



The Development of Islamic Maritime Civilization on the East Coast of Sumatra during the 17th-18th Centuries

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Abstract

The following research aims to discuss the development of Islamic maritime civilization on the East Coast of Sumatra during the 17th to 18th Centuries AD. What sultanates represented Islamic maritime civilization on the East Coast of Sumatra and what were their contributions to the development of Islamic maritime civilization on the East Coast of Sumatra are the two questions raised in this research. To answer these two questions, this research uses the historical research method with research steps that include heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The search for sources was carried out through literature research. From the research conducted, it was concluded that the Islamic maritime civilization on the East Coast of Sumatra was represented by sultanates such as Aceh, Siak, Deli, Serdang, Langkat, and Asahan. These sultanates contributed greatly to developing Islamic maritime civilization by making maritime-oriented policies and providing protection to fishermen, sailors, and traders which encouraged the operation of more ports so that maritime activities became increasingly crowded with maritime trade activities, shipbuilding, and voyages. The bustling maritime activities

then supported the development of Islamic maritime civilization in the region.

Keywords: Islamic maritime civilization, Islamic history, maritime history, Malay sultanates, East Coast of Sumatra.

Introduction

The archipelago is an area of islands surrounded by water. This geographical condition has become one of the factors that caused the Islamic civilization in the archipelago to be a maritime civilization. This is shown by the presence of most of the centers of Islamic civilization in the archipelago in coastal and downstream areas. However, the theme of Islamic maritime civilization has not yet become one of the important subjects in studies of Islamic civilization in the archipelago. Important works on the history of Islamic civilization in the archipelago such as those written by Burhanuddin,¹ Pulungan,² Sunanto,³ Abdullah,⁴ Azra,⁵ dan Laffan,⁶ have not made Islamic maritime civilization one of the main parts of the discussion. An explanation of the development of Islamic maritime civilization in the archipelago is very important as a way of reconstructing the history of Islam in the archipelago, which is still distorted by colonial historical narratives that tend to place the sultanates as objects of suffering that do not play a

¹ Jajat Burhanudin, *Islam Dalam Arus Sejarah Indonesia* (Jakarta: Kencana Prenada Media, 2017).

² J. Suyuthi Pulungan, *Sejarah Peradaban Islam Di Indonesia* (Jakarta: AMZAH, 2019).

³ Musyrifah Sunanto, *Sejarah Peradaban Islam Indonesia* (Depok: Rajawali Pers, 2017).

⁴ Taufik Abdullah and Endjat Djaenuderadjat, eds., *Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam Indonesia: Akar Historis Dan Awal Pembentukan Islam*, vol. 1 (Jakarta: Direktorat Sejarah dan Nilai Budaya Direktorat Jenderal Kebudayaan Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2015).

⁵ Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Global Dan Lokal Islam Nusantara* (Bandung: Mizan Media Utama, 2002); Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII & XVIII: Akar Pembaruan Islam Indonesia* (Jakarta: Kencana Prenada Media, 2013).

⁶ Michael Francis Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma below the Winds* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003); Michael Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past* (New Jersey: Princenton University Press, 2011).

significant role in the development of civilization in the archipelago.⁷ Regardless, this is a gap in the study of the history of Islamic civilization in the archipelago that can be filled with research that specifically discusses the maritime aspects of the history of Islamic civilization in one of the regions in the archipelago.

One of the important areas in the history of Islamic maritime civilization in the archipelago is the East Coast of Sumatra, which is a coastal area of Sumatra Island facing east and directly facing the Strait of Malacca and the Strait of Karimata. Because of its position facing the Strait of Malacca, which is part of the maritime route connecting East Asia with West Asia, the East Coast of Sumatra has been a transit location for Muslim traders and sailors since the early Hijri Century. For centuries, the region has also been one of the fertile locations for the growth of Islamic maritime kingdoms such as Perlak, Samudera Pasai, Aceh, Aru, Deli, and Siak. Given that this region is an important area in the development of Islamic maritime civilization in the archipelago, it is also appropriate that this region be studied from the perspective of Islamic maritime history. Moreover, the studies conducted on this region have not yet raised the theme of Islamic maritime civilization because they still raise the theme of plantations such as those conducted by Darini,⁸ Akbar,⁹ dan Sinaga.¹⁰ Another theme of study about this region is trade as conducted by Harkantiningasih,¹¹ Barus,¹² and Swastiwi.¹³ In addition, there are still studies that raise conflicts conducted

⁷ Ajid Thohir, "Establishing the Historiography of Islamic Sultanate in Nusantara," *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 10, no. 4 (2021): 89.

⁸ Ririn Darini, "Deli Maatschappij's Contribution to the Transformation of East Sumatera, 1869-1940s," *Paramita* 31, no. 1 (2021): 22-32.

