

The History and Meaning of the *Umah Pitu Ruang* in Tanah Gayo, Aceh

Sejarah dan Makna *Umah Adat Pitu Ruang* di Tanah Gayo, Aceh

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Abstract: *This paper examines Umah Pitu Ruang, the Gayo community's traditional house in Aceh Province. This paper aims to describe the understanding and history of Umah Pitu Ruang's emergence in the Gayo community. The method used is the historical method with five stages: topic selection, heuristics, verification, interpretation, and historiography. This study shows that Umah Pitu Ruang is a stilt house made of wood. The term Umah Pitu Ruang comes from the Gayo language, which is the influence of Austronesian culture. In its history, umah initially appeared in the neolithic period, which was still simple and later developed into an Umah Pitu Ruang with a more extensive and elongated shape. An extended or joint family formerly inhabited the seven-room house.*

Keywords: *Umah Pitu Ruang, traditional house, Tanah Gayo*

Abstrak: *Tulisan ini mengkaji tentang Umah Pitu Ruang yang merupakan rumah tradisional masyarakat Gayo yang ada di Provinsi Aceh. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan pengertian dan sejarah munculnya Umah Pitu Ruang pada masyarakat Gayo. Metode yang digunakan adalah metode sejarah dengan lima tahapan, yaitu pemilihan topik, heuristik, verifikasi, interpretasi, dan historiografi. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa Umah Pitu Ruang merupakan rumah panggung yang terbuat dari kayu. Istilah Umah Pitu Ruang berasal dari bahasa Gayo yang merupakan pengaruh dari budaya Austronesia. Dalam sejarahnya, umah pada awalnya muncul pada masa neolitik yang masih sederhana dan kemudian berkembang menjadi Umah Pitu Ruang dengan bentuk yang lebih besar dan memanjang. Rumah dengan tujuh ruang tersebut dahulu dihuni oleh keluarga batih atau keluarga besar.*

Kata Kunci: *Umah Pitu Ruang, rumah adat, Tanah Gayo*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has different cultures and customs (Neonub & Habsari, 2018; Rero & Maryani, 2022). All of that cannot be separated from more than three hundred tribes spread across various islands (Manurung, 2017). Each tribe has its characteristics of different traditions and cultures (Laente, 2019). These differences make Indonesia rich in cultural heritage (Asfina & Ovilia, 2017). Hence, this diversity can be seen in language, literature, art, traditional clothing, living equipment, and traditional houses.

A traditional house is a form of cultural wealth from the knowledge of the community. Rapoport (1969) states that a traditional house can be interpreted as a house built similarly for generations. Waterson further reveals that traditional houses are built by adapting to the local climate, geography, and environment using materials and construction (Dahlioni, 2014). In addition, traditional houses have an essential component of physical elements that reflect sacred and social unity. The construction uses a cooperation system (Tamraz in Salihin, Juned, & Dharsono, 2019). Traditional houses are different from modern ones, generally, they have the same function, as a place to live. Suparlan (1992) mentions that the house is one of the primary needs of the human body's biological aspect or organism. Besides being a place to live, the house is also a shelter from rain, sun exposure, cold weather, and danger (Triyanto, 1992). Traditional houses are part of the culture as well as the local identity of a community according to their function and type (Vitasurya, Hardiman, & Sari, 2018).

In Sumatra, the ethnic generally have traditional houses on stilts, such as the houses of the Acehnese, Batak, Batin, Minang, Gayo, and others (Iswanto, Sufi, & Abdullah, 2012). Each of these houses becomes a work of architecture and an expression of identity. The building's architecture represents cultural values

(Endika & Sholihah, 2017). Likewise, the traditional house of the Gayo ethnic in Tanah Gayo (Gayo Land), Aceh Province. The Gayo ethnic has a traditional house, which is a type of house on stilts made of wood (Pinan, 2003). Traditional wooden houses are part of the integrity of a place's identity and community heritage (Mendoza et al., 2022). So are *Umah Pitu Ruang* or seven-room house.

