The settlements were clustered based on the tribe or sub-tribe of the Enggano community. Then some of the settlers in the interior moved to the southern coastal area of the island known as Sebalik. However, it is not known when the move occurred and the reason for the move. At the end of the 19th century, it is said that the Enggano people both on the south coast and the hills moved back to the northern coastal area. This move was due to the Enggano community experiencing an outbreak of disease, so the Dutch East Indies government tried to provide treatment to the community on the condition that they had to move from their old settlement to a new location in the northern coastal area (Sari 2018; 2020). The settlement has grown to the present day.

If we look at the historical records that mention that the Enggano Island area was planned for a coconut plantation managed by the van der Vessen Firm, it appears that the displacement of the population was related to the plan to develop the coconut plantation. At that time, similar things also happened in several other Dutch East Indies regions related to natural resources that had economic potential, such as Belitung Island which had potential tin resources. In managing these resources, the Dutch East Indies government tried to move the Belitung residents who initially settled in the interior to the roadside. The reason for the move was to make it easier for the government to control the Belitung population and reduce the role of local leaders in the region so that conflicts between local residents and the government related to natural resource management could be avoided (Heidhuis 2008; 1991; Novita et al. 2019).

Findings dating back to the Japanese occupation can still be seen along the eastern coastline of the island. Remnants of defense buildings in the form of pillboxes and bunkers still stand firmly on the beach. Some pillboxes have been destroyed by earthquakes and sea waves. Information about these buildings was obtained from resident informants who were also historical witnesses at that time. There are at least 5 pillboxes and two bunkers that can still be seen today.

Archaeological excavations conducted on the eastern side of the island recovered clay pottery artifacts. These artifacts are associated with surface findings in the form of stones that were deliberately arranged for a specific purpose. The presence of this stone arrangement indicates a megalithic cultural tradition that took place at that time. From the results of geological research, the rocks came from the west side of the island, so there is a suspicion that the rocks were deliberately brought to the excavation site area for a specific purpose. The dating of the excavation site is around 130 years ago. From the special analysis of the pottery, it is known that the quality of pottery from Enggano Island is at a moderate level. Usually, this type of pottery is used as a container for daily use. In addition to pottery, glass beads were also found which were most likely obtained from outside Enggano Island.

## **5.2 The Role of Enggano in the Past**

The west coast of Sumatra Island has been a famous shipping route in the past. This is evidenced by the many findings along the coast from north to south. The location of Enggano on the west coast of Sumatra makes this island also part of the past shipping / trade routes. Since the early centuries AD, the west coast of Sumatra has had coastal cities and towns that became the center of the pepper and gold trade. At that time on the west coast of Sumatra there were many traditional trading ports that were visited by foreigners, including Pulau Pisang, Barus, Sibolga, Air Bangis, Tiku, and Bandar X (Bahar, 2009: 28). This may have encouraged the Dutch at the time to utilize Enggano Island as a coconut plantation.

During the Srivijaya period, only some trading cities were successfully controlled. According to Nurhadi Rangkuti, there were two phases of the existence of trading cities on the west coast of Sumatra. The first phase emerged during the period of Hindu Buddhist kingdoms until the early days of the emergence of Islamic-style kingdoms. During this period, trading city ports that were already crowded with visitors included Barus (7-16 AD), Lamuri (12-19 AD), and Tiku and Pariaman (15-17 AD). The second phase came after the colonization of Europeans, especially the Dutch, in shipping and trade as well as political hegemony in the archipelago. The busy ports in this phase included Meulaboh, Sibolga, Padang and Bengkulu (Rangkuti, 2013: 2-4). Enggano, which is currently included in the Bengkulu region, very likely contributed to these activities.

The existence of defense buildings during the Japanese period, changed the role of this island into the foremost defense island. The Japanese occupation of the archipelago occurred from 1942 to 1945. Although it did not last long, a lot of infrastructure was added, especially in the field of defense in the form of pillboxes and bunkers.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The role of Enggano Island before the arrival of foreigners was the place where the Enggano people settled. From Portuguese records, the island has been inhabited by humans since the beginning of the arrival of Cornelis de Houtman's ship in 1596. However, archaeological evidence that shows the number of years older than the arrival of the Portuguese has not yet been found. The form of settlement of the Enggano community before the arrival of foreigners occupied much of the highlands. So far, evidence of old villages has been found in the areas of Meok Village and Gunung Jangkar. Megalithic remains on Enggano Island are in the form of large stones arranged and brought from the Sebalik area to the eastern part of the island. Indications of findings around the megalithic remains indicate the daily activities of the Enggano people. This indicates that the remains may be a former sign of a dwelling or village. After the arrival of foreigners, there was a change in community settlement from the highlands to the coast. Enggano Island is one of the islands that has the smallest size among other island groups in the western part of Sumatra Island, but in its time, this island had a big role in terms of natural resources and defense.

## 7. COMPETING INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors declare that this article is free from any conflict of interest regarding the data collection, analysis, and the publication process itself. Either replicate or modify the previous sentence for this part.

## 8. AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contribute in designing the research, building up the conceptual framework, analyzing the data, and interpreting the research findings.

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