

A VIEW FROM
THE HIGHLANDS

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A VIEW FROM THE HIGHLANDS

Archaeology and settlement history of
West Sumatra, Indonesia

EDITED BY

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BPCP	Balai Purbakala dan Cagar Budaya (Centre of Antiquities and Cultural Property)
DFG	Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation)
EFEO	École française d'Extrême-Orient (French School of Asian Studies)
FU Berlin	Freie Universität Berlin
KAAC	Kommission für Archäologie Außereuropäischer Kulturen (Commission for Archaeology of Non-European Cultures)
MAMS	Curt-Engelhorn-Zentrum Archäometrie
MF	Magnetic feature
OSL	Optically stimulated luminescence
BPPP	Balai Pelestarian Peninggalan Purbakala (Centre of Antiquities and Cultural Property)
PUSLIT ARKENAS	Pusat Penelitian dan Pengembangan Arkeologi Nasional (National Research Centre for Archaeology)
RISTEK	Kementerian Riset dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia (Ministry of Research and Technology of Indonesia)
VOC	Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (Dutch East Indies Company)
WD-XRF	Wavelength-dispersive x-ray fluorescence

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume concerns the historical archaeology of Sumatra, whose past has been neglected by researchers in comparison with other islands of the Indonesian archipelago such as Java, Bali, and Sulawesi. In particular, historians have assumed that highland Sumatra played a marginal role in the formation of the riverine trading kingdoms such as Melayu and Srivijaya in the seventh to the fourteenth centuries, places that were well-known to foreign traders and are better documented. However, little is known about the origins of the settlement processes that created the unique ethnic and cultural diversity of Indonesia's highland regions, or the demographic, political, and cultural developments that followed. This book analyses the rise of the settlement system in the heartland of the Minangkabau region in the highlands of West Sumatra. Historians have studied European sources and indigenous writings (Dobbin 1975; 1983; Drakard 1990; 1999; 2008–9), but the pre-colonial settlement history is poorly understood. An examination of the settlement and material culture from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries reveals growing social complexity in the region.

At the centre of this research lies a mountain called Bukit Gombak. Excavations suggest its identification with the royal centre of Adityavarman, the last Buddhist king of Sumatra, in Tanah Datar, a fertile plain in the highlands of West Sumatra. Buddhist artefacts and stone inscriptions document his reign (*c.* 1347–75),¹ which also produced more epigraphic material than any other ancient Indonesian