Umah Pitu Ruang is a form of expression of knowledge, technology, and art owned by the Gayo community (Iswanto et al., 2012). The knowledge of making houses on stilts has been passed down from generation to generation. The house without using iron is unique because, as the name implies, it has seven rooms with their respective functions (Pinan, 2003). In addition, a house is also a form of artistic expression, especially from the carving motifs, which also have conceptual and philosophical values (Iswanto, Nurasiah, & Putri, 2020). However, the form of housing has shifted and changed from traditional housing to transitional and modern forms (Meutia & Sari, 2021). The existence of *Umah Pitu Ruang* is increasingly challenging to find and has been replaced with modern houses.

Previously, many studies have examined *Umah Pitu Ruang*, but few studies focus on the study of its etymological and historical meaning. This research is expected to increase the knowledge of the Gayo community and the Indonesian people in general about *Umah Pitu Ruang*. Therefore, this study aims to examine *Umah Pitu Ruang* that focuses on the Gayo community, the meaning of *Umah Pitu Ruang*, and the history of *Umah Pitu Ruang*'s emergence in the Gayo community in Tanah Gayo, Aceh Province.

METHOD

Historical studies are not only limited to economic, political, social, urban, rural, and religious studies but also include studying

culture. Cultural history is one of the categorical themes in historical research. Therefore, research on the origin of *Umah Pitu Ruang* uses the historical method.

The historical method is a method with collection of techniques and approaches that refer to traditional and social history (Toland & Yoong, 2014). The historical method has a systematic set of rules and principles, such as collecting sources that are carried out systematically, but it must be critical in its assessment (Garraghan, 1957). These rules become signs that historical researchers must carry out (Pranoto, 2010). In addition to rules, another term used is stages. These stages include topic selection, heuristics, verification, interpretation, and historiography (Kuntowijoyo, 1999). The stages in this research are similar to Kuntowijoyo's statement and they will be elaborated below.

First, selecting research topics or themes is appointed according to available data sources or literacy. Historical research is data research, both written and unwritten. If the source is not available, the researcher will have difficulty in carrying out the stages of the historical method. The research theme focuses on the development of *Umah Pitu Ruang*, the Gayo community's traditional house in Tanah Gayo. *Second*, heuristics or source/data collection related to topics or themes. The sources referred to here are primary and secondary sources. The primary sources used are Dutch documents, one of which is a source from the Leiden University KITLV. While the secondary sources used are books and articles that examine *the Umah Pitu Ruang*. These sources were obtained from various places such as the Library of Aceh Cultural Value Preservation Center or *Balai Pelestarian Nilai Budaya* (BPNB) Aceh, Universitas Syiah Kuala (USK) Library, Aceh Regional Library, Private Collections, and articles from several online journals.

Third, verification or criticism of the source. In this stage, the researcher verifies the primary and secondary sources collected by critiquing the content, year, author, materials, and sources used. Inappropriate sources will be eliminated so that the remaining data are only the valid ones. *Fourth*, interpretation of the source. The data considered valid are interpreted into historical facts. In this case, time considerations must also be considered to interpret more chronologically illustrated, lastly, historiography or historical writing. After interpretation by making a valid concept, it is poured into written form, namely history.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Gayo Community in Tanah Gayo, Aceh Province

The Gayo ethnic, known as the Gayo community, is one of the ethnic groups living in Aceh Province. The origin area of the Gayo ethnic residence is known as the Gayo Highlands (Gayo Land), and the Gayo people call it *Tanoh Gayo* (Iswanto, Zulfan, & Suryana, 2020; Wibowo, Munti, Lestari, & Hasimi, 2007). The Gayo ethnic is the oldest ethnicity in Aceh and lives separately from Aceh's coast, which is surrounded by Acehnese people (Loeb, 2013). From archaeological findings, the Gayo people ancestors have settled in Tanah Gayo between the Mesolithic and Neolithic times. They develop their own culture, distinguishing them from the Acehnese and others (Wiradnyana & Setiawan, 2011). These differences can be seen in the language, customs, arts, and traditional houses.

