



Illustration 1. The south view of Fort Marlborough, Bengkulu. Engraving by Joseph Stadler, 1799

## Report from the Minister of Banten Tsiely Godong and former translator of the English Harkis Baly concerning the English presence in Silebar and Bengkulu, West-Sumatra, 1696

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## 1 Introduction

Jeyamalar Kathirithamby-Wells, “Report from the Minister of Banten Tsiely Godong and former translator of the English Harkis Baly concerning the English presence in Silebar and Bengkulu, West-Sumatra, 1696”. In: *Harta Karun. Hidden Treasures on Indonesian and Asian-European History from the VOC Archives in Jakarta*, document 12. Jakarta: Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2013.

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By the mid-sixteenth century, Bengkulu joined the rest of the west coast of Sumatra as a major exporter of pepper attracting the ambitions of the neighbouring state of Banten across the Sunda Straits. With the aim of augmenting its own pepper supplies, With the aim of augmenting its own supplies, Banten is believed to have gained access to Sumatran pepper when Sultan Hasanuddin gained access to Sumatran pepper when Sultan Hasanuddin (r. 1552-70) married the daughter of the ruler of Inderapura, receiving as dowry all the coastal areas to the south. Subsequently, Tuan Pati Bangun Negara and Bangsa Radin, chiefs respectively of the Redjang-Lebong and Lemba of Sungai Lemau and Silebar, received the title of pangeran (prince, governor) from the Sultan of Banten. This is recorded by some copper plates dating back from 1668 (A.H. 1079).<sup>1</sup> Their empowerment was aimed, evidently, at securing their cooperation to boost Banten’s pepper supplies.

Years of Anglo-Dutch rivalry in Banten over the pepper deals with the local rulers culminated during an internal Bantenese power struggle in 1682. The outcome led to the withdrawal of the English East India Company from its factory there. Consequently, the British had to search for an alternative access to the pepper market in Sumatra. Pre-empted by the VOC in Pariaman (north of Padang), the English East India Company turned to Bengkulu. Here, in July 1685, the Company signed a treaty with the pangeran of Sungai Lemau and Sungai Itam, gaining exclusive delivery of pepper at a fixed price of 12 dollars per bahar (fixed, later, at 560 pounds) and land for a settlement, upon which they raised the robust Fort Marlborough, which survives to this day.<sup>2</sup>

Though the Dutch in Banten – no less than the British in Bengkulu – were keen on avoiding hostilities, they had much to profit from a successful Bantenese challenge to British access to the pepper gardens of west Sumatra. Thus, in December of 1685, prompted by the VOC to dislodge the British, Sultan Abu Nasr Abdul Kahar (r. 1682-7) sent to Silebar a 2-300 strong force conveyed by a Dutch fleet under the command of a jenang (representative/ambassador), Karia Sutra Gistra. The British position was saved by a combination of factors, principally, the pangerans’ flight to the hinterland; the outbreak of disease among the invading forces; and the lack of Dutch reinforcements which compelled the Bantenese withdraw-

<sup>1</sup> J. Kathirithamby-Wells, *The British West Sumatran Presidency (1760-85)*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1977, 21. For the respective interests of Banten, the British and the Dutch in Bengkulu see P. Wink, ‘Eenige Archief stukken betreffende de vestiging van de Engelsche factorij te Benkoelen in 1685’, *TBG*, 64 (1924): 461-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6; John Bastin, *The British in West Sumatra (1685-1825)*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1965, xii-xvi, 1-12; British Library, India Office Records: East India Company Factory Records, *Sumatra Factory Records*, Vol. 2 (1685-1692), 6 Nov. 1686. For the text of the treaty, see H. Dodwell, *Records of Fort St. George. Letters from Fort St. George for 1688*, Madras: Government Press, 1919, vol. 3, 3 July 1685, 205-7.

<sup>3</sup> Bastin, *The British in West Sumatra*, 17, 20-6; *Sumatran Factory Records*, vol. 2, Benjamin Bloom to Karia Sutra Gistra, ? Jan. 1685.



