



Temple Construction as a Religious and Political Strategy Srivijaya 7th–12th Century

Hudaidah,^{1*} Syafruddin Yusuf,¹ Endang Switri,¹ Supiyah¹

¹Universitas Sriwijaya, Indonesia

*hudaidah@fkip.unsri.ac.id

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to analyze the construction of temples during the Srivijaya era from the 7th to the 12th century as part of a religious strategy related to political interests and the expansion of power. This research is based on the view that temple construction is not only a means of worship but also plays a strategic role in strengthening the kingdom's position. The method used is the historical method with a historical-critical approach. It consists of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Research findings indicate that temple construction in Srivijaya not only served as centers for religious rituals but also functioned as instruments of political legitimation and as centers of Buddhist education. Thus, the construction of temples was a religio-political strategy that played a role in maintaining internal stability and strengthening Srivijaya's influence in the Southeast Asian region.

Keywords: political legitimation; religio; Srivijaya; temple construction

Abstrak: Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis pembangunan candi pada era Srivijaya dari abad ke-7 hingga ke-12 sebagai bagian dari strategi keagamaan yang berkaitan dengan kepentingan politik dan perluasan kekuasaan. Penelitian ini didasarkan pada pandangan bahwa pembangunan candi bukan hanya sebagai sarana ibadah, tetapi juga memainkan peran strategis dalam memperkuat posisi kerajaan. Metode yang digunakan adalah metode historis dengan pendekatan historis-kritis. Metode ini terdiri dari heuristik, kritik sumber, interpretasi, dan historiografi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembangunan candi di Srivijaya tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai pusat ritual keagamaan, tetapi juga berfungsi sebagai instrumen legitimasi politik dan sebagai pusat pendidikan Buddha. Dengan demikian, pembangunan candi merupakan strategi religio-politik yang berperan dalam menjaga stabilitas internal dan memperkuat pengaruh Srivijaya di kawasan Asia Tenggara.

Kata Kunci: agama; legitimasi politik; pembangunan candi; Srivijaya



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Introduction

The Srivijaya kingdom was the first international kingdom in Indonesia, its existence is recorded in history as having ruled over the region of Sumatra, parts of West Java, the Malay Peninsula, and even Indochina, flourishing from the 7th to the 13th century AD (Manguin, 2025). As a great kingdom, Srivijaya had an impact on the political, territorial, and religious development in Nusantara. Srivijaya was very different from other kingdoms, which relied on economic resources from agriculture like the old Mataram or Majapahit. Srivijaya chose its economic base as the largest maritime kingdom (Hudaidah et al., 2024; J. Wisseman Christie,

1995). Based on archaeological records, namely the Kedukan Bukit Inscription (683 AD), which chronicles the king's victory in a political campaign for territorial expansion through a sacred journey, it serves as early evidence of Srivijaya's existence as a strong political entity (Hudaidah et al., 2025). Meanwhile, Chinese records provide an overview that Srivijaya was a center of Buddhist education, and from Arab records, it is also known that Srivijaya was an international trading hub in Southeast Asia (Febrian & Hudaidah, 2025).

The religious characteristics and teachings of Buddhism in Srivijaya are clearly seen in its inscriptions, which always begin and end with gratitude to the Buddha. The king always prayed for blessings and mystical powers from Buddha to uphold the glory of Srivijaya and bring benefits to all beings. In addition, at various regions under its control, Srivijaya always built Buddhist temples as an effort to enhance the religious devotion of its people (Coedès. G, 1968). Srivijaya is known for the presence of important cultural and religious centers. These centers, usually beginning with the establishment of temples and viharas, played a significant role in the spread of Buddhism (Wolters. O.W, 1999). Because of that, Srivijaya then became a center of Buddhist learning and study, attracting monks and students from various parts of Asia. This not only strengthened Srivijaya's position in a spiritual context but also in terms of cultural and intellectual influence, which impacted its political legitimacy and power (Andhifani et al., 2024; Khairunnisa et al., 2024). The traces of Buddhist temple discoveries from the Srivijaya era can be identified as follows: the temples on Bukit Seguntang, Palembang, the Bumiayu temple complex in South Sumatra, the Muaro Jambi complex in Jambi province, Muara Takus Temple in Riau province, and the Padang Lawas temple complex in North Sumatra. However, this study focuses on Bukit Seguntang, the Bumiayu temple complex, the Jepara temple, and the Muara Jambi temple complex.

