



The History and Development of the Gereja Batak Karo Protestan (GBKP), 1990-2010

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the Gereja Batak Karo Protestan (GBKP) museum between 1990 and 2010 using historical research methods consisting of heuristics, verification, interpretation, and historiography. The research results show that the existence of GBKP in Karo is closely linked to the evangelists or Zending who arrived in the area in the late 19th century to carry out the Christianization process. Although the Christianization efforts seemed slow, they were ultimately successful as the majority of the Karo people embraced Christianity and began building churches as places of worship into the 21st century. The uneven distribution of the Karo population across regions led to some churches becoming uninhabited, prompting their conversion into a museum in 1990. The museum aims to introduce and preserve the ancestral heritage of the Karo people. Despite low visitor interest, efforts to preserve the museum continue as a way to maintain the memory and identity of the Karo people through various challenges.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted 29/01/2024

Revised 13/02/2024

Accepted 20/02/2024

Published 24/06/2024

KEYWORDS

Identity; Museum of Karo Batak Protestant Church (GBKP); history of church.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34007/warisan.v5i1.2108>

INTRODUCTION

Events from the past are immortalized in various forms such as photographs, documentary films, or artifacts that indicate their creation in a bygone era, yet they still exist today (Batubara, [2020](#)). These items can be found in museums (Alwi, [2011](#)). By definition, a museum is a permanent, non-profit institution serving society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, links, and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage for purposes of study, education, and enjoyment (Hooper & Greenhill, [2007](#)). Additionally, museums play a role in preserving the collective memory of a community, defined as the shared remembrance within a group built from past experiences (Junaid, [2017](#)).

In the local context of Karo Regency, the Gereja Batak Karo Protestan (GBKP) has long preserved the ancestral heritage of the Karo community. The history of GBKP in Karo is inseparable from the evangelization process carried out by the Zending at the end of the 19th century (Sembiring et al., [2016](#)). The history of the Gereja Batak Karo Protestan began with the arrival of the Protestant mission and colonization in Karo, initiated by a Zending from the Nederlands Zendelingenootschap (NZG) foundation and several people from Minahasa in 1890. On April 18, 1890, the first Zending was sent by the Dutch government, led by Rev. Hendrik C. Kruyt, accompanied by Nicholas Pontoh from Tondano Minahasa, to evangelize in Karo, North Sumatra. The first church construction began in 1899 in Buluh Awar, initiated by Rev. H.C. Kruyt, marking the development of Protestantism in Karo (Tarigan, [2019](#)).

Throughout the 20th century, as more churches were established in Karo, some became uninhabited due to the uneven population distribution (Anwar, [2023](#)). In response, the idea to establish the GBKP museum emerged as a means to preserve cultural heritage and Karo artifacts. The proposal was well received by religious leaders, community figures, organizations, and the community, particularly GBKP congregants. The plan to build the GBKP museum was agreed upon during the centennial jubilee celebration of GBKP in 1990 (Cooley, [1976](#)).

Initially, the museum served as a supplementary facility for the GBKP Retreat Centre, aiming to increase the number of church congregants and missionaries and to strengthen the faith of the congregants. However, over time, the museum's function shifted to focusing on preserving and showcasing various Karo cultural heritage collections. On March 31, 2007, the facilities and infrastructure of the GBKP Museum, along with the arrangement of Karo cultural artifacts and GBKP historical documents, were completed. By 2007, the museum housed approximately 143 collections, including ethnographic, archaeological, historical, philological, and ceramic items. Information about additional collections up to 2010 is unavailable. There remain many Karo cultural artifacts scattered and stored within the Karo



community and beyond, requiring significant efforts and collaboration with committed parties to incorporate them into the museum's collection (Sutaarga, [1998](#)).