Besides Tanah Gayo, which includes Central Aceh District, Gayo Lues District, and Bener Meriah District, a few members the Gayo ethnic live in Southeast Aceh, Aceh Tamiang, and East Aceh District. Although scattered in several districts, they still refer to themselves as *urang Gayo* (Gayo people), which refers to their origin

area, namely Tanah Gayo (Iswanto et al., 2012). Overall, the Gayo community embraced Islam. It is not surprising that almost all elements of the culture have Islamic nuances. One of these elements is art, such as *Saman* dance from Gayo Lues, *Didong* from Gayo Lut (Central Aceh and Bener Meriah), and many other dances. In addition, the textiles are also very beautiful, namely Gayo filigree embroidery, which has been designated as Indonesian cultural heritage (Iswanto, Nurasiah et al., 2020).

Before the 20th century, the Gayo people lived separately and were rarely known by people outside Aceh. Tanah Gayo began to be visited by many outsiders since the arrival of the Dutch colonial era, since 1904 (Iswanto, Zulfan, et al., 2020). Various tribes began to arrive since the construction of the road connecting Tanah Gayo with the coastal area (Iswanto, Nurasiah, & Kesuma, 2021). Since then, Tanah Gayo has continued to experience changes and developments in various aspects. Although on the one hand, the influence of the Netherlands has also eliminated some community cultures, such as the royal system, Tanah Ulayat land, and others.

Meaning of *Umah Pitu Ruang*

Etymology is a branch of linguistics that studies "the origin of a word." Vocabulary used today has root words that come from various language sources. The word's root can be an adaptation of another language word or the absorption of a foreign term. In addition, the history of the language also influences the emergence of root words (Eliastuti & Hapsari, 2016). The word etymology is absorbed from the Dutch language, which is rooted in Greek, namely *etymos* (meaning word) and *logos* (science) which means a word.

Studies on the origin of the term *umah* in the Gayo community etymology are rarely found. The Indonesian-Gayo language dictionary states that *umah* is a place to live. *Pitu* means seven,

and *space* means room or cubicle (Thantawy et al., 1996). Referring to that, etymologically, the term *Umah Pitu Ruang* is a series of words from the Gayo language which means "house of seven rooms."

The term *umah* in the Gayo community is the influence of Austronesian culture. PaEni & Tjahjono argue that the terms *uma*, *umah*, *ume*, and *umag*, which are spread in Indonesia, refers to the realm of settlement and inhabiting or the main building for housing. These terms are closely related to the traditions and influences of building buildings and working on agricultural spaces from Austronesian culture (PaEni & Tjahjono, 2009). Until now, the term can still be found, for example, *uma* in the Mentawai community, which refers to their traditional house (Kusbiantoro, Anthonius, & Santosa, 2016). The term *umah* in Balinese society is widely known as a house or place to live (Gata, Sudika, Purnomo, Widayani, & Yhani, 2020; Manuaba, 2018). At the same time, the term *ume* can be found in the people of the island of Timor in western Indonesia. The term *ume* refers to a traditional local house (Dima, Antariksa, & Nugroho, 2013). Those are just a few examples of many ethnic groups in Indonesia.

In the Gayo community, the term *umah* refers to a residential building similar to the Balinese's house. In term, *umah* is generally used by the entire Gayo community. While the term *ume* in the Gayo community does not refer to residential buildings such as in the Timor Island community, *ume* in the Gayo community refers to agricultural land, namely rice fields. The Indonesian-Gayo language dictionary also states that *ume* is defined as rice fields (Thantawy et al., 1996). The term *ume* is also different from *ume*, which means *besan* or in-laws.

The use of *umah* mentioned in the Gayo community is also the influence of Austronesian traditions and languages. Eades & Hajek once

defined the Gayo language. According to them, the Gayo language is part of the Malayo-Polynesian group, which is included in the Austronesian language section (Eades, 2005; Eades & Hajek, 2006). Likewise, with the mention of *pitu*, which means seven. The *pitu* can also be found in other Malay-Polynesian communities, such as the Batak language family in North Sumatra. In comparison, the term space has many meanings, such as cubicles, niches, caves, rooms, places, corners, and others. Nevertheless, in the Gayo community, the space here refers to the room contained in the traditional house.