⁹ Allan Akbar, "Perkebunan Tembakau Dan Kapitalisasi Ekonomi Sumatera Timur 1863-1930," *Tamaddun* 6, no. 2 (2018): 61-97.

¹⁰ Dian Mariana Sinaga and Wisnu, "Aktivitas Perdagangan Deli Maatschappij Di Sumatera Timur Tahun 1870-1930," *Avatara* 6, no. 1 (2018): 257-272.

¹¹ Naniek Harkantiningasih and Sonny C. Wibisono, "Kota Rentang, Sumatra Utara: Jalur Perdagangan Pantai Timur Sumatra," *Amerta* 30, no. 1 (2012): 45-55.

¹² Saparudin Barus et al., "Environmental Influences on Trade Activities in the 19th Century East Coast Sumatra," *E3S Web of Conferences* 202, no. 07048 (2020).

¹³ Anastasia Wiwik Swastiwi, "Aktivitas Perdagangan Kerajaan Riau-Lingga Abad 18-20: Historiografi Pantai Timur Sumatera," in *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Peradaban Pantai*

by Kathirithamby-Wells,¹⁴ and studies on identity influenced by geographical factors conducted by Sumarno.¹⁵ From the research map above, we find that the theme of Islamic maritime civilization is still a gap in the studies on the East Coast of Sumatra.

Based on these issues, the following research will discuss the development of Islamic maritime civilization on the East Coast of Sumatra during the 17th and 18th Centuries AD. This research aims to elaborate answers to two questions regarding the development of Islamic maritime civilization in the region. First, what sultanates represented the Islamic maritime civilization on the East Coast of Sumatra from the 17th to the 18th Century AD? Second, what were the contributions of these sultanates in developing Islamic maritime civilization on the East Coast of Sumatra? The method used in this study is the historical research method with four research steps, namely heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography.¹⁶

Meanwhile, the search for sources was carried out through literature research. The results of this study are expected to fill the gap of previous studies that have not raised the theme of Islamic maritime civilization as well as provide new knowledge in the history of Islamic civilization in the archipelago, especially on the East Coast of Sumatra. In the meantime, the results are expected to enrich the research aspects in the study of Islam in the archipelago and Southeast Asia, as well as to support efforts to reconstruct a critical and comprehensive history of the Islamic civilization of the archipelago.

Timur Sumatra: Silang Budaya Dan Dinamika Pergerakan, vol. 1 (Presented at the Seminar Nasional Humaniora, Jambi: FKIP Universitas Jambi, 2021), 1–15.

¹⁴ J. Kathirithamby-Wells, "Hulu-Hilir Unity and Conflict: Malay Statecraft in East Sumatra before the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Archipel* 45 (1993): 77–96.

¹⁵ Edi Sumarno et al., "Sungai Dan Identitas Melayu Di Sumatera Timur Pada Abad XX," *Indonesian Historical Studies* 2, no. 2 (2018): 83–88.

¹⁶ Dudung Abdurrahman, *Metodologi Penelitian Sejarah Islam* (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2011), 104.

The Islamic Maritime Sultanates on the East Coast of Sumatra

Over the centuries, the East Coast of Sumatra has been a fertile coastal area for the growth and development of Islamic civilization. This is due to its geographical position on the international maritime route connecting China and Arabia. Due to its advantageous geographical position, Islam entered and developed in this region earlier than other regions in the archipelago as evidenced by the presence of the two earliest Islamic kingdoms in the archipelago, namely Perlak and Samudera Pasai. These two kingdoms were maritime Islamic kingdoms in terms of the geographical position of their government centers and the economic orientation of their communities. After these two kingdoms declined, Islamic maritime civilization was represented by the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam which began to reach its peak in the 16th Century AD.

Until the 17th Century AD, Aceh was still the main representation of Islamic maritime civilization not only on the East Coast of Sumatra but also on the West Coast of Sumatra. This can be seen in the magnitude of Aceh's maritime power to balance the power of the Portuguese and Johor in the Strait of Malacca. The success of Aceh as an Islamic maritime power on the East Coast of Sumatra and the West Coast of Sumatra had been going on since a century earlier. At that time, Aceh already had good relations with the Islamic world through the maritime spice trade route.¹⁷ Through good relations with the Islamic world, Aceh was connected to the Ottomans. The relationship between the two dates back to the reign of Sulaiman the Great. Significantly, the first diplomats sent by Aceh to the Ottomans were already in Istanbul in 1547.¹⁸ However, there is an argument that the first diplomat sent by Aceh to the Ottomans only arrived in Istanbul in 1562.¹⁹ Despite these differences of opinion, the most important aspect of the relationship

¹⁷ Muhammad Affan, "The Role of Sufis in Connecting Aceh to the Global Islamic Network in the 17th Century," *Islam Nusantara: Journal for the Study of Islamic History and Culture* 4, no. 2 (2023): 35.