Research related to temple studies in South Sumatra has been widely conducted by scholars. Dhanty and Susanti (2023) argue that the Bumiayu Temple site functioned as a center of religious tolerance, integrating Hindu, Buddhist, and Tantric beliefs. Suriadi and Srinindiati (2021) emphasize the influence of Shaivism at Bumiayu Temple, which shows similarities to Prambanan Temple in Central Java. Suryani (2018) states that the Muaro Jambi Temple complex played a significant role in the dissemination of civilization through Buddhism between the 9th and 12th centuries. Hidayatullah (2020) explains the spread of Hindu-Buddhist influence into the inland region of South OKU through the Musi River route, leading to the establishment of Jepara Temple. Meanwhile, Andhifani et al. (2024) highlight that Bukit Seguntang functioned as a center of Buddhist worship during the Srivijaya period. In general, these studies primarily focus on aspects of religious tolerance, cultural diffusion, and the influence of Hindu-Buddhist traditions.

In contrast, this study adopts an integrative approach by positioning temple construction as part of Srivijaya's religio-political strategy, functioning to strengthen political legitimacy, territorial consolidation, and the expansion of ideological influence in Southeast Asia. Based on this framework, the issues that arise are: how did Buddhism develop in Srivijaya? Secondly, why did temple construction become a focus of Srivijaya's royal policy in the 7th–12th centuries AD? Thirdly, what is the relationship between temple construction and the expansion of Srivijaya's influence? Fourth, which temples reflect Srivijaya's religious strategy? Some of these issues will be examined using the historical method with a historical-critical approach. It consists of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography.

This is done considering that studies on Srivijaya have generally focused on its role as a maritime kingdom and an international trade center, as well as a center for the development of Buddhism in Southeast Asia (Stuart-Fox, 2021). Archaeological research on Srivijaya temples tends to focus on the typology of architecture, building chronology, and artifact findings.

Meanwhile, historical studies tend to focus more on diplomatic relations and trade networks without deeply linking them to the development of religious institutions. No study has yet been found that places temple construction as an instrument of power legitimacy, territorial consolidation, and the strengthening of international Buddhism networks within the framework of Sriwijaya's religio-political strategy in the 7th–13th centuries AD. It is this gap that becomes the focus of the research and constitutes an important novelty of this paper. Therefore, this study seeks to understand how Sriwijaya integrated religious and political dimensions through the construction of temples in various regions under its control.

Research Methods

This research uses the historical method with a historical-critical approach to analyze the construction of temples during the Sriwijaya era from the 7th to the 12th century AD. The critical historical method was chosen because it allows researchers to systematically examine past events through the testing of available sources, both written and material. The historical-critical approach allows researchers not only to describe the data but also to analyze the relationship between temple construction, religious dynamics, and the political interests of the kingdom. Thus, this study aims to produce a comprehensive and contextual interpretation of Sriwijaya's religious and political strategies. The research steps can be seen in the following diagram:

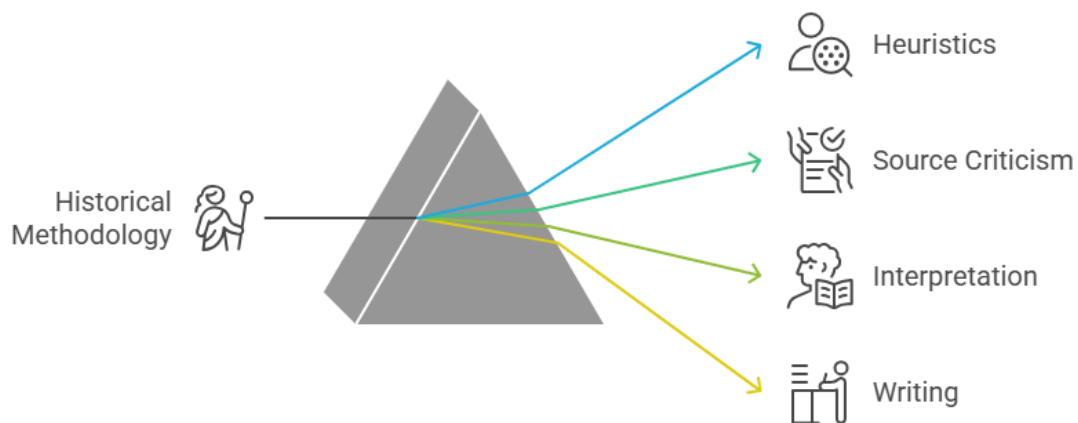


Figure 1. Historical Research Method

Source: Adapted and synthesized from Clement (2022), Heller (2023), Hilary (2021), and Schwandt (2022)

The historical research method consists of several interconnected stages that systematically guide the researcher in reconstructing past events. The first stage is heuristics, which involves the process of searching for and collecting relevant sources. At this stage, researchers explore various primary and secondary materials that can provide authentic data related to the topic under study. This includes activities such as visiting archives, examining historical documents, analyzing artifacts, reviewing previous research, and consulting scholarly literature. The quality of historical research is highly dependent on the completeness and reliability of sources obtained during this stage (Clement, 2022).

The second stage is source criticism, which aims to evaluate the authenticity and credibility of the collected sources. This stage is divided into two forms: external and internal

criticism. External criticism focuses on verifying the physical aspects and origin of the source, including its material form, authorship, date, and overall condition, to ensure that it is genuine and not falsified. Internal criticism, on the other hand, examines the content of the source by assessing its accuracy, objectivity, consistency, and the competence of the author, as well as the context in which it was produced. Through this process, researchers ensure that only valid and reliable data are used in the analysis (Heller, 2023).

The third stage is pattern interpretation, which involves analyzing and interpreting verified historical facts to uncover relationships, patterns, and underlying meanings. At this stage, the researcher moves beyond merely describing events and begins to construct a coherent understanding of historical phenomena. Interpretation allows the researcher to identify trends, causal relationships, and broader contexts, thereby transforming raw data into meaningful historical explanations. This stage is essential for producing an analytical and scientifically grounded reconstruction of the past (Schwandt, 2022).

The final stage is historiography, which refers to the process of writing and presenting historical findings in a structured and analytical narrative. Rather than simply arranging events chronologically, historiography emphasizes critical interpretation and deeper analysis, resulting in a more comprehensive and meaningful account of history. According to Abdullah and Surjomihardjo, historiography should produce narratives that are interpretative, reflective, and oriented toward understanding the significance of historical events. Through this stage, historical research is ultimately communicated in a form that contributes to scholarly discourse (Hilary, 2021).

Research Result

Religio-Political Strategy and the Expansion of Srivijaya's Maritime Power

The spread of Buddhism and Hinduism in Asian history is not only a spiritual phenomenon, but can also be understood as a strategy for legitimizing and expanding political power. During Ashoka's reign, Buddhism was used as a means of consolidating the Maurya Empire after military expansion, where through his edicts he emphasized dharma as the moral foundation of governance and the integration of the vast territories (Kulke & Dietmar, 2004). The spread of the Buddhist mission to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia demonstrates how religion functions as an instrument of diplomacy and political stabilization (Mabbett, 1998). Meanwhile, the spread of Hinduism to Southeast Asia through the process of 'Indianization' shows the adoption of Indian political cosmology, including the idea of *devaraja*, to strengthen the legitimacy of local kings (Munandar et al., 2012). This model appears in the power structure of the Sriwijaya Kingdom, which utilized Mahayana Buddhism as the ideological foundation of its maritime network.

The spread of Buddhism in the context of the Sriwijaya Kingdom cannot be separated from its strategies for legitimizing and consolidating maritime power. George Coedès asserted that Srivijaya was a center of Mahayana Buddhism that played an important role in the intellectual network of Southeast Asia and East Asia (Coedès, G, 1968). The construction of temple complexes is understood as part of a strategy to strengthen political authority as well as a symbol of the king's protection of religion (Miksic, 2013).