Currently, the term *umah* in the Gayo community is a general term that does not only refer to buildings for housing but also other buildings, such as *umah saket* (hospital), *umah sekolah* (school house), and others. In the past, the *umah* was specifically only mentioned for the house as a place to live. In the Gayo community, the *umah* itself is divided into two: the ordinary and *Umah Pitu Ruang*. The division is due to the differences between *pitu* ordinary and space houses, such as materials and shapes. However, *umah* was the forerunner of *Umah Pitu Ruang's* emergence, which known as the Gayo community's traditional house.

Umah Pitu Ruang is the traditional house of the Gayo community with a stage formed in a traditional architectural style (Nas & Iwabuchi, 2008; Salihin et al., 2019). It has an elongated shape that serves as a place to live for several families (Ifani, 2019). However, *Umah Pitu Ruang* did not appear since the beginning of the Gayo people's ancestors living in Tanah Gayo. It all started at a time when the knowledge level of the people was getting more complex. At first, the shape was just an ordinary stilt house without any spatial divisions, such as seven rooms. Usually, that is called *umah* and there will be rice fields; where there is an *umah*. In addition, at first glance, *Umah Pitu Ruang* is similar to the traditional Acehese

house, namely, *krueng bade*. However, the layout, carving motifs, and materials used differ greatly. *Umah Pitu Ruang* has its uniqueness, in each of its carved motifs it has philosophical values, and in each room has a kitchen.

Umah Pitu Ruang is also a form of cultural heritage closely related to the cosmology of life and the characteristics of the Gayo community. Because of its uniqueness and as part of Indonesian culture, in 2010, *Umah Pitu Ruang* was designated by the Ministry of Education and Culture as an Intangible Cultural Heritage, with registration number 2010000709, and included in the domain of Traditional Craft Skills and Proficiency.

History of *Umah Pitu Ruang*

So far, there are very few studies on the origin of the Gayo ethnicity in written form and in the form of finding objects (Wibowo et al., 2007). Likewise, the study of *Umah Pitu Ruang's* emergence is challenging to know. The only source that describes the emergence can be traced through a local oral tradition called *kekeberen*. Based on *kekeberen*, two opinions state that *Umah Pitu Ruang* appeared hundreds of years ago (*zemen pudaha*), long before the Linge Kingdom appeared in the Isaq area. Another opinion states that *Umah Pitu Ruang* appeared during the Linge Kingdom.

Recently, studies on the origin of the Gayo ethnic from anthropologists, archaeologists, and ethnoarchaeologists have begun to appear. The history is not only based on fairy tales but also artifacts or archaeological evidence, and *Umah Pitu Ruang*. The history of *Umah Pitu Ruang's* emergence cannot be separated from the arrival of the Gayo ethnic ancestors and their knowledge of buildings for residence. Wiradnyana and Setiawan's book "*Gayo Merangkai Identitas*" (2011) explained a lot about archaeological findings in Takengon related to the origin of the Gayo ethnic's ancestors. It all started 7,400 years ago. An

Austromelanesoid racial group entered the island of Java and spread to various islands, including Sumatra. In Sumatra initially, they lived on the east coast of the Sumatra Island, bringing the Hoabinh culture with them. At that time, they still had the characteristics of hunting, catching fish, and collecting shells or snails as food. In the year 4,000, they were familiar with simple farming, making simple houses, pottery, and social values. One of these groups migrated to Tanah Gayo by tracing the Peusangan river, and in Tanah Gayo, they lived in caves and inlets such as Loyang Mendale. However, around the year 4,400, it turned out that there were also other human groups, namely speakers of Austronesian languages, who also migrated to Tanah Gayo. This group lived in Loyang Mendale, Loyang Ujung Karang, and Loyang Putri Pukes (Wiradnyana & Setiawan, 2011). These findings further strengthen that the Gayo community is one of the oldest ethnic groups in Indonesia.

