



# **From Prominent 17<sup>th</sup> Century Colonial Dutch Settlements to Modern Indonesian Urban Centers? The Different Destinies of Banten, Ambon, Jakarta, and Malacca and their Cultural Heritage**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Dutch arrived in the islands that now compose Indonesia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, settling first in Banten (1600) and Ambon (1605) before establishing Batavia (1619) and taking over Malacca (1641) from the Portuguese. Referring to this network of strategic bases throughout the Nusantara region, this paper uses the element of urban cultural heritage to examine these four major trade hubs experienced very different destinies as a result of Dutch decisions. It also explores how shifts in political power after Indonesia's independence influenced Jakarta's dominance in modern-day Indonesia. The paper suggests that Dutch opportunism and strategic visions underpinned the decision to make Jakarta the center of colonial power in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It also concludes that Jakarta's continued importance in political control and policies explains why it retained its position after Indonesia's independence, and these have been supported by recent policy measures. Finally, this paper concludes that, despite its Dutch origins, urban cultural heritage has been embraced by Indonesians.

**Key Words:** heritage, settlements, Dutch East India Company, Indonesia, Malaysia

## **I . Introduction**

Jakarta, Ambon, Malacca, and Banten appear very different today. Today, Jakarta is the sprawling urban center of Java, the largest urbanized area in Indonesia. Ambon in Eastern Indonesia is far smaller. Malacca is another case altogether, not even a city in the Indonesian Republic today, even though it was once a Dutch-controlled port along the Straits of Malacca that separates the Malay Peninsula from the island of Sumatra. Banten completes the lineup, having been the center of the Banten Sultanate that was important far before the arrival of European colonialism.

However, looking closer look at these four seemingly unrelated cities in Maritime Southeast Asia, all four share an important common heritage: all four had been major settlements in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, focal points in colonial trade network developed by the Dutch that could have potentially become the seat of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Indeed, although the Dutch spent an enormous number of resources in the Moluccas to create a monopoly on the precious spices produced, Governor-General Jan Pieterszoon Coen decided to move the colonial capital to what is now Jakarta in 1619.

Jakarta thus became the Company's most important base of operations, and it has retained this prominence into the modern day. Interestingly, this significantly affected the urban development of the other important settlements within the Dutch sphere of influence. Once all major nodes in the colonial trade network, Banten, Ambon, and Malacca are now relatively minor settlements. Today, Ambon is but a mid-sized city. Meanwhile, although Banten is now a province, the former capital is a shadow of its former self. Finally, Malacca—the capital city of the state of Malacca—is a mid-level city on the Malay Peninsula. Each city has had a distinct fate.

This paper will thus investigate these cities' different destinies as well as the factors that contributed to Jakarta's rise to prominence. Considering that the Dutch have been replaced by the modern Indonesian government, the paper will also explore how and to what extent new political paradigms shaped the geospatial administrative settlement pattern that ensured Jakarta's continued dominance. The paper will use urban cultural heritage as an entry point to investigate 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch ideas and explain the shift from the Moluccas, in which the Dutch had heavily invested, to Jakarta. It will also use a *longue durée* timeline to explain these four settlements' distinct destinies, with Jakarta achieving a dominance that would only be seriously challenged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## II. Cities and Urban Cultural Heritage

Urban networks and their importance as nodes have been heavily researched. In his 2008 study, Leonard Blussé examined Canton, Nagasaki, and Batavia in relation to the Chinese economy. Exploring the network that connected them with Europe and America, he saw these centers as different yet “curiously dovetailing maritime polities” of the governments steering them.<sup>1)</sup> In *Strange Company*, Blussé focused on the transformation of Batavia and its various social classes/groups throughout history.<sup>2)</sup> In *The Social World of Batavia*, Jean Gelman Taylor focused more specifically on the European and Eurasian social groups in the city.<sup>3)</sup> Her 2003 history of Indonesia emphasized a patchwork of peoples and their interactions.<sup>4)</sup> Susan Abeyasekere and her study of Jakarta’s socioeconomic evolution over the centuries provides a very thorough look at the city’s development.<sup>5)</sup>

This paper bridges these wideranging studies by focusing on the original strategic vision behind the Dutch trade network of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the colonial decision to focus on a particular node, as well as the 20<sup>th</sup> century Indonesian vision of absorbing this urban cultural heritage. For this, it employs a novel model that does not focus exclusively on one city and its development but rather considers the four primary nodes of the Dutch colonial network in the Malay region. In this, it resembles Leonard Blussé’s examination of Canton, Nagasaki, and Batavia, but limits its scope to the Malay world (as the world inherited by Indonesia). The excellent work by Taylor, Abeyasekere, and Blussé on Jakarta sufficiently highlights the city’s development from the points of view of various social groups. This study radically departs from such an approach, balancing its analysis across all four major Dutch settlements then tracing that heritage from the 17<sup>th</sup> century through modern Indonesia and its nationalist views. This study thereby breaks new ground.

