



Research Article

Fort Rotterdam During Dutch Rule: Traces of Power and Colonial Administration in Makassar

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Abstract

This study examines the role of Fort Rotterdam as a center of Dutch colonial power and administration in Makassar following the Treaty of Bongaya in 1667. It analyzes the transformation of Fort Ujung Pandang into a colonial administrative center and explains the mechanisms through which the VOC exercised control over South Sulawesi. Using the historical method, the study proceeds through the stages of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography and draws on a range of historical literature. The findings show that Fort Rotterdam functioned not only as a military stronghold but also as a center of administration, political surveillance, trade monopoly, and colonial social control. Its transformation reflects the Dutch colonial strategy of establishing a centralized and hierarchical system of governance in eastern Indonesia. The study argues that Fort Rotterdam became a symbol of colonial hegemony through the integration of military, political, economic, and bureaucratic power.

Article History

Submitted 04/04/2026
Revised 22/05/2026
Accepted 31/08/2026
Published 05/09/2026

Keywords

Fort Rotterdam; Dutch colonialism; Gowa Sultanate; Makassar War; colonial administration.

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INTRODUCTION

Fort Rotterdam is one of the most significant legacies of Dutch colonial architecture in eastern Indonesia, particularly in Makassar, South Sulawesi. Its long history is inseparable from the dynamics of political power and trade in the Nusantara during the seventeenth century. The history of Fort Rotterdam is closely connected to the conflict between the Gowa Sultanate and the Dutch East India Company (VOC), which culminated in the Makassar War (1666–1669). The Makassar War was among the largest and longest conflicts faced by the VOC in the Nusantara and fundamentally altered the political and economic order of eastern Indonesia (Nadjamuddin, [2024](#)).

The fort was originally built in 1545 by the ninth King of Gowa, I Manrigau Daeng Bonto Karaeng Lakiung, and was known as Fort Ujung Pandang or Fort Jumpandang. Following the Treaty of Bongaya on November 18, 1667, and the military defeat of Gowa, the fort was surrendered to the VOC after sustaining severe damage during the conflict. Cornelis J. Speelman subsequently renamed it Fort Rotterdam in reference to his birthplace in the Netherlands. This transformation represented more than a change of name; it symbolized the transfer of political power from the Gowa Sultanate to Dutch colonial authority.

Fort Rotterdam became a symbol of Dutch dominance in South Sulawesi and a colonial administrative center from which the VOC sought to control the spice trade and shipping routes in eastern Indonesia. Dutch renovations transformed the fort from a local defensive structure into a European-style fortress with a more elaborate defense system. It served not only as a military installation but also as a center of colonial administration in South Sulawesi. The complex contained administrative facilities, including the governor's office, a prison, a church, and residences for colonial officials (Marihandono, [2008](#)).

The Dutch colonial administration in Makassar operated through a hierarchical structure centered on Fort Rotterdam, where political and economic policies were implemented to consolidate control over a broad territory in eastern Indonesia (Hadrawi et al., [2022](#); Marihandono, [2008](#)). The prison within the fort also has considerable historical significance because it was used to confine Prince Diponegoro after the Java War (1825–1830). Diponegoro's detention at Fort Rotterdam from 1830 until

his death in 1855 illustrates how the fort also functioned as a political instrument for suppressing resistance to colonial rule (Carey & Noor, [2022](#)).

Fort Rotterdam's role as a center of colonial power had complex consequences for Makassar society. On the one hand, the fort symbolized oppression and the loss of local sovereignty. On the other, the complex became a hub of economic and social activity that contributed to changes in Makassar's social structure. The broader consequences of the Makassar War and VOC domination included political marginalization, economic restructuring, and social change among local communities and elites (Nuraeni et al., [2024](#)).

Previous studies of Fort Rotterdam have generally focused on cultural heritage preservation, tourism development, its use as an educational resource, and changes in the building's functions over time (Firdausy & Qayyim, [2023](#); Meiliana et al., [2023](#); Nadjamuddin, [2024](#); Rajab, [2020](#)). Such studies tend to be descriptive and emphasize the fort's physical, social, and economic value in a contemporary context.

In contrast, this study examines Fort Rotterdam during Dutch rule by focusing on traces of colonial power and practices of governance in Makassar. It considers not only changes in the fort's function but also the ways in which it was used as an administrative center, a symbol of political domination, and an instrument of colonial control. The study therefore offers a more analytical perspective on the relationship between the fort as a physical space and the construction of colonial power, an issue that has not been comprehensively addressed in previous research.

