



Jambi City under the Dutch Colonial Era, 1906-1942

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of Dutch colonial rule on the economic, political, social, and educational sectors in Jambi City from 1906 to 1942. The research aims to explore the Dutch position during the colonial period and its implications for the people of Jambi, who experienced both benefits and oppression. Employing a historical research method, the study follows four stages: heuristics (data collection), source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The findings reveal the Dutch role as Resident in Jambi from 1906-1942, highlighting the early period of Dutch presence (1906-1920), the colonial heyday (1920-1929), and the decline of Dutch influence (1929-1942). The research underscores the complex legacy of Dutch colonialism in Jambi, illustrating both advancements and exploitation experienced by the local population. Furthermore, it provides a nuanced understanding of the shifts in power dynamics and their lasting effects on the region's development.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted 30/04/2024
Revised 14/05/2024
Accepted 21/05/2024
Published 22/07/2024

KEYWORDS

Dutch colonialism; Jambi City; historical research; economic impact; social change.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34007/warisan.v5i1.2222>

INTRODUCTION

Jambi was one of the regions controlled by the Dutch. The entire area, including Kerinci, Muaro Jambi, Tebo, Batanghari, and even Jambi City, which became the center of the Residency, fell under Dutch control (Disvia et al., 2024). According to Miftahurrah et al. in "*Jambi City as the Colonial Administrative Center*," Jambi was chosen as the residency center due to its strategic location along the Batanghari River, which strengthened Dutch control over Jambi by occupying the Jambi Sultanate (Miftahurrah et al., 2022). The Dutch presence in Jambi inflicted prolonged suffering on the local population since their arrival in 1615.

Upon their arrival in 1615, several versions of the Dutch arrival in Jambi exist. According to various sources cited by Sari, the Dutch arrival was led by Orderkoopman Abraham Streck, initially prompted by Sultan Abdul Kahar's request for assistance against pirates, bringing two Dutch trade ships, "Wasten Amsterdam" and "Middle Burg" (Sari 2021). Other researchers, Syuhada et al. (2017), argued that the Dutch came to Jambi seeking spices and exploring potential trade opportunities, leading to the establishment of a trading post in Muara Kumpeh due to Abraham Streck's cunning promises to the Jambi people (Syuhada et al., 2017).

The Dutch government's involvement in monopolizing trade in Muara Kumpeh led to uprisings by the local people, resulting in the Dutch being expelled from the area. In subsequent years, the Dutch continued to attempt to monopolize trade in Jambi, causing discontent among the locals and resulting in wars and uprisings that lasted 73 years (1833-1904) (Sari, 2021). The war concluded during Sultan Thaha Saifudin's leadership on April 27, 1904, when the Dutch successfully conquered the Jambi Sultanate and converted it into a residency within the Netherlands Indies (Suryani, 2021).

The defeat of the Jambi Sultanate led to the transfer of power to the Dutch, who issued a decree on May 4, 1906, establishing Jambi as a Dutch Residency with O. L. Helfrich as the first Resident, appointed by the Dutch Governor-General's Decree No. 20 of 1906. O. L. Helfrich was inaugurated on July 2, 1906 (Seprina & Wahyuni, 2021). Following Helfrich's appointment, the Jambi Residency was divided into seven subdivisions: Jambi, Muaro Tembesi, Muaro Bungo, Muaro Tebo, Bangko, Sarolangun, and Tembesi (Miftahurrah et al., 2022).

The fall of the Jambi Sultanate to the Dutch saw Jambi City chosen as the colonial administrative capital. According to Syuhada et al., Jambi City was selected due to its strategic location along the Batanghari River, facilitating Dutch colonial mobility to monitor the movements of the Jambi Sultanate's descendants and restrict their activities, effectively

creating a prison-like environment along the riverbanks and surveilling the Jambi population as a strategy to maintain control and prevent uprisings from the sultanate and locals (Syuhada et al. [2017](#)).

Another reason for selecting Jambi City as the Dutch colonial capital and administrative center (*Eenstadsgemeente*) in 1906 was its economic, social, and political advantages for the Dutch (Luktiandi & Seprina, [2023](#)). During this period, Dutch colonialism expanded in the social and political spheres and saw trade growth. The Dutch also utilized the port along the Batanghari River for exporting natural resources (Sumarni, [2022](#)). Furthermore, the Dutch colonial government developed infrastructure to facilitate their administration. This study aims to understand the Dutch colonial position in Jambi, making Jambi City the residency center and exploring Dutch developments from the early period of their presence in Jambi to their decline from 1906 to 1942.