## INTRODUCTION



Illustration 2. Captain John Macdonald, Bengal Engineers, at Fort Marlborough. 1794. Peter Archer, 1994

al.<sup>3</sup> This left the British free to conclude a treaty with another local ruler, the pangeran of Silebar, who controlled the only safe anchorage for ships visiting the West Sumatran coast, at Pulau Bay.

Though in 1688 the British successfully expelled the Banteneese from collecting pepper at Silebar, Banten did not relinquish hopes of pressing its claim over the area. Hence, menteri Tsiliey Godong was commissioned in 1696 by Pangeran Kesatrian to investigate the state of affairs in Bengkulu. The report he wrote on returning to Banten was in cooperation with Harkis Baly, a resident of Bengkulu and former interpreter for

the British who was in Banten on a private visit. The historical validity of the report, favourable to advancing Banten's claim, may be evaluated with the benefit of local British reports.

The price paid for pepper by the British was indeed 12 Spanish dollars per bahar as Tsiliey Godong reported; but the 'toll' referred to was the commission of 1 dollar per bahar payable to the pangeran on pepper delivered by areas under their respective jurisdiction. It was in lieu of their now-relinquished right to impose hasil (export duty), a distinct feature of their customary authority, exercised for preferential or monopoly control over trade. The pangeran of Selibar was understandably reluctant to renounce a lucrative source of income derived from Silebar's pre-eminence as the main centre for the export of southwest Sumatran pepper. The East India Company granted in a written settlement to him a compensatory annuity of only 400 Spanish dollars.<sup>4</sup> In addition to hereby securing transfer of the pangeran's control over the pepper trade, the Company proceeded to impose port duties allowing him no share in the revenue.

The trade arrangements between the East India Company and Sumatran leaders appear to have weighed heavily in favour of the British, leaving shortfalls in local expectations, which the report represented as a loophole Banten might well exploit to assert its influence. The fact remained, however, that the British contracted a higher price in Spanish dollars for pepper,<sup>5</sup> compared to payments offered, often in rice and provisions by Chinese, Javanese and other traders, including those licensed by the ruler of Banten. Additionally, British presence promised security and stability, not guaranteed by the customary visit of

<sup>4</sup> Bastin, *The British in West Sumatra*, 4, 37-8; Kathirithamby-Wells, *The West Sumatran Presidency*, 32.

<sup>5</sup> During the early years, when payment for pepper was offered in cloth and copper coins to meet the shortage in Spanish dollars, the Sumatrans showed their discontent by smuggling produce to other buyers, compelling the Bengkulu administration to establish silver as the linchpin of its monopoly.



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Banten's jenang (representative) every 2-3 years, essentially to make new appointments and claim taxes and tribute.<sup>6</sup>

The perceived injustices of the British in their dealings with the pangeran, portrayed in Tsie-ly Godong's report, supported Banten's bid to expel the British, if necessary by force. Hence, close and accurate information on the layout of the British defences, including details of the fortifications were crucial, and who better to provide such intelligence than Harkis Baly. However, it would appear that Dutch reluctance to offer military aid for fear of umbrage with the British ruled out renewed aggression. Instead, in response to the subsequent contracts the British made with Manna and Krue – areas to the south of Bengkulu – Sultan Mahassin Zainal Abidin (r. 1690-1733) tried a strategy of negotiation for asserting his claims. On the basis of intelligence brought to Banten by two Sumatrans, 'Raja Tonkas and Malla', a jenang was dispatched in 1729 to return the men and install them as local heads. On the same occasion, the jenang conveyed a letter from the Sultan offering the British the coast from Manna to Nassal (north of Krue), with full powers to administer the region upon payment of 10,000 Spanish dollars. In response, the British returned the ambassador with a promise to refer the matter to the Directors and let the matter rest.<sup>7</sup>