To examine the four settlements in detail, Jakarta is administratively designated the Special Capital Region of Jakarta, and covers an area of only 664.01 sq km.<sup>6)</sup> Except for a few brief years

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1) Blussé, L. (2008). *Visible Cities: Canton, Nagasaki, and Batavia and the coming of the Americans*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 9.

2) Blussé, L. (1986). *Strange Company: Chinese Settlers, Mestizo Women and the Dutch in VOC Batavia*. Dordrecht: Foris Publications.

3) Taylor, Jean Gelman. (1983). *The Social World of Batavia: European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

4) Taylor, Jean Gelman. (2003). *Indonesia: Peoples and Histories*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

5) Abeyasekere, Susan. (1987). *Jakarta: A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

6) Badan Pusat Statistik Republik Indonesia. (2021). *Statistical Yearbook of Indonesia 2021*. Jakarta: BPS, 45.

during Indonesia's struggle for independence (1946–1949), Jakarta has served as the country's capital city. The original Dutch settlement, now called *Kota Tua* (Old Town) in West-Jakarta. Meanwhile, Ambon grew up around the Portuguese settlement of Fort Victoria, which was captured by the Dutch in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It is the capital of the Moluccas Province, a role that it maintained after the northern part of the archipelago was made into a distinct province in 1999. This province, which covers 46,914.03 sq km, consists of a vast sea dotted with 1,286 islands.<sup>7)</sup> Administratively, it is divided into nine regencies; for contrast, the Jakarta Capital Region is only home to one.<sup>8)</sup>

Jakarta can also be sharply contrasted with Banten, a province in western Java. The current capital of this province is Serang, located approximately 9 km away from Kaseman Subdistrict—the seaside seat of the former Banten Sultanate.<sup>9)</sup> It was there that the Dutch first settled when they arrived in the region. As of 2019, the village of Banten was home to merely 15,323 people, a fraction of the subdistrict's population of 97,430.<sup>10)</sup> Completing the line-up is Malacca. Now part of Malaysia, it is located in the district of Central Melaka, which has a population of 586,600.<sup>11)</sup> In 2008, the oldest part of this area—the historical site of Melaka (Malacca)—was recognized by UNESCO in conjunction with Penang as the “Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca”.

All four settlements differ significantly in population. Jakarta is by far the largest, with a population of 10.6 million.<sup>12)</sup> It is thus larger than the entire Moluccas Province, which has a population of 1.8 million. Ambon, as the provincial capital, had only 384,132 inhabitants in 2019.<sup>13)</sup> Melaka is likewise considered a mid-sized city. Finally, the former seat of the Sultanate of Banten is not even registered as a city, as no city ever developed around the site of the historical Sultanate.

Despite these significant differences, however, all four settlements have a cultural urban heritage rooted in indigenous and European settlements. All four were also major Dutch settlements in their respective regions during the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

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7) Badan Pusat Statistik Republik Indonesia. (2021). *Statistical Yearbook of Indonesia 2021*. Jakarta: BPS, 10.

8) *Ibid.*, 45.

9) Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Serang. (2020). *Kecamatan Kasemen dalam Angka 2020*. Serang: BPS, xiii.

10) *Ibid.*, 16.

11) Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia. (2021). *2020 Laporan Sosioekonomi Negeri Melaka*. Putrajaya: JPM, 152.

12) Badan Pusat Statistik Republik Indonesia. (2021). *Statistical Yearbook of Indonesia 2021*. Jakarta: BPS, 87.

13) Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Ambon. (2020). *Jumlah Penduduk Kota Ambon Menurut Kelompok Umur dan Jenis Kelamin 2019*. Ambon: BPS.