This study is important because it highlights dimensions of colonial governance that have received comparatively limited attention, particularly the fort's function as an administrative center and a symbol of political domination in Makassar. It also contributes to the historiography of colonial Indonesia by adopting a more analytical and contextual approach to the relationship between space, governance, and power. In addition, the study may provide a conceptual basis for more critical and evidence-based history education, linking historical interpretation with the development of historical awareness in the present.

METHOD

This study employs the historical method, consisting of four stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Hamid & Madjid, [2015](#); Herlina, [2020](#)). Heuristics refers to the identification and collection of sources used to reconstruct historical events. The sources for this study were obtained through a literature review, primarily from books and scholarly articles relevant to Fort Rotterdam, the Gowa Sultanate, and Dutch colonial rule. Source criticism was then conducted to assess the reliability and relevance of the information obtained (Hamid & Madjid, [2015](#)). Information on similar events and issues was compared across sources to identify consistencies, differences, and possible limitations. The interpretation stage involved analyzing and connecting verified historical facts to develop a coherent explanation (Herlina, [2020](#)). Finally, the findings were organized into a historiographical narrative that presents the results of the analysis in a systematic and comprehensible form.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A Retrospective on Fort Rotterdam as the VOC's Administrative Center

The Dutch presence in Sulawesi from the early seventeenth century was received differently from that of Portuguese and British traders in Makassar. The VOC was viewed with suspicion because its commercial ambitions threatened the Gowa Sultanate's relations with Portuguese and British merchants. In particular, the VOC was perceived as seeking to monopolize trade and impose regulations that conflicted with Makassar's established commercial practices (Sritimuryati & Suryaningsi, [2021](#)).

Before the Makassar War, the VOC's presence in South Sulawesi was driven primarily by its ambition to control regional trade. Makassar possessed a busy and strategically located port on the trade

routes linking western and eastern Indonesia. The VOC's ambitions, however, met strong resistance from the Gowa Sultanate, then the dominant political power in the region. Diplomatic efforts failed to resolve the growing tensions. In 1653, the VOC launched a limited attack through the port of Makassar, but Gowa's forces successfully repelled the assault and forced the VOC troops to withdraw.

The VOC renewed its military campaign in 1654–1655 by blockading the Port of Somba Opu. At the same time, conflicts in several areas, including Buton and Maluku, stretched Dutch military resources, while the Gowa Sultanate continued to receive support from its allies. Gowa's forces again resisted the VOC effectively. On October 23, 1655, a Dutch vessel commanded by Casper Buytendijk, carrying approximately 24 people, was destroyed in an explosion during an attack by the Gowa Sultanate (Fadli, [2022](#)).

In addition to military action, the VOC pursued diplomatic negotiations with the Gowa Sultanate. Three treaties were concluded during these efforts, but the agreements failed to resolve the fundamental conflict of interests between the two sides. The VOC continued to seek political influence and a trade monopoly, whereas the Gowa Sultanate sought to preserve its autonomy and its position as a major commercial power in South Sulawesi (Agussalim, [2016](#)).

Arung Palakka's flight to Buton further intensified the conflict because he later allied with the VOC against the Gowa Sultanate. The struggle escalated in 1666, when the Kingdom of Bone cooperated with Dutch forces under Admiral Speelman. The alliance was reinforced by local and external military contingents that strengthened the VOC campaign against Gowa (Fadli, [2022](#); Pelras, [2006](#)). They arrived at Somba Opu on December 19, 1666. Before attacking, Speelman presented several demands to Sultan Hasanuddin, including the surrender of those accused of murder and compensation for Dutch losses. Sultan Hasanuddin rejected these demands.

Open warfare began on December 21, 1666, signaled by the raising of a flag. Dutch forces attacked from the sea, while Bone troops advanced overland (Pelras, [2006](#)). Dutch cannon fire repeatedly targeted Somba Opu, but Gowa's forces resisted using armed boats. When Dutch troops attempted to advance further inland, they encountered strong resistance, including poison-tipped arrows, and were forced to retreat. On December 25, 1666, however, Dutch forces captured Bantaeng, an important food-supply center for the Gowa Sultanate, and began destroying granaries in the area.

The rulers of Bima and Luwu supported Karaeng Bontomarannu, who led a large force in an effort to attack Dutch positions. Fighting resumed in Buton on January 1, 1667, with Dutch forces attacking from the sea while Arung Palakka and his allies pressed Gowa's troops from other positions. The campaign ended in defeat for Gowa's forces, many of whom were captured by the Dutch (Mappangara, [2004](#)). Facing shortages of personnel, the Dutch subsequently recruited additional troops to reinforce Arung Palakka's forces. In preparation for another campaign in June 1667, Arung Palakka led approximately 2,000 troops toward Bone and the surrounding areas, while Sultan Hasanuddin strengthened Gowa's defensive forts under the leadership of Daeng Tulolo.