The construction of temple complexes such as Muara Takus Temple and Muaro Jambi Temple not only served as centers for religious rituals, but also as symbols of political authority and centers of religious education that reinforced Sriwijaya's position as a center of Buddhist studies in Southeast Asia (Soekmono, 1995). These temples became a concrete representation of the king's legitimacy as a protector of religion while also expanding the ideological influence of Sriwijaya through trade and Buddhist intellectual networks.

The power of Sriwijaya was based on the concept of mandala, where political legitimacy was reinforced through religious symbols and extensive patronage relationships. Thus, the construction of temples was not merely an expression of piety, but also an ideological and geopolitical instrument to expand Sriwijaya's maritime influence. This interpretation aligns with the approach of cultural hegemony. From the perspective of cultural hegemony, religion and monumental symbols such as temples function as instruments of ideological domination that create social acceptance of power structures (Antonio, 1971). In line with this, the concept of soft power explains that the spread of values and culture, including the development of religious centers, is an effective means of expanding influence without military coercion (Joseph S. Nye, 2004).

An important role in this process was carried out by the community of monks, who acted as agents for spreading teachings as well as serving as diplomatic and intellectual links between Srivijaya and the international Buddhist world. The *Yijing* notes from the 7th century mention Sriwijaya as a stopover and center for Buddhist studies before continuing the journey to Nalanda, which shows that Srivijaya was regarded as the authoritative representation of Buddhist tradition in Southeast Asia (Yijing & Junjiro, 1896). In addition, I Tsing's records also mention Sriwijaya as a place where 1,000 Buddhist monks studied before going to India. The same is noted in the records of the monk Xuanzang, another famous Chinese traveler who also visited Southeast Asia in the 7th century. Xuanzang provided information regarding diplomatic interactions and Sriwijaya's influence on the spread of Buddhist teachings in the Southeast Asian region (Watters, 1904). Several monks from India, such as Bodhidharma (the founder of the Zen Buddhism sect in China), are believed to have come to Srivijaya to spread Buddhist teachings. In addition, Srivijaya also sent monks to study in India, especially at Nalanda, a very famous Buddhist educational center in India at that time (Andhifani et al., 2024).

Srivijaya was a center of Mahayana Buddhism that played a role in the intellectual network of Southeast Asia and East Asia. The construction of temple complexes was related to strengthening the religious patronage of the rulers. Buddhism is one of the most significant factors in Sriwijaya's relationship with India. Sriwijaya was known as a center of Buddhism, which played a major role in spreading the religion throughout Southeast Asia. Srivijaya received significant influence from India in terms of religious teachings and practices (Thepa & Shangphare, 2022).

An important role in this process is played by the monastic community, which acts as both an agent for spreading teachings and as a diplomatic and intellectual link between Srivijaya and the international Buddhist world. In this context, the monks not only spread the doctrine but also reinforced ideological loyalty to Srivijaya as the protector of religion, thereby positioning the kingdom as the representative and center of Buddhist authority in the maritime region of Asia. Sriwijaya also became part of the network of Indian kingdoms that had a significant influence on the Southeast Asian region (Mishra, 2021). With the support of that religious legitimacy, Sriwijaya was able to expand its influence through trade and intellectual networks without relying entirely on military expansion.

Therefore, Sriwijaya itself, through this network of temples and monks, succeeded in becoming a center for the development of Buddhism (Kern, 1917). In this context, monks played a role not only as spiritual leaders, but also as cultural and intellectual mediators who reinforced ideological loyalty to Srivijaya as a protector of religion. Meanwhile, Soekmono (1995) explained that the construction of temples in the classical Indonesian tradition was inseparable from political functions as a symbol of the king's protection of religion and the legitimacy of his power.

Thus, the construction of temples during the Srivijaya period can be understood as a strategy for social integration, political legitimacy, and the expansion of maritime influence, supporting stability as well as the widening of power networks. This is reflected in the development of sites such as Bukit Seguntang as an early religious symbolic center in the Palembang area during the 7th–10th centuries AD. Bumiayu Temple and Jepara Temple show the penetration of religio-political influence into the interior of South Sumatra in the 7th–10th centuries AD. Muaro Jambi Temple developed as a center of education and Buddhist rituals in the Batanghari area during the 11th–13th centuries. To understand the concept above, the existence of Srivijaya-era temples in Southern Sumatra will be further explained, along with their role as symbols of the king's protection of religion and the legitimacy of his power.