In obtaining preliminary information and material for analyzing the following article, a literature review was used by the author. The study of the history of GBKP in Karo Regency can refer to the work of P. Sinuraya (2002), entitled *History of the Gereja Batak Karo Protestan Volume 1 1890-2000*. The author explains about how the evangelization process in the Karo Highlands. This book helps the author to review the entry and development of Christianity in Karo until 2000. Furthermore, research by Yolanda Rafella M. Sari & Payerli Pasaribu in 2019 in the Journal of Anthropology entitled the role of GBKP in preserving and maintaining the culture of the Karo Batak tribe. This paper argues that GBKP has a mission that is directly related to cultural preservation. This mission is an effort made to realize GBKP's vision, namely "*Nggeluh bagi kula Ni Christ (Acting as the Body of Christ)*". The survival of the Karo Batak culture in the GBKP congregation in Medan Selayang District is because the culture that is preserved does not conflict with the teachings of GBKP.

Furthermore, Darwan and Darwin in "*Karo History and Culture*" describe the origin of Karo culture. In the study, the origin of Karo culture has a long history. The existence of Karo as a community entity is known to have been present since the beginning of AD, this is based on the results of archaeological research. As a community with a high culture, until the arrival of the Dutch in the late 19th century, they still upheld their ancestral heritage. This then became a challenge for Zending in the process of Christianization in Karo. Thus, the information from this study can help to analyze the culture of the Karo people in accordance with the focus of the research conducted.

In Sutaarga (1998) entitled "*Museology Studies*" published by the Jakarta Museum Development Project, explains the differences between museums and museums, which include the definition of museums and museums, museum systems, museum systems. This book also explains the role of museology in museum management, where museology has a comparative and analytical nature aimed at developing various theories and finding various rules for various types of museum activities, to then be tested for application in organizing and practical processing in museums that need it. This book also explains the role of museums in the field of education, the Museum still acts as a non-formal educational institution. If this book only discusses the role of Museology in museum management, it is different from the author who will relate the role of the GBKP museum, with this book helping the author in knowing about the Museum system.

Ida Bagus Mantra, in the Seminar on the Management and Utilization of Museums in Indonesia in 1976 explained all the problems regarding museum management and utilization of museums, so that general formulations can be produced on ways to solve them and find ways to overcome these problems, one way or another still based on policies and legal regulations that apply. With a perfect management system supported by adequate facilities, and with in-depth knowledge of the aims and objectives of state development, especially in the field of museums, as one of the fields of spiritual and cultural development activities, there are many benefits that the museum world can contribute to society and the nation.

An article about the GBKP Moderamen Report for the 2000-2010 period by the BP3P management which explains the various programs and activities during that period as a forum for preserving cultural heritage objects. Development of dioramas (miniature objects of cultural heritage), replication of historical objects, art performances and the existence of karo ethnic books and others to be known and utilized as science or learning tools in increasing public appreciation of ancestral cultural heritage.

In general, this article discusses the Museum of the Gereja Batak Karo Protestan (GBKP). In a more specific framework, this article discusses the history of evangelization in the Karo region which became the forerunner of the establishment of the Gereja Batak Karo Protestan (GBKP), then the establishment of the Gereja Batak Karo Protestan (GBKP) museum and efforts to preserve the historical heritage of the Karo tribe and closed with a conclusion as a series of all the contents of the article that have been reviewed.

METHOD

This article employs historical research methods, including four stages: heuristics (source collection), consisting of primary and secondary sources (Kartodirdjo, [1988](#)). Primary sources include archives and documents such as the GBKP service guidelines from 1995-2000, 2000-2005, and 2005-2010 from Kabanjahe, as well as in-depth interviews, photographs, and contemporary newspaper articles. Secondary sources include books, journals, and other relevant

scholarly works. The collected sources are then verified by examining the types of scripts, paper, writing styles, and orientation of each historical source to ensure their authenticity and credibility. The third stage involves interpreting the verified sources analytically and synthetically to construct a historical narrative. The final stage is historiography, or writing, to present the interpreted facts in a thematic and chronological manner.

Historiography involves synthesizing facts into a narrative form that is critical, analytical, and scientific. Writing history is an intellectual activity and a primary means of understanding history. It is also an imaginative reconstruction of the past based on available sources. The final product of historiography depends on the historian's imagination and skills. Historical writing should use standard, clear language to ensure readability and avoid misinterpretation (Kuntowijoyo, [2013](#)).