Galesong Fort was attacked from the sea on July 19, 1667, and its food-supply granaries were destroyed despite strong resistance from Galesong's defenders. In September 1667, Dutch and allied forces again attacked Barombong Fort by land and sea. Arung Palakka led the land assault while Dutch naval forces supported the attack with cannon fire. The fighting caused heavy casualties on both sides, and Barombong's defenders responded with approximately eighteen cannons. The Dutch later received reinforcements from Batavia in the form of five warships under Captain Pierre Dupon, enabling them to destroy Fort Barombong and gradually dismantle Gowa's defensive network.

After a prolonged and exhausting conflict between the Gowa-Tallo Sultanate and the VOC during the Makassar War (1666–1669), the Dutch again offered peace to Sultan Hasanuddin. The resulting agreement was formalized in the Treaty of Bongaya on November 18, 1667, which the Gowa Sultanate accepted under the pressure of sustained military conflict.

The Treaty of Bongaya was concluded on November 18, 1667, between Sultan Hasanuddin and the VOC. During the negotiations, Speelman presented a series of demands that substantially restricted Gowa's political and military autonomy. Article 11 specifically required the transfer of Fort Ujung

Pandang and the surrounding area to the VOC, allowing the Company to establish a permanent military and administrative presence in Makassar (Hadrawi et al., [2022](#); Meiliana et al., [2023](#)).

The treaty thus formalized the transfer of Fort Ujung Pandang to the VOC, while other Gowa forts were ordered to be demolished. The Treaty of Bongaya significantly strengthened Dutch power in eastern Indonesia. At the same time, a number of Gowa officials and supporters left the sultanate rather than submit to Dutch authority (Fadli, [2022](#); Nuraeni et al., [2024](#)).

Governance During the Dutch Colonial Period

Fort Rotterdam is now managed as an important historical heritage site and has developed into a prominent tourist destination in Makassar, attracting both domestic and international visitors (Rajab, [2020](#)).

Fort Rotterdam is located in Baru, Ujung Pandang District, on Jalan Ujung Pandang in Makassar, South Sulawesi. Its location is strategically situated near the city center and approximately 500 meters west of Karebosi Square. The complex contains 16 European-style buildings and is surrounded by walls constructed of andesite and tuff stone, as well as a moat. The fort is commonly described as resembling a turtle and has five principal bastions: Buton in the northeast, Mandarsyah in the southeast, Bacan in the northwest, Amboina in the southwest, and Bone on the western side near the main gate (Sumantri, [2021](#)).



Figure 1. Map of Fort Rotterdam and Its Five Bastions
Source: BPCB Province of South Sulawesi

Construction of the fortress began in 1545 under the ninth King of Gowa, I Manrigau Daeng Bonto Karaeng Lakiung Tumapa'risi' Kallonna. During his reign, the palace and administrative center of the Gowa Kingdom were relocated from Tamalate to Somba Opu near the Jeneberang River. The area subsequently developed into an important commercial center of the kingdom. Gowa's growing emphasis on maritime trade was also reflected in the appointment of a syahbandar, or harbor master (Meiliana et al., [2023](#)).

The Gowa Kingdom emerged as a major political power in the early sixteenth century, particularly during the reign of its ninth ruler, Daeng Matanre Karaeng Manguntungi Tumapa'risi' Kallonna (1510–1546). Under his leadership, the kingdom made significant advances in political organization, economic activity, and military defense. One important development was the construction of defensive forts along the Makassar coast (Mattulada, [1998](#)).



Figure 2. Layout of the Makassar Forts in 1667

Source: Sumantri (Ed., 2021, p. 85), after David Bulbeck (2013, p. 115)

Fort Ujung Pandang was initially constructed using earth and clay. During the reign of the fourteenth King of Gowa, Sultan Alauddin, its structure was reinforced with limestone quarried from the karst area of Maros. The fort covers approximately 28,595.55 square meters, with a building area of 11,805.85 square meters. Its layout is broadly rectangular, with the main gate on the western side facing the sea and a smaller entrance on the eastern side. The walls range from approximately 5 to 7 meters in height and reach about 2 meters in thickness. The overall form of the fort is often interpreted as resembling a turtle moving toward the sea, a design associated with the Gowa Kingdom's maritime identity and its connection to both land and sea. The fort's coastal location also reflects its defensive purpose and the kingdom's efforts to protect strategic access points (Hatmini & Aslim, [2019](#)).