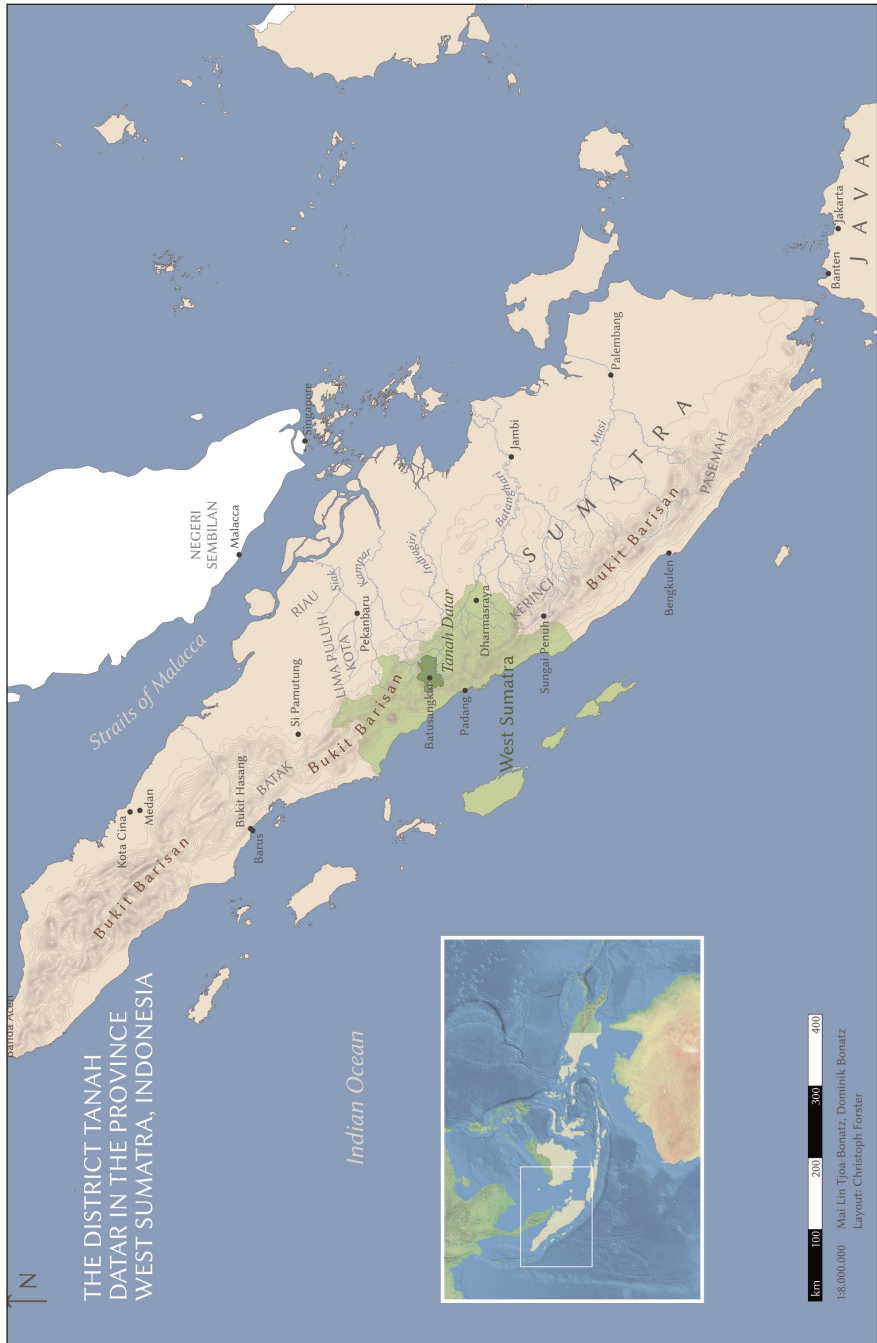
polity. Drawing upon recent archaeological investigations, this volume explores the regional settlement pattern arising from Adityavarman's highland interregnum, and provides the first attempt to place the archaeological remains and the landscape of Tanah Datar in a cultural-historic synthesis.

The book explores the role of upland zones in the development of complex settlement systems in Southeast Asia, based on archaeological evidence and a close examination of the material culture of pre-state and early state systems in the highlands of Sumatra during the fourteenth century. This process occurred later than in the lowlands but was contemporaneous with developments in other highland regions in Southeast Asia. The research is important for understanding a core cultural region of West Sumatra, today the homeland of the Minangkabau, but it also facilitates evaluation of the settlement pattern, technology, cultural affiliation, and external links of Sumatra's highland in the development of precolonial Indonesia.

The research involved geophysical surveys, magnetometry, drone-based aerial surveys and detailed studies of metal, ceramics and glass finds by laboratory-based specialists as well as careful descriptions of stone, clay and other finds. Aerial imagery and remote sensing techniques revealed settlement activity and anthropogenic changes in the landscape. A remote-controlled flying system newly introduced in the highlands of the Indonesian archipelago allowed for the development of large-scale mapping and thus helped in the understanding of the spatial context of the geoarchaeological environment of the region.

