



Development of Kotta Cinna Site Museum in Medan City, 2008-2023

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the development of the Kotta Cinna Site Museum in Medan City from 2008 to 2023. The background of this research underscores the importance of cultural heritage preservation amidst rapid urbanization and the role of museums as cultural institutions in education and conservation. The primary research question posed is how the Kotta Cinna Site Museum has evolved over this period and its impact on the local community. The research methodology includes literature review, in-depth interviews with stakeholders, and field observations. The findings indicate significant advancements in the museum's facilities, collections, and educational programs, contributing to heightened public awareness of cultural heritage importance. The author concludes that despite challenges in funding and management, the Kotta Cinna Site Museum has positively impacted cultural preservation and community education.

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INTRODUCTION

In Medan City stands a robust building with significant historical value known as the Kotta Cinna Site Museum. This cylindrical structure houses numerous relics from Chinese civilization (Sinar, [1991](#)). Generally, a museum is a structure that holds art, science, and artifacts for public viewing. Specifically, it is a place to showcase artifacts from important historical periods (Mulyasari, [2012](#)). The Kotta Cinna Site Museum exhibits artifacts from archaeological excavations, such as pottery, Chinese cash coins, ceramic statues, brick constructions, and information about the Kotta Cinna area, which used to be an old port utilized for Southeast Asian trade (Eridani, [2020](#); Perret, [2010](#)).

Based on ancient Malay beliefs indicating that Kotta was a bustling trade center, this area was named Kotta Cinna (Sinar, [2006](#)). This naming reflects the location where these items were found. Therefore, this term was officially adopted to refer to the area since 1914, particularly in reports from the Dutch Archaeological Service. In 1920, the name Kota Tjina was then added to the Dutch maps (Sitanggang, Manalu, Sihombing, & Azhari, [2022](#)). Located between the confluence of the Belawan and Deli rivers, the Kotta Cinna Site area is about six to seven kilometers inland towards the island known as the Belawan Deli port (Harahap, Siregar, & Purwaningtyas, [2021](#)) the Belawan River's flow heads eastward. The surrounding area is mostly swampy, connected by several small rivers, some with sufficient water depth. According to John Anderson's report, Kotta Cinna was noted in 1823 and included in the "*Mission to the East Coast of Sumatra*" (Anderson, [1826](#); Purnawibowo & Koestoro, [2015](#)).

According to McKinnon's records, Kotta Cinna was once a wetland (swamp) area close enough to the sea to be affected by tidal changes. Despite this, the location was frequently visited due to rapid sedimentation that could deposit material up to 2 cm annually. If accurate, the last 800 years have resulted in 120-140 cm of sediment deposition in the river delta. This is evident from the soil layers composed of shell layers and excavation depth. Generally, excavations are considered sterile after reaching a depth of 140 cm, meaning no more artifacts like beads, glass objects, ceramics, or coins and remnants of boat planks are found (Situngkir, Lubis, & Kadir, [2020](#)). McKinnon claims that Tamils settled in Kotta Cinna during this time. It is believed that there was a trading network in this Chinese city, a large group of Tamil traders known as *Ayyavole Ainnuaruvar* and *Mannikiram*. This organization operated in Southeast Asia (Irsyad, Fitri, & Sumantri, [2023](#); Nababan, Agung, & Yamtina, [2019](#)).

The Kotta Cinna Site Museum is an archaeological site on the edge of Lake Siombak, Paya Pasir, Medan Marelan District, North Sumatra. This site has been known since the 1970s, and its historical traces were revealed when an ancient statue was discovered during excavation with heavy equipment for the construction of the Belmera Toll Road



(Belawan-Medan-Tanjung Morawa) around 1986 (Sitanggang, Manalu, Sihombing, & Azhari, [2022](#)). Douglas A. Alan describes a museum simply as a building that houses collections for research, study, and enjoyment (Widyarto, [2022](#)). Since many findings were discovered at the Kotta Cinna Site, a museum was established to house these artifacts.

The Kotta Cinna Site Museum was founded by a historian from the State University of Medan named Ichwan Azhari in 2008. The museum was officially inaugurated by the government in 2009. The primary purpose of establishing this site museum was to preserve the history that is part of Medan's civilization (Muthalib, [2022](#)). The name "Kotta Cinna" comes from Tamil, meaning a small area. It is called a site museum because it is located directly on the site. Thus, the museum contains not only Chinese relics but also predominantly Indian Tamil artifacts.