Originally known as Fort Ujung Pandang, the fortress was also referred to by the Gowa-Makassar people as Fort Panyyua. Following the Treaty of Bongaya, one of the agreement's provisions required the Gowa-Tallo Sultanate to hand the fort over to the VOC. After taking control, Cornelis Speelman renamed it Fort Rotterdam in reference to his hometown in the Netherlands. The Dutch subsequently used the fort for a range of military, administrative, and commercial purposes, including the storage of spices from eastern Indonesia (Firdausy & Qayyim, [2023](#)).

The Dutch takeover of the fort brought major political and economic changes to Makassar. Colonial policies restructured governance and disadvantaged many groups formerly associated with the Gowa Sultanate, while strengthening the position of the VOC and its allies. Dutch control over trade also enabled the VOC to dominate important economic centers. One of the most significant changes was the conversion of Fort Ujung Pandang into a center of colonial government and defense in South Sulawesi (Meiliana et al., [2023](#); Nuraeni et al., [2024](#)).

The VOC victory and the Treaty of Bongaya imposed severe political and social consequences on the Gowa Sultanate. Although the treaty formally ended one phase of the conflict, Sultan Hasanuddin and other Gowa leaders continued to oppose Dutch influence and the presence of foreign power in Sulawesi (Fadli, [2022](#); Nuraeni et al., [2024](#)).

Under VOC occupation, Fort Ujung Pandang was not only renamed but also substantially renovated in a European architectural style. Its walls and defensive layout were strengthened to improve resistance to artillery attacks. Additional fortifications associated with Speelman included artillery positions, defensive moats, and reinforced walls designed to support the fort's military function. These changes transformed Fort Rotterdam into a more formidable colonial stronghold and reflected European fortification principles of the period (Hadrawi et al., [2022](#); Marihandono, [2008](#)).

The VOC's reconstruction of Fort Ujung Pandang sought to address weaknesses in the earlier fortifications and provide more effective protection against cannon fire. Engineers constructed more permanent walls facing the defensive moat and widened the moat to make it more difficult for attackers to use debris from collapsed walls to cross the defenses. The fort's defensive capacity was further strengthened by placing high-caliber cannons on elevated positions.

The strengthening of Fort Rotterdam was partly driven by Cornelis Speelman's doubts about the durability of the Treaty of Bongaya. Concerned about renewed conflict, Speelman requested additional troops from Java and reinforced the fort's defenses. Cannons used during the Makassar War were repaired and positioned on the fortress walls so that the garrison could respond quickly to further attacks.

Speelman's concerns were soon justified when Karaeng Karunrung continued resistance against the VOC. On August 5, 1668, Karaeng Karunrung's forces infiltrated positions around Fort Rotterdam; further attacks followed on August 12 and August 27. His forces were eventually defeated by Bugis troops led by Arung Palakka in cooperation with Speelman. During the fighting, Arung Palakka's forces captured 27 cannons. Fort Rotterdam's defensive capacity allowed it to serve securely as a residence, administrative center, military headquarters, and prison for political detainees under the VOC and later Dutch colonial government (Hadrawi et al., [2022](#)).

From an economic perspective, VOC colonial control was expressed most clearly through trade monopolies. The VOC sought to dominate strategic ports and trade routes that had previously been controlled by the Gowa Sultanate. Control of the ports enabled the VOC to regulate commodity flows, distribution networks, and trade levies, thereby weakening the economic foundations of the local kingdom. The requirement that Gowa pay war reparations further illustrated the exploitative dimensions of colonial rule. Politically, the Treaty of Bongaya restricted the sovereignty of the Gowa Sultanate and transferred Fort Ujung Pandang to the VOC, after which it was renamed Fort Rotterdam. The change in name and function had both symbolic and practical significance: a former royal defensive center became a colonial administrative hub from which Dutch authorities could oversee political activity, trade, and security in Makassar. From a maritime perspective, the decline of Gowa also demonstrates how colonial power was exercised through control of maritime access. Restrictions on navigation and inter-island trade weakened Gowa's position as an international trading center.

The VOC's alliance with the Kingdom of Bone further illustrates a divide-and-rule strategy in which local allies were mobilized to weaken political rivals. Colonial influence also extended into social and cultural life through sustained interaction, coercion, and changing social relations. VOC rule in Makassar can therefore be understood as a system of domination that combined military force, economic control, political hegemony, maritime power, and social transformation (Nuraeni et al., [2024](#); Sritimuryati & Suryaningsi, [2021](#)).