¹⁸ Ismail Hakki Goksoy, "Ottoman-Aceh Relations as Documented in Turkish Sources," in *Mapping the Acehnese Past* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2011), 68.

¹⁹ Denys Lombard, *Kerajaan Aceh: Jaman Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636)*, trans. Winarsih Arifin (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1991), 158.

between the two was the Ottomans' assistance to help Aceh improve its military capacity and quality in facing the Portuguese in the Strait of Malacca. This assistance took the form of sending ten engineers who would transfer artillery-making technology to the Acehnese.²⁰ The Ottomans' willingness to help Aceh was also motivated by their policy of trying to take a greater role in protecting the Islamic world after the conquest of Constantinople and the Ottomans' rise to the top of the caliphate.²¹

Thanks to Ottoman assistance, Aceh built up its military capabilities, especially in the sea. This military power became the primary actor in Aceh's development whose superiority was evident in the armed confrontation against the Portuguese and also in the conquest of Daya, Pidie, and Pasai.²² Through its military superiority, Aceh also managed to conquer Aru, which was one of the strongest maritime powers on the East Coast of Sumatra. The conquest of Aru is often misunderstood as Aceh's attempt to spread Islam by force of arms. In fact, when Aceh conquered Aru, the kingdom had already become an Islamic kingdom. This was informed by Pires who stated that the ruler of Aru was a Moor who owned many *lancharas* and ruled over many rivers.²³ The Islamicization of Aru is estimated to have taken place since around the 13th Century AD.²⁴ The attack by Aceh on Aru itself can be interpreted as one of Aceh's efforts to eliminate Portuguese influence on the East Coast of Sumatra because Aru was allied with the Portuguese. This is implied by the news conveyed by Pinto that after the death of the ruler of Aru, his empress sailed with 16 vessels to Malacca in the belief that the

²⁰ Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 118.

²¹ Muhammad Affan, "Kesultanan Utsmani (1300-1517): Jalan Panjang Menuju Kekhalifahan," *Tamaddun* 6, no. 2 (2018): 121.

²² Amirul Hadi, "Aceh and the Portuguese: A Study of the Struggle of Islam in Southeast Asia (1500-1579)" (McGill University, 1992), 89.

²³ Armando Cortesao, ed., *Suma Oriental Karya Tome Pires: Perjalanan Dari Laut Merah Ke Cina Dan Buku Francisco Rodrigues*, trans. Adrian Perkasa and Anggita Pramesti (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2018), 182.

²⁴ Suprayitno, "Islamisasi Di Sumatera Utara: Studi Tentang Batu Nisan Di Kota Rintang Dan Barus," *Miqot* 36, no. 1 (2012): 171.

Portuguese would not refuse any assistance she requested.²⁵ However, the Portuguese caution had grown impatient with the empress so she sailed to Bintan to ask the sultan of Johor for help.²⁶

The success of Aceh was also accompanied by strong policies to protect the existence of its ports and maritime trade routes to remain safe amid the chaos that took place after the Portuguese presence in the Indian Ocean and the Malacca Strait.²⁷ Despite its aggressive and offensive nature, Aceh contributed greatly to the development of Islamic maritime civilization on the East Coast of Sumatra. This contribution can be seen in the formation of several new maritime sultanates on the East Coast of Sumatra. The presence of these Islamic maritime sultanates will enliven the Islamic maritime civilization in the East Coast of Sumatra which is concentrated in the lower reaches of the river that empties into the Strait of Malacca. The Islamic maritime sultanates are Deli, Asahan, Langkat, and Serdang. These four Islamic maritime sultanates had a history linked to Aceh and each other.

The historical connection of the four sultanates began in 1612 when Sultan Iskandar Muda conquered the remnants of the Aru Kingdom which had moved its center of power to Deli Tua. The story of the conquest is a little confusing because local sources refer to the kingdom as Deli.²⁸ This is probably why some researchers such as Djajadiningrat and Swantoro mention that it was Deli that was conquered.²⁹ Nevertheless, Djajadiningrat provides an additional explanation that what is referred to as Deli in local

²⁵ Ferdinand Mendez Pinto, *The Voyages and Adventures of Ferdinand Mendez Pinto, The Portuguese*, trans. Henry Cogan (London, New York: T. Fisher Unwin, MacMillan & Co, 1891), 67.

²⁶ Pinto, *The Voyages and Adventures of Ferdinand Mendez Pinto, The Portuguese*, 71.

²⁷ Muhammad Affan and Ahmad Suaedy, "Maritime and Trade Policies of the Aceh Sultanate on the West Coast of Sumatra during 16th-17th Centuries," in *International Forum on Spice Route 2022 Proceedings* (Presented at the International Forum on Spice Route 2022, Jakarta: BRIN Publishing, 2022), 504.

