

The dynamics of the rise and decline of islamic kingdoms in indonesia : (a historical analysis from the perspective of islamic education)

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ABSTRACT

Historical studies of Islamic kingdoms in Indonesia generally focus on political, economic, and military aspects, while the dimension of Islamic education has not been systematically analyzed as a structural indicator of civilizational change. This article aims to analyze the dynamics of the rise and decline of Islamic kingdoms in the Indonesian archipelago through the perspective of Islamic education as the main variable. The research uses a historical-qualitative approach based on library studies of Indonesian and international historiographical sources and reputable scientific journal articles. The kingdoms studied include Samudera Pasai, Aceh Darussalam, Demak, Banten, and Islamic Mataram. The results show that during the peak period, Islamic education developed through political patronage, the integration of ulama and the palace, and the institutionalization of mosques, dayah, and pesantren. During the period of decline due to internal conflict and colonialism, Islamic education did not experience total disruption but transformed into a more autonomous community-based institution. Comparative analysis reveals a pattern of institutional resilience of Islamic education amidst changing power structures. Islamic education in the Indonesian archipelago has proven to be highly adaptive and capable of maintaining continuity of values despite political fragmentation.

Abstrak :

Kajian sejarah kerajaan Islam di Indonesia umumnya berfokus pada aspek politik, ekonomi, dan militer, sementara dimensi pendidikan Islam belum banyak dianalisis secara sistematis sebagai indikator struktural perubahan peradaban. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dinamika kejayaan dan kemunduran kerajaan Islam di Nusantara melalui perspektif pendidikan Islam sebagai variabel utama. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan historis-kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan terhadap sumber-sumber historiografi

Indonesia dan internasional serta artikel jurnal ilmiah bereputasi. Kerajaan yang dikaji meliputi Samudera Pasai, Aceh Darussalam, Demak, Banten, dan Mataram Islam. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pada fase kejayaan, pendidikan Islam berkembang melalui patronase politik, integrasi ulama dan istana, serta institusionalisasi masjid, dayah, dan pesantren. Pada fase kemunduran akibat konflik internal dan kolonialisme, pendidikan Islam tidak mengalami disrupsi total, tetapi bertransformasi menjadi lembaga berbasis komunitas yang lebih otonom. Analisis komparatif menunjukkan adanya pola resiliensi institusional pendidikan Islam di tengah perubahan struktur kekuasaan. Pendidikan Islam di Nusantara terbukti memiliki daya adaptif yang tinggi dan mampu mempertahankan kontinuitas nilai meskipun terjadi fragmentasi politik.

Kata kunci: Kerajaan Islam, Kejayaan, Kemunduran, Pendidikan Islam, Sejarah Nusantara

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INTRODUCTION

The history of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago demonstrates a long-standing dynamic that shaped the social, political, economic, and cultural configuration of modern Indonesian society. Beginning in the 13th century, the emergence of Islamic kingdoms marked a major transformation in regional power structures previously dominated by Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms. This change affected not only political aspects but also value orientations, legal systems, trade networks, and patterns of social relations. The process of Islamization occurred gradually through international trade, political marriages, the preaching of Islamic scholars and Sufis, and Islam's ability to adapt to local cultures (Ricklefs, 2008).

The success of Islamic empires is generally measured by territorial expansion, economic stability, and military might. However, beneath these lies an intellectual and spiritual foundation that underpinned their power. Samudera Pasai and Aceh Darussalam developed as maritime trade centers and centers of Islamic study, connecting them with the Middle East, India, and Southeast Asia. (Reid, 1987). In Java, Demak, Banten, and Mataram, Islam succeeded in integrating Islamic teachings with local culture, thus forming strong political legitimacy. (Lombard,

2005). Islam became a moral source that strengthened the king's authority and built social consensus.

Amidst these dynamics, Islamic education plays a crucial role in maintaining the sustainability of civilization. Through *surau* (Islamic prayer houses), *dayah* (Islamic boarding schools), and *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), Islamic values are systematically transmitted to the younger generation. Education serves not only to disseminate religious knowledge but also as a means of legitimizing power and establishing a religious elite. (Azra, 2013). The scientific network connected to Islamic centers in the Middle East also enriched the intellectual tradition in the archipelago.