### **III. A 17<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch Vision of Trade and Control**

We know that, when the Dutch came to Indonesia, they first arrived in Banten on Java. Founded by Pieter in 1600, this became their first settlement.<sup>14)</sup> At the time, the Portuguese held Malacca (which they had captured in 1511) and the Dutch were in competition with the Portuguese for access to spices. Malacca was located along the Strait of Malacca, on the border between Malaya and Sumatra, and thus the most important European-controlled settlement in the region. The Dutch base in Banten, close to the Sunda Strait on Java, avoided this route. Furthermore, Banten had been the area's main port in rice, foodstuff, and pepper trade since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and thus had trade connections with the Maldives and Sumatra.<sup>15)</sup> English traders also maintained a small settlement, having sought a means of breaking the Portuguese monopoly on the spice trade in Europe.<sup>16)</sup> The Dutch, who were opposed to the Spanish (and the Portuguese, by way of the Iberian Union of 1580) as they were struggling to obtain their independence from the region, were thus natural allies. However, European politics and competition for the spice trade often plagued the relationship between the Dutch and the English.

Feeling vulnerable due to the presence of the Sultanate of Banten, in 1619 the Dutch moved to an area straddling the borders of a rival polity. Trade likewise followed to this area, which is now Jakarta. The Bantenese were worried that their city would be destroyed, and thus they made a peace offering. However, Jan Pieterszoon Coen, director of the Dutch East Indies Company—which had been created in 1602 as an amalgamation of existing Dutch powers—decided to block Banten's harbor as he suspected Bantenese treachery.<sup>17)</sup> As a result, trade in Banten began to decline, and the Sultanate no longer controlled the most important harbor on the island. By then, the VOC possessed the fleet necessary to enforce military control over the weaker indigenous and European nations in the region.

It is important to recognize the rapid buildup of Dutch power through investment in the area.

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14) Jonge, J.K.J. de. (1862). *De opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag in Oost-Indië: verzameling van onuitgegeven stukken uit het oud-koloniaal archief*. Vol. 1. 'SGravenhage: Nijhoff, 230.

15) Pires, T., F. Rodrigues, and A. Cortesão. (1944). *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires: an account of the East, from the Red sea to Japan written in Malacca and India in 1512-1515*. The book of Francisco Rodrigues: rutter of a voyage in the Red sea, nautical rules, almanack and maps, written and drawn in the East before 1515. Vol. 1. London: Hakluyt Society, 170.

16) Hall, D.E.G. (1986). *A History of South-East Asia*. London: Macmillan, 226.

17) Tiele, P.A. (1886). *Bouwstoffen voor de Geschiedenis der Nederlanders in den Maleischen Archipel*. Vol. 1. 'SGravenhage: Nijhoff, xl.

According to an assessment conducted by the historian Meilink-Roelofs, from 1613 to 1617 the English sent 29 ships to Asia, whereas the Dutch managed to send out 51.<sup>18)</sup> The Dutch realized the need for control over the spice trade, understanding that competition with other European nations would drive down prices and make trade unprofitable. They thus ramped up their investments, took military action against their opponents, and avoided the direct influence of existing powers (such as the Sultanate of Banten).

Turning to the Moluccas, Dutch interest in the area stemmed from a desire to control the spice trade.<sup>19)</sup> Cloves and nutmeg grew only in this particular area of the Indonesian archipelago. In 1512, a Portuguese sailor named Juan Serano wrote: “a profitable commodity is found in Banda, namely nutmeg, which grows in great quantity and kinds. (···) The cloves grow in another island which is smaller, and is called Tidory, the tree on which it grows is like the box or Buxo.”<sup>20)</sup> A major problem for Europeans was that the Bandanese, whose tiny archipelago was situated southwest of Ambon Island, were militant and fiercely protective of their islands and wealth. Although they engaged in free trade, they refused—much to the frustration of foreign nations—any exclusive deals. The Portuguese had never been able to maintain a long-term presence on the islands, but in Ambon they had been able to build a fortress in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. In subsequent years, after the Portuguese were chased out of Ternate by that island’s sultan, they expanded their settlement in Ambon and made it into their primary base of operations in the region.<sup>21)</sup>

The Portuguese settlement was situated on the southern side of Ambon Island, and there was significant tension between them and the indigenous population. The Dutch took advantage of this, providing military aid that the Hitus of northern Ambon Island used against the Portuguese. In 1604, the Ambonese came to Banten to notify Dutch admiral Van der Hagen about a Portuguese attack. Van der Hagen set sail for Ambon in January 1605, and when he arrived on 23 February 1605 the Portuguese simply surrendered. The Ambonese pledged allegiance to the Dutch,<sup>22)</sup> and from then on

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18) Meilink-Roelofs, M.A.P. (1962). *Asian Trade and European Influence in the Indonesian Archipelago between 1500 and about 1630*. The Hague: Nijhoff, 194.

19) Historically the term Moluccas (‘lands of the kings’) was used only for the northern part of what became known as Indonesia’s Moluccas Province. It is in the latter meaning that this paper uses the term.