²⁸ Muhamad Usman, Mawardi Sulaiman, and Rosman Husein, *Penelitian Dan Pengkajian Naskah Kuno Daerah Istimewa Aceh: Hikayat Putroe Hijoe* (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Proyek Penelitian dan Pengkajian Kebudayaan Nusantara, 1988).

²⁹ P. Swantoro, *Perdagangan Lada Abad XVII: Perebutan "Emas" Putih Dan Hitam Di Nusantara* (Jakarta: KPG, 2019), 49.

sources is Aru based on the agreement with European sources.³⁰ According to Lah Husni, the conquered Aru was not the same Aru that was conquered by Aceh in the mid-16th Century, but it was still related to the old Aru because its founder was a descendant of the king of Aru who was killed in the Aceh attack in the mid-16th Century.³¹

After Sultan Iskandar Muda conquered Aru, he placed one of his military commanders Gocah Pahlawan to be his representative in the former Aru territory.³² This Acehnese military commander later brought down the rulers of Deli so that he was considered the first ruler of Deli. Deli itself is considered to have been officially established only in 1632 with Deli Tua as its capital. After Gocah Pahlawan died in 1669, his son Tuanku Panglima Perunggit succeeded him as ruler of Deli. Meanwhile, another Islamic maritime sultanate that was established almost simultaneously with Deli was Asahan. This sultanate was officially established two years earlier than Deli, in 1630. Its first ruler was Tuanku Abdul Jalil who was the son of Sultan Iskandar Muda from his marriage to one of the local rulers he stopped by during his military expedition in 1612.³³

Apart from Deli and Asahan, another Islamic maritime sultanate would emerge on the East Coast of Sumatra in the 17th Century. This kingdom would later be known as the Sultanate of Langkat whose origins were laid by the ruler of Aru who managed to escape when conquered by Sultan Iskandar Muda in 1612. There are differences of opinion among local historians regarding the name of the escaped ruler of Aru. Some say that Dewa Syahdan was the father of Dewa Sakti, the latter of whom escaped when Aru was conquered. He then had a son named Raja Kahar who later

³⁰ Raden Hoesein Djajadiningrat, *Kesultanan Aceh: Suatu Pembahasan Tentang Sejarah Kesultanan Aceh Berdasarkan Bahan-Bahan Yang Terdapat Dalam Karya Melayu* (Banda Aceh: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Proyek Pengembangan Permuseuman Daerah Istimewa Aceh, 1984), 47–48.

³¹ Tengku Lah Husni, *Lintasan Sejarah Peradaban Dan Budaya Penduduk Pesisir Sumatra Timur, 1612-1950* (Medan: B.P. Lah Husni, 1975), 65–66.

³² Usman Pelly and Ratna, *Sejarah Pertumbuhan Pemerintahan Kesultanan Langkat, Deli Dan Serdang* (Medan: Perdana Publishing, 2022), 13.

³³ Mailin, "Peran Sultan Iskandar Muda Dalam Pengembangan Islam Dan Kesultanan Melayu Di Sumatera Timur," *Jurnal Komunika Islamika* 8, no. 1 (2021): 29.

founded the Sultanate of Langkat.³⁴ Meanwhile, there is another opinion that mentions Dewa Syahdan as a figure who escaped from Aceh's attack.³⁵ This difference of argument strengthens the relationship between Aru and Langkat, so it can be said that Langkat is a continuation of Aru in a different form.

Among these three newly established Islamic maritime sultanates, Deli was the most popular. The presence of Deli was informed in the *daghregister* of 1641-1642. It states that Arent Pater went to Deli in 1642 and returned to Malacca with eight slaves and 270 bushels of rice. In the same year, it was also recorded that a ship from Aceh bound for Malacca had stopped at Deli to load rice. Subsequent information about Deli shows that this maritime sultanate had a port that became a transit and export place for rice and several other commodities such as beeswax, slaves, horses, and agarwood. Ships that came to Deli came from Aceh, Malacca, and Batavia, among others.³⁶

Although Deli was already known in maritime trade in the Strait of Malacca region and beyond, the exact location of its port is unknown. Considering that the capitals of Islamic maritime sultanates on the East Coast of Sumatra often played a dual role as the center of government and also as the center of the maritime economy, there is a possibility that the port of Deli was in Padang Datar, because in the 17th Century, the capital of Deli was still in Padang Datar (Kampung Medan). Deli then moved its capital again to Pulo Berayan at the end of the 17th Century.³⁷ All of these Deli capitals were on the banks of the same river as the first Deli capital and the river is also known as the Deli River.³⁸ The relocation of the capital was

³⁴ Ratna, "Birokrasi Kerajaan Melayu Di Sumatera Timur Pada Abad XIX" (Universitas Gadjah Mada, 1990), 52–53.

³⁵ Pagar et al., *Sejarah Sosial Kesultanan Langkat* (Jakarta: Litbangdiklat Press, 2020), 20.