When Islamic kingdoms declined due to internal conflict and colonialism, political structures weakened, but Islamic education persisted. Educational institutions transformed into relatively independent social institutions and served as cultural strongholds for Muslim communities. Islamic boarding schools, for example, became centers of religious education and spaces for the formation of collective identity amidst colonial pressures.

Thus, the dynamics of the rise and decline of Islamic kingdoms cannot be fully understood without examining the development of Islamic education. An educational perspective allows for a more in-depth historical reading, as it demonstrates that when political power weakened, the education system became the primary support for the continuity of Islamic values, identity, and traditions in the archipelago.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a library study method within a historical analysis framework to examine the dynamics of the rise and decline of Islamic kingdoms in Indonesia and their implications for Islamic education. This approach allows for the reconstruction of historical events, interpretation of ideas, and analysis of the transformation of educational institutions based on written sources. (Zed, 2008).

Data were obtained from classical and modern historiography on Islamic kingdoms in Indonesia, academic literature on Islamic education, and reputable scientific journal articles. Source selection took into account the authors' credibility, thematic relevance, and their contribution to the analysis of the relationship between political power and Islamic educational institutions.

The analysis was conducted using historical-critical procedures, including source selection, external and internal criticism, interpretation, and the development of an analytical narrative. (Kuntowijoyo, 2018). The focus of the

analysis includes: (1) the character of the kingdom's success based on political, economic, and religious institutional support indicators; (2) internal and external factors of decline; and (3) a comparative analysis from an Islamic education perspective to examine patterns of transformation and sustainability of educational institutions in the face of changing power. This approach provides an integrative understanding of the relationship between political dynamics and the development of the Islamic education system in a historical context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Samudera Pasai

The Character of Glory

Samudera Pasai is known as the first Islamic kingdom in the Indonesian archipelago with a relatively established and well-organized political structure. Established between the 13th and 15th centuries, this kingdom marked the successful entry of Islam into the local power system, not only as a new religion but also as an ideological basis that strengthened the ruler's legitimacy. (Tjandrasasmita, 2009). Its strategic location along the Strait of Malacca trade route made Samudera Pasai a hub for international trade connecting the Arab world, India, and China. This position not only enhanced the kingdom's economic wealth but also strengthened Pasai's role as a hub for Islamic maritime and cultural networks in Southeast Asia. (Reid, 1987).

Pasai's success was not solely based on economic and trade strength. Religious aspects played a crucial role in establishing social and political stability. The sultans of Pasai used Islamic symbols as the ideological foundation of their government, thus gaining moral legitimacy in the eyes of the people. (Yatim, 2008). In the context of education, mosques served as centers of religious instruction, while the *dayah* tradition began to develop as formal learning institutions emphasizing the study of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), *tafsir* (interpretation of the faith), and Sufism (Sufism). Relations with Middle Eastern scholars also enriched local religious knowledge, creating an intellectual network that enabled the exchange of ideas and religious texts. Thus, Samudera Pasai became not only a center of trade but also the starting point for the development of the Islamic education system in the archipelago. (Azra, 2013).

The Character of Decline

The decline of Samudera Pasai in the early 16th century was triggered by a combination of geopolitical and economic factors. Shifts in trade routes and the rise of Portuguese domination in Malacca reduced the flow of trade that had been the

backbone of Pasai's economy. (Reid, 1987). The decline in trade revenues weakened the kingdom's political capacity to maintain internal stability, leading to fragmentation of power and conflict among elites.

Despite the weakening of political and economic structures, the intellectual tradition of Pasai remained intact. The knowledge and educational practices developed in Pasai subsequently migrated to Aceh, which assumed the role of a new center of Islamic education in northern Sumatra. This phenomenon demonstrates adaptive intellectual mobility, where educational institutions and networks of ulama were able to adapt to geopolitical changes. The persistence of this educational tradition confirms that the strength of a civilization lies not solely in political stability, but also in the capacity of the educational system to maintain, adapt, and transmit knowledge to the next generation.

2. Aceh Darussalam

The Character of Glory

Aceh Darussalam reached the peak of its glory in the 16th to early 17th centuries under the leadership of Sultan Iskandar Muda. During this period, Aceh not only became a center of the pepper trade but also developed as an influential center of Islamic studies in Southeast Asia, becoming a regional intellectual and commercial hub. (Ricklefs, 2008). The royal patronage of the ulama was very strong, creating a conducive environment for the birth of important religious works, including *fiqh* texts, *tafsir*, and religious literary works that enriched the treasury of Nusantara knowledge. (Azra, 2013).