20) Barbosa, Duarte. (1866). *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the beginning of the Sixteenth Century*. Translated by Henry E. J. Stanley, Hakluyt Society: London, 227.

21) Jonge, J.K.J. de. (1862). *De opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag in Oost-Indië: verzameling van onuitgegeven stukken uit het oud-koloniaal archief*. Vol. 1. ‘SGravenhage: Nijhoff, 181.

22) Jonge, J.K.J. de. (1865). *De opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag in Oost-Indië: verzameling van onuitgegeven stukken uit het oud-koloniaal archief*. Vol. 3. ‘SGravenhage: Nijhoff, 35-36.

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Ambon grew into a prominent Dutch settlement. Although the Portuguese and Spanish remained a menace in the northern part of the Moluccas, in the stronghold of Ambon the Dutch enjoyed significant local support.

When Pieter Both—the first Governor-General of the VOC (1609–1614)—arrived in what is now Indonesia, he made his headquarters in Ambon.<sup>23)</sup> The Dutch, who had yet to dislodge the Portuguese from Malacca, had failed to transform Johor into a competitive port.<sup>24)</sup> Both was thereby tasked with evaluating the possessions of the VOC and finding the best suitable base for the company in the region.<sup>25)</sup> Realizing the importance of the Spice Islands, in 1611 Both arrived in that region.<sup>26)</sup> In 1613, he chose Ambon over the established trade ports of Johor, Banten, and Jakarta as his preference for the seat of the Governor-General. However, it was decided to also have an important member of the VOC handle trade on Java as well.<sup>27)</sup> Both thus guarded the precious Spice Islands from his base on Ambon, while Jan Pieterszoon Coen was assigned the port of Banten. Born in 1587, Coen was a relatively young man, but nevertheless had prior experience in the region. On October 31, 1617, Coen was appointed Governor-General, a position which he held until 1623.

It is in this capacity that he founded Batavia on the ruins of an indigenous village named Jakarta.<sup>28)</sup> Coen related how, after a failed attempt on him in 1618, fear for his life had led him to move to Jakarta, from where he governed and began the construction of a fortress.<sup>29)</sup> Until December 1620, Dutch letters continued to refer to this fortress as Jakarta;<sup>30)</sup> only in 1621 did the term ‘Batavia’ enter common usage.

Coen also sent a letter to the VOC’s headquarters in the Netherlands detailing English attack on Jakarta in 1619. The English dispatched nineteen ships to the settlement,<sup>31)</sup> and the indigenous ruler of

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23) *Ibid.*, 130.

24) *Ibid.*, 137.

25) *Ibid.*, 132-133.

26) *Ibid.*, 141.

27) *Ibid.*, 381-382.

28) Aa. A.J. van der. (1858). *Biographisch woordenboek der Nederlanden*. Vol 3. Harlem: J.J. van Brederode, 581.

Batavia remained the city’s name until World War II, when it was renamed Jakarta by the Japanese occupation government.

29) Jonge, J.K.J. de. (1869). *De opkomst van het Nederlandsch Gezag in Oost-Indië: verzameling van onuitgegeven stukken uit het oud-koloniaal archief*, Vol. 4. ‘SGravenhage: Nijhoff, 170-171.

30) *Ibid.*, 247.

31) *Ibid.*, 164.

Jakarta demanded that the Dutch surrender; if not, the fortress would be demolished, with the support of the the English.<sup>32)</sup> However, ongoing power struggles between Banten and Jakarta allowed the Dutch to endure, and the English returned to Banten.<sup>33)</sup> When Coen was notified, he set sail from Ambon with the Dutch fleet. In May 1619, about 1,000 people attacked Banten and Jakarta; most inhabitants fled.<sup>34)</sup> From then on, Coen started to aggressively take over the area. As Coen related, “The city was razed completely and the main walls were torn down.”<sup>35)</sup> Claiming victory, Coen declared that a large section of fertile land and sea belonged to the VOC, and he requested the people and funding necessary to build a strong fortress and town to protect the VOC’s new acquisition.<sup>36)</sup> On the west side of the river, where the town of Jakarta once stood, Coen planned to build a fortress “with a size of 46 square rods, surrounded by a moat.”<sup>37)</sup> These plans were realized, forming the nucleus of modern-day Jakarta.