³⁶ Daniel Perret, *Kolonialisme Dan Etnisitas: Batak Dan Melayu Di Sumatera Timur Laut*, trans. Saraswati Wardhany (Jakarta: KPG, 2010), 86–87.

³⁷ Lucas Partanda Koestoro et al., *Medan, Kota Di Pesisir Timur Sumatera Utara Dan Peninggalan Tuanya* (Medan: Balai Arkeologi Medan, 2006), 21.

³⁸ Muhammad Affan, "From Riverside Hub to Urban Center: Understanding the Metamorphosis of the Sultanate of Deli's Capital Landscape," *Al Tsaqafa* 20, no. 2 (2023): 196.

probably to make it easier for ships to stop and anchor in Deli because Pulo Berayan is located slightly downstream so it is closer to the Strait of Malacca.

In the 18th Century, not much news was obtained about Deli, Asahan, and Langkat. However, the 18th Century became the century of the birth of several other Islamic maritime sultanates on the East Coast of Sumatra which would further enliven maritime geopolitics in the region. The Islamic maritime sultanates that emerged in the 18th Century were Siak and Serdang. The emergence of Serdang in 1723 stemmed from an internal conflict within the Sultanate of Deli. The conflict was between two sons of the third Deli ruler, Panglima Paderap, who vied for the throne. The excluded son, Tuanku Umar, then left Deli and established a government in a place later known as Kampung Besar. Since then, Serdang began to exist as a sultanate separate from Deli.³⁹

Meanwhile, on the other side of the East Coast of Sumatra, another Islamic maritime sultanate also emerged under the name Siak. This Islamic maritime sultanate began in 1717 when Raja Kecik expelled Johor from Siak.⁴⁰ In 1718, Raja Kecik attacked Johor and made him the ruler there.⁴¹ After Johor was defeated, Raja Kecik made the ruler of Johor, Sultan Abdul Jalil, the treasurer of Johor and married his daughter, Tengku Kamariah.⁴² Despite attempts at reconciliation through marriage, the conflict between Raja Kecik and Sultan Abdul Jalil continued until Sultan Abdul Jalil decided to leave Johor and settle at the mouth of the Pahang River. After Johor was abandoned by Sultan Abdul Jalil, Raja Kecik also left Johor and went to Riau to establish a government there.⁴³ In Riau, Raja Kecik established the capital in a place called Buantan which is located on the banks of the Siak River in

³⁹ Pelly and Ratna, *Sejarah Pertumbuhan Pemerintahan Kesultanan Langkat, Deli Dan Serdang*, 14.

⁴⁰ Wilaela, Nur Aisya Zulkifli, and Khaidir Alimin, *Het Rijk van Siak* (Pekanbaru: Asa Riau, 2016), 9.

⁴¹ Timothy P. Barnard, *Multiple Centres of Authority: Society and Environment in Siak and Eastern Sumatra, 1674-1827* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2003), 67.

⁴² Raja Ali Haji Ibn Ahmad, *The Precious Gift (Tuhfat al Nafis)*, trans. Virginia Matheson and Barbara Watson Andaya (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1982), 49.

⁴³ Ibn Ahmad, *The Precious Gift (Tuhfat al Nafis)*, 53.

1723. Since then, the Sultanate of Siak was officially established.⁴⁴ The establishment of Siak has added to the number of maritime-style sultanates present on the East Coast of Sumatra in the period from the 17th to the 18th Century AD. If in the previous period, there were relatively only three influential maritime kingdoms in the name of Samudera Pasai, Aru, and Aceh, then in the 17th and 18th Century AD there were at least six sultanates namely Aceh, Deli, Langkat, Asahan, Serdang and Siak.



Picture 1. Map of the Maritime sultanates on the East Coast of Sumatra

The Sultanates Contributions to the Development of Islamic Maritime Civilization

Maritime sultanates played a crucial role in the development of Islamic maritime civilization on the East Coast of Sumatra, as they were the ones who adopted maritime-oriented policies and patronized the fishermen, sailors, and traders in their territories. The policies adopted by the sultanates encouraged the operation of more ports in the region so that maritime activities on the East Coast of Sumatra became increasingly busy with maritime trade, loading, and unloading of goods, entry and exit of people, manufacture of boats and ships, and voyages. The bustling maritime activities contributed greatly to the development of Islamic maritime

⁴⁴ Asril, "Raja Kecil Pendiri Kerajaan Siak Sri Indrapura," *Lentera* 1, no. 2 (2009): 64.

civilization in the region, because with the increasing number of ports, the centers of Islamic maritime civilization in the region became more dispersed, and maritime activities also spread to various places on the East Coast of Sumatra. In addition, Islamic maritime knowledge also began to spread to various places in the region.