Caution over extending British influence further south towards Krue soon changed given the repeated invitations for trade and settlement received from local chiefs, Banten's weak control in the region, and the absence of any Dutch claims

in the area. But, above all, it was feared that British inaction would merely encourage Banten's claims to the entire coast up to the borders of Inderapura. In 1742 the British occupied Pulau Pisang, an important southern point for pepper collection, but only some four years later did Banten stage a protest. The rumoured attack by the Bantenese Radin was followed by a letter from Sultan Arifin (r. 1733-48) threatening to appeal to the Dutch should the British fail to withdraw immediately. Returning the stock 'civil answer' that the matter would be referred to Europe,<sup>8</sup> the British successfully bought time which, in the event, saw the eruption of trouble in Banten, fanned by the political intrigues of the ruler's wife, Ratu Sharifa Fatima, which culminated in the Banten Rebellion of 1751-52.<sup>9</sup>

By the time Banten entered Dutch vassalage in 1752, the proliferation of private trade involving Malay, Chinese, Buginese and European participation undermined the VOC's claims over Banten's major source of pepper from Lampung. Much of it entered British hands removing the need for further British expansion. By 1763, a stone planted by the VOC at Flat Point (Vlakke Hoek) in Semangka Bay firmed up the boundary between the two rival European powers, fulfilling their mutual desire to avoid conflict.<sup>10</sup> Semangka, which entered British hands during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-84), was duly reoccupied in 1785. The exchange of the British Sumatran territories for Melaka, under the Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1824, finally settled contending claims over Bengkulu paving the way for its ultimate integra-

<sup>6</sup> For Banten's commercial relations with Silebar in the pre-British period see See J. Kathirithamby-Wells, 'Banten: A West Indonesian Port and Polity', in J. Kathirithamby-Wells and John Villiers, *The Southeast Asian Port and Polity: Rise and Demise*, Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1990, 116-17.

<sup>7</sup> *Sumatra Factory Records*, Vol. 8, 30 Oct. 1729.

<sup>8</sup> *Sumatra Factory Records*, Vol. 9, 28 July 1742.

<sup>9</sup> For an account of these events see Ota Atsushi, *Changes of Regime and Social Dynamics in West Java: Society, State and the Outer World of Banten, 1750-1830*, Leiden: Brill, 2006, 59-74.

<sup>10</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells, *The West Sumatran Presidency*, 139-40.



## 2 Transcription of the Dutch text

Jeyamalar Kathirithamby-Wells, “Report from the Minister of Banten Tsiely Godong and former translator of the English Harkis Baly concerning the English presence in Silebar and Bengkulu, West-Sumatra, 1696”.

UIT: DAGHREGISTERS VAN BATAVIA, 18 JANUARI 1696 [BEGINNEND BIJ FOL. 48]

*Relaas gedaen door den mantry des Sultans van Bantam genaamt Tsiely Godong en Harkis Baly, gewesen tolck der Engelsen op Bankahoelo, en tot nog een inwoonder aldaer, wegens de constitutie van Sillebaer etc., sijnde de eerstgenoemde naer verrigting sijner meesters beveelen, den Pangerang Cassatrian, op den 17e january anno 1696 van daer geretourneert ende de andere om sijn eygen affaires hier gekomen, dog ider in 't bijzonder ondervraegt en sodanig gelijck volgt verhaalt.*

Dat Sillebaer en Bankahoelo in gelijke forma leggen als Bantam en Pontang, excepta dat voor de bay van Sillebaer geen eylanden sijn, maar wel voor Bankahoelo alwaer twee [49] eylanden haer vertoonen, bijna in de gedaente van de twee poele madis voor Pontang, dog geheel onsuyver wegens de klippen die bij en omtrent die eylantjes leggen, om welcke oorsaken geen schepen haer omtrent die plaatse kunnen vertrouwen, maer nemen haar verblijff op de rheedde van Sillebaer, waer sij oock niet langer dan vier maanden om de harde winden en leger wal sig kunnen verseecken, in welke tijd sij haer van een lading peper versien, en daer mede van daer begeben.