In 1620, Coen reported that some 2,000 Chinese traders were active in Banten. The presence of these traders allowed the Dutch to draw in the pepper trade from the surrounding area.<sup>38)</sup> Coen again pleaded for support, so that Jakarta would “become the most exquisite place of all the Indies, and very shortly would be the emporium off all the Indies trade; because the place is very well situated for that and very capable.”<sup>39)</sup> Indeed, in previous centuries the port had been of great importance, and Tomé Pires, in his famous 16<sup>th</sup> century account of the region, had identified the Port of Jakarta as the best.<sup>40)</sup> With this choice, Coen not only took the best harbor on Java but also strategically left the immediate sphere of influence of the Sultanate of Banten without remaining outside the direct influence of the Sultanate of Cirebon.

In another letter, dated October 1620, Coen related how a new rampart—641 feet in length and

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32) *Ibid.*, 167-168.

33) *Ibid.*, 174-175.

34) *Ibid.*, 177.

35) *Ibid.*, 177-178.

36) *Ibid.*, 179.

37) *Ibid.*, 184.

38) *Ibid.*, 197.

39) *Ibid.* 197.

40) Pires, T., F. Rodrigues, and A. Cortesão. (1944). *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires: an account of the East, from the Red sea to Japan written in Malacca and India in 1512-1515*. The book of Francisco Rodrigues: rutter of a voyage in the Red sea, nautical rules, almanack and maps, written and drawn in the East before 1515. Vol. 1. London: Hakluyt Society, 172.

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18 feet in height—had been built for positioning people and artillery.<sup>41)</sup> The founding guidelines for Batavia, as decided by Coen and the council on March 29, 1620, have also been preserved. They outline the strategy of building a formidable fortress and town, then populating them to form an area bridging the land of the king of Cirebon and the king of Banten.<sup>42)</sup> In 1620, the coat of arms of the city was decided: “a blue sword on an orange background sticking with the tip through a wreath of laurels of green and brown”.<sup>43)</sup>

The documents clearly show that it was Coen’s personal decision to block the port of Banten and push for investment in what later became Batavia. He preferred Jakarta/Batavia as capital, and investments were made to expand and improve the settlement. By successfully attracting traders and merchants to the city while exerting military control over the region, within a year Coen had managed to build up the city into the crown jewel of VOC holdings.

Although their struggle with the English and the Portuguese–Spanish continued, the Dutch were now better equipped and financed. They used military pressure to push out their competitors, and in 1641 they captured Malacca—once the region’s most important port. Originally, the Dutch had wanted Malacca to be their headquarters in the region.<sup>44)</sup> However, the situation had changed by 1641, at which time the Dutch had already invested in Batavia for decades. At the same time, the Dutch attacks on and blockade of Malacca had undermined the city’s strategic. Trade was sluggish; the population of 20,000 was reduced to 1,400; and many of buildings had been reduced to rubble.<sup>45)</sup> Although the Dutch did make improvements to the city and ruled it for approximately 175 more years, there was never any consideration to move the seat of the Dutch Governor-General to Malacca. In fact, in 1824 the city ended up being traded to the British through an agreement wherein Sumatra Island would be controlled by the Dutch and the Malay Peninsula by the British.<sup>46)</sup>

In the eastern part of the Indonesian Archipelago, the Dutch continued their efforts to capture a monopoly on cloves. Banda was conquered completely in 1621, and this gave the Dutch a

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41) Jonge, J.K.J. de. (1869). *De opkomst van het Nederlandsch Gezag in Oost-Indië: verzameling van onuitgegeven stukken uit het oud-koloniaal archief*, Vol. 4. ‘SGravenhage: Nijhoff, 214.

42) *Ibid.*, 221.

43) *Ibid.*, 228.

44) Jonge, J.K.J. de. (1865). *De opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag in Oost-Indië: verzameling van onuitgegeven stukken uit het oud-koloniaal archief*. Vol. 3. ‘SGravenhage: Nijhoff, 51.

45) Heeres, J.E. (1895). *Bouwstoffen voor de Geschiedenis der Nederlanders in den Maleischen Archipel*. Vol 3. ‘SGravenhage: Nijhoff, v.

46) As such, Melacca is now a state in Malaysia, rather than the Republic of Indonesia.

monopoly on nutmeg. Meanwhile, after many wars and struggles with European and indigenous forces, the Dutch finally managed to bring clove production under their exclusive control by 1656.<sup>47)</sup> Administratively, Ambon retained its position as regional center, and thus the Moluccas continued to hold their importance.

Banten and Malacca were not so lucky. The city of Malacca was reduced to a minor hub in the Dutch trade network, and it never regained its former prominence. The same held true even more starkly for Banten. As trade was diverted to Batavia, there was less and less trade left for Banten, and thus no city grew up in the modern era. Batavia became the most important city of the region.