The second group is likely from Southern China or Taiwan. They came to the Malay Peninsula to Sumatra and continued to move eastward to the island of Sumatra until they entered the Tanah Gayo (Takengon). This group came with a more advanced culture than Hoabinh. They have higher knowledge of all preparations that are pretty mature in managing life in the future. Wiradnyana and Setiawan (2011) also argue that it is possible that the two groups conducted cultural unification and became the ancestors of the Gayo ethnic. According to Ibrahim, in the story of the Gayo community, these times are called *jemen pudaha*. At that time, the Gayo people were still closed from the outside world and had no relationships with people outside the Tanah Gayo (Ibrahim & Pinan, 2009) so that an outside culture does not touch their culture.

Referring to the research results of Wiradnyana and Setiawan, it can be said that during the Neolithic period, there was knowledge

of building houses in the Gayo community. At first, they lived in caves or alcoves, but after building a house, they began to leave the cave (Wiradnyana & Setiawan, 2011). In addition, the increasing number of family members is also a factor in them starting to leave the caves and niches. Knowledge of *berempus* (farming) and *berume* (rice fields) made them start a sedentary lifestyle. Since then, caves and niches have been abandoned, and they have started to build houses on simple stilts (Iswanto et al., 2012). Some Dutch documents show that the house on stilts is of medium size. Until the early 20th century, these simple stilt houses could still be found. According to Ibrahim, at first, there were no rules that people had to follow in building houses. The materials they use are materials that are in the environment. However, the house can protect them from the heat of the sun, rain, cold weather, wild animals, mosquito bites, and others. At that time, they also knew about raising livestock. No wonder if near the house, there are cattle pens. This simple house is generally referred to as a *house*, and rice fields are referred to as *ume* (Ibrahim, Interview: 12 August 2012).

Umah is usually built adjacent to the *empus* and *ume*. Austronesian culture also influences the Gayo community's culture. It should be noted that the early Gayo people did not yet know about making a house and the terms *empus* and *ume*. It is the influence of the Austronesian people who came during the Neolithic period and were assimilated.

Besides being a place to live, the house's bottom usually functions as a place to cook, store firewood, and weave. Not far from *home*, usually, there is *keben* (rice barn). *Kebeen* is usually built not far from *umah* and serves as a storage place for the rice harvest. At harvest time, they will save the harvest for the *kebeen*. *Kebeen's* size is not significant and includes a pillared building.



Figure 1. Keben, that is getting harder to find
Source: Author's Private Document

The form or construction of the house they built was a stilt house built on four main pillars. From top to bottom, the house tends to be tied using fibers or rattan. Meanwhile, parts that require a wide area will be covered with woven, bamboo, or wood slats (Wiradnyana & Setiawan, 2011). The construction is the initial form of the *umah* Gayo community. In addition, at that time, there was no application of aesthetic value to house buildings. In later times, houses were built on four main pillars and up to six or even eight main pillars. The size of the house is getting bigger, and the walls have started using woven bamboo called *tepas*.



Figure 2. Housing construction of the Gayo community
Source: (Winter, 1931)

In addition, the main feature of the house at that time was that it was built near a river. Water is an essential component in the survival of the Gayo community. So as was foreseeable, *umah* were mainly located close to the river and Lake Lut Tawar. Almost all *kampung* (villages) were established close to rivers ranging from small to large ones, such as the Peusangan River. For example, *Kampung Jongkok Kebayakan*, located near the river flow, is also adjacent to rice fields, and so is *kampung* around Lake Lut Tawar. At that time, the *umah* then developed into *umah setengah bubung*, and this house was different from the shape of *umah* previously.

Umah setengah bubung sometimes stand in the same *kampung* at the same time. Usually, in one *kampung* the number of houses is not too many. The maximum number is six to seven houses only. However, residents in one *kampung* are usually bound by *sudere* (siblings or family) ties and are still from *blah* or *kuru*. Settlement in the form of *kampung* only occurs when the population of a *kampung* increases. An increasing number makes the existence of a *kampung* apparatus such as a *kejurun*.