METHOD

This study employs a historical research method with a library study approach based on primary sources such as books, journals, and theses. The historical research method seeks to find sources and information about past events, systematically compiled through four main stages: heuristics (data collection), source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Kuntowijoyo, [2005](#)). In the first stage, heuristics (data collection), the author gathers data through a library study approach, utilizing books, journals, and theses relevant to the research topic. The second stage, source criticism, involves assessing and evaluating the validity and authenticity of the collected data (Lora et al., [2023](#)). The third stage, interpretation, involves analyzing the data with social science concepts and theories to assist in writing and examining historical sources. The final stage, historiography, involves writing the historical narrative based on source criticism and interpretation, resulting in a coherent and factual narrative about the Dutch colonial position in Jambi City from 1906 to 1942 (Sukmana, [2021](#)).

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Dutch Position as Resident in Jambi City, 1906-1942

The transfer of power from the Sultanate to the residency in 1906 led to Jambi City being governed by a Resident. The Resident's duties were supported by department heads and sub-departments, with an indigenous official acting as a liaison between the native administration and other ethnic groups (Sari, [2021](#)). Significant changes occurred due to the transfer of power to the Dutch colonial government, with the administrative structure described as follows:

- 1) Resident: The highest rank during the residency period, equivalent to a Governor.
- 2) Counter (Head of Afdeling): The rank held by a district head, equivalent to a Regent.
- 3) Demang: The rank given to a sub-district head.
- 4) Kepala Adat (Customary Head): The term used for a village head (Luktiandi & Seprina, [2023](#)).

Information about the Residents who served during this period is documented in the Dutch Indies Government Decree No. 187 of 1906, translated by Hertina and Budi, and cited by Miftahurrah et al., which includes the Dutch colonial decision to make Kerinci part of Jambi and designate Jambi as a residency (Miftahurrah et al. [2022](#)). The names of the Residents who served from 1906 to 1942 are as follows:

O.L Helfrich, the first Resident, served for two years from 1906-1908, followed by A.J.N Engeleberg, who served from 1908-1910. Th.A. L Heyting served for three years from 1910-1913, followed by A.L Kamerling, who served for two years from 1913-1915. H.C.E Qwaast held the position for three years from 1915-1918, followed by H.L.C Petri, who served for five years from 1918-1923 and significantly increased the export of natural resources. C. Poorman served for two years from 1923-1925 and increased rubber exploration, reaching tens of thousands of guilders in 1925. G.J Tahun Van Dgen served from 1925-1927, during which the *Nederlandse Rubber Unie* (Dutch Rubber Union) was established in 1926. H.E.K Tahun Ezermen served for only one year from 1927-1928, followed by J.R.F Versoohor Van Nosee, who served from 1928-1931. W. Tain Buch served for two years from 1931-1933, followed by H.J Van De Maulan, who served for three years from 1933-1936. M.J Ruyschaver served for four years from 1936-1940. From 1940-1942, the Dutch faced difficulties with Japan disrupting their trade routes, leading to their expulsion by the Japanese (Sari, [2021](#)).

The Dutch presence in Jambi City was strategic, with the Dutch aiming to control the Jambi Sultanate completely by dismantling it and taking over its power (Miftahurrah et al., [2022](#)). During this period, the Dutch colonial government significantly influenced the governance system, implementing an open-door policy and a liberal political system. The

Dutch also established a decentralized and feudal bureaucratic system, benefiting their interests (Luktiandi & Seprina, [2023](#)). However, Dutch control ended in 1942 when Japanese forces overthrew the Dutch, and the Jambi population expelled them (Suryani, [2021](#)).

Early Dutch Presence in Jambi City, 1906-1920

During the early period of Dutch presence from 1906 to 1920, there was little development in trade as local uprisings persisted. However, Resident Helfrich distributed rubber plants to farmers at no cost, which were planted along the Batanghari River. Between 1910 and 1912, rubber prices increased, and by 1918, rubber cultivation spread among the local population, with small family-owned plantations dominating (Seprina & Wahyuni, [2021](#)).

Jambi's economy continued to grow as the Dutch implemented ethical policies, opening large-scale plantations and introducing export crops recognized in international trade. Oil and gold mining also commenced in Jambi. By 1920, private investors began to arrive, investing in Jambi, which the Dutch leveraged to establish export plantations, benefiting Jambi's economy but also disadvantaging the local population (Sholekhah & Seprina, [2022](#)).