Bukit Seguntang as the Spiritual Center and the Spread of Buddhism in Winua Srivijaya

Palembang, as the center of the Srivijaya kingdom, is based on dozens of inscriptions found in the city of Palembang, the most important of which are the Kedukan Bukti, Telaga Batu, Talang Tuwo, Bukti Seguntang, Bukit Seguntang, Boom Baru inscriptions, as well as dozens of Sidayatrah inscriptions. Based on studies of these inscriptions, it is known that Palembang had become a center of power, trade, and religion (Hudaidah et al., 2024).

Palembang has long been known by various visitors from China, India, and Arabia as a metropolis since the 7th century AD. As a center of power, of course, the city has various facilities for governance and religion (Febrian & Hudaidah, 2025). One of the most important sacred places during the Srivijaya period was Seguntang Hill. Seguntang Hill is located about 5 km west of the current city center. Seguntang Hill is the highest peak in Palembang, 65.26 meters above sea level. The area around the hill consists of swampy land that dries up during the dry season (Andhifani et al., 2024).

Findings from Seguntang evidence include the Seguntang inscription, beads, gold plates inscribed with Buddhist teachings, pottery shards, ceramics, and beads. The most important are the discoveries of various statues such as stone Bodhisattva statues. The Vairocana statue, a seated Buddha (taken by the Dutch and now at the Tropen Museum in Amsterdam), as well as the Avalokitesvara statue (now stored in The Hague Museum). Meanwhile, the Kuwera statue and the Buddhist area made of bronze are kept in the Srivijaya Kingdom Tourism Park Museum. The most special statue, the Bodhisattva, is 2.77 meters tall, carved from granite stone with realistically and finely detailed folds of the robe. Initially, this statue was found in parts: the head was discovered in the 1920s, the body was found later, but unfortunately, the legs have not yet been found (Purwanti & Taim, 1995). This statue has been reconstructed, with the head and body parts rejoined, so the original size of the statue can be determined. Currently, the statue is displayed in the courtyard of the TWKS museum (Larasatih & Hudaidah, 2025). The statue is not just a religious artifact, but a symbol of the grandeur of Srivijaya as a center of Mahayana Buddhism, a center of political power, and a cultural hub connected with India.

In addition, on Seguntang Hill, according to reports, a Dutch person discovered ruins of a stupa made of sandstone and bricks. The remains of the religious buildings on Seguntang Hill consist only of the base or foundation, while most of the building foundations have disappeared as a result of modern settlement construction (Schnitger, 1937). Remnants in the form of bricks are scattered across the foothill area. According to an archaeological report in 1954, the layout of the remaining stupa building could still be found at that time. In addition, gold plates and a padmasana were also discovered. The remnants of the ancient brick structure are suspected to be part of a temple or monastery (Utomo, 1985).

The discovery of buildings and stupas with various fittings further reinforces the site's position as a spiritual center of Srivijaya. Various statues from different periods also indicate

that Bukit Seguntang was not only a place of worship, but also a center of active religious activities, including spaces for learning, meditation, and possibly a temple/vihara center that formed the spiritual foundation of the Srivijaya society. This is in line with I-Tsing opinion, who stated that more than 1000 monks and students lived, studied, and practiced Buddhist teachings in Srivijaya, initially estimated to be at Bukit Seguntang. He emphasized that every student from China or other Asian regions should first study in Sriwijaya for several years to understand the Sanskrit language, Vinaya discipline, ritual practices, as well as the fundamentals of Mahayana philosophy before continuing advanced studies at Nalanda (Casparis, 1956). They live in the dormitory, study, and work for the dormitory. Eventually, they become monks who will be sent to Buddhist temples in various regions, whether in Wanua, Samaryyāda, or Bhūmi/Mandala (Soeroto, 1975).

Along with the development of Sriwijaya as a strategic region in Southeast Asia, Bukit Seguntang became important as a symbol of Sriwijaya's power. Bukit Seguntang therefore had a dual function, namely as a spiritual center, a center for Buddhist education, and the initial gateway to the international Buddhist knowledge network. With the large number of monks and students studying in Sriwijaya, as well as strong intellectual ties with India and China, Bukit Seguntang can be seen as one of the most influential centers of Buddhist learning in Southeast Asia. Naturally, this also reflects the greatness of the power of the Sriwijaya kingdom.