Table 1. The Role of Fort Rotterdam During the Gowa Sultanate and VOC/Dutch Periods

No	Comparative Aspect	Gowa Sultanate Period	VOC/Dutch Period
1	Fort Name	Ujung Pandang Fort	Fort Rotterdam
2	Period of Rule	c. 1545–1667	1667–1942
3	Rulers	Gowa Sultanate	VOC and the Dutch Colonial Government
4	Background of Construction	Built as a royal defensive fortress to protect the seat of government and Makassar's port area	Taken over after the Treaty of Bongaya to strengthen Dutch colonial dominance in eastern Indonesia
5	Main Function	Center of defense for the Gowa Kingdom	Colonial administrative center, military headquarters, trade hub, and center of political oversight
6	System of Government	Under the direct authority of the King of Gowa	Administered bureaucratically by the resident and other colonial officials connected to Batavia
7	Architectural Structure	Initially built with simple materials and later reinforced with brick, coral stone, and lime during the reign of Sultan Alauddin	Redesigned in a European architectural style with bastions, warehouses, offices, and barracks
8	Strategic Role	Center of maritime defense and a symbol of Gowa's political power	Center of Dutch colonial political, economic, and legal control in eastern Indonesia
9	Key Figures	Sultan Alauddin and King Gowa X I Manrigau Daeng Bonto Karaeng Lakiung	Cornelis Speelman
10	Historical Impact	Reflects the maritime and political power of the Gowa Sultanate	Symbolizes Dutch colonial rule and the transformation of power in Makassar

Source: Research data, 2026

The Dutch colonial government in Makassar developed a centralized and hierarchical administrative structure. Within this system, the Governor-General in Batavia held the highest authority, while regional officials represented the central government. Fort Rotterdam served as both a military stronghold and an administrative center in Makassar. Colonial administration classified territories into several levels, including *gewest*, *regentschap*, and *stadsgemeente*, and relied on officials such as residents, assistant residents, and *controleurs* to supervise local administration. This structure placed indigenous officials within a hierarchy subject to colonial oversight and regulation (Laely, 2018; Stroomborg, 2018).

This colonial administrative system differed substantially from earlier forms of governance under indigenous polities. Under Dutch rule, the autonomy of local officials was increasingly constrained by colonial laws, regulations, and supervision from appointed officials. The Dutch East Indies administration operated within legal frameworks established by the Kingdom of the Netherlands and colonial legislation governing the relationship between the colony and the metropolitan state. By the early twentieth century, these arrangements had produced an increasingly formalized bureaucratic system of colonial government (Stroomborg, 2018).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Fort Rotterdam functioned not merely as a defensive fortress but also as a center of colonial administration and a symbol of Dutch dominance in Makassar. Following the Treaty of Bongaya, the fort underwent a major functional transformation from a defensive center of the Gowa Sultanate into an administrative and military center of the VOC and, later, the Dutch colonial government. From Fort Rotterdam, Dutch authorities sought to regulate maritime trade, enforce economic monopolies, monitor political conditions, and consolidate administrative control in South Sulawesi. The fort therefore became an important instrument in the expansion and maintenance of colonial power in eastern Indonesia.

This study contributes to the historiography of colonial Indonesia by emphasizing the relationship between physical space, power, and practices of governance. It shows that colonial forts

performed functions beyond military defense: they also served as centers of administration, political surveillance, commerce, and social control. By positioning Fort Rotterdam as a material expression of VOC and Dutch East Indies authority, the study also contributes to the historiography of Makassar and the Gowa Sultanate. Its findings may further support the development of more critical, contextual, and historically informed approaches to history education.

This study has several limitations. It relies primarily on secondary sources, including books, journal articles, and historical literature, and therefore does not make extensive use of primary colonial archives or local manuscripts such as *lontarak*. Its discussion also focuses mainly on the political and administrative dimensions of colonialism at Fort Rotterdam, while the socio-cultural experiences of local communities receive less attention. Future research should therefore incorporate a broader range of primary archival and local sources and may benefit from interdisciplinary approaches to provide a more comprehensive account of colonialism and its effects on Makassar society.

Acknowledgement

Not applicable.

Author contributions

The author was solely responsible for the preparation and finalization of the manuscript. The author has read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Availability of data and materials

Not applicable.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

The author has approved the publication of this manuscript.

Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.

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