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The History of Evangelization in Karo: The Birth of GBKP

Evangelization or Christianization since the 17th century has been carried out by the Dutch in the Eastern part of Indonesia. This continued until the 19th and 20th centuries in the Tapanuli part of Sumatra (Ivony & Witrianto, [2023](#)). Evangelization efforts were carried out by the Dutch by piggybacking evangelists who came from Germany with Protestant beliefs. Evangelization or Christianization was carried out in the Tapanuli region, including Karo, to stem the influence of the Padri Movement from the West Sumatra region, which had succeeded in Islamizing communities in Southern Tapanuli (Irsyad et al., [2023](#)). According to Dutch policy, if the Padri Movement continued to be allowed to control the entire Tapanuli region, there were consequences that Tapanuli and Aceh would join on the basis of religious beliefs (Islam) to subvert Dutch rule (Amliansyah & Fatimah, [2021](#); Khusniawati et al., [2021](#)). For this reason, the Dutch had to take a more subtle way, namely through evangelization to perpetuate their power (Ujianto & Isharyanto, [2016](#)).

Christianization in the Karo region was carried out since the 19th century through Pastor H. Kruyt who began evangelizing from 1890-1892 who came from the Nederlandsch Zending Genootschap (NZG). On April 18, 1890, the Nederlandsch Zending Genootschap (NZG), sent Rev. H. C Kruyt from Tomohon, Minahasa, to Tanah Karo. Kruyt stayed in Buluh Awar which became the first evangelization post in Tanah Karo. The following year he picked up gospel teachers, B. Wenas, J Pinontoan, R Tampenawas, and H Pesik. These four people became Kruyt's partners in evangelizing in Karo. Previously, these four people also worked in the Minahasa area, North Sulawesi. After being a gospel teacher for 2 years, Pastor H. Kruyt felt so much pressure exerted by the authorities and the Dutch government on Kruyt. So, in July 1892, he decided to abruptly quit his mission in the Karo highlands. Reverend H. Kruyt returned to his home country without succeeding in baptizing a single Karo person (Randwick, [1989](#)).



Figure 1. H. Kruyt on the right in Minahasa (Source: KITLV Leiden)

Kruyt's departure left the NZG (Nederlandsch Zending Genootschap) in the lurch. At such a time, the NZG had to make an immediate decision to fill the post left by Kruyt. This was because the gospel teachers were not considered capable of replacing Kruyt's position. He was replaced by Rev. J.K. Wijngaarden, who had previously worked on Sawu

Island near Timor. J.K. Wijngaarden and his wife Dina Guittart departed from Batavia on November 28, 1892, and arrived at the port of Belawan on December 3, 1892. Arriving in Medan, Wijngaarden immediately set off for the Karo highlands, and arrived in Buluh Awar on December 21, 1892. In 1893 it can be said that the efforts made by Wijngaarden and the gospel teachers began to bear fruit. This was evidenced by the construction and inauguration of gospel houses for gospel teachers who evangelized in several areas such as Sala Bulan, Pernanganen, Sibolangit, and Tanjung Beringin. These gospel houses were built on poles high above the ground so that the lower part of the house could function as a church and school (Kozok, [2016](#)).

In 1893 the first baptisms of Karo people also took place. They included: Ngurupi (Nd. Pengarapen), Pengarapen, Nuan, Tala, Tabar and Sampai. This baptism took place on August 20, 1893. One year later, on August 4, 1894, the second baptism was given to: Negel, Lampo, Nesei and Sangap. By 1900, only 25 Karo people had been baptized (Siregar et al., [2024](#)). In the first 10 years not many Karo people were baptized. This was due to the Karo's persistence in maintaining their traditions and customs. They felt safe living in a culture that was magical, mystical and animistic. In addition, the development of Islam in Sumatra also influenced the lack of local Karo people willing to be baptized. At the end of 1904, on December 31, 1904, the contract between Guillaume and the NZG expired (Daya, [2004](#)).

Reverend J.H. Neumann was sent by the NZG as an additional pastor in the Karo Highlands. This was because the existing pastors and gospel teachers in Buluh Awar and its surroundings had difficulty controlling the congregation. He and his wife G. Neumann Bos departed from the Netherlands on December 2, 1899, and arrived at Belawan Harbor on April 16, 1900. After six months of preparation, on October 25, 1900. J.H. Neumann chose to serve in the village of Sibolangit and ministered there. They opened Zending hospitals in Sibolangit and in Kabanjahe. They also cooperated with the government Rev. E. J Van den Berg opened a leprosy hospital in Lau Simomo, while J. H. Neumann actively opened pekan-pekan (a kind of market in villages) in the upstream Deli area (*GBKP Ministry Outlines 2005-2010*, n.d.).