Although the religious building structures in Palembang are no longer intact, the remnants of artifacts in the form of stone and bronze inscriptions, as well as Buddha statues, support the hypothesis that Sriwijaya was a center of Buddhist religion. The lack of archaeological remnants of religious building structures does not affect the view on the importance of Palembang's role in the development of Buddhism. The discovery of several building parts around Seguntang Hill, such as the makara from the Gandus district, is one of the pieces of evidence of the remains of a sacred building nearby (Taim, 2022).

Bumiayu Temple Complex, Spiritual Center and Center for the Spread of Buddhism in Samarayada Sriwijaya

The Bumiayu temple site is one of the important religious complexes in the inland region of Srivijaya. This complex is located in Bumiayu Village, Tanah Abang District, Penukal Abab Lematang Ilir Regency, not far from the Lematang River, about 200 meters to the west, which in the past was a strategic route in local and regional trade of Srivijaya. Its location on a water transportation route shows that this area was connected to trading activities in the 9th century AD and beyond, thus allowing the entry of Buddhist influence into the interior region (S. Siregar, 2007).

The excavation results revealed the existence of thirteen temple building structures in this area, as shown in the following map:

Jebara Temple Complex, the Spiritual Center and Center for the Spread of Buddhism in Samarayada Sriwijaya.

The Jebara or Kebayan Temple site is located in Ogan Komering Ulu (OKU) Regency, South Sumatra, and serves as an important evidence of the spread of Buddhism from the Sriwijaya center to the inland areas. Although not as large as Bumiayu or Muaro Jambi, this site plays a significant role because it demonstrates the religious network of Srivijaya that reached upstream areas through river routes. Geographically, the location of Jebara Temple is situated near a large river, namely the Komering River, which flows directly towards Palembang (Hidayatullah, 2020). This access indicates that the spread of Buddhist culture and teachings during the Sriwijaya period was carried out through river routes as the main means of transportation.



Figure 3. Jebara Temple in South OKU
Source: Hudaidah Documentation, 2025

Figure 3 shows the structure of large stones arranged in a horizontal pattern. This temple building is the only temple structure that uses large stones like the temples in Java. This type of rock was used by people in the past as building material for temples, especially those found on the highlands (Rangkuti, 1995). The temple stones are made of limestone, with a rectangular foundation measuring 9 meters in length and 8 meters in width. The temple foundation has side moldings of genta and padma. Stone panels were also found, suspected to be parts of the temple, shaped in squares, but no decorations were found. The stone joining system uses a notched stone system, with the temple facing northeast. The flannel temples feature a padma ornament, this ornament developed in the 10th century AD (S. M. Siregar, 2010).

Jebara Temple was a Samarayyada for Sriwijaya; in the socio-religious context, Jebara is suspected to have been a “satellite shrine” or secondary worship center, a place for religious activities supporting the main spiritual center, which is Bukit Seguntang. This shows that the construction of temples by Srivijaya was not only focused on the center of government, but also spread to inland areas to strengthen religious influence and power networks.

Muaro Jambi Temple Complex, Spiritual Center and Spread of Buddhism in the Land of Sriwijaya

Jambi holds strategic significance for the Sriwijaya Kingdom because this region became an important hub that integrates economic, political, and religious interests within its maritime power network. Economically, its location along the Batanghari River allowed for control over the distribution of Sumatra's gold and trade routes connected to the Malacca Strait (Fatimah et al., 2024).

This site stretches along the Batanghari River and consists of dozens of structures including Candi Gumpung, Candi Tinggi, and the Kedaton, which demonstrate the spatial planning of a monastic complex, not just a single ritual building. Archaeological findings in the form of tiered brick structures, ancient canal systems, Buddhist statues, as well as Tang and Song Dynasty ceramics indicate the continuity of religious activities and settlements over several centuries (Manguin, 2021).