This support is also reflected in the development of Islamic educational institutions, particularly Islamic boarding schools (*dayah*), which serve as centers for the development of religious knowledge and the character of students. *Dayah* institutions in Aceh are the oldest and most prominent centers of Islamic education, not only teaching in-depth religious knowledge such as *fiqh*, *tafsir*, *hadith*, and *Sufism*, but also shaping the character and morals of students through the practice of integrated Islamic boarding school life. In addition to maintaining the tradition of classical scholarship, several modern *dayahs* have adapted their curriculum to include general education and life skills, so that students not only possess religious knowledge but also skills relevant to the current social context, ensuring that *dayahs* remain relevant as formal educational institutions that adapt to changing times. (Rifqi & Dehham, 2024).

In addition to formal education, Aceh also emphasized the integration of education with social and political practices. Religious institutions played a role in building social cohesion, regulating public morality, and supporting the Sultan's political legitimacy. Thus, Islamic education in Aceh served not only as a means of transmitting knowledge but also as an instrument of social stabilization and strengthening royal authority.

The Character of Decline

Following the death of Sultan Iskandar Muda, Aceh faced significant internal and external pressures. Conflicts among political elites weakened the stability of the government, while Dutch and Portuguese colonial pressure disrupted the trade routes that were the source of the kingdom's economic strength. (Reid, 1987). This condition reduced Aceh's political capacity to control large areas and maintain its dominance in the pepper trade.

Despite this, Islamic educational institutions persisted. Community-based Islamic boarding schools demonstrated a high degree of institutional flexibility, maintaining educational traditions without relying entirely on the stability of the palace. This demonstrates that the Islamic education system in Aceh possesses adaptive capacity, able to adapt to political and economic changes while maintaining the intellectual and religious sustainability of the community. This pattern demonstrates that the strength of Islamic education is not solely determined by political power, but also by the community and religious networks that support it institutionally and culturally.

3. *Sultan Of Demak*

The Character of Glory

The Demak Sultanate emerged in the 15th century as the first Islamic kingdom to rule Java and played a crucial role in the region's Islamization through a synergy between political power and the religious activities of the ulama. As the first center of Islamic power in Java, Demak not only supported the preaching of ulama, especially the Wali Songo, but also integrated the spread of Islam with a cultural and educational approach that adapted to local traditions so that Islam could be peacefully accepted by Javanese society. The Wali Songo played a strategic role in introducing Islamic teachings through cultural preaching, the establishment of Islamic educational institutions, and the mutually supportive socio-political legitimacy between Demak's power and the ulama's authority, allowing Islam to grow rapidly and take root in the socio-religious life of Javanese society at that time. (Frida & Khunaifi, 2025).

The Great Mosque of Demak served a dual purpose: as a center of religious legitimacy for the sultan and as an educational institution. The mosque served as a place for religious instruction, community moral development, and a center for socio-religious activities. The Islamic boarding schools and madrasas associated with the mosque taught Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), interpretation of Islamic law (tafsir), and Sufism (Sufism), while also serving as a vehicle for the formation of an intellectual and religious elite in Java. (Azra, 2013). This educational pattern shows the integration between political power and Islamic education as an instrument of legitimacy, social stability, and the dissemination of religious values.

In addition to formal education, Demak also developed social and cultural networks through political marriages, alliances between kingdoms, and relationships with coastal traders. This integration of economic, political, and Islamic educational activities made Demak a powerhouse capable of facilitating the consolidation of Islam in Java during the early period of its spread.

The Character of Decline

Demak's decline was triggered by internal succession conflicts that weakened the kingdom's political structure. Disputes between elites led to territorial fragmentation and reduced the sultan's political capacity to control conquered areas. (Sartono Kartodirdjo, 1992). Furthermore, the emergence of new Islamic kingdoms in Java, such as Pajang and Mataram, displaced Demak as the center of political and trade power.