Bukit Gombak is part of a community (*orong*) of the same name in the district (*kecamatan*) of Lima Kaum in the regency (*kabupaten*) of Tanah Datar, part of the province of West Sumatra. Tanah Datar, which means "flat land", and refers primarily to a fertile highland plateau that covers a total area of 1,336 km² south of the volcano Gunung Merapi at an average altitude of 420 m (see Map 1). The capital of the regency, Batusangkar, lies in the southeastern part of this plain. It is located along the Selo, the principal river of the region, the southern reaches of which cross the mountains before turning eastwards and joining the Batang Hari River in the broad lowland plains. The Selo is the only river-based transport route to Sumatra's east coast, though it is not an easy one. Other routes

MAP 1



The Tanah Datar district in the province of West Sumatra, Indonesia

Source: Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz and Dominik Bonatz; lay-out: Christoph Förster.

lead to the nearby west coast of Sumatra, the eastern lowlands, and the north, passing through deep ravines and over steep passes in the Barisan Mountains, a difficult but passable range whose highest volcanic spurs rise to almost 3,000 m in addition to Gunung Merapi (2,891 m), Gunung Singgalang (2,877 m), and Gunung Sago (2,271 m).

The region has exceptionally fertile soils, gold and other metals, and forest products including beeswax, honey, different species of wood, aromatics and ivory, providing a distinctive microclimate for the development of early societies. As a legendary land of gold and the original homeland of the Minangkabau (see Chapter 3), it is of immense importance for understanding the cultural history of the modern period.

The resources of the highlands were highly regarded in the international maritime trade and decisive for the region's political-economic systems. For the first time in a historically detectable way during the fourteenth century, these dynamics brought the highlands of West Sumatra into a network of supra-regional trade that brought glass beads, porcelain, and stoneware from China, other parts of Southeast Asia, and West Asia into the highlands. The circulation of these items is discussed in the context of the development of local traditions changes arising from state formation under Adityavarman. Material culture remains at the settlement sites under investigation indicate long-distance exchange relations, and the international trade wares reveal that maritime connections of an early globalized trade linked the interior highland region of Sumatra with both coastlines. The interdependence of the uplands and the lowlands influenced highland society, but archaeological finds indicate that the highlands remained autonomous and did not form part of the state system of the lowlands, where political entities such as the emporium of Srivijaya-Melayu or Dharmasraya of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries on the upper Batang Hari River in Southeast Sumatra were the most important political and economic powers at that time.

Many socio-economic changes have been identified in the societies of Southeast Asia during the "age of commerce" in the fifteenth century. Anthony Reid (1993) identifies six fleets sent by the Chinese emperor as trading expeditions to the Indonesian archipelago and the Indian Ocean in the early fifteenth century as the starting point of this new era. Challenging

this chronology, archaeological materials from West Sumatra show that socio-political and economic complexity in the fourteenth century made possible intensified maritime trade in the next century, when wet-rice agriculture became established, local iron production became more important, and political centralization and territorial consolidation took place. It seems, therefore, that the shift towards new economic modes in the highlands began before 1400.

The establishment of a capital in the highland region of Tanah Datar under Adityavarman, far from any seaports, has been the subject of extensive scholarly discussion (Miksic 1987, pp. 9–10; 2015, p. 36; Reichle 2007; Kulke 2009, pp. 233–37). Adityavarman, a high official of royal descent in the East Javanese Majapahit court (1292–1527), founded the first identifiable monarchical polity in the Sumatran highlands. This period is a particular focus of the present book because it led to various changes in the socio-political, economic, and cultural landscape of the region. It is viewed against the background of written records of Adityavarman's reign and new archaeological data. However, the evidence also raises questions about the extent to which structures of rule as well as other economic and symbolic influences that developed out of external traditions, fit into existing local structures of settlement and society.

The “Tanah Datar Project” began with a hypothesis that Adityavarman's reign marked a turning point for the Sumatran highlands and the research sought archaeological traces of his rule to provide a point of reference for examining early state formation. This research then moved to broader questions about prehistoric conditions and historical consequences, as well as the formation of a Minangkabau ethnic identity.