The shape of the *house*, even in one village, still looks the same. The number of people is increasing, and the need for land is also increasing. Many people leave the *kampung* to move to find new land, which is then called the *nebuk*. Those who move will call themselves *urang*, referring to their area of origin. Those who live in a *kampung* will also refer to themselves as part of the *blah* or *kuru*. In the Gayo community, there is a prohibition against marrying *sara blah*. However, the number of the Gayo community, who are still little, experience problems in finding a life partner. At that time, every *blah* that left *blah* and founded a new settlement became a *kuru*. Since then, the *kuru* have formed their group by bringing up differences in social status as well (Ibrahim, Interview: 12 August 2012).

In the next period, in addition to the growing population, a pattern of leadership emerged in the form of *reje*, which was integrated into the *sarak opat* (government apparatus), service institutions *kejurun* and the *batih* family had made changes to the *umah*. These changes occur in size and function. The most fundamental main factor to this change is the existence of the *nuclear family system*. Rusdi stated that the Gayo community has always adhered to the *nuclear family system*. Usually, after marriage, they will settle in the *batih* or husband's house for a while (Rusdi, 2011). They also adhere to a split or clan exogamy marriage system or *klen* (Hidayah, 2015). Their marriage is also arranged according to the custom of split exogamy (minimum lineage). Therefore, there is a strict prohibition against marrying to one village because it is still considered one *belah* or *klen*.

Family *batih* (nuclear) system with the implementation after marriage will stay at the male parent's house for a while, which indicates that since then, large-sized houses are increasingly being found in Gayo society. The layout of the house began to be divided because, in addition to being familiar with the inner family system, knowledge of norms was increasingly complex. The house started to be built with customary provisions, where the number of rooms and their functions began to be applied. Separated rooms are made between men and women and are based on family according to Islamic provisions because, at that time, the Gayo community had received Islamic influence. Since then, *Umah Pitu Ruang* has appeared and is a continuation of *umah*. According to Ifani (2019), *Umah Pitu Ruang* form a long house that functions as a house or residence for several families who have a father's lineage and live under the same roof. Although several families inhabit it, each room will usually be equipped with a kitchen. It becomes a unique thing for *Umah Pitu*

Ruang. For the Gayo community, the kitchen is the most sensitive place in the family, so each family is left to manage its kitchen. Because each family will also usually have its livelihood, some only have one kitchen, and they cook together. The form *Umah Pitu Ruang* still exists today. According to Setiawan, Pratama, & Sari (2020), the visual construction of the house represents Islamic values as the basis for creation and activities in the house.

At that time, *Umah Pitu Ruang* was also a representation of the social status of a particular family and group. Making a *Umah Pitu Ruang* requires a large amount of money, and besides the size, the materials used differ from the *normal umah*. It makes not all people able to build an *Umah Pitu Ruang*. If children get married, they will live in the house usually built adjacent to the male parent's house after marriage. While in certain groups such as *reje*, *sarak opat*, *kejurun*, and *kuru*, certain people usually build and live in an *Umah Pitu Ruang*. Their position is considered the highest and most honorable in society, so the community will usually do cooperation during construction. Therefore, it can be said that the existence of *Umah Pitu Ruang* remains side by side with the *umah* ordinary stage (Ibrahim, Interview: 12 August 2012).



Figure 3. Medium sized umah pitu ruang in Tanah Gayo in 1905.
Source: (KITLV Universitas Leiden, 2006)

Based on the story of the Gayo community, one of *Umah Pitu Ruang* most magnificent is *Umah Pitu Ruang* Linge I Kingdom which is located in Isaq. The house was built with many pillars and was taller. On the walls, it used Gayo filigree carvings. Besides being a palace, the house is also used for every meeting or deliberation. At that time, the teachings of Islam had entered and further strengthened the house's spatial planning rules. The separation between men and women is increasingly emphasized according to Islamic teachings. According to Salihin et al. (2019), the house caught fire and was then renovated from its original form.



Figure 4. *Umah Pitu Ruang* in Gayo Lues in 1905
Source: (KITLV Universitas Leiden, 2006)

Umah was built based on *edet urum hukum* (customs with laws). The *sarak opat* determined the custom through deliberation and law based on religion, and *Umah Pitu Ruang* was formerly occupied by *reje* (king) (Hakim, 2020). Since then, *Umah Pitu Ruang* has become a condition of value and is considered the great house of the Gayo kings. The existence of *Umah Pitu Ruang* is getting less, apart from having to be built at a high cost, and more children choose to leave the house and build their own house after marriage, which is no longer in the form of *Umah Pitu Ruang*.