In 2012, when the museum was still a rattan-roofed building, Daniel Perret, a French historian, conducted a surface survey in the Kota China area. The surface findings included fragments of ceramics, pottery, and statues discussed with archaeologists from the Medan Archaeological Office and the founder of the Kotta Cinna Site Museum, Ichwan Azhari. The Kotta Cinna Site Museum has seen significant development, evidenced by its transformation from a rattan-roofed structure to a nearly cylindrical building. The museum has also made progress in its collections and contributions.

This study focuses on several research questions related to the Kotta Cinna Site Museum in Medan City. Firstly, how did the establishment and early development of this museum unfold, and who were the key figures involved? Secondly, how did the infrastructure and facilities of the Kotta Cinna Site Museum evolve from 2008 to 2023, including physical improvements and additional amenities, and what impact did these changes have on the visitor experience? Lastly, how has the management and utilization of the museum been explored in terms of curatorial changes and educational programs during this period? This includes analyzing changes in exhibition themes, types of artifacts displayed, and educational activities conducted, and how these factors have influenced visitors' historical knowledge.

The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Kotta Cinna Site Museum in Medan City. Firstly, the research aims to uncover the museum's history, including its founding process and the figures involved in its establishment. Secondly, the study aims to analyze the development of the museum's infrastructure and facilities from 2008 to 2023, focusing on physical improvements and additional amenities, and to understand their impact on visitor experiences. Lastly, the study aims to evaluate curatorial changes and educational programs at the museum and to assess the response and engagement of the local community with the museum's development over the past 15 years. These research objectives will provide in-depth insights into the evolution of the Kotta Cinna Site Museum and its impact on the local community and its visitors.

METHODS

This study employs historical research methods to understand the development of the Kotta Cinna Site Museum in Medan City from 2008 to 2023 (Salim, [2019](#)). The research process began with developing basic assumptions and rules of thinking to be used during the study (Moleong, [2018](#)). In this research, the researchers began with heuristic methods to collect written materials and conduct a literature review. The researchers accessed various sources such as academic journals, history books, newspaper articles, and reliable internet sources relevant to the research topic. Additionally, interviews were conducted with the Head of the Kotta Cinna Site Museum to obtain direct perspectives on the museum's development. Furthermore, the researchers performed internal and external criticism of the sources found during the verification process. This involved evaluating the accuracy, reliability, and relevance of each source to the research objectives. Subsequently, the researchers proceeded to the interpretation stage, where the collected historical data were evaluated, selected, organized, and explained based on the chronological development of the Kotta Cinna Site Museum from 2008 to 2023. This interpretative process includes analyzing changes in infrastructure, curatorial programs, and public responses to the museum. Finally, during the historiography phase, the researchers ensured that the research findings were presented in simple language and terminology understandable to all readers. This aims to prevent misunderstandings and ensure that the information conveyed is accessible to various audiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

History of the Kotta Cinna Site Museum in Medan City

Ichwan Azhari, a historian, founded the Kotta Cinna Site Museum in 2008. He was a lecturer in the history department at the State University of Medan. The museum was officially opened by the government in 2009. This heritage museum

was established primarily to preserve the history that is part of Medan's civilization (Muthalib, [2022](#)). The name "Kotta Cinna" originates from the Tamil language, with "Kotta" meaning place/location/trading area and "Cinna" meaning small or narrow. Therefore, "Kotta Cinna" philosophically means "a narrow but beautiful place." It is called a site museum because it is located directly on the site. Thus, the museum contains not only Chinese relics but also predominantly Indian Tamil artifacts. In 2012, when the museum was still a rattan-roofed structure, Daniel Perret, a French historian, and Edward McKinnon, an English historian, conducted a surface survey in the Kotta Cinna area. The surface findings, including ceramic, pottery, and statue fragments, were discussed with archaeologists from the Medan Archaeological Office.

The history of the Kotta Cinna Site Museum in Medan City is a tangible proof of the commitment to preserve and introduce local history to the public. Established in 2008 by historian Ichwan Azhari, the museum is the result of the dedicated efforts of a history lecturer at the State University of Medan who has a deep interest in the city's history. With a passion for preserving cultural heritage, Azhari brought this vision to reality by opening the museum in 2009, which was later inaugurated by the local government. The name "Kotta Cinna" was chosen to reflect a profound meaning; from the Tamil language, "Kotta" means place or trading location, combined with "Cinna," which describes beauty in limitations. As a site museum, the location of the museum directly on the site allows visitors to have an authentic experience in exploring Medan's history and culture.

The journey of the Kotta Cinna Site Museum did not stop with its opening. In 2012, when the museum was still a simple structure with a rattan roof, French historian Daniel Perret and English historian Edward McKinnon, together with archaeologists from the Medan Archaeological Office, conducted a surface survey in the Kotta Cinna area. The findings from this survey marked the starting point for further exploration of the history and culture contained in this site. Valuable discoveries such as ceramic, pottery, and statue fragments became silent witnesses to a rich past.