Wat nu de quantiteyt der wegvoering van dien corl jaerlijx betreft, werd aldaer geschat op ongevaer twee middelbare scheepsladingen, hoewel alle jaren twee â drie en somwijlen vier bodems, soo kleyn als groot, aldaer komen en met peper weder vertrecken, betalende voor ider bhaer aan de inlanderen twaelf Spaance realen, dog weten haer voordeel integendeel seer wel waer te nemen, soo in de vergrooting van 't gewigt, als van ieder bhaer voor thol een reael, van wien oock de regerende Pangerang een gelijcke reael voor sijn portie ontfangt, soodatt de peper aanbrenghers niet meer dan thien realen voor ieder bhaer genieten.

Buyten die tolln waervan de Pangerang een gelijcke deel heeft, trecken de Engelse van alle andere uytvoerende en inkomende goederen de tolln alleen, sonder aan den Pangerang van die plaets iets daarvan te geven, om welke onregtmattigheden den Pangerang te onvrede geweest is. Dog de Engelsen hebben hem eensdeels door haer verkregen ontsag, en ten anderen met een jaerlijxse gift van vierhondert realen wat tevreden gestelt, onder een stipt bevel dat hij Pangerang off iemant van de Sillebaresen geen de minste peper aan eenige natiën souw mogen verhandelen, off uyt het land laeten voeren, als alleen door haer, waerover de inlanderen soo groot als kleene, alsoock omdat de Engelsen een souveraine heerschappij in andere voorvallen meest over dien [50] lantaart voeren en aanmatigen, geweldig murmureren en wensten den meesten hoop dat het Engels juck door den Sultan van Bantam van den hals mogt geschut wer-



## TRANSCRIPTION OF THE DUTCH TEXT

den, als sijnde selfs daertoe onvermogens.

Dat de Engelsen op Bankahoelo op een heuveltje een fortresje hebben die een plaats bijna de helft kleender als den omtreck van Speelwijk, en met dertig ijsere stucken belegt, alsoock bemant met ongevaer veertig Engelsen, waeronder de Commandeur, verdere gequalificeerde, twee overgelope Hollanders van Padang, en ses off agt Engelse jongens die om het klimaat van Sillebaer te gewinnen derwaerts gesonden, mitsgaders veertig Boegisen, en hondert stux soo Mallebaren als kaffers, benevens een Hollander genaemt Willem die van Batavia met een Engelse chialoep gesiapeert is, en sig aldaer onthout en als tolck ageert; dat het fortresje jegenwoordig maer aan twee sijden met een muur oost- en westwaerts is versien, en de andere van zuyt en noort, van aaneengevoegde plancken, dog jegenwoordig besig sijnde om die oock met steenen als de andere te bemantelen; dat de muur van twee gebacke steenen dick is, en omtrent 10 voeten hoog; dat de stucken op de vaste gront staen, en datter schietgaten in de muur sijn voor de stucken, soowel in de gardijnen als in de punctjes; dat se een hoog packhuys maken waer mede stucken op sullen staan; dat se een put binnen hebben die goet water geeft dog die niet gebruyken; dat het fortresje omtrent een roerschoot van de zeekant leyt, dog wanneer den Sultan van Bantam haer wilde te hulp komen, sagen zij genoegsaam kans om de Engelse van daer te drijven, waermede sij haer relaas met betuyginge van de opregte waerheyt gesproken te hebben, eyndigen.



### 3 English translation

Jeyamalar Kathirithamby-Wells, “Report from the Minister of Banten Tsiely Godong and former translator of the English Harkis Baly concerning the English presence in Silebar and Bengkulu, West-Sumatra, 1696”.

