

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The word "Minangkabau" is derived from two separate words in Minangkabau language. The first word "Manang" means to win and the second word "kabau" means water-buffalo. So Minangkabau means "the victorious buffalo."¹

According to the legend, once a buffalo-fight was held by people from Java and people from this area. The people themselves did not want to fight over any disagreement, so they just fought the buffaloes instead. The people from Java brought a very big and powerful mother buffalo with them while from this area they served a baby buffalo with two very sharp knives tied to its horns. This baby buffalo was purposely separated from its mother for a couple of days and was without milk and water. When it was let loose to face the strong buffalo from Java, the baby buffalo ran towards the big buffalo to suckle thinking it was its mother. The two sharpened knives on the horn of the young buffalo calf injured the big buffalo. The later ran away pointlessly because of the pain it suffered. When it arrived at a village it died. The local people there dehidied it. The village where the dehididing took place was given the name "Si Jangek" (hide).

Another village - where people took out the bowels was given the name "Si Paruik" (meaning the bowels).

Up to now we still find the two villages named "Si Jangek" and "Si Paruik" near Batu Sangkar.

The buffalo from Sumatra won the fighting competition. Since then, the population of this region named their land MINANGKABAU meaning "Victorious Buffalo."

¹ To the people of MINANGKABAU it has a legendary explanation from their ancestors.

In fact there are several ideas about the origin of the word Minangkabau. Some people tried to analyze the word from its social meaning. Others tried to invent new meanings of the word from its linguistic point of view, resulting in several interpretations, like "pinang kabu," means original land.²

The homeland of the Minangkabau people is located in the middle of the western part of Sumatra. Three original districts constitute the three original divisions of Minangkabau, namely the district of Tanah Datar (around Batu Sangkar), the district of Lima Puluh Kota (around Payakumbuh) and the District of Agam (around Bukittinggi). These districts are still called "Luhak" (region).³

There are also several villages outside of these three luhaks and the Minangkabau called them "rantau" (areas outside the original home territory), such as Rantau Pasisie (the coastal reaches), near Painan and "Siak Sri Indrapura" near Pakan Baru. Later the region of Minangkabau became the province of West Sumatra having Padang as its capital.

The people of Minangkabau are famous for their democratic way of thought. There are lots of historic places in Minangkabau area indicate that the leaders of the people from this area ruled the country by having democracy.

² Joustra, M, MINANGKABAU OVERZICHT VAN LAND geschiedenis en Volk. p. 41

³ TUAH, Dt. M, Tambo Alam Minangkabau, P. 20.



**A Writing on Stone .
In Kubu Rajo Batusangkar**

Batu Basurek (a writing on stone) in Kubu Rajo. It is a symbol of democracy where as the outcome of the meeting held by the adat council, the three penghulus ini Lima Kaum, namely :

1. Datuk Ketemanggungan
2. Datuk Perpatih Nan Sabatang
3. Datuk Suri Dirajo Nan Banego-nego

The result of the meeting was : Datuk Ketemanggungan was allowed to set up a new Kingdom in Bukit Batu Patah. Later the palace there was used for holding meetings among the three chiefs.⁴

The Minangkabau area is located along the equatorial line where we find Mount Merapi, Mount Singgalang and Mount Sago.

The Merapi mountain is a volcano, still active. Time and again it erupts, and as the result the surrounding areas become fertile. The greater part of the forests are still virgin. People grow rice, vegetables, maize, sugar cane while along the coast they plant coconut trees.

Lots of mineral resources are available like gold, coal, petroleum and uranium. Most of these resources have not been exploited.

Besides farming, the local people are also famous for their home industry, like embroidery, weaving, handicraft and silver wares.

A unique phenomenon in Minangkabau is that many among the people are outmigrating from the area to

⁴ A writing on the stone of Kubu Rajo, Batu Sangkar.

other towns & cities. Such movement is called "Merantau" (voluntary migrating). At present lots of the Minangkabau people live in Jakarta, Medan, Surabaya and other cities throughout Indonesia.

Two existing factors cause the Minangkabau people to go "merantau."⁵

One is the social setting where the right to possess property of a clan lies in the hands of the clan-chief.

When a young man begins a new life in a family he does not have sufficient right to use the property of the clan. Second, because of social prestige, a man cannot do any job freely in his village to earn his living. The more it is for those who do not enjoy sufficient education and skills. In a city away from Minangkabau they can do any job without facing problems related to social prestige.

There is no written sources about the Minangkabau kingdom. The Minangkabau kingdom can be studied by way of handed down stories (legends) and traditions among the people. The king's palace was located at Pagaruyung near Batu Sangkar, the former site of the Pagaruyung kingdom.