Between 1890 and 1906, two churches were built in the Karo highlands. These churches were built in two villages, Buluh Awar and Tanjung Beringin. Both churches were built independently by the community. This construction was carried out to increase the comfort of the community to worship. The inauguration of the first church in the Karo highlands took place on December 24, 1899. This church was built in Buluh Awar Village. This inauguration was carried out in an ecclesiastical ritual, namely by conducting a service led directly by Pastor Meint Joustra. All congregational hymns that have been translated into Karo are sung to add to the solemn atmosphere of the service. While the inauguration of the second church in the Karo highlands was carried out in 1904. This inauguration was carried out in Tanjung Beringin Village. Like the church in Buluh Awar, the inauguration of this church was also carried out in a service and the one who led the service was Pastor J.H. Neumann (*GBKP Ministry Outlines 2000-2005*, n.d.).

At that time, the development of the Gereja Batak Karo Protestan (GBKP) could be said to be very slow from Buluh Awar Village evangelism developed to the surrounding area. Furthermore, to Kabanjahe, and other areas in the Karo highlands. Next to the Pancur Batu area in 1927. The Langkat area began evangelism in 1921 and the first church was ordained in 1929. Medan city already had a service in 1937 and in Jakarta in 1939 there was a Karo Sada Kata community association and in Bandung a Karo Sada Perarih community association (*GBKP Ministry Outlines 1995-2000*, n.d.).



Figure 2. The First Gereja Batak Karo Protestan in Buluh Awar (Source: GBKP Archives Karo Region)

Zendeling made various efforts to influence the Karo people, but by 1940 the number of baptized Karo people only reached 5,000. Cooley mentioned that the neglect and rejection of local culture was one of the causes of the slow growth of Christianity in Karo in the first 70 years. Rev. A. Ginting Suka (Chairman of the GBKP Moderamen Period 1966-1989) agrees that the attitude of the church that does not respect local culture is the cause of the slow growth of Christianity in GBKP. Another reason is due to the persistence of the Karo tribe in maintaining their traditions and customs. They feel safe living in a culture that is magical, mystical and animistic. In addition, the development of Islam in North Sumatra also influenced the lack of local Karo people who wanted to be baptized. Since then, the presence of churches in Karo has been increasing at least until 2010. Although the development of Protestant Christianity in the early days seemed slow due to various factors, in fact the religious majority in Karo are Protestant Christians (Dobbin, 2007).

The Establishment of the GBKP Museum and its Preservation Efforts

The rationale for building the GBKP museum is to preserve various sites, culture and heritage of the Karo tribe, so the idea of the moderamen to build the GBKP museum emerged. Religious leaders, community leaders, organizations and other communities (especially the GBKP congregation) responded well to the construction of the GBKP museum so that talks about how to plan and continue to build a GBKP museum were agreed upon at the GBKP 100-year jubilee celebration in 1990. (*It's Me, Send Me*: The Role of Retreats in the Formation of a Missionary Church to Welcome the Era of Industrialization, 1993). On the occasion of the 100-year Jubilee of GBKP (April 18, 1890-18 April 1990) as a celebration and commemoration of the entry of the Gospel into Karo land, this is where the construction of the museum began, coinciding on July 30, 1990 in Sukamakmur Village, Sibolangit District, Deli Serdang Regency which was established on an area of ± 4 Ha with permanent building conditions in the GBKP 100-year Jubilee Park. The construction of the museum coincides with the GBKP Retreat Center building as a center for guidance and services for modern society which received financial assistance from abroad by the Dutch *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk (NHK) (gereformeerde)* adherents) and the German *Vereinigte-Evangelische Mission (VEM)* as a missionary organization in the world. This support made the construction of the museum run smoothly and could be completed on time. Supported by the help of the Karo people, especially for the GBKP congregation who enthusiastically donated according to their abilities (Ujianto & Isharyanto, 2016).