The bustling maritime activities on the East Coast of Sumatra were based on maritime trade with pepper as the primary commodity, so the area was known as one of the important pepper trading centers in the 17th and 18th Centuries. In the 16th and 17th Centuries, pepper was indeed the most important export commodity in the Western part of the archipelago.⁴⁵ The 17th Century was a time when the quantity of pepper trade in the archipelago was greater than cloves, nutmeg, and mace, although, in terms of price, cloves were still the highest-value spice commodity.⁴⁶ Pepper shipping traffic on the East Coast of Sumatra has connected the region with other regions in the international scope.

In addition to connecting the East Coast of Sumatra with the international world, pepper maritime trade also connects the East Coast of Sumatra with hinterland areas in Sumatra such as Minangkabau which is one of the important pepper cultivation centers in Sumatra. Pepper produced from the hinterland is usually carried by boat through the river to the downstream area where the city is located. Sometimes, pepper from the hinterland is also distributed using rafts usually made of large bamboo.⁴⁷ After reaching the ports in the foreland, the pepper was transferred to ships to be sailed to Malacca, India, Arabia, China, and Europe. These ports then formed the spice routes on the East Coast of Sumatra.

Apart from pepper, the East Coast of Sumatra was also a transit point for other spices from North Maluku. The shipping of nutmeg and cloves from North Maluku began with a voyage to Hitu and Banda. After that, the

⁴⁵ Adrian B. Lopian, *Pelayaran Dan Perniagaan Nusantara Abad Ke 16 Dan 17* (Depok: Komunitas Bambu, 2017), 85.

⁴⁶ Swantoro, *Perdagangan Lada Abad XVII: Perebutan "Emas" Putih Dan Hitam Di Nusantara*, 29.

⁴⁷ William Marsden, *Sejarah Sumatera*, trans. Sutrisno (Jogjakarta: Indoliterasi, 2021), 214.

voyage continued to the ports on the North Coast of Java before being taken to the ports on the East Coast of Sumatra. From the ports on the East Coast of Sumatra, the nutmeg and cloves were then sent to Malacca to continue their voyage to Gujarat, India.⁴⁸ In the international spice shipping traffic, the East Coast of Sumatra has always been one of the important areas so the sultanates there made the maritime trade of spices the main orientation of their economy. One of the maritime sultanates in the region, Aceh, even managed to establish itself as one of the centers of maritime spice trade in Southeast Asia.⁴⁹

For the sultanates on the East Coast of Sumatra, their ports played a complex role not only as trading ports, but also as the capital of the sultanate, and the center of their maritime civilization. The sultanates on the East Coast of Sumatra generally built their ports on the lower reaches of rivers, so the Islamic maritime civilization that developed in the region can be referred to as "brown water civilization".⁵⁰ On the East Coast of Sumatra, rivers are indeed very important because they serve as the main transportation route connecting the interior of Sumatra with the waters of the Strait of Malacca, Strait of Karimata, Strait of Bangka, and South China Sea.⁵¹ The importance of rivers in maritime civilization is also due to the superiority of rivers as one of the best places to anchor for ships, although the width of the river affects the development of river ports.⁵²

The river width factor was also a reason for the Islamic maritime sultanates on the East Coast of Sumatra to build their capitals and ports on the lower reaches of the river because the lower reaches of the river usually had a greater width than the upper reaches, making it easier for ships or trading boats to enter and exit. Aceh, Deli, Serdang, and Asahan were

⁴⁸ Lopian, *Pelayaran Dan Perniagaan Nusantara Abad Ke 16 Dan 17*, 41.

⁴⁹ Djoko Marihandono and Bondan Kanumoyoso, *Rempah, Jalur Rempah, Dan Dinamika Masyarakat Nusantara* (Jakarta: Direktorat Sejarah, Direktorat Jenderal Kebudayaan Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2016), 38.

⁵⁰ The generally brown color of river water has become the basis for the term brown water civilization for civilizations that place their civilization centers on river banks.

⁵¹ Gusti Asnan, *Sungai Dan Sejarah Sumatra* (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2016), 101.

⁵² Lopian, *Pelayaran Dan Perniagaan Nusantara Abad Ke 16 Dan 17*, 95.

sultanates whose capitals were located downstream. While Siak and Langkat placed their capitals slightly upstream, the rivers on which their capitals were located were large rivers that allowed ships from the Strait of Malacca to sail up to their towns and capitals. This was different for the sultanates whose capitals were located on the banks of rivers that were not so large, so the placement of their ports and capitals downstream became an important policy to maintain their cities so that they still had a geographical strategic advantage in maritime trade in the Strait of Malacca.

The rivers that hosted the capitals of the sultanates on the East Coast of Sumatra emptied into the Strait of Malacca, so the socio-economic and political centers of the sultanates were connected to the Strait of Malacca. This also made the Strait of Malacca part of the living space of the sultanates on the East Coast of Sumatra. Vessels from the sultanates on the East Coast of Sumatra sailed across the strait carrying trade commodities to ports on the West Coast of the Malay Peninsula. This cross-strait voyage was carried out using vessels with light to medium tonnage. The vessels used in the Strait of Malacca voyages were the work of local Muslims on the East Coast of Sumatra.