This summary shows how the Dutch vision of trade and control, combined with the regional situation, underpinned their creation of an international trade network. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, Batavia had rapidly become a major port for trade with China. Banten and Malacca had belonged to hostile powers, been blocked by the Dutch, and then became dilapidated. Ambon remained important, but more as base for spice production rather than a practical port for international trade. Coen's vision was imprinted on the region, and his chosen headquarters preferred by the Netherlands. This decision, and the investment that accompanied it, ensured the continued prominence of Batavia/Jakarta, which continued to grow to fulfil the Dutch vision for it.

Banten remained nominally under the Sultanate of Banten until the area was formally annexed by the Dutch in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its port fell entirely into disuse. In the meantime, the Dutch regional base in Ambon continued to guard against the Spanish (based in the Philippines) and ensure Dutch control of the eastern archipelago. However, the wealth provided by the spice trade declined, as did foreign threats. Consequently, the Dutch reduced their investment in this region.

Finally, after the Dutch succeeded in removing the Portuguese from Malacca in 1641, the settlement was no longer a central trade hub. Batavia offered a more central location, and thus Malacca saw relatively little investment. When the city was ceded to the British in return for Dutch control of Sumatra in 1824, the entire area of what is now Indonesia came under Dutch rule. Malacca had no further role in the Dutch vision of trade and control, and was thus relinquished.

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47) Knaap, G.J. (1987). *Kruidnagelen en Christenen: De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie en de bevolking van Ambon 1656-1696*. Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 234.

#### **IV. The challenges and cultural heritage of these colonial sites in independent Indonesia**

While has been shown that the Dutch, during their centuries of presence and control of the Indonesian Archipelago, favored the growth of urban centers such as Jakarta and Ambon over others, it is also important to consider the situation when Indonesians themselves took control of the archipelago after proclaiming independence in 1945. After all, the Dutch vision of developing urban centers to control an international trade network was replaced with new ideals.

For the Indonesians, realizing a unified Indonesian Republic was important, and thus the Moluccas became merely one of the country's provinces. In his younger years, the Moluccan Latuharhary had joined *Surabaya Studyclub*, the political nationalist discussion group under the nationalist leader Dr. Sutomo.<sup>48)</sup> Having proven his worth as nationalist, Latuharhary was appointed Governor of Moluccas when Indonesia became independent.<sup>49)</sup> Ambon was chosen as the seat of the provincial governor of the Moluccas, and therefore kept the administrative position that it had maintained throughout the colonial era—even after the decline of the spice trade. Indonesia's continued administrative interest in the city, in conjunction with the legitimacy bestowed by the new regime, guaranteed Ambon's growth and prominence as a regional capital. This situation continued even after the Moluccas were divided into two provinces in 1999.

The destinies of the once prominent regions of Banten and Malacca were less favorable. Malacca was not part of the Indonesian Republic, as it had become British and then Malaysian after the the country's independence from Great Britain. As such, the city was not part of Indonesians' conceptualization of their homeland and vision of exerting national control over the archipelago. Nevertheless, the city did maintain its regional importance as the capital of the Malaysian state of Malacca.

Meanwhile, Banten never saw its political power restored; after Indonesia's independence, the region became part of the province of West Java and then later the province of Banten (with the capital in Serang). As such, the Indonesian government built upon the colonial framework that had reduced the network importance of Banten in favor of Serang City. During the colonial era, in the

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48) Chauvel, R. (1990). *Nationalists, Soldiers and Separatists: The Ambonese Islands from Colonialism to Revolt, 1880–1950*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 136.

49) Jong, L. de. (1985). *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog, deel 11b, Tweede helft*. Leiden: Nijhoff, 1031.

19<sup>th</sup> century, Serang (part of Serang District) had been made the capital of the Residence of Banten; the historical settlement of Banten, meanwhile, was but one of the area's eleven districts.<sup>50)</sup> Through the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Serang continued to grow in size, in part because its elevated location was deemed far healthier than that of Banten.<sup>51)</sup> This is reflected in the *The Geographical and Statistical Dictionary of the Dutch East Indies*, printed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which reads in part: "Banten, previously the capital city of the mighty kingdom of Banten, at present no longer deserves to be called a city. Here and there the ruins of past glory are scattered around." The rest of the description relates Banten's neglect and decay and describes the unhealthy climate of the area, including the mudflat-filled Bay of Banten.<sup>52)</sup>