Colonial Dutch Heyday in Jambi City, 1920-1929

The increase in natural resource production in Jambi, such as rubber, rattan, copra, and resin from 1918 to 1922, indicated economic growth. This was evident from the influx of imported goods such as vehicles, flour, sugar, cigarettes, and tobacco. In 1921, a significant quantity of rattan was exported due to rising market demand (Sari, [2021](#)). By 1924, Jambi had three large rubber factories owned by Chinese entrepreneurs: Tjoa Hauw Kiat, Rubber Factory Hong and Co, and Kongsi Tjoa Siang and Tjoe Hie Liam (Heribertus & Seprina, [2022](#)). Rubber exports continued to rise, reaching tens of millions of guilders in 1925, benefiting the Dutch but creating dependency on Singapore. To address this, the Dutch formed the *Nederlandse Rubber Unie* (Dutch Rubber Union) in 1926, ensuring benefits for the Dutch without sharing with other private entities (Miftahurrah et al., [2022](#)).

In 1926, the Dutch colonial government constructed a permanent port in Jambi, known as Boom Batu Port, situated on the Batanghari River's marshy banks. The port began operations on April 1, 1929, near the Angso Duo market. However, it is no longer visible due to the construction of the WTC Mall (Yuliana, [2021](#)).



Figure 1. Batu Boom Pier
Source: Saputra et al., [2023](#)

The establishment of Jambi City as the Dutch Residency capital also led to significant changes in the region, characterized by the presence of Dutch-style buildings. One such structure is the Old Tower, built by the Dutch colonial government in 1928. The tower's function was to store water and serve as a lookout point to monitor enemy movements along the Batanghari River. The Old Tower complex includes three buildings: the main tower with three floors and two adjacent structures. The tower's diameter is 932 m², with a height of 24,150 m².



Figure 1. Old Dutch Tower in Broni
Source: antaranews.com, [2020](#)

In 1928, the Dutch colonial government also constructed a water tower in Jelutung, Jambi City, capable of storing 7 liters/second of water. After gradual renovations in 1976, the tower's capacity increased to 42 liters/second (Heribertus & Seprina, [2022](#)).



Figure 2. Jelutung PDAM Water Tower
Source: Sholekhah & Seprina, [2022](#)

The Dutch colonial presence not only developed the economic and infrastructure sectors but also established schools for indigenous people in Jambi. However, most students were from outside Jambi, with only a few native Jambi students (Sholekhah & Seprina, [2022](#)). The school was named Hollands Inlandsche School, a Dutch-language indigenous school located in the SMP Negeri 1 Kota Jambi complex. A separate school, Europese School, was established in 1920 for Dutch colonial children.

Dutch Decline in Jambi City, 1929-1942

From 1929 to 1933, Jambi's economy faced a crisis due to falling rubber prices. Consequently, the customs office increased import taxes by 50% on June 15, 1932. The decline in rubber prices also impacted laborers in Jambi (Miftahurrah et al., [2022](#)). By 1934, income recovery improved with a special tax on rubber products, raising customs revenue to f.15 million and continuing to rise to f.37 million in 1935. By 1937, the economy gradually improved with increasing rubber demand, known as the Coupon Era (Heribertus & Seprina, [2022](#)).



Figure 3. State Junior High School 1 Jambi City

Source: Sholekhah & Seprina, [2022](#)

Jambi's economic growth led the Dutch colonial government to increase patrols to monitor and control the entry of foreign ships into Jambi City. The Dutch also prioritized building and expanding road access, improving connectivity between Jambi's districts and facilitating access to Palembang and Padang through Jambi. In 1933, the Dutch built an airfield with partial support from NIAM (Miftahurrah et al., [2022](#)).

The Dutch colonial presence in Jambi significantly evolved, exploiting and enslaving the local population to benefit the Dutch. By February 1942, Japanese forces seized Dutch oil wells, expelling the Dutch, who were then driven out by the indigenous people and the Japanese, marking the end of Dutch colonial rule in Jambi.

CONCLUSION

The Dutch's success in defeating the Jambi Sultanate in 1906 made Jambi City the Dutch Residency capital, with O. L. Helfrich as the first Resident, appointed by the Dutch Governor-General's Decree No. 20 of 1906. This designation led to the division of the Jambi Residency into seven subdivisions, with Jambi City as the municipal capital (*Eenstadsgemeente*). This colonial period saw significant social, political, and economic development in Jambi, including using the Batanghari River port for exporting natural resources and implementing a beneficial bureaucratic administration system for the Dutch. The Dutch ethical policy encouraged the opening of large-scale plantations and mining, which, although boosting Jambi's economy, also disadvantaged the local population. European-style buildings such as the Old Tower and Dutch-language schools emerged as symbols of regional transformation.

The study's limitations lie in the availability and accuracy of historical sources, given that much of the data was sourced from Dutch colonial archives. Additionally, local perspectives are often overlooked in historical records dominated by colonial narratives, necessitating further research to provide a more comprehensive and balanced view of colonialism's impact on the Jambi community. Future research should explore local sources and oral history to complement the existing understanding.

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