Since its opening, the Kotta Cinna Site Museum has become a vital center for understanding and preserving local history. Not only does it serve as a repository for valuable artifacts, but it also functions as a learning center for the Medan community and visitors from outside the city. With an ever-growing collection and diverse educational programs, the museum successfully attracts visitors eager to understand and appreciate Medan's history.

Beyond being a tourist destination, the Kotta Cinna Site Museum plays a crucial role in documenting and strengthening Medan's cultural identity. Through these efforts, the museum becomes a symbol of collective efforts to preserve rich and diverse cultural roots, inspiring the younger generation to understand and appreciate their cultural heritage. Thus, the Kotta Cinna Site Museum continues to serve as a window to the past that opens insights and enriches the historical experience for anyone who visits.

The Kotta Cinna Site Museum in Medan City not only serves as a place to explore history but also acts as a means to strengthen the cultural bonds inherent in the community. With various programs and activities organized, the museum actively builds awareness of the importance of preserving cultural heritage for the present and future generations. For instance, through workshops and seminars on local history, the museum provides a platform for sharing knowledge while also building a community that cares about their cultural heritage. Additionally, collaboration with local educational institutions such as schools and universities are a key part of the museum's efforts to reach and engage the younger generation in historical preservation.

More than just housing historical artifacts, the Kotta Cinna Site Museum is actively developing educational programs that allow visitors, especially children and teenagers, to engage directly in the learning process. These programs may include role-playing activities, mini archaeological experiments, or field trips to nearby historical sites. In this way, the museum is not only informative but also offers an interactive and engaging experience for visitors of all ages.

Moreover, the Kotta Cinna Site Museum actively utilizes modern technology to expand its reach and impact. With virtual tours, interactive websites, and social media, the museum has succeeded in reaching a broader audience worldwide. This not only makes local history more accessible to those who cannot physically visit the museum but also opens doors for collaboration and knowledge exchange with the global historical community.

Besides being a center for learning and preservation, the Kotta Cinna Site Museum also functions as a cultural and artistic activity hub. By hosting art exhibitions, music concerts, and other cultural events, the museum becomes a

gathering place for artists and cultural enthusiasts who contribute to enriching visitors' experiences in understanding Medan's history and culture.

The Kotta Cinna Site Museum not only serves as a place to store historical artifacts but also as a bridge connecting the past, present, and future. By continuously innovating and collaborating, the museum will continue to play a vital role in shaping understanding and appreciation of the rich and diverse cultural heritage for local and global communities.

Development of the Kotta Cinna Site Museum Building

The development of the Kotta Cinna Site Museum building has undergone numerous changes over the years. For instance, in 2008, the museum building did not yet have walls. The foundation of the museum was made of wood, and the partitions were made of woven bamboo or *gedek*. The museum building was in an emergency state and built with limited funds. However, with financial support from the museum's owner, Mr. Ichwan Azhari, the museum was gradually constructed according to the needs and new vision of the museum.

The museum's transformation from 2016 to 2023 is also significant. This change is evident in the different building structures. Based on interviews with Mr. Ichwan Azhari and Mr. Adek, the building's architecture resembles a ship, symbolizing an ancient international trading area. The ship represents an element of ancient city civilization. The Kotta Cinna Site Museum building was designed by an architect from the University of North Sumatra, Faisal Pane.

Currently, the Kotta Cinna Site Museum building has two floors. Based on the author's observations and interviews with Mr. Ichwan Azhari, the museum was built with two floors because the museum area faced challenges, particularly flooding. Flooding in the museum area often occurs due to rising tides from Lake Siombak. Therefore, the museum was built with two floors to protect its collections.

Field research revealed that the Kotta Cinna Site Museum houses thousands of collections. In 2008, the museum's collections included 200 pottery fragments, 300 pottery shards, and 500 shell fragments. These collections were obtained from excavation exercises behind the museum, where the excavation site has now been converted into a pond. By 2023, the museum's collections were estimated to have grown to 10,000 items, indicating that the collections at the Kotta Cinna Site Museum were acquired gradually.

An interview with Mr. Ichwan Azhari provided valuable insights into the visitation patterns at the Kotta Cinna Site Museum in Medan City. According to him, since 2010, the museum has attracted significant attention from the public, particularly students. This interest is driven by the practice of history education in schools. Medan historians explain that many history teachers bring their students to visit the museum as part of their curriculum. These visits are not merely tourist trips but valuable opportunities for students to gain firsthand experience with the artifacts and history displayed in the museum.