While Banten was the clear loser of the important 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch settlements, the biggest success story remained Batavia which became Indonesia's capital. The city, which had had been the seat of colonial rule for centuries, was renamed Jakarta and used as the seat of the Indonesian government. The former palace of the Governor-General of the Netherlands Indies, renamed *Istana Merdeka* (Independence Palace), served as the official residence of the President of Indonesia. This carried great symbolic meaning; the name Jakarta referred to the original indigenous name of the area, while the repurposing of the former palace of the Dutch Governor-General represented the change of power that had occurred. At the same time, practical considerations were also evident. The extensive Dutch facilities of almost three and a half centuries of rule had made Jakarta extremely prominent. Centuries of investment and development in the region had made the city the largest in the country by far, with an economic and political dominance that was hard to challenge unless specifically targeted by Indonesians and their strategic vision of government.

Nevertheless, Jakarta was never the optimal choice for Indonesian nationalists, and practical and strategic factors have threatened its position as Indonesia's center of power. In fact, from 1946 to 1949 Yogyakarta—a city located along the southern coast of central Java—effectively became the seat of the Indonesian government. The nationalist government, then merely considered a group of rebels by the Dutch, expected that the returning Dutch forces would attempt to recapture Jakarta in their efforts to reclaim Indonesia after the defeat of the Japanese in World War II. To create distance, the government relocated to Yogyakarta, and thus Jakarta temporarily lost its status as

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50) Veth, P.J. (1869). *Aardrijkskundig en Statistisch Woordenboek van Nederlandsch Indië*, deel 3, R-Z. Amsterdam: P.N. van Kampen, 297.

51) *Ibid.*, 297.

52) Anonymous. (1861). *Aardrijkskundig en Statistisch Woordenboek van Nederlandsch Indië*, deel 1, A-J. Amsterdam: P.N. van Kampen, 93.

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Indonesia's political center. Even after the government returned to Jakarta when the Dutch formally recognized Indonesia's independence in late 1949, the city's position as capital was not settled. In the 1950s, President Sukarno considered moving the capital to Kalimantan (the Indonesian part of Borneo Island) in the province of Central Kalimantan, where a new city called Palangka Raya was constructed.<sup>53)</sup> This location was deemed more strategic, as Kalimantan was located at the geographic center of Indonesia. Likewise, it certainly occurred to Sukarno that this would demonstrate a break from the country's colonial history. However, nothing happened; the plans fizzled out, as moving the government to Palangka Raya was deemed too expensive and impractical. Jakarta's position as the center of political power and seat of the Indonesian government was thus reconfirmed, and the debate over its position was put to rest for decades.

The latest challenge to Jakarta's position as Indonesia's predominant urban center came in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, when President Joko Widodo's government again put forward a plan to move Indonesia's capital city to Kalimantan—this time, even further east, in the province of East Kalimantan. It cited various reasons, ranging from traffic congestion to sinking ground and regular flooding. The exploding population of Java, which has been Indonesia's major commercial and administrative center, has compounded the issue; decoupling these two centers by developing a new site in East Kalimantan as the country's administrative center would relieve that stress. However, it remains to be seen whether this will come to pass.

Nevertheless, hidden in the violence of modernization and political change remains the archeological and architectural heritage embedded in these cities' historical cores. The old part of Malacca has become known, recognized, and protected as the historical site of Melaka (Malacca); together with George Town in Penang, it was recognized by UNESCO as part of the Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca world heritage site. The Indonesian government has made similar attempts to promote the heritage of irnam sites in Indonesia. Banten, for example, still holds the remnants of various historical buildings, as it already did in Dutch descriptions dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>54)</sup> The history it contains makes Banten one of the oldest urban areas of Indonesia, albeit a sparsely populated, and thus in 1995 the Indonesian government unsuccessfully bid for it to be recognized by UNESCO as Banten Ancient City. As for Ambon, the city itself has never been proposed for inclusion on the list of potential UNESCO World Heritage sites. Instead, the city has grown more

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53) Wijanarka (2006). *Sukarno dan Desain Rencana Ibu Kota RI di Palangkaraya*. Yogyakarta: Ombak.

54) Anonymous (1861). *Aardrijkskundig en Statistisch Woordenboek van Nederlandsch Indië, deel 1, A-J*. Amsterdam: P.N. van Kampen, 93.

as a economic and administrative regional center. It is clear, thus, that the original Dutch vision for Ambon has been maintained by the Indonesian government since the country's independence.