Nevertheless, Islamic educational institutions in Demak remained relatively independent of the stability of the palace. Pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) and madrasas (Islamic schools) continued to function as centers of religious and social learning, adapting to the changing center of power. (Dhofier, 2011). This pattern demonstrates the flexibility and resilience of Islamic education, which was able to maintain intellectual traditions despite a weakening political framework. Thus, the Demak Sultanate demonstrated that the sustainability of Islamic education does not always depend on political power, but also on socio-religious structures that support the ongoing dissemination of Islamic knowledge and values.

4. Sultan of Banten

The Character of Glory

The Banten Sultanate emerged in the 16th century as a major trading center on the west coast of Java. Its strategic location in the Sunda Strait made it a trading hub for pepper, spices, and local commodities, as well as a center for international diplomatic interaction with traders from India, China, Arabia, and Europe. (Lombard, 2005). This position not only strengthened the kingdom's economy, but also allowed Banten to utilize trade networks to expand Islamic political and cultural influence in the surrounding region.

In the context of education, Banten emphasizes the development of community-based and religious educational institutions. Coastal Islamic boarding schools and madrasas have developed as centers of religious learning, emphasizing Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), tafsir (interpretation of the faith), hadith (hadith), and Sufism (Sufism). These educational institutions not only impart religious knowledge but also serve as platforms for the formation of social character, morals, and the religious identity of the community. (Muslimah, 2017). Royal support for education, both through patronage of ulama and provision of learning facilities, strengthened the legitimacy of Islam as a political foundation and an instrument of social integration.

In addition to formal education, Islamic boarding schools also played a role in strengthening transregional networks of ulama. Relations with ulama from Mecca, Aceh, and other coastal areas enabled the exchange of knowledge and strengthened Banten's position as an intellectual and spiritual center in western Java. The integration of trade, diplomacy, and Islamic education created a synergy that strengthened the kingdom's success.

The Character of Decline

The decline of Banten began to appear in the 17th to 18th centuries, triggered by Dutch colonial pressure, internal political fragmentation, and trade competition with other ports in the archipelago. (Ricklefs, 2008). The kingdom's political and economic structures weakened, reducing the ruler's ability to control territory and trade routes. Internal conflicts among elites also accelerated the decline in political stability.

Nevertheless, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) continued to demonstrate remarkable resilience. These community-based educational institutions survived despite declining political support, serving as centers of religious and moral development for the local community. This pattern demonstrates that Islamic education in Banten possessed a high degree of adaptive capacity, maintaining intellectual and religious continuity amidst shifts in power and external pressures. This educational continuity confirms that the strength of the Islamic education system depended not only on the kingdom's political stability but also on the community involvement and network of *ulama* who supported it institutionally and culturally.

5. Sultan Of Mataram Islam

The Character of Glory

The Islamic Mataram Sultanate reached its peak of stability in the 17th century through a combination of centralized power and the integration of Javanese-Islamic culture. The Mataram sultans implemented a centralized government structure, systematically regulating the bureaucracy, taxes, and military, while simultaneously integrating Islamic symbols with Javanese political and cultural traditions to strengthen their legitimacy. (Lombard, 2005). This strategy enabled the kingdom to control a vast territory while simultaneously building a cohesive political and religious identity among the elite and the populace.

Islamic education developed parallel to political consolidation. Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and *madrasas* (*madrasahs*) in the interior of Mataram became educational bases, providing access to knowledge for communities far from the royal center. The curriculum taught Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), interpretation (*tafsir*), *hadith*, and *Sufism* (*Sufism*), while instilling moral values, religiosity, and social loyalty. These educational institutions served as a means of transmitting Islamic culture and forming a local elite that supported the power structure, as well as centers of intellectual exchange with scholars from the coast and other regions. (Dhofier, 2011).

In addition to formal education, Islamic boarding schools served as a vehicle for strengthening social cohesion. They fostered community religious life, enforced moral discipline, and acted as mediators in socio-political interactions. Thus, Mataram's success was determined not only by military or economic strength, but

also by the ability of Islamic education to build and maintain identity and social stability.

The Character of Decline

Mataram's decline was primarily driven by political fragmentation resulting from Dutch colonial intervention and internal power struggles. Conflicts between elites and external pressures weakened the sultan's authority, resulting in a decentralization of power and a decline in control over the region. (Ricklefs, 2008). Weakening economic and military factors further exacerbated the kingdom's political instability.