Figure 3. Museum of the Gereja Batak Karo Protestan (Source: GBKP Museum Photo Collection)

Initially the museum was used as a means of supporting the activities of the GBKP *Retreat Center* and especially to increase the number of congregations and church missionaries and increase the faith of the congregation (interview with Hemat Tarigan, 2024). However, over time the function of the museum no longer focused on increasing the faith of the Karo people and religious missions but focused more on efforts to maintain and preserve various collections of Karo cultural heritage. The shift in work began in 2003, where the GBKP Moderamen fully handed over the responsibility to the Head of the Karo Museum, Library and Culture Bureau within the scope of the GBKP Moderamen itself, precisely

at the General Secretariat. Currently, it has changed its name to the Bureau of Excavation, Preservation and Cultural Development (BP3B) in the 2005-2010 management period. Every five years, the GBPK board will hold a meeting to form a new museum management (interview with Hemat Tarigan, 2024).

The equipment of GBKP Museum facilities and infrastructure as well as the arrangement of Karo cultural objects and materials of GBKP historical documents were carried out on March 31, 2007. (Interview Liasta Sitepu). The museum contains objects or cultural materials that once existed among the Karo, evidence of Karo culture (agricultural tools, household tools, war instruments, musical instruments, Pamena religious tools, clothing, jewelry and others), books about Karo and churches that once existed. The museum is open every Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday from 10:00-16:00 WIB and closed on holidays. The museum entrance ticket is not set but visitors can make voluntary donations to increase museum funding. The GBKP Museum is equipped with a permanent exhibition room, library room, administration room and toilet (interview with Avenia, 2024). Some of the GBKP museum collections certainly hold historical events that are very important for the Karo tribe and the entry of Protestant Christianity in Karo. The GBKP Museum and its collections express concern for future generations not to forget the history of Karo. Information about the uniqueness of the GBKP Museum includes the Karo clan building room built around the museum building (interview with Liasta Sitepu, 2024).

By 2007 the museum had ±143 collections including: ethnography, archaeology, history, philology and ceramics. Information on the addition of collections until 2010 has not been available until now. Actually, there are many more Karo cultural relics scattered within the Karo community, as well as outside the Karo community or in various regions in Indonesia and abroad that have not been touched and used as museum collections so that efforts and hard work and cooperation with parties who are committed to the museum are needed (interview with Feri Karo-Karo, 2024). In carrying out its functions, BP3B has a vision as a cultural information center that is able to educate the nation, improve civilization and pride in culture. Meanwhile, its mission is not only to carry out museum functions, but also to provide information services on the history of the gospel and Karo culture to the wider community.

BP3B has established various activity programs for 10 years (2 management periods 2000-2005 and 2005-2010) including: inventorying cultural heritage objects in various districts throughout North Sumatra, seeking information from the public and the media about the existence of a location and cultural heritage objects related to Karo ethnicity, conducting research on cultural heritage sites and objects, replicating cultural heritage objects and maintaining and caring for cultural heritage objects in museum collections. Based on the Moderamen Report for the period 2000-2010 that the achievement of the GBKP museum work program has not been in accordance with expectations due to the ability of Human Resources (HR) is still lacking in the field of museums so that various training and education are needed, employees are still low willingness to improve their performance. Facilities and work facilities are still makeshift (1 set of computers is available), and operational funds are only able to renovate buildings so that there are obstacles in implementing the GBKP museum work program (interview with Feri Karo-Karo, 2024).

On the other hand, the existence of the GBPK museum has also begun to be abandoned by the community. Even though the museum management has made various rooms of the Karo clan building to attract visitors. However, the number of visitors is getting quieter every year, especially on weekdays or weekdays only 1 or 2 people visit. Perhaps this can also be caused by the number of museum collections not increasing over time, causing visitors to feel less interested. In contrast to visitors to the Simalungun museum, where visitors are very interested when they see performances playing musical instruments in the museum. They admitted that they had not encountered this in other museums they had visited.