Finally, the story of *Kota Tua* (Old Town) in Jakarta is to an extent a story of change and loss of heritage. Although *Kota Tua* itself is small,<sup>55)</sup> rapid growth in the modern era has destroyed many historical building that would now be considered priceless heirlooms. Coen's original fortress in Batavia, for example, was demolished in the colonial era. As Jakarta has grown, the preservation of its heritage sites seems to have been neglected, with reports as recent as 2010 advising the government to protect these buildings as the Malaysians had done with Malacca. Recently, Indonesia has made some clear efforts to protect what is still left, and in 2015 the Old Town of Jakarta (formerly Old Batavia) and 4 Outlying Islands (Onrust, Kelor, Cipir, Bidadari) were placed on the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List. However, this whole area is but a very small part of the urban center of Jakarta, which has expanded to become the megacity that it is today.

## **V. Conclusion.**

The paper charted the trajectory of four cities that were centers of power in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, through which the Dutch East India Company sought to realize its colonial vision in what is now Indonesia and Malaysia. Using urban cultural heritage to highlight both the original construction as well as the Indonesian heritage of these Dutch urban heritage locations, this paper concludes that this heritage has become embraced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century after being neglected in the. Despite their similar origins as important harbors and nodes in the Dutch colonial trade network, the sites discussed all experienced different destinies due to the particular junction of time and need. It was the Dutch vision of trade and control that set these cities on different courses, which have been further affected by the modern Indonesian polity that focuses on national unity and independence even as it carries the imprint of the Dutch vision for urban development.

Banten became neglected and never recovered, withering away to the small village it is today. Malacca in Malaya was traded for complete Dutch control of Sumatra, as it was not deemed

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55) Budi Setiawan. Preservasi, Konservasi dan Renovasi Kawasan Kota Tua Jakarta, *Humaniora*. 1(2), Oktober 2010, 699-704.

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important enough to develop retain; as a result, the Dutch and British consolidated their spheres of colonial power. Ambon remained an important center in the eastern part of the Indonesian Archipelago, while Jakarta (as Batavia) became the main node in the Dutch regional trading network. This situation was inherited by the Indonesians after the country's independence, and despite the new government holding a different vision for the archipelago, Jakarta has remained the economic and administrative center of region—despite plans that may potentially change the status quo.

The stories of these four historical cities are also to an extent very similar. All of these places show traces of historical heritage, which in three of four cases have warranted UNESCO attention. Banten, Jakarta and Malacca all still continue to be the sites of valuable cultural heritage due to their past history, and the urban heritage of the latter is recognized as a world heritage site. Banten's urban heritage is preserved by the Indonesian government, despite the fact that historical Banten is now only a relatively small village. Jakarta has similarly been promoted for UNESCO recognition, and the remaining heritage is still preserved. Only Ambon has yet to attract worldwide attention.

Three out of the four sites became medium to very large cities, principally because of their roles as administrative centers in the colonial trade network and subsequent importance in modern polities. Malacca serves as the administrative center of the state of Malacca in Malaysia; Ambon is the capital of the Moluccas Province in Indonesia; and Jakarta has been Indonesia's national capital since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. These roles have contributed to the cities' growth, with Ambon and Malacca becoming medium cities and Jakarta an economic center. Banten, however, suffered neglect and disappeared as the administrative center of the region was moved to Serang.

Colonial legacy and investment have continued to make Jakarta important in the modern era, despite the strategic argument for building a new capital in the geographic center of the Indonesian Archipelago. The city's historical growth and importance have strikingly contributed to its administrative and economic primacy. These same factors apply, albeit to a lesser extent, to Ambon and Malacca as well. Only Banten has lost the importance that it held in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Although the Dutch may be gone from the region, their colonial imprint remains tangible today.

The paper began by examining the different destinies and trajectories of four important centers of power in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that were all at one point in the hands of the Dutch colonial regime. The paper answered why Jakarta's fate is so different from that of the other three cities discussed and it has maintained its prominence in the modern Indonesian nation. The new government's political emphasis on geospatial control did not curb Jakarta's growth in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, despite various attempts by Indonesian nationalists. It is only in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that Indonesia may transform the status quo. This indicates that the Dutch vision of the Indonesian Archipelago remains imprinted in the location of the country's cities of power, even today. The *longue durée* approach explains

why Jakarta's dominance has endured until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as practical and historical considerations—as well as colonial investments made since the 17<sup>th</sup> century—overruled the modern strategic interests of the independent Indonesian Republic.

**Ethical considerations**

Ethical issues (including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancy) have been completely observed by the author.

**Conflict of Interest**

The author has no conflict of interests to declare.

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