However, 2020 marked a turning point for the Kotta Cinna Site Museum. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the museum was temporarily closed to protect visitors and staff from potential virus transmission. This closure impacted the museum's operations and limited the community's, especially students', access to the valuable historical collections.

The closure's impact was deeply felt by both the Kotta Cinna Site Museum and the community relying on it as a crucial history learning resource. Students lost opportunities for enriching field visits that enhanced their understanding of local history. Moreover, the museum staff faced challenges in maintaining the collections and engaging with the community amid uncertainty.

Despite these challenges, the Kotta Cinna Site Museum remains committed to preserving and introducing Medan City's historical heritage to the public. During the closure period, the museum may have initiated online or virtual programs to stay connected with the public. Additionally, preparations for reopening with strict health protocols to ensure visitor and staff safety were likely underway.

When the museum reopens, it is expected to see a surge in visits due to the community's strong connection to their local history heritage. The learning experiences provided by the Kotta Cinna Site Museum remain invaluable for history education in Medan City. Thus, the museum serves not only as a repository of historical artifacts but also as a dynamic learning center that continuously fosters interest and appreciation for the city's cultural heritage.

Management and Utilization of the Kotta Cinna Site Museum

The designation of the Kotta Cinna site as a Cultural Heritage was proposed in 2009 by Mr. Ichwan Azhari, the museum's founder. The Kotta Cinna site was designated as a cultural heritage by the Mayor of Medan, Bobby A. Nasution, with registration number 15/CB/SR/2022. Ichwan Azhari stated that the Kotta Cinna site becoming a Cultural Heritage site is still limited to the brick structure of an ancient temple ruin in an area of 7 x 20 meters, not the entire site. Ery Soedewo, a researcher from the National Research and Innovation Agency in the field of archaeology, stated that the Kotta Cinna site must be developed further to benefit the community, as they are considered the inheritors of the site (Sinaga, [2023](#)).

The efforts made by the Kotta Cinna Site Museum include publishing collections, serving as a tourist attraction, and advancing knowledge. Currently, the museum primarily offers permanent exhibitions. Visits to the Kotta Cinna Site Museum are conducted on Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays. The museum receives only 2-5 visitors daily. The ticket prices for visiting the museum are set at Rp. 10,000 for students and Rp. 15,000 for general visitors.

The Kotta Cinna Site Museum has implemented several strategies to optimize its potential as a knowledge source and tourist destination. One of the emphasized strategies is the publication of collection items. By publicizing the museum's historical collections, the museum aims to extend its influence through print and online media. This publication not only aims to raise public awareness about the museum's existence but also to share knowledge about the cultural heritage preserved within.

Additionally, the Kotta Cinna Site Museum serves as an attractive tourist destination. With its strategic location in Medan City, the museum attracts both local and international tourists interested in exploring the city's history and culture. However, an interview with Mrs. Jura revealed that the museum currently only offers permanent exhibitions without additional programs or activities to enhance its appeal as a dynamic tourist destination.

The current condition of the Kotta Cinna Site Museum also faces challenges regarding visitor numbers. Open only on Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays, and receiving just 2-5 visitors per day, the museum struggles with limited visitation. This may be due to factors such as inadequate promotion and information about the museum and limited facilities and services.

Regarding ticket prices, the Kotta Cinna Site Museum offers affordable rates for visitors. Students and university students are charged Rp. 10,000, while general visitors are charged Rp. 15,000. These affordable ticket prices are expected to encourage more people to visit the museum and appreciate the cultural heritage on display.

Despite facing several challenges in terms of utilization and visitation, the Kotta Cinna Site Museum still holds great potential to become an important center for learning and research on the history and culture of Medan City. With appropriate efforts in promoting the museum, providing engaging programs, and improving facilities and services, it is hoped that the museum can expand its impact and become a more favored destination for the local community and tourists.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that the Kotta Cinna Site Museum in Medan City has undergone significant development from 2008 to 2023 despite facing various challenges. The museum's establishment marked an important milestone in preserving Medan's history and culture and reflects the collaborative efforts of the local community, government, and academic figures. However, the museum still faces obstacles in expanding its reach and increasing visitation, especially in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, with continued commitment and innovation in utilization strategies, the Kotta Cinna Site Museum has great potential to continue developing and significantly contribute to understanding and appreciating Medan City's history and culture. The development of the Kotta Cinna Site Museum reflects a commitment to preserving historical and cultural heritage while also posing challenges for its operational sustainability. In the coming period, efforts to expand the museum's influence, increase visitation, and develop engaging programs will be key to its success. Thus, the Kotta Cinna Site Museum in Medan City can continue to be a dynamic learning center and valuable tourist destination for the local community and tourists.

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