The vessels built by Muslims on the East Coast of Sumatra are classified as small and medium vessels. They are designed and built in a small size to suit their geographical conditions and shipping needs as small and medium tonnage vessels are more suitable for river shipping. The largest vessels usually weighed between 30 and 40 tons. The Muslim sailors who manned these vessels sailed using the stars as their main navigational tool and were skilled sailors. Although the main navigation tool for Muslim sailors on the East Coast of Sumatra was the stars, each vessel was usually equipped with modern navigation equipment such as a small Chinese compass.⁵³ The sailors of the sultanates on the East Coast of Sumatra

⁵³ John Anderson, *Mission to the East Coast in M.DCCC.XXIII, under the Direction of the Government of Prince of Wales Island: Including Historical and Descriptive Sketches of the Country, an Account of the Commerce, Population, and the Manners and Customs of the Inhabitants, and a Visit to the Batta Cannibal States in the Interior* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood, Edinburgh and T.Cadell, Strand, London, 1826), 292.

generally only sailed around the Strait of Malacca and Strait of Karimata, so the need to build large vessels was not a priority. Given the vessel-building and sailing skills of the sailors on the East Coast of Sumatra, the maritime level of the sultanates on the East Coast of Sumatra was classified as “green water cruising”.⁵⁴

Although the general maritime level of the sultanates on the east coast of Sumatra was “green water cruising,” Aceh was an exception to this as their maritime capabilities were already classified as “blue water cruising”.⁵⁵ This is evidenced by reports from Venice that Aceh's pepper-lifting vessels had reached the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea.⁵⁶ Other reports also mention that Aceh had vessels that were larger than European vessels as reported by Augustien de Beaulieu.⁵⁷ Among all the Acehnese vessels that have been recorded in history, there was a vessel with three masts that was about a hundred meters long. This vessel had cannons numbering more than a hundred. The Portuguese Navy captured the vessel in 1629, took it to Spain, and named it *Espanto del Mundo*, which means scourge of the world.⁵⁸ This fact tells us that the Islamic maritime civilization on the East Coast of Sumatra in the 17th and 18th Centuries had developed rapidly and achieved the ability to cruise the blue waters.

The advances achieved by the sultanates on the East Coast of Sumatra in the maritime trade and shipping influenced other regions. One of them can be seen in the use of maritime terms in other parts of the archipelago that use terms commonly used on the East Coast of Sumatra such as the term *bandar* to refer to the port, *syahbandar* to refer to the head of the port, and *nakhoda* to refer to the leader on a vessel. The origin of these

⁵⁴ Straits and seas are generally green in color, so the term green water cruising is used to refer to the ability of a society, community or royal fleet to sail through straits and shallow seas.

⁵⁵ The blue color of oceanic and deep-sea water is the basis for the use of this term to refer to the ability to sail the ocean.

⁵⁶ M.A.P Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian Trade and European Influence in the Indonesian Archipelago between 1500 and about 1630* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), 144.

⁵⁷ Anthony Reid, *Menuju Sejarah Sumatra: Antara Indonesia Dan Dunia* (Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia dan KITLV-Jakarta, 2011), 93.

⁵⁸ Lombard, *Kerajaan Aceh: Jaman Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636)*, 115–116.

terms did not come from the East Coast of Sumatra, but from the Persian language which was then absorbed by the Arabs in medieval times.⁵⁹ Due to centuries of intense interaction, the terms were absorbed by the Malays and used commonly in the areas where they lived, including on the East Coast of Sumatra. From there, the term then spread widely to other regions.

Beyond contributing to the maritime development of the region and influencing other regions, the sultanates of the East Coast of Sumatra also contributed greatly to the spiritual and intellectual transformation of Islam in the archipelago in the 17th and 18th Centuries. This contribution was made through their ports, which also played the role of centers for the spread and teaching of Islam. The most prominent case in this regard can be seen in the capital city of Aceh which played a complex role as a maritime trade hub-port as well as a center for the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia. This role is similar to that played by the capitals of Perlak and Pasai in the past, but Aceh's capital played this role on a wider scale and scope. Banda Aceh became a place where scholars from various regions gathered to study and teach religious sciences. It also became a center for the production of religious texts. Some of the important scholars who lived in Banda Aceh and wrote religious books worth mentioning here are Hamzah Fansuri, Nuruddin ar-Ranniry, and Syaikh Abdurrauf bin Ali al-Fansuri.