FROM: DAILY JOURNALS OF BATAVIA CASTLE, 18 JANUARI 1696 [BEGINNING WITH FOL. 48]

*Report made by the minister (mantri) of the Sultan of Bantam (Banten) by the name of Siliely Godong and Harkis Baly, formerly interpreter for the English at Bencoolen and still resident there, about the nature of Silebar etc., the former having returned from there on the 17 January in the year 1696 after carrying out the orders of his master Pangeran Kesatrian (Cassatrian) and the latter come here on his own business. Each questioned individually, producing the following narrative.*

Silebar and Bengkulu are situated in the same way as are Banten and Pontang, except that there are no islands off the bay of Silebar, whereas there are two [49] off Bengkulu, closely resembling the two *pulau madis* off Pontang. However, [the waters around them] are extremely treacherous because of the reefs which lie close to and around the small islands. They are the reason that no ship can venture into that area with confidence, but must anchor in the Silebar roads. This they can do for only four months if they want to be assured of a safe anchorage, because the hard winds. They must load their cargo of pepper within this time and set sail.

The annual quantity of these peppercorns there is estimated to be about two average ship's cargoes, although every year two to three, even four vessels, both large and small, put in there and leave again with pepper. For each *bahar* (c. 500 Amsterdam pounds), they pay the native population 12 Spanish *reals*, nevertheless the latter can still make a profit either by inflating the weight or by levying a toll of 1 *real* on every *bahar*. The ruling *Pangeran* also receives 1 *real* as his share, so that those who bring the pepper profit no more than 10 *reals* on each *bahar*. Over and above the tolls in which the *Pangeran* has an equal share, the English levy tolls on all incoming and outgoing goods, and the ruler of the place is excluded from any share. This injustice has disgruntled the *Pangeran*, however partly [by exercising] the authority they have acquired and partly on account of an annual gift of 400 *reals*, the English have appeased him somewhat. The condition is that neither the *Pangeran* nor any Silebarese trader export even a single peppercorn to any nation whatsoever but to them alone. For this reason, the natives, both of both low and high estate, not least because the English behave as sovereign ruler over the people [50] under other circumstances as well, and arrogate [authority], mutter complaints and the majority hope that the English yoke will be lifted from their necks by the Sultan of Banten, as they are not in a position to do this themselves.



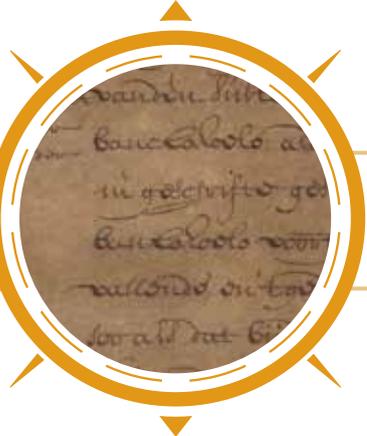
## ENGLISH TRANSLATION

On a low rise, the English at Bengkulu have built a small fort, whose inner courtyard is almost half as the size as that of Speelwijk. It is armed with thirty iron cannon, and manned by around forty English, including a commander, other officers, two Dutch deserters from Padang, and six or eight young English lads who have been sent there to accustom themselves to the climate of Silebar, plus forty Buginese, and a hundred or so men each Malabarese and *Kaffers*. Moreover, there is one Dutchman called Willem who sailed thither on a sloop. He makes his living there as an interpreter. At the moment, the small fort has only two brick walls, those on the eastern and western sides, the south and the north sides being [constructed] of fitted planks. Nevertheless, they are now also working on facing these with bricks. The wall is the thickness of two bricks, and around 10 feet high. The cannon emplacements are on firm ground and there are embrasures for the cannon, both in the curtain wall and in the small bastions. They are building a tall warehouse on which cannon will also be placed. They have a well inside with sweet water but they do not use it. The small fortress lies within a cannon shot of the sea. However, if the Sultan of Banten wanted to come to its aid, they would have an adequate chance of expelling the English from it. They declare that they have made their reports with absolute truth.



## 4 Colophon

Title	Jeyamalar Kathirithamby-Wells, "Report from the Minister of Banten Tsiely Godong and former translator of the English Harkis Baly concerning the English presence in Silebar and Bengkulu, West-Sumatra, 1696". In: <i>Harta Karun. Hidden Treasures on Indonesian and Asian-European History from the VOC Archives in Jakarta</i> , document 12. Jakarta: Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2013.
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### 5 Folio image

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