The first King inaugurated in Pagaruyung was Aditia-warman. He was believed to come from Java. Two famous leaders Datuk Perpatih Nan Sabatang and Datuk Ketumanggungan, laid down the foundations of the Minangkabau traditional laws and conventions.

The first leader was from "Adat Budi Caniago." while the second from "Adat Koto Piliang." These two adats constitute the base of Minangkaban customs and traditions up to now in whole Minangkabau land.

⁵ Merantau means going away from a village for a certain length of time for earning money or for education.

One Minangkabau queen named "Budo Kandung" was a very wise woman leader who was the symbol of Minangkabau women in society.

Other leaders mostly known in Minangkabau kingdom in the past were "Angku Gadang" in Batipuh near Padang Panjang.

He was the Minister of Defence. "Datuk Mangkudun in Sumanik" near Batu Sangkar and "Tuan Kadhi" in Padang Ganting also near Batu Sangkar. Minangkabau leaders in the past have conducted rulings for their people by way of conventions which are now still in force within the Minangkabau Society.

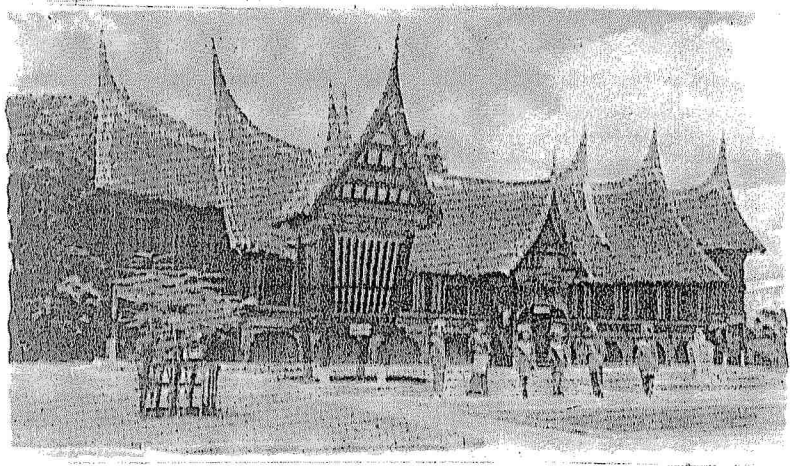
An other proof of democratic way of thinking is found in Lima Kaum. Here we can see "BATU BATIKAM (The stabbed Stone).

The symbol found here shows a hole resulted by a stabbing, cut by a dagger named "keris." It symbolized convention between Datuk Ketemanggungan and Datuk Perpatih Nan Sabatang showing that the two adats, (Law and traditions), namely "Adat Bodi Caniago" from the clan of Datuk Perpatih Nan Sabatang and the "Adat Koto Piliang" descended from the clan of Datuk Ketemanggungan are practiced together in all villages.

According to the "Adat Bodi Caniago" all penghulus or chiefs of the clan in the country have the same right, therefore, their customary house has the floor at the same level.

As it is in contrast to the Adat Bodi Caniago, the Adat Koto Piliang states that the four penghulus have a main chief to which the other penghulus should obey, therefore, they have the customary house that has different levels on its floor.⁶

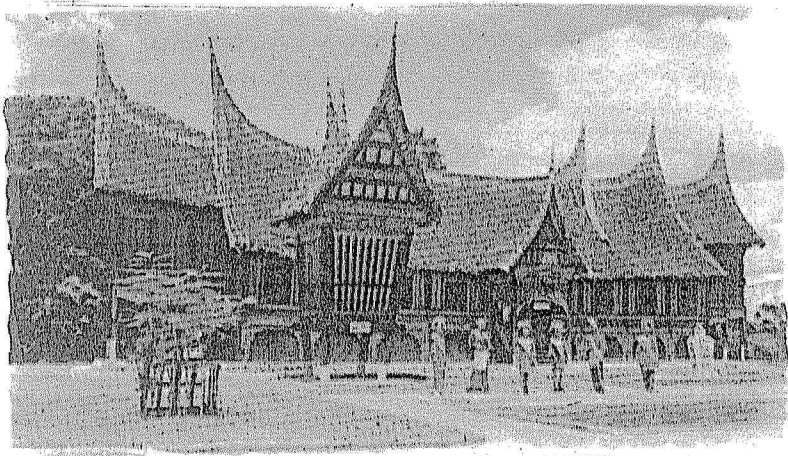
⁶ HAMKA, Adat Minangkabau dan Harta Pusakanya, Hukum Tanah dan Watis Minangkabau, Padang Sri Dharmma 1968. p. 27.



A Traditional House of Minangkabau

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