The core of this project consisted of excavations at two mountain sites, Bukit Gombak and Bukit Kincir, carried out by Dominik Bonatz, Johannes Greger, and Annika Hotzan-Tchabashvili and reported in this volume. Bukit Gombak was a central place in Adityavarman's kingdom, and provides evidence of the organization and material development of this political entity. Surveys in the Tanah Datar plain provided evidence of other settlements that could be examined in relation to each other and to sites from earlier and later periods, and used to sketch out the settlement history of Tanah Datar from prehistoric times to the pre-colonial period.

Chapter 1 outlines the history, methods, and objectives of the research project. In Chapter 2, Benjamin Vining describes survey methods and Johannes Greger discusses the excavation procedures, addressing the spatial aspects and political implications of the archaeological evidence. Chapter 3 begins with the discovery of a prehistoric findspot and documents the excavations at the plateau of Bukit Gombak, the potential royal centre of Adityavarman, and the hill top of Bukit Kincir, which was an iron-working site. These twin mounds are connected by a burial ground at the lower part of Bukit Kincir. Functionally both habitation sites are closely related but each has distinctive characteristics, including artefact types and proportions. An analysis of intrasite spatial adds information about the consumption of imported luxury goods and a differentiated economy. Chapter 4 deals with find groups and single finds relating to material culture. The sites at Bukit Gombak and Bukit Kincir contain material relating to household activities, trade, and manufacturing, underlining a differentiated habitation pattern. Items of foreign origin indicate that international trade was an essential part of this society. Bukit Kincir also served as a burial place, with stones erected as grave markers and for ritual practices. A prehistorical tradition of erecting stones connected with burials appears to have continued during Adityavarman's reign.

Evidence that Bukit Gombak and the adjacent Bukit Kincir form the oldest royal seat in the Minangkabau area, with continuous settlement from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries, challenges local historiography. It is a fundamental belief of Minangkabau oral history, supported by colonial sources of the late seventeenth century, that the ruling family of Pagaruyung was accorded a higher status than other rulers because it was the oldest and most prestigious kingdom of West Sumatra. It has obtained wealth as supplier of gold, forest products, and especially rice, which was rare in the entire island in the early colonial times. Archaeological finds raise questions about the claim that Adityavarman founded the royal court of Pagaruyung. Rather, it seems that the supremacy of leadership in the political realm of West Sumatra was constantly contested by competing lineages. Archaeological evidence indicates that Pagaruyung was a settlement site during the time of Adityavarman but less important than Bukit Gombak, and that the lineage of Pagaruyung only seized power when Bukit Gombak diminished in importance during the late seventeenth century.

This study could not have been completed without the support of numerous individuals and institutions and their help is gratefully acknowledged. After a preliminary survey in 2008, archaeological research on West Sumatra was undertaken between 2011 and 2014 by the Freie Universität Berlin (FU Berlin) under the direction of Dominik Bonatz, with funding from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation). Fieldwork in 2011 and 2012 was carried out in cooperation with the Pusat Penelitian dan Pengembangan Arkeologi Nasional (PUSLIT Arkenas, National Research Centre for Archaeology) in Jakarta, Balai Purbakala dan Cagar Budaya (BPCP, Centre of Antiquities and Cultural Property) in Batusangkar, Balai Arkeologi Sumatera Utara (Archaeological Centre of North Sumatra) in Medan, and the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO, French School of Asian Studies) in Jakarta, under a research permit from Kementerian Riset dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia (RISTEK, Ministry of Research and Technology of Indonesia). Surveys and excavations ran for eight weeks in March and April 2011 and 2012 with teams of up to 60 people. A final period of fieldwork was carried out over two months in mid-2014.

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*Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz,
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NOTE

1. Dates are provided in CE and are generally unmarked. CE and BCE are noted only if absolute dates are provided.

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