In the 1900s, existence of *Umah Pitu Ruang* could still be found in the *kampung*

(village). Some *kampung* that still had many *Umah Pitu Ruang* were *Kampung Kebayakan, Kampung Bebesen, dan Kampung Isaq*. At that time, community settlements were still not in large numbers. Still the same as before. In one *kampung*, there are not less than six housing units. Regarding the residents, Hurgronje once illustrated that occupants in the Gayo community's house is about 15 to more than 60 people. At that time, no one could be sure how many occupants of each house were apart from the occupants of the house itself (Hurgronje, 1996). Information from Hurgronje may give the idea that the number of people living in one house is uncertain. One house can be inhabited by several heads of families but still in the bond of one family. Although they live in one house, the spatial layout inside the building still limits them. At that time, the form of *Umah Pitu Ruang* was elongated, and there were not only seven rooms but could be more. They live together and are still governed by the prevailing norms, such as *edet sumang*.

In 1904, there seemed to be a change in the pattern of house construction. At that time, *Umah Pitu Ruang* was no longer built with large or elongated sizes as in previous years. The community began to move to a new agricultural area. Many children who had married and had families left their parents' homes at that time. In new lands or settlements, they build *Umah Pitu Ruang* that are no longer to accommodate large families but are limited to small nuclear families. Then, not all families build houses in the form of *Umah Pitu Ruang*. It can be seen in Dutch documents from 1904 to the 1930s. The shape of the house at that time was divided into two. There was only the form of a house on stilts without any artistic elements such as *Umah Pitu Ruang*. While some who still build *Umah Pitu Ruang*, are minimal. At this time, one of *Umah Pitu Ruang* remaining remains *umah reje Banluntara*.



Figure 5. Umah Reje Baluntara
Source: Author's Private Collection



Figure 6. Umah Pitu Ruang
Source: (Khalisuddin in Eskak & Salma, 2016).

The Baluntara King's House is not only as a place to live but also as a Gayo cultural identity and, at the same time, the application of aesthetic values for the Gayo community (Sari, Pratama, & Setiawan, 2020). Reje Baluntara's house is estimated to have been built in 1860. In the past, the house building was still simple, and the roof was still using *ijut*. The house is the only one remaining of the Gayo traditional house and now its status is as a Cultural Heritage Object. The house's condition is very worrying because some parts of the building have been damaged.

The Gayo filigree carving motif in *Umah Pitu Ruang* does not use animal motifs. It is because Islam's influence is so strong, but during the Dutch colonial period, there were several influences of animal motifs entered *Umah Pitu Ruang* as found in *umah reje Baluntara*. In comparison, the general motif is a plant motif inspired by the natural surroundings. Almost all motifs have meaning or philosophy of life, which is the way of life for the Gayo people. The meaning contained in each motif is a form of assimilation, which then becomes its uniqueness (Iswanto et al., 2012).

Umah Pitu Ruang has components of particular materials. The materials used in its construction, as for the components of these materials, include: (1) *atu kenunulen ni suyen* is the foundation stone for the pillars. *Kenunulen ni suyen* usually use river stones of varying

sizes. The stone will be placed at the bottom of the soil in 30-40 cm depth; (2) *suyen* or poles functions as a framework (central pole) to support or hold other parts, such as the roof. At first, the poles used logs, but over time, there was a change to use wood in the form of blocks; (3) *tilen* or *gergel* is an upper floor made of wood; (4) *gapit* is a clamp; (5) *bere lantang* is a pole cover that runs from north to south; (6) *bere bujur* is a pillar covering that stretches from east to west; (7) *bere singkih* is a pole cover that is tilted; (8) *pepir* is repulsive angina or snail cover; (9) *tulen bubung* or nok; (10) *supu* or roof which is usually made of cerule leaves (*Alpiniamalacensis Rasc*); (11) *bubungen* is a shoot; (12) *unte-unte* or large rattan tied to the roof cuff; (13) *bengkon* is the roof bone; (14) *rering tetap ines* is a wall made of distilled bamboo; (15) *tete* is the floor; (16) *pintu* is the door; (17) *kite* is a ladder which usually has an odd number of steps; (18) *kaso gantung* are the legs of an easel; (19) *gegulungen* are a component of battens; (20) *kaso gantung* or the rafters go down; (21) *tingkep* is window; (22) *parabuang* is type of attic to store something; (23) *belbes* is a lisplang; (24) *tetinyelen* is footwear; and (25) *ton* is a place to wash feet (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2010; Pinan, 2003).