The Simalungun Museum often holds performances playing traditional music in the museum such as gondang, husapi and others. This is so that people can see firsthand how to play traditional musical instruments because nowadays for traditional events, modern musical instruments are more often used and traditional musical instruments are only as accompaniment (interview with Rahmawan Sembiring, 2024). Various efforts have been made by the GBKP Museum in collecting various histories of evangelism and Karo culture. The GBKP Museum has a collection of ± 400 pieces which include archaeological, ethnographic, ceramic, philological, numismatic / heraldic collections. (Interview Rahmawan Sembiring). In general, the collections collected come from the Karo people themselves such as traditional clothing and accessories, tools for earning income such as agriculture and fisheries. (Rusmiyati, 2018, p. 342) The collections in the GBKP museum, namely: Party fashion and community clothing used daily (1) Agricultural tools; (2)

Fishing gear; (3) Farm tools; (4) Tools of culture; (5) Anti/old/special karo gambling tools; (6) Listening religious tools; (7) Economic tool; (8) Tools of war (Malau & Ginting, 2016).









No.	Collection	Benefits	Image
1.	Songket	Materials for clothing	
2.	Roka	Used to make a line on the land that will be planted with rice	
3.	Paduk-Paduk	Used to collect grass that has been cut	
4.	Bura Cimata	Used at the time of handing over the wedding gold at the wedding ceremony and as a raleng tendi ceremony equipment	
5.	Tutu-Tutu Belo	Used to pound betel nut by elderly parents	
6.	Ingan Tambar	Used for traditional medicine places	
7.	Kulcapi	Used as a stringed instrument	
8.	Kudin Renceng	Used for Cooking Daily Food	

Figure 4. Museum Collection of the Gereja Batak Karo Protestan (GBKP) (Source: Author's Documentation)

Although it seems that the GBKP museum is not very attractive to the public both from within Karo and from outside Karo, the museum management still carries out its vision, namely a museum that can provide maximum service to the wider community including:

- 1) Conduct an inventory of cultural heritage objects in the working area of Karo Regency and other regencies in North Sumatra Province, where Karo people have lived for generations.
- 2) Seek information from the community and media about the existence of cultural heritage sites or objects related to Karo ethnicity.
- 3) Conducting research on sites and cultural heritage of belief scripts related to the Karo people.
- 4) Make replicas of cultural heritage in the form of traditional houses, jambur, rare plants and medicines.
- 5) Form an art group and perform to the wider community.
- 6) Maintaining and safeguarding the museum's cultural heritage objects (interview with Hemat Tarigan, 2024).

Thus, the GBKP museum is not the type of museum that provides splendor as is generally the case with museums that are much more famous because they are supported by various factors, be it economic, social, or policy. So it can be said that the GBKP museum can be said only as a medium for preserving the memory and maintaining the

identity of the Karo people who continue to be hit and challenged by the times (interview with Rahmawan Sembiring, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The existence of museums is often only considered as a place of entertainment or tourism. Indeed, this assumption is not wrong, but if reviewed more deeply, the existence of museums is to maintain and care for the identity of every nation that has ever been present and has a long history in the constellation of every civilization. Museums are also part of history itself because they are present in a diachronic process (extending in time) not just providing historical objects. The Gereja Batak Karo Protestan Museum is one of the museums located in Karo Regency. This museum is inseparable from the process of Christianization carried out by Zending sent by the Dutch. Indeed, the process of Christianization in the early days did not go smoothly because the Karo people at that time rejected the presence of a new religion.

However, this did not make the Zending give up, they continued to make Christianization efforts and finally produced results in the community then predominantly embraced Protestant Christianity and began to establish churches as a means of worship. In 1990 there was a vacant church so that it was converted into a museum called the Museum of the Gereja Batak Karo Protestan (GBKP). The conversion of the church into a museum is not a despicable act, the rationale for this conversion is to display and maintain the ancestral heritage of the Karo people. In its development, at least until 2010, this museum was less visited by people from both inside and outside Karo due to various factors. Even so, preservation efforts continue to be carried out by the museum, because doing so is a step to preserve the memory and maintain the identity of the Karo people in every era.

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- 2) Liasta Sitepu, 24 October 2021.
- 3) Avenia Sembiring, 30 October 2021.
- 4) Feri Karo-Karo, 2 November 2021.
- 5) Rahmawan Sembiring, 11 November 2021.