Despite the weakening political and economic structures, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) persisted and developed autonomously. These educational institutions were able to adapt to new centers of power or local socio-political changes, maintaining the continuity of education and the dissemination of Islamic knowledge. This pattern demonstrates that the strength and sustainability of Islamic education depended not solely on the stability of the kingdom, but also on the community networks and *ulama* that supported it. This underscores the central role of Islamic boarding schools as instruments of social, intellectual, and religious adaptation in the face of political dynamics and colonialism.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Based on a study of five Islamic kingdoms in the Indonesian archipelago: Samudera Pasai, Aceh Darussalam, Demak, Banten, and Islamic Mataram, a consistent pattern is evident in the dynamics of their rise, decline, and the character of Islamic education. The success of Islamic kingdoms was generally characterized by an integration of political power and religious education, where the rulers' patronage of clerics and educational institutions strengthened legitimacy, built social cohesion, and facilitated the spread of Islamic values. (Azra, 2013).

Educational institutions such as *dayahs*, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), and *madrasahs* served dual functions as centers of religious learning and the formation of intellectual, moral, and social elites. These institutions also played a crucial role in transregional networks of *ulama*, enabling the exchange of knowledge and religious texts between the archipelago and the Middle East. For example, the *dayahs* of Pasai moved to Aceh after the decline of Pasai, the *pesantrens* of Demak adapted despite the weakening of the sultan's power, and the *pesantrens* of Mataram remained inland despite colonial interventions weakening the central government.

The pattern of kingdom decline was triggered by internal factors such as succession conflicts and elite fragmentation, as well as external factors including colonial pressure or shifts in trade routes. Despite the weakening of the political center, Islamic education demonstrated high resilience. Educational institutions were able to transform into community-based or autonomous institutions, maintaining the intellectual, moral, and religious continuity of the community. This demonstrates that the sustainability of Islamic education does not depend entirely

on political stability, but also on the community and ulama networks that support it. (Azra, 2013).

Thus, although each kingdom had unique characteristics, a fundamental similarity is seen in the role of Islamic education as an adaptive instrument and supporter of the continuity of civilization that maintained a network of knowledge and religious traditions despite fluctuating political power.

Comparative Table

The following table summarizes the patterns of success, decline, and character of Islamic education across the five major kingdoms in the Indonesian archipelago.

Kingdom	Glory Pattern	Decline Pattern	Character Education
Samudera Pasai	Maritime economy and the legitimacy of Islam	Shifting trade routes and Portuguese domination	Dayah moves to Aceh, intellectual mobility
Aceh Darussalam	Patronage of scholars and scientific works	Elite conflict and colonial pressure	Autonomous Dayah, transregional, adaptive network of <i>ulama</i>
Sultan of Demak	Integration of political preaching and cultural approaches	Fragmentation of succession and the emergence of new kingdoms	Independent, community-based, flexible Islamic boarding school
Sultan of Banten	Global diplomacy and trade	Colonial intervention and internal conflict	Community Islamic boarding schools and madrasas, high adaptive capacity
Sulan of Mataram Islam	Centralization of culture and bureaucracy	Political fragmentation and colonial intervention	Inland Islamic boarding schools, autonomous, maintain continuity of education

CONCLUSION

The success of Islamic kingdoms in Indonesia is closely linked to the strategic role of Islamic education as an instrument of political legitimacy, the formation of social identity, and the strengthening of community cohesion. During its heyday, institutions such as mosques, dayahs, pesantrens, and madrasas not only transmitted Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), *tafsir* (interpretation of the Islamic faith),

and Sufism (Sufism), but also instilled ethical values, leadership, and social loyalty. Royal patronage of ulama and the provision of learning resources created an intellectual ecosystem that supported government stability and the formation of a religious elite. During its decline, when internal conflict, political fragmentation, or colonial pressure weakened central power, Islamic education demonstrated high adaptability by transforming into autonomous, community-based institutions, maintaining the tradition of scholarship and the character development of students (santri). This pattern emphasizes that Islamic education is not entirely dependent on political power but rather forms an independent, adaptive, and sustainable social structure, ensuring the continuity of knowledge, morality, and religiosity in the Indonesian archipelago, making it a key instrument in maintaining the sustainability of Islamic civilization.

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