In the 20th century, the influence of Dutch colonial culture brought significant changes to the architecture of society. Although the

changes did not look natural at that time, many local people built houses with more modern style, primarily houses on the ground, and left the house with pillars in the following periods, especially after the Dutch colonial left Tanah Gayo. After Indonesia's independence, these changes are increasingly visible. The house buildings, especially in the city center, no longer leave buildings with pillars but are dominated by buildings on the ground directly. In the villages, *Umah Pitu Ruang* is still there, but in the end, the house is destroyed and leaves no residue. At this time, *Umah Pitu Ruang* is just a replica building that is no longer the original form of the building. One of the remaining is only *umah reje Baluntara* in Toweren Village (Iswanto et al., 2012). In addition, *Umah Pitu Ruang* that has undergone renovation is the traditional royal house in Isaq. Then, there are the traditional houses at the Antara State Museum and the Gayo Traditional House Pavilion in Taman Ratu Safiatuddin in Banda Aceh City (Salihin et al., 2019).

That is the history and components of *the Umah Pitu Ruang*, which is based on its knowledge and uniqueness. *Umah Pitu Ruang* is a traditional earthquake-resistant house, even without using nails. However, the materials used, such as tree species, are not strong trees, so only a few remnants of these traditional houses remain today.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECCOMENDATION

Conclusion

The Gayo ethnic is one of the ethnic groups living in Aceh Province. The Gayo tribe generally lives in Tanah Gayo, including Central Aceh District, Gayo Lues District, Bener Meriah District, and a small part of Southeast Aceh District, Aceh Tamiang District, and East Aceh District. The ancestors of the Gayo tribe had come and settled in the Tanah Gayo, especially in Takengon, between the Mesolithic and Neolithic times. They developed their own

culture and made it different from the Acehnese. One of the results of its culture is *Umah Pitu Ruang*.

Umah Pitu Ruang is a series of words from the Gayo language. In the Gayo language, *umah* means residence or dwelling, *pitu* means seven, and *ruang* means space. Thus, *Umah Pitu Ruang* can be interpreted as a house with seven rooms. The mentioned word follows the spatial layout, which has seven rooms. The term *umah* in Gayo society is the influence of Austronesian tradition and language, which means a place to live. The history of *Umah Pitu Ruang's* emergence is thought to have existed for hundreds of years before the Linge Kingdom appeared. It all started with the arrival of the Gayo ethnic's ancestors who originally lived in the niches or pans around Lake Lut Tawar. During the neolithic era, they built houses on stilts and began to leave their niches. The construction of the house is also closely related to the life's pattern that begins to settle because it is familiar with the farming system, followed by raising livestock and rice fields. The house was initially simple, and the building was called an *umah*. However, due to family members' increasing number and small kingdoms' emergence in the next period, the house's shape was enlarged. In addition, changes also occur in its function. The main factor for this change is that the Gayo community adheres to a nuclear family system, where they will temporarily stay at the husband's house after marriage. Therefore, there is a space limitation or division in the *umah*, referred to as *Umah Pitu Ruang*, usually, those who live in the house are not limited.

Recommendation

Currently, the existence of *Umah Pitu Ruang* is increasingly challenging to find. Even if they exist, they receive less attention and care. Therefore, we advise the Central Aceh District Government to regularly maintain *Umah Pitu*

Ruang remaining. In addition, we hope that the Government of Central Aceh Regency and Bener Meriah Regency can construct the Gayo village,

which includes *Umah Pitu Ruang*. Besides being a form of revitalization, it is also a tourist attraction.

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