Hamzah Fansuri was a Sufi poet who is thought to have lived in the 16th to early 17th Century AD. Hamzah Fansuri wrote many books and poems, but of his many works, only a few were saved from destruction during the time of Sultan Iskandar Tsani. Hamzah Fansuri's poetry is enveloped by Sufi images that echo the maritime world of the Malay nation.⁶⁰ Nuruddin ar-Ranniry was a scholar who came to Aceh from Ranir, an old port on the coast of Gujarat, India. ar-Ranniry also wrote several books including *al Shirat al-Mustaqim*, *Tibyan fi Marifah al-Adyan*, and *Bustan as-Salatin*. Meanwhile, Shaykh Abdurrauf bin Ali al Fansuri was *Qadhi*

⁵⁹ George Fadlo Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times* (New York: Octagon Books, 1975), 65.

⁶⁰ Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam : Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past*, 11.

Malikul Adil of the Sultanate of Aceh during the reign of the four queens. Shaykh Abdurrauf bin Ali al Fansuri wrote many books with themes ranging from Qur'anic tafsir, hadith, morals, tarikh (history), kalam, fiqh, and tasawwuf.

The book of interpretation of the Qur'an written by Shaykh Abdurrauf bin Ali al Fansuri entitled *Turjuman al Mustafid* is the first book of interpretation in the archipelago which completely interprets 30 juz of the Qur'an.⁶¹ Of the several themes in Syaikh Abdurrauf bin Ali al Fansuri's works, the largest part of the discussion of his works is on kalam and Sufism. Generally, Syaikh Abdurrauf's works were written in Malay. The dissemination of the works of the aforementioned scholars, along with other scholarly works to various regions within and outside the archipelago, depended on the presence of shipping and ports. If shipping acts as a means of bringing the works of scholars to various Muslim regions, then the ports act as gateways for the entry and exit of these works. The presence of the sultanates on the East Coast of Sumatra contributed greatly to the spread of these works because they provided shipping and ports that facilitated the spiritual and intellectual transformation of religion.

The spread of ports, the improved seafaring capabilities of the sultanates, and the guarantee of safety in sailing by the Muslim rulers have also encouraged an increase in the influx of Muslims from the archipelago who went to the center of the Islamic world to perform the Hajj or to study religious sciences. When these Muslims returned to their countries, they expanded their intellectual and spiritual networks, so that the intellectual and spiritual transformation of Islam for countries near or surrounded by water was also closely linked to the development of maritime civilization in the region. This can be seen in the case of Syaikh Abdurrauf bin Ali al Fansuri who studied in Haramain and then returned to Aceh and established Zawiyah Syiah Kuala. This Zawiyah then succeeded in becoming a center of Islamic teaching that produced scholars such as Syaikh

⁶¹ Arrivaie Rahman, "Tafsir Tarjuman Al Mustafid Karya Abd Al Rauf Al Fanshuri: Diskursus Biografi, Kontestasi Politis-Teologis Dan Metodologi Tafsir," *Miqot* 42, no. 1 (2018): 2.

Burhanuddin Ulakan, and Syaikh Abdul Muhyi who was also the khalifah of Syaikh Abdurrauf bin Ali al Fansuri in the Qadiriyyah tariqah.⁶² The two scholars, along with several other students from Zawiyah Syiah Kuala then developed Islamic spiritual and intellectual networks in various other regions in the archipelago, so it can be said that the development of Islamic spiritual and intellectual networks in the archipelago is directly proportional to the development of Islamic maritime civilization on the East Coast of Sumatra.

Conclusion

The above description has shown that in the 17th and 18th Centuries, the development of Islamic maritime civilization on the East Coast of Sumatra was represented by the presence of more maritime sultanates in the region such as Aceh, Deli, Serdang, Langkat, Asahan, and Siak. The presence of these sultanates has contributed greatly to the development of Islamic maritime civilization in the region through their maritime policies and their patronage of maritime activities within their territories. The proliferation of maritime activities in the region led to an increase in the volume of maritime trade, particularly the pepper trade, as well as an increase in the volume of shipping traffic. This has also led to the establishment and operation of more ports in the region and the vessel industries.

The number of ports operating on the East Coast of Sumatra has made the centers of Islamic maritime civilization in the region more dispersed and maritime activities also spread to various places on the East Coast of Sumatra. In addition, Islamic maritime knowledge also began to spread to various places in the region. We also find that the development of Islamic maritime civilization on the East Coast of Sumatra is directly proportional to the spiritual and intellectual development of Islam in the region and its surrounding areas as evidenced by the formation of a more

⁶² Martin van Bruinessen, "Sufi Orders in Southeast Asia, From Private Devotions to Social Network and Corporate Action," in *Buddhist and Islamic Orders in Southeast Asia: Comparative Perspective* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), 131.

massive network of ulama in the 17th Century with Aceh as its center. Thus the development of Islamic maritime civilization on the East Coast of Sumatra also contributed greatly to the development of Islam in the region and its surrounding areas.

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