Figure 4. Muaro Jambi Temple

Source: Hudaidah Documentation, 2025

The brick structure in figure 4 shows the remains of the main building in the Muaro Jambi Temple area, composed of large red bricks, typical of religious constructions from the Sriwijaya period. The visible terraced structure shows a simple yet highly functional architectural pattern, where each layer of bricks is neatly arranged to form the podium or base of the sacred building. The concave spaces at the front indicate the presence of former entrances or transitional spaces leading into the interior of the building. At the top of the structure, a flat terrace can be seen, which used to be the main location for religious activities, such as meditation, reading of teachings, or possibly the site of a now-vanished roofed building (Santiko, 2014).

This complex is believed to have functioned as a vihara (monastery), a center for teaching Mahayana and Tantrayana philosophy, a meditation and manuscript copying center, as well as a site for high-level religious ceremonies. With its massive and organized area, Muaro Jambi became a symbol of the intellectual and spiritual power of Sriwijaya in the northern part of its territory (Sadzali et al., 2025). This is also in line with the economic strategy to connect the inland Sumatra gold route with trade in the Malacca Strait. On the other hand, this complex functions not only as a center for Mahayana/Vajrayana Buddhist rituals and education, but also as an instrument of symbolic legitimacy and a means of strengthening the influence of the Sriwijaya region within the framework of Southeast Asia's maritime network (Coedès. G, 1968; Wolters. O.W, 1999).

After the Chola Empire's attack in 1025 AD, Sriwijaya's hegemony in Palembang experienced a significant weakening (Singh, 2020), causing the Sriwijaya Mandala to shift from Palembang to Jambi (Kulke et al., 2009). This is reinforced by records from China which mention envoys from 'Sanfoqi' (Sriwijaya) in the years 1079, 1082, and 1088 as coming from an area identified by experts as Jambi. This is interpreted by historians as an indication of the shift of diplomatic, economic, and religious activity centers to the Batanghari region (Dellios & Ferguson, 2015).

In the context of Southeast Asian politics, Srivijaya is more appropriately understood through the concept of Mandala. In the Mandala system, power is not based on fixed territorial

boundaries or a permanent capital, but rather on networks of loyalty, control of trade, and symbolic legitimacy (Alnoza, 2020). Therefore, a shift in the center of dominance does not necessarily mean relocating the capital administratively, but can involve a reorientation of the political and economic center of gravity following regional dynamics.

The religious dimension also reinforced this reorientation. The Muaro Jambi temple complex was built around the 7th or 8th century AD, but experienced rapid development as a center of Buddhist learning around the 11th to 13th centuries AD. This means that the 11th century was not the initial phase of establishment, but rather a phase of complex religious intensification. In the context of the Mandala, the strengthening of this religious center has important political significance; Sriwijaya positioned itself as a patron and protector of religion to gain symbolic legitimacy that reinforced its network of power. With the development of Muaro Jambi as a center of education and Mahayana Buddhist rituals from the 11th to the 13th centuries, Sriwijaya not only secured the economic base of Batanghari but also rebuilt its ideological authority within the international Buddhist network.

Conclusion

The construction of temples during the Sriwijaya era from the 7th to the 12th century cannot be understood merely as a religious expression, but also as part of the kingdom's political and ideological strategy. As an influential maritime power in Southeast Asia, Sriwijaya utilized the construction of sacred buildings as a means of legitimizing authority, strengthening religious identity, and consolidating territory. The existence of religious sites such as temple complexes in the South Sumatra region, including the Bukit Seguntang area, the Bumiayu temple complex, Jepara Temple, and the Mura Jambi temple complex, shows that Buddhist religious activities developed alongside the political interests of the kingdom. Temples not only function as places of worship, but also as centers of religious education, spaces for state rituals, and symbols of spiritual supremacy that reinforce the king's position as the protector of religion (*dharmaraja*). In the context of international trade and shipping networks, the construction of temples in strategic locations near major rivers and trade routes reflects Sriwijaya's role in symbolic legitimacy and the strengthening of Sriwijaya's influence within the framework of Southeast Asian maritime networks. Thus, the construction of temples became an instrument of cultural diplomacy that expanded Sriwijaya's influence through transregional religious networks.

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Hudaidah, Syafruddin Yusuf, Endang Switri, Supiyah

Temple Construction as a Religious and Political Strategy Srivijaya 7th–12th Century

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